

# KERALA CALLING

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2021 JUNE 01

## HEALTH ABOVE ALL

**Rs 20,000 cr package to tide over the crisis  
induced by the second wave of COVID- 19**

# Let their smiles brighten our hearts

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**The elderly need utmost care during the COVID-19 pandemic.  
Let their happiness brighten our lives**



*Photo Credit: V.V. Biju*

# Health is paramount

**T**he peak of the second wave of the pandemic is over, but the threat of a third wave is around the corner. The State has effectively restricted the mortality rates to the minimum and the administration has intervened to address the difficulties faced by the people during the lockdown. With the enviable record of having 'zero-wastage of' vaccines, our immediate aim is to get all our people vaccinated as early as possible. In the short run, the State is planning to get all those above 40 years of age vaccinated by July 15, at least with a single dose. For this, the administration is in full swing to procure maximum doses of vaccine.

In a significant move, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan took the initiative of writing to eleven chief ministers in India seeking a united effort to urge the Centre to procure vaccines and ensure a universal vaccination drive. The 15th Kerala assembly, in a rare camaraderie, passed a resolution that was critical of the Union Government's vaccine policy of pushing the states to procure vaccines directly from the open market. The resolution was passed unanimously. Later, when the Prime Minister announced the Union Government's decision to centralise vaccine procurement and provide free vaccination to everyone, the Chief Minister wholeheartedly welcomed the move.

The revised budget presented in the first session of the 15th Assembly has given utmost importance to the restriction of COVID-19. Rs 20,000 cr has been earmarked for this purpose. At the same time, the developmental works that have been going on since the previous years cannot be impeded. A 100 days programme is announced and the works are in full swing.

Given the impending third wave, and to dispense scientific information to the public, we have given excellent articles on it, written by experts par excellence. Of these, the interview with world-renowned virologist Dr. Gagandeep Kang invites special attention.

COVID-19 has claimed many famous personalities across the globe and Kerala is not an exception. In May, we lost the renowned poet S. Rameshan Nair. The renowned Bengali director Buddhadeb Dasgupta also bade farewell. We have given fitting tributes to the two great souls by giving well-written obit articles.

We are going through one of the worst times in history. But it is beyond that we will overcome it through unity. It is a proven fact and it will repeat.

**S. Harikishore I.A.S**  
Editor-in-Chief



# This Issue

## KERALA CALLING JUNE 2021

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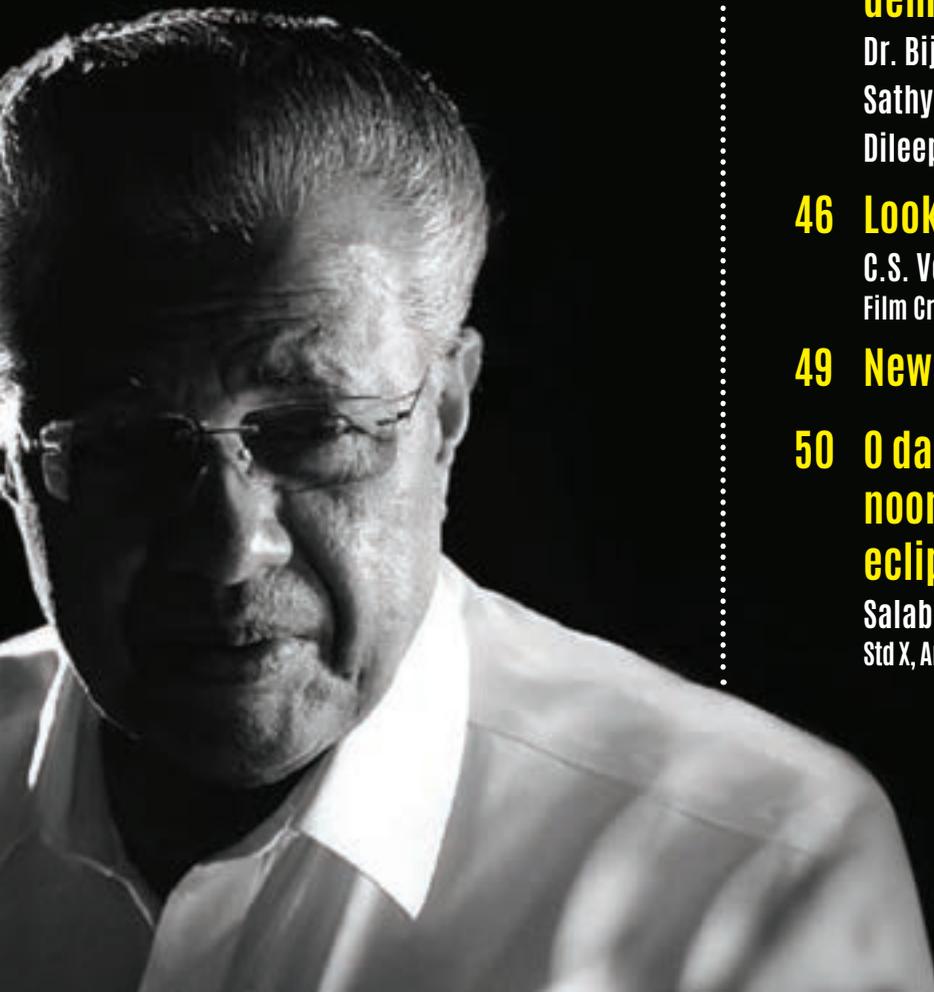
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Salabha Krishnan H.

Std X, Arya Central School, Thiruvananthapuram



# Committed to development and growth



Arif Mohammad Khan, Governor of Kerala

**S**tressing the Left Democratic Front Government's resolve to continue with its welfare and development measures, Governor of Kerala, Arif Mohammad Khan's first policy address to the 15th Legislative Assembly of Kerala cautioned that the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic would cause major impediments to the state's economic growth.

"We expected a sharp recovery in the economic growth to 6.6% in 2021-22. But the second wave of the pandemic can impede this expectation," the Governor said. The downturn in growth of GSDP would naturally have adverse consequences on the state's revenue receipts as well, he said.

Reiterating the state's policy to provide free COVID-19 vaccines to

all, the Governor said the differential pricing of vaccines would cause an additional burden of Rs.1,000 crore to the state exchequer.

The Governor said that Kerala ranks first in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index of the NITI Aayog for 2019. It also tops the Devolution Index across all the States with regard to devolution of Funds, Functions and Functionaries to Local

Self Governments. "However, Kerala's development experience faces two key challenges which cannot be lost sight of. Kerala's capital expenditure in the areas of social and physical infrastructure needs to be augmented and more quality jobs need to be created for our youth and those who faced career break. It is to meet these twin challenges that the Government created a dedicated and unique

investment agency named Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB), for ensuring adequate investment in both social and physical infrastructural sectors. This has also been supplemented by attracting support from multilateral and bilateral donors for the Rebuild Kerala Initiative (RKI) to create climate-resilient 12 infrastructures in the State. Our budget has manifold schemes for tackling the second major challenge, of providing employment,” the Governor said.

The focus of Kerala State IT Mission (KSITM) in 2021-22 will be to upgrade the Data Centres forming the backbone of the IT infrastructure, setting up of an Aadhaar Data Vault, Unified State Portal, Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence and Implementation of Single Sign-On, the Governor said.

Pointing to the infrastructure development of Kerala, the Governor said Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) has so far approved 903 projects with an outlay of Rs.63,224.42 crore. These projects comprise both physical and social infrastructure across a range of sectors including hospitals and health centres, schools and colleges, roads and bridges, water supply and sanitation, electricity and communication networks,

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industrial parks and cultural complexes etc. Out of these, 488 projects 40 worth Rs.21,309.68 crore have been tendered and 27 projects worth Rs.732 crore and 160 project components worth Rs.560.29 Crore have been commissioned, he said.

The key declarations in the Governor’s policy address include: further extension of K-Fon project and its Implementation in a time-bound manner; setting up 25 new cooperative societies for young

entrepreneurs and service providers; converting all KrishiBhavans into ‘Smart’ KrishiBhavans; utilisation of research from universities to enhance agricultural yield; increasing income from agriculture by 50% over the next five years; deploying ambulances in 152 block panchayats for veterinary services to farmers; setting up of paddy cooperative society and two more modern rice mills; naming cultural complexes named after the state’s Renaissance leaders in every district; implementation of electronic file disposal system in all offices; setting up of Vimukthi Jagratha Samitis with ward member or councillor as head; anti-drug clubs in select schools will be extended across the state; inland fish farming to be promoted so as to double the yield; and mobile ration shops for tribals residing in remote areas.

# Development will not be hit by the pandemic

**Pinarayi Vjayan**  
Chief Minister

**W**hile taking firm decisions to bridle the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has given assurance to the people that the developmental works will continue despite the setbacks in terms of revenue. The 100 Days Programme is the first step in this direction.

We live in a time when the world is gradually coming out of the hardships wreaked by COVID-19. People are increasingly getting vaccinated around the globe and many countries have returned to their normal ways of life. In Kerala too, we have been battling the second wave of the pandemic in the recent weeks. The good news is that we have successfully got ourselves out of the worst part of it.

In the elections to the State Legislative

Assembly in April 2021, the people of Kerala gave a historic verdict by re-electing the Left Democratic Front back to power. It is a record of sorts, as never in the history of the State, has the same Government been returned to power consecutively. The mandate was nothing short of an acceptance of the people-oriented developmental and welfare policies of the LDF Government. During the last 5 years, the State witnessed progress that is unparalleled in recent history. The social welfare schemes and policies

of the Government touched every aspect of life and even during times of distress like the two floods, Nipah, Ockhi and the recent COVID-19, the Government stood firmly with the people, assuring that their lives and livelihoods would not be at stake. Now, with a new team and a cabinet that has hit the ground running, the present LDF Government is taking on the challenges ahead with renewed confidence.

*Pinarayi Vjayan, Chief Minister*



Kerala saw a worrying surge in the daily number of COVID-19 patients in April and May, 2021. As you are well aware, the Kerala model in curbing the pandemic during the first wave was commended globally. With strict testing, tracing and preventive measures in place, we stood out in the battle against COVID-19. However, with the virus undergoing several mutations and becoming even more aggressive in spread, we had to yet again resort to a complete state-wide lockdown during the second wave. With strict measures in place including social distancing and other covid protocols, we have managed to bring down the cases significantly and return to our routines. Our health system has been operating in full capacity during the previous months, ensuring optimal availability of life-saving facilities including oxygen and ventilators. The most important task ahead of us now is to make sure that all our people would get vaccinated as early

as possible. With this goal in mind, the Government is working hard to procure sufficient doses of vaccine. By July 15, we aim to vaccinate everyone above 40 years of age at least with one dose.

One of the crucial challenges of this pandemic has been the continuation of developmental works despite the setbacks in terms of revenue. The KIIFB has played a key role in this regard, lending pace to the basic

**I believe that Kerala has all the potential to grow in to one of the finest destinations in the world in terms of overall growth and social contentment.**

infrastructural development of the State. The Government has used funds raised from KIIFB to build roads, bridges, schools, hospitals and various other initiatives that have directly touched the lives of the people. Similarly, social and economic welfare reforms were initiated to guarantee the well-being of people at a difficult time. Knowing well in advance that people will not be able to go out for work, the Government has been providing free food kits to all families in the State, so that not even a single person would go hungry in Kerala. Over 85 lakh families have benefitted. Meals were distributed to millions of people through community kitchens across the State. Welfare measures including free rice distribution were ensured. Social security pensions were hiked and distributed well on time. Much of these relief activities are still going on and have proved to be a big relief to the people of Kerala.

The new LDF Government is not only committed to carry on the good work, but also poised to ideate and implement a

**A special package has been declared for children who have lost both their parents to COVID-19. A sum of Rs. 3 lakhs each will be distributed as onetime payment. Rs. 2000/- will be distributed every month until the age of 18. Moreover, their education expenses up to graduation will be taken care of by the Government.**

host of new and futuristic endeavours. The 100 Days Programme is the first step in this direction. It is already underway and will continue till 19 September, 2021. Drafted with an intent to overcome the economic and social consequences of COVID-19, the programme will see the execution of various measures including creation of new jobs, development of new possibilities in health, education and social security and strengthening the base of our knowledge economy. Ventures worth Rs. 2464.92 Crores are included in this programme under the PWD, Rebuild Kerala Initiative and the KIIFB.

The Government has set as its prime priority, the eradication of extreme poverty in Kerala. Various measures will be implemented in the coming months in order to achieve this within the next 5 years. Efforts are being put forward to convert our civil service in to a completely corruption-free and people-friendly entity. As a part of this, all the services provided through village offices will be made available online by 2 October, 2021. Efforts to create Smart Village Offices are underway and will be completed within the coming 5 years. Another focus of the Government is to assure that all the students in Kerala will have access to internet. As a part of this initiative, the internet reach of the State will be expanded to all possible regions in a time-bound manner. More laptops and tabs will be distributed, especially to students who can't afford them. Also a special package has been declared for children who have lost both their parents to COVID-19. A sum of Rs. 3 lakhs each will be distributed as onetime payment. Rs. 2000/- will be distributed every month until the age of 18. Moreover, their education expenses up to graduation will be taken care of by the Government.

Even as the Government is moving forward with endeavours to transform the face of Kerala, we need to realise that the most important need of the hour is to bring the pandemic completely under control. With a possible third wave looming over us, the Government is determined to keep



*Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister*

the people of Kerala safe and avert the possibility of yet another lockdown. Genetic sequencing of breakthrough infections and infections among kids are being executed. The result of the same will be analysed on a weekly basis. We will be keeping a close watch on possible mutations that happen to the virus. All COVID protocols including social distancing will be enforced in public places. The relief measures too will be continued until we can get our lives fully back on track.

I believe that Kerala has all the potential to grow in to one of the finest destinations in the world in terms of overall growth and social contentment. The Government will stand by the side of our citizens in every step of the way; and lead from the front in all matters of progress. Together, let's work towards making our dreams come true.

## 100 Days programme to implement futuristic endeavours

**The new LDF Government is not only committed to carry on the good work, but also poised to ideate and implement a host of new and futuristic endeavours. The 100 Days Programme is the first step in this direction. It is already underway and will continue till 19 September, 2021. Drafted with an intent to overcome the economic and social consequences of COVID-19, the programme will see the execution of various measures including creation of new jobs, development of new possibilities in health, education and social security and strengthening the base of our knowledge economy. Ventures worth Rs. 2464.92 Crores are included in this programme under the PWD, Rebuild Kerala Initiative and the KIIFB.**

# Age cannot wither her fighting spirit



When Janaki Amma, the 104-year-old centurion was admitted to the Kannur Medical College on May 31, her health had worsened. Much more to the anxiety of her relatives was her age. Oxygen dipped to an alarming level.

But she triumphed over the deadly pandemic. A big salute to her fighting spirit and the selfless, committed service of the health professionals in the hospital. From the day she got admitted to the hospital, the medical staff, under the leadership of COVID-19 nodal officer Pramod, were determined to cure her. She was included in the high-risk category and the treatment was coordinated by doctors from the specialities of general medicine, anaesthesia, and pulmonology. She left the hospital after spending eleven days.

“Janaki Amma’s confidence is an inspiration for all”, said Health Minister Veena George. The Minister congratulated the hospital staff for nursing Janaki Amma back to health.

The Government of Kerala is all set to start a vaccine production centre at the Life Science Park, Thonnakal, Thiruvananthapuram. Dr Chithra IAS has been appointed director of the vaccine production project. A team of experts will be included in this project. The working group experts will conduct discussions with vaccine manufacturing companies for the production of vaccines. Dr K P Sudheer (Principal Secretary, Science and Technology) is the chairman of this group. Dr B Iqbal (State-level expert committee, Covid management), Dr. Vijayakumar(vaccine expert), Dr Rajan Khobragade (Principal Secretary Health And Family Welfare), Dr. Rajamanikyam IAS( Managing Director KSIDC) are the other members of this working group. As the need for vaccines is increasing day by day, the Government of Kerala has taken effective steps to start the vaccine production centre to ensure vaccine for every citizen in the State.

# Kerala to start vaccine production centre



# Healthier measures

## Interview with Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal



**N.V. Raveendranathan Nair**  
Senior Journalist



*K.N. Balagopal, Minister for Finance*

**P**resenting his debut budget, Finance Minister K N Balagopal has come up with proposals instilling hopes and confidence in the people who are struggling to ward off the ill effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and economic fronts.

Though he had sufficient reasons to introduce new taxes to cross over the COVID-19 induced financial crisis the Finance Minister opted not to burden the people citing that it is not the right time to do so.

*A third wave of the pandemic*

*hanging like Damocles' sword, the finance minister has rightly chosen to address the situation as a health emergency. The budget prioritised the health sector and put forth key initiatives to expand preventive healthcare facilities.*

*The budget's focus is on strengthening the core aspects of health infrastructure. The budget proposes to start isolation wards for contagious diseases at all community health centres, taluk, district and general hospitals. Setting up of independent blocks in medical college hospitals for combating contagious diseases; enhancing bed strength of*

*pediatric ICUs; setting up liquid medical oxygen plant of 150-tonne capacity via PPP, and promoting vaccine research and development by encouraging manufacturers to set up units in Kerala are part of the highlights of Balagopal's budget speech.*

*Once the COVID-19 pandemic is contained, financial reforms would be introduced based on the recommendations of the State Finance Commission, Balagopal says in an exclusive interview granted to N.V Raveendranathan Nair for Kerala Calling*

**As the Finance Minister, you have been left with the challenging task of crossing over a hitherto unheard of crisis. Your debut budget is seen as an earnest effort in this direction. What was the philosophy behind your making of the budget?**

We are dealing with a crisis, so far unheard of. For the last 100 years, we have not confronted a pandemic like COVID-19.

Everyone is living under the shadow of fear. People's life is threatened, mobility is restricted, even the rules for moving from one place to another has been changed. In every sphere of life, we are witnessing a sea change. Life is going ahead through a warlike situation. During wars, people in the bordering states live under

prolonged restrictions given the threat from the enemy. Here, we live under the shadow of death, fearing the invisible enemy – a virus.

The first wave of COVID-19 and the consequent lockdown have

**The philosophy behind the Budget is to focus on these two aspects- firstly to vaccinate everyone as soon as possible and secondly to bring the economy back on track.**

**Only if God's own country is healthy, people from far and wide would feel secure and confident to visit here.**

already paralysed life and the economy to a large extent. With its second coming, the pandemic has literally pulverised every sector of life. The employment, education, production and agriculture sectors have come to a standstill. To breathe life into these sectors we have to secure the health of people by vaccinating them against COVID-19 and instill confidence in them by reviving the economy. So, naturally, the philosophy behind the Budget is to focus on these two aspects- firstly to vaccinate everyone as soon as possible and secondly to bring the economy back on track.

**You said the Health sector would receive the priority. Do you think the allocations made in your budget proposals are enough to ensure that everyone gets vaccinated in a time-bound manner?**

The budget presented by Dr. Thomas Isaac in January, this year had the character of a general budget in its approach and allocations. In case a new government comes to power after the elections, generally, it would either scrap or reshape the previous government's budget. As the LDF returned to power, we decided not to make any change in Dr. Isaac's budget and to implement it without any change. Along with it, broadly we considered two aspects. We feel that it's the government's responsibility to provide COVID-19 vaccine to all, above the age group of 18 -44 years free of cost. Because of the reports that there could be a third wave of the pandemic, we have to prepare ourselves to deal with such a health emergency. For this, we have to improve the facilities in the hospitals from CHCs to Medical Colleges. Scientists and medical professionals are pointing to the prospect of various

infectious diseases being spread through the air. Though there have been no authentic studies to confirm that the new variant of COVID-19 would affect children, we have to take that aspect also into account.

We have over 150 community centres at the block level. We plan to develop and improve infrastructure facilities including the construction of Paediatric wards. Buying new equipment including oxygen beds in each such hospital spending up to Rs. 3 crore each is our priority. Rs.500 crores will be utilised to purchase medical equipment.

Facility to deal with infectious diseases should be set up urgently at least in two medical colleges. Setting up a 150 MT capacity Liquid Oxygen plant under the PPP model is a major project. Behind all these, there is a philosophy. If we could give the vaccine to all, we could open up our economy soon. The United States and Europe could open up their economy as they vaccinated 50 to 70 per cent of their population. The experience suggests that if people get two doses of vaccine, even if they get infected, the disease will not become severe. We plan to complete the vaccination for all above the age of 18 as soon as possible.

**Do you think the proposals to strengthen the Health sector will help to boost the economy?**

Once the health is regained, we have to set the economy ready in three to four months to provide employment to the people. We need more investments. More funding is required for the MSMEs.

Our tourism sector being a fragile one, there are chances for people to contract the illness from the visitors. Only if God's own country is healthy, people from far and wide would feel secure and confident to visit here.



Taking all these into account that we decided to provide loans with the offer of interest subsidies to various sectors. Besides, the Tourism sector, entrepreneurs, expatriates and farmers will get the funding to strengthen the economic activity.

**You have referred to funding infrastructural projects in the health sector and on the economic front. More funding means more expenditure. There is a Rs.20,000 crore COVID-19 related package. But, you have not made any proposals to improve the income and decided not to levy any new tax. How do you plan to manage the additional expenses?**

We have Rs.3000 to 4,000 crore additional expenditure. When the total schemes are implemented including the Rs.20, 000 crore package, the expenditure will further go up.

But it is not the right time to levy tax. When the people have no money to buy food and medicine, they won't be able to pay tax. We are not providing the entire amount directly from the government. We arrange Rs.9000 crore as a loan to the business community with offering interest subsidy at the rate of three to four per cent. If they avail it from banks they will have to pay 8 to 9 per cent interest. Investing one crore in the agri- sector will fetch 20 jobs compared to two jobs in a modern

industry or a factory. Agri sector loans worth Rs.2000 crore are on offer. Our vision is to convert Agri products into raw materials for investors. Priority will be given for Agri production. Pravasis will get Rs.1000 crore. If we spend Rs.1000 crore, 10,000 new jobs can be generated.

An allocation of Rs.2,800 crore has been made for the health sector alone. Rs. 600 crore is exclusively earmarked for improving hospital infrastructure. Rs 559 crore will be made available to the hospitals under the panchayaths and Municipalities from a Centrally sponsored project. An amount from the MLA's local area development fund also will be pooled for the benefit of the health sector. Rs. 1740 crore has been earmarked to provide food kits for the next four months. Rs.1100 crore has been allocated for the beneficiaries of the Welfare Boards who are not receiving any pension.

We are advancing the arrears due to the contractors. Rs.3000 crore will be pushed forward for the MNREGS. Altogether, we push Rs.20,000 crore to the people to make money circulate among them. We hope these steps would help activate the economy.

There are some projects to clean up our backwaters. Global warming and climate change are affecting us and it has started impacting our tourism sector. There is a major allocation for the development of the coastal areas. KSRTC cannot be allowed to incur such a huge loss forever. Rs.300 crore is required to convert the diesel engines of the KSRTC buses into CNG. This year Rs.100 crore will be spent to

convert 1000 buses into CNG.

Besides reducing the fuel cost it will help check the contamination. Introduction of 5000 e -auto-rickshaws and 10,000 battery driven e-bikes at subsidised rate are part of the efforts to control environmental contamination.

**The budget has mentioned the importance of the knowledge economy. But has there any serious effort on the part of our universities to link their research departments with industries?**

We have to bring out major projects for extracting the benefits of the Knowledge economy. But our universities should come forward to start productive projects and link their Research and development wings with the industries. There are scopes for major business houses to fund such projects. In the budget presented by Dr.Isaac in January, there were proposals to provide Rs.150 crore with each to the major universities and Rs.50 crore each to other higher education centres. Higher education and research would be given priority.

**What did you have in mind when you decided to be pragmatic on the budget?**

All budgets are sincere efforts to better every sector of governance. With earnest efforts from the department officials, most of the proposals get implemented. But sometimes, because of various reasons, certain proposals in

the budget may have been left unimplemented. Without the proactive efforts of the departments, it will be difficult to achieve the targets.

**You said it was not the right time to introduce new taxes. But the budget has proposals that incur**

**additional expenditure. How will you reduce the expense?**

There will be strict measures to bring down expenses. Once the situations become congenial we will have to introduce new taxation. As the centre has changed its vaccine policy and decided to provide vaccine free of cost to

the states, we can save Rs.1000 crore. But, during a crisis, the Government wants to help people even by borrowing and once the Covid situation is improved, we will explore ways to add to the state revenues and check the expenditure.

## State Budget 2021-22: Major Highlights

- The conservation measures worth Rs.5300 crore over the next five years is proposed for the facelift to the coastal sector.
- 10 Hydrogen-powered buses on a pilot basis in collaboration with the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) to be launched as an initial step to help reduce the operational cost of the KSRTC.
- Rs.100 crore for converting KSRTC's 1000 diesel-based buses into CNG.
- Rs.2000 crore for additional working capital for Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- Rs.50 crore worth interest subsidy and Rs.25 crore entrepreneur support scheme, and Rs.15 crore for margin money and interest assistance scheme for nano industrial housing units projects.
- Rs.1000 crore for a free vaccination.
- Rs.500 crore to purchase medical equipment.

### Revised Budget Estimate for 2021-22

(amounts in crores )

- |                                       |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| ▪ Revenue Receipts: 1,30,981.06       | ◆ | ▪ Public Account (Net) 6250.00                             |
| ▪ Revenue Expenditure: 1,47,891.18    | ◆ | ▪ Overall deficit: 27.68                                   |
| ▪ Revenue Deficit: 16,910.12          | ◆ | ▪ Additional expenditure announced 1715.10                 |
| ▪ Capital expenditure (net) 12,546.17 | ◆ | ▪ The cumulative deficit at the end of the year 1,866.7957 |
| ▪ Loans and advances (net) 1241.30    | ◆ |  |
| ▪ Public Debt (net) 24,419.91         | ◆ |  |

# Determined to protect general education

**V. Sivankutty**

Minister, General Education

**N**o one is familiar with this strange phase that the world is passing through. The pandemic called COVID-19 has declared war on mankind. As human beings are the carriers of the disease, we have been forced to take odd measures as part of survival. From March 2020 onwards, safety measures such as lockdown have been implemented to prevent gatherings and thereby contain the spread of the virus. Unusual circumstances call for unusual modes of action. There is a predicament the world over as far as school education is concerned. Schools have remained closed. Like anywhere else, Kerala too could not commence the last academic year on June 1 as has been the norm otherwise. Due to the outbreak of the second wave of COVID-19, it was not possible to start the new academic year on June 1, 2021, either, in a way that students expected.

When the whole world was caught in a dilemma about the functioning of children's education, we looked for innovative ways to go about it. Digital classes were launched through KITE-VICTERS, an edutainment channel under the Department of Education as a part of this process on June 1, 2021. When digital learning is discussed, the problems caused by the digital void come up as a global cause for

concern. Studies conducted through Samagra Shiksha showed that out of 45 lakh students, 2.6 lakh face issues related to digital accessibility. At the behest of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Kerala came together, setting aside all their political differences. Within a matter of days, digital accessibility was made possible for all students. This is perhaps a feature that is unique to our state. We need to understand that no other state in India

provides digital classes on such a comprehensive scale.

The last five years saw sweeping changes as part of the General Education Protection Mission. Infrastructure was upgraded on a massive scale. Technological equipment was introduced in all schools. Inequality is visible when digital infrastructure is introduced in different parts of the world. The



V. Sivankutty, Minister, General Education

rich-poor divide becomes evident. It is in such a scenario that we ensured digital access to all students without such discrimination. The quality of academics is as important as the improvement of infrastructure. Without quality education, we cannot make public schools attractive places of learning.

Kerala's community as a whole, especially parents, trusted the efforts of the government to improve the quality of public schools by ensuring the availability of modern technology. The outbreak of COVID-19 forced children to stay at home for more than a year. This happened at a stage when varied action plans were being developed for quality education. The condition still persists so, this year, we should aim to tackle problems raised by COVID-19 in our own ways.

Even if we were at

**Kerala's community as a whole, especially parents, trusted the efforts of the government to improve the quality of public schools by ensuring the availability of modern technology.**

**Our public schools must transform into public spaces that are secular and democratic, where quality education is assured for all. Everyone must unite to ensure that the General Education Protection Mission is a success.**

home, we held Pravesanotsavam - the start of the new academic year, on June 1. Sitting apart, we came together with our minds. This academic year can be made meaningful by engaging in activities that can be best carried out within the limitations created by COVID-19. In a normal situation, learning takes place in teacher-led classrooms where students exchange their learning experience. Other factors such as the confidence that the environment of a school campus provides are as important. But in the time of COVID-19, students are hindered from partaking in such experiences. So, we cannot consider digital learning as an alternative measure to classroom learning. At this stage, we must be able to give children the confidence and reassurance needed to keep productively engaged on the path towards learning. Teachers have a major role in this. During the last academic year, teachers carried out follow-up activities to digital classes in an impressive manner. Utilizing technology in the best manner possible also revealed new experiences. We should conduct digital classes this year by taking advantage of the learnings from last year. We will rely on digital classes till conditions become favourable. Follow-up activities must be carried out after digital classes. Leadership should be provided at the school level for the same.

We live in times when knowledge-based education is being debated. Knowledge is given a lot of importance in this world. For the same reason, it will be impossible to live in society simply by depending on bookish

knowledge. Only those who can develop their skills by assessing their environment can survive in future societies. School children should be given opportunities to participate in various activities through which they can build knowledge. This is where the experimental study becomes highly relevant. Our classrooms need to be more process-oriented. For this, we should make use of all available technologies. Teachers need to be skilled and creative in leading such matters. Their professionalism needs further enhancement. This requires fail-proof, organized orientation programmes. It can be made possible by making timely changes to the current teacher training programs.

School campuses should be made more attractive for when they open after the COVID phase. Many schools in Kerala have been made attractive to students using funds from KIIFB and other plans. Maintenance work should be carried out on school buildings and features like walls should be beautified to make the campus more attractive to children. Local self-governing bodies have a crucial role in this.

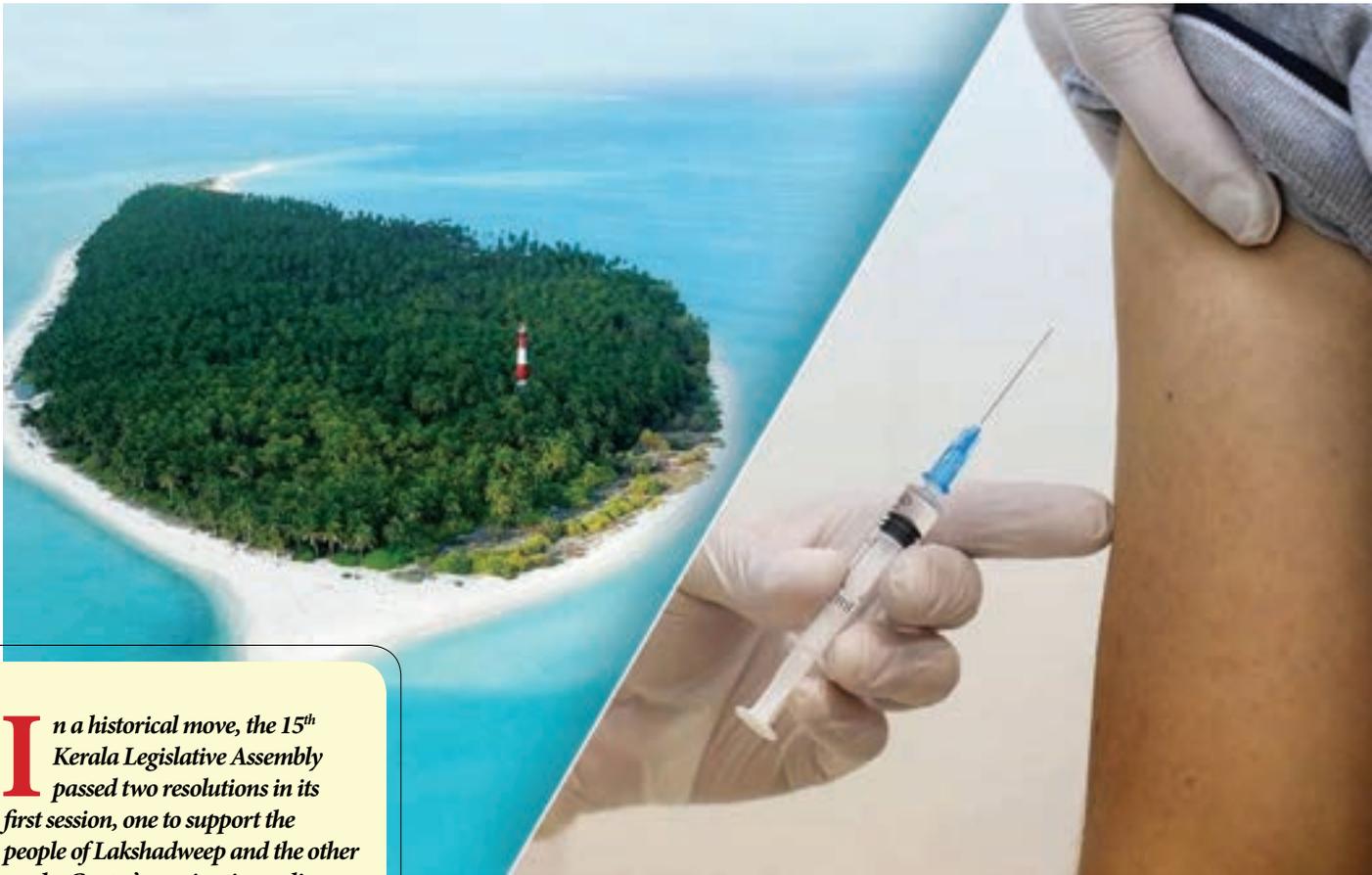
We need to continue on those initiatives that were already in progress to make our schools equipped for differently-abled students. We need everybody's co-operation to carry the activities initiated by the previous government forward. Plans should be made at the academic level to compensate for the gap in the learning process suffered by students as a result of missing out on classroom learning.

Our public schools must transform into public spaces that are secular and democratic, where quality education is assured for all. Everyone must unite to ensure that the General Education Protection Mission is a success.

# A rare camaraderie



**Bimal Shivaji**  
Senior Journalist



**I**n a historical move, the 15<sup>th</sup> Kerala Legislative Assembly passed two resolutions in its first session, one to support the people of Lakshadweep and the other on the Centre's vaccination policy

The 15<sup>th</sup> Kerala Legislative Assembly made history when it passed two significant resolutions unanimously in its first session held from May 24 to June 9, 2021.

On May 31, expressing solidarity with the people of Lakshadweep, the Kerala Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a resolution

requesting the Centre's immediate intervention to protect the lives and livelihood of the islanders.

With this, Kerala has become the first state in the country to come up with a resolution to support the people of the union territory over recent developments.

On June 2, the Assembly passed another unanimous resolution urging the Centre to provide free COVID-19

vaccines to all states and ensure its easy availability. State Health Minister Veena George moved the resolution which was supported by opposition members after certain amendments.

“To fight the pandemic we need to provide free universal vaccination which will ensure that all sections of society are protected from the virus. The Union government can't shirk its responsibility and

leave everything to states. It has to ensure vaccination in a time-bound manner,” said the resolution.

## Resolution on vaccination policy

On June, 2, Minister for Health, Women and Child Welfare Veena George moved the resolution in the Legislative Assembly of Kerala as the State faced an acute shortage of COVID-19 vaccine. The resolution was moved one day after the Chief Minister reiterated in the House that his government will make available COVID-19 vaccine free of cost to the citizens and that one crore COVID-19 vaccine doses had been ordered by the government.

The resolution moved by the Health Minister was also critical of the Union government’s vaccine policy which pushed the States to compete in the open market for vaccine purchase from the manufacturers.

The Health Minister also highlighted that the coronavirus crisis had weakened the country’s economy. “If we could take necessary steps for speeding up the vaccination, it would help the economy also,” she had said.

The policy of free vaccines to combat dangerous infectious diseases was adopted as a national policy earlier. The Centre is now asking States to procure vaccines from the market and this is highly condemnable, the resolution said.

The resolution was approved by the House after incorporating the amendments moved by the Opposition. This was the second time in the ongoing first session of the 15th Kerala Legislative Assembly that the ruling CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and Opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) had joined hands to pass a government resolution.



*Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister*

## CM TAKES THE INITIATIVE

The Chief Minister of Kerala, on May 29, wrote a letter to all non-BJP chief ministers seeking a united effort to press the Centre to procure vaccine and ensure universal vaccination.

“Wrote to 11 CMs in the spirit of Cooperative Federalism. Quite unfortunate that the Centre absolves itself of its duty to procure vaccines, ensure free universal vaccination. United effort to jointly pursue our genuine demand is the need of the hour so that Centre acts immediately,” CM tweeted.

The letter urged the states to jointly demand that the vaccine be fully procured directly by the Center and distributed free of cost to the states. The letter was sent to the chief ministers of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Kerala had sent a letter to the Prime Minister requesting the Center to call for a global tender considering the vaccine demand of all the states.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on June 7, announced his decision to centralise vaccine procurement and provide free inoculation to the 18-44 age group, a week after a 32-page Supreme Court order, the Kerala Chief Minister welcomed the move. He said, “I wholeheartedly welcome the statement made by the Prime Minister that COVID-19 vaccine will be supplied to the States free of cost from June 21. This has been the consistent demand of Kerala. We are extremely happy to note that the new policy will go a long way in building herd immunity against the pandemic. This will also alleviate the need for the States to spend substantial amount towards the purchase of vaccine,” the CM said.

# Exemplary performance

## Kerala retains top position in SDGs India Index



Kavita Martin  
Senior Journalist



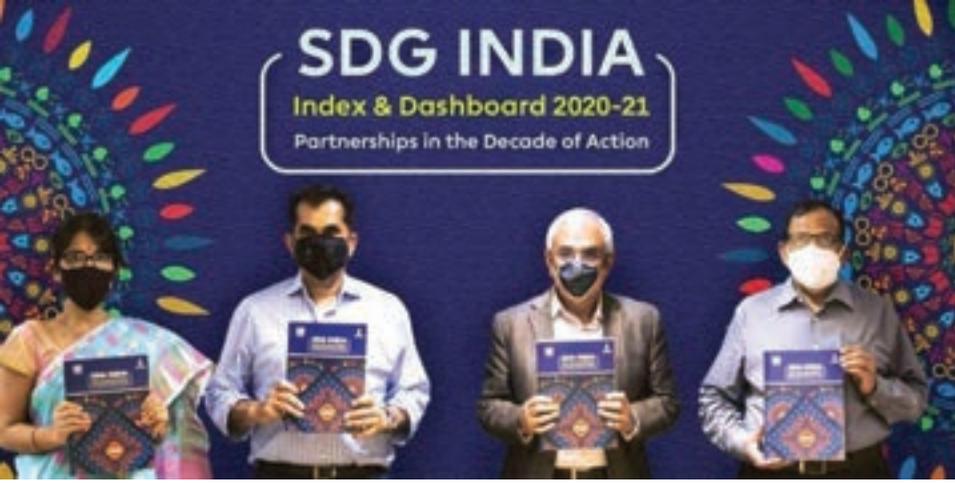
**K**erala continued to progress in various social and economic spheres of society during the past year despite a never before the encountered pandemic.

While the astounding success in fighting COVID-19 has been widely recognised the world over with accolades pouring in from across

the globe, it is the State's continued growth that has baffled experts and political leaders alike. On June 3, the Government of India released the SDGs India Index 2020-21 and Kerala, which has been on the top of the list since it was launched by NITI Aayog in 2018.

SDGs India Index, developed in collaboration with the United Nations, measures the progress at the national and sub-national levels in our journey towards meeting the global goals and targets.

NITI Aayog came up with the SDG



India Index spanning 13 out of 17 SDGs (leaving out Goals 12, 13, 14 and 17) in 2018. The Index tracks the progress of all the states and Union Territories (UTs) on a set of 62 National Indicators, measuring their progress on the outcomes of the interventions and government schemes. The SDG India Index is intended to provide a holistic view of the social, economic and environmental status of the country and its states and UTs.

It has been designed to provide an aggregate assessment of the performance of all Indian States and UTs and to help leaders and change-makers evaluate their performance on social, economic and environmental parameters. It aims to measure India and its states' progress towards the SDGs for 2030, as per NITI Aayog.

This edition of the index covered 17 goals, 70 targets, and 115 indicators, while the last covered 17 goals, 54 targets and 100 indicators.

In a statement, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said, "The Kerala model of people's development and social progress is once again number one in the country. Kerala has been adjudged as the best-performing state in Niti Ayog's 2020-21 Sustainable Development

**The SDG India Index is intended to provide a holistic view of the social, economic and environmental status of the country and its states and UTs.**



*Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister*

**The Niti Ayog's new Sustainable Development Index gives us the confidence and motivation to excel. At the same time, this study will help comprehensively study the development developments in the social, economic and environmental spheres and understand where Kerala stands with the international indicators**

Goals Index. The fact that we were able to do this despite the crises created by the COVID-19 epidemic adds to the change in achievement."

"These achievements are based on

the development perspectives and commitment that we have unwaveringly upheld over the past five years. The Niti Ayog's new Sustainable Development Index gives us the confidence and motivation to excel. At the same time, this study will help comprehensively study the development developments in the social, economic and environmental spheres and understand where Kerala stands with the international indicators." He said.

Despite many challenges, the people of Kerala were able to overcome them with determination and stand united for the good of the country. It is also a recognition of that glorious example of dedication and brotherhood. Let's fill in the gaps and move forward together with more enthusiasm," the Chief Minister said in his Facebook post on June 3.

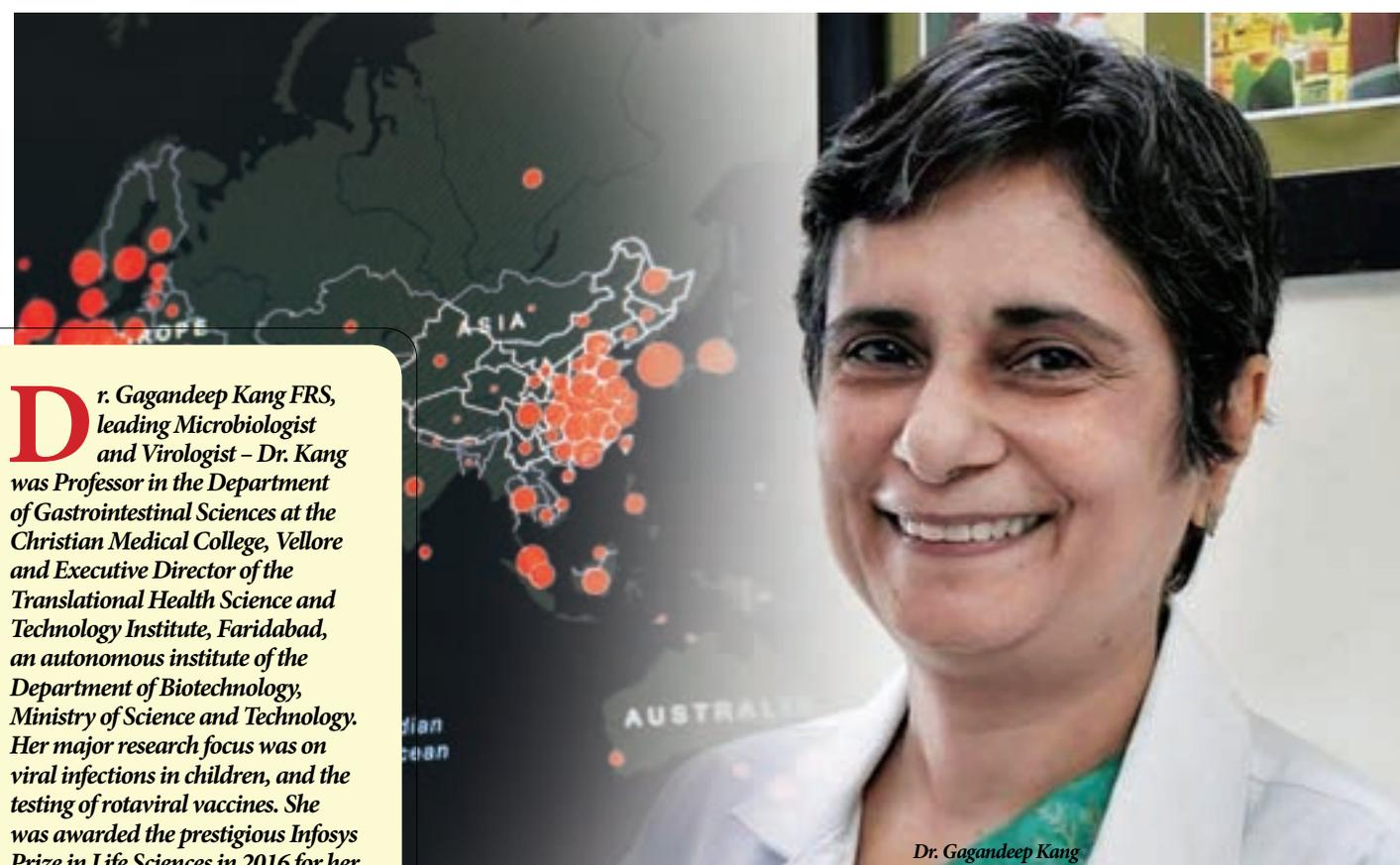
"The report reflects on the partnerships we have built and strengthened during our SDG efforts. The narrative throws light on how collaborative initiatives can result in better outcomes and greater impacts," Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said during the release of the index.

Among front runners were Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Punjab, Haryana, Tripura, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. According to the report, Tamil Nadu and Delhi improved the per capita income of citizens while Gujarat and Delhi topped the health sector while Kerala and Chandigarh did well on education.

# Delta variant spreads faster: Dr. Gagandeep Kang



**N. Bhadran Nair**  
Executive Editor, Indian  
Science Journal



*Dr. Gagandeep Kang*

**D**r. Gagandeep Kang FRS, leading Microbiologist and Virologist – Dr. Kang was Professor in the Department of Gastrointestinal Sciences at the Christian Medical College, Vellore and Executive Director of the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, Faridabad, an autonomous institute of the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology. Her major research focus was on viral infections in children, and the testing of rotaviral vaccines. She was awarded the prestigious Infosys Prize in Life Sciences in 2016 for her contributions to understanding the natural history of rotavirus and other infectious diseases. Dr Kang was the first Indian woman to be elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 2019.

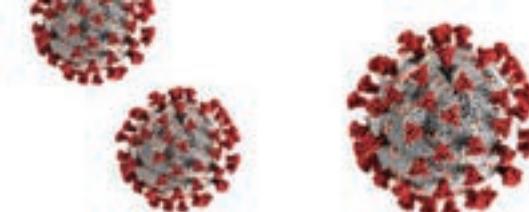
*Dr Gagandeep Kang talked exclusively to N. Bhadran Nair for Kerala Calling on various aspects of the prevailing pandemic COVID-19 in India.*

**It has been an unprecedented period for the global community and equally challenging for the healthcare professionals with the outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic since early 2020. Do you believe, the crisis is over, or still we have to be watchful, before normalcy is restored?**

**Dr. Gagandeep Kang:** The crisis is not over and will not be over as a public health emergency until most of the world is

infected or vaccinated. We are dealing with a new virus that is increasing in its ability to infect people, so we really need to ensure that we can protect people and decrease transmission by increasing immunity.

Just like last year, when we needed to flatten the curve so that our healthcare systems would not be overwhelmed, this year too we need to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected



from infection until they can be fully vaccinated. Therefore, we need to continue to be watchful and at this time, we are some distance away from any level of normalcy.

**The second wave of COVID-19 has been lethal in India, with more than 50 percent of the casualties recorded in a short period of three months, than during the first wave. Some experts warn a third wave is inevitable and it would be even more deadly. Do you subscribe to this view?**

**Dr. Gagandeep Kang:** Essentially, the third, or fourth or any subsequent waves are dependent on potentially infectious people coming in contact with people who are not protected from infection. The more infectious the virus is, the more easily infections happen. Last year we said that you needed to have face-to-face contact for at least 15 minutes to get infected, this time around with more infectious virus that duration is shorter. There is some indication that the Delta variant progresses to severe disease faster than other viral variants. We do not know whether this is because the virus replicates better or because it has become more virulent. I think the former is more likely to be the case, but we will need more information for confirmation of the severity.

**In the hindsight, do you see had India not lowered its guard after abating the viral spread in the first quarter of the current year, the situation wouldn't have gone out of control during the second wave?**

**Dr. Gagandeep Kang:** There were three components to the speed and scale of the second wave. These were letting down our guard and ignoring precautions on the use of masks and avoidance of crowds, the permissions granted for superspreader events, and finally, the emergence of the Delta variants. Given the rapidity of the spread in other parts of the world, it is clear that the Delta variants is very infectious and the precautions we had previously were likely to be insufficient, but our behaviour and events that permitted crowding amplified the scale

and accelerated the speed.

**Some medical scientists opined, the treatments given to COVID-19 patients were like the idiom “throwing darts in the dark”. Do you believe indiscriminate use of Remdesivir or steroids have accentuated the situation? Many medical professionals blamed it for WHO protocols.**

**Dr. Gagandeep Kang:** Irrational treatment is unfortunately all too frequent in India, whether that is the overuse of antibiotics for simple viral infections or the unnecessary vitamin supplements. For COVID-19, we had in appropriate recommendations for both prophylaxis and treatment that were widely adopted across the country. Other than one clinical trial on convalescent plasma with about 500 subjects, we have had minimal contributions to the evaluation of appropriate therapies and the approval of drugs based on very limited clinical data, despite the fact that we have had huge numbers of cases in the country. The WHO Solidarity trial had many sites in India but despite the large number of science and cases, India contributed just about 10 percent of the overall numbers in the trial. The solidarity trial confirmed the findings that steroids worked in patients who had showed that Remdesivir did not work.

**The government has been tweaking the gap between the first dose of COVID vaccine and the second booster dose. Do you believe, it is based on any scientific evidence or forced by the gap in demand and supply situation?**

**Dr. Gagandeep Kang:** The adjustment to the doses is only being done for the Covishield vaccine and is based on data from clinical trials and from the UK showing that the vaccine works well with a single dose against severe disease due to the Alpha and the Delta variants. For the Delta variant, there is lower protection against infection (33 percent with one and 60 percent with two doses for infection, 71 percent and 92 percent for severe disease). Given the reasonable protection against severe disease with a single dose, it makes sense to give one dose to more people than to give two doses to half the people.

**Children are more vulnerable to infectious diseases. Shouldn't the**

**vaccination protocol have taken care of children as a priority group for vaccination?**

**Dr. Gagandeep Kang:** In most situations, children are more likely to be in when infected and adults. However, in this pandemic although children are infected at the same rate, the levels of severe disease are much lower. That is not to say that no children become severely ill, but the proportion of severe illness is low. Ultimately children will need to be vaccinated, and this may be required more to stop the spread of infection than to protect children directly. I do not think we should prioritise children over adults at this time.

**At the end of the second wave, many countries including India found the spread of black fungus, white fungus and the latest is Delta variant. Do you believe the ever increasing mutations of Coronavirus would make efficacy of the currently available vaccines under stress?**

**Dr. Gagandeep Kang:** Among the variants, the one that has the greatest escape from the immune response is the beta variant, possibly followed by the delta variant. As long as the virus multiplies at a high level, variants are likely to continue to emerge. We will have to wait and see the consequences of these mutations on the performance of vaccines.

**Why do you think the new variants of COVID like Black Fungus, White Fungus and Delta are fast spreading in India? Is there any specific reason?**

**Dr. Gagandeep Kang:** India's rate of mucormycosis was the highest in the world, even before COVID-19. The fungal infections that we are seeing have arisen for a number of reasons which include uncontrolled sugars in diabetics, the inappropriate use of steroids and an inability to manage oxygenation as needed. It is also possible that there is damage to the pancreas, which might result in poor glycaemic control. All of these factors contribute to fungal infections but it is not clear whether any of them are related to the emergence of variants.

# The third wave and prevention

**Dr. Indu. P.S.**  
Professor and head,  
Community Medicine,  
Govt Medical College,  
Thrissur

**Dr. Prajitha K.C.**  
Senior Resident,  
Govt Medical College,  
Thiruvananthapuram



**K**erala has not been out of the second wave yet. With the possibility of a third wave around the corner, the State is all set to overcome the threat.

A steep peak in the global epidemic curve occurred recently in which South East Asia Region was most affected (figure 1)one. India continues to be the country reporting the highest number of daily cases, though there is 31% reduction in the number of cases. The genetic variations, large crowds and non-compliance to basic public health and social measures have all contributed to this wave in India. The wave in India was steeper than the wave faced by any other country, since the beginning of this pandemic.

*Reference- COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update Edition, 44, WHO , 15th June 2021*

Kerala also has not yet come out of the second wave. It began in Kerala

**Well co-ordinated and synchronised responses from different departments and sectors in Kerala enabled us to tide over the situation. There was excellent inter-departmental co-ordination at the state and district levels, especially in the manner in which logistics, human resource and oxygen were managed.**

in the surge of cases (Fig: 2) and increase in the need for hospitalisation, critical care and oxygen. Well co-ordinated and

which logistics, human resource and oxygen were managed. With the concerted efforts of different departments and consequent to the implementation of lock down, the number of cases have come down to 12,469 on 17th June and the overall test positivity rate has reduced to 10.85%. The overall efficiency of Kerala's response is reflected in the low case fatality rate of 0.4%.

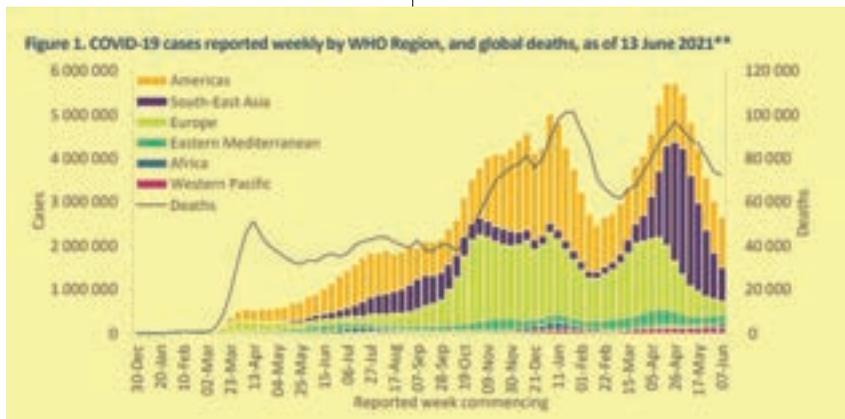
Fig 2: Number of new cases and 7-day average COVID-19 cases in Kerala 2

## Third Wave- Strategies for Prevention and Control

Restrictions are being lifted in Kerala from 17th June. The next few weeks and months are going to be very critical, since we have the highly transmissible delta variant circulating.

### 1. Enhancing the speed of Vaccination:

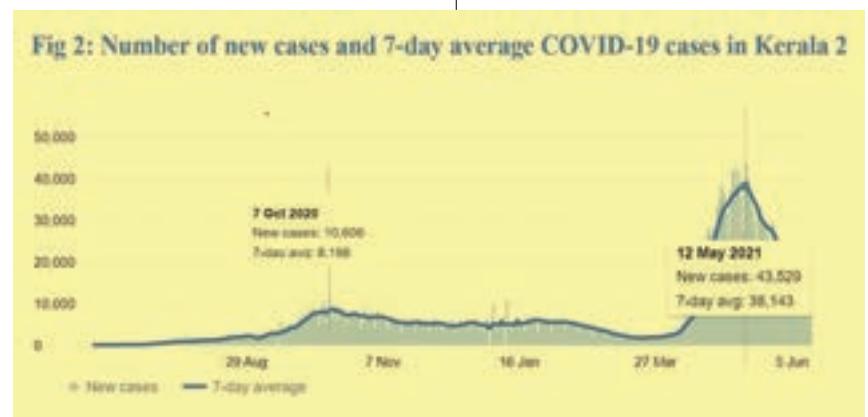
Vaccination is the critical intervention which can determine the direction of the COVID epidemic in Kerala. Lock downs become inevitable because of health system strain. Hospital admission rates and severity are extremely low



in April. There were 1.6 million cases and 6,887 deaths during this period. This amounts to about 60% of the total reported cases in Kerala. The circulating alpha and delta variants of SARS Co-V-2 , which have high transmissibility, high secondary attack rate and possibly enhanced severity resulted

synchronised responses from different departments and sectors in Kerala enabled us to tide over the situation. There was excellent inter-departmental co-ordination at the state and district levels, especially in the manner in

**Kerala is the first state in the country to implement a genetic epidemiology study with samples being analyzed from all districts since November 2020.**



among the vaccinated. Hence if Kerala can vaccinate its large proportion of susceptible population, using its robust public health system with

latest being the Lambda variant (VOI) reported first from Peru. Right now, we have VOCs and VOIs circulating in Kerala. Amongst these, the delta variant is a huge cause of concern for Kerala, especially when unlocking happens.

can be identified.

**4. Region specific public health intelligence and actions:**

Analysis of data at the PHC / LSGD unit/ institutional level will be done to initiate local actions. The number of tests to be done in an LSGD unit will also be based on this data.

**5. Contact tracing, quarantine, isolation:**

These public health and social measures will continue in a seamless manner.

**6. Risk Communication and Community Engagement:**

Constant communication and engaging people will be done based on the situation. Feedback from the community will also be considered in policy decisions.

**7. Case management:**

Facilities for diagnostics

TABLE 1: Total Vaccination done in the State as on 15/06/21 midnight

District	State Summary till 15/06/2021		at 12 AM		Total Doses Administered
	First Dose	Percentage*	Second Dose	Percentage*	
Alappuzha	579783	34%	161966	10%	741,749
Ernakulam	1092667	41%	264457	10%	1,357,124
Idukki	336650	38%	72342	8%	408,992
Kannur	691894	34%	170345	8%	862,239
Kasaragod	399301	41%	91399	9%	490,700
Kollam	713617	35%	189245	9%	902,862
Kottayam	591303	39%	149747	10%	741,050
Kozhikode	833722	34%	191854	8%	1,027,576
Malappuram	768103	24%	152726	5%	920,829
Palakkad	563847	26%	156409	7%	720,256
Pathanamthitta	496162	49%	147610	14%	643,772
Thiruvananthapuram	1078932	41%	294257	11%	1,373,189
Thrissur	830205	33%	195092	8%	1,025,297
Wayanad	312199	48%	88584	14%	400,783
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>9290385</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>2326033</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>11,616,418</b>

\*Percentage of eligible population(>= 18 years)

participation from private hospitals, in the shortest time span, there is hope for the prevention of the third wave and future lock downs. We have already vaccinated 77% of health care workers and 75% of front line workers and this is one of the reasons why their hospitalisation and mortality is extremely low in Kerala, compared to other places which faced surges.

Source: Daily bulletin DHS Kerala 3

**2. Strengthening surveillance**

Strengthening surveillance is the important step to identify early sparks. In addition to regular surveillance, genomic surveillance is also important in COVID. Kerala is the first state in the country to implement a genetic epidemiology study with samples being analyzed from all districts since November 2020. This is a collaborative initiative of Govt of Kerala and CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB). Data from genomic surveillance gives us inputs for policy actions. Globally, there are four variants of concern (VOCs) and seven variants of interest (VOIs), listed by the WHO1, the

Reference: COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update Edition, 44, WHO, 15th June 2021

**3. Enhancing testing:**

When lock downs are lifted, the number of tests are being increased.

Table 2: SARS-CoV-2 Variants of Concern (VOCs) and Variants of Interest (VOIs), as of 15 June 2021

WHO label	Pango lineage	GISAID clade	Nextstrain clade	Earliest documented samples	Date of designation
<b>Variants of Concern (VOCs):</b>					
Alpha	B.1.1.7	GRY (formerly GR/501Y.V1)	20I (V1)	United Kingdom, Sep-2020	18-Dec-2020
Beta	B.1.351	GH/501Y.V2	20H (V2)	South Africa, May-2020	18-Dec-2020
Gamma	P.1	GR/501Y.V3	20I (V3)	Brazil, Nov-2020	11-Jan-2021
Delta	B.1.617.2	G/478K.V1	21A	India, Oct-2020	VOI: 4-Apr-2021 VOC: 11-May-2021
<b>Variants of Interest (VOIs):</b>					
Epsilon	B.1.427/ B.1.429	GH/452R.V1	21C	United States of America, Mar-2020	5-Mar-2021
Zeta	P.2	GR/484K.V2	20B/5-484K	Brazil, Apr-2020	17-Mar-2021
Eta	B.1.525	G/484K.V3	21D	Multiple countries, Dec-2020	17-Mar-2021
Theta	P.3	GR/5092K.V1	21E	Philippines, Jan-2021	24-Mar-2021
Iota	B.1.526	GH/253G.V1	21F	United States of America, Nov-2020	24-Mar-2021
Kappa	B.1.617.1	G/452R.V3	21B	India, Oct-2020	4-Apr-2021
Lambda	C.37	GR/452Q.V1	20D	Peru, Aug-2020	14-Jun-2021

Those with high risk exposures and symptomatic must undergo testing, so they can be isolated to interrupt further transmission. Only through increasing the number of tests, early identification of clusters/outbreaks

and treatment are being strengthened

**8. Essential health services:**

Because of COVID, other health care have been compromised and this will be resumed at

primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Increasing the speed of vaccination is the most important intervention to prevent the third wave. Kerala has vaccinated 35% of the eligible population above 18 years (26.2% of total population) with one dose. We have vaccinated 9% of the eligible population (6.6% of total population) with two doses. With more evidence coming up on the need to give two doses of the vaccine to protect the population from new variants, by preventing severe COVID, hospitalisation and deaths, Kerala needs to focus on this critical strategy. Kerala has implemented an excellent vaccination programme, with zero wastage. The main impediment to speed up the vaccination is the availability of vaccines. To achieve this, many emergency policy decisions have to be taken at the national level. For example, recently, recombinant vaccine reported an efficacy above 90% and the advantage of this platform is that massive vaccine production is possible and the cost will be less. This technology earlier helped us to introduce universal vaccination of hepatitis B free in India. We hope that such policy decisions will be taken by Govt of India, on emergency basis to ensure vaccine availability to protect millions of people and to prevent future waves.

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2. COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University: url: <https://github.com/CSSEGISandData/COVID-19/COVID-19>
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# APP for PWD



P.A. Mohamed Riyas, Minister for P.W.D.

The Department of PWD under the leadership of Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas, has launched a new app to address the grievances and discomforts in the PWD roads. With the launch of this app, the public can directly register their complaints regarding the roads online. For the first three months, the app will be functioning on an experimental basis. These functions will be observed and necessary changes will be included after considering the suggestions from the public. The grievances about the PWD roads can be registered in the app along with the photos and the sender will be able to know about the actions initiated by the Department accordingly. Once registered, the complaint will be forwarded to the engineers of the Roads wing. Once the issues are solved and rectified by the authorities, they will be updated on the mobile application. Steps are in progress to digitalize the roads under the PWD. Pieces of information about 4000 km roads are included in this app. The digitalization of 29,000km roads has to be completed and the work is in full swing.

# To whom should I tell my grief?



**Dr. Arun B. Nair**  
Associate Professor of Psychiatry  
Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram



**I**n his splendid short story, *Misery*, Anton Chekhov depicts the picture of the grief-stricken sledge-driver, Iona who lost his son unexpectedly. Filled with grief and no where to turn for solace, Iona becomes grief personified. He wants to tell his sadness to someone, but fails to find a sympathetic ears. At midnight, in desperation, Iona starts telling his unbearable loss to his horse... Similar is the case with most of the people in this pandemic times. COVID 19 pandemic has affected the lives of all the sections of society belong to all age groups worldwide.

A large section of society is affected by psychological problems which the pandemic usually posed, ranging from hyperactivity in children to depression in adolescence to anxiety issues in the middle-aged to memory problems in the elderly. Every section of society is affected by the trauma caused by the pandemic. It is in this context that counselling becomes relevant as the second wave is progressing and probably the third wave is

expecting in the country.

Many people shy away from counselling thinking that it is something that is a part of treatment for mental disorders. But the truth is that counselling is usually given to people who are not having mental illness but are affected by stressful life events. Counselling is an empowerment process that any person may need at any time in life.

## Common problems faced by the population and relevance of counselling

Children are entering their second consecutive academic year without going to school or meeting their teachers or peers. Online education has posed definite problems for the learning memory and behaviour of children. A large no of children has developed behavioural addiction in the form of addiction to electronic gadgets. This may lead to aggression, poor learning skills and attention deficit in quite a large no of children. Counselling for children should be directed at responsible use of digital media as well as maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Adolescence groups are severely affected by the fact that the most beautiful phase of their life is getting wasted and not able to engage in any other productive activities. The restriction of freedom of movement has affected this group more than anyone else. The counselling of adolescent groups should be directed at enabling them to lead a healthy, productive and positive way of life with full engagement with their academic activities retaining their social connectivity. The energy of adolescents can be utilized in forming self-help groups, or voluntary service groups which can be used for COVID 19 awareness

**People affected by Covid are also petrified due to the psychological impact. They should refrain from reading and watching information related to Covid other than the messages spread by authentic agencies**

**Many people who have taken a loan and invested in business are suffering severe setbacks and are extremely apprehensive about the future. Many middle-aged are finding it hard to find resources for educating their children, for the treatment of ageing parents, repayment of easy monthly instalments. This is the area where real social support may be necessary.**

programs. The adolescents who can create videos and audios can spread the awareness and prevention messages about COVID 19. They can also be engaged in the delivery of essential supplies of medicines and all. This kind of social activism will give them a sense of direction, the purpose of life and would help them to remain positive during the pandemic.

Youth and the middle-aged are severely affected by the financial consequences of the pandemic. A large section of the youth in the private sector has lost their jobs or had severe pay cuts. Many people who have taken a loan and invested in business are suffering severe setbacks and are extremely apprehensive about the future. Many middle-aged are finding it hard to find resources for educating their children, for the treatment of ageing parents, repayment of easy monthly instalments. This is the area where real social support may be necessary. Counselling of adults and middle age should direct giving information in the facilities available to them in this crisis and specific directions regarding how to overcome financial problems associated with the pandemic.

One of the worst affected among the lot is people with lifestyle-induced diseases such as diabetics, cancer, hypertension, heart diseases etc. They are at risk to develop COVID complications. Many of them have affected by serious

depression because of their strict quarantine. Counselling these people should focus on empowering them to lead a healthy lifestyle with proper diet and regular exercise. Many people with long term diseases especially mental illness who were on treatment are finding it difficult to reach out to the hospital and procure medicines. The service of District Mental Health Programs becomes very valuable to these people.

Information about the services of DMHP in primary health programs should be informed.

The elderly population of people above 60 years have lost their only entertainment like evening walks, discussions with fellows beings and all. A large number of elderly people have developed sleep disturbances, anxiety and memory problems as well. Counselling them should be directed at helping them to remain physically and mentally active. Regular exercise at own courtyard for thirty minutes per day, proper diet, sleep hygiene exercises, learning new technological things etc would help them to maintain a positive mental state. Interaction with relatives and friends through social media would also help them to remain positive and confident.

People affected by Covid are also petrified due to the psychological impact. They should refrain from reading and watching information related to COVID other than the messages spread by authentic agencies. They can utilize online counselling services also to get relief from stress. At least 34% of the population who should have recovered from Covid are likely to develop severe mental illness in the next six months following COVID. Counselling for post-COVID is relevant and very much important. Relaxation exercises, cognitive restructuring to take away negative thought process, a healthy lifestyle, adequate entertainment all these should be factors should be emphasized in the counselling.

# Learning the e-way



**Jisha Surya**  
Freelance Journalist



**E**ven before the pandemic, the Edutech sector in Kerala has been brimming with innovations and possibilities. As the world froze under COVID 19, parents started looking out for new ways to teach their kids, making edutech one of the fastest-growing sectors now.

The pandemic not just affected the traditional mode of learning; it also exposed the impacts of the digital divide. After the first wave of pandemic crushed the normal school system, the state education sector was gearing up for a major revamp when the massive second wave hit with much greater intensity. Now it is almost certain that the students will

have to learn the e-way for most of the new academic year too.

Considering the concerns that the gap in digital infrastructure would alienate students from marginalized communities, the Kerala government had strategically adopted a digital education system, in contrast to the online learning adopted by schools that follow other syllabuses. According to K Anvar Sadath, CEO, Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education (KITE), digital education in the state is categorised into online, offline and broadcast, “Under our system, the broadcast is the primary medium and online is a supplementary mode. For students who lack infrastructure like TV, offline facilities to screen downloaded

contents were arranged,” he said. While state syllabuses take an inclusive approach, schools that follow other syllabuses are mostly dependent on online tools like zoom, google meet etc. Several private players are also active in the field.

Learning from the experiences of last academic year, the Education department is better equipped for digital learning. “Last year, we got merely ten days to get everything ready. Now we have resolved various issues ranging from accessibility, availability of teachers, etc. Proper follow up of the digital class by teachers concerned is one factor that needs to be given a special focus. Schools where



teachers properly monitored and followed up portions performed well,” said Sadath.

Shyamrin C, English teacher at MVHS Ariyallur, too stressed the importance of proper follow up after each class. “I would do it through WhatsApp or google meet. I also felt that sharing contents ahead of the actual class would make students engage well. However, there are lots of disadvantages to digital learning. Only students who are keen on learning show some interest in the digital classrooms. Subjects like Mathematics are very tough for students to follow through digital learning platforms,” she said.

Experts feel that public broadcasting

**Learning from the experiences of last academic year, the Education department is better equipped for digital learning.**

**Digital education could be seen as an opportunity. However, parents and teachers should properly monitor to ensure that students are watching age-appropriate contents.**

of the sessions helped in boosting the image of public education in Kerala. It also introduced a new benchmark for teaching with its unique and engaging style. With the huge popularity of ‘First Bell’ classes, the Youtube channel of KITE Victors started earning revenue within a month after launching the sessions.

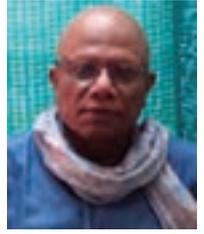
Excessive use of gadgets and access to the internet has also created concerns among both teachers and parents. Parents are struggling to limit the screen time of students. Shyamrin said that she had to intervene following complaints of parents that their children had developed relationships with strangers through online chats.

Dr G Mohan Roy, consultant psychiatrist and resident medical officer at Government Medical College Thiruvananthapuram, said that digital education could be seen as an opportunity. However, parents and teachers should properly monitor to ensure that students are watching age-appropriate contents. “We need an instructor even to learn driving. However, in the digital space, children are learning themselves. Proper monitoring and use of software to filter inappropriate contents are essential,” he said.

Dr Roy also said that students should be discouraged from opening accounts in social media below the permitted age bar. “Using social media at a young age might expose children to various issues including cyberbullying. While social media accounts must be beneficial to a minority, it harms most children,” he commented.

Shyamrin opined that gadgets that have features to screen out non-education contents will be ideal for educational purposes.

# UN launches “Decade on ecosystem restoration 2021-2030”



Ignatius Pereira  
Senior Journalist

**T**he outstanding aspect of this year’s World Environment Day celebrations, observed on June 5, was the launch of the “UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030”. The ambitious programme was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in March 2019 following a proposal by over 70 countries including India. The UN also declared that the programme would be led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The programme unites the world like never before behind a common goal: preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide.

Through this programme, the UN urges intense restoration of nature to address climate and biodiversity crises. The UN also called on countries to meet commitments to restore 1 billion hectares of land to nature. Facing the triple threat of climate change, loss of nature and pollution, the world must deliver on its commitment to restore at least one billion degraded hectares of land in the next decade - an area about

the size of China. Countries also need to add similar commitments for oceans.

The UN call underlines that “conservation efforts alone are insufficient to prevent large-scale ecosystem collapse and biodiversity loss. Global terrestrial restoration costs - not including costs of restoring marine ecosystems - are estimated to be at least US \$200



billion per year by 2030”. The report also outlines that every 1 US \$ invested in restoration creates up to US \$30 in economic benefits.

Ecosystem restoration is the process of halting and overturning degradation, resulting in cleaner air and water, extreme weather mitigation, better human health, and recovered biodiversity, including improved pollination of plants. It contributes to the realization of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including health, clean water, and peace and security, and to the objectives of the three ‘Rio Conventions’ on Climate, Biodiversity, and Desertification. The prime call of the programme is to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide.

Ecosystems across the world requiring urgent restoration include farmlands, forests, grasslands and savannahs, mountains, peat lands, urban areas, freshwaters, and oceans. Communities living across almost two billion of degraded hectares of land include some of the world’s poorest and marginalized. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 is a rallying

**The UN call underlines that “conservation efforts alone are insufficient to prevent large-scale ecosystem collapse and biodiversity loss.**

**A UN statement in this connection says that Restoring damaged ecosystems is an efficient and cost-effective way people can work with nature to address the most pressing challenges humanity is facing today, i.e. the Coronavirus disease 2019(COVID-19) global pandemic, especially in the context of the Build Back Better approach**

call for the protection and revival of ecosystems all around the world, for the benefit of people and nature. It aims to halt the degradation of ecosystems and restore them to achieve global goals. The UN Ecosystem Restoration Decade is building a strong, broad-based global movement to ramp up restoration and put the world on track for a sustainable future. That will include building political momentum for restoration as well as thousands of initiatives on the ground.

“We must all throw our weight behind a global restoration effort. Drawing on the latest scientific evidence, it sets out the crucial role played by ecosystems, from forests and farmland to rivers and oceans, and it charts the losses that result from a poor stewardship of the planet. Degradation is already affecting the well-being of an estimated 3.2 billion people - that is 40 percent of the world’s population” said UNEP Executive Director, Inger Andersen, and FAO Director-General, QU Dongyu.

The UN also emphasised that reliable monitoring of restoration efforts is essential, both to track progress and to attract private and public investments. In support of this effort, FAO and UNEP also launch today the Digital Hub for the UN Decade, which includes the “Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring.” The Framework enables countries and communities to measure the progress of restoration projects across key ecosystems, helping to build ownership and trust in restoration efforts. It also incorporates the “Drylands Restoration Initiatives Platform”, which collects and analyses data, shares lessons and assists in the design of drylands restoration projects, and an interactive geospatial mapping tool to assess the best locations for forest restoration.

“Restoration must involve all stakeholders including individuals, businesses, associations, and governments. Crucially, it must respect the needs and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, and incorporate their knowledge; experience and capacities to ensure restoration plans are implemented and sustained.”

A UN statement in this connection says that Restoring damaged ecosystems is an efficient and cost-effective way people can work with nature to address the most pressing challenges humanity is facing today, i.e. the Coronavirus disease 2019(COVID-19) global pandemic, especially in the context of the Build Back Better approach..

# The evergreen Kathakali artiste



Dr. N.P. Vijayakrishnan  
Art Critic



Photo credit: Thulasi, Krishnan Nair Studio, Shoranur

Kalamandalam Gopi

**K**erala has celebrated the 84th birthday of the master performer of Kathakali, Kalamandalam Gopi recently. Fondly called Gopi Asan by many a Kathakali aficionado, the maestro is endowed with a distinguished style and outstanding performance capabilities.

The chief appeal of the Kathakali costume is its sheer beauty. This does not mean that the actor need not be handsome. Rather, once the

costume is donned, all that is required is a kind of creative transmutation. When the artiste begins to act, his body movements should be attractive because what he essays is fundamentally a dance form. Kathakali is an amalgamation of the story (katha) and dance (kali). The actor should know how to convey a story through dance. He should execute it in an aesthetic manner, and employ his body to do justice to Cholliyaattam [dancing according to the song and the rhythm, while simultaneously acting with the help of mudras [hand gestures]

and body movements]. The artiste should reinvent himself from time to time, to suit the changing tastes. He should be trained under exceptional instructors. Even in his youth, he should cultivate the ability to enact all the full-length and prominent roles of the Kathakali repertoire. He should be supported by talented singers and percussionists. The supporting actors also should be gifted artistes. He should gain prominence in the art world even at a tender age.

The spectators should promote him without showing any regional bias. If all these factors converge, they contribute towards creating the right environment that will, in course of time, give birth to a flawless performer. Kalamandalam Gopi is one such Kathakali artiste who received all of them in full measure.

After training in Ottamthullal, when Gopi went to Kalamandalam to learn Kathakali, Vallathol Narayana Menon took one look at him and remarked that the make-up test (to check the suitability of the face for Kathakali roles) was not necessary for his induction. Vallathol, the visionary poet, could foresee a great Kathakali artiste in young Gopi straightaway. The training imparted by exceptional instructors like Padmanabhan Nair and Ramankutty Nair at Kalamandalam chiselled the principles of Gopi the performer to perfection. In due course, Kalamandalam Gopi played Kathakali alongside them as well as other stalwarts like Krishnan Nair. He danced to the beat of great percussionists like Krishnankutty Poduval and Appukutty Poduval. He performed to the songs rendered by Neelakantan Nambisan and Unnikrishna Kurup. At a very young age, he played the role of the hero in Nalacharitham and Rugmangadacharitham. His face and body were most suited for the Pachcha [virtuous hero] role. He began to play scintillatingly well in stories that had dramatic situations, donning even the role of Raudra Bhima, the revengeful

**Behind the evolution of Kalamandalam Gopi to a point where he has almost become synonymous with Kathakali and a source of great pride for all Keralites, lies the story of a lifetime of total self-surrender at the altar of art.**

**Even when his dance partners left and newcomers entered the scene, Gopi's supremacy remained unquestioned. Today, even at 84, when he steps into the stage, the majesty of his Pachcha roles cannot be eclipsed by any.**

Pandava, in Duryodhanavadham. He stole the show, no matter what the predominant mood he had to take on – be it shringara [amorous] or raudra [ferocious] – and carved a niche for himself even at a time when Krishnan Nair's Pachcha roles were setting the stage on fire.

Kalamandalam Gopi played Nala to Kottakkal

Sivaraman's Damayanti with such finesse, that the pair was deemed matchless on the Kathakali stage. In later years, the ardent music flowing from the lips of Sankaran Embranthiri, Venmani Haridas, Hyder Ali and others would lend more beauty to the many mythological roles played by Gopi. Even while teaching at Kalamandalam, he performed as an artiste. It was not long before he began to gain attention as much for the



Gopi Asan as Lalitha



*Gopi Asan as Duryodhana Chuvannathadi*



*Gopi Asan as Hanuman*

handsomeness of his facial features as for the poetic beauty he brought into his acting style. The amour he exuded while expressing shringara, the grief that flowed while conveying viraha, or the compassion that oozed while essaying karuna – each was so intensely expressed and uniquely rendered that his characters glowed with majestic gravitas. To this day, no Kathakali artiste can outmatch Kalamandalam Gopi in his role as Nala of Nalacharitham, played out through all the four days. When he played the role of Bahukan [the identity Nala takes when he works in the court of King Rituparna of Kosala] in the fourth part of Nalacharitham, his emotive range made for a full course in Kathakali acting.

Even when he moved from this shringara-dominated role to become the epitome of vengefulness as Raudra Bhima, there was no one to out-rival Kalamandalam Gopi. His eyes and his face could convey any bhava [emotion], shift from one bhava to another with effortless ease, and whenever that happened, his body language changed accordingly. The subtlety with which he handled all emotions on stage – be they dominant or fleeting

– was uniquely his. The beautiful finesse of his acting and the communicative power of his choreography made him numero uno. There was a sheen of novelty in whatever he did, yet he never stepped out of the foundational grammar of Kathakali. And this gave joy to generations of spectators. He was not subjected to criticism because his



*Kalamandalam Gopi*

majestic stage presence rose above it. Kalamandalam Gopi reigned and sparkled as a character-actor for a long period.

Even when his dance partners left and newcomers entered the scene, Gopi's supremacy remained unquestioned. Today, even at 84, when he steps into the stage, the majesty of his Pachcha roles cannot be eclipsed by any.

Behind the evolution of Kalamandalam Gopi to a point where he has almost become synonymous with Kathakali and a source of great pride for all Keralites, lies the story of a lifetime of total self-surrender at the altar of art.

To a man born to dance and act out stories, what else can life mean? The value of Gopi's artistic life is to be seen in the successful performances he has done. Even as he ages, the glory of his artistic genius appears to grow correspondingly. Today, his is a commanding presence, whose repertoire is vast, varied and rich enough to constitute an elaborate chapter in the history of Kathakali. Undoubtedly, this symbol of artistic beauty is a living legend in the world of dramatic art.

# Award of Excellence in the public sector

The government of Kerala is planning to institute an award of excellence to the public sectors under the Industries Department. To ensure efficiency and to increase healthy competition between the public sectors, awards of excellence will be given to the persons and institutions of various sectors under the department of industries. The awards will be given for the categories such as best public sector institution, best managing director, best management- best officers who initiate to give novel researches and model workers. The guideline

procedures and criteria to select the eligible candidates will be handled and supervised by Kozhikode IIM. It has also been decided to give proper training to the senior officials like managing directors, general managers in academic -management fields. This training program will be conducted in incorporation with the country's best research management institutions. Apart from these, the department is also planning to conduct refresher courses to throw light on new technical management methods.



*P. Rajeev, Minister for Industries*

# Ayurveda personified



**Sreekanth M. Girinath**  
Information Officer, I & PRD



*P.K. Warriar*

**T**he name P.K. Warriar in Kerala's Ayurvedic history invites no parallel. The doyenne of Ayurveda completes his 100 years this month, still curing thousands of patients.

Panniyambally Krishnankutty Warriar aka P.K. Warriar is the doyen of Ayurveda who now became a Centenarian, the rarest and greatest ever achievement of a human in his/her lifetime. He was born in June 8, 1921. One can describe him as a Living University in terms of the subjects he dealt with in these long years' vast experience. He is the Chief Physician and Managing Trustee of Vaidyaratnam P.S. Warriar's Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala.

The autobiographical book titled *Smrithiparvam* (The memories in aeons) manifests how an Ayurveda Centre in a remote place of Kerala, Kottakkal became the world's pioneer institution of Ayurveda in three separate periods through the memories of P.K. Warriar. In the first part (up to 1953), he reminisces his school age, his great maternal uncle Vaidyaratnam Panniyampally Sankunni Warriar, who build the base of Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala in 1902. Also about his elder brother P. Madhava Warriar who took charge of Arya Vaidya Sala and continued until he died in an airline crash in Nagpur in 1953. In part two (1954-81), he describes the progressive growth of the Arya Vaidya Sala and in part three (1982-2005), about his experiences in treatment, etc.

The history of this great institution is the history of Kerala itself. The Viceroy of

Colonial India conferred the mentor of Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala P.S. Warriar with 'Vaidyaratnam' in 1933 in recognition of his service to humanity and his youngest nephew P.K. Warriar is conferred with Padmasri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2010 and that is the life and legacy of these most respectable physicians and Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala.

One can learn many wow factors in this book. One of them is the land of Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala in Trivandrum city opposite to Government Secretariat was bought during 1959 for only rupees forty-eight thousand! Kottakkal tharavadu 'Kailasa Mandiram' was the Indian President's office with the national flag hoisted in front for a month



while the then-president V.V.Giri was under treatment for leg pain in Kottakkal during 1970, is another one. Being uninformed the security personals planned to gun down the chopper that was denied permission for landing in the helipad of Kerala Rajbhavan, carrying P.K.Varrier, who was to take care of Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. It was in 1995. One among the great triumvirate poet, Vallathol Narayana Menon started a career in Vaidya and he had written books related to vaidya, viz., Arogyachinthamani, Balachikitsakramam, Garbharakshakramam, Vaidyabhooshanam, etc. is the fact perhaps unknown to many. Former Indian Presidents V.V. Giri, Gyani Zail Sing, K.R. Narayanan, APJ Abdul Kalam, Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi, Morarji Desai, A.B.Vajpayee, Chandrasekhar, Manmohan Sing, all CMs of Kerala, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bhandaranayake and many political and cultural leaders undergone treatment under the supervision of P.K. Warriar.

This book spread the ray of knowledge as the sun rays give light to the world. We can learn practical experiences

**One can describe him as a Living University in terms of the subjects he dealt with in these long years' vast experience.**

**The autobiographical book titled Smrithiparvam (The memories in aeons) manifests how an Ayurveda Centre in a remote place of Kerala, Kottakkal became the world's pioneer institution of Ayurveda in three separate periods through the memories of P.K. Warriar.**

of Diplomacy, Management, Politics, Arts and Culture and of course Ayurveda and more while reading this book. This autobiography was first published in the year 2005 by the Department of Publications of The Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal and a second edition also was published in the same year. It was the fifty-eighth book in Kottakkal Ayurveda Series. Not even a single spelling mistake can be identified in any of the five hundred and twelve pages of this great book published in Malayalam is the stunning experience one can feel as a reader. The English version of this book titled, The Canto of Memories is also available in the Publication division of Kottakkal Aryavaidyasala.

With a slight modification in the first sloka of the 'holy book' of Ayurveda called Ashtangahridayam (Heart or Essence of all the Eight Branches of Ayurveda) "Ragadi rogan statanu shaktha nasheshakaya prasruthan asheshan Outsukya moha arathithan jaghana Yo

apoorva vaidyaya p.k.waryaraya namostu thasmai". It is not only Kerala but the whole world bow to this legendary physician who could cure the diseases of the body and the diseases of the mind such as desire, ego, anger and jealousy.



# The lost and found gold nugget

The poetic genius named Rameshan Nair



Prabha Varma  
Poet



**R**ameshan Nair always took the path of traditional poetry. He was never mesmerized by any fad. He never played to the gallery in order to make himself popular among the youth.

Years back, during the festive season of Onam, a four-year-old went missing from a house at Kalkulam

near Kanyakumari. Needless to say, a pall of gloom descended on the household. Sometime later, the boy was wrested back from a beggar at a considerable distance from home. This happy retrieval for the family would in later years be a great artistic boon to the entire state of Kerala. The boy who was locally hailed as Kalanju kittiya thankam [Lost and found gold nugget] grew up to be everyone's favourite

Malayalam poet, Rameshan Nair. He was like a brother to me. In one of the books he autographed and mailed to me, was written: "To my younger brother". Ours was a relationship that lasted decades. The longest stretch of time we spent together was when he came to Delhi to receive the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award. It was during the conversation we had then

that he told me the “lost-and-found” story in detail.

A few weeks back, he called to say, “I’m not well. But don’t tell this to anyone.” That was all he said. A long spell of silence followed. On Friday last, I heard of his demise.

## Unique poetic style

In one of his poems, Rameshan Nair wrote: *Odeethodikal kaayalil* – employing a nuanced artistic style that was uniquely his! Depending on the reader, the clause can mean either “Country boats sped on the lake” [*odeeth odikal kaayalil*] or “Thodi raga rippled over the lake” [*odee thodikal kaayalil*]. The latter clause would cleverly suggest that the country boats zipped over the lake, leaving musical notes of Thodi in their wake! Such was the dexterity with which Rameshan Nair manipulated words and created poetic ambiguity.

In a sense, he belonged to the Akkitham school of poetry because, like Akkitham Achuthan Namboodiri, he was very scrupulous about syntactic discipline. Rameshan Nair was a very strong link that welded the traditional and the modern movements in the chain of Malayalam poetry.

## Gurupournami

Gurupournami is arguably Rameshan Nair’s masterpiece. It extols the greatness of Sree Narayana Guru, one of the great savants of the twentieth century. The anthology earned him the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award. Rameshan Nair used to lament frequently that our world and our time had not studied Sree Narayana Guru in depth or given him due recognition. So he took upon himself the task of poetically proclaiming

**Rameshan Nair was a very strong link that welded the traditional and the modern movements in the chain of Malayalam poetry.**

**The Shlokas and Muktakas [self-contained shlokas that use Sanskrit and Dravida metres, and are characterized by tight structure and imaginative artistry] he composed are an eternal asset to Malayalam poetry.**

the magnificence of the Guru, and this became his life mission. He imaginatively presented the life and philosophy of Sree Narayanan Guru through the pieces in this anthology, completing “Janmapuranam” even before he crossed his youth.

Rameshan Nair always took the path of traditional poetry. He was never mesmerized by any fad. He never played to the gallery in order to make himself popular among the youth. Rather, he took a stand, and adhered to it with a certain self-confidence that was entirely his own. There has not been a poet in Malayalam quite like him who could employ Sanskrit metres like Anushtippu, Sraddhara, Shaardulavikreeditham, Vasanthathilakam or Gayathram with such felicity, write verses with such fluid grace, or weave poetic narratives with such structural integrity.

## Creator of devotional songs

The Shlokas and Muktakas [self-contained shlokas that use Sanskrit and Dravida metres, and are characterized by tight structure and imaginative artistry] he composed are an eternal asset to Malayalam poetry. Besides, he penned more than 3,000 devotional songs, and wrote 450 lyrics for Malayalam films. His romantic songs that poignantly portrayed the exchange of hearts soon became very popular. Rameshan Nair’s entry into the world of Malayalam film lyrics was on the invitation extended by the great novelist and screenplay writer M. T. Vasudevan Nair in 1985 for the film titled “Rangam”. The very first song he wrote became a hit. This was followed by scores and scores of songs.

## Karunanidhi’s translator

As he was born in a village that was situated close to Kanyakumari, Tamil was as much a mother tongue to him as Malayalam. This cultural background gave him a vocabulary that was rich enough to execute translations of Thirukkural, Chilapathikkaaram and other Tamil classics into Malayalam to good effect. When Karunanidhi, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, came to hear about his talent, he commissioned Rameshan Nair to translate his novel Thenpaandi Simham into Malayalam.

## Shataabhishekam that provoked a Transfer

Rameshan Nair came into the spotlight with the composition of a radio play titled Shataabhishekam when he was working at Akashavani. Immediately criticism arose. He was issued a transfer order from Thiruvananthapuram. Subsequently, Rameshan Nair resigned, and became active in the field of Malayalam film lyrics.

With his demise Malayalam poetry has lost its active link between tradition and modernity.



**In one of his poems, Rameshan Nair wrote: *Odeethodikal kaayalil* – employing a nuanced artistic style that was uniquely his! Depending on the reader, the clause can mean either “Country boats sped on the lake” [*odeeth odikal kaayalil*] or “Thodi raga rippled over the lake” [*odee thodikal kaayalil*]. The latter clause would cleverly suggest that the country boats zipped over the lake, leaving musical notes of Thodi in their wake! Such was the dexterity with which Rameshan Nair manipulated words and created poetic ambiguity.**



# When the 'Athira' star closes its eyes...



**A. Chandrasekhar**  
Asst. Professor, Indian Institute  
of Mass Communication

**I**n spite of being an extremely talented and original poet by himself, Poovachal Khader has been acknowledged more as a lyricist who had written tailor-made songs for movies in accordance with the stipulated on screen situations. But truth remain to be true that Poovachal Khader's lyrics were all absolute poetry with utmost quality both in its musical as well as literary quality.

Khader established himself as a noted poet and lyricist while stalwarts like ONV Kurup, P. Bhaskaran and the like were reigning the tinsel world with their enchanting verses. He was born in Poovachal, a remote hamlet near Thiruvananthapuram

on Christmas Day in the year 1948. He graduated himself as an Engineer from the Govt. College of Engineering Thiruvananthapuram. Khader, who had his stint towards poetry during his student days, started penning songs for stage and radio before his entry to the tinsel world. His song *Jayadeva kaviyude...* composed by M.G. Radhakrishnan for the All India Radio, became an evergreen hit.

He made his entry to Movies in 1973 through *Kattu Vithachavan* and the songs, *Neeyente prarthana kettu...* and *Mazhavillinanijnathavaasam...* were on the top charts. But it was *Chuzhy* that got released in the theatres with his credits as its lyricist. Songs like *Kandu Randu Kannu*, for that movie

was composed by none other M.S. Baburaj, the legend!

His teaming up with filmmaker I.V. Sasi changed his destiny. The songs he penned for Sasi's debutant film *Ulsavam* established as a lyricist to reckon with. He became one of the busiest lyricists in the 1970s and 80s with hits after hits.

Many of his songs like *Natha nee varum kalocha...* (*Chamaram*), *Shararaanthal thiri thaanu...*, *Chithrithoniyil akkare pokaan..* (*Kayalum Kayarum*), *Aadya samaagama lajjayil...* (*Ulsavam*), *Sindoora sandhyaykku mounam...* (*Choola*), *Ente janmam neeyeduthu...* (*Itha*



*Oru Dhikkari*), *Etho janma kalpanayil* (Palangal), *Maunama nirayum maunama* (Thakara), *Naanamaavunno...* (Aattakalasangam), *Poomaaname oru raga megham...* (Nirakkoothu), *Anuraagini itha en...* (Oru Kudakkeezhil), *Pon veene...* (Thalavattom), *Mandaracheppundo...* (Dasharatham), *Rajeevam vidarum nin chiriyl...* (Belt Mathai), *Kiliye Kiliye...* (Aa Raathri), *Pandoru kattiloraan simham...* (Sandarbham), *Ithiri naanam pennin kavilil...* (Thammil Thammil) are tagged to be Evergreen hits without which the Malayali life is incomplete.

He had penned lyrics for more

**His songs will be there in the hearts of millions of music lovers for whom, Poovachal Khader is not mere a lyricist, but a great poet indeed! For them, his death during the Pandemic in June 2021 is certainly a loss that could never be repaired at all!**

**His teaming up with filmmaker I.V. Sasi changed his destiny. The songs he penned for Sasi's debutant film Ulsavam established as a lyricist to reckon with. He became one of the busiest lyricists in the 1970s and 80s with hits after hits.**

than 900 songs in which many of them became chartbusters. He got himself associated with hit film makers like Joshy, Priyadarshan, Sajan etc., in the commercial mainstream at the same time wrote lyrics for directors like Bharatan too. In 1980, he was bestowed upon The only major award that he was bestowed upon, the Kerala Film Critics Award for the best lyricist for his song *Natha nee varum* for the movie *Chamaram* directed by Bharatan. His major literary works include 'Kaliveena' and a collection of children's poems 'Paduvaan Padikkuvaan'.

Though he had worked along with legendary musicians like G. Devarajan, M.S. Viswanathan, Baburaj, K.V. Mahadevan, A.T. Ummer,

Raveendran, Johnson etc., his teaming up with Shyam yielded many golden numbers to Malayalam film music. Khader borrowed the imageries from real life and he wrote for the common man. He chose words carefully that is understandable even to the illiterate. Perhaps this is the reason why his songs were well received by the public with such an appreciation.

Even though he made his mark as a legendary hitmaker with his empty number of soft-worded lyrics that got appreciated and accepted by the mass, he maintained a very low profile as a celebrity unto his end. Perhaps the fact that he had been in the government service as an Engineer in the State PWD might have kept him away from such circles. But it is of no doubt that his songs will be there in the hearts of millions of music lovers for whom, Poovachal Khader is not mere a lyricist, but a great poet indeed! For them, his death during the Pandemic in June 2021 is certainly a loss that could never be repaired at all!

The title of the article is inspired from Poovachal Khader's famous film song "Aadya samagama lajjayil aathira tharakam kannadakkumpol" from the film *Ulsavam* (As the Athira star blinks shyly on first tryst)

# A Kerala model for deepening democracy



Dr. Biju Lekshmanan, Sathyan T. & Dileep P. Chandran

Students of a Government School in Kerala began a new epoch in the history of democratic politics in India through their community intervention programs in tribal hamlets in Attappadi.



**T**he students' activities and initiatives under Electoral Literacy Club (ELC) and Students Police Cadets (SPC) at Government Higher Secondary School, Agali rekindled Kerala's journey to substantive democracy. Their activities resulted in the significant rise in electoral participation of inhabitants of tribal hamlets in Attappadi. The impact of their community intervention programs were not limited to surge in voter turnout, rather it strengthened the growth of substantive democracy.

## Owning Democracy

Inhabitants of tribal hamlets in remote areas of Attappadi hardly turn out to vote till 2019 election to the Lok Sabha. They had to travel around fourteen kilometers to reach the nearest polling station - six kilometers walk through forest and eight kilometers by a jeep, if available, through a narrow forest path where elephant infestation in the afternoon is regular. Their sense of alienation and lack of motivation for political participation were psychological barriers for electoral participation.

Electoral education programs jointly conducted by students of ELC and SPC

made significant growth on the voter registration and electoral participation of inhabitants of Attappadi tribal hamlets in elections to Lok Sabha, Local Bodies and Legislative Assembly in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively. ELC and SPC also arranged transportation and refreshment facilities on the polling day. They identified and arranged special facilities for physically challenged and senior citizens to cast their vote. They succeeded in convincing electors from Murugala and Thadikkundu hamlets that boycotted election in 2019. Election process did not confine to a procedure for establishing formal institutions of governance. They had raised their livelihood and development needs



through this community intervention activities. Students became a channel between authorities and electors in tribal hamlets. Students not only taught electors how to vote, but why to vote.

## Uniform and Language

Majority of members of ELC and SPC at the school were from the tribal hamlets they engaged with. One of the attractions of SPC is its khaki uniform. The activities of ELC in tribal hamlets were carried out in SPC uniforms. Electors in tribal hamlets were moved by the leading role of their own children in uniforms along with government authorities in electoral education programs. Electoral education classes in each hamlet was led by the ELC member from the same hamlet in their respective tribal languages. The classes in tribal languages converted inhabitants of tribal hamlets from passive recipients

**Attappadi Model for deepening democracy reflect some characteristics of Kerala model.**

**Attappadi Model also was a micro initiative and sensitive to the cultural, social and political life of tribes.**

to active participants. People started to clarify doubts and asked students to repeat instructions. Inhabitants encouraged their children to lead the classes and supported them by actively responding and singing. The initiative spilled over to a channel for raising livelihood and development needs of people hitherto at the receiving end of democracy.

## Continuing Kerala Model

Attappadi model for deepening democracy reflect some characteristics of Kerala model. While Kerala model was the result of mass movements combined with generation of social capital and appropriate policy actions, same pattern can be identified in Attappadi model in which students got active support of all departments like Forest, Tribal Welfare, Home, Education, and Election Commission of India. Like Kerala model, women's agency was a remarkable highlight of Attappadi model for deepening democracy. Attappadi

model also was a micro initiative and sensitive to the cultural, social and political life of tribes. Like Kerala model it flourished in the presence many constraints. It not only reflect the features of Kerala model rather roots in the local support system which leveraged the sustainability of Kerala model. The significant byproduct of the electoral socialization program in Attappadi was the enhancement participating capability of target groups.

### Author Profiles

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# Look! He is in the balcony



C.S. Venikiteswaran  
Film Critic



Buddhadeb Dasgupta

**B**uddhadeb Dasgupta, one of the finest filmmakers in the post-Satyajit Ray era in Indian cinema, passed away at the age of 77 in Kolkata on 10 June 2021. His departure will leave a huge void in the Indian art cinema scene, for he was one filmmaker, who in a career spanning four decades (1978 to 2018) made some of the most memorable films.

Buddhadeb was already an accomplished poet when he turned to cinema, and he brought his poetic vision into cinematic imagination. His distinct style was evident from his early films. And they were

heart-wrenching films that shocked the audience, forcing them to look at reality from intimate quarters, both at the personal and social level.

Take for instance two striking scenes from his early films: *Neem Annapurna* (1979) begins with the heroine, running to the door of her hut and towards us, and throwing up; it is the bitter morsel she stole for her family's survival. It is one of the most poignant and also hard-hitting film openings. His first film *Dooratva* (1978) has one of the most evocative endings in Indian cinema: it ends with a tender dialogue by the husband who has come to meet the woman he had divorced after

knowing she was pregnant at the time of marriage: he tells her he often dreams of her young son falling from a crowded bus and asking her to be careful with him. At that moment, there is a sound of thunder outside, and the camera pulls back through the window and the image blurs. These scenes are emotionally intense and also poetically evocative; the first one makes a strong political statement and is also a very direct address at the world in general and the middle-class audience of art cinema in particular. The *Dooratva* scene is poetically subtle and one that opens up the narrative to infinite possibilities.



## The Multiverse of characters

What is striking about the characters of Buddhadeb Dasgupta, especially in his later films is that they simultaneously inhabit different worlds; the performers among them live in and through the characters they imagine and play, many protagonists have a past they want to forget or seek refuge in. Moreover, they are not idealists or puritans as they are prone to violence, lust, infidelity and treachery. They are all caught in ethical and emotional conflicts and dilemmas. Their past – especially their childhood – linger on and sneak into the present, through certain haunting memories of ghostly presences. The dead often follow their progeny, with unsatisfied desires and unfulfilled missions. Performers and singers, and jesters appear to wake the characters from their decaying relationships and loss of dreams. Many of them live several lives in one: as children and adults, dead and alive, as actors and characters, and many pry into other peoples' lives (Bag Bahadur (1989), Phera (1988), Lal Darja (1997), Ami, Yasin Ar Amar Madhubala (2007), Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa (2018).

Buddhadeb's concern and anger about the socio-political situation that unfolded in the country always resonated in his films. He entered the scene when the nation witnessed the large-scale migration of desperate millions from rural poverty to urban squalor. And in the midst of all this, was an upwardly mobile and

**Singers, dancers and performers marched through the narratives, like the chorus in Greek drama, breaking the realistic mode, and transporting us into a world of imagination that prompted us to look at life and our world more intensely and introspectively.**

ambitious middle class ready to make any compromise to share the spoils of the corrupt system – all these provided the setting for his early narratives.

## The Man in the balcony

One recurrent image in Buddhadeb's city films is of protagonists looking down from their balcony, and gazing at the city swarming and pulsating below; these scenes and situations evoke a sense of longing and identification as well as detachment and ennui, existential and spatial. It is also related to the middle-class dream of owning a flat in the city; 'to build a house in the sky, as Hemanto says to his wife in Andhi Gali (1984). In Grihayuddha (1982) and Dooratva too, the protagonists indulge in the space of the new flat they want to buy, walking through its rooms and balcony with great pride and joy. It is also such ambition for material achievement and comforts that alienate them from their self and idealist past, driving them to fatal compromises

and insensitivity.

In the later films like TahaderKatha (1992), LalDarja, Swapner Din (2004) Kaalpurush (2008), Urojahaj (2018) etc we see the narratives centring around the male protagonist, their inner dilemmas, remorse, guilt, that often haunt them in the present and in the case of the dead, forcing them to return from the other shore of life to visit their dear ones. There is an insatiable zest for life that is evident in all his films, which manifests in the form of intense passion for art (Phera, Bagh Bahadur or as political commitment (Tahader Katha), or middle-class ambition for a comfortable life; even those who return from the dead say that nothing is better than being alive. In Kaalpurush the son declares his love for life when he tells his repentant (departed) father that life has many hues, and every day wakes up to a new beginning.

## Men that refuse to die

The male protagonists in Buddhadeb films live several simultaneous lives in one, engrossed in guilt, remorse and also desire, they also do not easily depart from the earth even after death. But compared to men who live in several times and several guises, women are more rooted in their lives and anchored to the living situations: they seek and find solutions in the present, offer solace, understand and accept the vagaries of life and relationships, and take on life as it unfolds. In contrast, men are haunted by the past, hunted by the present



and often the future slips away from their grasp; they are dragged down by memories and get lost in dreams and fantasies. In *Andhi Gali*, Jaya refuses to pander to her husband's ambition by forcing her to become a model, she instead chooses death. In *Kaalpurush*, women do not forgive their husband's marital infidelities. Interestingly it is men who, though they are unable to forget, learn to forgive in the end.

Buddhadeb Dasgupta consistently wove dream narratives throughout his career; life here and beyond, past and present, dream and reality, space and time everything was fluid and porous in this spectral world. Singers, dancers and performers marched through the narratives, like the chorus in Greek drama, breaking the realistic mode, and transporting us into a world of imagination that prompted us to look at life and our world more intensely and introspectively. No wonder his last film *Urojahaj* was a heart-wrenching film on the impossibility of dreams in the world we live in.

Cineastes will return to his films, not only for aesthetic pleasures but also to experience the feeling of being human in the world.

## Filmography

(Feature films)

<b>Samayer Kache</b>	(1968) (short)
<b>Dooratwa</b>	(1978) (Distance)
<b>Neem Annapurna</b>	(1979) (Bitter Morsel)
<b>Grihajuddha</b>	(1982) (The Civil War)
<b>Andhi Gali</b>	(1984) (Blind Alley, Hindi)
<b>Phera</b>	(1988) (The Return)
<b>Bagh Bahadur</b>	(1989) (The Tiger Man)
<b>Tahader Katha</b>	(1992) (Their Story)
<b>Charachar</b>	(1993) (Shelter of the Wings)
<b>Lal Darja</b>	(1997) (The Red Door)
<b>Uttara</b>	(2000) (The Wrestlers)
<b>Mondo Meyer Upakhyan</b>	(2002) (A Tale of a Naughty Girl)
<b>Swapner Din</b>	(2004) (Chased by Dreams)
<b>Ami, Yasin Ar Amar Madhubala</b>	(2007) (The Voyeurs)
<b>Kaalpurush</b>	(2008) (Memories in the Mist)
<b>Janala</b>	(2009) (The Window)[10]
<b>Mukti</b>	(2012)
<b>Patralekha</b>	(2012)
<b>Anwar Ka Ajab Kissa</b>	(2013) (Sniffer, Hindi)
<b>Tope</b>	(2017)
<b>Urojahaj</b>	(2018)

# Rendering service par excellence



Commendable selfless service rendered by Nidhin, a clinical psychologist is praiseworthy during this epidemic period. Nidhin B, who hails from Thiruvananthapuram, has been working in the COVID wards to ensure the mental health of patients for the last 450 days without any remuneration.

He joined the voluntary service as a clinical psychologist at the General Hospital, Thiruvananthapuram. The isolated patients in the covid ward without any bystanders would go through heavy mental stress. Giving mental support as well as proper advice is necessary as part of treatment. This young man continues to work without any reward proves beyond doubt that he is the epitome of courage and inspiration to the youth in our society. His words and care are like valuable medicines to those who are affected by the COVID 19.

What Nidhin has been doing a supreme selfless service. The pure smile unfolding on their lips under the mask after getting their life back is priceless for him.

# For the orphaned, the Government is with them

The Government of Kerala has announced financial assistance to those children orphaned due to the hit of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that financial assistance of Rs 3 lakh each would be given to all children who lost their parents after succumbing to COVID-19. Along with this one-time financial aid, the Chief Minister has also announced that the government will bear the cost of education of these children till the graduation level. Besides that, Rs 2,000 per month will be given to the children till the age of 18. With the number of death escalated in the second hit of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of children who lost their parents has also increased. This is why the Government has initiated to look after these children.



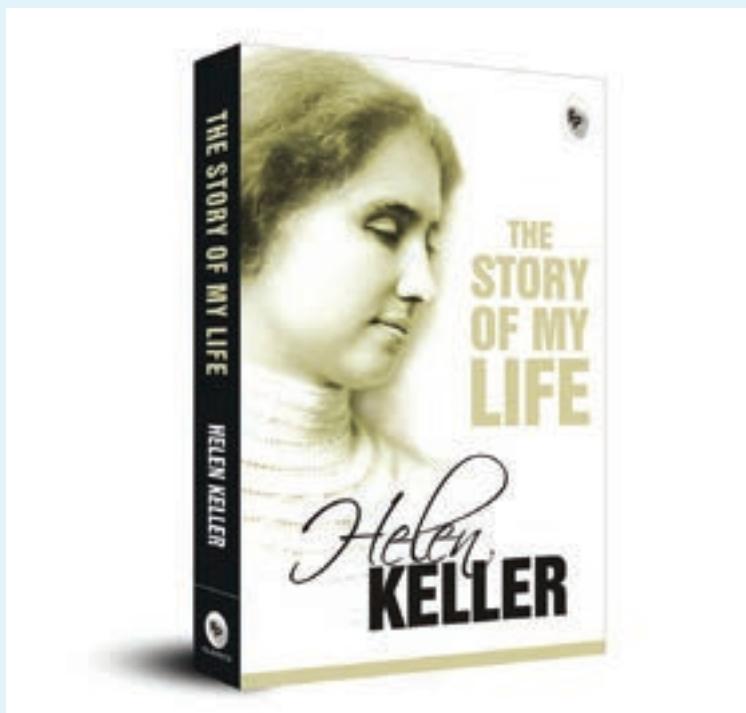
*Kerala Calling* provides a wonderful platform for children to express their thoughts in words or in colours. The young can send their writings/artistic creations to [keralacalling@gmail.com](mailto:keralacalling@gmail.com).

**O dark, dark amid  
the blaze of noon  
irrecoverably dark,  
total eclipse without  
all hope of day!’**



**Salabha Krishnan H.**

Std. X, Arya Central School, Thiruvananthapuram



**S**alabha Krishnan, the great grand daughter of the late renowned literary critic Prof. M. Krishnan Nair, is a voracious reader and tries to follow the footprints of her great grand father. Here is a piece of writing by her on, *THE STORY OF MY LIFE*, the famous autobiography of Helen Keller.

How well Homer has described the dark. None can ever feel these real sensations of our majestic world like those specially abled ones.

Homer's those sightless eyes (even though he was traditionally portrayed as blind) seeking for the light and blue skies still seek something better, the various sorceries of dark

And how that igniting soul of Helen Keller understood Homers deprivation, the hidden light of night.

Helen Keller's *THE STORY OF MY LIFE* is one of the best autobiography to acknowledge that your dream of flowers can only be reached if you climb the hill of difficulty.

Being deaf and blind may make her impaired but doesn't stop her inspired. She may not enjoy the beauty of colors, but her joy is unlimited, when it comes to

sensations. What joy it would be for her to feel the cool bouncy earth under her feet? Splatters of raindrop wasn't heard by her but she heard the silence of its tingle.

It would be true that her left life may not enter to the joys of fireflies, melodies of beautiful earth and selfish sapiens. But her heart is filled with contempt by the wonders of darkness and silence.

As she says her heart is still undisciplined and passionate, there would be a cold satisfaction flowing through her blood river. The satisfaction that crossed the barriers of silence, sitting upon her soul as immense the deadly noise.

But these specially abled, like Homer, Helen and Louis Braille have long tried to illuminate light in others eyes. Like Helen, Evelyn Glennie can also be taken as one of those who vibrates music in others ears, symphony. The beautiful smile resting on other's lips, their ecstasy.

And as Helen has written- 'To know the thoughts and deeds that have marked man's progress is to feel the great heart throbs of humanity through centuries, and if one doesn't feel in these pulsations a heavenward striving, one must indeed be deaf to the harmonies of life.

These spirits have thought us one of the most important lessons of life that **'The doors of dream are always open and it only depends on how you find the key?'**

# When comes such another...



He was an actor par excellence. He breathed life into every character he had handled. The subtle nuances he infused into his characters mesmerised generations.. And still he mesmerises...

**Paying homage to the memories of the great actor of Malayalam, Sathyan, on his 50 th death anniversary.**



Sathyan won the best actor award for the first Kerala film state award for his film *Kadalpalam* in 1969. He won the Kerala state award for best actor again in 1971 for his film *Karakanakadal*.

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