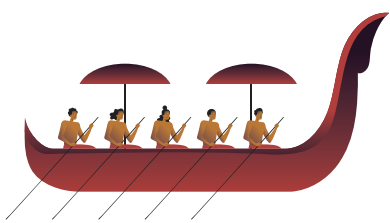
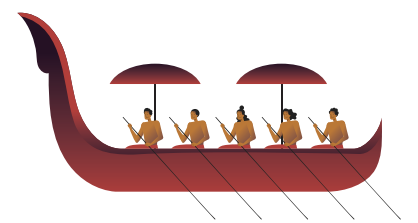


READING CORNER

HISTORY | LITERATURE | ART | ARCHITECTURE | CULTURE | HERITAGE | BIOGRAPHY | TRAVEL | WILDLIFE | ENVIRONMENT | RELIGION | SELF-HELP | FICTION | TRANSLATION | CINEMA | FOOD | CHILDREN



The School That Broke Taboos: Kerala's Educational Heritage



In a land where knowledge was once considered divine, where ancient universities like Nalanda and Takshashila drew scholars from across Asia, education has always been more than mere literacy. It was a living bridge between generations, a way to shape individuals and societies. From the gurukulas of the Vedic age to the Buddhist viharas that dotted the Gangetic plain, India's educational heritage spans millennia, shaping philosophies that would influence cultures far beyond its borders.

Yet this heritage had its shadows. Knowledge, often zealously guarded within rigid social hierarchies, remained inaccessible to many. The untouchables, relegated to society's margins, found themselves locked out of these hallowed spaces of learning. It's here that education's role as heritage becomes most profound—not just in the ancient structures we preserve or the texts we pass down, but in the revolutionary act of opening doors that were once firmly shut.

In Kerala, one such door opened in 1817, when a modest school challenged centuries of educational exclusion, becoming part of a new chapter in India's educational heritage.



It is the over 200-year-old St. Francis Church L. P. School. Founded by the Anglican missionaries of the Church of England, its target group was the 'untouchables,' who had no easy access to education because of caste discrimination.

Popularly known as 'Free School' as everything came free to the students—books, school uniform, transport and mid-day meals—it was also the first English medium school in Kerala. It started as two separate schools for boys and girls and was only up to seventh standard.

Sometime in 1899 they were merged and renamed Church of England Elementary Free School under the management of St. Francis Church. In mid-80s, it changed hands to the Trichur-based CMS Corporate Management which renamed it St. Francis Church L. P. School.

It was a dream project of an Anglican missionary, Rev. Dawson, who was moved by the plight of the outliers of society in the state who had neither the right nor the riches to be educated and be part of the social mainstream. He knew that education could be the emancipator and, possibly, a lifeline to a decent profile and career. In the Church of England and the East India Company, he found an ally to realise his dream.

As it turned out, even the privileged made a beeline for the school, possibly enamoured of the prospect of learning English from the practitioners of the language who were among the staff. It was quality education proof of which was the readiness with which the British companies of the time solicited students from the school for employment.

One of the alumni was no less than the son of the ruling Maharaja, Veera Kerala Varma (1813–1828). Therein hangs an interesting story. The Raja was keen that his son, Rama Varma, learnt English. After consulting the

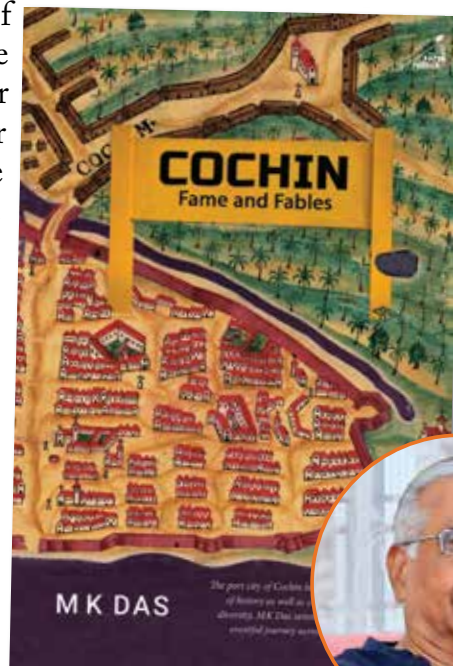
royal astrologer who predicted a bright future for the prince, the royal ward was enrolled in the school and was put under the tutelage of one Rev. Samuel Ridsdale. He was later joined by his friend Anand, a Konkani Brahmin boy.

The two were taught English literature in the school, and Christian theology privately by their tutor. Evidently fascinated by the latter, they decided to convert much to the deep disappointment of the two families. Every effort, including posting of armed personnel from the royal army on the day of their baptism, was made to dissuade them from their decision but to no avail.

The prince was christened Constantine Ravi Varma and Anand was renamed John. The former moved to Madras and joined the Grammar School where he worked for a few years before returning to Cannanore to join the Basel Mission. He later married a teacher of a local boarding school and was ordained a priest and took the name Jacob Rama Varma. John joined a Syrian Bishop as his secretary. Initially there were indeed protests but the school had the backing of the Anglican Church and its political masters.

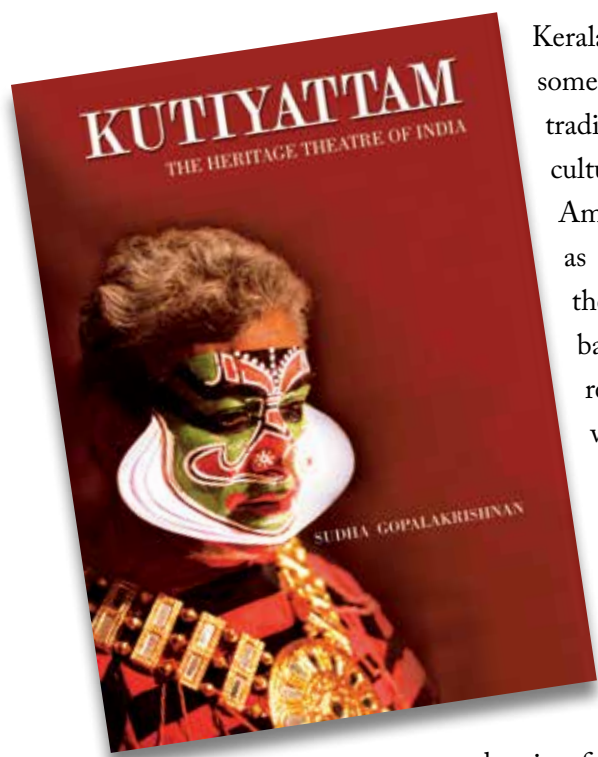
The school lost its sheen, post-Independence, when English-medium schools mushroomed in and around Fort Cochin with better facilities and attractive appurtenances in tow. They, predictably, put the schools that offered free or relatively cheap education on notice. In the long run, none was spared, St. Francis Church L.P. School included. The latter, nonetheless, battles on, thanks to its original sponsors, generous corporates and individuals, and a helpful state government.

Adapted from *Cochin: Fame and Fables* by MK Das





Kerala's classical arts, like its lush landscape, are alive with dramatic intensity. Each tradition reveals layers of history through mythical narratives, oral stories and symbolic gestures. From the temple courtyards to royal courts, these art forms have preserved not just performances but entire ecosystems of cultural knowledge. Each tradition, whether it's the sophisticated Kutiyattam, the expressive Kathakali, or the ritualistic Theyyam, serves as a gateway into Kerala's profound artistic heritage. They embody not merely dance or theatre but complex systems of philosophy, aesthetics and social relationships that have evolved over generations.

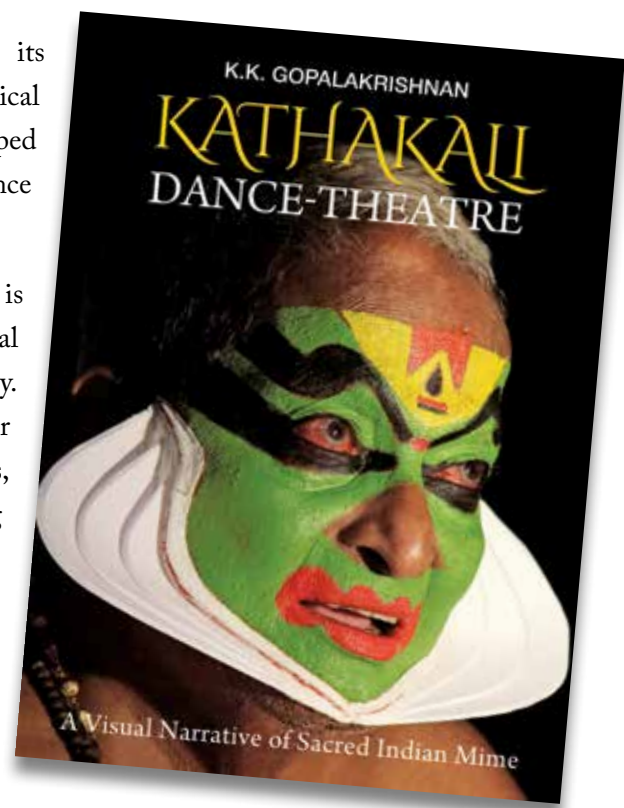


Kerala's rich performing arts scene showcases some of India's most distinctive theatrical traditions, each telling a unique story of cultural evolution and artistic innovation. Among these, Kutiyattam stands out as perhaps the world's oldest surviving theatre form, with a history stretching back two millennia. While it remained relatively unknown outside temple walls until the 1970s, its younger sibling Kathakali has long captured global imagination.

Both forms share Kerala's cultural DNA but took different paths to prominence. While Kutiyattam developed within temple precincts, drawing from Sanskrit plays of ancient dramatists like Kalidasa and Bhasa, Kathakali emerged in the 17th century under royal patronage, free from religious constraints. This difference in origin shaped their

characters: Kutiyattam preserved its classical codes with almost archaeological precision, while Kathakali developed a more dynamic blend of dance and drama.

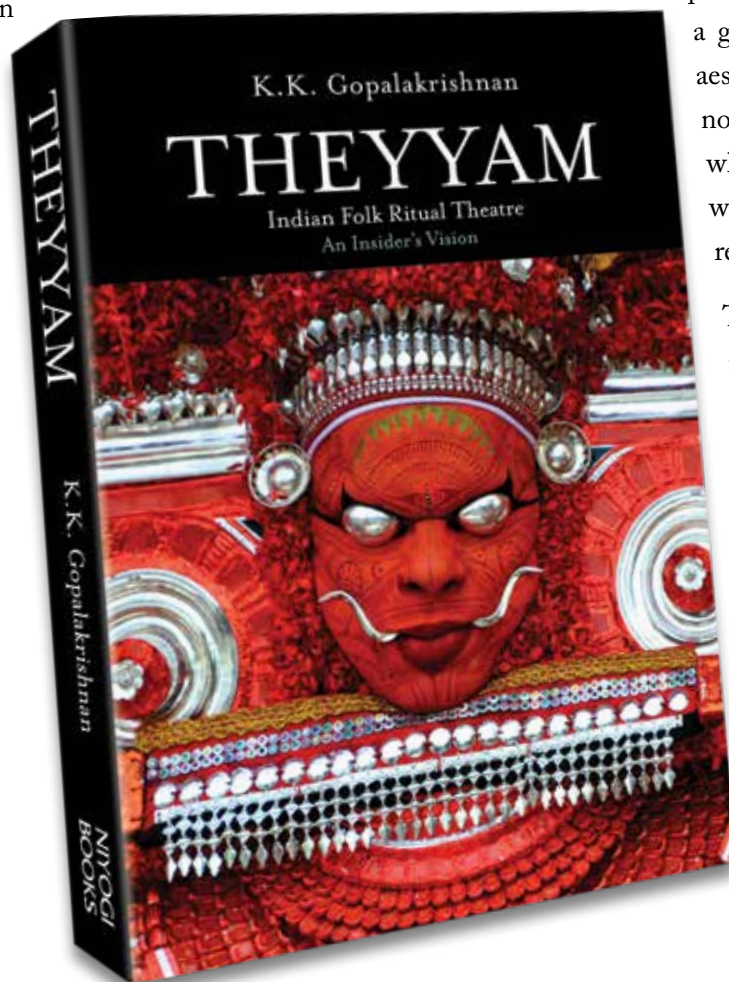
What unites these art forms is their emphasis on elaborate facial expressions and gesture vocabulary. Kathakali, in particular, is known for its visually stunning performances, with performers donning striking makeup and elaborate costumes while maintaining minimalist staging. Kutiyattam, meanwhile, distinguishes itself through its imaginative elaboration of action, turning brief sequences into rich, extended performances.



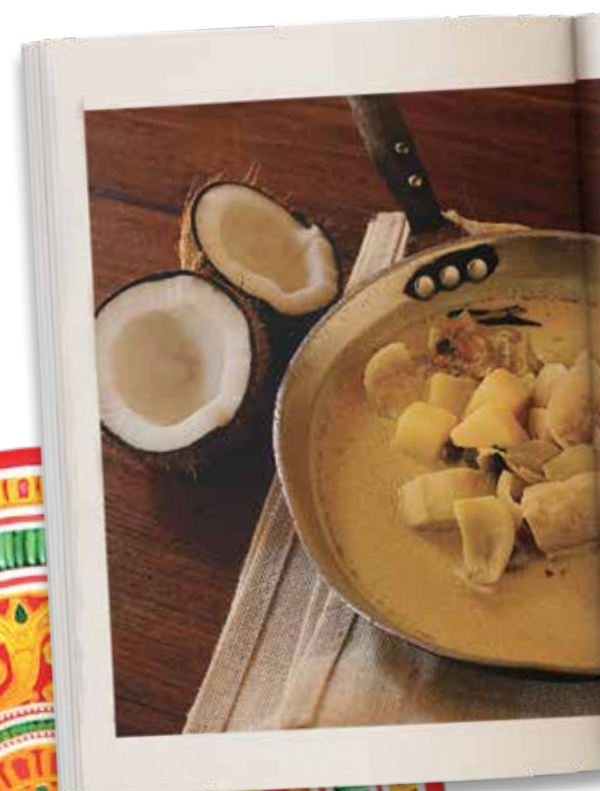
Adding another layer to Kerala's theatrical heritage is Theyyam, a folk tradition that emerged around the 15th century. Unlike its more classical cousins, Theyyam breaks social barriers, with performers from the margins of society transforming into divine embodiments during rituals. It's a raw, vibrant art form where religious faith meets social dialogue, featuring distinctive facial-body drawings and headgear designs.

Each of these forms has adapted differently to modern times. Kutiyattam's venture beyond temple-theatres in the 1950s opened new possibilities while raising preservation challenges. Kathakali has found a global audience while maintaining its core aesthetics. Theyyam continues to thrive in northern Kerala, serving as a unique platform where traditional artistry meets community worship, proving that these ancient art forms remain relevant in contemporary society.

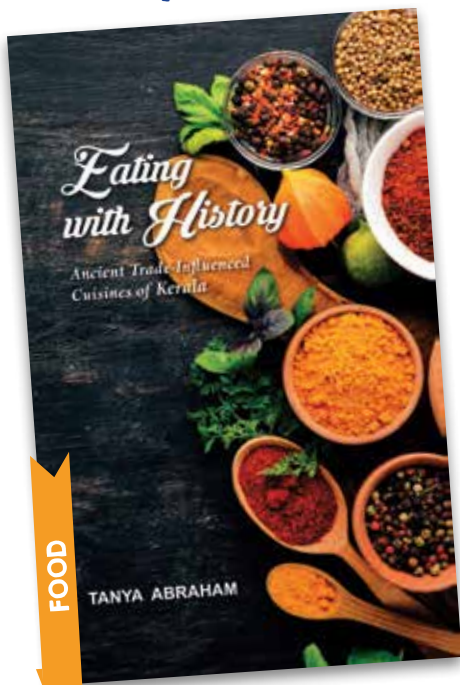
The documentation of Kerala's performing arts presents its own fascinating story of evolution. While scholarly analysis has deepened our understanding of these art forms, it's the emerging voices of cultural insiders—those who combine artistic appreciation with local insight—who are perhaps best equipped to tell these stories. Unlike the traditional masters who relied solely on oral transmission or academic scholars who sometimes



get lost in theory, these *rasikas* (informed connoisseurs), like KK Gopalakrishnan, bridge multiple worlds. They bring both cultural fluency and artistic understanding to their work, helping preserve these rich traditions while making them accessible to broader audiences.



Eating With History



Malabar parotta, appam, meen curry and kappa—the flavours emerging from Kerala's kitchens are as diverse as Kerala's natural beauty. The proximity to the sea and the natural resources of the state—especially the fragrant spices which grew in abundance—attracted inhabitants of foreign soils. This book chronicles how foreign cooking techniques and exotic flavours were carried to life from foreign trade influences and became part of the state's cuisine.

Want a delicious recipe from the book? Here you go...

Tanya Abraham is the curator and director of Kashi Art Gallery in Kochi and the founder of the NGO The Art Outreach Society.



MARAK RECIPE

From Kerala's *kusinchyas* To Your Kitchen

The kitchen is the heart of a home. And Kerala's kitchens draw their uniqueness from the marrying of flavours through diverse cultures. Here is a cherished recipe, passed down from generations to generations, straight from Kerala's

Cochin Fame and Fables

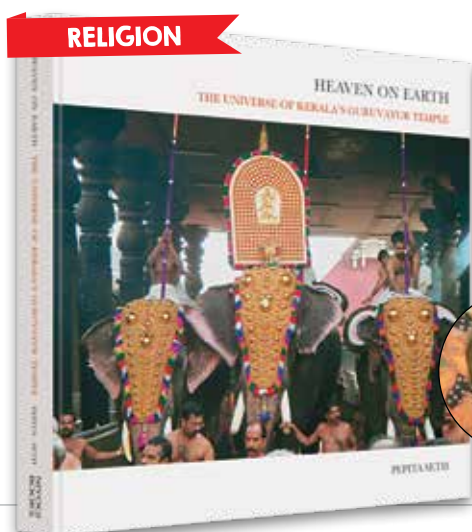


M.K. Das is a Kochi-based writer and columnist. He was the resident editor of the southern edition of *The Financial Express*.

Dot on the international maritime route, Cochin (now Kochi), was a rewarding destination for explorers and traders since time immemorial. Some came to trade in its hottest product, spices, some to escape persecution back home, and a few others for peaceful living with a comfortable career. From royalty to rabble, all found warm welcome in abundance. The history of this small port-town saw the rise and fall of many powers, the complicated trajectories of the diverse people who made a home out of it, and crucially, the confluence of seemingly favoured faiths and conflicting cultures yoked together by visionaries who could imagine a better future of its citizens—here is the story of Cochin's transformation

Heaven on Earth

Every day of the year, thousands of pilgrims swarm into the sacred precincts of Kerala's Guruvayur Temple. They come to seek the blessings of Lord Krishna, known locally as Guruvayurappan, a deity

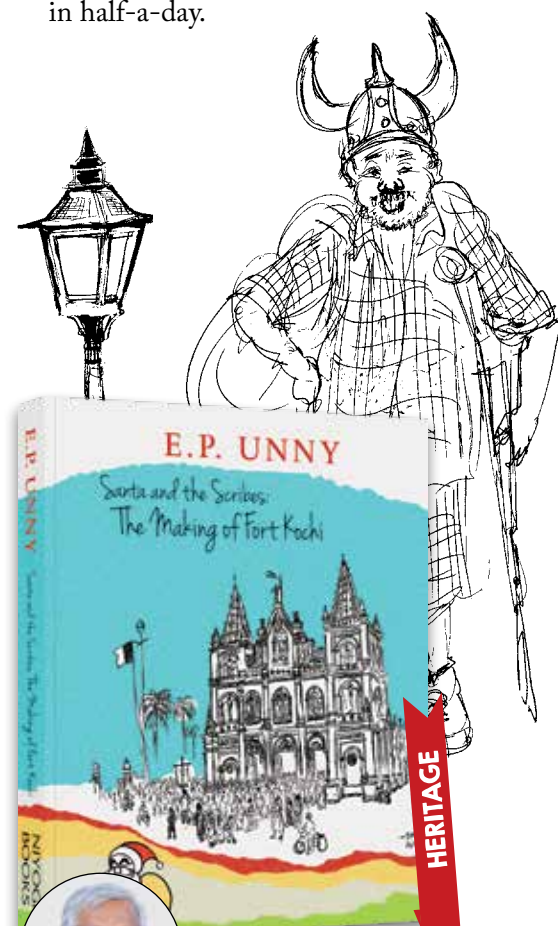


Pepita Seth is a photographer, writer, film editor and 2004 Weiss International Fellow. Her work focuses on Hindu rituals and temple traditions in Kerala.

whose precious idol was, according to myth, originally worshipped by Lord Vishnu. From such mythical beginnings, Guruvayur became one of India's most important temples, a mahakshetram. It is a temple whose elaborate poojas have survived the many vicissitudes of history, of wars and changing times. This tome is the outcome of seven years of careful research enhanced by sensitive photographs that not only portray all aspects of life within the temple, but its atmosphere of intangible divinity.

Santa and the Scribes

Few countries and continents tell more stories than the tiny town of Kochi—of Chinese sailors, Arab traders, Jewish merchants and European conquests—set against a backdrop all of one square mile—chronicles that clash as vehemently as the protagonists once did. Captured here are 135 sketches and a commentary that takes the reader on a walk across half-a-millennium in half-a-day.



E.P. Unny has sketched and written several books and serialised *Free India*, a graphic novel. He has won the Lifetime Achievement Award of The Indian Institute of Cartoonists.



kusinchya. Marak refers to soup. Fish can be replaced with chicken to which celery or mint leaves may be added instead of coriander. This dish accompanied with rice formed the first proper meal fed to Jewish babies.

FOR THE FISH BALLS

- Fish 250 gm
- Onions 4 medium size
- Turmeric powder 1 tsp
- Oil 2 tbsp.
- Salt to taste
- Coriander leaves 1 bunch

FOR THE GRAVY

- Onion 1
- Potato 1 large, cubed small
- Carrot 1 large, cubed small
- Tomato 1 large, cubed small
- Oil 3 tbsp
- Turmeric 1 tsp
- Coriander 1 bunch
- Salt to taste
- Water 3 cups

To make the balls, mince the fish and keep it aside. Now, mince the onions along with the salt. Keep quarter portion of it aside and squeeze out the water from the remaining minced onions. Discard the water.

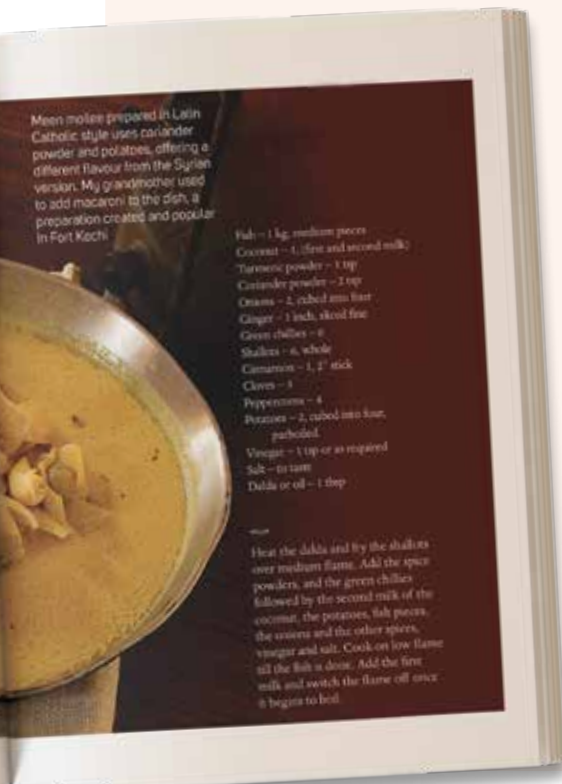
Add the fish to the onions along with chopped coriander leaves and turmeric and oil. Mix well and shape into lime size balls.

For the gravy, slice all the vegetables and place in a pan with the water. Add the turmeric, oil and salt and boil till the vegetables are soft. Strain the liquid and keep aside.

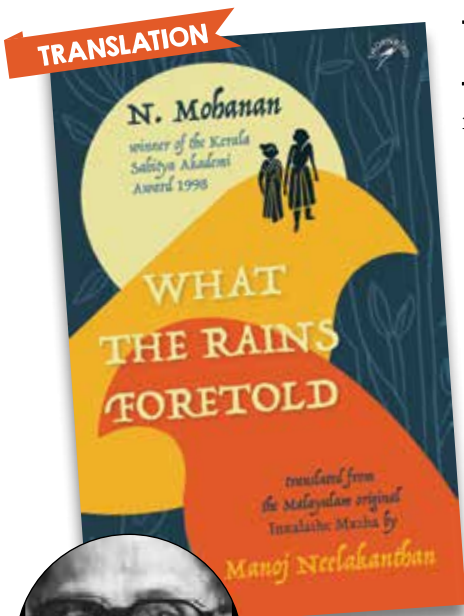
Puree the vegetables and add it to the liquid, allow it to boil once again.

Once of a gravy consistency, add the fish balls and cook for five minutes.

Sprinkle fresh coriander leaves before serving.



What the Rains Foretold



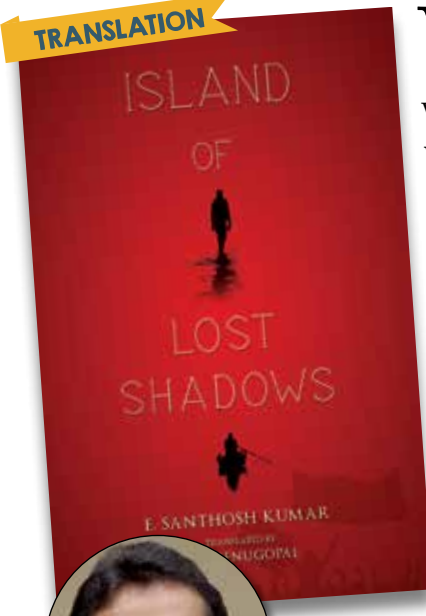
N. Mohanan was the son of well-known Malayalam writer Lalithambika Antharjanam and a renowned novelist himself.

Destiny has a way of catching up, no matter how far you run. In this tale inspired by an origin myth of Kerala, Vararuchi, a brilliant scholar, defies fate by rejecting a prophecy about his marriage. His quest for truth leads him to abandon twelve children, each destined to shape Kerala's future. They grow into fine young people from different walks of life—religion, warfare, the arts and crafts—to become the progenitors of Kerala. As the land prospers, Vararuchi faces the consequences of his choices. N. Mohanan's introspective tale, elegantly translated, weaves together ambition, destiny, and redemption, offering a soul-stirring journey through time and tradition.

Manoj Neelakanthan is a translator and design professional from Bangalore.



Island of Lost Shadows



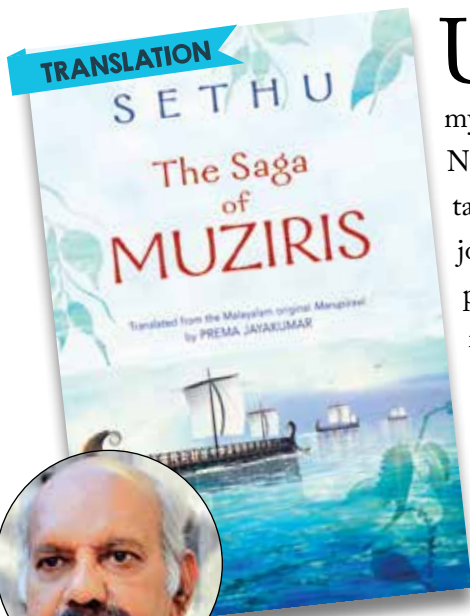
E. Santhosh Kumar is a renowned Malayali writer of short stories and novels.

Welcome to an island where revolutionaries and poets disappear without a trace. Through the intertwining voices of Sivan, a firebrand on the run, and Sakunthala, searching endlessly for her missing husband, E. Santhosh Kumar crafts a tale of intrigue and suspense set in the turbulent 1970s. As the lines blur between revolution and terrorism, readers are forced to confront uncomfortable truths about power, corruption, and the human capacity for both heroism and depravity.

A freelance journalist, **P.N. Venugopal** translates fiction and biographies.



The Saga of Muziris



A. Sethumadhavan, has been writing stories and novels in Malayalam and belongs to a highly innovative generation of fiction writers.

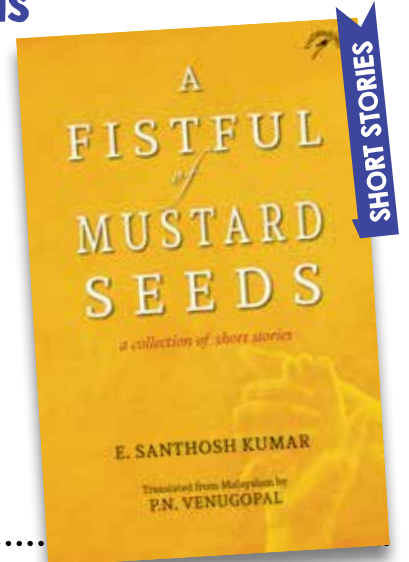
Unearth the secrets of a lost civilization! When Muziris, an ancient Kerala port, vanishes mysteriously, it spawns centuries of speculation. Now, new excavations at Pattanam offer tantalizing clues. Join Aravindan on a magical journey through time, unraveling millennia of political turmoil, social upheaval, and mass migrations. This gripping blend of history, myth, and magic reality connects the distant past to our present, offering a fresh perspective on the ebb and flow of human civilization. It takes the reader on a journey through antiquity, moving back and forth to reflect on the socio-economic ferment of varying periods.

Prema Jayakumar is a columnist and a translator.

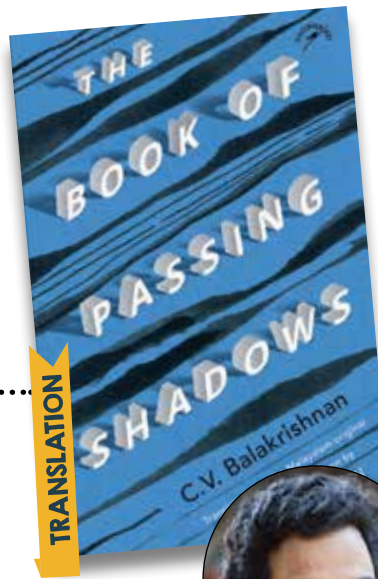


A Fistful of Mustard Seeds

Dive into the depths of the human psyche with E. Santhosh Kumar's collection of 12 haunting stories. Written over two decades, these tales explore moral dilemmas and personal traumas, illuminating the heights and abysses of the human condition. Kumar crafts lives and geographies with his pen, inviting readers into realms of emotional experience both familiar and alien. Sensitive, thought-provoking, and perceptive, each story is a window into a different facet of our shared humanity.



The Book of Passing Shadows



C.V. Balakrishnan has received the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award and the Kerala State Film award.

Shin casts long shadows across generations in this lyrical tale of redemption. Set in a Christian settlement in Malabar, young Yohannan's life unravels as family tragedy strikes again and again. With biblical cadence and rich scriptural allusions, C.V. Balakrishnan weaves a passionate, visionary narrative exploring the eternal conflict between worldly temptations and spiritual aspirations. As Yohannan seeks solace in the arms of a grieving widow, readers are left to ponder the role of faith in our earthly tribulations.

T.M. Yesudasan is a renowned academic.



The Story of the Timepiece



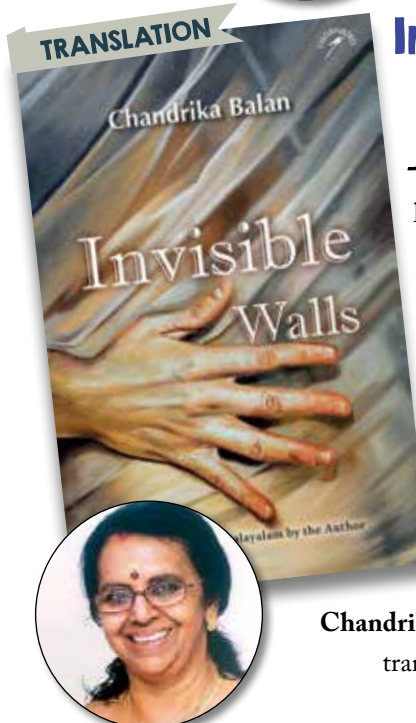
Sankarankutty Pottekkat, popularly known as S.K. Pottekkat, is an iconic Malayalam writer.

Step into the pre-Independence era with S.K. Pottekkat's masterful short story collection. Blending realism with romanticism, Pottekkat crafts complex characters navigating everyday situations that resonate with universal themes. His unique style, both prosaic and poetic, brings to life a bygone era while touching on timeless human experiences. Each story is a finely crafted timepiece, marking the moments that define our lives and relationships.

Venugopal Menon runs the training unit of an engineering conglomerate, where his writing and workshoping skills were widely appreciated.

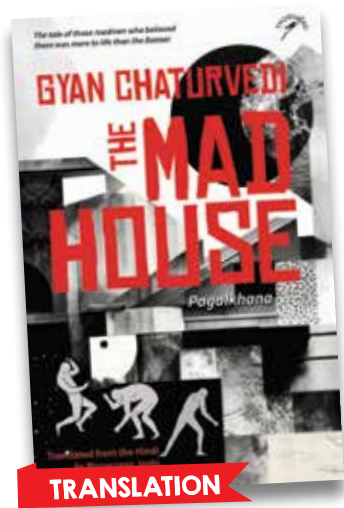


Invisible Walls



Chandrika Balan is a bilingual writer, academic critic, orator and translator. She was formerly Associate Professor of English, All Saints' College, Thiruvananthapuram.

Invisible Walls, translated from Malayalam, is about two women, Aparna and Kamala, leading seemingly parallel lives. The book starts with Kamala, seated in a railway compartment, reading a novel about Aparna's life called 'Invisible Walls'. While reading, Kamala begins to realize their similarities—they both are independent women who yearn to break free from the invisible boundaries constricting their lives. The novel takes the reader through a nuanced portrayal of timely issues like societal and familial expectations, underlying patriarchy and sexual assault.



This novel of a cat-and-mouse game between the Citizen and the Bazaar explores the changes in people's psyche and belief systems brought on by the liberalisation of India in the 1990s.

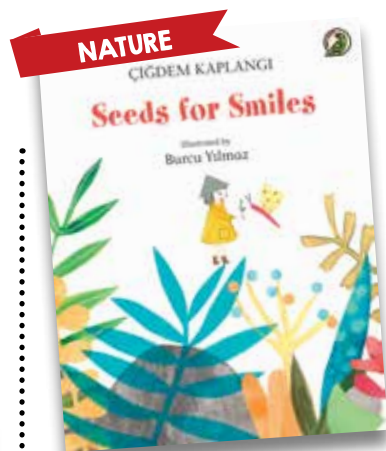
Join Orange, the little grey fish, on his adventure through the vast depths of the ocean to find out where he truly belongs.



Have you ever wondered what goes on inside the Forest when the night is silent? The trees, the animals, the rocks—each one has a story to tell. Come listen to them...



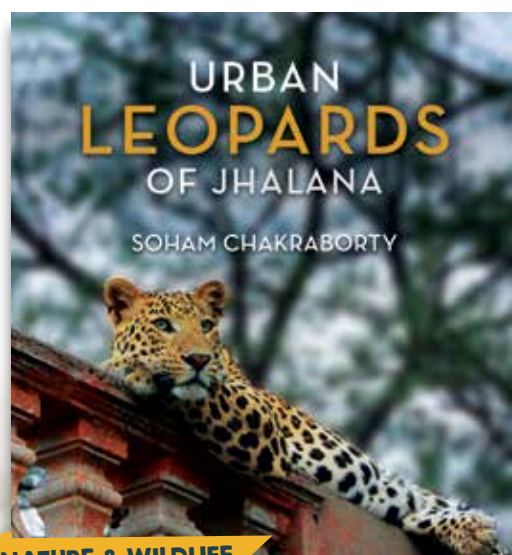
Best friends Jojo and Moni have a thrilling adventure in their own backyard, when a naughty stranger visits their garden.



The little gardener is all set to begin her next mission, but wait! Something is missing in this big concrete city. Which secret seeds will she bring out to make the magic unfold?

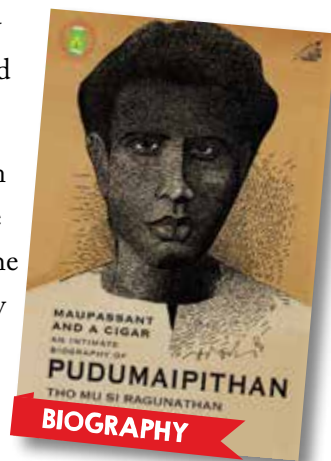


In the village where it never stops raining, a farmer finds the biggest carrot he has ever grown. Want to know what he does with it?



The life of a literary giant, equally lauded and criticized...

This biography is an intimate look at the writer considered the harbinger of literary modernism in Tamil language.



Meet the beloved leopards from Jhalana, the first leopard conservation reserve in India, in this vividly illustrated chronicle.

Preserving the heritages you cannot touch: In conversation with Binny Kuruvilla



What is The Kochi Heritage Project?

The Kochi Heritage Project is a collaborative social enterprise I founded in 2018 to document and celebrate the rich and diverse heritage of Kochi. We focus on creating immersive, research-driven experiences that tell the untold stories of the city's past and present. Through walking tours, curated food experiences, digital documentation, heritage events and research, we engage both locals and visitors in exploring Kochi's unique heritage. A portion of our proceeds goes directly to the stakeholders and our tours also encourage responsible tourism by promoting local businesses and artisans. Our aim is to preserve and promote the city's cultural legacy in a sustainable and responsible manner while contributing to the local economy and community.

What was your motivation to start this initiative?

My motivation came from my travels where I saw various cities around the world celebrating their heritage. I encountered people who were working tirelessly to create awareness and to preserve the heritage in their communities, which deeply inspired me. Seeing their dedication, I wondered, 'Why not in Kochi!' With its rich cultural history, Kochi deserved the same level of attention and celebration.



What are three areas which you think need immediate attention?

Firstly, there is an urgent need to raise awareness about Kochi's intangible heritage, such as its oral traditions, craftsmanship and community stories, which are slowly fading. One intangible heritage that is fading quickly is Kochi's traditional culinary practices. With the rise of modern, globalized cuisine, many of the city's unique local dishes and cooking methods of different communities passed down through generations are being forgotten. Through The Kochi Heritage Project, we've introduced food trails and experiences that celebrate these traditional recipes and foods, focusing on family-run eateries and home cooks who still prepare dishes using age-old techniques.

Secondly, urban development must balance modernization with heritage conservation, particularly in areas like Fort Kochi and Mattancherry, and more importantly, in areas like Ernakulam and Tripunithura, where the architectural heritage is at risk.

Finally, more attention is needed to empower local communities to take an active role in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage, as they are key stakeholders in any conservation effort.

How do you measure your impact?

When it comes to measuring our impact, we track the success of our initiatives through several metrics. Firstly, the increasing participation in our tours, workshops and events over the last two years reflects growing local and visitor engagement. Secondly, the number of local collaborations with artisans, storytellers, small businesses and organizations is a key indicator of our impact on the local economy. We also measure awareness through social media engagement as well as feedback and reviews from our audience, which gives us insight into how well we are communicating and celebrating Kochi's heritage. Lastly, our repeat visitors and partnerships with organizations that support heritage are testaments to the project's long-term relevance and success.





BESTSELLING CHILDREN'S AUTHOR ELIF YONAT TOĞAY IN DELHI



At Bookaroo Children's LitFest 2024



At Kunskapsskolan International School, Gurgaon



At Pathways School, Noida



Gauri Shilendran, illustrator of *Why Are My Words Tangled?*, at Bookaroo 2024



L-R: Writer Kaiwan Mehta with Mustansir Dalvi, author of the book, at the launch of *Charles Correa: Citizen Charles*, at Kitaab Khana, Mumbai

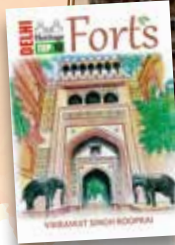


Author Rajat Chaudhuri during a book discussion at Bookworm, Kolkata.

Sutapa Basu, author of *Murder in the Jungle*, at Bookaroo 2024



Vikramjit Singh Rooprai, author of *Delhi Forts: Top 10 Heritage*, during a heritage walk at the Red Fort, organized in collaboration with Tales of City

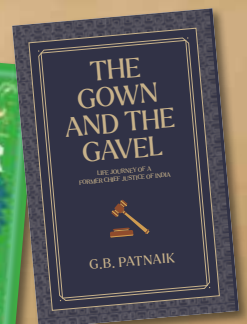
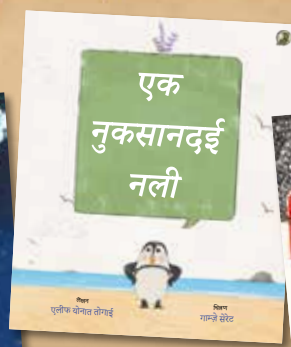
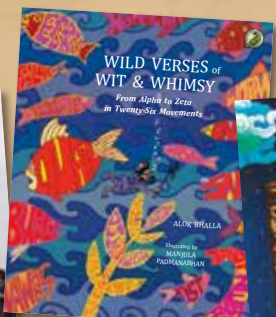
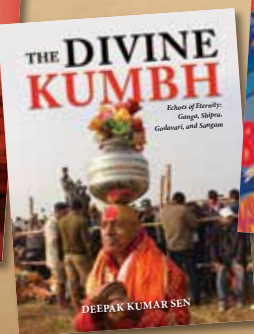
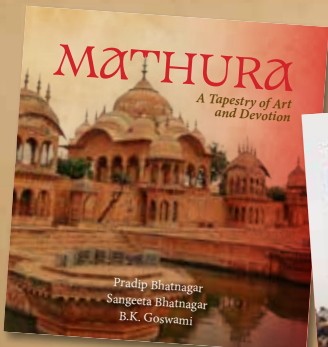


Visit us at

48th International Kolkata Book Fair 2025
31st Jan-9th Feb

New Delhi World Book Fair 2025
1st-9th Feb

FORTHCOMING



FORTHCOMING

To subscribe, send an email to niyogibooks@gmail.com

Stay tuned at:

