

Qissa

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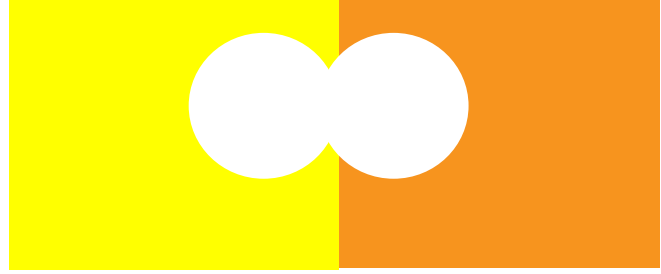
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editorial note

As an evolving text(s), Qissa is aware of the returning colours and newness as things begin to open up again, whether or not the pandemic has conclusively ended. With a patchwork of emotions, we are facing a normal stitched together with the coping mechanisms leftover from the times of lockdown (all those hobbies!) and the mounting stress of returning to the old normal. A splash of freshness is called for in these times.

Our design for this issue reflects these thoughts and more.

The poems in this issue have some continuity with the previous issues. This is apparent in terms of the continuing ways in which young writers grapple with family dynamics and their affinities with their language(s). 'Laughter, it hurts' by Parvathy J and 'Aajee (meaning dadi\ father's mom) by Divisha Chaudhry explore familial ties. The speaker in the poem 'The Metamorphosis of Aging' watches her grandparents grow old.

'Not Quite My Tongue' by Zainab Ummer Farook and 'A poem describing my poor trilingual abilities' by Ranjini Nair tackle the small joys of thinking about our multiple tongues.

There is a sense of an ending and hence also a beginning in the poems 'Kodiyirakkam' by Farsana Majeed K and 'The Seducing Sunset' by Wafa Sidheeque. These poems capture a moment or an event with distilled thought.

'Experiment: Defamiliarization' by MS Alphonze, as well as 'Cognate' and 'Serenade' by Zainab Ummer Farook approach emotion through the intellect. 'Karia Co' and 'Coconut' by Nithya Mariam John capture familiar scenes from Kerala in poetic form. Similarly, 'And to Think That the Sweetmeat Corner and the Fern There Didn't Mean Anything' by Rahana K Ismail instantly takes one to the Sweetmeat Street in Kozhikode and the columns of sunlight that fall between the sparse trees and the not-so-sparse crowds. 'Oru Raathri' by Farsana Majeed K leaves a memorable tenderness in the narrative of a night of the singular kind.

Haritha Chandran's "Dictionary of the Unfortunate" is a story set in 1960s Kerala. It is focalised from Ramani's perspective, and details the quotidian aspects of striving for education as a member of the lower caste even as she struggles with poverty. She flips through "the pages of her primordial Ezhava dictionary" as she makes her way through school with her stomach "grumbling in protest". A poignant vignette of caste societies in Kerala, Chandran's story is a piece which attempts to deftly interweave traditionalist and postmodernist aspects of the "every day" in the Malabar.

Sona Srivastava's "My Very Own Friends" [original in Hindi by Kamleshwar Prasad Saxena] is a fable centering on the themes of authority, hypocrisy, and sycophancy. The tale, with its employment of ellipses, invites readers to speculate on the form and technique as much as it invites attention to the central theme — the jackal hits upon a sad realization only after he has met his fall, but were his friends really his friends?

Jeenia's non fiction piece "Njale Kalyaneem Dakshaneem" speaks unpretentiously. The writer does not hide her excitement when she writes that she found confidence to speak in her Malayalam dialect like the characters of the novel.

Jacob Joshy's observations about the changing cinemascapes and viewing habits made in the article "Covidanandhara Cinemakal: Chila Chinthakal" are timely. The writer has expressed his views with a great economy of thoughts and words.

We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed putting this together for you.

As always, keep reading and writing, and keep sane!

Editorial Team

Qissa

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Laughter, It Hurts

Your text reached me
Between a nightmare and foggy sleep

*"I thought of you today - your
Loud, loud, loud, laughter"*

I sobbed in my dream
Next morning
The words caught me
leaning to the dusty window of a city bus
I smiled myself to tears
(How is that every time I cry in buses,
I find a man, any man
Sitting next to me, looking away
Uncomfortable, disgusted
Even when the seat is marked mahila?)

my laughter - loud, loud, loud

It is easy to forget one's own laughter
Easier to hold on to its history
To laugh I had to grow
Plant myself away from the root
Root that erupted in rage at the volume of
joy

'Hens shouldn't be loud'
I am meat, I am meant for consumption

HAHAHA

HAHAHA
HAHAHA

HAHAHA

HAHAHA

HAHAHA

HAHAHA



HAHAHA

HAHAHA

HAHAHA

'Lower your volume, people can hear you'

Shrink shrink shrink until I am a whisper

'What is this stupid noise'

How dare I laugh-seeK pleasure-breathe!

'I shouldn't hear another word'

A father

Anger, ego, all that he is allowed (entitled)

A mother, a daughter

Traipsing through everyday

Soft soft soft, lest you trigger the next explosion

Rituals of holding back laughter, whispering, huddling

In kitchen to breathe and be

Gulping down words when the footfall nears

Offered as prayers

To maybe, maybe soften the next blow,

Shorten the next spell of yelling, silence and hurting

HAHAHA

HA
HA

'Ah, yes, here comes the tears'

In a dream I scrawl his dictums on the peeling walls of the old house

Tired of screaming in silence

Nobody reads

Nobody is shocked, nobody reads

"Go wash your Face"

Home is where you cry

Allowed to cry, inevitably cry

In silence

My body trembled with shock as it learned safety

As laughter gurgled free free free out of me

Away from anger

Seeking

Laughter

HAHAHA.

haritha t chandran

Dictionary of the unfortunate

Take a sharp right turn from the asphalt, walk the stretch of the gravel road, and cross the backyard of Ramamammi's house (you find Ramamammi busy scouring the pots perched between her strong, invincible thighs, the glint of yesterday's lashing scorched intermittently in them) and here it is, Chirakkuthazha LP school, her impregnable fort of toil. All night the parasomnic building mourned and snored in dreams of tang of listless children in its jejunum. Morning come, cohorts of juveniles, colorless and melanated, opulent and impecunious, noble and untouchable, Paraya, Pulaya, Nambiar clad in the soiled color of communist Pacha (siam weed) trickled down to it. Ezhava, like Ramani, shared the classroom with Nambiar and Pulaya at the same time. It was the time of the unprecedented.

The story unfolds in a classroom where students who were differentially treated according to their class and caste privileges were compelled to interact in an egalitarian setting for the very first time. It is set in Kerala in the 1960s, when the state underwent reforms in education and land reforms.

The school code demanded pigtails in neat tight braids. Ramani's clumsy elfin hands failed to fulfill the purpose. So the duty falls on the hands of her sister, elder to her by precisely ten months, four days, and 358 minutes, who went by baby ass wiper, culinary serf, and off-label tutor.. Their matriarch woke up before the break of dawn and scurried to the paddy fields owned by upper caste illam residents in the hope of an earning that would quench the enormous debt piling up in the convenience store. The two sisters were left to tame the beast of domestic chores. Most days, just like today, their ovens refused to burn in the morning, and pits of fire ignited in the stomachs of Ramani and her siblings. Evenings were much better when juvenile hunger was satiated with root vegetables brewed in a surfeit of Indian condiments, which they had in abundance since they could grow them in their property.

With a stomach empty to the bottom and growling in protest, Ramani plods to the school, or as she called it, uskool. Her makeshift school bag, which was a shopping bag in its previous incarnation, contained exactly three things-half of a slate pencil, since giving a second standard student an entire one would always warrant losing it to unknown minions of hell, and they could not afford it, a black slate that is darkened stark black with the magic of half a dozen pepper-elder stems and a steel plate with remnants of its obscure floral indentation playing hide and seek with your eyes. The bag wasn't particularly heavy, but a starving tummy bestows you with the superpower of having heightened sensory perceptions. But Ramani was not a stranger to this feeling. She continued her expedition with much ease of a skilled unfortunate.

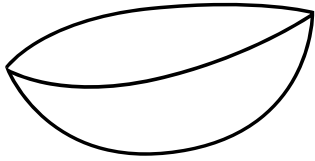
The bag wasn't particularly heavy, but a starving tummy bestows you with the superpower of having heightened sensory perceptions.

Ramani reached school just in time for the long bell, which was a rare occurrence in her limited school life so far, especially on days their oven burned. The school had a primordial existence so much that only fourth-standard students were considered cardinal enough to have benches and books. So Ramani and her classmates had to make do sitting on the filthy floor, smooth in places and broken in other. Ramani noticed how upper-class children reached in time for school and occupied the most discrete and comfortable positions to sit on. Baby sitters, kitchen managers, professional beedi makers, reputed field plowers always end up finding cavities beneath their butts to rest on. Ramani found the front row ready to take in her royal, empty stomach. She wasn't complaining. All her eyes were set on the smoke from the school stove. The fine smell of Rava roasting reached her nostrils.

Ramani eyed Ragu sitting next to her. Ragu had never been a consistent attendee in the class. He smelled faintly of tobacco and tendu leaves, which often prompted teachers to mock at his chastity. His attendance was registered more at the beedi company than at the school. He scurried around in search of cashew nuts in other's properties in the evenings, dried them, and sold them for a handful of annas. Ragu eyed her back in retaliation, and his ebony skin gleamed in contempt; hurt in his eyes at her and her classmates for condescending him till he was tiny as an insect.

Periods limped forward as Ramani's stomach filed more complaints to her system. Teachers paraded in and out of the class with a nonchalance apt for the paycheck they were offered. The roasting smell of Rava was replaced with the smell of sauteed onions, and slowly aroma of upma filled the air.

The benevolent lunch bell struck just ten minutes past one (punctuality was never a forte of the institution), and kids streamed to the lunch line. With her steel plate propped in her bony elbow, Ramani waited for the great filler of needy stomachs, the lunch lady to serve her portion of upma to her. Her mouth watered in deep fervor as her plate gained weight with the steaming upma. She rushed to her place in the classroom in the hope of devouring the government school, unfortunate's delicacy.



Ramani had always been a slow eater, something she learned from her older brother. The faster you eat, the longer you would have to watch others eat, and the sadder you get. So she chewed every morsel with the utmost elegance, feeling every grain of the thick porridge she swallowed in.

But unbeknownst to her, Ragu, owner of an even emptier stomach, had finished his portion of upma and was eyeing her upma in hunger. A stomach that had not seen substance for days prompted the kid to snatch the plate from Ramani and make a run for it.

Broken from the trance that upma provided her, Ramani gave out a deep wail. Kids gathered around her, and a commotion was born with Ramani in the epicenter. Kids started being divided into factions based on how to go about the situation.

Sreedevi, a well-bred upper caste child, took matters at her hand and came forward.

"Hey, Ramani! You know how poor Ragu is. He might have not eaten at all for days. Be a good girl and show some kindness to him"

Mass agreed in unison. But Ramani was confused about hearing the word kindness from Sreedevi's mouth.

What is kindness?

She racked through her tiny brain to find this alien word. She flipped the pages of her primordial Ezhava dictionary to find the essence of such a word, the secret recipe to grant forgiveness to someone who stole her upma.

But the first word to be found in her tiny dictionary was hunger. Before she turned the ripe age of the school, she spends her days loitering around the fields and households her mother worked on. An empty-stomached toddler Ramani watched as straws were reaped, hauled, and thrashed till tiny gems of rice appeared. She watched as her mother milked the cow, and silver jets of milk splashed out of them, and her tiny tummy rumbled. Her mother peeled jackfruit and collected mangos at upper caste households as Ramani swallowed down her saliva that pooled up on the back of her mouth.

Once, a Nambiyathi commented on Ramani's emancipated body, saying,

"Edi, why don't you feed your child well?"

Why don't you feed your child

When Ramani turned five years old, Ramani's mother let out a sigh of relief. Crossing the magical age mark meant there was the silver lining of upma waiting for Ramani.

Ramani let this word go and foraged for the word kindness again. But again, another word hit her instead, anger.

She remembered how finishing the leftover sicklepod leaf curry without sharing it with her younger brothers had caused her mother's fury to unleash upon her. It was a weekend, hence devoid of upma heaven, and she was hungry to her bones. She devoured the curry and rice without a second thought and found her siblings famished and vengeful. They cried out in unison.

Her mother was busy picking lice from the heads of patrician women who paid her for the service while her own children wandered around unkempt. (The matriarch simply did not have time.) The racket left Ramani's mother humiliated before the noblewoman, and she stormed into the kitchen and unleashed all her wrath on Ramani. Crimson hibiscuses bloomed on Ramani's inner thighs that day.

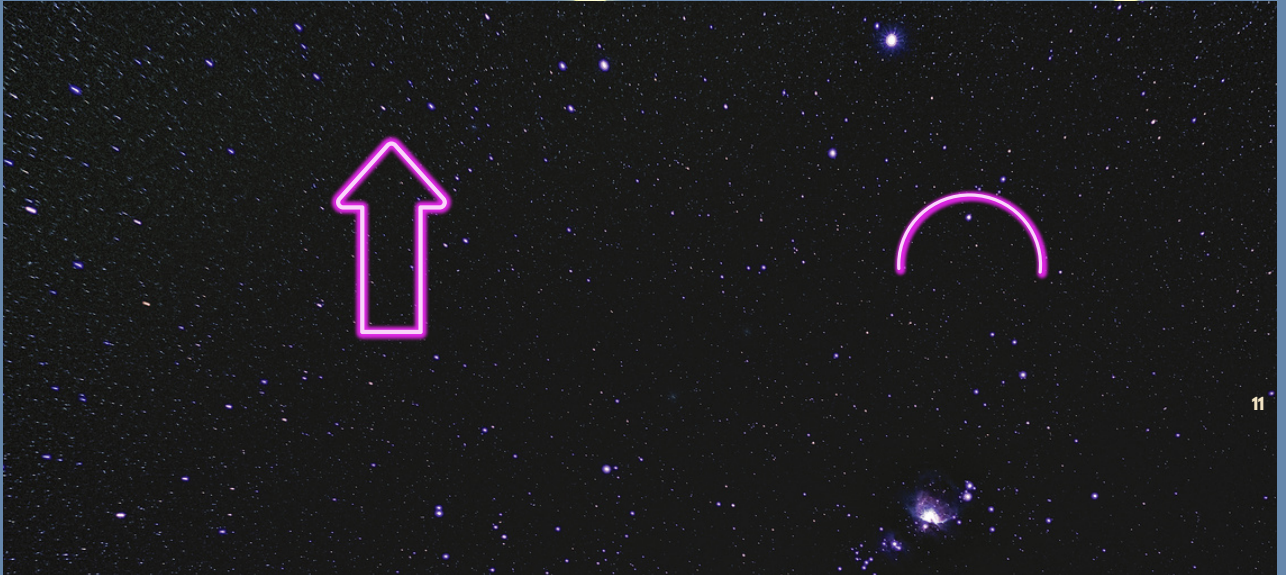
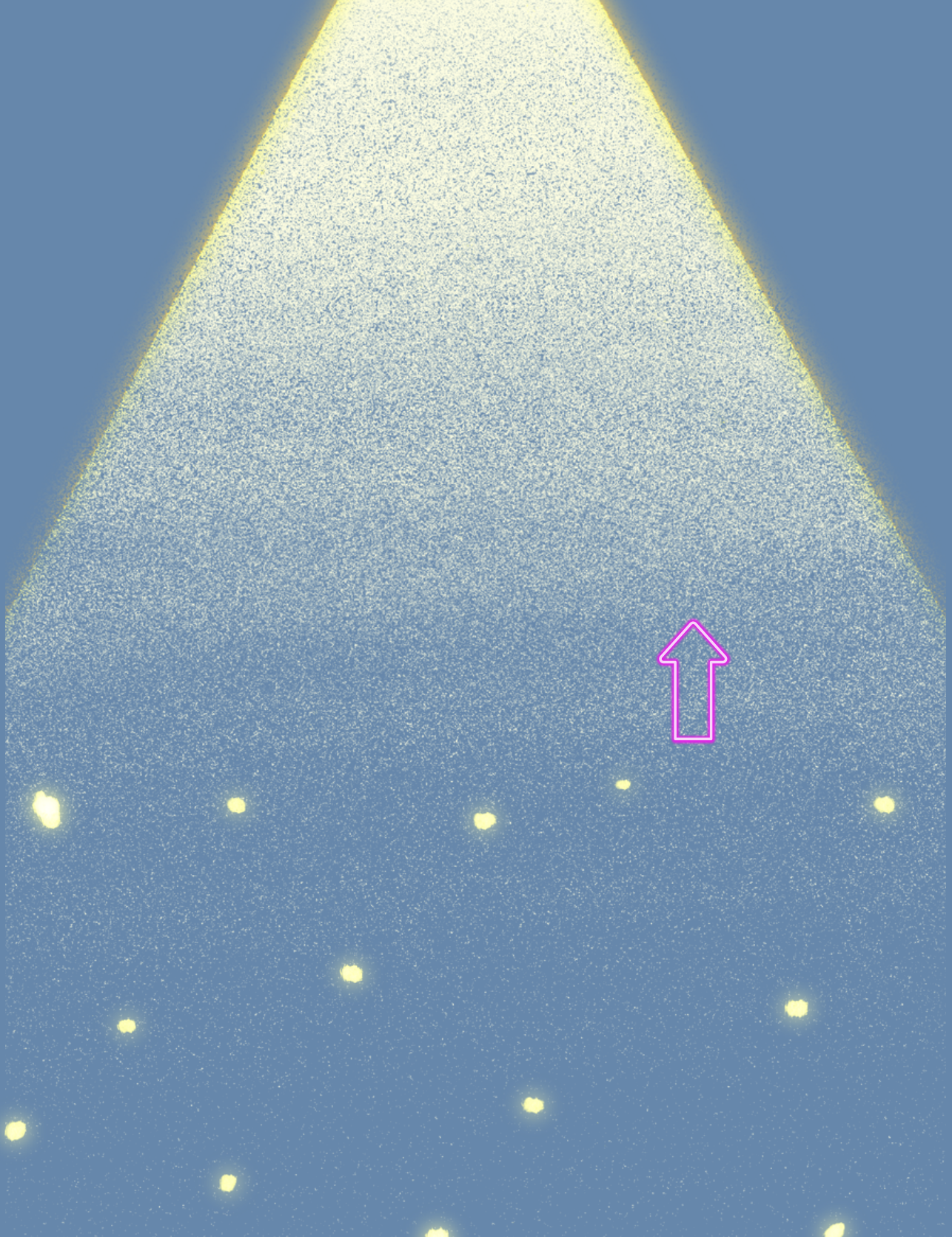
Ramani let go of that word as well. She flickered more sheets of her dictionary in her tiny brain and a word even bizarre than the earlier kept popping up. But alas, she couldn't find kindness in those leaves.

**She stood perplexed at her inability to comprehend this odd word.
Kindness!**

Where did it come from?

What indeed is it?





m s alphonze

Experiment: Defamiliarization

**While researching how to transmute helplessness into heat
I see your name in a poem I didn't write
and cuss—**

**The poet broke a word—impelled by genius,
malice or luck—just before the letter
that marked the beginning of my breathlessness,
hindered my reading, made me yell
what the—**

**I keep looking at the accidental word.
Surely, it's not supposed to be your name
but the letters are just the right number, set
in the exact ~~sequence and strategically brok-~~
en to break the rhythm of my breathing.**

**Observation: When I squint, words turn into smoke—
the name dissolves.**

**Conclusion: The poet broke the word
just the way your name breaks my heart—
unknowingly, unknowably.**

**Inference: I have learnt how to distill matter into dreams.
My eyes have deciphered the logic of turning letters into air.
My lungs are yet to master the alchemy of forgetting.**

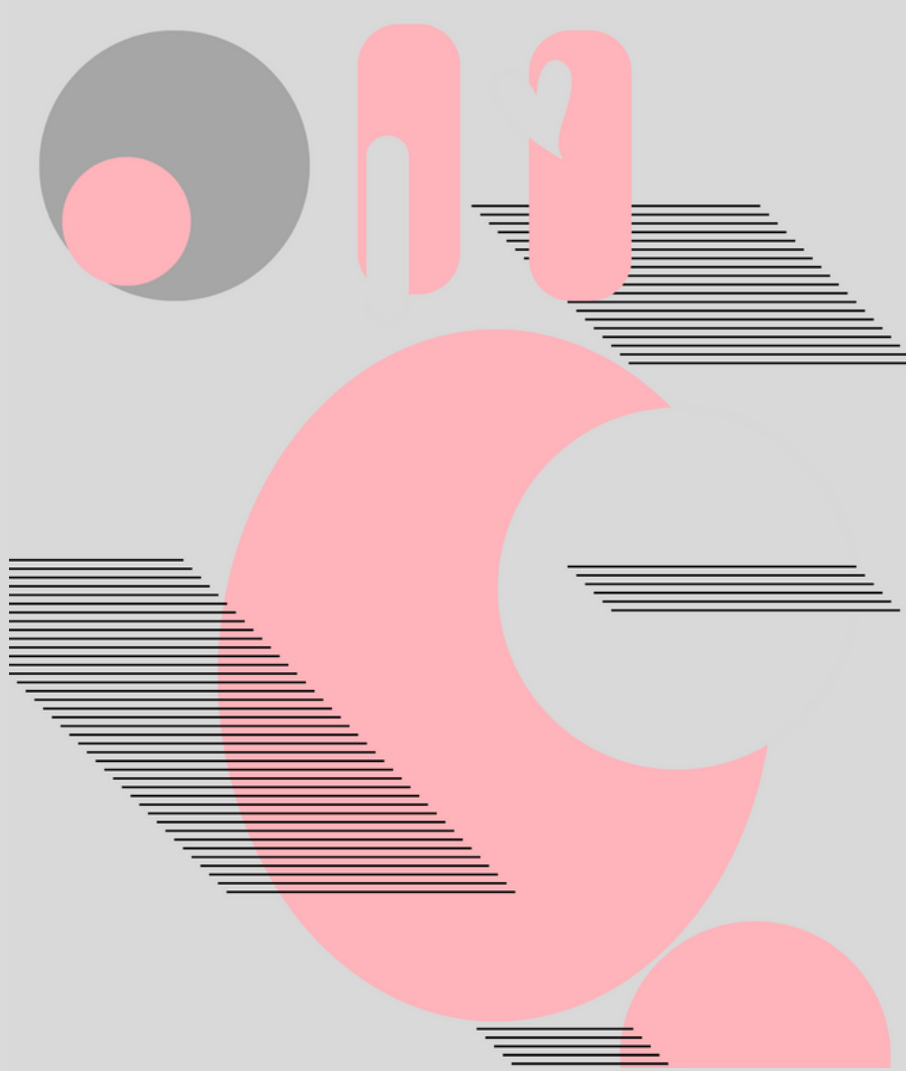


rahana k ismail

And to Think That the Sweetmeat Corner and the Fern There Didn't Mean Anything

How like lightning
the portiere
of morning sky
claps itself on our owl eye
and the frond in
fern opens
its raw line
to meld what it had been
to what is it
to become in an ink clap
as though what matters
is this:
becoming
robed
red and ribbed
to marry what was
with what is to be
sublime in its becoming.

ജീനിയ തച്ചാനമ്പത്



ഞാളെ
കല്യാണിം ദാക്ഷാണിം

'കല്യാണിയെന്നും ദാക്ഷായണിയെന്നും പേരായ രണ്ട് സ്ത്രീകളുടെ കത്' എന്ന പുസ്തകം തുടങ്ങുന്നത്,

"എന്നാണേ മണങ്ങീറ്റ് ചെയ്യൂന്ന്?" എന്ന ചോദ്യത്തോടെയാണ്.

"എന്നേ" എന്ന് എന്നെ ഈ ലോകത്ത് വിളിച്ചിരുന്ന ഒരാളെ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നുള്ളൂ - എന്റെ അച്ഛൻ. ആവിളി ഒരിക്കൽ കൂടി കേൾക്കാൻ ഞാൻ ഇപ്പോഴും കൊതിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. അത് അതുകൊണ്ടായിരിക്കും ആദ്യവരിയിൽ തന്നെ എനിക്കീ പുസ്തകത്തോട് അടുപ്പം തോന്നിയത്

കോഴിക്കോട് ജില്ലയിലെ കൊയിലാണ്ടിയോടുത്തുകിടക്കുന്ന ഒരു ഗ്രാമമാണ് എന്റെ "ജന്മം കൊണ്ടുള്ളദേശം". അവിടത്തെ പ്രാദേശിക ഭാഷാശൈലിയിലാണ് ഞാൻ സംസാരിച്ചുതുടങ്ങിയത്. പക്ഷെ ജീവിതത്തിൽ പലപ്പോഴായി ശുദ്ധീകരിക്കപ്പെട്ടതാണ് എന്റെ ഭാഷ. അഞ്ചാം തരത്തിൽ കോഴിക്കോട് നഗരത്തിലെ ഒരു കോൺവെന്റ് സ്കൂളിലേക്ക് പഠിച്ചു നടപ്പോഴാണ് ആദ്യത്തെ ശുദ്ധീകരണം നടന്നത്. അന്നത്തെ "cultural shock" ഒരു പതിറ്റാണ്ടിനിപ്പുറം ഇന്നും എന്നെ ഭീതിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നുണ്ട്. അവധിക്ക് നഗരത്തിൽ നിന്ന് ചേക്കുന്ന കസിൻസ് എന്റെ അപരിഷ്കൃതത്വത്തെക്കുറിച്ച് പലപ്പോഴായി നടത്തിയ ഓർമ്മപ്പെടുത്തലുകൾ ഒഴിച്ചു നിർത്തിയാൽ എനിക്ക് സാംസ്കാരിക-ഭാഷാ വ്യത്യാസങ്ങൾ തികച്ചും പുതിയ ഒരറിവായിരുന്നു. പിന്നീട് എഞ്ചിനീയറിംഗ് പഠനത്തിനായി എറണാകുളത്തേക്കെത്തുമ്പോഴേക്ക്, വീട്ടിൽ ഫോൺ വിളിച്ച് സംസാരിക്കാൻ വേണ്ടി മാത്രം ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്ന പ്രാകൃതഭാഷയായി എന്റെ നാടിന്റെ ഭാഷമാറിയിരുന്നു. നാളുകൾക്ക് ശേഷം ഇന്നിപ്പോൾ ഞാൻ തിരിച്ചറിയുന്നുണ്ട് ശുദ്ധീകരിച്ചുകളഞ്ഞ എന്റെ മണ്ണിനെ.

തെക്കൻ കേരളത്തിലെ എന്റെ പാർട്ട്നറുടെ വീട്ടുകാരും നാട്ടുകാരും "മോൾക്ക് അവിടുത്തെ സ്റ്റാങ് തീരെയില്ലാട്ടോ! അതെന്തായാലും നന്നായി, അല്ലെങ്കിൽ ഞങ്ങൾ കഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടേനെ" എന്ന് വടിവൊത്ത മലയാളത്തിൽ പറയുമ്പോൾ എന്റെയുള്ളിലെ നഷ്ടബോധം ആളിക്കത്തും. "ഈടേളേളാർക്കു ഞങ്ങളാടാതെ ഭാഗം തിരിഞ്ഞിരിക്കില്ലേൽ ഞങ്ങളെന്തെന്നോ?!" എന്ന് സ്വാഭാവികമായ പരയാനുള്ള അർഹത എനിക്ക് നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു എന്നു തോന്നി. ഇതുകൊണ്ടൊക്കെത്തന്നെ ഈ പുസ്തകം എനിക്ക് എന്റെ സ്വന്തമാണ്. സ്വന്തമല്ലാതായ പലതിന്റേയും ബാക്കിവെയ്പ്പ്, ഓർമ്മപ്പെടുത്തൽ.

ഭാഷയിൽ തുടങ്ങിയ ആകർഷണീയത മുന്നിലേക്കുപോകുംതോറും കഥയോടും തോന്നി. കേരളത്തിന് പുറത്തു നമ്മുടെ തെക്കുവടക്കു ദേശങ്ങളെ പൊറാട്ടയും ബീഫും (മറ്റ് പലതും) ഒന്നിച്ചു നിർത്തുന്നുണ്ട്. എന്നിരുന്നാലും, തെക്കുവടക്ക് വൈരുദ്ധ്യങ്ങൾ പലതാണ്. ഈ ഈ വൈരുദ്ധ്യങ്ങളെ പറ്റി ഞാൻ പറഞ്ഞു ഫലിപ്പിക്കാൻ ബുദ്ധിമുട്ടിയ പലതും ദാക്ഷായണിയുടെ കഥയിലൂടെ അന്നായാസേന കഥാകാരി അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്.

ദാക്ഷായണി ആണിക്കാരന്റെ വീട്ടിൽ കണ്ടകാഴ്ചകളും ഞാൻ എന്റെ പാർട്ട്നറുടെ വീട്ടിൽ കണ്ടകാഴ്ചകളും തമ്മിൽ വലിയ അന്തരമില്ല.

"ആട്ത്തെ പേഷൻ " കണ്ട് ഞാനും അമ്പരന്നുപോയിട്ടുണ്ട്.

"ഈബീടിൻറാത്താനാട്?" എന്ന് എനിക്കും ചോദിക്കാൻ തോന്നിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. കഴിഞ്ഞകുറച്ചു വർഷങ്ങളായി "സ്ത്രീപക്ഷ" സിനിമകളും എഴുത്തുകളും ഒരുപരിധിവരെ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ ബുദ്ധിമുട്ടുകളിലും ഉയർത്തപ്പെടുന്നതും ഒതുങ്ങി പോകുന്നതായി തോന്നിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. അത്തരം സൃഷ്ടികൾ പ്രസക്തമായിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ തന്നെ സരസമായി സ്ത്രീകളുടെ കഥ പറച്ചിലുകൾ കേൾക്കാൻ ഞാൻ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നുണ്ടായിരുന്നു. **Flea bag** പോലുള്ള സീരീസുകളിൽ കണ്ട ലളിതമായ കഥ പറയൽ അധികം വേറെ കണ്ടിട്ടില്ല (ഒരു പക്ഷെ അറിയാത്തതുകൊണ്ടായിരിക്കും). ഈവിഭാഗത്തിൽ ഉൾപ്പെടുത്താൻ സാധിക്കുന്ന ഒരു പുസ്തകമാണിത്. കഥയിൽ സ്വാഭാവികമായി കടന്നുവരുന്ന പരേതാത്മാക്കളും പശുക്കളും പുസ്തകത്തിന്റെ ലോകത്തിന്റെ ഭംഗികൂട്ടുന്നു.

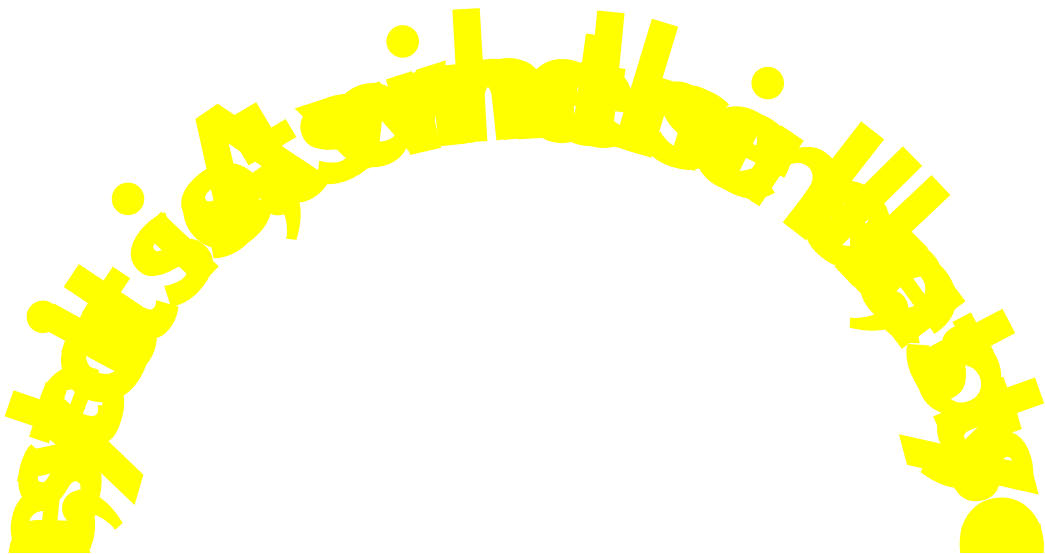
വായിച്ചു കഴിഞ്ഞപ്പോൾ 'ഊയിന്റുച്ചാകയിത്തൊ' എന്നാണ് വായിൽ വന്നത്. ഒരു കാര്യം ഉറപ്പിച്ച് പറയാം. ഞാൻ വീണ്ടും വീണ്ടും വായിക്കുന്ന ഒരു പുസ്തകമായിരിക്കും 'കല്യാണിയെന്നും ദാക്ഷായണിയെന്നും പേരായ രണ്ട് സ്ത്രീകളുടെ കത്'.



wafa sidheeque

The Seducing Sunset

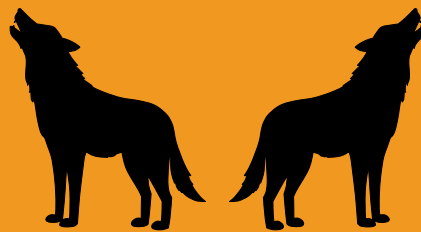
As in the east,
rose in my heart.
Valley it is,
where I let you float.
World of love,
to set and sink,
as a seducing sunset.



sonakshi srivastava

MJ **very own friends**

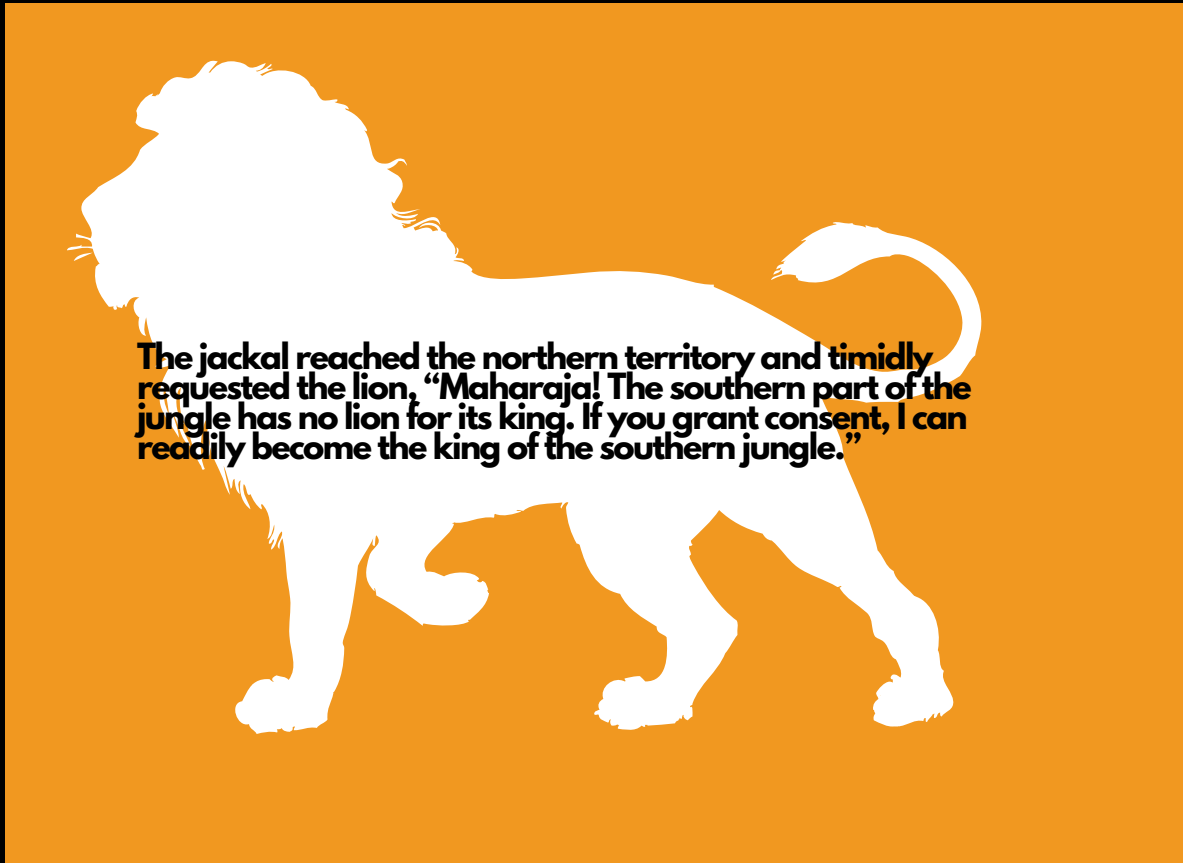
It so happened that a development program was underway in India. A dense jungle was cleared and partitioned into two to pave way for the construction of a road. The lions stayed behind in the northern territory while the jackals remained in the southern.



One day, a henchman of the jackal said, “Huzur, why don’t you become the king of this jungle?”

Upon hearing this, the jackal replied, “Unlike the lion, I don’t know how to hunt nor do I know how to assume kingship by bossing around.”

The fellow-henchman suggested that he better visit the lion in the northern jungle to attain the choicest nuggets of wisdom – the guru mantra to become the king.



The jackal reached the northern territory and timidly requested the lion, “Maharaja! The southern part of the jungle has no lion for its king. If you grant consent, I can readily become the king of the southern jungle.”

The lion replied, “Be one, I have no objection to that.”

“But Huzur,” the jackal said, “before that, do teach me the tricks of hunting and rules of becoming a king.”



The lion agreed, and said, “look here, is my body taut and stretched?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Are my whiskers erect?”

“Yes, they are.”

“Has my tail begun to twitch?”

“Yes, it has.”

The lion then leapt and attacked a wild boar passing by, and killed it.



The jackal made his way back to his jungle. To declare himself the king, he called for a congregation, and assumed the trappings of a lion in pursuit. All the henchmen and sycophants gathered where he was holding court.

The jackal asked, “is my body taut and stretched?”

The sycophants replied, “Yes, it is.”

“Are my whiskers erect?”

“Yes, they are.”

“Has my tail begun to twitch?”

“Yes, it has.”



And in that instant, the jackal in his leonine glory roared and attacked the wild boar standing in front. But the teeth of the wild boar pierced through him and tore open his belly.

Injured and bleeding, the jackal fell down on the ground, his body splattered with blood.

The assembled animals enquired, “Sarkar, how did this happen?”

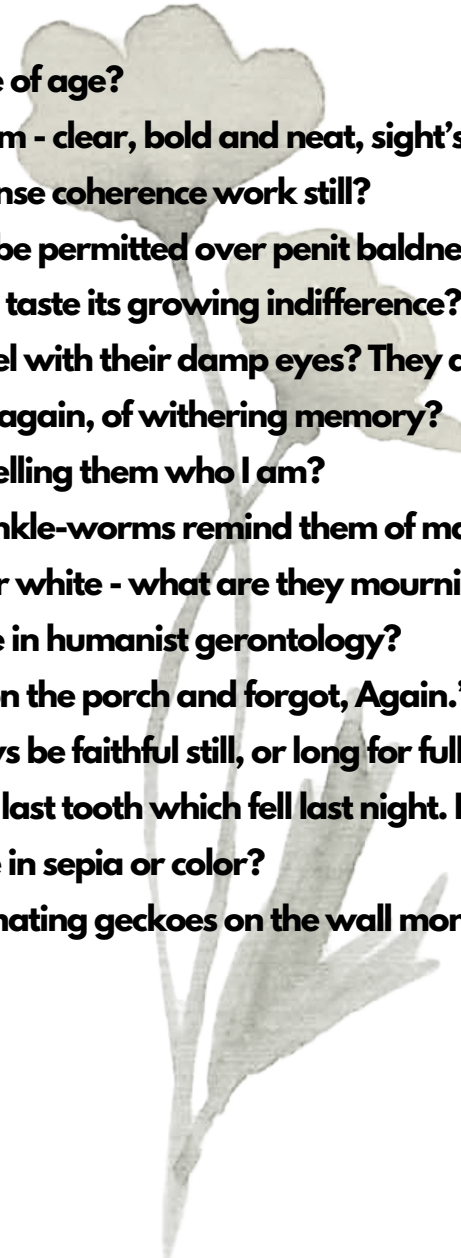
The jackal whined and replied, “my very own friends...”





jerin ann jacob

The Metamorphosis of Aging



**How do adults come of age?
Can colors catch them - clear, bold and neat, sight's playthings?
Does the nervous sense coherence work still?
Should silky manes be permitted over penit baldness?
Could they eat time, taste its growing indifference?
Where do they travel with their damp eyes? They are barely here, ever.
Will his grasp let go again, of withering memory?
Why should I keep telling them who I am?
Might the lanky wrinkle-worms remind them of maps taken, or not?
They both only wear white - what are they mourning? or celebrating?
Do they live a course in humanist gerontology?
'Ammachi pooped on the porch and forgot, Again.'
Would their shadows be faithful still, or long for fuller bosoms?
I buried appachan's last tooth which fell last night. Do you know why?
Shall I take a picture in sepia or color?
Perhaps watching mating geckoes on the wall months their passing climax.**

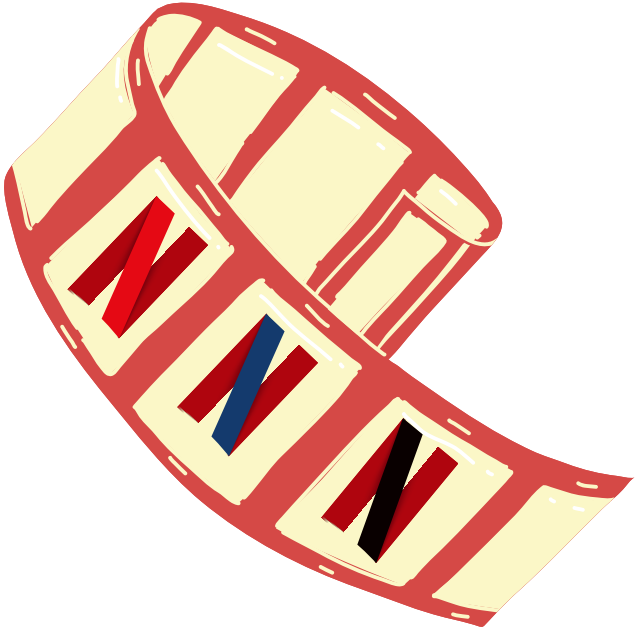
ജേക്കബ് ജോഷി



കോവിഡാനന്തര സിനിമ: ചില ചിന്തകൾ

കോവിഡ് നിയന്ത്രണവിധേയമാവുന്നതോടെ ലോകം നവസാധാരണഗത എന്ന പുതിയ ഘട്ടത്തിലേക്ക് പ്രവേശിക്കുമെന്നാണ് വിവിധ മേഖലകളിലെ ചിന്തകരും വിദഗ്ദ്ധരും അഭിപ്രായപ്പെടുന്നത്. നവ സാധാരണഗതയെന്നാൽ എന്തെന്നതിനെ പറ്റി വ്യത്യസ്ത സമീപനങ്ങളും കാഴ്ചപ്പാടുകളും അവതരിപ്പിക്കപ്പെടുന്നുണ്ട്. എന്നാലും പൊതുവായ ചില ധാരണകൾ ഉരുത്തിരിഞ്ഞു വന്നിട്ടുണ്ട്. സിനിമ മേഖലയിലും അത്തരത്തിൽ കാണത്തക്ക മാറ്റങ്ങൾ വന്നു തുടങ്ങിയിട്ടുണ്ട്.

ഒ.ടി.ടി മേഖലയുടെ വളർച്ചയാണ് അത്തരത്തിൽ സിനിമയിൽ വന്ന ഏറ്റവും വലിയ മാറ്റങ്ങളിൽ ഒന്ന്. നെറ്റ്ഫ്ലിക്സ് , ആമസോൺ പോലെയുള്ള കുത്തകകൾക്ക് പുറമെ അതേ മാതൃക പിന്തുടർന്നുകൊണ്ട് തദ്ദേശീയമായ ഒ.ടി.ടി. പ്ലാറ്റ്ഫോമുകളും രാജ്യത്തു പുതുതായി കടന്നു വന്നിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഓൺലൈൻ റിലീസ് നടത്തുന്നതിന് അഭിനേതാക്കളെ ബഹിഷ്കരിക്കും എന്ന തീരുമാനങ്ങളങ്ങൾ ചില സംഘടനകൾ നിലകൊണ്ടത് വാർത്തകളിൽ നിറഞ്ഞിരുന്നു. തങ്ങളുടെ കുത്തക നഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്നതിനോടുള്ള നീരസമായി ഇതിനെ കാണാവുന്നതാണ്. ആർക്കും സിനിമ ചെയ്ത് അത് കാണികളിലേക്ക് എത്തിക്കാം എന്നുള്ള സ്ഥിതിവിശേഷം ഉണ്ടായിത്തീരുന്നത് സിനിമ കൂടുതൽ ജനാധിപത്യം ആർജ്ജിക്കുന്നു എന്നതിന്റെ തെളിവായി കാണാൻ സാധിക്കുന്നതാണ്. ഇത്തരത്തിൽ ഓൺലൈൻ റിലീസ് സാധ്യമായപ്പോൾ ഒരുപാട് പരീക്ഷണ സിനിമകൾക്കും മിതവാദ **(minimalist)** സിനിമകൾക്കും പ്രചോദനമായി. ഓൺലൈൻനായി റിലീസ് ചെയ്ത സിനിമകൾ കോവിഡിന്റ് പ്രത്യേക സാഹചര്യം കണക്കിൽ എടുത്ത് ഓസ്കാർ അവാർഡുകൾക്ക് പരിഗണിക്കും എന്ന അക്കാദമി തീരുമാനവും ഒ.ടി.ടി മേഖലയുടെ സ്വാധീനത്തിന്റെ പ്രതിഫലനമാണ്.

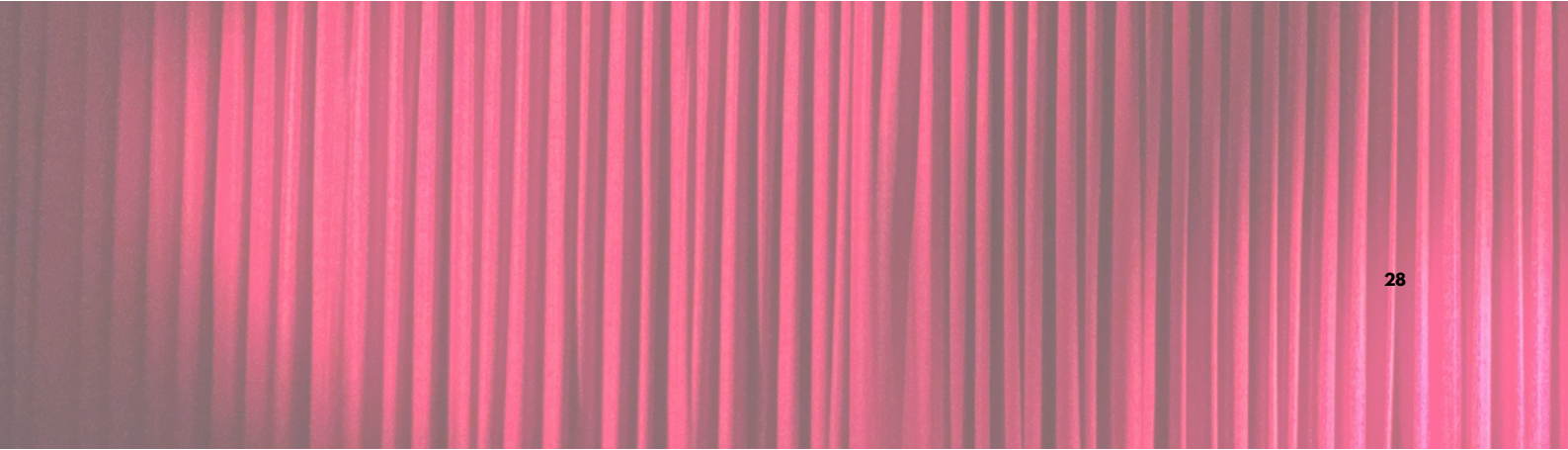


ഇത്തരത്തിൽ സിനിമ കൂടുതൽ വികേന്ദ്രീകൃതവും ജനാധിപത്യപരവുമാവുന്നതിലൂടെ സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ താഴെ തട്ടിൽ ഉള്ളവർക്കും അടിച്ചമർത്തപ്പെട്ടവർക്കും തങ്ങളുടെ കഥകളും ജീവിതങ്ങളും സിനിമയിൽ അവതരിപ്പിക്കുവാൻ കഴിയുന്നു. ഇത് സിനിമ എന്ന മാധ്യമത്തെ സംബന്ധിച്ചിടത്തോളം ഒരു ശുഭ പ്രതീക്ഷയാണ്. ഇതിനുള്ള ചില സാക്ഷ്യങ്ങളും സിനിമ മേഖലയിൽ നിന്നും ദൃശ്യമാണ്. മുഖ്യധാരയിൽ അല്ലാത്ത സിനിമ പ്രവർത്തകർക്ക് തങ്ങളുടെ ചലച്ചിത്രങ്ങൾ കാണികളിലേയ്ക്ക് എത്തിക്കുവാൻ ഇത് സാധ്യമാക്കിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഈ കാലയളവിൽ തന്നെ പ്രേക്ഷകർ പല ഭാഷകളിലുള്ള നാനാ ദേശങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നുള്ള ഒരുപാടു സിനിമകൾ തങ്ങളുടെ മൊബൈൽ സ്ക്രീനുകളിലൂടെ കാണുകയും ഉണ്ടായി എന്നത് നാം പരിഗണിക്കേണ്ട വസ്തുതയാണ്. ഇതും സിനിമ എന്ന മാധ്യമത്തിനും കലാരൂപത്തിനും നേട്ടമാണ്. ദൈനം ദിന ജീവിതത്തിന്റെ പ്രയാസങ്ങൾ കഴിഞ്ഞ വരുന്ന ഏതൊരാൾക്കും ഇത്തരത്തിൽ തങ്ങളുടെ സ്വന്തം സ്ക്രീനുകളിൽ സിനിമ കാണുവാൻ സാധ്യമായിട്ടുണ്ട്. സ്വന്തമായി മൊബൈൽ ഫോണും ഇന്റർനെറ്റുമുള്ള ചെറിയ ഒരു ന്യൂനപക്ഷത്തിനു മാത്രമാണ് ഇതും സാധ്യമായാത് എന്ന് നാം മറക്കരുത്.



എന്നാൽ വൻകിട കുത്തകകൾ ഒ.ടി.ടി മേഖലയും കീഴടക്കുന്നതോടുകൂടി സിനിമ വീണ്ടും പഴയ സ്ഥിതിയിലേയ്ക്ക് തന്നെ മടങ്ങും എന്ന സൂചനകൾ ചെറുതല്ല. അൽഗൊരിതത്തിന്റെ അതിപ്രസരവും കൂടി കണക്കിൽ എടുക്കുമ്പോൾ കോർപ്പറേറ്റുകൾക്ക് സിനിമയുടെമേലുള്ള ആധിപത്യമേറും. ലോക സിനിമയുടെ സിംഹ ഭാഗവും നിർമ്മിക്കപ്പെടുന്നത് ഹെഡ്ജ് ഫണ്ടുകൾ ഉപയോഗപ്പെടുത്തിക്കൊണ്ടായതിനാൽ, നഷ്ടം സംഭവിക്കുന്ന സാഹചര്യങ്ങൾ പരമാവധി ഒഴിവാക്കിയാണ് ഇന്ന് സിനിമകൾ നിർമ്മിക്കപ്പെടുന്നത്. നഷ്ടങ്ങൾ ഒഴിവാക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുമ്പോൾ തീർച്ചയായും മുഖ്യധാരയുടെയും സാമൂഹിക തൽസ്ഥിതിയുടെയും അധികാരവർഗ്ഗത്തെയും ചൊടിപ്പിക്കാത്ത സിനിമകളാകും അവ. ജാതി മത വർഗ ലിംഗ തട്ടുകളിൽ മുകളിൽ നിൽക്കുന്നവർ ഇത്തരത്തിൽ ചലച്ചിത്ര മേഖലയുടെയും മേൽ തട്ടിൽ തുടരാൻ ഇത് കാരണമാകുന്നു. അതായത് സിനിമയുടെ ആഖ്യാനത്തിൽ കാര്യമായ മാറ്റങ്ങൾക്കൊ പരിവർത്തനങ്ങൾക്കൊ ഇത് തടയിടുന്നു. അതോടൊപ്പം തന്നെ പരീക്ഷണ സിനിമകളുടെ വലിയ ഒരു സാധ്യതയുമാണ് അവിടെ തൽക്ഷണം വിശേഷിപ്പിക്കപ്പെടുന്നത്.

സിനിമ എന്നാൽ ചിത്രത്തിന്റെയും ശബ്ദത്തിന്റെയും സംയോചനമാണ്, സിനിമകൾ മൊബൈൽ ലാപ്ടോപ്പ് സ്ക്രീനുകളിലേയ്ക്ക് ഒരുങ്ങുമ്പോൾ ദൃശ്യവും ശബ്ദവും സാങ്കേതികവിദഗ്ധർ ഉദ്ദേശിച്ച അതെ നിലവാരത്തിൽ കാണികൾക്ക് ആസ്വദിക്കുവാൻ സാധ്യമല്ല എന്നുള്ളത് മറ്റൊരു വസ്തുതയാണ്. അതുകൊണ്ടു തന്നെ സിനിമ വീണ്ടും വലിയ സ്ക്രീനുകളിലേയ്ക്ക് മടങ്ങി വരിക തന്നെ ചെയ്യും. പക്ഷെ അതിന്റെ മൂറുകളും സൂത്രങ്ങളും കോവിഡാനന്തര കാലത്ത് മാറ്റങ്ങൾ വിദേയമാകും എന്നതിൽ സംശയമില്ല. നവ-ലിബറൽ സാമ്പത്തിക യുഗത്തിൽ സിനിമയും കേവലം വിപണിയിലെ ഒരു ഉൽപ്പന്നം മാത്രമായി ചുരുങ്ങുമ്പോൾ ചലച്ചിത്രമേഖലയിൽ വരുംകാലങ്ങളിൽ വരാൻ പോകുന്ന മാറ്റങ്ങൾ പ്രവചനാതീതമാണ്.





nithya mariam john

Karia Co.

Karia Chettan delivered carrot, beans, beetroot, onion, garlic, ginger and lemons in the mornings. I was five years old when I saw him and his cart first. For two decades, his customers never complained of rotten tomatoes or stale fruits. “Fresh!”, he always said when we paid him, the “sh”, bold and honest. I am twenty-five now. Karia Chettan completed his sixtieth year last Monday. His sons, settled in the U.A.E, bought him a car and renovated the house.

Last week holding a kilo of potatoes and two kilos of red spinach stuffed inside a brown cover, I asked him casually, “Karia Chetta, why don’t you take some rest? The cart is unnecessary now; your sons can provide for you ...” He looked at me, eyes glazing like those of that big, black spider, when I’d cleared cobwebs under the table on the verandah. “Mole...this cart stays till the very end. There were nights when it served me and my younger brother, two orphans, as a bed. I brought my Elsa to our shack, on these wheels, after our wedding! I sent my sons to college, built a small house, and found food with this trade. How can I give up life and memories so easily?!”

As he pushed the wheels to the next door, I could not help but salute the wooden board firmly placed at the back: Karia Co.

mapping memoir,
a cartography of survival:
humankind.

കൈ ടി യി റ കിം



കൊട്ടിഘോഷങ്ങളുടെ ആയുസ്സ്,
ഒരു ദിവസം.
പിന്നെ കാവിൽ കൊടിയിറങ്ങും.
തെയ്യക്കാരൻ ചമയമൂരും.
കോപിഷ്ഠനായിരുന്ന മുർത്തി
ശാന്തനായി,
പടവിൽ ഇരുന്ന്
എടുപ്പിൽ തിരുകിയ നാണയമെണ്ണും.
ആളുകൾ വീടണയും.
നടയടച്ചുകെട്ടും.

പ്രതിഷ്ഠകൾ വീണ്ടും
അനാഥരായിരിക്കുന്നു.



Cognate

Why call mother amma, not umma?
The latter leaves his lips like a kiss.
The alphabet never asked to carry
the weight of our lives. Now we sit
one letter apart, the u in umma
a kangaroo pouch, nursing
worlds that could have been.

Not Quite My Tongue

**not quite used to being prompted
into recognition, beyya's mouth
refuses memory, grumbles**

ille pidiyaayithle, aarith –
who on earth is this?

**not quite at home, naani is loud
when pining for Mangalore:**

oode mayyaayith di nakk
here, my knuckles ache

**not quite a storyteller, mother
still hoards wisps of gossip,
gaspig enthro baava ith!**

**not quite mine, these words,
yet they melt on my tongue**

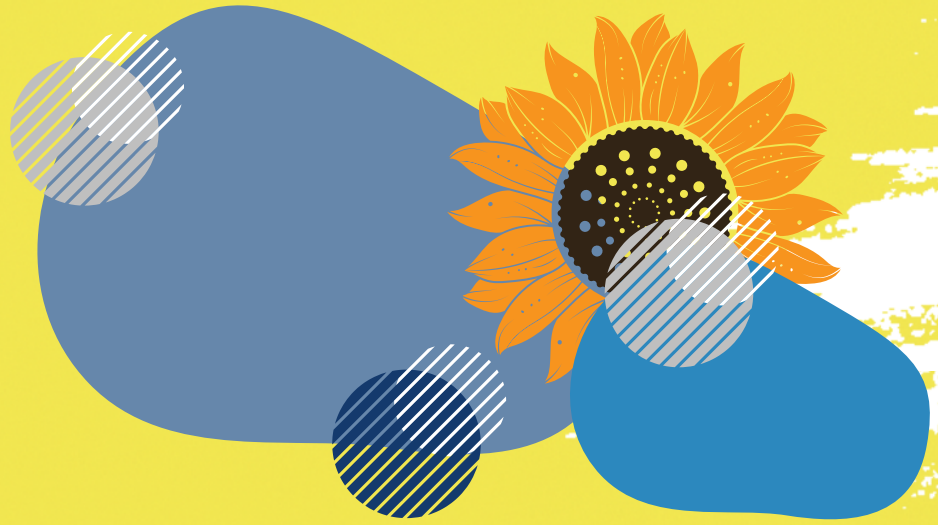
**like puffs of cotton candy,
all air & feather, then shock
of spun sugar upon my tongue**

**I regale my grandaunt
with stories from the past
two years I haven't seen her,
Beary gallivanting on my tongue**

nintokaanti chanthathil
beary palka parayraal aalu –
**she wears this baashe better
than you, my mother is taunted,
and pride grows lush on my tongue**



zainab ummer farook



Serenade

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

**Here, the sun scorches lip and land and skin,
spidering riverbeds with cracks. Brittle earth
meets a prickling breeze meets livid blue sky**

**meets you, simile withering in the heat of May.
Beloved, my heart is yours: just sing to me
of ribcages drowning in tender coconut water.**



ഒരു രാത്രി

നീണ്ടപകലുകളെല്ലാം അവസാനിക്കുന്നത്
നിന്നിലാകുന്ന ഒരു ദിവസം വരും.

വിയർത്തൊലിച്ച്,
കരിപുരണ്ട കവിളുകളുമായി
നിന്നിലോട്ടൊട്ടിയിരിക്കാൻ
രാവ് പൂക്കുമെന്നതിനാൽ മാത്രം
ആ പകലുകൾ ഞാൻ ജീവിച്ചു തീർക്കും.

ആ രാത്രിക്ക്
ചെമ്പകം പൂത്ത ഗന്ധവും,
പുതുമഴയുടെ നൈർമല്യവും കാണും.
നനഞ്ഞ പൂല്ലിൽനിന്ന്
ഇളംപൂക്കൾ ഉയർത്തേഴുന്നേറ്റ്,
മിന്നാമിനുങ്ങുകളായി മാറും.
(പിന്നെയുമൊരു പകൽ തലപൊക്കുമ്പോൾ,
അവ പൂല്ലുകളിലേക്ക് വേഷപ്രച്ഛന്നരായി
മടങ്ങുകയും ചെയ്യും.)

പക്ഷെ, ഏറ്റവും വിശേഷം എന്തെന്നാൽ,
ആ രാത്രി അവസാനത്തേത് ആകും.
ഒരു ദീർഘനിശ്വാസത്തിൽ തുടങ്ങി,
അനന്തതയിലേക്ക് നീളുന്ന
ഒരു ഒടുക്കത്തെ രാത്രി.



divisha chaudhry

Aajee (meaning dadi\ father's mom)

**the words dadi and aajee taste bitter in my mouth
I try to spell the alphabets and the letters
come out in the form of an apparition**

**Da, the only time I remember you was when a four year old me
munched on sabudana as you gestured for me to come near you
but I ran away
I ran away because you looked funny to me – maybe I always knew that
I would never really like you and would be fine with it.**

**Your hair coloured like the cement of that room I loathed stepping in – even after
you
went away
Your eyes tracking my steps as I frolicked freely in rubber slippers and pixie
haircut
that I think you disliked
I was like a white skinned outsider to you,
just like to me you were the old woman who I didn't like talking to**

**Aajee, you are the only maa that I pray no one to have -
my father is who he is because of you
but maybe that is fine**

**we all have demons in our closet and
for you, it is your mind**

**for us, it is you
I wish I could say that I called you dadi
I wish I could say that I knew what that word meant up close**

**as today I am guilty of being happy that I don't.
Just like everything else, I am fine with it.
I guess you are too.**





ranjini nair

A poem describing my poor trilingual abilities

When I speak Malayalam,
my sentences keep encountering the hartals
the state is known for.

My tongue doesn't touch the right part of my tooth (or is that the problem,
should it be the left, wink wink).

I'm trying to say I have fever (പനി), instead
I relay that I have pigs (പന്നി), oink.

It's also because my head played hopscotch with hindi,
tripped up my tongue with plastic bags (पन्नी)
giving birth to more plastic bags,
like you'll find in the kitchen,
and some of that wriggled out.

വെറുതെ പണി ഉണ്ടാക്കണ്ട,

I tell myself,

drink some water (पानी)

and stumble defeated into English.



nithya mariam john

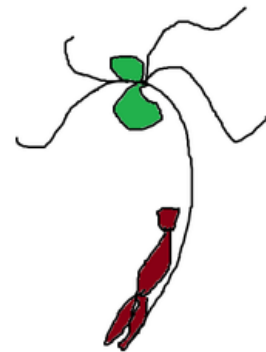
Coconut

**The moony innards
of this large, hard, brown drupe-
hairy and a bit prickly on the inside
after the husk is wrenched off-
when shred into bits against
the teeth of a scraper, seasons
the veggies in her kitchen. But what delights
the tastebuds of her five-year-old munchkin
is sweet water which oozes out as
father cracks open
the sturdy fruit of
'God's own country'.**

**At night the mother
sighs stories-
ebony hued men tied to lean trunks,
accused of 'stealing' the fruit of their labour:
lashes etched on black skin,
women begging at the feet of the landlords,
children bawling in fear...**

She closes her eyes;

**red rains on white copra,
while immortals silently watch.**

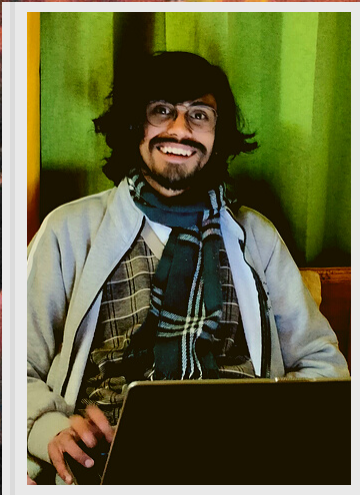
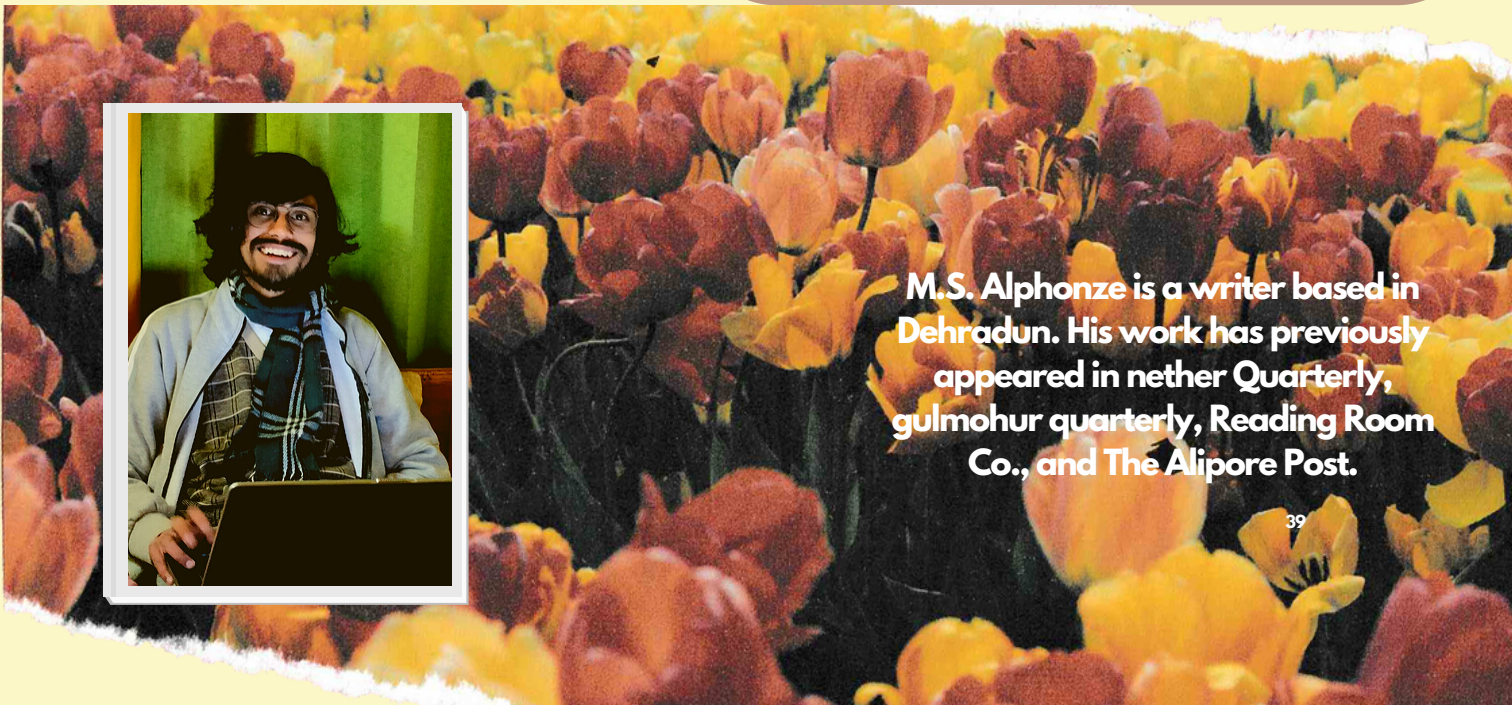




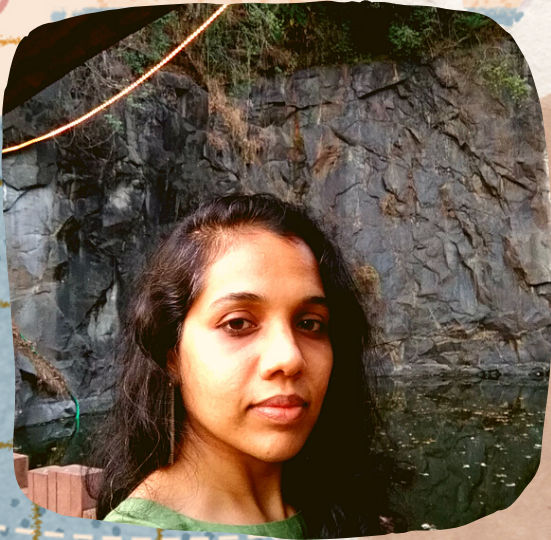
Parvathy is a reader known for constantly humming and breaking out into songs anytime everywhere. Part writer, part researcher, part puddle of exhaustion, part anxious squirrel, she lives for her brother, bougainvillea plant, and her dream of opening a library. She can be reached at parvathy074@gmail.com



Haritha T Chandran is a Malabari doing PhD in Tu Dortmund. She is interested in writing about Malabari women navigating through different facets of traditionalist society in postmodern times. She has her stories published in various magazines in India including Cafe Dissensus, Muse India, and Indian Ruminantion.



M.S. Alphonze is a writer based in Dehradun. His work has previously appeared in nether Quarterly, gulmohur quarterly, Reading Room Co., and The Alipore Post.



Rahana K Ismail is a poet and doctor from Kozhikode, Kerala. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English, The Penn Review, nether Quarterly, Contemporary Haibun Online, Usawa Literary Review, POSIT, lo Literary Journal, The Alchemy Spoon, Paradoxlit, Chakkar, Alipore Post, Aainanagar, and elsewhere.



My name is Jeenia and I am from Kozhikode. I am a Software Engineer who loves literature and who tries hard not to lose this love amidst the hectic schedule.



My name is Wafa Sidheeque. I am a communication designer from NIFT Bangalore. Apart from design I also love doing photography and art. My sweet bitter relationship with books sometimes let the words flow out of me.



Jerin Anne Jacob is an educator-researcher-poet based in Mumbai who loves to squeeze in a story or poem into every conversation. She researches and writes on retold contemporary narratives with a focus on biblical literature.



Jacob Joshy completed his BTech from College of Engineering Trivandrum and currently works at a consulting firm. In addition to his field of work, he is passionate about economics, politics and history. A wannabe writer Jacob loves to spend his free time reading books and watching movies




Nithya Mariam John is a poet, translator and editor from Kerala, India. Apart from three short collections of poems titled Ruminations and Reflections : A Pinch of Poetry & Perspectives, Bleats and Roars and Poetry Soup, her scribblings are housed in Indian Literature, The Alipore Post, Borderless, gulmohar quarterly, theravenquothpress (Dreams), latinanthology(Memories on Food), Hyderabad Literature Festival-Khabar, Muse India, The Samyuktha Poetry, Malayalam Literature Survey, Ink-Kochi, Usawa Literary Review, Sanglap and DoubleSpeak, and also forthcoming in Last Leaves.

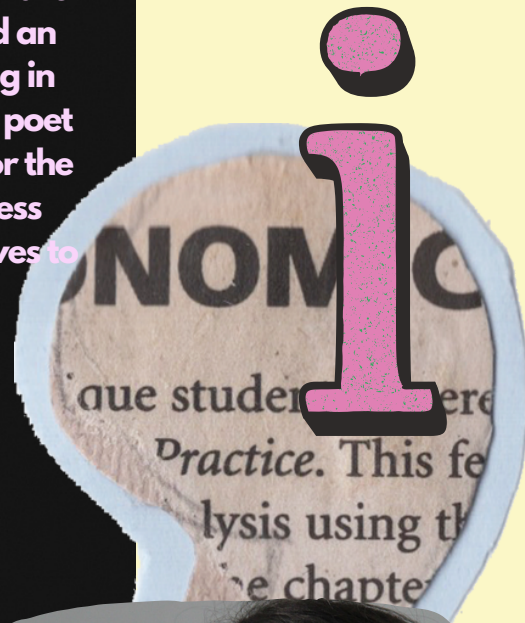


She loves pothos, sugar and milk. But nothing matches her love for books.





Farzana Majeed K is a software engineer by profession and an avid reader, currently living in the UK. She is an occasional poet with a huge writing block for the past few years, nevertheless trying to write more. She loves to travel.



Zainab Ummer Farook calls many places her home, but the city of Kozhikode has claimed that mantle the longest. Her poems have been previously published in *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *nether Quarterly*, *Narrow Road*, as well as the anthologies *14 International Young Poets* and *Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English 2021*.



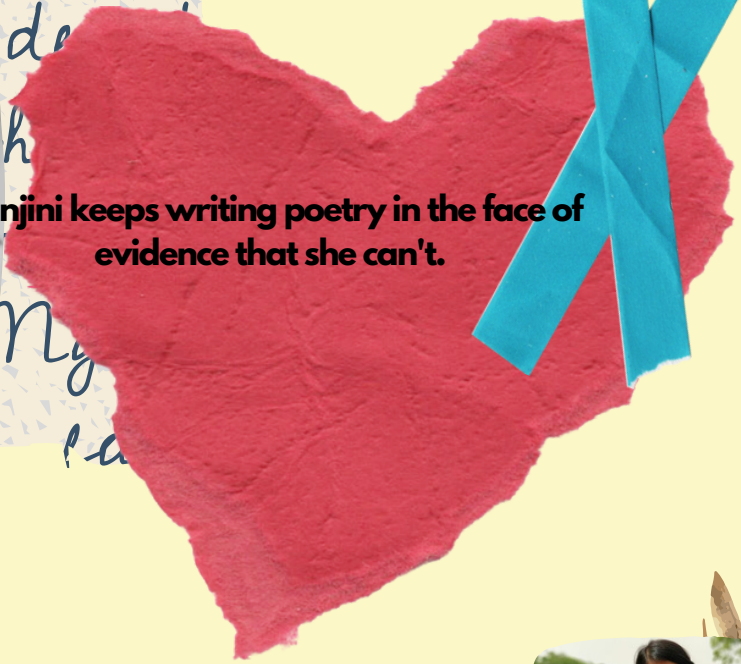
Divisha Chaudhry is a 21 year old South Asian currently pursuing BA English (research) from Shiv Nadar University. She is an advocate for Intersectional Environmentalism and identifies as grey-ace.



strongly believe that



Ranjini keeps writing poetry in the face of evidence that she can't.



Sonakshi Srivastava is a writing tutor at Ashoka University, Sonapat, India. She is one of the recipients of South Asia Speaks mentorship programme, working on translating the Hindi novel, "Titli" into English under the mentorship of Arunava Sinha. She is also the contributing translator columnist at "The Bilingual Window". She was also shortlisted for the 2020 Serendipity FoodLab Residency, and was a Tempus Public Foundation Fellow in 2021. Her works have previously appeared in or are appearing in Hakara, potluck zine, orangepeel mag, and Rhodora among others.





Aiswarya Sanath is a research scholar and a translator who dabbles in poetry and politics. But on most days you can find her chasing purple sunsets and taking a book large and a worry small.



Athira Unni is a research scholar and poet. Her debut poetry collection 'Gaea and Other Poems' was published in September 2020. She lives with her anxiety and a few books.



Jinan Ashraf is a research scholar living in Dublin and working on James Joyce and Anglophone South Asian avant-garde writing. She has received the Laura Bassi Scholarship Summer 2021 and has been published in leading modernist journals such as The Modernist Review. If you couldn't say she is passionate about all things Joyce.



Lakshmi Prabha is a research scholar and she is in no great hurry.



Sukanya Shaji is a freelance writer, poet and lawyer. She loves rainy days and people who smile with their hearts.

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