



MATHRUBHUMI INTERNATIONAL  
FESTIVAL OF LETTERS

# MBIFL'24

DAILY BULLETIN  
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My Story and  
My Time  
T Padmanabhan



Listening to  
Nature: Poetry  
Performance  
Adrian Fisher &  
Luna Montenegro



# Welcome to the KAPITAL

## ■ Paul Zacharia



**T**hiruvananthapuram is a beautiful and friendly place in many ways. Good-natured people, plenty of bookshops and the enterprising spirit of its inhabitants mark this capital city. It has plenty of places like Kanakakunnu and the Museum compound where its inhabitants can relax and have fun. The city often witnesses intermittent political processions that transform akin to the weather—be it the rain or the sun. In both cases, one may simply prefer to look away. Book-lovers are aplenty here, which is reflected in the crowd seen at the public library. The University Library in the city boasts global standards.

And, what about the culinary delights? Thiruvananthapuram is a paradise for foodies with its several joints. And it is to this beautiful city that the 'Ka' festival arrives once again. The festival by Mathrubhumi is a beautiful gift to the cultural and literary scenes. Nearly 400 speakers—not just writers, but people from different walks of life—come together here at Kanakakunnu. Come, watch and listen. As a writer and a resident of this wonderful city, I warmly welcome you to 'Ka.'







Poetry will not change the world, but it can change people, who in their turn, perhaps, hopefully, will be able to change the world.

**Ghayath Almadhoun**

Source: [asymptotejournal.com](http://asymptotejournal.com)

# Defiance could well be key to pluralism

■ E.P. Unny

**T**his edition of Mathrubhumi Literary Festival focuses on pluralist pursuits.

Where does the cartoon fit in? The answer is to be found in a lecture delivered in New Zealand in 1996 by the late Colin Seymoure-Ure. He was the kind of speaker who could have addressed many sessions at a litfest. A scholar in political communication and government, he taught at the University of Kent, Canterbury, England, besides managing its formidable archive of cartoons and caricatures. The professor travelled, lectured and wrote on the multiple domains he mastered. The 1996 talk traces the work of a cartoonist we in India know well – David Low (1891–1963).

Low was a New Zealander who left home at twenty to cartoon for Sydney Bulletin in Australia. After eight years he made one more career switch that changed cartoon history. He arrived in London and quickly became Fleet Street's big star and a bigger critic of that man called Adolf Hitler. For readers across the British empire, his caricature of the German Chancellor came to be the thumbnail of Nazi



Sketch of Colin Seymoure-Ure by unny

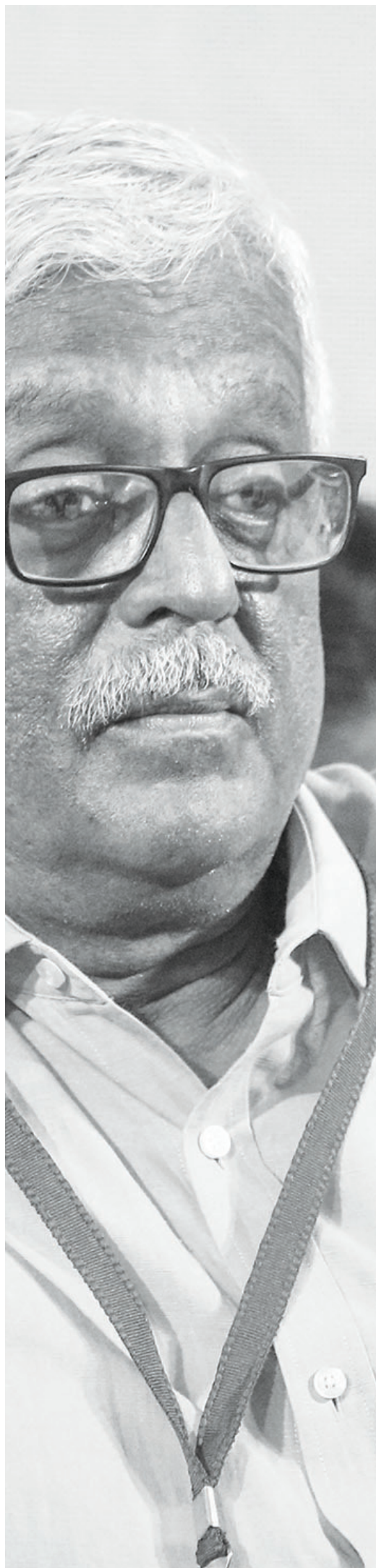
politics. Back then when there was no Internet, the imperial reach was as global as it could get.

In our subcontinent and neighbouring Sri Lanka, Low became a hit. Published by *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* in the British days, he did much to shape the Indian cartoon as we know it today. He was an acknowledged influence on our early practitioners from Shankar and Laxman to, closer home in Kerala, Thomas who went on to do social cartoons for Mathrubhumi Weekly in the 1960s.

Low's was a remarkable crossover. Here was a communicator who thought, spoke and ideated in English cutting across to alien cultures whose first language was far from English. Cinema, a similar Western art practice that India took to, entertains with story, song and

dance. Far less endowed, the cartoon is a mere static visual with a pithy gag animated by that elusive element called humour, often annoyingly specific to cultures and languages. With all this, diverse Indian societies welcomed the cartoon which bore the added risk of offending authority.

Perhaps it is this very urge to defy that makes the cartoon popular. If so, defiance could well be the key to pluralism.







“ An old man paints a large sun striped by clouds of seven blues. Across the yellow centre each blue is precisely itself and yet, at the point it meets another, the eye cannot detect a change.

Gabeba Baderoon

Source: poetryinternational.com



# Talk to survive... Let's talk

■ N.S. Madhavan

Literature festivals are good. In a country where spaces are shrinking or you are being silenced or shouted down, any place where the like-minded can meet and chat is welcome. Surely they are not like famed agoras of old Grecian world - town squares where orators harangued and graffiti warned rulers; far from that.

These days in litfests we side-step politics, find comfort in trivia, revel in soft topics, and are consciously conflict-averse. Novelist John Steinbeck said the purpose of literature is to inform and entertain. More entertainment than informing usually happens in a typical litfest. Uncomfortable topics like erosion of national values are pushed under carpet, instead our search has been for safe middle ground of consensus.

It was not always like this, or at least in old Kerala. Annual literary conferences of Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishad, in early 20th century, used to be a fierce battleground of ideas. It was a reflection of Kerala society, which was transiting from deeply conservative, feudal society to a progressive, more equal society. What used to happen in Parishad meetings was plenty of debate; fierce, combative, no quarters asked or given type of deliberations. Contrast that to pleasant, celebratory feel-good ambience of a modern day litfest.

Still we need litfests; though only two cheers for them because they do promote speech, albeit guarded and many times self-censored. But speech does happen. At a time when dissent and free speech are not encouraged and when artist's territory is getting abridged, it's important to talk. Talk to a shamiana full of literature loving crowd or a fellow visitor at festival. Talk to survive. Let's talk.

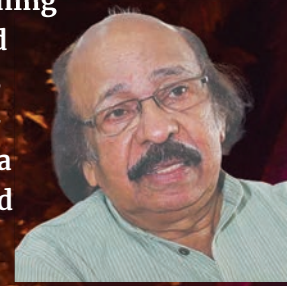






**K. Satchidanandan**  
Poet

I have been a regular participant at the Mathrubhumi literature festival for the past many years. I think people's participation and acceptance for 'Ka' festival has been growing every year. Some of my friends are taking part in the event. One of them is a team of performing poets from England whose performance I had witnessed earlier at the Kerala Sahitya Akademi International festival. I am planning to attend sessions by Ramachandra Guha and Manu S. Pillai.



**Sarah Joseph**  
Writer

Literature festivals are an inevitable part of our society these days. In recent years, Kerala witnessed many interesting literary events that logged footfalls in the thousands. I have been an active part of 'Ka' festival for the last four years and just like the theme 'plurality,' Mathrubhumi Literature festival proclaims a safe space for 'everyone.' This time, the session that I am eagerly awaiting is the one involving the Egyptian writer Mansoura Ez-Eldin.



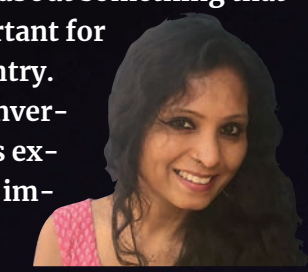
**Khyrunnisa A**  
Writer

M BIFL is a feast for the people of Thiruvananthapuram. Within four days, we are exposed to so much of art, literature and culture. I would be interested in listening to Ramachandra Guha and Shashi Tharoor. I love what they write and their perceptive analysis of what is happening.



**Nirmala Govindarajan**  
Author/Journalist

M BIFL is the best literature festival I have attended in India. I love coming back every single year. It is really inspiring. I would like to hear Saba Naqvi. She has, at the moment, written about something that is important for the country. That conversation is extremely important.

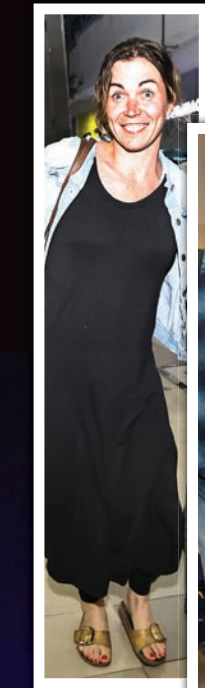


**Parvathy Salil**  
Author

I have been a part of the festival since the very first edition. Every year, this offers an opportunity to discover new authors and research topics. It is also wonderful to interact with authors from various countries. I am looking forward to attending the sessions on 'Listening to Nature: Poetry Performance' and 'The Question of Plurality in Culture and Language.'



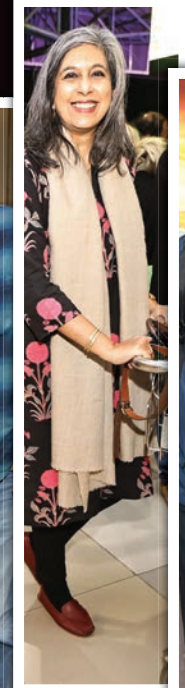
Johanna Schaible



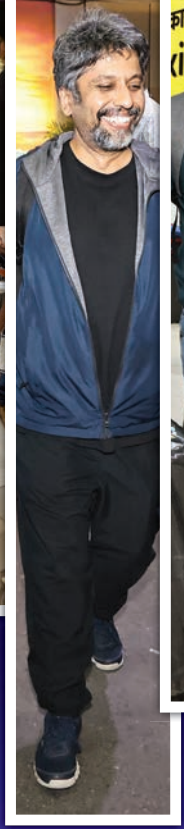
Manoj Mitta



Monica Halan



Rahul Soni



Ravi Chakraborty



Sonnet Mondal



Sarabjeet Garcha







I don't offer any answers to the questions posed, but I try to explore the power and terror of rape and the ways in which women attempted to escape it – or subvert it.

Mary Chamberlain

Source: [aspectsofhistory.com](https://aspectsofhistory.com)

# Singularly plural

## ■ S. Gopalakrishnan

This short note is on an office room in which I landed in 1995 in Delhi. It took more than a year for a 35-year-old Malayali in me to perceive many layers of nuances that a room in Delhi's Akashvani Archives was keeping in store within its protected walls. Nitty-gritties of many legacies slowly pierced into my very Malayali being. That room, the people working there and the recordings stored there, turned out to be a laboratory for me to experience the rights and wrongs that I learnt or failed to learn about the Indian sub-continent by living in Kerala society for over three decades. In 2024, I conceive myself as a singularly plural social being, and I am thankful to Delhi for that embryonic progress.

Gaurab Gangopadhyay, my colleague at the AIR archives, an intelligent young Bengali who spoke tasteful English with a rooted understanding about Bengali literature, once told me his parents always wished that one day in future both the Bengals (Bangladesh and West Bengal in India) would merge into a single nation. When he realised that I watched most of Ray and Mrinal Sen films, he told me remorsefully that he could never watch an Adoor or an Aravindan film. I told him lovingly that it is his loss, and he softly agreed.

Another colleague, Nayyer Saduruddin, who hailed from a genteel Lucknow Muslim background, always talked in poetic Urdu-mixed Hindi and I loved the way she spoke about mundane things in a language that Javed Akhtar used to write film songs. I started loving Hindi because of the way Lucknowites speak the language.

Sanjala Kaul, much younger than I, never discussed politics with me. Her father Lassa Kaul was gunned down when he was 45 by Kashmiri militants as soon as he stepped out of Srinagar Doordarshan Kendra on February 13, 1990. Her silences, rather than her naive reflections, always made me thoughtful.

Amarjit Kaur, a lean woman in her early forties, was an administrative official in our office. Her face always reminded me of a cloudy sky, with little sunshine. On November 1, 1984, when Kerala was celebrating its birthday, a mob in Delhi poured kerosene on her husband and burnt him to death following Indira Gandhi's assassination. I met her later in 1995, and I never saw her smiling. One day she showed me a photograph, a charred scooter, and it looked like an installation-art in memory of a genocide.

I understood Indian pluralism as a living experience only after leaving Kerala and it was because of the proximity to diversified historical legacies carrying memories from the partition of the sub-continent to various ups and downs of a pluralistic society across generations. When it comes to the cultural reflections of this legacy, a store-house with twenty-five thousand hours of recordings of music, the archives of All India Radio sang the same in harmony.





I was born in Bulgaria, so I'm an immigrant. Just out of curiosity, I tried to find out which Bulgarian writers have been translated into Turkish. There weren't any books from contemporary Bulgarian literature in Turkish. So that gave me the idea, why not cover these less known countries in Turkish.

**Nermin Mollaoglu**

Source: [bosphorusreview.com](http://bosphorusreview.com)

## Mathrubhumi Hall

Nestled within the heart of Kanakakunnu Palace grounds lies the crown jewel of the Mathrubhumi Literature Festival 2024—the Mathrubhumi Hall, a beacon of pluralistic ideals and aesthetic brilliance. As attendees enter, they are greeted by long columns of chairs adorned with poetic shades of blue and green cushions, invoking a sense of serenity and unity. The meticulously positioned lights and speakers exude minimalistic elegance, mirroring the festival's theme of pluralism.

## Nishagandhi

The popular open venue of Thiruvananthapuram is hosting a wide range of events for MBIFL this year too. Ma Anand Sheela's 'Osho and I' is one of the many prominent events to be held here. The open air auditorium is the perfect place to enjoy vibrant performances.

## Hall of Letters

Yearning for a different approach to the world of technology? Waiting to listen to Egyptian voices? Or are you into the world of Malayalam literature and translation? Join us at the Hall of Letters to ask questions and find answers on many more sessions like love jihad, coastal regulation and the question of gender and sexuality.



The importance of criticism, when it's impartial, is its ability to fairly address those voices that are marginalized by prevailing tastes or dominant literary trends, those that fall beyond the list established by the tastemakers of the literary scene.

**Mansoura Ez-Eldin**

Source: [arablit.org](http://arablit.org)



# 'Ka' map



## Under the Tree

Come, sit around this picturesque tree. Join us for discussions that are wonderfully woven together. The concept of 'Under the tree' aims to introduce an informal and nature-friendly space for dialogues and debates.

## Festival Hall

The best way to start anything is to start at the very beginning. MBIFL is no different. The first session at the Festival Hall is to be conducted by renowned Indian short story writer T Padmanabhan. This hall is also going to host Francesc Miralles, the Catalan writer and the co-author of the 'Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life.' You'd regret not being there.

## Ka Corner

Welcome to the creative corner. Here's where we offer live calligraphy, the visual art related to lettering, and sessions on animating folklore. Unleash your creative spirit and come join the sport. This is a chance that is too good to miss.

## Tree of Life

Walk into this open space and tap into your inner self. Listen to the many sessions out in nature at this wonderful venue called 'Tree of life.' It all starts with the session – 'The verses we hear now' on February 8th. Get your artistic senses ready and show up.







I realized that language exists not only to communicate but to link you to people... I have been in love with it since then.

**Onyi Nwabineli**

Source: [theglossbookclub.com](http://theglossbookclub.com)



# Malabar Musings

## ■ Beena Philip

Mayor, Kozhikode Corporation

**T**houghts are ingrained in the minds of human beings. We evolved into cultural beings from a primitive life and the very concept of culture emerged from that transition alone. As we all know, animals do not have culture; they rely on instincts instead. We never speak about 'animal culture.'

It is through the alteration of natural instincts and adaptation to various situations that humans transformed themselves and absorbed culture. Using their intellectual capacity, we invented agriculture and developed dwellings which gradually gave rise to civilizations. Therefore, I would argue that thoughts create culture and that they are not inherent but acquired. In this sense, letters provide a means for conveying thoughts, highlighting the relevance of literary festivals like Ka, organized by Mathrubhumi. Beginning with the oral tradition of passing information, as observed in the case of ballads and other works, we can now access them through written letters. Indeed, letters are important for the progress of the world as it moves forward.

There are diverse streams of thoughts, and religions and revolutions are all part of these streams. It is through letters that we come to know about these streams that propel the world forward. There is no use of thoughts if a person fails to express them. These thoughts reach a wider society, that is the collective conscience, through letters alone. When a literary festival

concludes, something subtle occurs within us without the knowledge of the organisers, guests, or the audience, and that is called sustainable development. When we eagerly await the next literary festival following the present edition, knowingly or unknowingly, we tend to gravitate towards them. The media also plays a significant role in these festivals by disseminating information to the society. Many people who feel they missed the previous editions may be tempted to be part of the present one.

UNESCO's declaration of Kozhikode as India's first City of Literature should be seen in this context because such recognitions promote plurality, which is the backbone of culture. At the same time, the plurality of our times also presents an issue because of its magnitude. When plurality is extensive, individuals may become confused about what is right and what is wrong.

Unlike in the past, when people engaged in interpersonal discussions and debates over issues, ideologies and struggles that brought them together, every human being appears to be a lonely island in the present gadget-centric world, finding pleasure in reading forwarded messages while forwarding them further. In this era of knowledge explosion, we often struggle to distinguish between the right and the wrong. There are many things that we ought to notice, but often fail to heed. In such contexts, literary festivals help us get closer to the realities that we fail to understand. No doubt, these festivals make us more humane and sociable, which is also the goal of art, culture and literature.



Festival Chairman: M V Shreyams Kumar | Festival Chief Patron: P V Chandran | Festival Patrons: Dr. Shashi Tharoor, P V Nidheesh | Festival Curators: Sabin Iqbal, P K Rajasekharan  
Festival Directors: Manoj K Das, Rajeev Devaraj, Mayura M S, Devika M S | Creative Director: Renjini Menon | Chief Coordinator: K R Pramod  
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