



We have to get rid of the idea that journalism should always be positive. To promote the 'good deeds' of the government, they have their own PR team.

- Sashi Kumar, *Journalist*



Politics of the Weak: Fear, Creativity & Protest in Literature

 Radhika Retnam

In a thought-provoking session titled 'Mukundante Manorajyangal' at Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters 2024, iconic Malayalam author M. Mukundan and Kerala's Minister for Local Bodies and Excise M.B. Rajesh delved into a discourse that resonated deeply with the intricacies of fear, creativity and protest in literature. Mukundan's poignant assertion, "Fear and creativity are highly connected with each other," set the tone for a profound exploration into the role of writers, particularly the 'weak' ones, in reflecting on the darkest chapters of history.

Mukundan emphasized the indispensable contribution of 'weak' writers, who, despite their fear, went on to become creators, courageously writing about the dark times. "Only the weak writers, who failed to protest, can reflect on these incidents through their writing," he said. Drawing parallels with legendary writers like Fyodor Dostoevsky and Honoré de Balzac, he underscored

the symbiotic relationship between fear and creativity, asserting that fear serves as a catalyst for profound artistic expression.

The conversation pivoted towards Mukundan's literary portrayal of Delhi, a city that has undergone enormous transformations over the decades. Reflecting on his seminal work 'Delhi,' Mukundan lamented the pervasive violence that now characterizes the city, contrasting it with the aura of happiness and dreams he witnessed in the city he once referred to as, "a lover who I never want to part ways with."

Minister Rajesh steered the conversation towards Mukundan's silence during the Emergency era, deftly navigating the delicate balance between protest and survival. Mukundan's candid admission of fear during that tumultuous period resonated with the audience, highlighting the complex interplay between individual agency and societal coercion.

The dialogue expanded to encompass broader socio-political realities, with Rajesh drawing parallels

between past atrocities and contemporary injustices. Mukundan's astute observation that "social media will misread the intention of the writer and create an online chaos" underscored the challenges of navigating the digital age while upholding the integrity of literary protest.

Mukundan's analogy likening writers to concerned parents, admonishing society for its betterment through their works, resonated deeply. "Just like parents who scold kids for betterment, writers show their dissent and disapproval in their works for the sole purpose of the betterment of society. Most of the time, social media will misread the intention of the writer and create an online chaos. But the real reason for every writer to protest is that they want the reader, the society to reflect upon and change what needs to be changed," Mukundan added.

The session concluded with a call to action, emphasizing the enduring relevance of literary events like the MBIFL to protest and foster societal introspection and change.



Only the weak writers, who failed to protest, can reflect on the incidents during the dark times in the past through their writing

M. Mukundan



My meeting with Osho, it was meant to be.
-Ma Anand Sheela, Spokesperson, Rajneesh movement

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'Fyodor Dostoevsky was my favorite'

 Shalini Chandran

ISRO Chairman S. Somanath commenced his session at the 5th edition of the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters with his childhood memories about reading. "I began to see the world from the books my father brought home along with the sack of ration," he said.

On the dias, it's not the ISRO Chairman we saw. We witnessed a simple man instead, a boy born into an ordinary family with a thirst for knowledge, a graduate from Maharaja's College and a fellow Malayali merely engaging in a casual

conversation with his peer V.J. James.

He delved into a discussion outside the world of numbers and rockets and talked about his love for reading and music instead.

"Reading has always been a passion for me. It was the only source for me to know the world. I used to read the translations of Russian classics, travelogues of S.K. Pottekatt and stories of Nandanar. "Fyodor Dostoevsky was my favorite. I used to read across all genres," Somanath recalled.

He also talked about his love for music. "I always sing while I work. I enjoy singing. But I have a problem. I look into the engi-

neering of music. The frequencies in the swaras and how the arrangement of swaras makes us happy or sad. It intrigues me," Somanath said.

Returning to his forte, Somanath also spoke about the current research in the field of Indian space. "The new era calls for the privatisation of space programs. We should have our own space station. There should be more explorations on the moon", he opined.

He also noted that if space programmes are to surge as an economic activity, they need to be opened up to the outside world. "Then there would be real growth," said the ISRO chief.



Shashi And Shobha Tharoor Recall An Upbringing Among Books

 Sadhana Sudhakaran

Celebrity siblings Shashi Tharoor and his sister Shobha Tharoor came together at Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters 2024 in Kanakakkunnu Palace to delve into a discussion about their respective books, shedding light on their shared upbringing in the world of words.

During the session titled 'Home Turf,' big brother Shashi posed a question to his sister Shobha, inquiring why she was a late bloomer. Shobha humorously responded saying she bloomed late because she flourished under her brother's shade. "One Shashi had fulfilled all the dreams and I wanted to carve out some of my own," she explained.



The siblings reminisced about their early exposure to the world of words, thanks to their father, who would engage them in games of Scrabble. Shobha fondly recalled moments like playing with the word 'Constantinople,' forming smaller words and saying that words were an integral part of their family.

Shashi Tharoor expressed his affinity for the

sound of words and when asked about writing for movies, he clarified that translating words into a visual form was not his forte. Reflecting on his personal journey, he credited books as his means of escape during times of loneliness, long before alternatives like Nintendo or Netflix existed.

He also expressed joy that his sons shared his passion for writing and that they never board a flight without a book in hand.

Shobha praised her brother's unique writing style. She also discussed her own book titled 'Time to Rhyme, Look Before You Write,' emphasizing her love for poetry.

During the discussion, Tharoor said he felt children often pursued books solely for school and homework, overlooking the fact that they can also serve as a source of pleasure and diversion.



From A Sales Manager To A Promising Writer

Sadhana
Sudhakaran

From a sales manager to a highly promising writer – that is the unexpected journey of Turkish author Fuat Sevimey who says he started writing in his leisure time to tackle boredom.

Becoming a writer was never part of his aspirations, nor was it a childhood dream. However, Sevimey acknowledges that his experiences in business significantly influenced his literary work. Literature is intricately connected to life, he says.

Sevimey's dedication to writing bore fruit when his works started receiving recognition. In 2014, his short story collection "Ara Nağme" bagged the prestigious Orhan Kemal Short Story Book Prize in Turkey. His novel "Grand Bazaar," depicting the lives of 12 characters involved in the construction of a grand bazaar in Istanbul, not only won the Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar Novel Prize but also found its way into a Malayalam translation.

Reflecting on the literary



We have one percent good readers, 14 percent moderate readers and 85 percent who do not read.

landscape in Turkey, Sevimey says it is almost similar to other countries. "We have one percent good readers, 14 percent moderate readers and 85 percent who do not read." The author, however, loves to stay connected with contemporary Irish, Italian, and Scandinavian literature.

A graduate in Business Ad-

ministration, Sevimey's literary portfolio includes five novels, two short story collections, four children's books and two plays. He has translated 22 books from English and Italian. The author's focus revolves around labour and identity issues.

For Sevimey, literary success transcends awards; the true reward lies in heartfelt conversations with his readers. Expressing his deep affection for the Turkish language, he cherishes the ability to dream, sing, fall in love, and think in Turkish. English, to him, serves merely as a tool for communication, while Turkish, Malayalam, Italian, and Persian embody the essence of real life.



I eat parotta, but I don't serve it in my restaurant. When I want to eat, I go to Paragon or to Chef Pillai for his 'Nool parotta'
-Regi Mathew, Chef



Ayodhya is not a milestone, it is a continuum, says Yechury

P. Sudhakaran

Is Ayodhya a milestone in the political history of India? What is the difference it has brought about in the political landscape of the nation? According to CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury, Ayodhya is a continuum rather than a milestone.

Addressing the session 'India After Ayodhya,' at the fifth edition of the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters, he said this is a continuum that has been happening for a century. "It was in 1923 that Veer Savarkar wrote a small pamphlet called 'Hindutva' and it meant the people who were here and whose holy places are in this land. This naturally excludes Muslims and Christians whose holy places are outside India," he said. In 1925, the RSS was formed, he pointed out, underscoring the evolution of a political game plan.

"For Savarkar, Hindutva is a political project that has nothing to do with the practice of the Hindu religion," he pointed out, adding that the project has been continuing for a long time and hence Ayodhya is not a milestone.

Yechury also pointed out that the political agenda of the BJP-RSS combine is to use Ayodhya



as a campaign tool again and a motion has been moved in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, congratulating the prime minister for building the Ram Temple at Ayodhya with that aim only.

"We respect religion and we respect the right of every human being to choose their religion, but that should be allowed without any interference. Interference is what we are actually suffering today," said Yechury.

He was critical of the Supreme Court verdict on Ayodhya while expressing that he respected the verdict. "The Supreme Court said the demolition of the masjid was really a violation of the law and handed over the land to the same people (who demolished it) to build the temple," he said.

Yechury observed that the Trust has to build the temple and the government or the state cannot propagate any one religion. "That is the

We respect religion and we respect the right of every human being to choose their religion but that should be allowed without any interference. Interference is what we are actually suffering today

Sitaram Yechury
CPM general secretary

foundational principle of secularism but that is violated today and that is what we oppose," he added.

Snubbing the stories of development and progress that India has achieved under the BJP regime, he said the country has the highest unemployment rate. Also, there is the reverse migration and workers are returning back from the cities to their villages for a living, which contradicts the development narrative being created, he pointed out.

Yechury also said the Modi regime wants to convert a secular democratic republic into a Hindutva state and also undermine independent institutions, subtly criticizing the way the judiciary is functioning today, especially in the backdrop of the abolition of Article 370. So, the India after Ayodhya is worse than the India that was before Ayodhya, said the CPM general secretary.

Kerala, a mesmerising experience for these students

They are excited about Kerala. And they express it in a single statement. 'Simply beautiful!' No, these students are not from God's Own Country. They travelled all the way from Karnavati University in Ahmedabad to be a part of Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters as volunteers. The group took this opportunity because they had heard about the litfest and wanted to experience the charm.

You will see them running around with a pleasant smile. The students are assigned the task of welcoming guests, both regional and international. When they landed here along with their teacher and curator of Alphavarse, Preeti Das, the group of

seven, comprising Chirayu, Sneha, Niharika, Vaibhavi, Sneha, Levin and Sashwathi never expected it to be such a unique experience that has the potential to widen their horizon.

The students spend their moment with great enthusiasm meeting people from different places, interacting with people from different cultures, and enjoying the sense of plurality it offers. Though they have been part of many festivals in colleges, nothing could match MBIFL 2024, said the students from Karnavati University, who are enthralled to be part of this celebration of plurality.





There are nine different earth systems. Each of these earth systems is drastically affected one way or the other. But we only talk about climate change.

- Yuvan Aves, *Naturalist/Writer*

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It Happens Only In Mumbai!

 Bhavik Nair

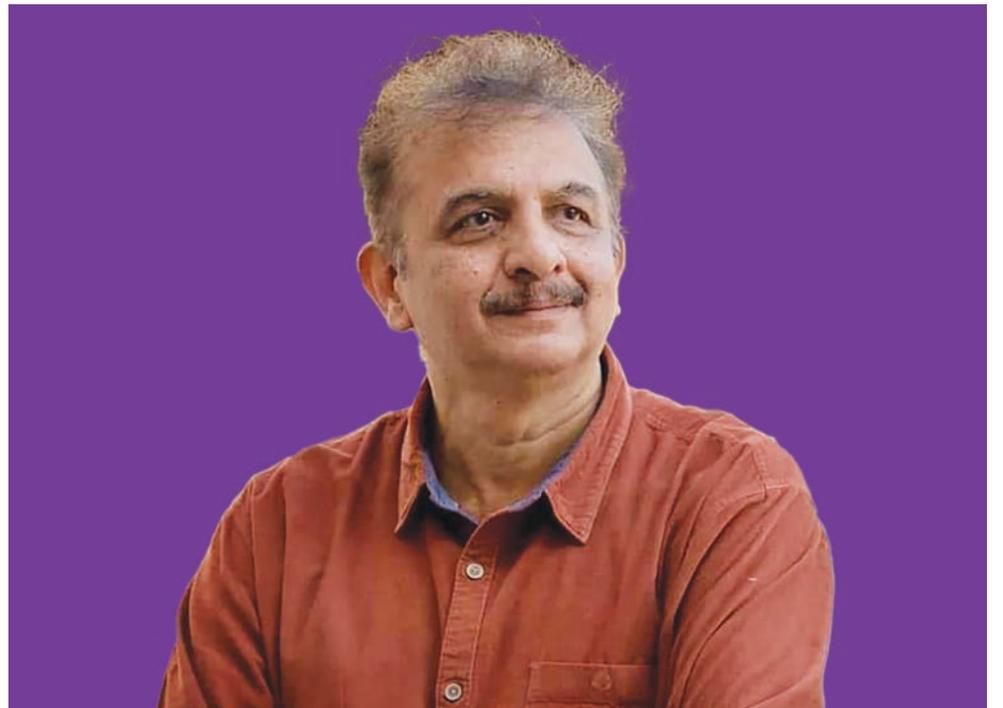
A

person had an epileptic attack on a bridge crisscrossing Matunga in Mumbai. People around did not know how to respond but they did try to help. Somebody suggested offering him water; another recommended some food while one advised fresh air as a solution.

In the midst of the commotion, one commuter noticed a piece of paper in the person's pocket, raising hopes it could be an address to the man's home. However, it turned out to be a drawing resembling a map. This created further confusion among the bystanders with one even suspecting the man on the floor to be a part of the underworld. Finally, it took a boy to figure out the mystery. The drawing, in fact, turned out to be a measurement reference for a baby's foot size.

Kannada poet Jayant Kaikini's book 'Mithun Number Two and Other Mumbai Stories' offers glimpses into such experiences in Mumbai, also known as the Maximum City. Kaikini's book has been translated into English by Tejaswini Niranjana.

"Bombay was a collective space where an individual enlightenment happened. You need not go to the Himalayas for enlightenment; you should go to Victoria Terminus station, you should travel in local trains and you should be in public bus-stands.



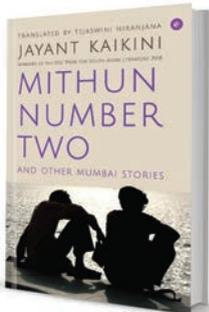
Throughout the entire Bombay journey, life was like public transport," Kaikini said during a session at the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters 2024.

In Mumbai, everybody lives in a minimal space and even Gods appear to have their limitations, the author explained. "Houses are minimal. Even God has a very small space there — either above the refrigerator or above the cupboard," Kaikini noted.

He also narrated a curious incident where a relative made it his mission to figure out the author's sleeping time. "I went to a distant relative's home—a small one—and had stayed there for some time. I remember one of the relatives used to appear in the night, staring at me to figure out whether I

had slept or not. I was getting scared thinking what he is up to. Later on, I realized that when he was convinced I had dozed off, he used to switch off the fan," the author said.

Kaikini's funny experiences in the city do not end there. The author was presented with a bouquet of flowers following a poem recital at the Kannada Sangha. "While travelling back, I somehow entered the local train in Matunga that was crowded to such an extent that my bouquet was beginning to get into people's noses. Somebody then asked me 'Bechne ka he kya?' (Is it for sale?), assuming I was a flower-seller," Kaikini said. That's Mumbai, he says, where he went from being an celebrated poet to a flower-seller in no time.



You need not go to the Himalayas for enlightenment; you should go to Victoria Terminus station, you should travel in local trains and you should be in public bus-stands.



“As an art form, cartoons have gone through amazing migration. It has migrated from language to language and culture to culture.
- E.P. Unny, cartoonist



A Ramachandran



1935-2024

Ramachandran

The Master of Colours Fades



P. Sudhakaran

That was a studio where I had complete freedom, but whenever I touched some of his paintings he would warn me jokingly, “Those are so costly that even I cannot afford buying.”

Yes, that was A. Ramachandran,

who placed Indian art on a global pedestal.

From paintings and sculptures to illustrations and children’s books, his creative oeuvre spread across different media. I had never seen him without his pen or brush.

“If I stop working, I would no longer exist,” he used to say. But when I met him for the last time, he wasn’t

fit enough to work because of his poor eyesight.

“Now, I will not be able to draw or paint,” he had said, recollecting the earlier days when he braved to paint even while passing through a period of colour blindness. Then he asked his driver to show me the last set of paintings he did, on the Rajasthan landscape and the lotus ponds, which marked his transformation as an artist who captured the colours of life.

My relationship with him began as a translator but slowly it turned into a personal one. He would say, “I would ask only you to translate my writings, though my Malayalam is far better than yours!” Yes, he was a powerful writer.

On a hectic day at the MBIFL, a friend from Delhi had been calling me continuously. Initially, I didn’t attend his call; but later, I felt something was wrong. I finally attended the call.

“Heard the Ramachandran sir is ...” he could not complete it.

“Nothing will happen to sir,” I tried to console him. But I knew the colours have faded forever.

MBIFL24
Day

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The grand finale

Watch out for these stalwarts who take the centre stage on the final day



Ramachandra Guha
Historian
Session: Biography Meets History



Subhashini Ali
Politician
Session: Reimagine India



Indrans
Actor
Session: Nadanalla, Naatukaran



S. Sreesanth
Cricketer
Session: Kaliyil Malayali Akathu Purathu?



M. Jayachandran
Composer,
Session: Paattum Ezhuthum



Joy Alukkas
Chairperson,
Joyalukkas group
Session: Spreading the joy