



MATHRUBHUMI INTERNATIONAL  
FESTIVAL OF LETTERS 2023

**MBIFL '23**  
MATHRUBHUMI INTERNATIONAL  
FESTIVAL OF LETTERS



A century of thinking ahead

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# ‘Religion does not preach killing’

MBIFL 2023 begins with M. T. Vasudevan Nair’s clarion call to shed violence and foster humanism through culture



spoken around the world are facing extinction as they have very few speakers. In India, 197 languages are endangered or extinct. Five languages from South India, including Tulu, are at serious risk.”

He expressed concern about the way in which Malayalam was being taught.

“I doubt if there is any kid in Tamil Nadu who cannot utter at least four lines penned by Subramania Bharathiar. Similarly, every kid in West Bengal may know Rabindranath Tagore. But I wonder if kids in Kerala know the path-breaking poets in Malayalam. Children should study Malayalam, especially poems of Kumaran Asan and Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer. Poems can boost the power of children’s imagination. An educational system without literature is inconceivable.”

He observed that the growth of language gave momentum to civilization. “By promoting Malayalam, we open the doors of our culture to the world,” he added.

Writer M. T. Vasudevan Nair has said that no religion essentially promotes killing.

He was delivering the keynote address at the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters 2023 on Thursday.

“Any attempt to promote violence should be curbed. Religion should be understood through its deep philosophy than anything else,” he said.

He urged writers to take on forces that tried to silence them.

“Writers should refuse to be cowed into submission. I express solidarity with Tamil writer Perumal Murugan who faced attacks

from such forces. Even though I support him, I disagree with his self-imposed silence earlier as a writer. The voices of dissent should invariably be alive,” he added.

He expressed concern over intolerance spreading its tentacles.

“Critics of the regime are being silenced. These developments resemble the Nazi rule in Germany and it cannot happen in India. I don’t believe it will,” he added.

He stressed the need to promote the Malayalam language in the curriculum.

“According to UNESCO data, the status of indigenous languages is alarming and at least 50 per cent of the 6,700 languages

## Focus on values: Sudha Murthy



Author and philanthropist Sudha Murthy has said that children should be encouraged to imbibe values than madly chase academic excellence.

“Grandparents should stay with children as the experience and good values they share with children help them stay afloat in life. Children have less access to grandparents with the ‘small family concept’ gaining ground. Making matters worse, parents run after money and nobody has the time to talk to children,” she said.

She stated that every child is a precious gift of god.

She added that children should engage in outdoor games, especially team games such as cricket so that they can learn teamwork. Parents should buy books for their children and encourage them to read rather than gift them computer games.

Why does she prefer to write children’s books? “I love children. I love to share my knowledge with them,” she said.

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# It's Everest, it's never rest

## THE MOUNTAIN SLAYER

In everyday life, not even in the wildest of dreams, a teenager would think about conquering Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain towering more than 29,000 feet above sea level. But Poorna Malavath, who hails from the Nizamabad district of Telangana

Poorna, the youngest Indian and the youngest girl in the world to conquer Mount Everest, completes the Seven Summits Challenge and inspires with her fearless determination and endurance



scaled the highest peak just at the age of 13. By setting the precedent, she became the youngest Indian and the youngest girl in the world to have reached the summit.

It's not just Mount Everest. This fearless mountaineer also recently completed the 'Seven Summits Challenge' by climbing the seven most difficult and tallest mountain peaks located on seven continents. She conquered Mt Everest (Asia), Mt Kilimanjaro (Africa), Mt Elbrus (Europe), Mt Aconcagua (South America), Mt Carstensz Pyramid (Oceania), Mt Vinson (Antarctica) and Mt Denali (North America). Among these, climbing Mount Vinson in Antarctica is extra special as Poorna is the first tribesperson to achieve this feat. She even received a word of praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi for completing the 'Seven Summits Challenge'.

Poorna's amazing life story has been published as a book.

Authored by Aparna Thota and published by Prism Books Pvt. Ltd, the book 'Poorna' chronicles the journey of the bold tribal girl and how she fought odds to conquer some of the highest and most challenging peaks of the world. There's even a Bollywood movie on her titled, 'Poorna: Courage Has No Limit'. She was also listed on the Forbes India list of self-made women in 2020.

Poorna, with her steely resolve and extraordinary endurance, proves that there is no limit to what we can achieve if we reach for the sky and take risks.

# Grandson carries Marquez's magical torch

## GIFT OF GABO

*Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.*

Many years later, after these magical words from Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez changed world literature, his grandson Mateo Garcia Elizondo, remembers that day in 2016 when his grandfather's ashes were laid to rest in the cloister of the University of Cartagena.

On that solemn occasion, Garcia Elizondo read chapter six of Marquez's memoirs, 'Living to Tell the Tale'.

He was a constant companion of Garcia Márquez in his final days, holding his hand on some of the last occasions in which he appeared in his garden in Mexico City. He recalls his grandfather teaching him to value the classics in literature and film.

García Elizondo is warmly welcomed to MBIFL's fourth edition as he proudly stands on his own as a writer.

García Elizondo was born of two great literary legacies, the grandson of the revered Márquez and Salvador Elizondo Alcalde. In a world where names carry weight, García Elizondo quietly crafted his own tale before the burden of his familial fame could catch up to him. His father, a graphic designer and mother, a photographer, birthed him in Mexico City under the stars in September 1987.

His debut novel, 'A Date With Lady', takes the reader to Zapotal, a forgotten village on the edge of the rainforest, where a young man flees the city to hide away in a room. There, he finds solace in his ample reserves of opium and heroin, writing down the final moments of his life in a little notebook. With the first inhale of opium smoke, he is transported into a magical realm of dreams.

Critics see in his novel the influence of the Mexican novelist Juan Rulfo rather than García Márquez, both of whom explored the boundary between life and death. The protagonist creates his own universe, 'El Rincón de Juan', where the lost souls of the village converge, but as the memory gaps multiply and the



Born of two literary legacies, Mateo García Elizondo writes with influence from Juan Rulfo and grandfather Gabriel Garcia Marquez, exploring themes of identity and Mexico in a magical realm where dreams and reality collide

drug reserves dwindle, death lingers just beyond reach.

García Elizondo's travels and love of literature from around the world inform his work, which often deals with themes of identity and Mexico, yet he sees himself as a narrator of universal stories.

## PASSAGES

Some time ago I got arrested and charged with three counts of first-degree murder. There's nothing special about how it happened: I used to own a real estate contracting business; some guys showed up one day with a front company and a plot of land in their name; they roped me into a dream project that ended up saddling me, my business and my entire family with debt. When they ran off with the loan money I'd taken out from the bank, I swore I'd find them. I searched for a while and when I finally tracked them down, I arranged to meet them in a parking lot to get my money back. Not only did they refuse to hand it over, but they also started threatening my wife and daughter, so I stabbed them with this really long hunting knife I had and once the blade was all the way in, I jiggled it around to make sure their innards would be properly scrambled and they wouldn't wake up on me in some hospital. It took me two thrusts to finish off the one who gave me the most trouble.

That's how I told the story in court, my audience of respectable citizens widening their eyes in fear and horror.

Excerpts from 'Capsule'

# ‘Prioritize the greater good’

▀ Sudha Murthy, Chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, writer and philanthropist, speaks to Tiffany Maria Brar, social activist and trainer for visually challenged people



**T**ell us about your childhood. What values you imbibed as a child have impacted your life?

Money does not bring happiness but honesty and one's commitment to one's work do. I learnt this at a very young age.

What directed you towards philanthropy?

I have talked about it many times. I have a daughter called Akshata. At the age of 16, she used to read aloud and be a scribe for a visually challenged child.

His name was Anand Sharma. She came and told me 'Anand is very bright, and he may get admission to St. Stephen's College, New Delhi. He cannot afford the fee. "Amma, Why can't you help him?" she asked.

I was at that time working as the head of the computer science department, and I was extremely busy preparing the question papers. On hearing this, I casually told her

"Look Akshata, Why don't you help him?" she replied "Amma, you never give me pocket money, and you ask me to help. You are widely-travelled and well-educated. What is your aim in life? If you can't do philanthropy, then you have no right to ask anyone to do that." I paused and kept thinking. I then realized the real meaning of her words. I have worked for 25 years with Infosys Foundation, helping my husband establish the company. For the next 20 years, I concentrated on my family, raising my kids, as they went through education. Now at the age of 45, what was my aim in life?

Was it money or glamour? It took almost a week to understand what I needed. I decided to go for philanthropy. I realized that Akshata was my guru. I soon quit my job and decided to teach computer science on a part-time basis. I took up philanthropy and have been doing that for the past 25 years.

Wasn't it a proud moment, when you came to know that your son-in-law Rishi Sunak was elected as the Prime Minister of the U.K.?

Yes, I did feel happy about his success. Like any other mother-in-law would. Not more than that. This is because positions come and go, but relationships are forever. In fact, I have not been to the U.K. ever since he came to the position. It is very cold there and he is extremely busy. I will go in good time.

What kind of person is he?

He is a patriot and he loves India. He is very honest and hardworking. Though he is Indian by ethnicity, he was born and brought up as a British citizen. So for all practical purposes, he is British.

What is your message to the youth?

Any social change takes time. You cannot get it at the press of a button. Any social change requires awareness and a change of mindset. And when you look at the world, it is a much better place than it was 50 years ago. To the youngsters, I tell them, whatever you earn, give a small percentage of it to good organizations working for empowering the less privileged. Loving fellow human beings is more important than loving yourself.



# Soda's charming effervescence

## ■ INNOVATOR

**I**f Soda can, so can the rest of India. Audiences at MBIFL on Thursday watched with rapt attention when Chhavi Rajawat narrated her success story.

Soda, a remote village 60 km from Jaipur, got transformed when Rajawat, a young, tech-savvy strategic thinker and innovator, became its sarpanch.

Rajawat's journey back to her roots in Soda is a story of sacrifice and determination.

Urged by the villagers to take on the role of sarpanch, she gave up a high-flying corporate career. With an MBA from the Indian Institute of Modern Management, Rajawat is proof that a person with a mission and determination can make a world of difference. In 2010, she was elected as the sarpanch of Soda, a remote village located 60 km from Jaipur, and tasked with transforming the lives of its struggling residents.

"The villagers wanted me to be the sarpanch of the village. It was not my choice," Chhavi says.

Soda was plagued by numerous challenges — a low literacy rate, frequent power outages and the constant threat of drought. But with Rajawat at the helm, the village underwent a remarkable change. Under her leadership, water conservation, education, public health, reforestation, power supply and road development saw significant improvement. And, in a move toward transparency, Rajawat ensured that all information about projects was shared online for the world to see.

"Whatever little water we got was not good for even irrigation...how can human beings use water that is not good even for plants?" she asks. "If you drink a cup of tea, you would think that someone has added six dollops of salt in it instead of sugar...so saline is the water."

"For a village with a population of 10,000, we only received Rs 20 lakhs from the government. This was not allocated in one whole. We got it in uneven intervals. How can we plan development activities with small amounts received in irregular intervals?" she asks

▀ Chhavi Rajawat's courage and determination change the fortune of a village in Rajasthan



Rajawat defied the conventional image of a 'Sarpanch' by disregarding the customary veil and donning jeans. She fought gender inequality with rare determination. ▀

VOICES



**Jerry Pinto**

Indian English Writer

"The more we experience life through our senses, the more humane we get."



**Anirban Bhattacharya**

Bestselling Author

"The biggest challenge I faced while writing this book ('India's Money Heist') was the pandemic. I was unable to come to Kochi or Chelambra. Every week, we had a zoom meeting with 10 to 12 police officers regarding the case."



**Kevin Missal**

Writer

"I'm quite an insecure man who goes through a lot of thoughts and ideas...my journey as a writer was a turbulent one. It started at the age of 12 by rehashing and rebuffing everything that I could come across... The courage to publish a book at the age of 21 came from sheer arrogance. I believed that if Charles Dickens could be a writer I could also be a writer."



**Vani Mahesh**

Indian Writer

"I'm an accidental everything... I'm an accidental engineer...I'm an accidental entrepreneur... I'm an accidental writer...but one thing I'm not. I'm not an accidental reader."



**Amandeep Sandhu**

Writer and Journalist

"India as a country did not exist before 1947. If India was born in 1947, then Partition was the bloody birth of it because all the blood spilled in Partition created India."



**Manreet Sodhi Someshwar**

Writer

"You cannot run Punjab out of Delhi time and again. Anybody who has the mildest familiarity with Punjab, with the Punjabi ethos, will recognize that... I grew up in a hometown where every house had a Partition story or more but I did not find those stories in my history textbooks, indeed the history textbooks had many pages on Partition at the most... I grew up in the border town and I think my hometown is what made me a writer."

# 'Behemoth English crushes other languages'



## VOICES FROM THE FAR EAST

English is everywhere and everywhere. It bullies and borrows. It dominates completely.

'Voices from the Far East', a gathering of renowned writers from the Far East at MBIFL on Thursday, lamented the dominance of English over other languages of the world.

More than 400 million people speak English as their first language. A billion more know it as a secondary tongue. In at least 59 countries, it is an official language.

Filipino poet Lawrence Ypil, Singaporean writer Alwin Pang, South Korean writer Lee Seok Ho and Malaysian author Malachi

Wherever it goes, English leaves a trail of destruction behind — dialects mangled, languages erased and literatures crushed

Edwin Vethamani took part in the session.

"Each language is a gem. One must choose the language of innovation and possibility. The dominance of English in literature is not a good sign. Regional languages need to be promoted. Right now, writers need to go to the West for recognition. Let us not forget the fact that global

communication is possible without English," said Alwin Pang.

He said that many people living in the Far East had their roots in India, especially Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Lawrence Ypil conveyed his interest in colonial history and photography and described how poetry could write about history.

Prof. Lee said that the dominance of the West should not drown out voices from the East.

Malachi Edwin Vethamani expressed his views on the co-existence of English and regional languages in Malaysia.

# 'Reality, a negotiable concept'

## EUROPEAN VOICES

The Russian invasion of Ukraine dominated the topics discussed at 'European Voices' at MBIFL.

The words of Latvian playwright and author Rasa Bugavicate-Pece and Georgian fiction writer and screenwriter Archill Kikodze reflected the pity of war.

Bugavicate-Pece and Kikodze, however, stated that Russia had played a major role in their lives. They spoke of how Russia influenced their writings.

Kikodze spoke about his childhood and schooling in Russia and how he got access to European literature when he grew up.

"My family members were great storytellers and that is how I was inclined to writing," he said. "I don't believe literature can change the world, but it will create an



Writers discuss the strengths and limitations of generalized notions of European culture

impression that good people are not alone in the world. Literature is important to know about the past as we tend to forget the past. Literature becomes important in documenting different ages of the world as official history is full of lies."

Bugavicate-Pece said that she believed in the therapeutic value of literature. "Love binds human beings. This is the crux of my writing," she added.

English author Niall Griffiths said that reality was now a negotiable concept. "People in power say what we have to believe. We are forced to believe what we did not see or what we did not hear. Reality, now, is something that you can mould to your will and to your ideological angle.

Polish poet, multi-instrumentalist and activist Szczepan Kopyt recited poems at MBIFL. The themes of his poems include colonization and capitalism, and how human beings robotically work to attain conflicting goals.

# Height of wonder

## HIMALAYAN DREAMS

**T**he Himalayas never fails to evoke wonder.

Historian John Keay took audiences on a journey of the geophysical, historical, environmental, and social wonders of the Himalayas in his session at MBIFL with a special focus on his book, 'Himalaya: Exploring the Roof of the World'

He spoke about his early memories of Kashmir, calling it "paradise on earth", and how the beauty of Srinagar had captured his heart. He shared his experiences of feeling at peace among the rolling hills, reminiscent of his homeland Scotland. His passion and knowledge about the region were on full display.

"History has not been kind to Himalaya," he said.

The author delved into the unique physical and geological history of the Himalayas, including its formation from the collision of tectonic plates and the impact of Alfred Wegener's theory of continental drift. The theory was once discredited but is now widely accepted as responsible for creating the stunning geography of the Himalayas.

His book has a vibrant narrative that navigates through the lives of characters, a different approach to telling history. Keay emphasized that he considers himself a history writer rather than an academic historian. He spoke about how he had immersed himself in the rich history and culture of the Himalayas, spending years researching and exploring the

The world's most majestic mountain range has shaped the history and politics of Asia to this day

region, meeting the people who lived there and learning about their lives. He also does not forget to mention the spiritual aspect of the pilgrimage to the Himalayas.

As Keay described the diverse landscape of the Himalayas, from its snow-capped peaks to its lush valleys, and the proud people who call it their home, the audience was transported to a world of stunning beauty and resilience. He talked about the challenges faced by the people who lived in the region, from harsh weather conditions to political unrest, and how they were adapting and preserving their heritage despite the difficulties. The population of Kashmir has shown steady growth over the past years due to migration. He said that the Himalayas should be treated with utmost ecological care just as Antarctica is.

The talk took on a more serious tone when the audience asked about the environmental issues concerning the region, including the problems at Joshimath and the impact of human activities on the delicate ecosystem. He spoke about the importance of conservation and sustainable development, and how it was important to preserve the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the Himalayas for future generations.



"A poet is ultimately a good human being. You have to be a clean-souled person to be a poet."

Sudeep Sen,  
author of 'Anthropocene'





### Shamal Days: On longing, loneliness and hope

Sabin Iqbal talks to Nirmala Govindarajan  
@ Festival Hall  
10 a.m.

Sabin Iqbal talks about the journey behind the novel, 'Shamal Days', a whimsical, ironic take on the aspirations and resentments of expatriate life in a tiny desert country and on the political unrest in the region.



### Swedish Tales

Featuring Christian Kamill, Jacob Dalborg, Nandita Bose

@ Under the Tree  
10 a.m.

While Christian Kamill is the Deputy Head of Mission, at the Embassy of Sweden in New Delhi, Jacob Dalborg, a pioneer in the digitalization of the publishing business in Europe dabbles with multiple industries. Nandita Bose is a Bangalore-based writer, poet, book reviewer and occasional feature writer who gave up her career as an HR consultant to pursue her passion for writing.



### The stories I had to kill

Featuring Josy Joseph, Vinod K. Jose, Rajagopal Ramdas

@ Hall of Letters  
11 a.m.

Deeply researched and engagingly told,

they are extraordinary stories that question the status quo. Their investigational stories have fostered public debate and continue to contribute to significant policy and systemic changes in India.



### Social change in India: A snapshot

Leela Gulati talks to Prof. Vijayakumar P  
@ Under the Tree  
11 a.m.

Known for her works on issues related to women, work and poverty, Leela Gulati has been interested in the study of women in the international labour migration stream, both on women who stay behind and those who migrate.



### Partition

Aanchal Malhotra, Kiran Manral

@ Bamboo Grove  
1 p.m.

Aanchal Malhotra is a historian of material culture and her partition trilogy delves into the human heart of India's 1947 divide, bringing forgotten voices to the forefront. Since publishing her first book, 'The Reluctant Detective', in 2011, Kiran Manral had become an established author who made marvellous contributions to both fictional and non-fictional writing. Listen in as Aanchal and Kiran join forces to shed new light on a historic turning point.

BUZZ

# Our honour



asikala, a student from a remote village, struggled to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor in Chennai until K. Chandru, a lawyer, came to her aid. Not only did he fight her case in court, but he also mentored and supported her journey, becoming a father figure to her. When she saw 'Jai Bhim', a film about Chandru's life, it brought back warm memories and she sent him a poignant message, "This is you and me in the picture, Sir,"

The landmark judgments of Justice Chandru, a former judge of the High Court, include allowing women to be priests in temples, removing caste considerations from burial grounds and protecting government employees with

The Indian judiciary has been enriched by the grace and humanity embodied in the likes of Justice K. Chandru. MBFIL salutes him

mental health illnesses from being dismissed. He had a rigorous schedule and heard at least 75 cases a day, and cleared 96,000 cases in six and a half years.

Chandru had always been humble and unassuming. On his retirement day from the Madras High Court, he submitted his final declaration of assets to the then Acting Chief Justice R. K. Agrawal. He returned the key of his official car, walked across the road to his

## JAI BHIM

old office and headed to the railway station, buying a season ticket to take a local train home. He politely refused a formal farewell ceremony. He also vowed that he would not practice in Supreme Court or head tribunals. Immediately upon retirement, he vacated his official residence and moved into a two-bedroom apartment in the nearby area of Mylapore and took up teaching.

When the Tamil Nadu government demolished the Uthapuram wall in Madurai in 2008—a wall created to separate the living areas of caste Hindus and Dalits—Chandru made the observation in a judgment that, "Uthapuram wall is no Berlin Wall. When the Berlin Wall crumbled, no one wept for the fall of the wall," referring to the resentment among caste Hindus. He has been involved in several cases for women, including the Parvathi case featured in the film, 'Jai Bhim'. His book, 'Listen to My Case! When Women Approach the Courts of Tamil Nadu', outlines the stories of 20 women from marginalized communities and their fight for justice.

Growing up, Chandru was inspired by the speeches of Dravidian leaders. Later, he joined the Communist Party of India (Marxist). His activism got him expelled from Loyola College in his second year for organising student agitations. Advocate K. K. Venugopal then convinced Chandru to pursue law. He helped him join the Government Law College in Chennai. Chandru's time with the CPI(M) eventually ended. When the Indian Peacekeeping Force was deployed in Sri Lanka, he criticized the CPI(M)'s support for it. In 1988, the CPI(M) expelled him for his opposition to the Indo-Sri Lanka accord.

Chandru's small office in Alwarpet, Chennai, greets visitors with an inviting sign: "Don't remove your footwear". Next to it stands a stone Buddha with two yellow flowers on its shoulders. The walls within are decorated with books and mementos, including a dried peepal leaf and a brick wrapped in polythene—the Uthapuram brick and the leaf from Jallianwala Bagh, respectively.

# This time for Africa

## THE BRIGHT CONTINENT

► Africa is in a state of 'trans-temporality'— an emotional and material engagement with intersecting pasts, presents and futures

Writers expressed concern over the hegemonic Western world and its dominance over African writing.

Taking part in a session at MBIFL on Thursday, African writers Futhi Ntshingila, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Mshai Mwangola and Khadija Bajaber pointed out the challenges faced by African writers.



They spoke of instances when their writings were turned down by Western publishers citing that they did not fall in the 'grand narrative' category. But now, things were changing, they said.

Futhi Ntshingila saw the continent Africa as an ancient grandmother "who was complicated, disrupted and looted".

She represented herself as the daughter of Africa. "There is something pristine with Africa that can never be touched," she said.

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor said that Africa was in a state of 'trans-temporality'— an emotional and material engagement with intersecting pasts, presents and futures. But the hegemonic world has even preset meanings for the word 'forward' which is measured quantitatively and in their pretexts. The African writers unanimously admitted that they are in a fight to regain their lost identity. ►

# Tree of life

## MORE-THAN-HUMAN



Amitav Ghosh uses the trajectory of nutmeg to chart European violence against the earth.

Speaking on 'Stories of the more-than-human' at MBIFL on Thursday, he pointed out that in all civilizations, there was a story of a tree of life.

"Empirical documentation methods of conventional history cannot portray trees as makers of history," he added.

For Bandanese, trees and volcanoes were the protagonists of their stories. But for the Dutch, they were nothing but resources generating profit. In the colonial period, all other beings except Europeans were regarded as brutish, mute and devoid of agency.

"Though humans are not devoid of agencies today, for historians and academicians non-human entities are mute and incapable agencies. In that sense, their way of enframing the world is still very much founded on the ideologies in the wake of the European empire in the 17th century," he says

Going back to the 15th century, cloves only grew on the islands of North Maluku. Similarly, the volcanoes of Banda islands created incredibly rich forests with nutmeg trees endemic to

► Empirical documentation methods of conventional history cannot portray trees as makers of history

those islands only. A handful of nutmeg had an astronomical price in Europe. Europeans reached the Banda Islands. The Dutch had a monopoly over the nutmeg trade. The Bandanese resisted the Dutch as they had a long relationship with trade all over the world. In 1621, within 10 weeks, the Dutch exterminated the entire population of the Banda islands.

"The incredible resource Bandanese had became the cause of their destruction. This is happening all over the world," says Amitav Ghosh.

Uranium mines of Jharkhand exploited by mining companies and Adivasis being thrown out of Niyamgiri mountains in Odisha are examples of the extractivist economy practised by the world.

"The potential of biological organisms is revealed when they encounter other species. These accidental encounters are historical. The Enlightenment of Buddha while meditating under the Bodhi tree is one such encounter," he said. ►

## BUZZ



**Empathy in writing, seeing both sides**  
Colum McCann talks to Pooja Nair  
@ Under the Tree  
🕒 2 p.m.

Empathy in writing offers insights into creating relatable characters and exploring diverse perspectives. Colum McCann is an Irish writer of literary fiction. He authored 'TransAtlantic' and National Book Award-winning 'Let the Great World Spin'.



**The Price of Modi Years**  
Aakar Patel talks to Dhanya Rajendran  
@ Mathrubhumi Hall  
🕒 3 p.m.

Aakar Patel is an Indian writer, journalist, and commentator. His book, 'The Price of the Modi Years', provides a critical examination of the past eight years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rule, exploring its impact on politics, the economy and society in India.



**Jai Bhim**  
Justice Chandru, Dr. Thushara James  
@ Festival Hall  
🕒 6 p.m.

A power-packed conversation on Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution and a champion of the Dalit and minority rights movement in India.



**The Art of Biography**  
Featuring Sagrika Ghose, N. P. Ullekh, Meena T. Pillai  
@ Poetree 4 p.m.

This is a thought-provoking discussion wherein the best authors and journalists of the nation explore the challenges, opportunities and creative elements of writing biographical works.



**Nobel speaks to Booker**  
Shehan Karunatilaka, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Jokha Alharthi  
@ Mathrubhumi Hall  
🕒 6 p.m.

A conversation between Nobel Laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah, Booker awardees Shehan Karunatilaka and Jokha Alharthi. A must-watch session.



**Conquering Everest**  
Poorna Malavath  
@ Nishaganthi  
🕒 2 p.m.

Poorna Malavath's journey to the summit of Mount Everest made her the youngest Indian and the youngest female to have reached the summit, overcoming adversity and physical challenges in an inspiring tale of perseverance and determination.



**LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE:** Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan lights the traditional lamp to mark the inauguration of MBIFL 2023. Also seen are M. V. Shreyams Kumar, Managing Director of Mathrubhumi; Abdulrazak Gurnah, Nobel laureate; P. V. Chandran, Chairman and Managing Editor of Mathrubhumi; T. Padmanabhan, writer; Shehan Karunatilaka, 2022 Booker Prize winner; and Rajeev Devaraj, Executive Editor, Mathrubhumi News | Photo : Rahul G.R.

# Words fade, music stays

**W**e love their voices — when they sing or talk. Celebrated vocalists Bombay Jayashri and T. M. Krishna did both at MBIFL on Thursday.

She remembered how film music entered her life through a humming her brother sang when he got back from kindergarten.

How did her family, practitioners of classical music for four generations, view her tryst with film music? “If we go up in the air and look back at land, I cannot see any lines between any countries. It beautifully merges with mountains and rivers. In the same way, I am grateful that my parents and everybody around me taught me to appreciate every piece of music with the same appreciative spirit. Every composition is a jewel I have added to my repertoire,” she said.

She spoke about the wonders music could do for people with



autism. She remembered a boy she met 20 years ago at a concert. He told her three times, “You sang everything wrong”, and went away. Later, she found that the boy was attached to her voice. She remembered the boy’s words as a gift.

## ‘Language is not just about meaning’

T. M. Krishna demonstrated how he used verses of Sree

## SOUL OF MUSIC

Two iconic musicians throw light on their art and philosophy

Narayana Guru in Carnatic concerts.

“Good writing is characterized by having multiple layers. It should speak to different people and evoke imagination in the reader. Every composition has its own unique aspects, but it takes time for these differences to be fully realized. It’s important to acknowledge the devotional aspects of writing as it can help bring out the message of a composition,” he said.

He pointed out that the focus of artistes should not be on beauty, but on the message they wanted to convey.



“Tradition can be a burden, but it’s also a convenient way of preserving what has been sustained over time. Young musicians should not be afraid to break with tradition and do what they want to do. Never let the fire of thinking die in you. This also means you are smart enough to realize you are playing a power game.”

He said that language

was not just about meaning, but also about form and the interaction between words, sounds and syllables.

“No text can be mispronounced. The meaning of a song can be wide and deep, and the difference between reading prose and poetry is similar to the difference between spoken and sung language. Words can be broken in places where they shouldn’t be, but a composer can choose to do this to add a different dimension to their work. There is a distinction between the work of different composers, and it’s important to acknowledge the changes that occur in both the content and the listener. Ragas can be interpreted in various ways, and the freedom to move around within a raaga makes it dynamic,” he added.

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