



Kottayam hit by deluge as rains lash Kerala



Sarath P Das

Kottayam: The recent rainfall in Kottayam's eastern high ranges has once again inundated low-lying areas in and around the town. The rain spell left many places in Thiruvapur and its adjoining areas waterlogged. The

heavy rains entered many houses, shops and submerged roads causing damage to property near Thiruvapur. Rivers were overflowing and one could not differentiate between canals and paddy fields, causing challenges for

the local communities. Many residents in these areas had to take shelter in relief homes. Authorities have opened 57 relief camps in Kottayam where 1,450 people from 460 families have been

accommodated. The water levels in major rivers throughout the region have steadily increased in the last one week, posing concerns and potential risks to surrounding communities and infrastructure.



Thiruvapur



Thazhathangadi road



Eerayil kadavu



Illikal junction

Photo credits: Sarath P Das

Art forms on the Brink of Extinction



Manna Menachery

Kottayam: Kerala's artistic heritage shines through gracious expression of *Kathakali*, the sway of *Mohiniattam*, the age-old *Kalaripayattu* and the sparkling metal mirrors of *Aranmula*. These renowned art forms have garnered well-deserved acclaim and admiration globally. However, amidst the limelight enjoyed by these popularised art forms, there exist several lesser-known treasures on the brink of extinction.

The glory of the *Aranmula Kannadi*, the indigenous metal mirror of Kerala has transcended across oceans. Similar to this craft there is another variety of metal mirror solely owned by Kerala but known only to some; the *Adakkaputhur Kannadi*. Some claim that this mirror is even better than *Aranmula*.

This indigenous craft is not only less recognised but also faces the threat of extinction as there is only one existing practitioner, Krishnakumar Balan Mooshary. This legacy may be lost after him is the worry. "I am happy to teach anyone who comes forward to learn the technique, despite several efforts I was unable to find one. This craft requires a tedious amount of work. We will be alone in the workshop for days or months according to the need. Unstable income and societal undermining are making people reluctant to take this as their breadwinner," says Krishnakumar.

The lack of a successor to carry forward these traditions is one of the main reasons that make such crafts endangered. A case in point is the unexpected demise of the great horn craft artist Mr. T V Gopinathan

which has ceased to be unfillable void. This handicraft now struggles to find an equal master craftsman. "If there were enough measures taken to ensure the propagation of this handicraft, Kerala wouldn't have lost a grip over this art" says Deepa, shopkeeper of Gopinath's craft shop.

"There have been efforts from the side of the state government to uplift this community. Several initiatives like SMSM institute are set with the vision of empowering the handicraft

upper lip, specifically in the indentation between the nose and the top lip. The wooden puppet and limbs of the puppets are manipulated using a string held in the puppeteer's mouth. The balance and dexterity required from this almost trapeze-like act forces the performing artist to be focused with their gaze, patience and precise technique. The puppet show is accompanied by songs and the re-telling of stories from Indian epics. But this artform has something to hope for.



Fading Lustre: Krishnakumar with his exquisite Adakkaputhur kannadi

but there is a popular opinion that their activities are limited. Kerala Tourism Department's initiatives like Responsible tourism are proving to be beneficial. They find artists that utilise localised skills and promote them," says Sathish Kumar, Business Development Manager, Arts and Craft Village, Aranmula.

This is not limited to handicraft, many performing art forms also face the threat of endangerment. One such is *Nokkuvadya*. It is a centuries old form of puppetry of Kerala.

In *Nokkuvadya*, puppets chiselled out of wood are hoisted on a tall pole or balanced on the puppeteer's

Padma Shree awardee Moothikall Pankajakshi was the only one who knew the art. But her ambition to keep the art alive, made her train her granddaughter and now she is the only person who can perform it.

There are several other art forms that facing similar issues, some of them are *Nizhalpava kuthu* a form of shadow, *Margam kali*, *Theyyam* and many more. These being a ritual artform poses an extra limitation of popularising it with public. Passion is the driving force for these artists rather than money. To let go of these indigenous art forms will be an irreparable loss to Kerala's artistic heritage.

Clay Art therapy gaining popularity in Kerala



Mary Catherine

Kottayam: Sixteen-year-old Apsara (not her real name) was prescribed clay therapy because of her issues in bonding with peers and angry outbursts against her parents. In her first clay moulding class she was distant and guarded. After a few classes she warmed up to the material for a longer time than usual and immersed in her work with sensual touching.

When she opened her eyes, she looked at the form she had created. Apsara saw a crying mother, a child in her arms. It depicted the child wiping the mother's tears. She realises that the crux of her anger was the pain of being the daughter of a depressed mother.

"At a time when more than 12% of people in Kerala are facing depression and a chronic fear of failure, the process of creation and recreation provides them with multiple chances.

Clay unlike rock can be broken and remoulded multiple times, this provides a sense of purification, a second chance. They get an opportunity to make a concrete thing out of the piece of clay. It is an



Representational image

alchemy-like process: transforming the pain into meaningful expression" says clinical psychologist, Dr Vipin Roland.

According to the journal of American Art therapy, by lightly touching the lump of clay, the client leaves the imprint of his or her fingers on it and thus becomes absorbed in his or her ability to make art that soothes you."

The challenge is to source the clay due to licence issues. The issues faced by most clinics is the lack of availability of clay, and even if it is, the inconsistency in supply of clay. "Even though we've done clay art therapy a few times, it's not a dependable method as the material is not always available", says Dr Vipin. However with rising interest clinics are planning to open up such centres soon.

"The number of students has increased by 20% in the past year" says Yedu S, instructor at Terra Crafts.

"Making pottery requires a lot of focus and improves your concentration. Our client base consists of adults burning off the stress of a 9 to 5. The rules like clay are very flexible, it's just to make art that soothes you."

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Gokul's triumph on wheels



Akshaya M

Thiruvananthapuram: Gokul was just 22 years old when the news from the doctor came as a bolt from the blue. It was the year 2006 an accident made him dependent on a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Given the disabled unfriendly society we live in, he concluded this to be the end of his life.

However it only took him a short while to realise that every end has a new beginning. Gokul was pursuing his LLB from Law Academy, Thiruvananthapuram and always needed the assistance of another person. His motive to once again become independent changed the track of his life. Youtube videos became the new partner in his endeavour. Gokul learned to do things on his own with the help of those videos.

He joined hands with his senior Aravind who was suffering from paraplegia to form an organisation named 'Can Walk'. Two years

before he carried out a camp exclusively for physically disabled people in Attapadi.

The NGO aims to provide rehabilitation to those who lost mobility after road accidents. It is carried out with the help of Adarsh Trust, owned by SB Well Fort hospital, Thiruvananthapuram. They treat accident victims and



Gokul Ratnakar

bring them back to their life. The NGO also conduct road safety campaigns and sponsor wheelchairs.

"Being financially independent is also a part of

rehabilitation. For people like me there are many limitations, still they need a job which provides a decent income", says Gokul.

The 'Woodpecker' makes wooden mementos and sells them. Primarily made by paraplegic persons the initiative gives them a source of income. Apart from mementos other craftworks made by them are collected and sold in Kerala Arts and Crafts Village, Thiruvananthapuram.

Gokul, who has travelled across the country, has collaborated with a similar NGO in Dharampur, Uttarpradesh to gather craft works.

As a second step the group plans to train more such persons to ensure that quality products are made. Gokul himself designed a wooden memento symbolising the survival of Kerala for the Mahila Association Conference.

Gokul is living in Thiruvananthapuram with his wife and children. With his example, he has not only proved that a normal life is possible after a tragic incident but has also paved a way for others to 'walk'. "There is always a speck of hope, and we have to find it", says the father of two.

Footprints- creating careers for disabled



Ann Treasa Joseph

Kozhikode: *Footprints*, an initiative by the Institute of Palliative Medicine (IMP) in Calicut, has helped over a 100 handicapped individuals in wheelchairs. For the last 10 years, the institute has been training them to create items such as umbrellas, pens, nettipattam (traditional ceremonial headdresses), bulbs, and more.

The pandemic was a dampener, yet many of the trainees under *Footprints* managed to earn a living with the skills they acquired. Muhammadali Vazhioram,

Suresh Thiruvampady and many others in wheelchairs continue to make umbrellas for a living. Shameer CMR explains "This skill has been a tremendous help to them. They earn a profit of around Rs 40 to 70 per umbrella. They start their work three months before monsoon, and when the season arrives, it becomes a means of livelihood for them."

According to Sreekumar PC, the secretary of IMP, "Footprints aims to not only teach these individuals skilled work but also to market their products through our outlet Shop Compassion. Before the onset of Covid, their work received significant exposure through exhibitions and amassed large support from college students. Now IMP is putting efforts to bring back the same power."



Ability unfurled: People being taught how to make an umbrella at IMP

Forgotten films: Unreleased rolls at Chitranjali remains an epitaph to filmmakers' struggle



Faseen Mukhtar

Thiruvananthapuram: Beneath the halls of Chitranjali studio, where creativity and shadows interact, a museum exists. Within its depths lies a vault, shrouded in mystery, where films of untold tales reside.

The studio is harbouring numerous completed movies that have never seen the light of day. These forgotten works of art, painstakingly crafted by unknown directors, are gathering dust on a shelf, untouched and unnoticed. These films are a disheartening indication to the struggles faced by their

creators, whose dreams and hard work have seemingly gone in vain.

The unreleased films, which have completed the rigorous process of shooting, editing, sound production, and post-production, reside in a negative vault beneath the established museum in Chitranjali Studio. These movies are stored with the old film negatives containing both visuals and sound, and continue to occupy this hidden space, shielded from public view.

These films, captured in the past using cameras that recorded 24 frames per second, leaving behind a negative representation of each image on a filmstrip. However, with the rise of digital technology, cameras now store images as data, which can be easily accessed and recovered.

The once-established

procedures for screening movies, involving reels and projectors, have been replaced by more efficient and error-free digital

processes. The artistry of light and shadow, once safeguarded in filmstrips, now finds sanctuary in the realm of pixels and

algorithms. As a result, these unreleased films, with their negative strips stored in the vault, remain trapped. Sources say the shift from



Through the lens: Vintage Cameras on display at Chitranjali Studio

traditional film to digital formats has led to the possibility of these films never getting released.

Among the forgotten titles that lie dormant in the vault are Yesukrishnu (1966), Yakshikavu (1981), Yaathraamozhi (1991), Warrant (1995), Wait a Minute (1990), Vigilance (1992), Vidhi Parayunna Divasam (1989), and Vellarippaavu (1992), Vilaykku vaangaam (1993). Despite their completion, these movies have never reached the eager eyes of audiences, suffering from a lack of funding and mysterious delays.

Filmmakers, whose lives revolve around their craft and dreams of seeing their work on the silver screen, often find themselves emotionally shattered. Enduring financial hardships and battling overwhelming

disappointment, some filmmakers have tragically chosen to end their lives, says a worker of Chitranjali studio.

In the South Indian film industry, Chitranjali is not the only studio struggling with a backlog of unreleased movies. Other well-known studios have come into ownership of closed vaults containing a treasure trove of cinema, including Prasad Studios and Kalabhavan Studio. Filmmakers continue to hold out hope that these undiscovered treasures may one day be shown on the big screen. It remains to be seen whether these undiscovered jewels will ever be released, enthralling audiences and creating a lasting impression on the history of film as the industry struggles to understand this fascinating phenomenon.

Meet the Team

Editor Mary Catherine
Sub Editor Sarath P Das
Sub Editor Faseen Mukhtar
Sub Editor Manna Menachery