



Gitanjali 2015

An Ohmkaram Publication

10th Anniversary Edition



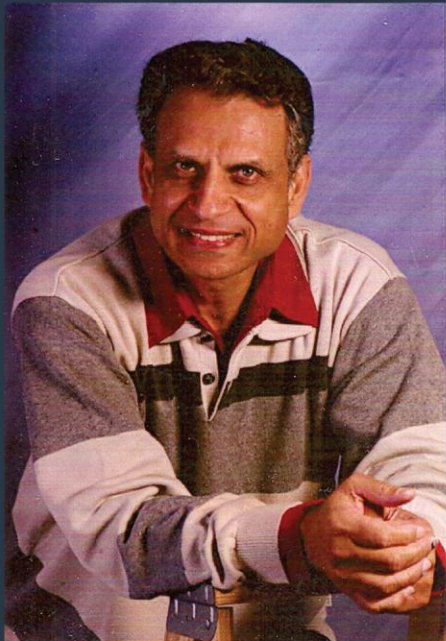
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(Kerala cultural organization based in St Louis, MO)

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Best Wishes



Madhavan Natesan Manchira & Family

From the desk of Gitanjali's Editorial team...

Welcome to the year 2016! This year brings with it a special edition of Gitanjali. Ohmkaram will be celebrating its **Tenth Anniversary**!! From the time it was formed Ohmkaram has grown leaps & bounds to how it is today. It has come a long way from the days when events were celebrated in basements of a few handful people who were part of this group. This is an interesting story that you can find in the Ohmkaram History Page within the magazine.

It is always a pleasure to work on Gitanjali. We, the Editorial team, are doing our best to deliver a magazine that is articulate, interesting, & well rounded. We try to do justice to all the submissions & treat them equally. We are thankful to everyone - from our oldest contributor to the youngest for their individual contributions.

Please do remember Gitanjali is a great platform, easily available too, to put forth your thoughts & ideas. We all have a vested interest in getting more involved in activities - whether we are in the St. Louis area on a temporary or permanent basis. If nothing else, for the sake of our children, who are keenly observing their elders. Those memories, values & traditions will carry on for eternity, no matter where they find themselves in times to come.

Do look for write-ups by Ohmkaram women in *Kerala in Our Hearts*. *Art by Kids* showcases creativity & teen contributions convey messages from eating healthy to learning from personal experiences to increasing awareness about social issues. Other pages consist of yummy recipes, stories both fiction & non-fiction. There's also an account of an *Iyer wedding* by one of our very own editors.

That said this edition would not have been possible without the help of numerous people in front & behind the scenes who contributed ideas, guidance, advice, including snacks & chaaya... We sincerely hope that you enjoy this magazine as much as we enjoyed putting it together.



Thanks,

The Editorial team, Gitanjali



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am very much thankful to all members of Ohmkaram in bestowing the trust you have in me to be the President of Ohmkaram this year. It was a great honor & privilege to serve you as the President. I am grateful to all Executive Committee members for supporting me in various activities of the organization & to the members of the Board of Directors for providing valuable guidance throughout the course of the year.

We have reached an important milestone this year by registering as a 501(c)(3) organization which enables us to seek public and private funds for various activities. I am leaving it in the hands of future leadership to take it to the next level and raise funds as and when needed.

One of the major activities this year was Shobhana's Krishna program that we organized in partnership with Tamil Sangam of St. Louis. I am very thankful to all who organized and worked relentlessly to make this program a great success. Other special programs such as Swami Udit Chaitanya's discourse, St. Charles' River Cleanup were very successful and I appreciate everyone who participated and worked for these programs.

Another major event was the Great Ohmkaram Vallomkali where we presented the winner with 'Natesan Manchira Madhavan & Family' Trophy for the first time. Thanks to Natesan Manchira Madhavan & Family for donating the trophy for this event. Thanks also to everyone who organized, participated and observed this program.

I thank you all again, for choosing me as the President of Ohmkaram for the second time.

Rajagopalan Unni

(President, Ohmkaram)



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A Brief History of Ohmkaram

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സർവ ഭദ്രാണി പശ്യന്തു
മാ കശ്ചിദ് ദുഃഖ് ഭാഗ് ഭവേത്
ഓം ശാന്തി ശാന്തി ശാന്തി

Om may all be happy
May all be free from illness
May all see auspicious
May no one feel grief
Om peace peace peace

Ohmkaram was officially formed during its first meeting on December 24th, 2005. The meeting was conducted at Sudhir and Anjana Prayaga's house, with eleven people attending - Sudhir Prayaga, Anjana Prayaga, Manoj Madhavan, Deepti Manoj, Sunil Krishnan, Reshma Sunil, Natesan Madavan, Remani Natesan, Sudhir Kozhikal, Prathibha Sudhir, and Rajesh Menon. During this meeting everyone agreed to proceed with the formation of a full-fledged organization catering to Malayalee Hindus in St Louis area. Natesan Madhavan was elected as the first president during the meeting.

During this period many of us felt the need for having a forum to celebrate our cultural traditions such as Onam and Vishu in our adapted country, which was lacking in St. Louis area at that time. Although started as a small group Ohmkaram quickly grew into a bigger organization within a short period of time.

The name of the organization - Ohmkaram, was originally suggested by Rajesh Menon and accepted by all sometime in middle of 2006. The logo was drawn by Krishna and Deepti Varma, who are now working in Delhi University. Bylaws were written by the committee headed by P.G. Ravindranathan, Rajesh Menon and Sudhir Prayaga. The organization was registered as a Missouri non-profit corporation in 2007. Website was registered and run by Anju Prayaga as Ohmkaram.org in 2006. Manoj Madhavan set up the yahoo group in 2006 to help members interact closely. In 2015 we applied and received IRS 501(c)3 tax exempt status.

The first program organized by Ohmkaram was Vishu in the year 2006, with a variety of cultural programs and Kerala Sadhya. Regular monthly potluck gatherings were conducted during the first 2 years with the host rotating between homes of different families, usually in the basement.

As Ohmkaram's strength increased it became difficult to conduct events in the basements. It

was decided early on that Ohmkaram will conduct four yearly programs - Anniversary, Vishu, Onam & Picnic - and many other ancillary activities supported by it.

Since last year we are also running a fifth program, the Ohmkaram Vallamkali or boat race with the Natesan Madhavan trophy.

A notable charity activity we started is offering scholarships in Kerala to financially challenged students enrolled for professional education. This was started by P.G. Ravindranathan and four students have been awarded since its inception in 2011 - Dhrishya V, Athira Muralee, Krishnamol and Vishna P.

Another successful activity supported by Ohmkaram is the Malayalam School of St. Louis - currently with 42 students and several volunteer teachers. It was originally started by Deepti Manoj at the basement of her house in 2006. Since 2007, classes are offered to those interested at the Daniel Boone branch of St. Louis County Library organized by Anju Prayaga.

Other significant ancillary activities by Ohmkaram are listed below. Ohmkaram organized programs for members:

- ✓ 10 Malayalam movies and kids movie *Thennali Raman* (2007-2011)
- ✓ *Kaviyangu* with Malayalam poet Madhusudhanan Nair (2007)
- ✓ Ohmkaram annual souvenir magazine, *Gitanjali* (2008 - present)
- ✓ Swami Udit Chaitanya's religious lectures (2010, 2012, 2015)
- ✓ Parent's Appreciation Day (2011)
- ✓ Drums & Dances stage performance & Visual Arts (2014)
- ✓ Ayyappa Pooja at Hindu temple (2015)
- ✓ Shobana's "Krishna" musical dance drama (2015)
- ✓ St. Louis Vallamkali for Natesan Madhavan Trophy (2014, 2015)

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Ohmkaram supported Charity and Voluntary activities:

- ✓ Blood Donations (2012, 2013)
- ✓ Soup Kitchen Volunteering (2012)
- ✓ Missouri River Clean Up Volunteering (2015)
- ✓ Nepal Disaster Relief Fundraising (2015)
- ✓ Mahatma Gandhi Cultural Center Fundraising (2015)
- ✓ Hindu Temple Expansion Fundraising (2015)

- ✓ Chennai Flood Relief Fundraising (2015)
- ✓ Ohmkaram Scholarship (2011-present)
- ✓ Malayalam School of St. Louis (2006-present)

Now this year, while celebrating Ohmkaram's 10th Anniversary, we can all be proud of our achievements. Hope we can offer more services to our members and do more charity.

Front Cover... By Suraj Alakkassery

With 2015, Ohmkaram entered the 10th year milestone into its existence and thus deserves the special edition of Gitanjali. The cover depicts in back ground the Vishu Kani and Pookallam representing Vishu & Onam festivals. On the side are numbers 'one', & 'zero'. The '1' shows Ohmkaram celebrating in a traditional style (with Vishu Kani, Pookkalam, Thiruvathira kali, Maveli varavelpu & a delicious Sadya). Vishu & Onam - the two major festivals of the beautiful state of Kerala (Photograph at the base of '1' is courtesy of Ganesh Pillai). The number '0' is a collage of cover pages of all editions of Gitanjali, to date.



Riot Of Colours – Kerala Mural Paintings

- A mural is any painting that is made directly on a wall or ceiling. A fresco is a painting done rapidly on wet plaster on a wall/ceiling. Kerala murals are frescoes depicting characters and scenes from mythology.
- Kerala murals are famous for their symmetry and precision.
- Murals can be commonly seen in many Kerala temples. Some of the famous murals can be seen at the Ettumanoor temple, the Vadakkunatha temple in Thrissur, and the Padmanabhaswamy temple in Thiruvananthapuram.
- The murals of Tirunandikkara (now in Kanyakumari district) and Tiruvanchikulam, both of which are said to have

been made between the 9th and 12th century A.D., are the earliest specimens of Kerala painting. The art form reached its peak between 14th to 19th centuries.

- The Krishnapuram palace is home to the famous Gajendra Moksham mural, which at fourteen feet by eleven feet, is one of the largest mural panels in Kerala.
- The selection of colors is very important in Kerala murals. The colors are derived from natural ingredients, such as white from lime, black from soot of lamps and blue from indigo. There are also unwritten rules that govern the selection of colors for each character. There are three main categories: Sattvic (green color for figures that are divine), Rajasic (red or yellow for warriors and other dynamic figures) and Tamasic (white and black for asuras). Avatars of Vishnu are usually coloured blue. Saffron is a prominent colour as well. **Note:** Photo of mural in background is from the Sri Rama temple Tripprayar. It depicts the scene of Rama's coronation.

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Swimming

By Arjun Madhavan

I took a deep breath and peered at the expanse of still water. The butterflies in my stomach seemed to multiply the longer I stared at the pool. Regardless of my skills as a swimmer, a sense of foreboding still crawled through my body. I quickly turned my head toward the stands to avoid looking at the chlorinated body of water. My stomach dropped even further when I saw the rabid animals many of the parents had become. They were jumping and screaming as they watched their children standing behind the starting blocks. I immediately decided it was better to watch the pool.

To put it plainly, my competitive swimming record was nonexistent. I had originally joined swimming for exercise, not for racing. So when I was placed in a swim meet, I was horrified. But my coach reassured me, telling me that I possibly had a shot at first place. Though I had high hopes, I was still apprehensive of participating in my first swim meet.

So when the referee blew his whistle and called the swimmers to ready themselves, I was a bit alarmed. I stepped onto the block, trying to maintain balance as a nauseating sense of vertigo attacked me. Taking a slow, shaky breath, I welcomed the newfound sense of adrenaline that pumped through my veins. I bent down and firmly gripped the block. A buzzer roared, and my body automatically reacted. I leapt off the block and stayed airborne for two seconds before breaking the tranquil surface of the pool.

Icy water welcomed me as I dove in. I immediately kicked upward, pushing myself towards the surface. Once again, I broke the surface and grabbed at the water, propelling myself forward. Water splashed around me, blocking the parents' cheers from my ears. I focused my attention to the blue arrow coating the bottom of the pool. Getting closer to the opposite wall, I took another breath and threw myself into a somersault.

I brought my body close when I flipped onto the opposite wall and pushed off. Once again I broke

the surface and swam. Taking a breath was not necessary. I just needed to keep swimming; I was determined to win. After I passed the halfway line, my lungs constricted and begged for air. I ignored them and pushed forward. The wall got closer. My lungs screamed, and I succumbed to the complaint. I turned to my side and took a deep breath, relaxing as oxygen filled my lungs.



Eventually I reached the wall and tore my goggles off my head, looking at the scoreboard. A flaming red two sat next to my time. I sighed and scanned the board for first place's time only to frown as I saw only a half second difference between my time and the winner's. That half second difference could have been eliminated if I didn't take that breath. My unwillingness to test myself had cost me first place. I didn't know if I could have held my air longer, but I knew I could have tried.

Looking back on my first swim meet, I realized I learned a valuable lesson about drive that day. Unless I put in the effort needed to step out of my boundaries, I would never see what I am capable of doing. In my case, it was about stepping outside the comfort zone where I felt safe. The need for determination sometimes outweighs the need for comfort. We tend to enclose ourselves in the spheres of our abilities and restrict ourselves to the activities that we know we excel in, refusing to test ourselves. But the only way to see what our true limits are is to push them. In the end the experiences that challenge us are the ones we learn from the most. It is through this self-assessing that we fully realize our true potential.

Arjun is a Senior at Marquette High School. He enjoys sports, hanging out with friends & drawing.



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- Gandhiji*

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Banning Sugary Foods & Unhealthy Snacks for Students

By Ananya Pillai, Eight Grade



If you were to do a survey of what most students are eating you would find that almost all of it is extremely unhealthy. You will see snacks that contain chemicals hazardous to human health, such as MSG and other mildly toxic substances. Along with these snacks, most students drink sugary, sweet drinks and eat candies of all shapes and sizes. Yes, they have a good time and seem to enjoy this junk food, but they are unknowingly poisoning themselves.

Young students simply go into the store and buy what seems fun and what excites their taste buds. This is where child protection must come in. Child protection agencies should ban such foods from being sold to kids when not accompanied by a parent. Additionally, a warning should be on the food that states that the food contains chemicals harmful to the health of growing children. If such a warning appears on the label and the child is in the company of a parent while purchasing such snacks, the parents will read the label. The parent can make a judgement call as to whether such food is what their child should or should not have.

Some people may argue that this takes away the rights of the child or teenager. The point to remember is that young students do not have the right to buy alcohol or cigarettes until they are 18 or 21 years of age in most countries. So, should they have the right to make a proper decision about whether to consume such toxins that are found in abundance in most popular snacks on the market today? Some say that the food companies have the right to sell such snacks. Come on! What company has the right to sell toxic products to children? Currently, most governments give them full rights to do just that, but it is time for people (and most importantly, parents) to wake up and realize that this should be a criminal act-just like it is to sell tobacco to minors.

These companies specifically target children in their market. This is criminal, too. These criminal acts will not change if the public does not request changes to be made. Parent groups and child-protection groups must create petitions to their governments requesting that snacks with toxic chemicals have warning labels and purchasing restrictions so that they can only be purchased with a parent.

Without a doubt, this would be a far-reaching policy. Some snacks, such as *Ramen* (dried noodles in containers), require young students to only add water. Many children love these noodles. It is a comfort food to youngsters and adults alike. However, most of these packages are full of toxic chemical known as MSG. Therefore, these noodles would fall under a policy that regulates such products being sold to children.

Our argument would stipulate that companies who do not put MSG or any other toxins in their foods do not need a warning label or parental regulation. They would be able to sell their noodles freely. If companies had to do this, we would see noodle companies remove the toxins from the foods so they can be sold freely. Thus, the company would not lose the potential market for their products; the new regulation would encourage them to remove the toxins.

This same principle would hold true for the snack or junk food companies. They will not lose their market if they simply remove harmful chemicals. The regulations argued here will benefit everyone. They will protect children, educate parents, and force food companies to quit poisoning children. Again, none of these will happen unless we all start taking action. It will start with just one person creating a petition and sending it around to concerned parents and even children.

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Climate Change Argument

By Rubina Thomas, Ninth Grade

Imagine yourself living in Alaska 100 years ago. Every morning you wake up to see the ground blanketed with white snow that in reality, is actually layers and layers of slick ice. Then picture yourself in Alaska right now, in present time. What was once covered with snow *many* years ago is now packed with green trees and grass. This is the effect of global warming, the gradual increase in the average temperature of Earth's atmosphere. All scientists agree it occurs, but the big question is what really causes global warming? Some people think it is caused naturally, but others think we humans have caused global warming. I believe global warming is caused by the actions of humans because we cause carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere which contributes to temperature change in our planet.



One reason humans cause global warming is because of the things we do. Prentice Hall's textbook, *Weather and Climate* attests, "... the burning of wood, coal, oil, and natural gas adds carbon dioxide to the air." All people contribute to the changing levels of CO₂ everyday even when they do not realize it, whether it means burning something or simply breathing in and out. This proves that the activities of humans are the cause of global warming because everyone has burned objects before. This also justifies that people create bits of CO₂ in the atmosphere and cause temperature changes on Earth. Smoke consists of CO₂ and it is known that it follows any change of temperature.

Moreover, global warming is caused by the actions of humans because we pollute the atmosphere. National Geographic's article, *Air Pollution*, points out that, "... there are different kinds of pollution - some visible, some invisible - that contribute to global warming." While smog or haze may be the basic form of pollution, there are other forms as well. This indicates that humans cause global warming because our activities such as working in a factory or driving a car emit invisible pollutants into the air. This also confirms that we release CO₂ in the air since carbon dioxide is a pollutant, a gaseous waste.

Some may argue that global warming is caused naturally because Earth is not the only planet in which temperature change is occurring in. In his speech, *Why 'Global Warming' Failed & Why Climate Change is Real*, Ben Davidson announces that Jupiter lost a stripe and its "meteorological loneliness was abated" by a serious storm, Red Jr. He also reminds people of a storm on Saturn that was 10 years earlier and much stronger than scientists expected. This vindicates that global warming is caused naturally because changes in storm patterns (climate change) occur in places with no people.

Although this point of view is completely understandable to side with, it fails to consider the term "atmospheric escape", when a planet's atmosphere fades away over time, carrying its gases along with it. Jupiter and Saturn have thick atmospheres and a high amount of gravity compared to Earth - Jupiter with 24.79 m/s² and Saturn with 10.44m/s². When gases escape into space from a planet, it is possible that other planets attract them using its gravity. This establishes that humans cause global warming because most forms of CO₂ relate back to humans. In other words we release CO₂ in our planet's atmosphere and it vanishes into space.

In conclusion, global warming does not happen naturally, but by humans themselves. CO₂ has been found to strictly follow the change of temperature and we contribute to CO₂'s existence,

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sometimes by unwillingly releasing pollutants. Although Earth is not the only planet experiencing global warming, it is possible that humans could be related to this situation. Different scientists create different insights on global warming from their own strategies, but they all lead to one implication: Global warming could pose danger and should be occurring slower. It is not easy to resolve, but people should definitely be aware of this problem.

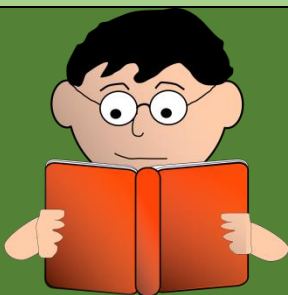
By Vani Ganesh,
Ninth Grade



Bullying happens all the time to kids all around the world these days. It is important to know that you have a voice and can stand up for yourself and even for your friends. I have seen bullying happen to people around me before and I have stood up for them as well.

All you have to do is find a teacher near you and let them know the situation that you or a friend is involved in. Even though you may not know it, a teacher will always listen and help with whatever is happening. Being bullied or seeing a person you know getting bullied is a serious matter so you should definitely not stand by and watch it happen. If you see something bad happen to anyone you know or to yourself you cannot let it stand by.

How would you feel if you were in the place of the person being bullied? You would want somebody to stand up for you, which is exactly why you should stand up and help others around you.



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- Siddharth Santosh, Fifth Grade



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My Story

By Pranav Menon, Sixth Grade

My name is Pranav Vimal Menon Nair. I am 12 years old. I am in 6th grade, and I go to Rockwood Valley Middle School (RVMS for short). I have been to 3 elementary schools (Pierremont, Henry, and Babler) but my transference to Babler was the hardest, because I got a whole new house. This is the story of how I moved into my new house and how the experience changed my life.



It all started with the houses. My parents spent several weeks looking for a new house. Then we stopped. Then started again. Most of our weekends were spent looking at different homes. Few of them my Dad did not like and few of them my Mom did not. But, I didn't like any of the houses we went to. Then finally we moved to a house that looked like it was as old as the hills. It took my family four days to take everything from our old house to our new house.

Then I started to worry about another thing. The school. I liked my old school (Henry), the teachers were nice to me, though I had very little 5th grade friends, I had several Kindergarten friends (whom I met after school during pickups, I was a pick-up leader so I would take them to their cars and it would take a whole another story for me to explain everything I did). They called me 'Overlord Master' (yes, I'm serious [Master for short {call me possessive}]). I didn't want to leave my Kingdom and my little subjects behind. What would they do without me?

The day I went to my new elementary school there were butterflies in my stomach. I did not know anybody. I still remember - my first day at the new school, It was a Wednesday and Wednesday happened to be the day of no PE. As the day progressed I found out that I fit in easily. By the end of the day I had 2 friends. By the end of the year I had several. Though I did not have time to build a new kingdom, it was not bad. The new house was after all not bad too. There were no monsters under the bed, no snakes in the woods, no bats in the basement...There were kids in the neighborhood who went to my school and now I had someone other than my brother to play with. So I found out that moving isn't something to be worried about. We never know what is in store for us until we do it.

2½ Months Later {My first day of middle school}

I woke up worried about school. I got up early and went to the bus stop. I went to my first class - History, and then I went to my Encore classes. Next was lunch time and the food I ate was good. I heard the footsteps of my friends going to their classes. Then I went to Language Arts, and finally went to P.E... The day was over quickly, and it was not as bad as I thought.

After I reached home, I told my dad, "I really like middle school Ach - wait, where's Vaibhav (my 8-year old brother)!?!?"

"He's still at school."

Continued on Page 23...

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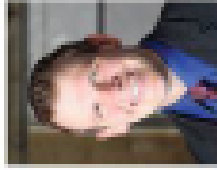
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Continued from Page 21...

"Really!?!? Yes!!!!"

The next day I slept like a log and missed the bus, and my parents dropped me at school. After that I went to my 2nd hour class - Foundations of Algebra. Then I went to my Encore classes and L.A. again. Finally, I went to the last class of the day - Science. Then the day was over. I came home and went back to sleep.

--x-x--

D.A.R.E.

Make the right choice...

My DARE Adventure

By Lakshita Senthil, Fourth Grade

"It's time for DARE, Children," my teacher yelled. Hi, I am Lakshita Senthil. I have been through the amazing DARE program. The DARE decision making model is something that I learned in DARE to Define the problems, Assess my choices, Respond, and Evaluate my decision. These 4 things also stand for what DARE is. Today I will be talking about the wonderful adventure in which I learned about drugs, how to solve problems, ways to communicate, and more!

A few things that I feel about DARE are the following. I feel that dare will help me with my future problems. I also think that it will make me encourage others not to smoke or drink alcohol. Last thing, I feel DARE will help me communicate bravely with others.

I learned many things in DARE that can help me stay drug-free and avoid violence. I learned the 5 W's of reporting bullying which are who, what, when, where and why. Another thing I learned is how to communicate effectively. Last, I learned resistance strategies. These are avoiding the situation, strength in numbers, walking away, changing the subject, and saying no while giving an excuse. These are the things that I learned in DARE that can help me stay drug-free and avoid violence.

The DARE decision making model can help me in the future by many ways and some of them are the following. The 'define' part of the DDMM can help me think about the problem, challenge, or opportunity. The 'assess and respond' part of the extraordinary model can help me make choices. Finally, the evaluate part of the DDMM can encourage me to review my decision. I feel above mentioned are some of the ways that the DDMM can help me with my future problems.

These are all the things I learned in my fabulous adventure through DARE. "Class dismissed," my teacher squealed. Well, that's it then. I really enjoyed my valuable time in DARE and the DARE officer I had. Once again, this is what I learned about staying drug-free and avoiding violence.

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Frank's First day at School

By Dhruv Menon, Third Grade



Frank was at his new school. It was his first day and he was nervous. He had just found out that he could turn into anything. He could turn into a bird, or a cheetah, or even the President by just thinking about them. He had to keep it a secret. He knew that he had to keep control of his thoughts. He hoped that his first day would go well.

When he went to his class he saw that his teacher Mr. Black was already there. Mr. Black said 'Class, I would like you to meet Frank Chase.' Looking at Frank he asked 'Would you like to tell the class something about yourself?' 'Yes, I would Mr. Black' Frank replied. Then to the class he said 'I am Frank Chase. Me and my parents moved here from a small town named Spring Valley.'

'Class, let's start with Math. What is one forth plus one fourth?' Frank's hand shot up. Mr. Black called on Frank 'Do you know the answer?' He nodded, then answered 'two fourths'. 'Good job Frank!' They practiced math facts for some time. Soon it was time for P.E.

They went to the P.E room. There were two teachers. Their names were Mr. Bell and Mr. Pelmet. 'Hello Class! I realize we got a new student. Would you mind telling us your name?' said Mr. Bell. Frank stood up and said his name. Both Mr. Pelmet and Mr. Bell welcomed him. Then Mr. Pelmet said 'Ok, let's continue with our unit about soccer. We are going to go outside and play pass. You are each going to be assigned partners.'

We went outside and it was super hot. My partner was a kid named Jason. I enjoyed playing Soccer with him. After P.E we had lunch. I had a sandwich. At lunch Jason was at my table. He told me that he started this school just yesterday. That meant he was also a new student!! Jason asked 'Do you want to be friends?' I said Yes!! After all, I didn't have any friends. After lunch was Science. Our unit was about Gravity!! It was so fun! Then was recess. Our playground was super big! We even had a Spider Web (the one where you climb on it). I and Jason played on the Spider Web. After recess we came inside to pack up and go home and I had already made a new friend.

Why I Like to Visit India

By Omkaar Alakkassery, Fourth Grade

I like to visit India because it is a very interesting place to go to. There are lots of things to explore and see, there are even things that are centuries old, like forts; and palaces where great kings once lived. One of the seven wonders of the world is in India too

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(even though I have never been there). Other than my mom, dad and me, all my relatives live there including my little sister. I got to visit my grandfather's farm which is next to a river. I also visit my grandmother's house, which is in a small village. There are also random surprises every time I go there, like this time, when we went to a HUGE hotel. It had good food. There were different pavilions & I even got to see a professional cricket player. I love India & always look forward to going there and having fun.

My Dad My Hero

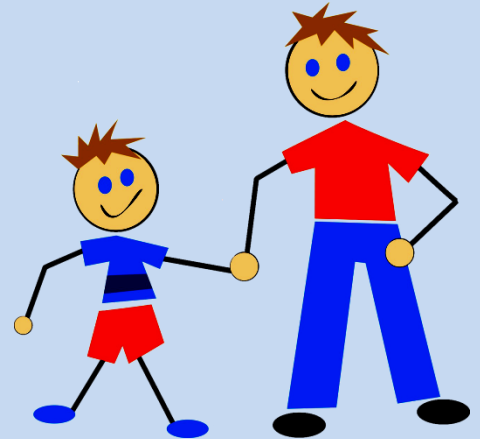
By Aryan Pillai, Third Grade

If I have to choose my favorite superhero, I'll choose one name, a superhero in my life "MY DAD". My dad is a happy, nice, kind, handsome, peaceful, awesome person. He smiles and sometimes does get angry. But even if he is angry, very angry at time, he still loves me. He teaches me right from wrong and to be respectful and responsible. These values will help me throughout life. I am very grateful for him and want to be like him. He always helps me with my problems and would do anything for me, my sister and my mom. We have fun playing catch and soccer.

Every day in the morning my family is all rushing getting ready to go to school, and it's my dad who makes it a point to help me to be at the bus stop on time. He drops me to my chess, soccer and my swim lessons every time by driving to all places. He cheers me for all my sporting events and praises me at my school plays.

During weekdays he works hard and spends maximum time working at his office. He always gets calls and emails so we sometime do not have enough time to play catch and other ball games but that's ok. He was awarded the best achievement awards for three consecutive years for his work. He tries his best to keep our family happy. He works hard to make money for our family. He loves me a lot and always tries to cheer me up whenever I am in a sad mood. He has always taught me good values and not spoiling me by buying me all the things which I am not going to list because it's so much. But at the same time he has gifted me many things that I always wish to have. I always enjoy spending time with him and learn new things with him.

I am running out of space. My dad means a lot to me, He's my **HERO** and you know it!!



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Review of India

By Hrithika Malugu, Second Grade



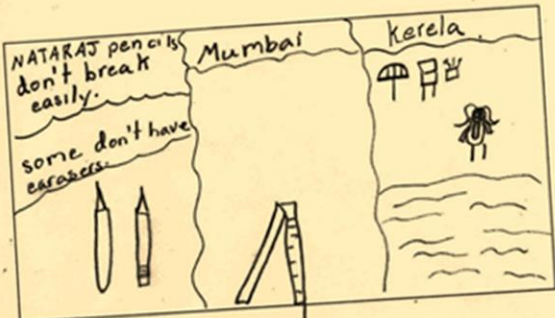
One time I used shampoo and it stinked.
There are diamond sweets. yum. yum.
Spicy is very spicy. Curry is very spicy.
Curry is very soupy. You can put all kinds of
vegetables in it. It can not have fruits
or pumpkins in them.

Review
of
India.
by:
Hrithika
Malugu

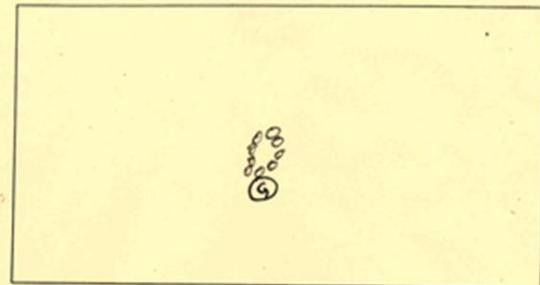
pictures are lovely!



Did you ever go to a place where you eat spicy
stuff? Well, it's INDIA! Whenever I went
to India I ate lots of spicy stuff and there are
sweets, yum, yum. I give that place 100 stars.
Wait... And TWO Thumbs Up. It's fantastic.
I'm a big fan of India. There is a restaurant
that's called AB's and it's smoking there.



There are special pencils in India. They are
called NATARAJ pencils. There is a place in
India. It is called Mumbai. There is a
playground somewhere there. Another place
in India is called Kerala. There is a big
beach there.



India is better than the United States
because India has lots of gold jewelry
shops. The United States just a couple
of them. I hope you learned a lot
about my trip to India. I also hope
you go to India.

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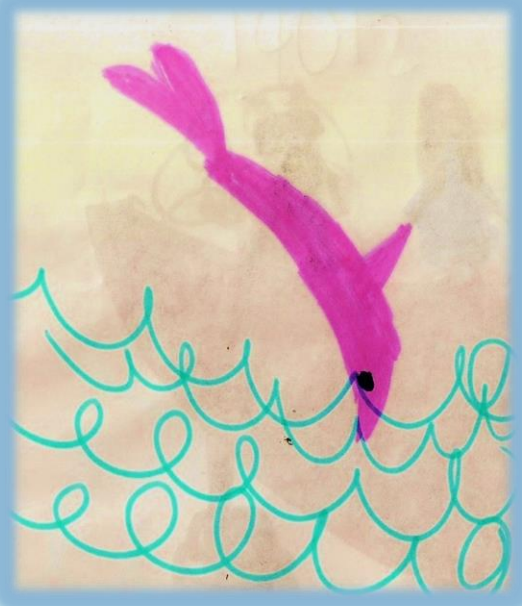
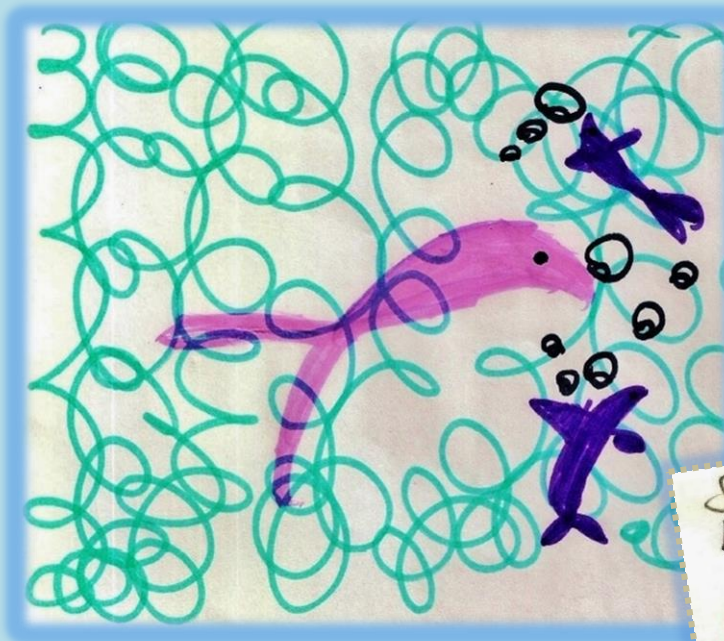
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'Dolphin in the Deep' By Arshiya Pillai, Third Grade



One day there was a mother dolphin who was in danger! She had to get to safety! She saw a small cave in the shallow waters. She had a baby. One year later the mother died. The baby dolphin was on its own. So she swam to find fish in the ocean. The dolphin caught two fish for her dinner. Years and years went by and the dolphin grew up. So again she went to search for fish. Suddenly a fish net caught her! She got tangled up. The fisherman mistook her for a fish. Then a young girl said STOP! and let her go! The dolphin was free in the ocean again.



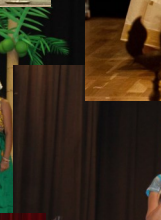
She had babies of her own



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Kerala in Our Hearts

Memories:

Nostalgic note from PUNE

It's so truly said KERALA – God's Own County- where the Season Never Ends.

My memories of Kerala have always been fresh and definitely bring a smile and feeling of happiness. Even though I have spent most of my time in Pune, we have always lived as a Malayali to the core. We celebrate Vishu & Onam like in Kerala. The traditions have never been forgotten even after being out of the state for ages. There is always a sense of oneness & a joint family culture that binds us. When I unwind my memories about Kerala it is all about my summer vacation trip there. The peaceful and pristine Kerala.

Waking up in the morning to the hymns of soothing Suprabhatham from the nearby temple was bliss. At 5.30 in the morning ammuma used to sing prayers loudly. That chanting still reverberates in my mind and body ... now and wherever, the scene flashes across my mind.

Kerala has been gifted with lot of scenic beauty abundant with lakes, rivers and being closely connected to the Sea. Its temples are so close to heart that one gets a feeling of peace, happiness and Love. The food is so delicious and freshly cooked that you will always have its taste on the tip of your tongue. I love my Kerala and will always want my kids to respect the tradition that we were in and be part of it. I would say it's **Florida of India!!!**

By Sunita Pillai

Summer Break (Vacation) Trip

As a child I always looked forward to the summer vacation when we got to go to my home town in Kerala. The lush green fields lined by coconut palms along the railway track herald the journey into Kerala. The favorite tea time snack *pazham pori* bring back the memories of travelling to Kerala.

At home, all my cousins and aunts would be waiting at the doorstep to welcome us. As soon as the initial welcoming was over, we ran out to the vast backyard to play. As girls, we enjoyed playing 'house'. We would use the coconut shells and fill them with wet mud and make 'puttu', the most common breakfast. Another staple food was the fish, for which we used mango leaves or jackfruit leaves as our pretend fish.

During summer, we relished the delicious mangoes and jackfruits. We would eat plenty of them. Plucking mangoes from the trees and eating them were some of our fun times. The raw mango would be eaten with little salt and chilli powder. We also loved playing in the ponds and rivers. Some summers the ponds would go dry.



We would go on a boat ride in the river along with the fishermen and buy fish from them. In the evening the kids were told to sit in front of the lamp & recite prayers. We would spend most of our vacation visiting all our aunts & uncles. We also would go to the Guruvayoor temple where we usually spent a night. This is where I first got to see the huge elephants up close. The Guruvayoor temple's palpayasam was very special. The taste of it still lingers in my mouth. After the darshanam, we would walk along the path lined by shops & buy things to take back with us. I would always buy a ring with Guruvayoorappan's photo.

My grandfather had a small house (a getaway during the day) between the fields surrounded by coconut trees where he would go every day. When we went there, he would always give us the tender coconut water, which was very sweet and cool during the hot summer days. Then as the days to return neared, the excitement would start to

subside. The 'goodbyes' would be very tearful and sad and the memories would linger with us until we returned the next year.

By Binu Chakkamparambil

Kerala Temples:

Padmanabhashetram

My first memory of the Padmanabha temple goes back to when I was in 7th grade. We went on a school trip to Kerala, Trivandrum, and Kanyakumari. I was amazed to see the huge temple, but the real experience which has stayed with me until today happened when we entered the temple. They stopped me and few of my classmates from entering the temple because we were dressed in frocks. They told us we have to cover our legs and gave us mundu to wear like a long skirt. We did as we were instructed and made our way inside the temple, and had a good darshan. This is when I learnt a lot about our tradition, culture, the right way to dress to the temple, and other traditional functions. Basically, wearing traditional clothing brings you closer to your culture, and by dressing in traditional attire while going to temple, we are respecting the deity (god). This is the main reason why I always choose to dress traditionally when I go to temple, or attend any traditional functions. The second time I visited the Padmanabha temple was after my wedding, with my husband. This time around the experience was very nice, and again as always I was mesmerized with the temple. We had an amazing darshan and we were very thankful to be in the god's own land Kerala, a lovely place to be in. Today living in St. Louis, I am very thankful for the beautiful temple we have and love how our temple encourages people to wear dress traditionally to respect our culture.

By Kalyani Ganesh

Triprayar Sree Rama Thevar Ambalam

My home town is Triprayar in Thrissur district. It is famous for its Sree Rama temple. One of my earliest recollections of the temple is when my grandmother almost lost me at the Arattupuzha Pooram that takes place with great pomp and splendor every year. I looked forward to the Pooram because that's the only time when I would get to drink sugar cane juice, gets lots of colorful bangles and toys.

As I grew other things like the Vedi Vazhipaadu (fireworks) and Meenootu (feeding fish) came to be my favorite. During Triprayar Thevar Ekadasi, I would love to eat the special kanji made from wheat because eating rice is not allowed.



Image courtesy of Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license

Now when I go back as a mother of two, I love to see my children experience the emotions I did. Over the last couple of years few unpleasant things have happened in my favorite Ambalam - looting of the Garbha Graha and an increase in petty thievery outside the Ambalam.

This temple is a mandatory part of the Naalambalam pilgrimage where one visits Rama, Bharatha, Shatrugna and Lakshmana. One day I hope to make this pilgrimage.

By Priya Sudeep

Lokanar Kavu

I was born in Kerala and brought up in a village called Meppayil. This is a small village near Vatakara. This village is very close to Lokanar Kavu, which means in literal terms '*world made of mountains, rivers & forests*'. This is the temple that was founded by a migrant group of 500 Aryan Brahmins & maintained by their successors.

The reason why I wanted to tell about this temple is because of the unique history which this temple is associated with. Vatakara is the capital of the Kadathanad which is the place of origin, of Kalaripayattu or the martial art of Kerala. Kadathanad is also associated with a famous warrior or hero called Thacholi Meppayil Kunjhu Othenan or more popularly called Thacholi Othenan. While Othenan was alive he was a very respected & feared leader. He was very respected by the Zamorin of Calicut which was a powerful kingdom at that time.

Lokanarkavu holds a Pooram - an important festival every year and it is conducted for one whole week with great pomp and show. This festival begins with a Kodyettam & ends with an Arattu.

A Mandala Utsavam is also conducted annually for 41 days. This is the annual festival of Lokanarkavu Bhagavathy Temple. There is a special dance which is performed at this temple during the festival and it is said that this dance closely resembles the martial art of Kalaripayattu. Even today Kalaripayattu artists seek the Bagavathy's blessings due to the association of the temple with Thacholi Othenan.

Another heroine associated with Kadthanad is Unniyarcha. She was a symbol of heroism and liberation of womanhood. She was a part of Putthuram Veedu and daughter of Kannappa Chekavar & youngest sister of Aaromal Chekavar. Both the Chekavars were great warriors. Chekavars were people who represented a kingdom or village and fought on behalf of the kingdom. They fought with similar people from another kingdom and the purpose they served was to avoid a big war between two armies & preventing many people dying in the war.

Unniyarcha was well versed in Kalaripayattu and was famous for defeating the Jonakars of Nadapuram who tried to molest her and harm her husband. With her knowledge of Kalari she taught them a very good lesson & was rewarded with a lot of gold and other presents for winning against them.

I am also very proud to say that Vadakara is known as the birthplace of Unniyarcha, Aromal Chekavar, Thacholi Othenan, the legendary heroes of the Vadakkanpattu.

By Savitha Krishnan

Guruvayoor

ഏകദേശം 12 വർഷങ്ങൾക്കുമുമ്പുണ്ടായ ഒരു അനുഭവം പറയാം.. എല്ലാ വർഷത്തെയും പോലെ ആ വർഷവും ഗുരുവയൂരംബലത്തിൽ കണ്ണനെ കാണാൻ ചെന്നു. സാമാന്യം നല്ല തിരക്കും കോരി പെയ്യുന്ന മഴയും. ഒരുപാട് കാത്തു നിന്നു ഒടുവിൽ കണ്ണന്റെ മുന്നിലെത്തി, കണ്ടുതൊഴുതു. പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ചു. മനസ്സിലെ ഭാരമൊക്കെ പോയ പോലെ തോന്നി, അക്ഷരാർത്ഥത്തിൽ ഞാൻ കരയുന്നുണ്ടായിരുന്നു ഞാൻ പോലും അറിയാതെ ..

പ്രദക്ഷിണം കഴിഞ്ഞു ഉള്ളംബലത്തിൽ കുറച്ചു നേരം ഇരുന്നു. പെട്ടെന്ന് ആരോ തോളിൽ തട്ടി വിളിച്ചു തിരിഞ്ഞു നോക്കിയപ്പോ പ്രായമായ ഒരു മുത്തശി നിൽക്കുന്നു. ഞങ്ങൾ മുത്തശിയെ നോക്കി ഒന്ന് ചിരിച്ചു. നല്ല ഐശ്വര്യമുള്ള ഒരു മുത്തശി.

ഞങ്ങളോടുള്ള ആദ്യത്തെ ചോദ്യം ഇതായിരുന്നു. എന്നേ എന്റെ മക്കളുടെ മുഖത്തു വല്ലാത്ത വിഷമം. അടുത്ത ചോദ്യം പറയാതെ തന്നെ എനിക്കറിയാം കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങൾ ആയില്ല അല്ലെ. കേട്ടതും ഞങ്ങൾ ഒന്ന് തെട്ടി. മുത്തശി തുടർന്നു. ഇന്നെന്റെ പിറന്നാളാണ്...കുട്ടിയിൽ കാശില്ലേലും എന്റെ കൃഷ്ണാ എന്ന ഒറ്റ വിളി മതി, കണ്ണനെ കാണാനുള്ള വഴി കണ്ണനായി കാണിച്ചുതരും അറിയോ എന്റെ കുട്ടിയോൾക്ക്. ഒരുപാട് വിഷമം തോന്നി, കുട്ടിലുണ്ടായിരുന്ന 1000 രൂപയോളം മുത്തശിക്കു കൊടുത്തു ഞാൻ. പക്ഷെ ആ പാവം ബസ്സിനുള്ള 20 രൂപയോ മറ്റോ എടുത്ത് ബാക്കി എന്റെ കുട്ടിയിൽ തിരിച്ചു തന്നു. മുത്തശിക്കു ഇത് ധാരാളം മതി...എന്നിട്ട് ഉച്ചത്തിൽ പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ചു, എന്റെ കണ്ണാ എന്റെ കുട്ടിയോളെ കാക്കളേ. അങ്ങനെ മുത്തശി തിരിഞ്ഞു നടന്നു എന്തൊക്കെയോ പറയുന്നും ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നു. ഞങ്ങൾ പ്രദക്ഷിണം വെക്കാൻ തുടങ്ങി, രാവിലെ ഏറെ വൈകി. വല്ലാതെ വിശക്കാനും തുടങ്ങി. മുത്തശി ചെറു പുഞ്ചിരിയോടെ ഞങ്ങളുടെ പിന്നിൽ തന്നെ ഉണ്ട്, ഞങ്ങൾ പരസ്പരം പറഞ്ഞു, മുത്തശിയെ കൂടെ വിളിക്കാം, ഒരുപാടു കണ്ണന്റെ കഥകൾ കേൾക്കാം നമുക്ക്. ഞങ്ങൾ തിരിഞ്ഞു നോക്കി. മുത്തശിയെ എങ്ങും കാണാനില്ല. ഒരുപാട് തിരഞ്ഞു നോക്കി. എങ്ങും കാണാനില്ല. മുത്തശിയുടെ രൂപത്തിൽ വന്നതു സാക്ഷാൽ കൃഷ്ണനാണോ എന്റെ ഭഗവാനെ...വല്ലാത്ത ഒരനുഭവം. അങ്ങനെ ആണെന്നു ഇന്നും വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു.

ഏതായാലും എല്ലാവരുടേയും ഒപ്പം മുത്തശിയുടെയും അനുഗ്രഹവും പ്രാർത്ഥനയും കണ്ണൻ കേട്ടു. വരുന്ന വർഷം അതേ സമയം ഞങ്ങൾക്ക് മോനെ തന്നു.മോന്റെ ചോറൂണിനു അമ്പലത്തിൽ ചെന്നപ്പോ ഞങ്ങൾ അറിയാതെ തിരയുകയായിരുന്നു ഞങ്ങൾക്കായി കണ്ണനോട് മനമുരുകി പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ച ഞങ്ങളെ അനുഗ്രഹിച്ച ആ പാവം മുത്തശിക്കായി. ഒരുപാട് പ്രാർത്ഥനയോടെ.

കൃഷ്ണായ വാസുദേവായ ഹരയേ പരമാത്മനെ പ്രണത ക്ലേശനാശായ ഗോവിന്ദായ നമോ നമ:

By Reshma Krishnan

Kerala Art:

Theyyam

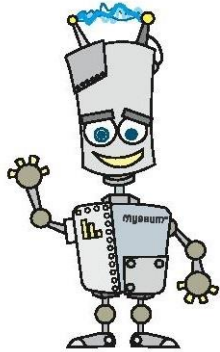
When I think about Kerala, most of my memories are in & around Kannur. Kannur is a district which belongs to North Kerala, also called as Malabar. Kannur is known as the *land of Looms and Lore* because of the good handloom industry & the different traditional folk art forms which are performed in the temples. You can see a long

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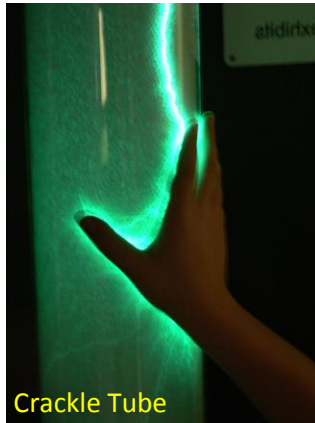
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coastal line and beaches like Payyambalam and Muzhappilangad are famous & attract tourists.



The most unique thing I have seen in Kannur is a special art form called Theyyams. They are ritual dances performed in smaller temples called 'Kaavu'. People consider Theyyam as their god or goddess and seek blessings during the performance. I like Theyyam because of its blend of art forms. The performers wear rich costumes, have beautiful drawing on the face & body, and sing accompanied by the chenda (drums). The ambience in the Kaavu when the Theyyam performances happen takes you to a different world. There are many varieties of Theyyams. Some are very adventurous, some scary, some funny and few are gentle ones. Few of the Theyyam names I remember are Gulikan, Sree Muthappan, Angakkaaran, Bhagavathi, Kuttichaathan etc. If you visit Kannur try to visit a temple where Theyyam festival is happening.

By Sona Prabhakaran

Kalaripayattu

Still feels nostalgic when I think about my father's home town Puthoor, Kannur. Our tharavadu is surrounded by paddy and rice fields, full of greenery & energy around. Wonderful refreshing scenes – cows, goats, green fields, happy people, pure water, mangoes & jackfruits smiling on us etc. We used to go & take bath in a small river nearby. What a whimsical & refreshing experience it was. They were magical times. I wish I can recreate the magic for my US-born son so that he can relish what will remain an indelible impression in my mind and some of the best times of my life.

One of our Family traditions is *Kalaripayattu*. My

grandfather, my dad & uncles all are trained in Kalari from their childhood. I remember my father saying the legendary C.V. Narayanan Gurukkal of the world famous CVN Kalari was my father's grandfather's younger brother. Thus the Legacy continues. One of my uncles who is in his mid-60s still starts his day by early morning Kalari practice. He says that practicing Kalari strengthens muscles, improves self-confidence & mental agility, and improves the sportiveness.

Kalari is a special kind of gymnasium, where the martial art Kalari Payattu is practiced. Kalaripayattu means practicing the arts of the battlefield. This art is said to have had its origin with Rishi Agastya and Parashurama. Kalari is the special training in 'Marma', the art of knowing and activating all the 107 energy points in the human body. These vital points (called marmas) are used for correcting the body's energy flows and replenishing its resources. Kalari therefore makes the practitioner not just a warrior but a self-healer, who can also help others with his healing powers - a *sound Mind in a sound Body*.

Legends say that around 525 AD an Indian Buddhist monk named Bodhidharma traveled to China and preached at the Shaolin temple. On finding the monks weak & listless, Bodhidharma taught them the 18 hands of Buddha - a special set of exercises & from this evolved the Chinese art of *Shaolin Boxing*. These eighteen hands of Buddha were said to be derived from the eighteen adavukal i.e. *techniques*, which form the base of the Vadakkan or Northern style of Kalaripayattu.

In the Northern style the emphasis is laid on progressing from body exercises to combat with weapons and last of all to unarmed combat. In the Southern style, the emphasis is primarily on footwork, movement and the ability to strike at vital points considered lethally vulnerable.

The CVN is very specific in preserving the traditional Kalari in all its beauty. If you get a chance please stop by to experience it.

By Remya Prashob



Art by Ohmkaram Kids



'Rainbow', Shalika Menon,
Seventh Grade



'Birds', Madhulika Jinu, Preschool



'In the Wild',
Ankita Nair, Third Grade



'Indian Elephant',
Bushan Sreekrishnavilas, Fifth Grade



'Forest', Arav Kozhikal, First Grade

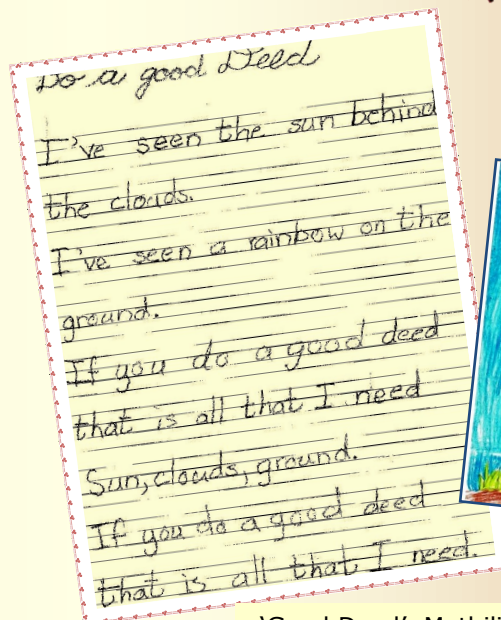


'Scary',
Aaromal Kozhikal, Third Grade

'Thanksgiving Turkey',
Devang Krishnan, First Grade

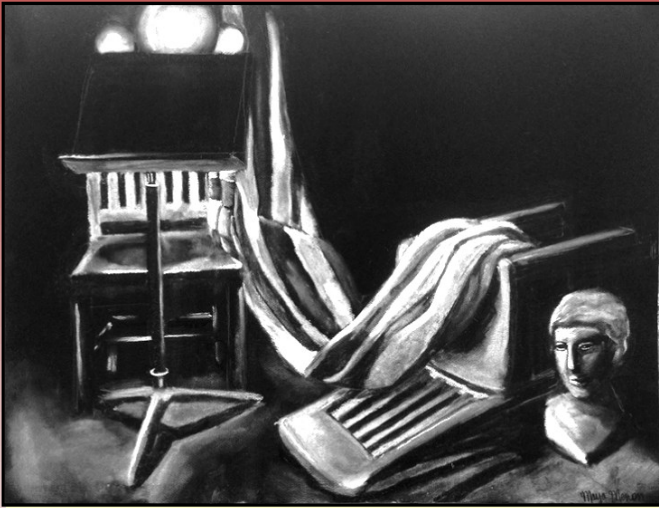


'Sad',
Devika Rajan, Preschool



'Good Deed', Mythili Alankar, Third Grade

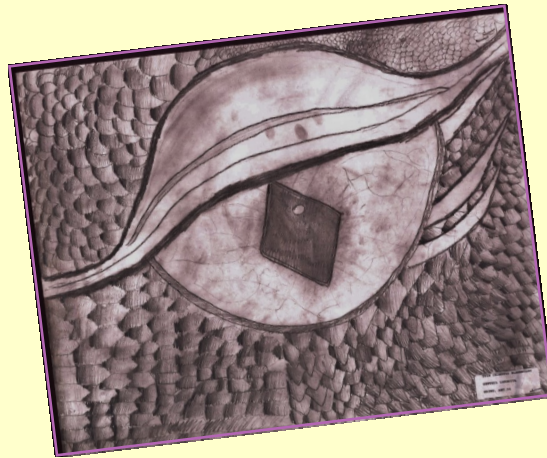




'Theatre Scene',
Maya Menon, Senior



'Thoughts',
Shruthi Punnachalil, Eight Grade



'Dragon Eye',
Lakshita Senthil, Fourth Grade

A Self-Portrait

By Ashwin Prayaga, Eight Grade

This painting was one I created when I was in 5th grade three years ago, at Twin Chimneys Elementary School in O' Fallon. This was a special painting that was made a lot differently than usual. There are a number of steps a person would have to take to make it. First, you would have to take a photo of yourself and print it. You would then place tracing paper over the printed photo and trace important features like hair, face, eyes, etc. Then you project the image on to a wall with a projector. Draw the outlines of the enlarged image on a larger piece of paper, suitable for painting, placed on the wall. You would then paint the paper according to how you would like your portrait to be. When painting, make sure you don't take too much paint on the paint brush, otherwise the paint could spread where you want a different color. If you don't like what you made, you could always try something else.





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Menu of Flavors by Rugma Sujith

Apple Oats Smoothie

What you need:

- ✓ Apple - 1
- ✓ Rolled oats - 2 tbsp
- ✓ Milk - 1.5 cup
- ✓ Almonds - 4 nos
- ✓ Dates - 3 nos
- ✓ Honey/sugar - to taste

Preparation:

- Soak the almonds and dates in hot water for 15 mins.
- Peel and chop the apple.
- Grind the rolled oats to form a fine powder.
- Add the whole ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth.
- Serve it with some finely chopped almonds and dates.



Mushroom Grilled Cheese Sandwich

What you Need:

- ✓ Bread - 6 slices
- ✓ Sliced button mushroom - 1.5 cups
- ✓ Sliced onion - 1 cup
- ✓ Chopped garlic - 1 tsp
- ✓ Pepper powder - 1/2 tsp
- ✓ Soy sauce - 2 tsp
- ✓ Chilli sauce - 1 tsp
- ✓ Tomato sauce - 1 tsp
- ✓ Cheese - 3 slices
- ✓ Butter - 1.5 tbsp
- ✓ Salt - as needed
- ✓ Oil - as needed

Preparation:

- Heat oil in a pan and add chopped garlic along with sliced onions. Saute until the onions turn translucent.
- Add in sliced mushrooms and sauté until it becomes golden brown and dry.
- Next, add enough salt, pepper, soy sauce, chili sauce, tomato sauce & mix well.
- Take a bread slice, spread some butter and top it with 2 tbsp of prepared mushroom mixture. Place a slice of cheese on top of it and cover with another bread slice.
- Toast both sides till the cheese melts. Cut into triangles and serve hot with any sauce of your choice.

The Philosophy and Psychology of Idol Worship

By Dr. Sudhirdas Kumar Prayaga

Generally there is a misconception that Hindus have lot of Gods and that idols are our Gods. In reality both are incorrect and myths. This notion is especially amplified by western missionaries claiming polytheism and idol worship as pagan ritual, either due to lack of understanding or deliberate attempt to discredit Hinduism. Very many times religious conversions are made on these kinds of misleading and incorrect arguments. Unfortunately, even many Hindus are not educated enough on these subjects, and are unaware of the purpose and intent of idol worship. Here I try to give a brief overview of the concept of 'idol worship' and the scientific basis for it.



Before that let me clarify the meaning of words 'worship' and 'idol' used in context of Hinduism. These labels coined by westerners from their religious perspective, are incorrect and lead to misunderstanding of Hinduism. In Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) worship of God is paramount, where blind faith and belief are warranted without questions decreeing that the information provided in their holy book is the word of God. In contrast, according to ancient Hindu way, we call it variously as *japa*, *upasana*, *yagna*, *pooja*, etc. depending on type of practice, and are done for self-improvement and self-knowledge. Practitioners should question information provided in religious text until they are convinced of the facts. In Sanskrit what we call '*vigraha*' stands for something that helps to understand, and has a clearly different connotation than commonly used for idol.

The Philosophy of Idol Worship

According to Vedanta (Hindu philosophy) the whole universe is or encompassed by a single supreme spirit or being, the Brahman or Purusha. God is omnipresent and everything in the universe (Isavasya Upanishad-1), there is nothing else in the universe other than God (Gita 7.7). God is within you and without you (Gita 13.16, Isavasya Upanishad 5). Thus, unlike the God of the Abrahamic religions, Hindus believe that God is not separate from oneself or the universe (the subject and object are the same). So, to know and understand God is to know oneself at first. Not our physical body but the eternal spirit in all of us (atman). Unlike the body, the atman is eternal and indestructible (Gita 2:30).

In contrast to Abrahamic religions, God realization is not a one size fits all, according to *Vedanta*. For example, some people have talents in sports, while others in music, and so on. Similarly, dedication to God realization also varies from person to person. Our ancient Rishis have recognized this universal fact and developed many scientific and well-founded practical ways for realization of God according to one's abilities and interest. These include *Samkhya yoga*, *Raja yoga*, *Karma yoga* and *Bhakti yoga*, which are described in *Bhagavat Gita* and other texts.

Just like everything else in life, Hindus believe, God realization also requires constant practice and dedication (*Gita* 6.35), but is possible. For example, if it takes ten hits with a hammer to break a stone did the first nine hits go waste? Those are the ones which led you to the final goal of breaking the stone. A dedicated practitioner should strive to convert his knowledge or *jnana* into a practical and personal experience or *vigjnana*. This is like the butter coming out with repeated churning of milk. Or the knowledge that fire is hot is *jnana*, and you feel the heat when you place your hand in fire is *vigjnana*. Unlike most other religions, in Hinduism faith and belief are personal and to be experienced by dedicated devotees. *Bhakti yoga* offers a simple and practical way for all to follow for God realization, converting *jnana* into *vigjnana*. This can be divided into *Sagunopasana* and *Nirgunopasana*.

Sagunopasana is a scientific, but practical and simple approach to focus your mind (*cit*) during the practice on an image or 'idol'. The idol itself is not the God but an imagery. It can be considered as a personal God. In Hinduism we do not worship God, but do *upasana*, which is mostly meant for self-development. *Upasana* includes many techniques or rituals or practices aimed at focusing our mind for

self-realization. As mentioned before, the purpose is to know yourself at first. These techniques help take your mind off mundane matters on to the absolute. Once the practitioner has achieved his goal he can discard the imagery and move on to *Nirgunopsana*, where no images are used. This is similar to a pole vault jumper who uses a long stick to jump, but discard the stick after crossing the bar. *Nirgunopasana* is difficult for practitioners who have not attained detachment about ones' body and the mundane (*Gita* 12:5).

The Psychology of Idol Worship

All religions have rituals and practices for God realization. Such practices, like fasting for example, helps to control the physical desire and interests. They alone are not effective at controlling our wandering senses and mind (*Gita* 2:59), but remain a ritual for outward appearances without affecting the *atman*. Controlling the mind and senses are of paramount important. Our ancient Rishis have recognized this fact and developed many techniques, including idol worship as means to focus our mind. During *sagunopasana* the idol helps one to focus all five senses, mind and intellect on the absolute.

Human being is endowed with five sense organs (*jnanaindriyas*), to perceive the universe around him and to interact with it. But these sense organs often work independently until we put our mind (*cit*) to it to focus. Similarly, our mind also wanders until we put our intellect (*buddhi*) to focus. Hindus believe that, with proper practice one can bring all *jnanaindriyas*, *cit* and *buddhi* to focus. *Katho Upanishad* gives a good analogy, it compares the body to a chariot (*ratham*), *atman* as the owner of the chariot, *bhuddi* as the charioteer (or the driver), five horses which pulls the chariot as the 5 sense organs or *jnanaindriyas*, and the mind or *cit* as the strings which control the horses (*Katho Upanishad* 3 - 4, 5). An intelligent person controls the senses with mind & mind with intellect. If not, the body will follow the senses for physical & material wealth like the untamed horses.

During idol worship or *vighraha upasana*, the idol and the decorations like flowers helps our visual sense. *Bhajans*, *japa* or ringing of bells during puja helps our hearing sense. Burning incense helps our smell sense. *Prasadam* or *nivedyam* helps with the taste sense. And finally the physical posture and beads used during *japa* helps with touch sense. All these work together to bring you mind into a single focus. Our ancient *Rishis* have clearly understood the psychology of the mind. They have devised many techniques and rituals to achieve this. For example, *Bhajans* (singing songs), is the most out word and simplest form. Then comes *japa*, (chanting a mantra like *Ohm Namō Narayana*, loud, quiet or in the mind) or other levels like yoga and meditation.

In his book '*59 Seconds*' Richard Wiseman reports on a study concluding that in a relationship if images or materials connecting with your loved ones are around you the relationship will last long and strong. For example, we place pictures of our loved ones in our office but the picture itself is not our loved ones. Similarly, if you like to have relationship with God you need to have images or materials that identify Gods presence. An Idol is a good example. Of course we do not know how God looks like, and definitely God does not look like what is depicted in an idol.

Sri Sankaracharya once said to have prayed to God to forgive him for 3 mistakes. 1) that he prayed to God with idols, who cannot be described by images; 2) praised God with words, who cannot be explained or described in words; and 3) searched for God by going to sacred places on pilgrimage, while God is omnipresent. Similarly, in *Upanishads* it says that whatever you are worshiping as *Brahman* is not really *Brahman*, they should be discarded once it is understood.

The Physics & Mathematics Of Idol Worship

From the very earliest dawn of religious consciousness in human beings, people have attempted to approach and know the divine by the using various physical devices. Such vehicles of worship included images, sacred geometry, celestial objects, etc. The use of images as a way to know God has been the norm, than exception, in the history of the world's many religions. Use of mathematics, trigonometry and astrology in this context will be discussed in future article.

My Spiritual Inspiration

By Vinay Menon

As a child my understanding of God was very simple and pure like any other child. I used to anxiously wait for the Ayyappa Mandala season to start in November. Saturday evenings used to be my favorite for a reason. I and my friends used to wait for the announcement “*Elavaroom prasadam ne vende veroo*”. Unlike here *prasadam* in my childhood was *Aravana payasam* in a *leaf* bowl. Standing in line for seconds was a norm.

On the Mandala Pooja day we had the grand *Thalapoli* procession with *Panchavadyam*. Ayyappan and Vavar was aptly represented by two individuals and they were the second reason I used to await the Mandala season. Their presence was truly an adrenaline pumping one! My dad was a key person in the Ayyappa samajam that conducted these



programs and is the reason I am writing this article as a tribute to him.

He had a selfless dedication to this *samajam*. Being the only breadwinner for our house I never understood how he had the energy after a

long day at work to go out for collecting funds for the samajam and the ultimate goal of building a Kerala style *Ayyappan Shetram*.

What was the inspiration? This routine continued until he retired in 1990. His retirement was sort of like a perfectly timed event. After that it became a full time job of being at the temple site. This new level of involvement had a big influence on him so much so that it made him quit smoking and eating non-vegetarian food. He had tried quitting smoking before but then he could not do it for long.

What gave him the strength to do this? The temple *shilpis* used to come home to check on him if he missed a day. The selfless hard work paid off and the temple's main deity Lord



Ayyappa's *prana prathista* was completed in 1996. As the years went by more *vigrahams* made their presence felt in this small town (Vasai) temple situated in the northern outskirts of Bombay. The temple gave you the feeling of being in Kerala without actually being there. I and my family were proud of *accha* for all that he had done for this temple!

Fast forward to year 2014 which is 18 years since the temple came into existence. My dad suffered a major heart attack at the age of 81. We left for India on hearing the news and was with him during his hospitalization and recovery at home.

The doctors said that it was truly a miracle that he survived such a massive heart attack and was recovering well. Now I see it as blessings from the Gods for his tireless selfless work at the temple. He passed away in July. Dad had never visited Sabarimala but now I feel *DharmaShasthav* himself let him climb the *holy 18 steps* one step each year and be with him after the 18th step.

Why am I thinking of all this now? This year I took the *vratham* for the Ayyappa Mandala season. The thought of going through the process of wearing the *Tulsi* mala and taking the *vratham* has been lingering in my head for some time now. The urge became stronger after my dad passed away. The need to connect with Him grew.

St. Louis thankfully has a strong devotional community. Attending the Saturday *bhajans* at the temple and the home *bhajans* during the Mandala season served as a platform for my spiritual journey during the *vratham*. Listening to our Guru Swamy and singing *bhajans* along with everyone after some time puts you in a trance. I have experienced that!

I personally did not know lot of *bhajans* or *shlokas* prior to this experience but then you just get it when you are in a group. The restrictions during the *vratham* has made me a better dad and husband. Preparing the *Irumudi* was a special feeling especially when you are told that the coconut that you fill in the ghee is to be considered as *Sashtav* himself. The ghee represents your *Athma* or soul and the process of filling the coconut with the ghee makes you one with Ayyappa.

So was this a way for God Realization for me? I think it was. Each individual has different experiences so I will not say that this is the way for everyone. The inspiration I got from my dad's work laid the groundwork and gave me strength to follow through my spiritual journey.



He has a way of showing you the way at the right time when you seek it.

Thanks Accha!



In America, St. Louis is lucky to have its own Ayyappa Sannidhanam next only to the temple in Maryland. This shows the vibrant support of the devotees in this Midwest town.

Ayyapaa Gayatri Mantra

Om Bootha Nathaya Vidhmahe

Bhava Nandhanaya Dheemahe

Tanno Sastha Prachodayaath

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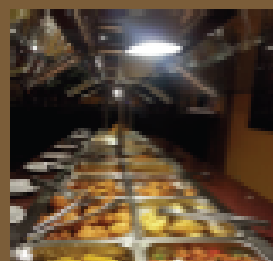
Chicken Curry,
chicken fry, egg
masala, dal, sambar,
rasam, pulao, rice,
yogurt, dessert,
pickle and chapatis



Veg gravy curries,
veg fry, dal, ulava
charu, sambar,
rasam, chapatis,
Pulao, rice, yogurt,
dessert and papad

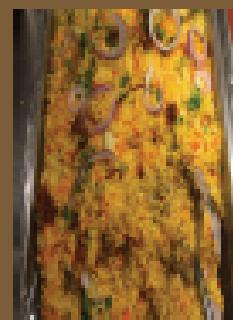
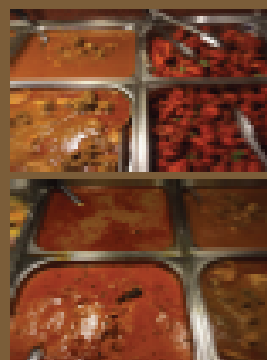
THURSDAY NIGHT VEGETARIAN DINNER BUFFET

All you can eat dinner buffet on
Thursdays 6 PM – 10 PM



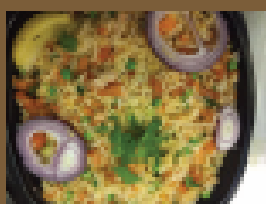
DAILY LUNCH BUFFET

Veg and non Veg appetizers, idly, chaat, noodles,
veg curries, chicken curries, fish fry, goat curry,
biryani's, desserts, veg and fruit salad bar



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ഓർമകൾ

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ഒത്തിരി,ഒത്തിരി ഓർമകൾ
ഞാൻ എൻ്റെ ജീവിത താളിൽ
കുറിച്ചു വെച്ചു ..കണ്ടു
രസിക്കുവാൻ ,
ഓർത്തു രസിക്കുവാൻ
ആടി രസിക്കുവാൻ
പാടി രസിക്കുവാൻ
ഐറെ ഉണ്ട്.... എൻ്റെ മനസ്സിൽ
ഒരിക്കലും മങ്ങാതെ മായാതെ
നിൽക്കുന്ന ഒരു ദീപ നാളം
കാറ്റിൻ തലോടലിൽ
താലോലമാടുന്ന
തുള്ളി കളിക്കുന്ന ദീപനാളം .
ഭൂമിക്കു പാദസരം
അണിയിക്കുവാൻ
അന്ത്യമില്ലാത്ത പ്രലോപനങ്ങൾ .
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സത്യം അല്ലാത്തതായ് ഒന്നുമില്ല
സ്വപ്ന കവാടത്തിൽ എന്നുമെന്നും
കാത്തു സൂക്ഷിക്കുന്ന മന്ത്ര ജാലം .
എന്തിനു ഇതെല്ലാം മനസ്സിൽ
ഒതുക്കി പുളളിമാൻ കണക്കെ
തുള്ളി ചാടി നടന്നിടണം
എവിടേയോ ,എന്തായോ
എന്തിനോ വേണ്ടി ഞാൻ
തുള്ളി കളിച്ചു നടന്നതാണീ സ്ഥലം .
അങ്ങ അക്കരെ ആ കാണും
മാമല കീഴിൽ ...ഇളകി പുളകി
കുണുങ്ങി ഒഴുകുന്ന ..ആ പുഴ
ഇന്നും ഉണ്ടവിടെ

ആ പുഴവക്കിൽ പൂത്തു നിൽക്കുന്ന
വാക മരം ഇന്നും ഉണ്ടവിടെ ...
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അങ്ങ് അകലെ ആ കാണും
ആ മലക്കീഴിൽ അർക്ക ബിംബം..
മെല്ലെ ഓടി മറയാൻ ശ്രമിക്കവേ ..
നിശ എന്ന കാമുകി വാരി
പുണരുന്നു
സ്വർണമുള്ള വസ്ത്രം ..
ഈ നദി തീരത്തിരുന്നു
ആനന്തിക്കുവാൻ ഇതിൽ ഏറെ
മറ്റൊന്ന് വേണോ ?
ഒന്നവിടം വരെ പോകണം ,
ഓർമ പുതൂക്കണം വീണ്ടും വീണ്ടും.
ആളിപടർന്നു വിലസുന്ന
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ആസ്വദിക്കണം
ആ മര കമ്പിൽ കയറി ചാടിയതും
പുഴയിൽ കുളിച്ചതും ഓർമയുണ്ട് ..
ജന്മ ജന്മാന്തരം പക്ഷികൾ ചേക്കേറി
മുട്ടയിട്ടു കുടുംബം നയിച്ചതും
ഇവിടെയാണ് .

Can you find all the Malayalam Vowels in this picture??



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BIG, FAT, IYER WEDDINGS!

By Vijayalakshmi Harish (Mythily)

It is not just the bright colours and fun and frolic that make Indian weddings a unique experience, but also the way in which each family member plays a role, making the marriage a true union between families, and not just between the groom and the bride. Another specialty of Indian weddings is the wide variation in customs and rituals. At no point did I wonder about the significance of the traditions and rituals of an Iyer wedding. It was only when I got married myself that I developed an interest and I was truly glad that I explored them. While the richness and complexity of an Iyer wedding cannot be condensed to a few pages, this is my humble attempt.

In the days leading up to the wedding, the aunts (father's sister and mother's brother's wife) of the bride and groom invite their niece/nephew who is going to get married for a feast called as **Pongi Podal**. Pongal- a dish of rice and dal, which is a symbol of prosperity is prepared and served along with the bride/groom's favourite dishes.

A day before the wedding, the groom and his family arrive at the wedding venue, and are welcomed by the bride's family in a ceremony known as **Mappilai Azhaippu**. In olden days, the groom was taken out on a ride in a decorated carriage through the bride's village, a ritual known as **Janavasam**. It was seen as an opportunity for the bride's townspeople to see the groom and raise any objections before the actual wedding –the Indian version of "speak now or forever hold your peace." Nowadays however, the Janavasam ceremony is usually not done. The rituals are formally begun with the **Vrutham** ceremony, which is a prayer to the ancestors and to God. A yellow thread/kaapu is tied around the wrists of the bride and grooms to protect them from the evil eye. Navadhanyams are arranged in pots and the ladies of the house sprinkle water on them as a sign of prosperity (**paaligai thelikkyl**). The ceremony ends with an aarathi performed by the aunts of the bride/groom. The **Nischayathartham**, or engagement ceremony follows the Vrutham. The lagna patrikai or marriage contract is prepared and read aloud by the priests of both families, and thamboolams (platters of betel nuts, dry fruits, nuts, coconuts, turmeric and 'kumkum') and gifts are exchanged.



The ceremonies on the day of the wedding begin with the **Kashi Yatra**. The groom dressed in a traditional panchakacham veshti and holding a copy of the Gita, a walking stick, an umbrella and a bamboo fan sets out on a mock pilgrimage to Kashi, expressing a desire to take sanyasa. The bride's father intervenes and explains to the groom that his journey from bhramacharya ashrama to sanyasa ashrama will not be successful unless he first becomes a grihasta (as a bhramachari cannot perform any sacrifices). The bride's father offers his daughter's hand in marriage saying that she will be an ideal partner in his spiritual journey. The groom accepts and returns to the wedding hall.

The groom's acceptance of the proposal is followed by the **Maalai Maatral** (exchange of garlands) and **Oonjal** ceremonies. The maternal uncles (mamas) of the bride and groom lift them on their shoulders and the bride and groom exchange garlands. This ritual is a lot of fun as the bride /groom are lifted really high in an attempt to make it difficult for them to be garlanded, making it a sort of friendly competition. The groom then holds the bride's hand and leads her to a decorated swing (oonjal). The women of the family sing songs (about the marriages of Vishnu and Lakshmi/Rama and Sita) and offer them a mixture of bananas and milk (paalum pazhamum). Balls of rice in red or yellow colour are waved in a circular motion around the bride and groom, and thrown in different directions to ward off the evil eye. Following this the mothers of the bride and groom and their aunts walk around the swing carrying a lamp lit on cooked rice, fed by ghee and with five wicks kept on a brass plate, a pot of water, and a lit lamp kept inside a vessel. After the oonjal the bride and groom are taken to the wedding mandapam where the bride's father performs **Vara poojai** by washing the groom's feet. The groom then starts the rituals with the permission of the priests. He first performs pooja to Lord Ganesha to ensure that there are no obstacles in the vivaha.

This is followed by the **Kannika dhaanam** ceremony. Hindus consider gifting of their daughter to a suitable groom as a very holy deed, superior to many other holy deeds. The bride sits on the lap of her father. Her hands are lifted upward and placed on the upward turned hands of the groom. Auspicious

MALAYALAM TONGUE TWISTERS

Can you wrap your tongue around these?

1. ഉരുളീലൊരുരുള (URULEELORURULAA)
2. അന അലറലോടലറി (AANA ALARALODALAREE)
3. തെങ്ങടരും മുരടടരൂല (THENGADARUM MURADADARULA)
4. പെരുവീരലൊരേരടലിടറി (PERUVIRALORERADALIDAREE)
5. റഡ് ബൾബ് ബ്ലൂ ബൾബ് (RED BULB BLUE BULB)
6. വരൾച്ച വളരെ വിരളമാണ് (VARALCHA VALAREY VIRALAMAANU)
7. പേരു മണി പണി മണ്ണു പണി (PERU MANI PANI MANNU PANI)



Think you know? Kerala's State...

Bird??

Tree !!

Capital City?

Fruit?

Flower?

Animal?

Fish??

Answers on Page 60



items like a coconut, betel leaves, and nuts are placed on the hands of the bride. While her palms are being transferred, the bride's mother pours water over her daughter's hand, (**Dharai Varthu Kodukkal**). On the bride's head, a ring made of darbha or Kusa grass is placed and over it is placed a yoke. The gold Mangal Sutra or Thali is placed on the aperture of the yoke, and water is poured through the aperture. The yoke signifies that just as a bullock cart cannot run with just one bull; the bride and groom have to traverse the ups and downs in life together. A new nine yard sari called the koora podavai is gifted to the bride by the groom's family. This sari is draped around the bride by the sister of the bridegroom, signifying her welcome to the bride. The **Mangalyadharanam** or tying of the mangal sutra takes place precisely at the pre-determined auspicious hour (muhurtham). The bride is seated looking eastward on the lap of her father while the bridegroom faces westward. The bridegroom puts the gold Mangal Sutra on a turmeric thread around the neck of the bride. The Nadaswaram is played loud and fast (Getti Melam) so as to muffle any inauspicious sounds. The mangal sutra is fastened using three knots (symbolizing Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) of which the first is tied by the bridegroom and the other two by the groom's sister. The groom ties a belt of reed grass around the bride's waist. The bridegroom assures the bride's father saying three times that he shall remain forever her companion in joy and sorrow, in this life and life after. The groom's sister places toe rings on the bride's feet.



This however does not complete the wedding. The wedding is complete only after the **Saptapadi** ceremony. This ritual consists of the groom taking the right foot of the bride in his left hand and making her take seven steps either in the direction of east or north. As he does this, the groom recites prayers to Mahavishnu, asking him to bless his wife with food, strength, piety, progeny, wealth, comfort and health. Once the Saptapadi is completed the bride and groom are shown the Dhruva nakshatra (a symbol of an ideal man who attained immortality through devotion and perseverance) and the Arundhati nakshatra (a symbol of the perfect wife), to encourage them to emulate these qualities in their married life. Now, the groom is officially a grihasta and can perform sacrifices. The bride and groom sit in front of the sacrificial fire (agni) and perform some homams (offerings to the sacrificial fire). The **Pradhana homam** is a crucial one. Another important one is the **Laaja Homam**, which is the bride's offering to the fire. The bride's brother hands the bride some puffed rice (pori) which she then hands over to the groom. The groom adds a drop of ghee and offers it to the fire on her behalf. This is the bride's prayer for her husband's long life and growth of her family. The participation of the bride's brother is symbolic of the fact that the families will continue to have ties even after the marriage. This is done thrice. The couple also circles the fire each time. Holding the bride's left toe the bridegroom helps her to tread on a grindstone kept on the right side of a fire. As he does this the groom recites a mantra asking the bride to be of strong mind so that she can be a support to him as firm as the rock on which she is stepping.



The marriage is now complete and couple then receives gifts from the elders in the family, blessed by the priests. The rituals end with an arathi performed by the aunts. The wedding is then followed by some fun and games called as **Nalangu**. The next most important ritual is the **Gruhapravesam**. This is the welcoming of the bride into her new home. The groom holds the bride's hand and takes her into his house. The bride and groom are then made to sit together and given a mixture of bananas and milk by the ladies of the house. This ritual is then repeated in the wife's house.

In the days following the wedding, a **Sumangali Prarthana** is held in the groom's house. This is a prayer to those ladies of the family who have died as sumangalis. The blessings of these sumangalis are sought by inviting 5-8 Sumangalis (who represent the dead Sumangalis) for a special pooja and a traditional feast. The rituals of the pooja differ from family to family. All Sumangalis come to the feast in a traditional attire of a nine-yard sari. It is a custom in certain families to hold it after the marriage so that daughter-in-law participates as a Sumangali in this Pooja. Another ritual that is completed in the days following the wedding is **Sambandhi chappadu** –a feast thrown by the groom's family to the bride's family in return for their hospitality during the wedding.

So, this is what an Iyer wedding is like. It has taken me so many words to describe, but this is by no means a complete description. There is much that I have left unexplained. To truly understand an Indian wedding, it is necessary to be part of one. So if you get a chance to be part of an Iyer wedding, do attend the same, as it will be a truly enjoyable experience!

The Trade You Are Not Making

By Sunil Krishnan

Most people I talked to are still wary of the stock market. They point to the meltdown in 2008 to reaffirm their belief. Even though the Dow Jones Index appreciated by 10,000 points from mid-2009 to 2015, the fear of another selloff keeps many people from investing. The skepticism is worse amongst Gen Y (Millennials), since they inherited one of the worst economies of our times. Only 18% think investing is the best way to save for the future.

Although the fear and distrust is understandable, investing is still the best way to generate long term wealth. Since 1947, the S&P 500's returns are up in 72% of the calendar years. In other words, you are most likely to see a positive return on Dec 31st, than losses. The key to success is to define your financial goals and risk tolerance – and have a good understanding on the functions of the market and economy.

This article is not to educate you about the stock market. There are many good books and articles out there that explain these functions very well. Rather, this article is about trading options, to compliment your existing stock trading strategy, if you trade outside of your 401 K.

So what are options?

An option is a contract that gives the buyer the right, but not the obligation, to buy or sell an underlying asset at a specific price, on or before a certain date. You can trade options just like a stock or bond. Typically, an option contract indicates 100 shares of the underlying security.

Think about it this way. You found a house in an affluent neighborhood and negotiated the price for \$200,000. You agree on a contract and pay an advance of \$5,000 with a commitment to purchase by March 20th. If the price of the house goes up to \$250,000 before March, you still pay the agreed upon price. If the price goes to \$150,000, you can still purchase it for \$200,000, or forfeit the contract. In this scenario, the premium paid is lost.

In option lingo, the house is the underlying security. The agreed upon price of \$200,000, is the strike price. The advance you paid is the premium and the date (March 20th), is the expiration date.

Below is the option chain (source: Google Finance) for Apple (NASDAQ: AAPL) with January 22nd expiration date. The Bid and Ask price changes based on the changes to the stock price and volatility. AAPL was at \$115.62, down \$2.61 as of today (Dec 9th 2015).

View options by expiration Jan 22, 2016 ▾													
Calls							Puts						
Price	Change	Bid	Ask	Volume	Open Int	Strike	Price	Change	Bid	Ask	Volume	Open Int	
7.75	-1.67	7.65	8.00	34	104	110.00	2.18	+0.78	2.12	2.20	140	255	
7.20	-0.43	6.85	7.25	2	0	111.00	2.48	+0.83	2.39	2.48	27	33	
6.40	-1.10	6.15	6.55	4	12	112.00	2.87	+0.94	2.70	2.78	19	218	
6.55	-0.90	5.50	5.90	16	12	113.00	3.10	+0.83	3.00	3.15	115	317	
5.02	-2.15	4.90	5.25	10	3	114.00	3.60	+1.09	3.40	3.50	15	483	
4.55	-1.45	4.45	4.70	352	2285	115.00	4.00	+1.25	3.80	3.95	258	760	
4.01	-1.24	4.00	4.15	562	398	116.00	4.30	+1.05	4.25	4.40	267	854	
3.60	-0.88	3.50	3.60	197	1248	117.00	4.90	+1.25	4.75	5.05	84	1177	
2.99	-1.26	3.05	3.15	171	1414	118.00	5.40	+1.63	5.30	5.60	58	112	
2.73	-0.72	2.63	2.72	132	269	119.00	5.85	+1.55	5.85	6.20	49	75	
2.30	-0.86	2.25	2.35	339	411	120.00	6.65	+1.70	6.50	6.80	63	232	

As you can see from the chart, there are several option terms you should be familiar with before you start trading options. I recommend reading "Options as a strategic investment" by Lawrence McMillian. I also found a lot of information from Investopedia (www.investopedia.com) and OptionXpress (www.optionxpress.com).

There are several option strategies to choose from and each of those might make sense for different market conditions. Options are very risky, and as I indicated, you have to know (and understand) the risk, and your risk tolerance, before entering the trade.

The goal of this article is to show how you could utilize two of those strategies, if you plan to invest in the stock market.



Selling Puts or Put Writing

The buyer of a 'put' option has the right, but not the obligation, to sell the underlying security to the seller on or before the expiration date. So as a seller, you have the obligation to purchase the underlying shares at the strike price of the 'put' sold. This is a good way to buy shares of the stock that you intend to own.

If you are comfortable owning Apple shares at \$110/share, you can sell a put contract for \$2.18/share (last price shown in the chart). Your account will be credited \$218 (1 contract = 100 shares) minus the

commission. You keep the premium no matter what. If Apple goes below \$110.00 on or before January 22nd, the buyer has the right to sell you 100 shares at \$110.00/share. The effective cost of owning the shares will be \$107.82 (\$110 - \$2.18) minus the commission. If Apple stays above \$110 before January 22nd, the premium is yours to keep. This is a good strategy to generate income as well.

Covered calls

So, you have 100 shares of Apple stock in your account. You can use those shares to generate income, more or less like getting rent from the second house you own, by selling an 'out of the money call contract'. The buyer of a call option has the right, but not the obligation, to buy the underlying security from the seller on or before the expiration date.

So, if you sell Apple 120 call for \$2.30, the buyer of the call, expecting the stock to appreciate above \$120, has the right to purchase the 100 shares from you for \$120/share. If it does, you have the obligation to sell the 100 shares of Apple as per the contract. Your net sell price is \$122.30 (\$120 + \$2.30) minus the commission. If it doesn't, you keep the premium and can write another call option next month and thus generate income. This is the best strategy for a novice option trader.

Conclusion

In both strategies described above, I am assuming that you have available funds to purchase shares, as they are assigned. Your broker can also allow you to trade with 'margins calls', but that is a whole different strategy. Personally, I would not recommend this approach because of the risk involved.

You shouldn't make these trades on random market conditions, as you want to avoid owning shares that is falling steadily, or lose potential upward move of the stock you own. So keeping up to date with the news and market conditions is very important. Option selling is mostly done when implied volatility is high, which fetches you higher premium. Of the possible outcomes in both the strategies described above, odds are 2:3 in your favor.

Happy Trading!!

Sleeping through the Nightmare - A Photo Feature looking into Humanity

By Harish Natarajan

The rain poured gently in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Looking through the broken car windows, a tear rolled down from her eye, mingling with the raindrops on her raincoat. She remembered her father, humming along with the radio, her mother smiling and the van that had come crashing into them, her mother's screams and the windows tinkling around her.



Samantha woke up in shock, panting. Every night for fourteen years, she had woken up with this nightmare. Unfortunately for her, it was all too real. Her parents had died in that fateful accident. Years had passed. Thousands of dollars and hours spent on psychotherapy were ineffective.

Knowing she couldn't sleep anyway, she sat at the window looking at the rain pouring down on the city below. She went through her morning routine in the same way that she did every day. But today was the day that her life would change.

Walking to school, she saw a familiar scene, a car with a couple in the front seats, and a little girl in the back. Suddenly, a man rushed out in front of the car- the driver swerved- missing the man, but crashing into an SUV. There were screams and people running about. "Call 911" someone was saying.

She looked through the broken windows of the overturned car. She could see that all three were still alive. "Help us" the woman cried. But no one helped. She knew then, what she had to do. She stretched out her hand to the woman and tried to pull her out. While she cried for help someone saw her, and joined her. Soon, the family was safe- even before the medics got there.

As she saw the tears of gratitude in the eyes of that woman, she knew that her nightmare would trouble her no more.

This photo feature shows, humanity is about showing passion and empathy to each other at times of need in all walks of life. Humanity is not just a word for symbolizing human compassion and civilization but it goes beyond the horizons of human nature and his creations. It is all about using your heart along with your mind in all the endeavors of human kind. So let us savor this feeling and embrace it to build a better world filled with love and peace.

Think you know?? Kerala's State...answers (contd from page 56)

Indian Elephant

Karimeen

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
(TRIVANDRUM)

GREAT INDIAN
HORN BILL

Coconut tree

Jackfruit

Kani Konna

Scholarship Program 2015

Ohmkaram supports many voluntary and charitable activities. In addition to supporting its own members Ohmkaram strives to help the society's down trodden. Ohmkaram scholarship fund was established to help poor and deserving bright students with financial need in Kerala. There are two types of Scholarships ... donor sponsored Scholarship and Scholarship provided by the general fund. In donor sponsored scholarship fund is fully generated or provided by the donor. So the donor can select a candidate for Scholarship and decide on the amount of award. Fund for the other type of scholarship is collected by fund raising or by member contribution. Selection of the scholar and the amount of the award are decided by the Scholarship committee. You can be a part of this activity by volunteering to run the program or donating some money to the fund. For more information please check the scholarship tab in Ohmkaram.org.

Eligibility for awarding the scholarship:

1. Student should be domiciled in Kerala.
2. Student should attend a professional course of any year.
3. Student should be enrolled in any institute in Kerala.
4. Scholarship will be awarded to a student only once in life time.

Scholarship Award Ceremony



Scholar: **Vishna P**, Final Year B. Tech Student, College of Engineering, Thalassery, Kannoor Dist., Kerala

Presenter: **Dr. Akhil Chandran**, Head, Dept. of Computer Science

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Other Special Occasions!!

Malayalam School of Saint Louis

By Anjana Prayaga

Malayalam School of St Louis, an Ohmkaram affiliate, is a voluntary organization that teaches and promotes Malayalam language to interested students in the St. Louis area. This is the ninth year of service with forty two students enrolled this year. The school runs efficiently because of the help it gets from volunteers & students, who assist with various activities of the school. It also provides an opportunity for youngsters to volunteer. Malayalam school gets lots of help from parents and other volunteers. Special thanks to all parents for providing snacks & juices for students.

Malayalam school started an additional new level this year for children between the ages of 4 and 5 years old. We focus on teaching vowels, consonants, words, songs, stories etc. from texts that are read aloud to children. There are also activities that help young children make sense of new words. Parents are required to accompany the student.

Contact us if you are interested to either enroll in Malayalam School or in Volunteering. Registration for next year will start from July through August. We teach students to read and write Malayalam in our class. Classes are conducted at different levels – Entry, Intermediate & Advanced. Malayalam School meets on alternate Saturdays for two hours, from September through May during the school year at Daniel Boone Library in Ellisville or at the O'Fallon Library.

Malayalam School Annual Day 2015



Volunteer Teachers: Anjana Prayaga, Binu Chakkamparambil, Cincy Reji, Deepa George, Kavita Anoop, Sheena Konikkara and Sona Prabhakaran

Student Volunteers: Ashwin Prayaga and Rubina Thomas

Contact: Anjana Prayaga

Phone: (636) 281-9778

E-mail: malayalamschool@yahoo.com

Website: www.ohmkaram.org/MalayalamSchool.html



OHMKARAM

...a nonprofit voluntary organization of Malayali Hindus in the Greater St.Louis area.

Ohmkaram is created with a **vision** to encourage active participation in the **Hindu culture**, foster **cooperation** and **unity** among **Kerala Hindus** throughout St. Louis and adjoining cities. In the midst of a collage of cultures, it is easy to forget and even lose track of many subtleties of our tradition that give a meaning to our identity. The **mission** of this organization will be to **rejuvenate** and **reinforce** the Kerala Hindu **traditions**. Participation and **Involvement** of our **youth** will be facilitated enabling them to appreciate our **cultural roots**. This Organization will also serve as a platform for effective **networking** of Hindus from Kerala or anyone interested in Kerala Hindu culture. This association will try to provide **Hindu cultural resources** not available through other sources in the Greater St. Louis area.

2015 Office Bearers

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~ Rajagopalan Unni (Board Member of Ohmkaram)

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