

10 July, 2002



Sahitya Akademi

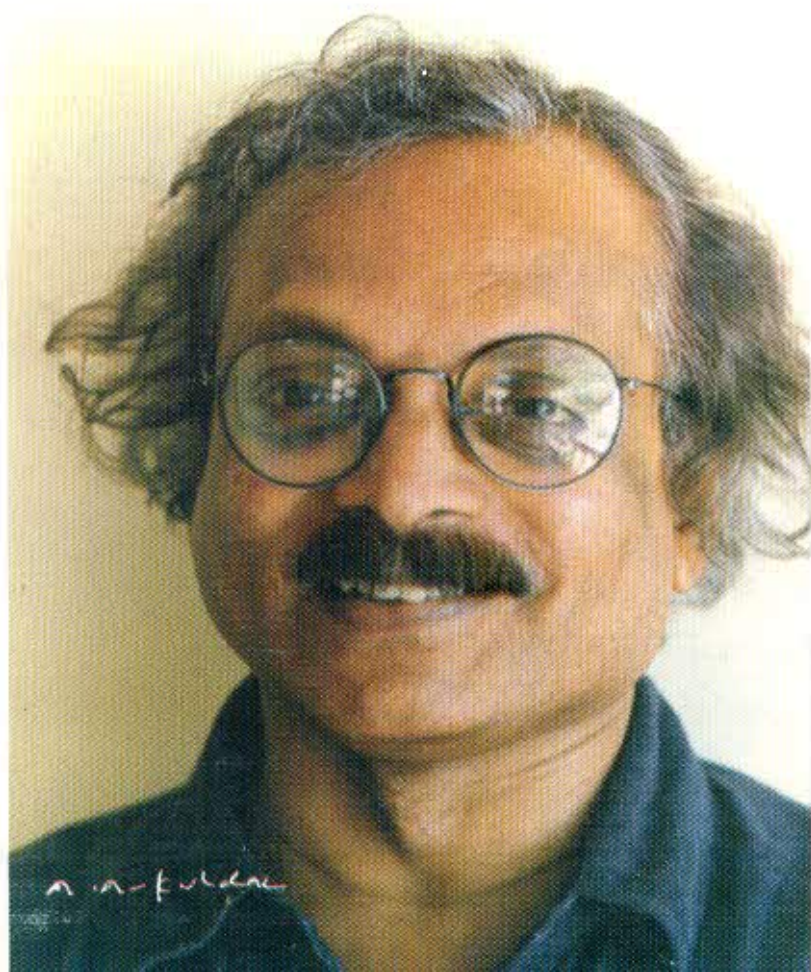


India International Centre

invite you to

meet the author

M. Mukundan



M. Mukundan

When Mukundan travels through the muddy banks of river Mayyazhi, or listens to the eternal flow of the Ganga while couped up in a stinking hotel room in the holy city of Hardwar, or wanders in the dusty bylanes of Delhi, he seems to be the chosen chronicler of the muted lives of the marginalized.

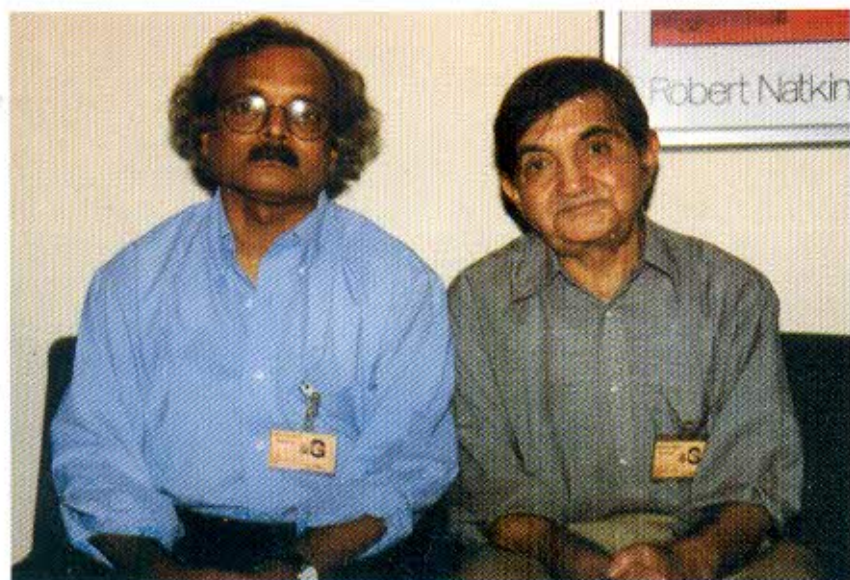
— S. Prasannarajan

Mukundan is one of the reputed Indian fiction writers today writing in Malayalam. Author of 27 books, his stories and novels have always been bestsellers in Malayalam.

Mukundan was born in 1942 in a middle class family in Mahe in Kerala, at that time under the French rule. His was a family known for its political and cultural background. He had his education at the College Labourdonnais at this native town. Mukundan had a difficult childhood that even disrupted his education many times. "Chronic illness that marred my childhood reduced my world to a little room smelling of rain and cowdung. It is in that confinement that I learnt the primary lessons of solitude and alienation which became the main themes of my writing. The same exile taught me the art of asking questions... I discovered a lot of new words in the silence of

my room and my heart," says Mukundan.

When he started writing his stories in the early 60s, Kerala's political and cultural life was going through a transition. The first ever elected Communist government under the leadership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, which held great promises, had collapsed. Unemployment mounted pushing thousands of young men into disillusionment. Cultural life stagnated as the Progressive Literary Movement that electrified the readers' sensibility in the preceding decades started decaying. It was in this socio-cultural scenario that Mukundan emerged on the literary landscape in Kerala publishing his early short stories in the prestigious *Mathrubhumi* weekly and other periodicals when he was 23. His stories were noted for their



With Nirmal Varma

unconventional themes and innovative form. Mukundan had to battle against the superficial progressive fiction on the one hand and the senile romantic fiction on the other in order to establish his writings mirroring the human condition in his fresh style that violated the sanctity of the accepted models.

In the face of growing unemployment and a blank future, a large number of the young men of his generation left Kerala migrating to India's large cities. Mukundan too left his home town in search of a job, which he found in Delhi, at the French Embassy where he is at present the Deputy Cultural Attache. Life in Delhi, he says, has widened the horizons of his experience and perceptions of life, particularly his contact with avant-garde cinema and painting which otherwise would have been impossible, given the tiny nature of his home town, Mahe. He developed new styles of writing from forms and tonalities culled from paintings and films which is evident in his path breaking novel *Delhi* (1969). The style of this novel is reminiscent of cubism in that situations and characters are viewed from different, conflicting angles. This novel made him popular among the discriminating readers.

However, it is with the publication of his novel *Meyyazhipuzhayude Theerangalil* (1974) 'On the Banks of the Mayyazhi', that Mukundan achieved mass popularity among the masses of Kerala. The novel deals with the pre-independent Mahe (Mayyazhi in Malayalam). Its first part portrays a vivid picture of the French elegance and exotic charms while in the second part it describes the realities — freedom struggle and its attendant human tragedies. The novel would have been passed as one of many novels written in Indian languages on the theme of our freedom struggle of the country, had he not raised it to a metaphysical level. He placed the



With his wife Sreeja

saga of Mahe in the centre of a popular legend and gave the story with its large number of characters a mythical halo. In his study of this novel entitled "Interrogating Colonialism: Novel as Imagined History", Dr. K.N. Panikkar, eminent historian says, "In Malayalam literature of the post-colonial period the interrogation of colonialism as an intellectual, cultural or political phenomenon has been very rarely attempted. An outstanding exception to this general trend are the two novels by M. Mukundan — *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi* and *God's Mischiefs*."

His Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel *Daivathinte Vikruthikal*, (1989) 'God's Mischief' considered as a sequel to *Meyyazhipuzhayude Theerangalil*, deals with the post-colonial Mahe, describing how the dreams of Independence slowly gave way to disillusionment and despair. The novel was made into a feature film that won the State Award for the best film.

Over the years Mukundan has been instrumental in helping Malayalee readers develop new sensibilities. He achieved this with persistent experimentation and innovation both in the realm of forms and contents of his fictional oeuvre. Though the modernity in Malayalam

literature to which his contribution was substantial is now a thing of the past, he continues to explore new vistas and has brought out recently two short fictional works of different genres. In *Adityan, Radha and the others*, he attempts to break the physical barriers of time and space. Intermingling space and time without borders create an eerie, poetic reading experience. "The Tragic Tale of a Young Dalit woman" shows how the consumer market appropriates to its advantage even the politics of gender and caste.

Mukundan's latest novel, *Kesavante Vilapangul* (1999) (Kesavan's Lamentation) is inspired by the life of E.M.S. Namboodiripad. While ironically deifying the legendary Marxist leader, he demystifies the Marxist Party. A strong critique of the present day socio-political life in Kerala, the book

is still in the eye of a storm, with nine reprints in little over two years.

Mukundan's short stories are a class apart. Stories like "Radha, only Radha", "Tonsured Life" and "Delhi-81" are masterpieces of Malayalam short story.

Mukundan has been conferred by over 15 awards and honours, including Sahitya Akademi Award, the First Crossword Award for Indian language fictions in English translation, Kerala State Award, best film scenario and the Chevalier of the Arts and Letters from the French Government.

Mukundan believes that though a writer should address social and political issues, he should always protect his creative freedom from encroachment whoever the encroachers are. His novels and short stories have been translated into most of the Indian languages and French.

A Select Bibliography

Novels

Akashattinte Chuvattil (*Beneath the Sky*). Kottayam: S P C S, 1969
Delhi. Trichur: Current Books, 1969
Avilayile Suryodayam (*Sunrise at Avila*). Trichur: Current Books, 1970
Haridwaril Manikal Muzhangunnu

(*Bells are tolling in Hardwar*). Kottayam: N B S, 1972
Ek Lokham Athiloru Manushyan. Calicut: Poorna Publications, 1972.
Mayyazhipuzhayude Theerangalil (*On the Banks of Meyyazhi*). Kottayam: S P C S, 1974



Receiving Sahitya Akademi Award from Prof. U.R. Anantha Murthy, then President of the Sahitya Akademi, 1993

Sita. Kottayam: S P C S, 1977
Ravum Pakalum; (Day and Night).
 Kottayam: Current Books, 1982
*Thiranjedutha Kathakal (Selected
 Stories)*. Kottayam: D C Books,
 1982
*Kili Vannu Vilichappol (When the
 Bird Came Calling)*. Kottayam: D
 C Books, 1984
*Deivathinte Vikruthikal (God's
 Mischiefs)*. Kottayam:
 D C Books, 1989
*Adityanum Radhayum Mattu
 Chilarum (Adityan, Radha and the
 others)*. Kottayam: D C Books,
 1993
*Oru Dalit Yuvathyude Kadana
 Katha (The Tragic Tale of a Young
 Dalit)*. Kottayam: D C Books,
 1996
*Kesavante Vilapangal (Kesavan's
 Lamentations)*. Kottayam: D C
 Books, 1999
Nrittam. Kottayam: D C Books,
 2000

Short Fiction

Charlie Master. Calicut: Poorna
 Publications, 1979.
Nagnanaya Thamuran. Calicut:
 Malayalam Publications, 1989.
Madamma. Calicut: Poorna
 Publications, 1989
*Ezhamathe Poovu (The Seventh
 Flower)*. Calicut: Poorna
 Publications, 1993

Collection of Short Stories

Veedu, (Home). Trichur: Current
 Books, 1965
Kathavaseshan. Kottayam: Current
 Books, 1967
*Thiranjedutha Kathakal (Selected
 Stories)*. Kottayam: D C Books,
 1982
Hridayavathiyaya Penkutti. Konni:
 Venus Books Depot, 1983
*Kallanam Polisum (The Thief and the
 Police)*. Kottayam: Current
 Books.
*Thattathippenninte Kalyanam (The
 Marriage of the Goldsmith's*

Daughter). Kottayam: Current
 Books, 1985
Thevidissikkilli (The Whoring Bird).
 Kottayam: Current Books, 1988
*Kannadiyude Kazhcha (The Eye of
 the Mirror)*. Kottayam: D C
 Books, 1997

Essay

*Enthanu Adunikatha? (What's
 Modernity?)* Calicut: Poorna
 Books, 1976

In English Translation

On the Banks of the Mayyazhi.
 Chennai: East West Books, 1999
God's Mischiefs. New Delhi:
 Penguin India (due October, 2002)

In French Translation

Sur les rives de la riviere Mahe. Paris:
 Actes Sud (due October, 2002)

Critical Works on the Author

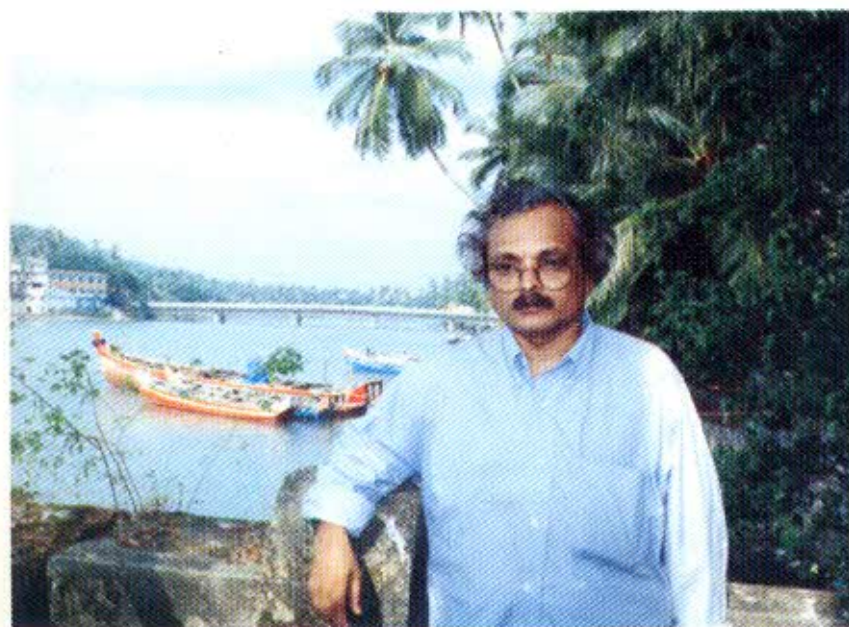
*Mukundante Kala — Asthithwathinte
 Arthaantharangal (The Art of
 Mukundan — The larger Meanings
 of Existence)*. by A.M.
 Unnikrishnan. Kottayam: D C
 Books, 1993
*Ee Em Essum Mukundanum
 Vilapangalum (E.M.S., Mukundan
 and Vilapangal)*, by Prathapan
 Thayat, Kala Veekshanam Books,
 2000



*Speaking on the occasion of the
 conferment of the Chevalier of the
 Arts and Letters, 1998*

Chronology

- | | | | |
|------|---|------|--|
| 1942 | Born in Mahe, former French enclave ✓ | | of short stories for <i>Hridayavathiyaya Oru Penkutti</i> |
| 1948 | Uprising against the colonial rule, soldiers enter Mahe ✓ | 1990 | Vishwa Deepam Award for <i>Deivathinte Vikrithikal</i> |
| 1950 | Setting in of chronic illness | 1992 | Kerala State Award for the best story for a feature film, for <i>Deivathinte Vikrithikal</i> |
| 1954 | Mahe is liberated ✓ | 1993 | Sahitya Akademi Award for <i>Deivathinte Vikrithikal</i> |
| 1958 | Works for the student wing of the Communist Party | 1995 | Kerala State Award for the Best Film for <i>Deivathinte Vikrithikal</i> |
| 1963 | Arrives in Delhi | 1995 | Received N.V Krishna Varrier Award for <i>Deivathinte Vikrithikal</i> |
| 1965 | His first story collections <i>Veedu</i> published | 1998 | Chevalier of the Arts and Letters conferred by French Government |
| 1967 | Joins French Embassy as a staffer | 1999 | Crossword Award for the Indian language fiction in English translation |
| 1969 | Publication of his first novel <i>Akashantinte Chuvattil</i> | 2000 | Bahrain Keralaeyeya Samajam Literary Award |
| 1970 | Marriage | 2001 | Malayattoor Award for the best novel for <i>Kesvante Vilapangal</i> |
| 1974 | Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for the best novel <i>Ee Lokham Athilovu Manushyam</i> | 2002 | Padmarajan Award for his best short story of the year |
| 1975 | S P C S Award for the best novel published in preceding three years for <i>Mayyazhipuzhayude Theerangalil</i> | | |
| 1985 | Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for best collection | | |



At the banks of River Mayyazhi