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Sahitya Akademi

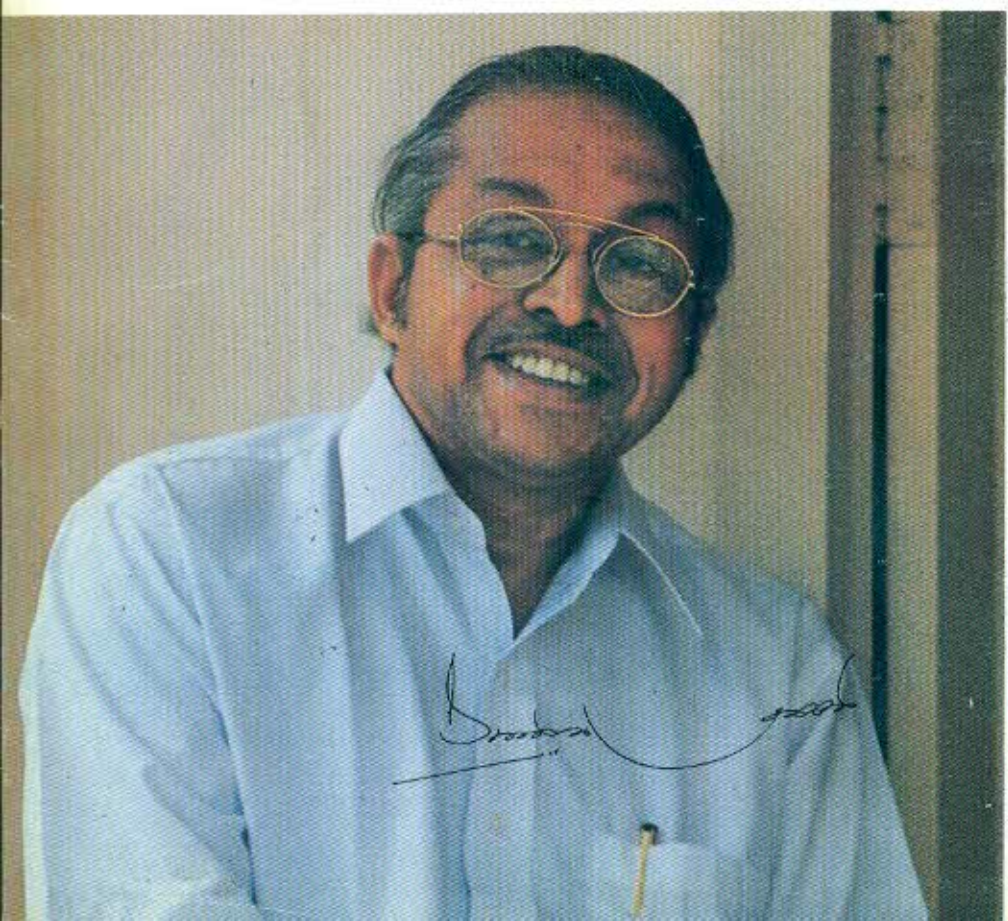


India International Centre

invite you to

meet the author

O.N.V. Kurup



Poetry is brought forth and bred by humanity as the pearl is by the ocean. The poet is the shell destined to break open its breast to give forth its pearl to others and disappear in some corner of the earth.

— O.N.V. Kurup

BORN in 1931 at Chavara, a coastal village in Kerala, O.N.V. Kurup spent his childhood in an environment where a peaceful agrarian culture was on constant confrontation with industrialisation. His first published poem was 'Munnottu' (Forward) which appeared in a local weekly in 1946. It was only an outburst of his exuberant patriotic sentiments, but it marked the beginning of a long poetic career. When he was only eight he lost his father who was also his first guru both in Malayalam and Sanskrit. Poetry, according to O.N.V. was 'a drop of light that came to him in that dark solitude of his childhood'. Later it became a source of solace and an unfathomable reality. His village also has witnessed the popular upsurge for independence and the local workers' struggle against oppression and exploitation. His early poems (1946-56) have been compiled in the book

Dahikkunna Panapatram (The Thirsty Chalice) which represent what could be called the 'pink period' in Malayalam poetry.

Resonances of a sense of tragedy and disillusionment prevailed in his poems written during the sixties—'The Promised Land', 'On Myself', 'Broken Bangles', 'Four O' Clock Flowers' etc. The poet assumes the role of the spokesman of the millions who are languishing in darkness and poses the question: "Where is the promised land? / Tell me, where's that golden land?". He wrote in a mood of soliloquy: "I planted the seedling of a doctrine / And pluck it out every day to count the roots ...". His concern for the future generation and awareness of the present we find well-epitomised in the concluding lines of the poem 'Rails': "I sit touching the crown of my grand child / And looking at the distant rails. / The sun gets hotter / Even the hugging breeze gets



Receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award from Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, 1976



Receiving the Soviet Land Nehru Award. Sri Rajkapoor is in the extreme left, 1981

warmer. / The trains are late . . ."

O.N.V.'s poetry may not be a thunder that can liberate the entire mankind, yet it receives reverberations of that thunder wherever it may come from. Like the squirrel in the Setubandhan episode of Ramayana, poetry does its modest service on this dark shore in unison with Man's noble efforts to reach the other shore—the shore of freedom, peace and prosperity.

O.N.V. has been admired as well as criticised for the romantic tint in his poetry. He is not bothered about 'isms' in literature, but he writes poetry as it comes to him. He retains traditional virtues in his poetry and at the same time tries to keep pace with the changing sensibility. Each of his poems creates its own music. He is an ardent lover of music though not wedded to its practice. Some of his poems are on Tyagaraja (Back to his Throne), Tansen (Tansen), Paul Robson (The Song of the Black Bird), Beethoven (Song of the Moonlight,

Sixth Symphony) and the Baul singers of Bengal (To the Baul Singer) to mention but a few.

O.N.V.'s poetry turns philosophical while dealing with the obscure puzzles of Life and Death as in the poems 'Mrgaya', 'Bhairavante Tudi' etc. 'Mrgaya', a khandakavya pictures the fulfilment and futility of sexual desire by reinterpreting the story of King Pandu and Madri. *Sarayu-vilekku* and *Ekalavyan* are also reworkings of some intensely dramatic moments in the Ramayana and Mahabharata respectively.

Bhoomikku Oru Charamageetham powerfully records the poet's reaction to Man's rape of Mother Nature. The collection with this title poem is now in its 16th edition. This requiem revives the faint memories of the poet's infancy when Mother's bounty had sweetened the infant's tongue as herb and honey. A new wonder dawns in his heart at the sight of the miniature sun in the dewdrop on a blade of grass. Poet reads the myriad manifestations of the Mother's

vital energy in nature's processes of creation and nurture, in the cooings of the temple-doves, ripples of brooks, in the eerie hootings of the owls and the cuckoo's soothing carol. But the poet realises that even the memories of these will fade out. The poet anxiously asks the Mother: "When you trudge along the solar highway with shaven head, cast out of your home, carrying the bundle of sin and shame of bearing children who ravished you, doesn't death creep in through your veins?". This requiem for the Mother is also intended for the son as the son won't survive the dying mother.

"Soorya Geetam" is an equally important poem which can justifiably be called O.N.V's 'Adityahridayam'. It is a prayer to the source of all energy to infuse the poet's soul with the power to fight the battle of life against tyranny, desecration and destruction.

In "Ujjayani", O.N.V. undertakes a pilgrimage through the immortal works of Kalidasa, recreating another Kalidasa in the process. It is a veritable deconstruction of the popular legends about the ancient poet. O.N.V. ventures to take up the poetic exploration of the truth about Kalidasa only to superimpose the artistic personality of the poet upon the broken image recovered from popular legends. At



Reciting his poem at Struga Poetry Festival, 1987

one level it is an exquisite love story that lends it a spiritual grandeur and at another, it is a poetic statement on the evils of power.

"Swayamvaram", another long poem is based on an episode in Mahabharata, the story of Madhavi, Yayati's daughter who was destined to live together with three kings and a hermit and deliver four children. It is not a story retold but a theme reinterpreted with utmost relevance to the present time. It is significant that this *kavya* is dedicated "to the Indian Woman always betrayed by words of praise and deeds of cruelty".

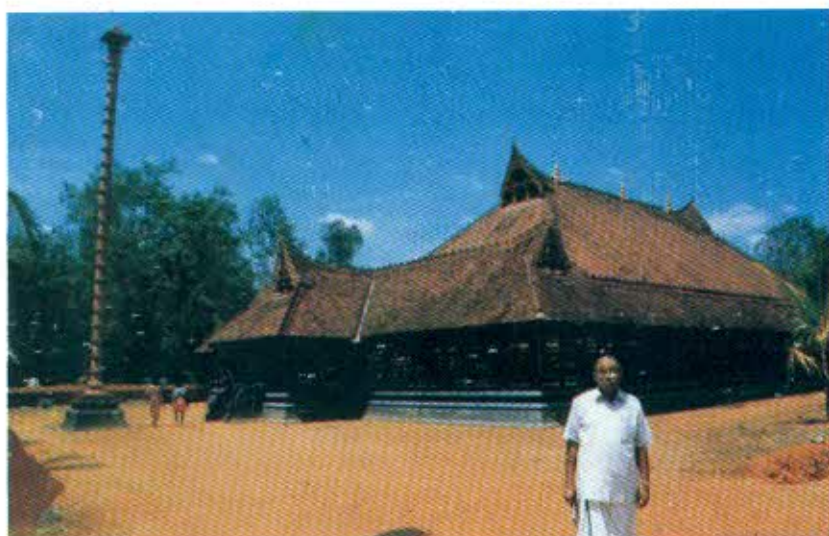
Having survived the onslaught of changing fashions and tastes, O.N.V's poetry is still committed to a fruitful fusion of tradition and modernity.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Poetry (Malayalam)

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Marubhumi
Nilakkannukal
Mayilppili
Oru Tulli Veliccam

Agni Salabhangal
Aksaram
Karutta Paksiyute Pattu
Uppu
Bhumikku Oru Caramagitam
Sarngakappaksikal
Mrgaya



On the threshold of the traditional theatre in Kerala Kalamandalam

Tonniaksarangal
Aparahnam
Ujjayini
Verute
Swayamvaram
Bhairavante Tuti
Oyenviyute Ganangal (Collection of 1500 songs)
Valappottukal (Children's poems)

Prose (Malayalam)

Kavitayile Samantara Rekhalakal
Kavitayile Pratisandhikal
Eluttacchan-Oru Pathanam
Patheyam
Kalpanikam
Puskin-Swatantrya bodhatinte Durantagatha

Poetry (In English Translation)
Ujjayini, Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi

Poetry (In Hindi Translation)

Ujjayini Sahitya Bhandar, Chah Chand, Allahabad
Swayamvaram, Vani Prakashan, New Delhi.
Darsan, Jnanpith Publications, New Delhi.
O.N.V. ke Kavitayem, Samya Publications, Ambikapur, M.P.

Poetry (In Sanskrit Translation)

Ujjayini, Ravi Varma Sanskrita Granthavali Govt. Sanskrit College, Trippunithura.

A CHRONOLOGY

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|------|--|------|---|
| 1931 | Birth | 1957 | Joined the Maharaja's College, Kochi as Lecturer |
| 1946 | Published his first poem 'Munnottu' | 1964 | Published <i>Agnisala-bhangal</i> |
| 1949 | Published his first poetry collection <i>Porutunna Sundryam</i> | 1971 | Received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for <i>Agnisala-bhangal</i> |
| 1955 | Took his M.A. in Malayalam Literature | 1975 | Received Sahitya Akademi Award for <i>Aksaram</i> |
| 1956 | Published <i>Dahikunna Panapatram</i> , selected poems (1946-56) | | |

- 1978 Visited USSR as member of an Indian Writer's Delegation to participate in the 150th Birth anniversary of Tolstoy
- 1980 Vayalar Award
- 1981 Soviet Land Nehru Award for *Uppu*; Visited USSR
- 1982-86 Member, Executive Board of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi
- 1984 *Bhumikku Oru Caramagitam* published
- 1987 Represented India in the Struga Poetry Festival, Yugoslavia
- 1989 Bharatiya Bhasa Parisad Bhilwara Award for *Mrgaya* (The Royal Hunt)
National Film Award for the best Lyricist (Film-*Vaisali*)
- 1990 Mahakavi Ullur Award for *Mrgaya*
Attended CISAC Asian Conference at Singapore
- 1991 Asan Prize for Poetry for *Sarngakappaksikal*
- 1993 Asan Memorial Award, Chennai, for *Aparahnam*
Published *Ujjayini*, a fiction poem; visited USA to participate in FOKANA Conference
- 1995 Published *Swayamvaram*; visited USA to inaugurate literary seminar in Kerala Centre, New York
Mahakavi Qurram Joshua Award for poetry, Hyderabad
Presented own poems on Beethoven and Mozart in the Dept. of German, Bonn University
- 1996 Chairman, Kerala Kalamandalam-the State Akademi of Classical Performing Arts
- 1998 Padmashri from the Government of India
Indian Delegate to the CISAC World Conference held in Berlin
- 1999 Fellow of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi



Receiving the Joshua Sahitya Puraskaram from Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, President of India, 1995. Dr. C. Narayana Reddy, Sri Krishna Kant (then Governor of A.P.), Sri N. Chandrababu Naidu (Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh) are with him.