

# REFLECTIONS

April 2021



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ePub: Latha V

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Banner & ResearchPad: Suresh K

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Tell us

What we're doing right and what we're doing wrong and what you think of this issue. We'd love to hear from you.

## From the Editorial Board

**A**s a part of the publishing industry, I'm sure we all have a penchant for the written word. There's just something about text on paper that strikes a chord, isn't there? From starting out as readers in our childhoods to our careers as publishing professionals, words have played a big part in our journey through life. But it's not just about words—it's more than that. Words are fundamental units for stories, and people gravitate toward stories. In the end, they are what make our legacy.

The twenty-first-century human being is dangerously becoming a creature of the everyday, so engrossed in the day-to-day that anything outside the quotidian little circle seems frivolous. We are content with surviving, and thriving seems a luxury. The pandemic has forced us all to quite literally focus on survival. While it has been a mentally grueling year for many, it has shown strength of character for many more. Now, the light is on the horizon. Let's come back stronger. Let us remember the little things that matter. Let us not forget that we all have a story to tell, however we choose to tell it.

This issue of *Reflections* features some storytellers at Newgen sharing their stories through words, art, and pictures.

How do you want to tell your story? Let us know!

~ Krishnaa Lakshmanan

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# Roma

## A true story

Ujwala Vaidyanathan

*Senior Manager, Books Copy Editing Team*

I watched with wide unblinking eyes the scene that was playing out on TV. It was a picturized version of a true story, a fierce war that was fought hard and won by India. Brave warriors, strong and dedicated soldiers, had faced and defeated the enemy. As the protagonist Abhi scoured the dark alleys, it was as if he could smell the enemy. The hackles on my neck stood up and I could feel goosebumps as I saw Abhi do that most difficult jump over a mass of rubble, and tiptoe stealthily round a corner, not knowing how many or which of those packages contained a bomb. He wasn't even conscious of the fact that there could be more of the vicious enemies lurking in the dark corners. I held my breath as I watched him take one silent step after another, so very quietly that you could hear the proverbial pin drop. I could literally feel my heart rate double and I was kind of hyperventilating. I shut my eyes tight to avoid seeing him blown to smithereens by an exploding bomb. There was absolute silence and I was dying to know what was happening to Abhi. Slowly I peeked through one half-opened eyelid and had missed the very part where he had identified the deadly RDX, and suddenly there was an eruption of cheers all over by his teammates who were following close behind.

I let out a sigh of relief and went into pensive thought. How very proud Abhi must have felt that day! His parents would have walked with their heads held high and their chests an

inch wider. Will I ever do something like that in my life? Since a very young age, I used to feel very proud to see my country mates doing such wonderful work like counter-infiltration and counter-terrorism operations; mine, narcotic and explosive detection; infantry patrol; search and rescue missions; assault, track and guard missions and umpteen other bold and daring tasks.

You can say I subconsciously began dreaming about joining the army from the day I could think for myself. My daily routine, without my mom knowing (she would have a heart attack if she knew that her only daughter wanted to join the army), was to run miles and miles around the house, dodging the tables and chairs, trying not to knock something over or seeking to find hidden things in the nooks and corners of the house. My brother mocked me saying, a girl? In the army? You must be crazy. It is a tough place out there. Sometimes this depressed me, but then I had also heard of the likes of Meena and Jaya doing exemplary duty at the line of control, sometimes involved in assault, tracking and explosive detection.

So, day and night I worked my leg muscles, tried to outrun my bro and beat him in our wrestling matches. I put in a lot of hard work, and one day my dream came true. Three army personnel from the Indian Army, Havildar Jagbirsingh with Aravindraaj and Prabakaran, were at our doorstep with a selection letter. They informed my mom and others at home that in theory I had passed all tests needed to be a part of the elite armed forces of the country. My daring, my loyalty, my ferociousness, my patriotism—all handed down to me as a legacy—had convinced them that I would be a proud soldier of the army. I cannot even begin to describe how I felt at that moment. I felt tears roll down my cheeks, my legs felt like jelly and I ran into my mom's arms, overwhelmed. I could not get a sound out. Is this how Harry must have felt when Hagrid told him he was a wizard and was accepted at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry? So, here I am, all ready to go serve my beloved country. I am headed to Meerut, where I will undergo intensive rigorous training. I know the road ahead is not an easy one; I will need to keep my grit and determination at full charge and then one day ... one day I will walk the hallowed portals of the Indian Army. Jai Hind!

— Roma (scroll down for my picture on the proud day)



*Roma (center), with two other army recruits, along with Indian Army personnel Havildar Jagbirsingh and trainers Aravindraaj and Prabakaran, on the day she was selected and picked up by the Indian Army.*

She is a *Combai* from Madurai. (*Combai* is a breed of Indian hound, particular to the southern part of India, known for its immense strength and guarding skills.) This part-fictional story was inspired by a news item I read in *The Hindu* on November 7, 2020. The names of the army personnel and trainers are actual names, while Roma's name is inspired by her namesake in the Indian Army. For more insights into how our brave canine friends serve the country, you may want to check out the following websites:

- <https://www.ssbcrack.com/2016/04/10-things-may-not-know-indian-army-dogs.html>
- <https://theprint.in/defence/pm-modi-praises-sophie-vida-balram-heres-what-the-brave-canine-soldiers-did-for-country/492094/>



# Manjha

Abhilasha Pandey

*Managing Editor, Anthem Press*

**I**t's been a really long time since I sat down to pen something. It's a sunny Sunday today, and winter afternoons with a gentle breeze in north India render the sky colourful. Kites of different shapes and sizes and wonderful bright colours are dancing up and down the clear blue sky. It is for sure an enjoyable sight. Such moments of solitude surprise us at times, for suddenly a small sight or an incident triggers a million thoughts.

It was 26 January 1984, and I was a little girl standing at the fore on my father's scooter. We, like most other middle-class Indians of the time, had a 'Hamara Bajaj' for our family

rides, and me being the little one in the family used to get to stand at the front with my little hands on the scooter's handle. I am surprised that even after so many years, the incident is so clear in my mind. I have been questioned about it a number of times these past years through school, college and even office, for I still carry the scars of that day, and yet I am penning my thoughts about that significant day for the first time today.

It was another sunny winter afternoon and it was a national holiday. My *bhaiyya* (elder brother) and I were always keen for a scooter ride those days, so when we got to know that Daddy had to go to the city, we both immediately got ready and took our respective spots on his scooter: *Bhaiyya* took the rear seat and I took my spot at the fore.

Fighter kites are popular in the Indian subcontinent. They are used for the sport of kite fighting. Traditionally most are small, unstable single-line flat kites where line tension alone is used for control, at least part of which is an abrasive string called *manjha* (a line coated with powdered glass or metal) to cut the line of other kites. In Brazil, a similar string is called 'cerol', and in Chile it is called 'hilo curado'. Kites are typically flown during specific seasons or festivals. *Uttarayan* or *Makar Sankranti* celebrated on 14 January each year marks the end of winter and the start of the harvest season. This day is also celebrated as the International Kite Festival in Gujarat. *Basant Panchmi* or *Saraswati Puja* is a festival that marks the preparation for the arrival of spring. The festival is celebrated by people in various ways, and kite flying is an important part of the celebrations in north India, including national holidays. The kite flyers use coloured *manjha* line and attempt to cut down opposing kites – which then drift away. Participants or bystanders often run after and try to capture such kites, a practice commonly known as kite looting.

My reminiscing drifted away from our scooter ride to kites because what happened next was actually a small incident of kite looting. A kite cut from the string drifted away towards the ground, and two little boys ran after the loot. One of them held the kite on one side of the road and the other one got hold of the string on the other end of the road. We just happened to be on the road at that very moment, and as I was standing at the fore on our scooter, my neck got a slice through with the glass-coated *manjha*. The only blessing was that



the cut was absolutely painless due to the sharp glass on the *manjha*! I got to know of the cut only because I felt some sweat trickling down my neck and I was surprised at sweating on a January winter morning. What I saw next was my blood-filled palm, and it made no sense so I just raised my hand right in front of my dad's eyes and said, 'Papa!'

Daddy worked as a medical representative with a prestigious multinational pharmaceutical company at that time and knew doctors throughout the city. I remember flashes of scenes next. Dad halted the scooter and examined me; he tied his kerchief around my neck; next, *bhaiyya* and I were sitting on a bench while the doctor there continued to examine his regular patients; *bhaiyya* and I sat there silently, neither of us uttering a word; I saw fear on *bhaiyya*'s face; I remember that we were waiting for Papa at that time. He had got us to sit in that nearby clinic and had gone somewhere. I don't remember the ambulance and the pre-operatives, but I do remember the local anaesthesia injections coming one after the other and being injected on my neck; I remember seeing Papa through the corner of my eye in the operation theatre and I remember being sewn together by the surgeon. The needle would go up and down, up and down. I also remember the surgeon calling Papa and showing him how narrowly my food and windpipe were left intact. A few nanometres more and I would not have met any of you and would not be sharing this with you all! The next thing I remember is us getting home and *bhaiyya* running inside to tell Mummy that I was hurt. She scolded him, thinking it was all a prank and that we were all teasing her. I did not know then if I could still speak and eat or not, and it was a few hours before I uttered another word. I lived to tell the story and ended up with only thirteen stitches and a few life-long scars.

I am a parent today and it is now that I realize that though I was the victim of this accident, my parents and my brother too suffered. I can't imagine what my father would have felt when he saw the blood-filled palm of his little girl and how he maintained composure and arranged for appropriate medical help at that time. I was in class I at that time and *bhaiyya*, though elder to me, was also just a little boy then; he was in class III. I could not see my cut, I could not see the continuous bleeding; *bhaiyya* could. I can't imagine the fears that he faced that day. I was the chatterbox at home, and I can't fathom how scared my mother would have been.

That day, they all wanted me to speak and smile and be well. I have recounted this accident a number of times whenever I have been questioned about my scars.

Many years later I remember receiving a call from Vidhya (my manager at Newgen) telling me that Shiva Kumar (our colleague in the Cambridge team) had met with an accident. The same *manjha* that could have killed me so many years ago proved fatal for Shiva. I remember him for his simple smile and a respectful ‘Namaste ji’ at the office. He taught me a few Tamil words, and I would like to say a heartfelt ‘Nandri’ (thank you) to him for being a very helpful colleague and I will always remember him fondly. May his soul rest in peace!

It is sad that a sport, a celebration, leads to so many accidents and deaths, not only of us humans, but also injures and kills numerous animals and birds. It was painful to see a pigeon hang helplessly entangled in the *manjha* last year on *Basant Panchmi*. Luckily, we could reach it and free it up, but so many of them lose their lives. If we are the most evolved species on the planet, then surely we can also be the most responsible. I am not against kite flying. It is an ancient practice and is also a very effective social equalizer, for the kite of the richest of the rich and that of the poorest of the poor share the same sky and get the same chance. Kites unite kids across strata too. The other day, my son’s group of friends were helping a poor boy in his kite loot and even shared some of their kites with him. When they were discussing about kites, they conversed as equals.

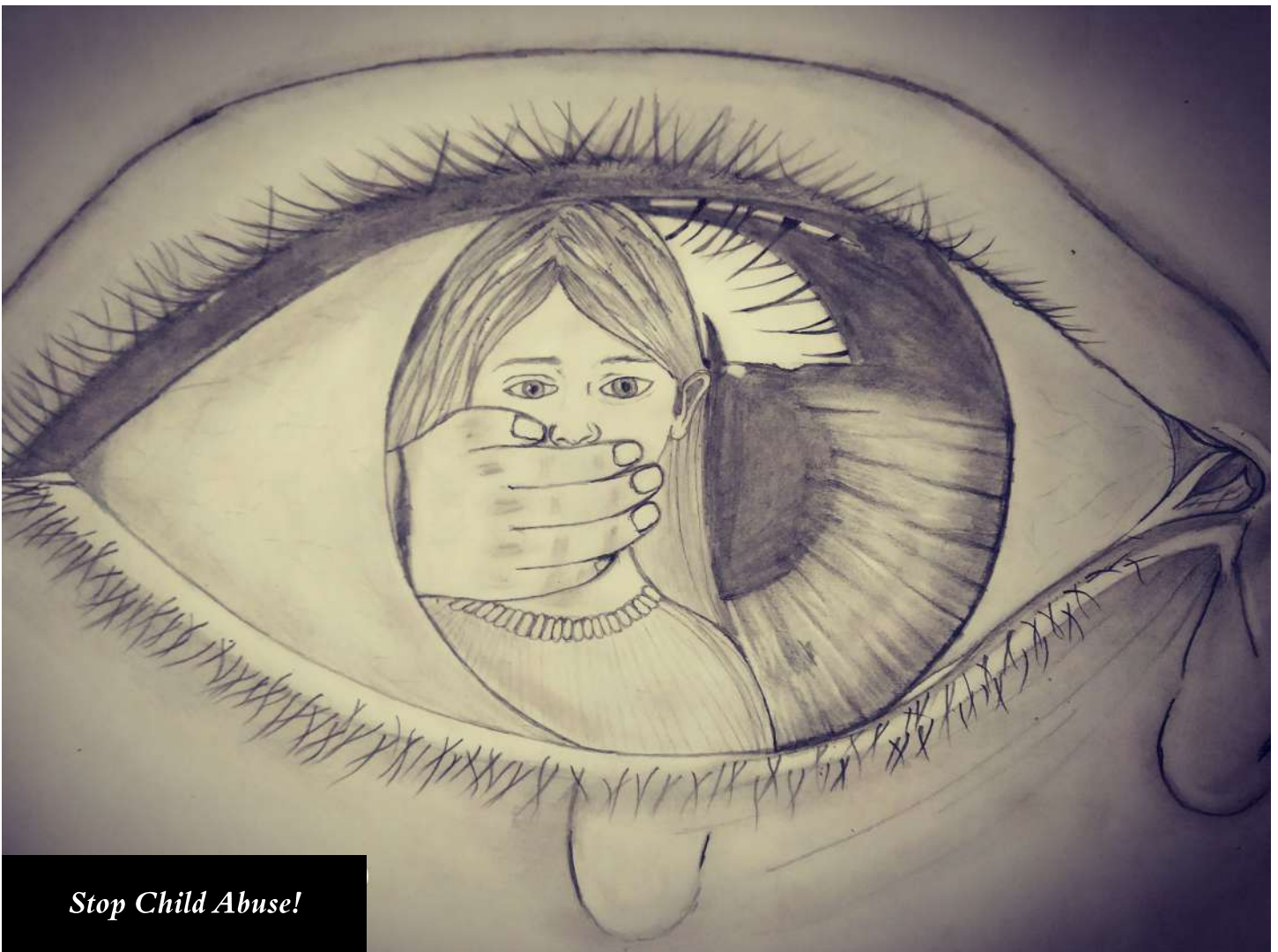
The traditional *manjha*, though sharp, was still less harmful and dangerous than the relatively recent introduction of the so-called chemical or ‘Chinese’ *manjha*, which is made of non-biodegradable synthetic fibres and is treated with glass and metal to make it sharper. This makes it harder to break and makes the string more dangerous to bystanders and birds. Unlike the cotton thread, it does not break easily but cuts through the skin. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2016 banned this product in India, but it continues to be easily available across local markets. We all need to take individual responsibility for correcting this. We need to make sure that we neither buy nor use such *manjha* for kite flying. We can easily lead by example and it does not take too much of an effort. The next time your foot gets entangled in *manjha* on the road or you see *manjha* lying around, do not walk away after

freeing yourself alone. Fulfil your social responsibility: collect the *manjha* and dispose it off responsibly. Last week, I was going to a nearby market and noticed that a *manjha* was entangled to the rear mirror of my car. I stopped, stood on the road and collected the entire bit of the *manjha*. It took me just a few minutes, but I know that those few minutes were well spent. I was safe in the car, but the *manjha* could be fatal to someone on a two-wheeler or to any bird that may have got entangled in it.

Let us all responsibly enjoy a colourful kite-filled sky.

## Sketches

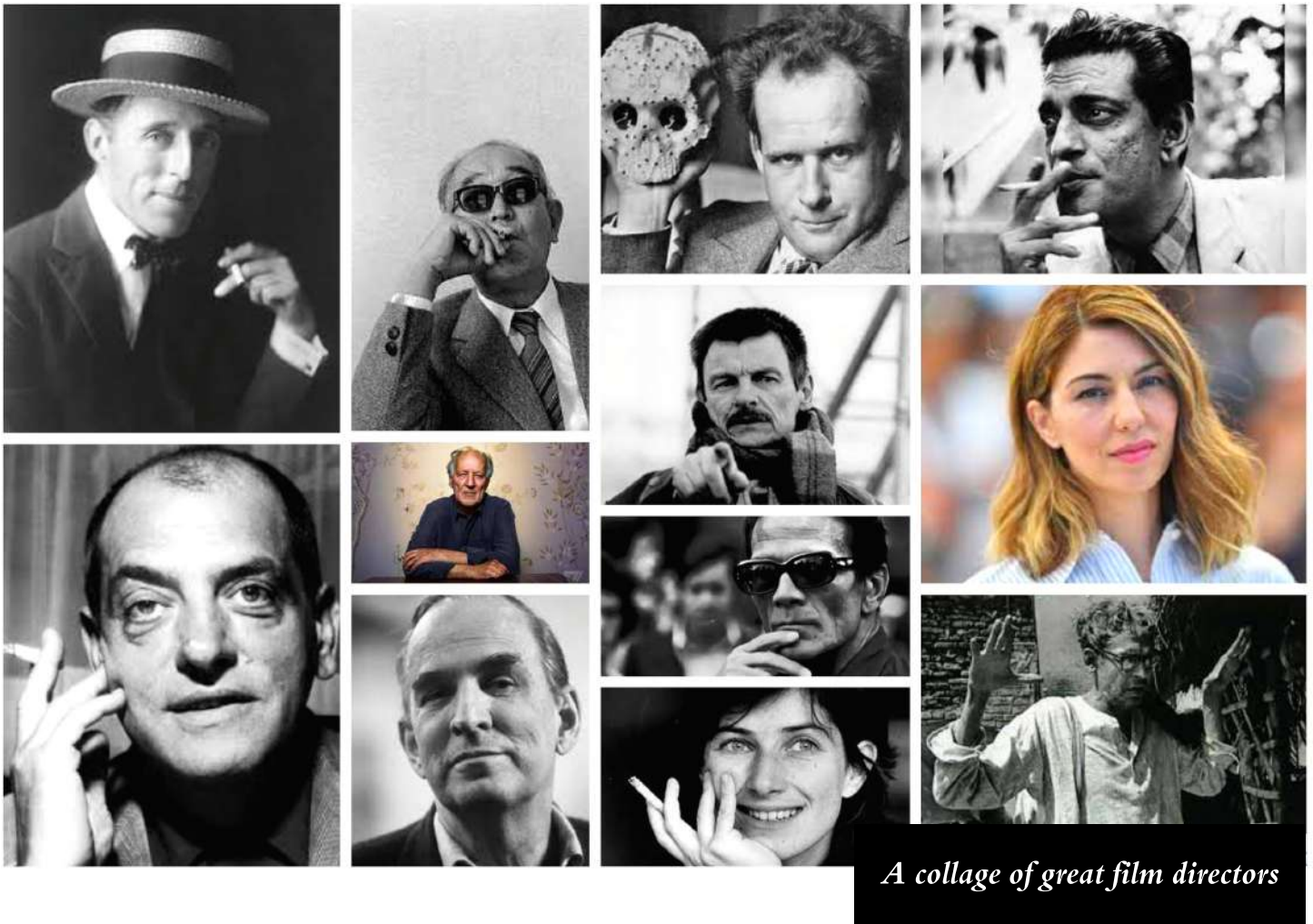
Uma Parvathi, *Journals Copy Editing Team*



**Stop Child Abuse!**



Sketches by Uma Parvathi.



# Cinema as education

Rengarajan Sundararajan, *Anthem Press*

**A**mong all art forms of human civilization, cinema is the youngest, existing for a hundred-odd years. In such a short span of time, cinema has pervaded all of life itself that, apart from becoming an industry worth billions of dollars, academics write books on how cinema as a narrative may lead to notions of identity and the self. With the ever-increasing use of technology in cinematographic production, especially with digital technology, cinema is more widely produced, distributed, and viewed than ever before insofar as it can be called the most democratic (and probably the most anarchic) of all art forms.

Gilles Deleuze, one of the most influential twentieth-century thinkers, in his *Cinema I* and *Cinema II* applies Bergsonian theories of movement and time to create a taxonomic classification of cinema into the movement-image—movement as physical reality in the external world and image as psychic reality in the consciousness—and the time-image—the signs of the order of time, of its internal relations, and signs of time as series. Although we need not delve deep into these two types of cinema images, it is sufficient to toe Deleuze’s line that great cinema directors can be compared not just with painters, architects, and musicians but also with thinkers, and I also agree with him regarding the cinema directors he considers great: D. W. Griffith, Sergei Eisenstein (both from the silent era), Akira Kurosawa, John Ford, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Alfred Hitchcock, Robert Bresson, Werner Herzog, Martin Scorsese, and Ingmar Bergman. Deleuze probably did not see the works of the Indian geniuses—Ritwik Ghatak and Satyajit Ray—to have included them in his list, and many others including his contemporaries the world over.

What education can one receive watching the cinema of these great directors? Or rather, the question should be, what education one cannot receive from watching these great directors? Cinema cannot be restricted to these great directors because cinema from all over the world is now easily accessible to be offered as education—culture, history, people, film as an anthropological document, a journey of “becoming,” the meaning of being human, and awareness of the human condition. What answers can one attempt at the questions Bergman posed, shining his cinematic artistry, peering into the human soul to probe its depths? How can one not be astounded at the breadth and range of Herzog’s works? What does one call the experiences one undergoes when watching Ray? The magnificent Kurosawa writes in his *Something Like an Autobiography* that cinema resembles so

One cannot object by pointing to the vast proportion of rubbish in cinematographic production—it is no worse than anywhere else, although it does have unparalleled economic and industrial consequences. The great cinema directors are hence merely more vulnerable—it is infinitely easier to prevent them from doing their work. The history of the cinema is a long martyrology.

—Gilles Deleuze, preface to *Cinema I* (French edn), 1983

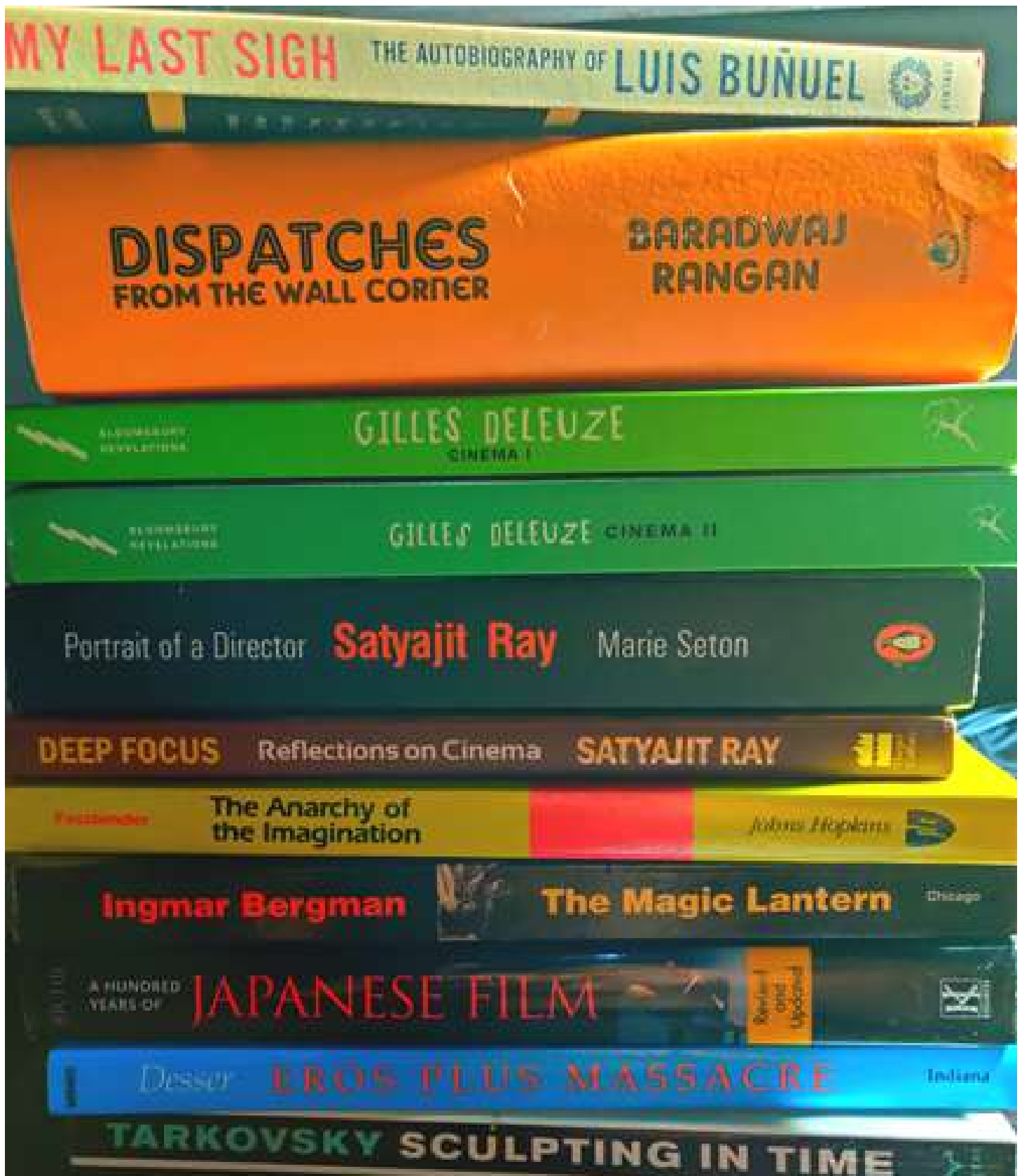
many other arts: “If cinema has very literary characteristics, it also has theatrical qualities, a philosophical side, attributes of painting and sculpture and musical elements. But cinema is, in the final analysis, cinema.”

Cinema from Latin America; independent cinema from North America and Canada; the cinema of the European art house masters and the Iranian masters; Russian cinema working under the severe censorship of the Soviet Union; the rich tradition of Japanese cinema, especially the Japanese New Wave of the 1950s and 1960s; contemporary Korean cinema; emerging cinema from the Philippines and Thailand; and the parallel cinema of 1960s and 1970s India along with the contemporary Malayalam New Wave have created an “infinite mythology to be dipped into at will,” as Jim Morrison writes in his *The Lords and the New Creatures*. What happens when one sees a lot of movies from different directors across the world?

The lovable and famous film critic Roger Ebert writes in the introduction to his *The Great Movies*, “Directors become like friends. Buñuel is delighted by the shamelessness of human nature. Scorsese is charged with the lurid possibilities of Catholic guilt. Kurosawa celebrates individuals in a country that suspects them. Wilder is astonished by the things some people will do to be happy. Keaton is about the struggle of man’s spirit against the physical facts of the world. Hitchcock creates images that have the quality of human dreams. Sooner or later every lover of the film arrives at Ozu, and understands that the movies are not about moving, but about whether to move.”

Cinema is most totalitarian of the arts. All energy and sensation is sucked up into the skull, a cerebral erection, skull bloated with blood. Caligula wished a single neck for all his subjects that he could behead a kingdom with one blow. Cinema is this transforming agent. The body exists for the sake of the eyes; it becomes a dry stalk to support these two soft insatiable jewels. ... Each film depends upon all the others and drives you on to others. Cinema was a novelty, a scientific toy, until a sufficient body of works had been amassed, enough to create an intermittent other world, a powerful, infinite mythology to be dipped into at will.

—Jim Morrison, *The Lords and the New Creatures*, 1971



*Some books on films and film directors.*

Cinema is no longer crass entertainment, or even art—it has assumed mythic proportions, a tangible and purposeful myth, more powerful than other mythologies and essential for our generation and for the coming ones.





# Farewell to Rajagopal, aka RRG

*Team LRUS*

Last year was a year of strange happenings, with a lot of changes in the work environment. Under such circumstances, Team WK LRUS (the “Aspen” team) hosted an online meeting as a farewell to Rajagopal, Manager – Copyediting, WK LRUS, who retired in November 2020.

It was indeed strange to bid farewell to RRG, as we call him affectionately, who had been with Newgen for almost 14 years.

The entire Aspen team (everyone from Jose, Dinesh, Jayshree, Mallika, Hema, Selwyn, Gayathri, and Suchi to the manufacturing, project management, copyediting, and indexing teams) called in online to reminisce about the time we shared and to wish RRG goodbye and good luck. We recollected the years each one of us worked with RRG, the help and support he always extended to his colleagues, his patience in training team members, his positive approach to issues both minor or major, his knowledge and his expertise, and his cheerful nature and sense of humor. He always encouraged his team to excel in their work. Gayathri was the organizer, and she had thoughtfully sent a delicious cake to RRG’s residence just before the call. RRG cut the cake during our call while we cheered and clapped for him, and the team shared slices of the cake virtually!

(Note the cake peeking out in the Zoom call screenshot below!)





(from left to right) *Rajagopal, Prasanna, Raghuraman, Uma Nazareth, Dharmasamvardhini, and Parvathi.*

RRG was committed to the success of the entire team and was a great colleague to work with. His contribution to the team cannot be expressed in words, and we will all miss him. We wish him the very best in his retirement.

Here are some excerpts from the call:

*Dinesh, Associate Vice President*

Sir is always a “Yes” person. He never says no. Whatever I say and whenever I say something, he would always say “Yes, sure.” I have never heard him say no. He is very modest and humble. He has managed the copyediting schedules well, and we will all miss him.

*Mallika, Manager – Project Management, Aspen*

I would like to congratulate Rajagopal on his retirement, and my best wishes for his future. He is one of our senior copyeditors with extensive knowledge of Aspen products. He was a

great team lead and a team player. Very calm and patient and handled all crises with ease. He is a jovial and fun-loving person, and the team will miss him very much. Here's wishing him all the very best.

*Gayathri, Lead – Project Management, Aspen*

Hi Sir, our acquaintance is over 13 years and we have worked together from the beginning for Aspen. I admire the way you have handled the copyediting schedules and the pressure and strain you undergo and bear at this age. I have experienced it in these three months when you were away, and I was not able to manage and schedule as well and perfectly as you did.

Hats off to you, Sir.

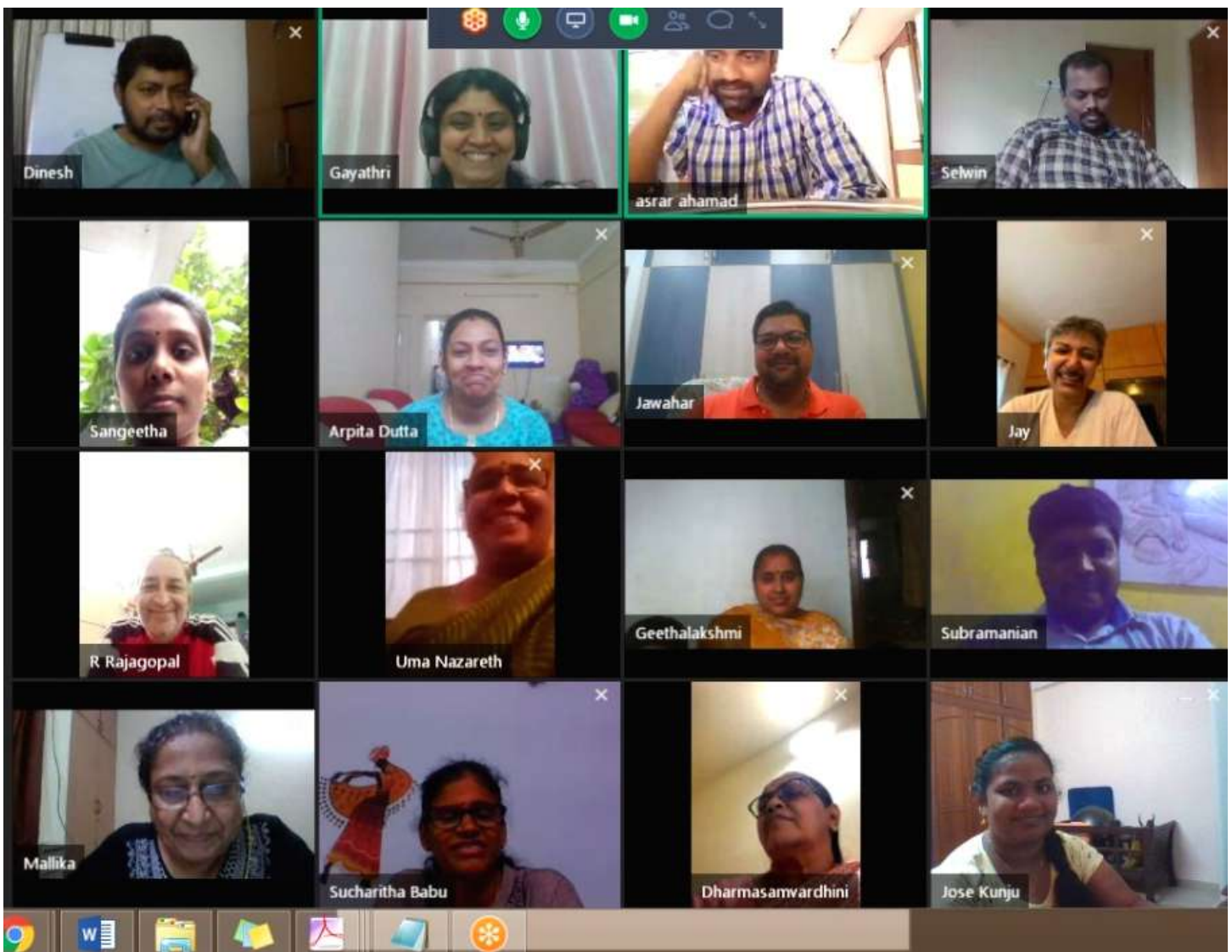
We have worked together for many peak seasons, and without you, it is very difficult to meet all the schedules. We will miss you and will definitely need your help and guidance in the forthcoming years too. Take care of your health and enjoy your retirement.



(from left to right) *Uma Nazareth, Parvathi, Dharmasamvardhini, Prasanna, Raghuraman, and Rajagopal.*

*Sucharita, Senior Executive – Production Editing, Aspen*

Rajagopal is a very humble human being. In addition to being a colleague, he was a great friend at work. We are lucky that we worked together. His support and encouragement during the difficult and the good times were inseparable. Our team is forever indebted to him for pulling us out of hard spots. His strategic thinking and decision-making skills have enabled us to excel in our targets. He was great to work with and has given us tons of memories. We'll share nothing but all the good memories of him here. We all would like to thank him for helping us achieve our milestones and making us a better organization. Thanks for being our mentor, confidante, and true friend. He'll always stay in our hearts. Goodbye, and please keep in touch.



*Dharmasamvardhini, Senior Executive – Copy Editing, Aspen*

Rajagopal sir has been more than a boss; he was my guru, mentor, and friend.

Sir, thanks for your guidance, timely help, and the training given since I joined Newgen in 2010. We have been lucky to have you as our boss. You have always been considerate and extended your support positively and encouragingly. There have been times when I was in a dilemma whether to continue or not. Your advice has helped to overcome my doubts and do my best all these years.

Sir! Aspen CE will never be the same without your presence ... you will be greatly missed by copyeditors, project managers, and team members. Wishing you good luck. Take care of your health and be assured we will continue to plague you with our doubts and copyediting issues as always! Thanks, Sir!

*Uma Nazareth, Executive – Copy Editing, Aspen*

Hello Sir! Hi everyone! Good to see you all after almost ten months. Even though my association with the Aspen team is only for 5 years, I have learned a lot from Sir. He is a remarkable team leader and colleague, and as a mentor, he walked me through the process very patiently. As Vardhini aptly mentioned, he was ever available to clarify our doubts and come up with solutions.

Sir, you will be missed greatly. You have been an inspiration to many of us here. I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with you. You have been a go-to person not only for the copyeditors but for the PMs as well. A stickler on scheduling and a ready-reckoner on citations. We wish you all the best and lots of luck with the things you have planned. This is not a “goodbye” but “see you soon, Sir!”

*Hemalatha Meenakshisundaram, KLI*

I remember Rajagopal from the days we had trained together way back in 2007. He was one of the quick learners and got placed in the Aspen team even before our training was completed. His enthusiasm to learn and impart his learning is commendable.

I join the others in wishing him a very happy and peaceful retired life :)

*Jayshree Parthasarathy, Managing Editor*

I have worked with Rajagopal for almost 14 years now. He joined the Aspen team soon after I did in 2007. Always calm and unruffled, even when the rest of us were running around like chickens without heads, Rajagopal managed to keep the team on an even keel. We will miss his steady hand at the helm of the CE team. Enjoy your retirement, Rajagopal! It is very difficult to say good bye to RRG after all these years. He will be greatly missed!! We wish him a happy and healthy retirement ahead.

Sir! This is not goodbye; this is see you soon!!!

## CBPT team outing



*The Centralized Books Production Team (CBPT) at a lunch at Barbeque Nation, Thoraipakkam.*

*(sitting, from left to right) Nathiga Selvan, Kalaiselvan, Sivaprakash, Jayakumari, Sudha, Reka, Kaviyaran, Mahendran, Paul Praveen, Sedhu, Santhasivam, Srinivasan.*

*(standing, from left to right) Harini, Rajasekar, Uma, Elango, Meghanathan, Mathanmohan, Dinakaran, Bindu.*



# Life in my college

Vishnu M. R.  
*Copyeditor, WK Australia*

My mind feels undisturbed  
By the footwork of lecturers  
In front of me on the dais.  
I ponder upon things

That may bring peace in life  
Which is still a distant dream.  
Through the slender pillars,  
Framed beside the pavement  
Peeping into my friend's classroom;  
I wondered if she enjoyed  
At least by dozing in peace.

My life would begin  
After the upcoming year,  
Still now I feel pity  
About those unworthy periods  
I've been through.

A short glance at my childhood  
Makes me determined of  
Being in great heights of life  
But now I'm aware of  
Minor blunders that ruin one's life.

Still when I'm relieved of distress  
The sweet memories that  
Come running to my mind  
Are just those delightful days  
Of my memorable college life.



S P O T L I G H T

Mallika



Say hello to Mallika Krishnan, Consultant – Project Management, Aspen. Located in Chennai, she loves the peace and calm in her apartment, and she’s trying to get back into reading books—thanks to her Kindle, as she feels that “print has become a little difficult.” Mallika’s pet peeves are dishonesty and unclean surfaces, and she’d like to have the superpower of making this world a cleaner place. People who know Mallika might be surprised to know that she has an ardent interest in world cuisine. She also loves flora and fauna, and would love to pursue flower farming as a hobby. Mallika’s day is made better by the small things in life such as the sunshine, birds, drizzle, and flowers, and she feels that everyone should



*With her daughter, Pallavi.*

take a nature walk and familiarize themselves with the surroundings. Apart from watching Pakistani serials, she also recharges with proper sleep! When asked what she would do with the extra time if she didn't have to sleep at all, "Are you crazy? No sleep?!" is her emphatic reply.

Mallika's happiest memory is her days at the tea garden: "My husband was a tea planter, and my life was close to nature." Her father is her biggest source of inspiration, and she is proud of her career journey: "I started as a proofreader in a small office and climbed my way up as a manager," she says. "Love what you do!" is her claim to fame. The nicest compliment she has



*With her husband, Krishnan.*

ever received: “When the client and my manager said I had great work ethics and professionalism.”

The top three items on her bucket list: traveling, river rafting, and going on a cruise. Writing handwritten letters is something she likes doing the old-fashioned way. Mallika likes reading historical and biographical books, and *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* is the best she’s read. While she likes watching comedies and thrillers, horror movies are not for her. If a movie were to be made on her life, Mallika would like Meryl Streep to play her role. She wishes she could go back to the world of the Mahabharat, filled with the most interesting characters.

Mallika shares the most heart-warming thing she has witnessed: "One day an unemployed engineer came to my father’s place asking for work and food as he had not eaten for several days. My father got up to get him some food but did not want to hurt his dignity. So he quickly asked the boy if he could fix the bicycle and clean it. The lad gladly accepted and thanked my father. The boy was very happy that he had earned his dinner that day. I was so proud of my father for being empathetic."

If she had to make a presentation on something with absolutely no preparation, Mallika would pick the need for men to evolve and mature in the same pace as women. She feels that women are dynamic and strong, ready to lead the world—“sadly the society does not acknowledge this,” she says. Mallika’s daughter has impressed her the most with her weight loss journey. “She lost 35 kgs!” she says proudly. The first thing Mallika notices about a person is their eyes. While she doesn’t get people’s obsession with cell phones, she does value her laptop highly: “It puts bread on my table after all.”

If she had to change her name, Mallika is not too bothered about what her new name would be. “It doesn’t matter,” she says. “What’s in a name?”

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SPOTLIGHT

# Krishnakumar



*With his wife, Uma.*

**K**rishnakumar, Associate Vice President – Education, is an energetic and witty person who is known for speaking his mind. While he is popularly called KK by many, he says he would like to change his name to “Krish” if the chance arose. He stays in Madipakkam, Chennai, where there are as many as four lakes within a four-kilometer radius, and trees and exotic birds are a part of the landscape. Though KK finds it easy to commute to different spots in the city from his house, what he hates about the city is the problem of water stagnation in the surroundings during the rainy season.

KK is most inspired by his family: “My wife, who has always been a bold warrior and a great support during all my difficult times; my father, who taught me loyalty; and my mother, who taught me the value of money.” Outside his family, he is most impressed by the actor Rajinikanth, “who is a brand of his own,” he comments. KK is proud that he is a good father to his daughter, and the day she was born is his happiest memory: “I wanted a daughter and everybody was claiming it to be a son. Finally when the doctor revealed that it’s a girl, it was a fantastic moment.”

If KK had one superpower, he wants the ability to recreate January 7, 2020. “That is the day I took my father for a routine check-up, and he passed away the next day after



*With his wife, Uma, and daughter, Sruthi.*

hospitalization. I have a strong feeling that he died of panic and not because of any disease he had. I want to recreate the same day but try a different approach.”

About himself, KK likes that he is an entertainer, but he’s not happy with his own cooking. Something people might not know about him is that he is a violinist, and he is also good at LaTeX and XML. He was also a typesetter who handled Quark, LaTeX, 3B2, and InDesign platforms. Without any preparation whatsoever, he can give a 40-minute presentation on quality. He also says that one’s willingness to learn is the first thing he notices when meeting people.

KK’s ultimate career goal is to grow the education business to five times from where it is today. The top item on his personal bucket list is to design and construct his dream house, and he is currently working on a terrace garden. If KK had to save one thing from his house



*With his parents.*

in case of an emergency, he says he'd go for his certificates and important documents. He recharges by watching comedy shows and thriller movies, and he enjoys going on a long drive with his family after 11 pm. If time and money weren't an issue, KK would join a film institute and pursue a course on direction. While he cannot visualize any imaginary life on his own, he says this: "When she was around the age of 4–6, my daughter used to ask me to take her to Dolakpur (where Chhota Bheem and his crew live happily)."

*How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie is the best book KK has read, and the latest one on his list is *Work Rules!* by Laszlo Bock. When it comes to movies, KK says he has a particular list, which includes *Baashha* and *Mullum Malarum*, both starring Rajinikanth. Movies with horror and those that end in tragedy are certainly not a part of this list. He'd like Dhanush to play his role if a movie were to be made on his life. Talking on the telephone

On women's place in today's society, KK has a thought-provoking take: "There is still a rulebook for women as to what they have to do and what not [to do], which is ridiculous. Who created this rulebook?"



With his daughter, Sruthi.



is something he likes doing the old-fashioned way—“I hate mobile phones,” he says. KK has been to a few places, but he is not too enthusiastic about travel: “I have been to the US once, and the UK and Australia a few times. But I cannot sustain for more than 10 days anywhere.” Something that KK feels everyone should do at least once in their lives: “Sponsor the education of a bright but poor student who cannot afford to study due to financial issues.” He also has a thought-provoking take on women’s place in today’s society: “There is still a rulebook for women as to what they have to do and what not, which is ridiculous. Who created this rulebook?”

## Family trip to Agra, Kullu Manali, and Manikaran

Natarajan Loganathan

*LWW Journals, Issue Team*

**M**y family, along with two others (comprising six adults and three kids), planned a trip to Agra, Kullu Manali, and Manikaran. This was my second trip to these places, so the planning was easy. None of us knew Hindi, which we envisaged could be a challenge.

*Train Journey to Agra: Visualizing the Masterpiece*

We boarded the Tamil Nadu Express by Saturday 10:30 pm and reached Agra by Monday early morning. After refreshing ourselves at a local hotel, we visited the much loved and awaited masterpiece: the Taj Mahal. Best viewed at night, it is such a pleasure to the eyes with its colour changing according to the moonlight. We completed our lunch and visited

the Red Fort. We then boarded our train to Delhi from Agra in the evening. **Important tip:** The Taj Mahal is closed to visitors on Friday; only prayers are allowed. Also, do not buy food around the Agra railway station, as it is not very hygienic.

*Road Trip to Manali: Snow-Filled Himalayan Mountains (535 km)*

We reached the Delhi railway station at night (3 hours' journey from Agra to Delhi). Once we boarded the prebooked Toyota Innova, our much-awaited night journey to Manali began. Our driver drove slowly and safely amid heavy mist; around 4 am, he stopped the vehicle and had a two-hour nap inside the car itself. By Tuesday morning around 9, we had a very nice breakfast at the Zorba Restaurant and relaxed there for an hour. By afternoon, we reached Hotel Surabhi (which has a fantastic view of the Beas River and apple orchards), where we had booked our stay for two nights and three days (3 km from Kullu Main Road). We came to know that we were the only group staying in the entire hotel for the next three days, so we had a lot of privacy.



*The group at Solang Valley.*



(Left) At the Manikaran Shiv Temple; (top right) Solang Valley, (bottom right) enjoying the snowfall.



At the Taj Mahal, Agra.

*Visit to the Vaishno Devi Temple and the Hidimba Devi Temple*

After 2 hours' rest, we visited the Vaishno Devi Temple (500 m from our stay), which has natural hot water springs; it is considered to be holy water, and the locals hold a belief that it cures skin diseases. Next, we moved to the Hidimba Devi (Dhungari) Temple by walk; it is a cave temple where a lot of film shooting takes place, one of the most famous ones being the kidnapping scene in the film *Roja*.

*Visit to Solang Valley*

The next day, we had the joy of experiencing complete snow and playing snow games. Rohtang Pass is closed till May, and Solang Valley is the last permitted place for tourists to enjoy snow games. After renting snow-friendly gear, shoes, and gloves, we played some snow games. In the evening, we completed some local purchases and tasted sweets in Manali Main



*Snowbike ride at Solang Valley.*

Road. With the memories of a snow-filled day, we moved back to the hotel. During dinner, one of the hotel employees informed us that we might be able to experience snowfall the next morning.

### *Manikaran Shiv Temple (80 km from Manali)*

True to his word, we were completely drenched in snowfall the next day, and I still can't find words to describe how we all felt that day! We then moved to the Manikaran Shiv Temple. The Manikaran Temple has hot water springs as well, and it is a holy, divine, and lovely place that every tourist must visit. Later, we enjoyed river rafting for 7 km in the Beas River before starting our night journey towards Delhi by road. **Important tip:** The local taxis will avoid taking you to Manikaran, giving some false reasons, but stick to your plan. Also, avoid taking food in the motels on the way to Delhi from Manali; they are very expensive, and not worth the money for the taste.

### *Return to Chennai by Rajdhani Express*

On Friday morning, we made a lot of purchases at Karol Bagh Market in New Delhi, where one can get good deals through bargaining. By noon we boarded the Rajdhani Express to



*River rafting.*

reach Chennai, full of snowy memories, though we were very tired. The service on the train was beyond our expectations, and it was a mesmerizing experience. On the train journey, we started planning our next trip, to Rajasthan.

### *Some General Tips*

I suggest skipping Shimla, as you can experience everything in Kullu Manali. If you're traveling as a couple, use the government-operated Himalayan Transport bus to Manali from Delhi and vice versa, rather than private transport. They stop at the best hotels on the way and provide a complete luxury travel experience. The bus starts at around 5:30 pm from Delhi, and from Manali it starts at around 4 pm.



## The Newgen Pubcast

Clare Owen, *Production Editor and Team Leader, Academic Division  
Newgen Publishing UK, and co-host of The Newgen Pubcast*

**N**ewgen Publishing UK are proud to announce their latest venture: a new podcast for a book-loving audience. From our softly furnished spare rooms (for better sound quality), we've had the opportunity to interview a variety of people from around the book industry. With this podcast, we go behind the scenes and get tips, tricks and

advice from those in the know. Season one of the podcast has six episodes and one bonus episode, each based around an interview with an author, a bookshop or a publishing professional.

The episodes feature:

- Danièle Cybulski, author, speaker and fellow podcaster, who talked to us about myth busting the Middle Ages and the importance of truth in a post-truth world;
- bookshop owner Ben Moorhouse from Our Bookshop in Tring, whose bookshop was shortlisted for the Independent Bookshop of the Year;
- commissioning editor for Pen & Sword and Arc Humanities Press Claire Hopkins, who talked to us about her drive to reveal lost stories of extraordinary women and other aspects of forgotten history;
- author, speaker and TV historian Matt Lewis, whose focus is the Wars of the Roses and Richard III;
- Gideon York, one half of the duo behind the Cotswold Book Room, recently refurbished and carefully curated for younger readers; and
- Alison Jones, whose publishing company Practical Inspiration is helping business owners to write their books in order to share their ethos, ideas and best practices to the wider world.

We have also been lucky to jointly interview Nicole Vanderbilt, Bookshop.org's UK managing director, and Peter Donaldson from Red Lion Books in Colchester. Peter was one of the first independent bookshop owners to support Bookshop.org, and he chatted to us about how his bookshop has survived the decline of the high street, various recessions and the pandemic, as well as how both he and Bookshop.org are looking forward to new ventures. Red Lion Books has also recently been crowned a regional winner of the Independent Bookshop of the Year award.

The podcast is hosted by Newgen Publishing UK production editors Clare and Phil (who has also edited the episodes) and produced by commissioning editor Eleri. The first season is out now on all good podcast streaming services and on the Newgen Publishing UK website: [www.newgenpublishing.co.uk/podcasts](http://www.newgenpublishing.co.uk/podcasts). Happy listening! #newgenpubcast



*Volunteers, Newgen staff, and Nandavanam trustees at the Urban Forest Drive.*

## **Nammavanam by Nandavanam**

### **An urban forest in Chennai**

Raghu Ram Prasath B., *Project Coordinator, Nandavanam Eco-Tree Project*

Over a period of 11 years, Nandavanam’s Eco-Tree Project has evolved and taken shape with the efforts of numerous people wanting to contribute to the greater good. Apart from battling climate change, we try to make a positive impact on people’s lives by educating about the importance of planting trees and conserving nature. During the past 11 years, we have planted over 1.5 lakh (150,000) saplings and raised them successfully. This year, we at the Eco-Tree Project have taken up the task of recreating the lost glory of our lands in Chennai by creating human-made forests in urban settings. We have kick-started this venture by developing our first Miyawaki Urban Forest named ‘Nammavanam’ at the Sholinganallur TNHB D-40 property, South Chennai, with the support of the Greater Chennai Corporation.





A forest is not just a place where wild animals live. It used to be an integral part of our ancestral livelihood. Forests and trees make vital contributions to both the people and the planet, bolstering livelihoods, providing clean air and water, conserving biodiversity and responding to climate change. One should understand that forest creation does not always mean planting trees in large numbers. It involves intense research to identify the native species of the particular area, soil examination, systematic planning of the plantation pattern, cultivating the required number of plant species under favourable conditions, enriching the soil using local biomass, and then tree plantation, followed by timely watering and periodic maintenance of the plantation site for at least 3 years.

### **The Miyawaki Forest Method**

The simplest definition of the Miyawaki method is random and dense plantation of native species.

Named after the Japanese scientist Dr. Akira Miyawaki, the Miyawaki methodology has been hugely successful, with over 17 million trees planted in 1,700 locations across the globe. Such forests are multi-layered and mimic the densest parts of native undisturbed forests.

Creating a forest is not a remote idea anymore. If the Miyawaki methodology is executed effectively, we could grow a forest in our backyard or any other suitable land in this urban, concrete world, taking us a step closer to a better world.

#### Advantages:

- It has revolutionized the concept of urban afforestation by turning backyards into mini forests.
- This method includes planting trees (only native species) as closely as possible to each other in the same area, which not only saves space but also allows the planted saplings to support each other in growth and blocks sunlight from reaching the ground, thereby preventing weed growth.
- The saplings become maintenance-free and self-sustainable after the first 3 years.
- The approach ensures that plant growth is 10 times faster and the resulting plantation is 30 times denser than usual.
- The Miyawaki method helps to create a forest in





just 20 to 30 years, while through conventional methods it takes anywhere between 200 and 300 years.

### **Our First Nammavanam Project**

The journey of creating Nammavanam has been a rollercoaster ride for us. Right from getting government approval to planting the last sapling, we faced numerous ups and downs. Rain, water logging, and Covid-19 were a few active factors that prolonged the entire process. But we had a plan: it was to take one step at a time. Every day we started planning, researching, and mobilizing resources one by one. Once we got the nod from the Greater Chennai Corporation to create the urban forest, we started the landfilling process to increase the height of the property; simultaneously, plantation patterns and saplings were prepared at our nursery in Kelambakkam. We were very keen to make sure that the entire project was completed using native resources and indigenous plants.

Once the landfill was completed, we constructed the water tank and fencing. In the meantime, red soil was brought in from Banrotti, and cocopeat from Hosur. A small lotus



*Raghu Ram Prasath.*

pond was dug in the centre of the property to grow aquatic plants and fishes. Plantation pits were dug systematically using a land excavator, and the pits were filled with a mixture of red soil and cocopeat to make sure that the saplings got the required nutrition for initial rooting. We brought the saplings and supporting sticks from our nursery a day before the plantation drive. On the day of the plantation, 28 February 2021, volunteers from the local community, a few staff from Newgen, and trustees from Nandavanam took part in the drive. The first sapling was planted by our dear student Suriya from Nandavanam Learning Centre.

Government authorities could not take part in the inaugural function as the Tamil Nadu election dates and its protocols were duly announced. There were about 2,000 saplings of 40 indigenous varieties planted in this half-acre land. The plantation was done in a systematic manner to allow sunlight to spread evenly throughout the land even when the trees become fully grown.

## **My experience as a volunteer in a life-sharing community for people with special needs**

Ragavan R.

*Physiotherapist, Nandavanam Center for Healing Education*

**A**fter attending Avapanam's Annual Conference supported by Nandavanam 2021, with the core thought of Seeds for Social Renewal, our staff at Nandavanam Center for Healing Education were offered the opportunity of a month-long volunteering in a life-sharing community in Bangalore. I was the first one to grab this opportunity, and I spent the month of February 2021 at the community. At a point when we

as social workers were thinking about developing as a community for our special children who were turning into adults, this volunteering opportunity was very much valuable in understanding the practicality of living together.

Personally, it was an enriching experience to be away from home for a month and in a place with multiple cultures, languages, and people. Unfortunately, there were very few co-workers and volunteers and the workload was quite high.

Friends of Camphill India, the place I volunteered at, are highly relatable to those in a spiritual environment with their ideas and ways of living together with special adults. I reached the premises at around 6.00 pm on January 31. I was welcomed warmly and was provided with a separate room for accommodation near the library (Jagruti). I was pumped up and excited to be there.

Spending time with special friends was satisfying, and it was learning all day. One achieves patience and sustainability while being with them. Such friends bring out the best in you and understanding humanity and discovering the purpose of life are some highlights.

Volunteering in a community is all about lending a hand wherever it is needed. I'd started





helping in the kitchen with breakfast preparation and washing-up. Many activities such as a candle-making workshop, textile workshop, paper workshop, baking, and gardening were organized. I stayed involved in gardening, which helped me to explore nature. Aside from these, waste management, room cleaning, house cleaning, and laundry were some other activities one participated in. All of these involved including our special friends, so participation was to the fullest. We were divided into groups, and joy, smiles, and happiness accompanied all activities. While the workload was a bit heavy and exhausting, every volunteer or co-worker got a day off once a week. Mine were Mondays.



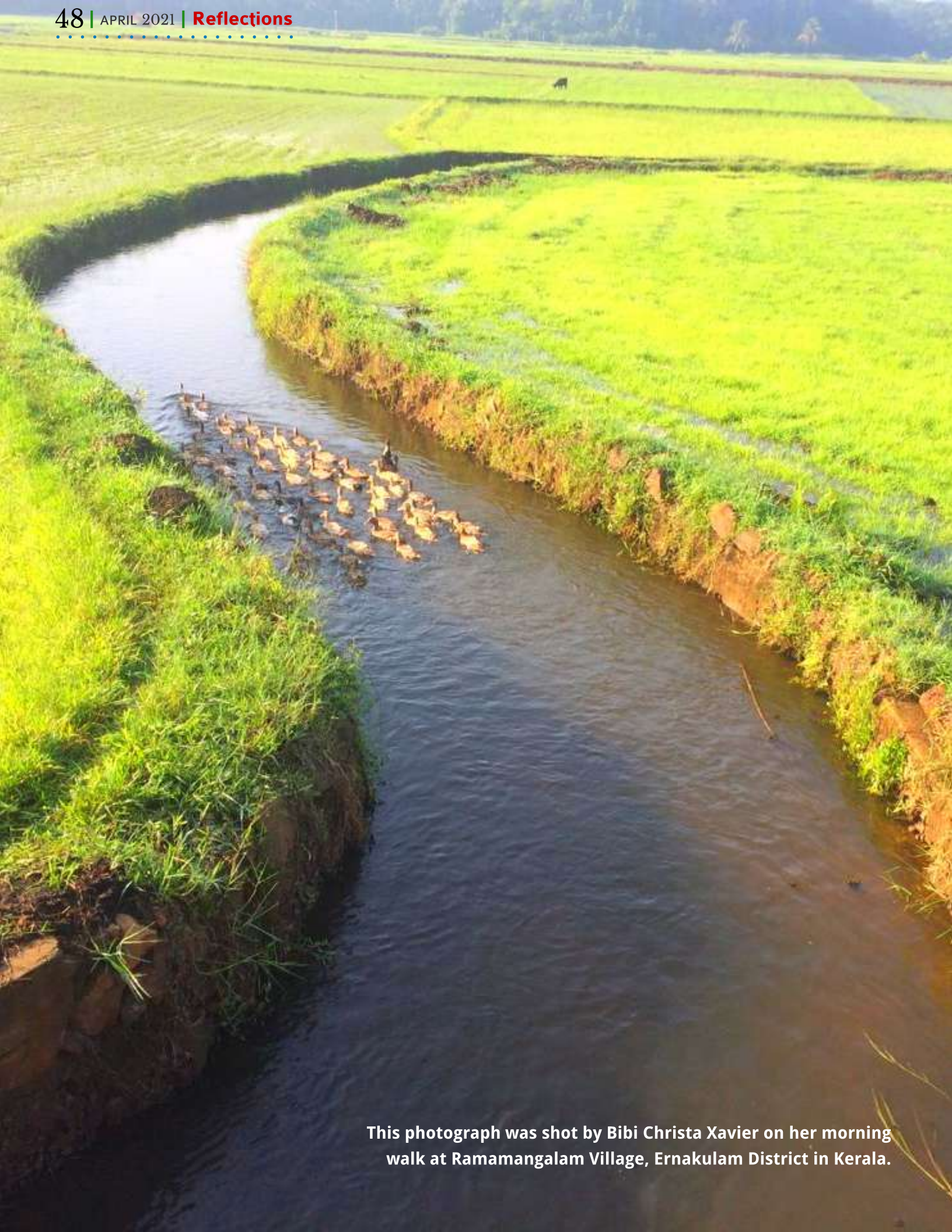
*Raghavan.*

In between, I had a chance to visit another of Camphill's projects at Mysuru, Karnataka. It is still under construction. They have a large area of land for farming, wherein we did some farming. We also made a greenhouse. The place was full of nature; it is considerably far away from the polluted cities. I thought to myself, "Oh, What a place to live!" Having stayed there for a night, we returned to Bangalore the next day. During my stay, one of our friends had an episode of seizure. I rushed quickly when I saw her falling on the floor. We had to let the seizure subside, and then with the help of a colleague we shifted her to a bed. It was a little upsetting and uncomfortable for me, as that was my first such encounter.

Working at Camphill was pretty exhausting, but I was able to pull through with a positive attitude. Camphill gave me some good friends, people with similar thoughts. We spent our free time together having conversations and sharing ideas.

I stayed an extra day at Camphill simply because I didn't want to leave the place. The last day was very emotional. Everyone gathered to give me a farewell. They sang songs, flooded me with good wishes, and gave me a small Buddha idol engraved with a verse from the philosopher Rudolf Steiner.

It was a hard goodbye. I carried back with me a lot of experiences and memories of community living. I learned to be more patient and understood sustainability better. It also gave me a feeling of "There is another way of life in this world."



This photograph was shot by Bibi Christa Xavier on her morning walk at Ramamangalam Village, Ernakulam District in Kerala.