



## Towards a Cosmopolitanism of things

A JANAL Talk by Prof. J. Devika

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*Summary: This lecture explores Kerala's evolving cosmopolitanisms, highlighting the impact of migration and transnationalism on the region's modernity*

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I am trying to present today a series of thoughts on migration, which is a part and parcel of Kerala as we imagine it now. Kerala is a highly migration dependent economy, as we all know, and migration is also very much part of our cultural heritage. In fact, as I will argue later, it's been part of our culture since quite a long, long time. And it's only that it is kind of difficult for us to acknowledge this, as part of what has constituted us as a culture in a region like us, which is actually more open to the sea. In fact, completely open to the sea, I mean, we all have a coastline that runs along the length and breadth of our state. And it has been the case for many, many centuries. The fact that we have been seafaring seafarers for very long.

## Defining the Cosmopolitan

So let me just start by introducing the term cosmopolitanism, it is very much in currency now. There is in fact, there are very important first world Metropolitan University Center debates around cosmopolitanism. I will not enter in depth into those debates. Those are academic debates. But I definitely want to clarify the idea of cosmopolitanism before we start this discussion. Because in this lecture, I'm trying to think through these three concepts, cosmopolitanism, migration and modernity, through and in the background of the history of Kerala in the 20th century.

So let's start with cosmopolitanism. The word cosmopolitanism comes from the Greek word, 'kosmopolites' and which translates as world citizens, citizens of the world. In fact, this was in kind of in opposition to the rule in Greek city states. I mean, the Greeks were divided into citizen states. And citizenship was essentially associated with particular city states. But there were some people who refused to accept that kind of a narrow definition. And who declared themselves to be the citizens

of the cosmos, not of some narrow city state. So the word cosmopolitanism comes from that kind of defined posturing. As the idea develops in history, the core becomes one of the ideals of a universal community. So the idea that it's possible to imagine a community of human beings who are not affiliated to any particular culture, or state, becomes the core of this concept. And of course, in time, it develops into an idea, not just a defined claim, posed against an entity, be it a city, state or country or a king, kingdom. It becomes an ideal to be achieved in the future. And the idea that all kinds of particularities can be shared, in order to assume a particular core of humanity. So that becomes an ideal in history that everyone ought to aspire to, that is actually a part of enlightenment modernity, where philosophers like Immanuel Kant, for example, tell us that we should actually aspire to become world citizens by shedding particularities, we should join in a moral community, which is universal and beyond, but particular kinds of cultural or political affiliations.

So as I said, it can be negative like the Greek philosopher Diogenes, who refuses to identify with his city state. And he says, I'm not a citizen of the cosmos, I am not bound by my city state. Then, and as I said, the ideal kind develops later. And there are very different versions of it. There is the Christian ideal, for example, Christianity proposed a certain kind of cosmopolitanism, where in which it was understood that anybody who joined Christianity redeemed their humanity, their essential humanity. Therefore, they were actually not bound by the affiliations of the states they belong to or other cultures they were born into. But Christ was very particular that Christians should acknowledge whichever state that they lived under. So he talked about how important it was to render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, but he also

encouraged Christians to share their particularities to treat all Christians as equal and the members of a world community.

Then in the enlightenment, Europe, that is in the 18th century, the famous encyclopaedia and others, they define the cosmopolitan as a man of no fixed abode or a man who is nowhere a stranger. So someone who does not put in roots anywhere, but it's not also a stranger anywhere. So this person is open to the world, speaks many languages, is able to travel, has the capacity to mingle in different cultures, and does not perceive cultures as antagonistic to each other. That kind of a person is deemed to be cosmopolitan. And of course, the pinnacle of these debates comes from Immanuel Kant, who says that all rational beings are bound to be in a single moral community, which is beyond the narrow particularities of nature, nation states and cultures and so on. Yes, but this ideal also ran into trouble in the 20th century.

Now, the 20th century brought a very, very powerful critique of colonialism. And it was pointed out that Kantian moral cosmopolitanism was not free of the racism, the sexism and colonial hubris. In fact, Kant, you know, in some of his early works was an apologist of colonialism. So the idea of the moral Kosmopolis was not exactly in opposition to the colonial ambition, and the white man's burden. However, a version of cosmopolitanism was very, very convenient to the expanding capitalism of the time, colonial capitalism of the time, because the colonial rulers badly wanted to open up the local markets for their goods, and also to buy goods raw material cheap. So for them, this was a very useful ideas, they could accuse anyone who was suspicious of colonial capitalism, by just saying that you are narrow minded, you know, you are narrow, you just fear the foreigner, you set

a phobic, you don't want, new people to come into your markets. And so, you know, so you're not cosmopolitan enough. That kind of accusation was useful for capitalism to create a certain kind of psychological domination over people who were suspicious of capitalist exploitation and its effects.

So Marxism of course, had its own version of cosmopolitanism. So, Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, famously call upon all the proletarians of the world to unite. So the essential core of common humanity is now transferred on to the proletarian masses of the world. So Marxism has its own version of cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, they believe that the evocation of this kind of culture, the ease with which people cosmopolitans glide from culture to culture, in Marxist critique is often associated with the ease of capital, moving from country to country, and gaining control over markets. Now, this critique was considerably refined in the course of the 20th century. And you have several theories, looking at cosmopolitanism, as essentially an apology for Colonial exploitation. And in fact, Donna Haraway, the well known feminist theorists and science studies scholar, calling it a conquering gaze from nowhere, that is, cosmopolitanism claims to be not affiliated to any particular culture or state. But the fact is that it is most often evoked by the privileged people of the world, who are usually European or Anglo American. So cosmopolitanism hides the fact that it is evoked mostly by the privileged people of the world, and it looks like it's coming from nowhere. And it induces people who are, you know, more locally, who are located in the peripheries of the world, in the southern parts of the world, to feel a certain kind of guilt, you know, that they are not open enough to the world in some way or they are not, you know, expansive in the manner in which

privileged people are. So this is a very brief history of the debates around cosmopolitanism.

So why do we want to reflect on it if there is so much critique about it. So why should we even think about it now? I think there are two reasons. One, of course, is the fact that cosmopolitanism, even as Harraway and others point out, is a first world ideal, there is something to it, because of the times that we are living in. I mean, after the 1990s, the third wave democracy has rapidly given way to very narrow jingoistic evocations of nationalism around the world. Now, this is happening not just in India, but also in other parts of the world, in Turkey, Poland, Europe, in the US, very violently jingoistic, xenophobic groups have taken over power and now they control the discourse of nationalism. Now, this is a context in which we need to think of belonging, other ways of belonging to the world as human beings. So, there are people who are thinking about planetary belonging, in the sense of being ecological beings. So, you know, Bruno Latour and others, for example, proposed that we should stop calling ourselves human beings. Instead we call ourselves Terrestrials, rather than human beings, because the moment we call ourselves Terrestrials, we bring ourselves down to a level of equality with all other life on the Earth.

## Cosmopolitanism in Kerala

So, there are such proposals, but I think it's also important for us to think about culture, beyond these narrow claims of belonging in a very specific context of Kerala. We know that Kerala as a state, as a linguistic entity, common entity came into being in the middle of the 20th century with the formation of the state of Kerala bringing together Malabar which was part of the Madras Presidency and Travancore and

Cochin, which were both native states under the British. So, we are a fairly young cultural entity and Kerala was understood as a common cultural entity in the 1940s and 50s and 60s, under the hegemony of the left, and the three pillars, which I'm drawing on my earlier work here. So, this hegemony which produced the national popularity of Kerala in the 1940s had three main pillars. One of it was development, the idea of welfarist development, the second was of the Malayalam language. And the third was of a shared culture in which the different people who hold groups of people who form the Malayali shared. So, there was a very, very strong attempt in the middle decades of the 20th century especially to articulate this shared culture to strengthen the Malayalam language as a vehicle, which would you know, of which would kind of anchor the belonging, sense of belonging of people born in this region and development as the state's major language of unifying people. Now, if you think about it, I don't want to talk about that long history, that's a whole different lecture perhaps, but at the present, more than 70 years down the line what would we think?

What stares us in the face is the fact that each of these pillars is seriously deteriorated and development for the weaknesses of these pillars have been exposed. We now know that the Kerala culture that was so celebrated in the middle of the 20th century was not as inclusive as it looked at the point. The Malayalam language is facing challenges as Malayalis become a more migrant population. The left itself is starting to abandon welfare is development, and it's no longer really a unifying force. In fact, the most divisive of debates, if you just go back a couple of years and see which were the most divisive debates, those debates were around development. So we need to think about the region in a different way and cannot rely on

the mid 20th century consensus anymore. We need to rethink the region in a way that actually salvages us as a cultural entity, but at the same time, we don't want to close our eyes to any of the faults of these three pillars. I mean, we know that Kerala culture has often been very elitist and Savarna. We know that development has not really been fair to you know people who are deprived and objective. Do we also know that the Malayalam language itself is shot through and through with, with elitist concerns. Now, we don't want to shut our eyes to all that. But at the same time, I wouldn't want to throw the region away completely and say that, okay, we are not even a region, we are nothing. So that doesn't look viable to me. So I think it's very important. And I think examining the history of cosmopolitanism in 20th century Kerala is an interesting way to start a re-imagination of the region in less narrow terms. So, in a way that will allow us to acknowledge the failings of 20th century regionalism, but at the same time, maybe reimagine the region in a way that is more inclusive.

## Kerala Matha



Figure 1. Kerala Maataavu (Mother Kerala). Image: J. Devika

This is my favourite image, a map of Kerala from a drawing from a Malayalam women's magazine called *Srimathi*, which used to be published in the 1930s. It was a black and white image. So when I got the scan, the guy in this photo studio was so you know, she

was so taken by this image, he put the colours on it, I didn't. So yeah, but then Kasavu etc, were already there. He just put the Golden Bell, you will notice I mean, this is a very, very interesting image, because actually, it should not be there. I put it this way only for you to get a sense of the map. If you look carefully enough in the waves, you can see the place names marked. You can see that column and you can see the place names marked on the coast. Now, if you put it vertically, you will see it will be very peculiar because you have Kerala which is turned away from India. And its legs are pointing to the north. And where is it looking? Its gaze is not westerly. So it is looking at the Gulf. That's where the Gulf countries have such a very, very present kind of image you know, it's almost prophetic. So, Kerala matha is gazing at the Gulf, you know, so, as if she knows that the money is going to come from there.

I think this is a very interesting imagination, it comes from the 1930s. Somehow it comes from you know, that is in it a kind of a recognition that Kerala has this connection towards the sea. And it is true if you think about it, say if you say to the 17th century or the 18th century, now, Kochi and Kuala Lumpur are, I think around 1800 kilometres via sea, and Kochi and Delhi are separated by around the same, I think 1500 kilometres or so. Now, it was easier to get to Kuala Lumpur in the 16th century than to Delhi. Because you travelled to Kuala Lumpur by ship whereas if you wanted to get to Delhi, you would have to cross the forests of the Sahyadri mountains. And those forests were truly daunting for any traveller until modern technology made it possible to cut down and build roads and clear forests and so on. So, this means that we are actually closer to Southeast Asia than to North India. And I don't know how many of you know but Trivandrum is closer to Colombo than it is to Calicut as the crow flies. So, this region

called Kerala is poised in a way that keeps it open to the sea. And this is something that we need to really take into account and we move on to the next slide.

## Kerala - Folk Wisdom for Travellers

Historically Kerala has been a trade oriented but very highly caste ridden, caste based. So, you have on the one hand, a society that is rigidly divided into caste and which employs not just untouchability, but also unseeability and that what was employed to keep society going here, the caste society going in Kerala. But at the same time, it was a society of seafarers. So trade was a great and important source of wealth for a very, very long period. So we have all kinds of sayings, you know, like for example, if you go to a land of rat snake eaters, eat the middle piece. It's means you have to mingle you know, you should not think of any of your own culture or your own customs or habits, you should just adopt the customs and habits of others even if they look very strange to you, maybe you have never eaten a rattlesnake in your life, maybe your culture forbids you to do that, but you still have to do it if you go to another place that is the kind of folk wisdom offered to travellers in Kerala. The very reason I keep using the word Kerala only to refer to this stretch of land which is full of Malayalam speakers and share a common heritage. Then you know, you must have also heard of this other proverb. This is about the cockroach who hopped on a ship and went to Bengal, I mean, there was a very active trade in rice between Bengal and Kerala and Travancore particularly, so, the ships filled with rice would come from Calcutta to Kochi and Calicut. So, the idea is that some cockroach jumped into the hole of the ship and went to Bengal and ate a lot of rice and then went to Bengal and then came back in the same ship. So there is this comparison about people who do not change though

they have been abroad. So this quote by the way is a way of describing people who have gone to foreign countries and seen a lot of different cultures and people, but they still remain the same. So now these are all parts of snippets of folk wisdom, which actually tell us that we have been a people exposed to other cultures, other people.

## Cosmopolitanism of objects

And you know, there is a material culture, common to Southeast Asia and the whole of South India, which we live very normally without even being conscious. And that is what I'm calling the cosmopolitanism of objects. Now if you go to a traditional Kerala kitchen, it looks exactly like a traditional Malay kitchen. There is no difference. Almost all the implements are the same. What we call cheena chatty, or cheena baraney, cheena kathy, you will see the same things in the Malay, Indonesian, Sri Lankan, Southeast Asian, even in Vietnam, you know, even in that entire region, there is a sharing of material culture. And it's not surprising because this happens under the Portuguese and the Dutch trade period, when Chinese goods circulated in this whole region. So it was not China that was directly exporting any of this stuff. It was Portuguese who were facilitating the circulation of material objects. So what we think about as pristine Kerala architecture, you will find even more pristine Kerala architecture in Minangkabau in Malaya. In fact, this guy Ranjith if he wants to shoot more of those old feudal films, he should go to Minangkabau, he'll find even more authentic Malayali architecture over there. So I think it's an important solvent for any claims of an exclusivist notion of Malayalee culture.

So let's pause that for a moment because I'll break come back here. I want to tell you my whole thesis in this lecture is to say that

this is really very important. This is what we need to keep in our minds.

We have to realise that during the Dutch and Portuguese periods, particularly during the Dutch periods, that many many different kinds of people came to Kerala. So for example, the Dutch never bought their own armies. They recruited Sri Lankan armies, so they were Sri Lankan forces that invaded Kerala you know, basically soldiers. When the Dutch captured Fort Kochi. They took a lot of captives to Batavia in Indonesia, when those people married local women. These were of course Luso Indians who spoke Cochin Creole Portuguese. They were taken to Malacca and Batavia where they married local Indonesian women and the Dutch call them Marjickers. They spoke the Creole Portuguese. The same group was brought back to Kerala later by the Dutch to fight the wars which ravaged the 16th century. Now there are vivid descriptions of these soldiers in the Dutch archives and they don't look any different from Kerala warriors. I mean the same and and it's every reason to think that they never went back. The Dutch also brought Hindu fighters from Bali because only they knew how to burn down a temple correctly. There's every reason to think that these guys may never have gone back to Bali. So, all these claims of over the purity of blood you know, which we say like you know Nayers are pure blood or whatever, is really nonsense, I mean, because there has been widespread mixing in at least in the 16th century and 17th century. There is no reason that in fact absolutely no reason why we should think of ourselves as some kind of a people united in blood and sharing some you know, blood that has flowed from generation to generation in some state of, you know, purity. There is absolutely no need and we need to keep that in mind.

If we want to open ourselves up we want to have a sense of belonging that is not rigid

and inclusivist. Yeah, the Kaili for example, even the patterns in the Kaili. I don't know if anybody has studied the prints in the Kaili, they used to be directly imported from Indonesia. And then very interestingly, the synthetic Kaili, which began to be produced in the Gulf countries, because of the Indonesian-Malaysian people who started working there, those Kaili's reached Kerala through the Gulf route. The technology of arrack making circulated in this region since the 14th century. Yeah, 14th century at least. So all these tree climbing techniques. Do you know that the tree climbing techniques in Kerala are not that of Sri Lanka ? That's what we would expect. These techniques that we use are shared with the island of Sunda in Indonesia. And in fact, the only Malayalam name for the toddy tapper, the Sanskrit name for the today tapper in Malayalam is sundikan which literally means a native of Sunda. So all this is very interesting. But I want you to keep this in mind as I pass on to the next part of my presentation, which is on cosmopolitanism and migration in the late 19th and 20th century Kerala.

## Pre-modern Cosmopolitanism

But I want to tell you a bit before we get into the 19th and 20th centuries, we did have forms of cosmopolitans. I mean what I explained to you as lived cosmopolitanism that came through trade. But there were other kinds of cosmopolitanism in pre-modern Kerala, which were especially associated with the Catholic Church, and the reason is, Kerala, besides being a great centre of trade. It was also the centre of world religions. So, if you look at the three major religions, the founding myths around the three major religions, all of them claim to be, I mean, the representative of that religion in Kerala claims to be close to the founder, one of the founding heads of that faith. For example, for caste Hindus, the

myth of Parashu Rama, who is Vishnu himself. So Kerala is supposed to have been founded by Maha Vishnu himself. Then if you look at say the Christian meets the association is with St. Thomas is nothing less than that, who is of course one of the founding figures of the Christian faith, or for Islam, again, a figure like Malik Dinar, or many other the first generation Muslim missionaries, they were all supposed to have been the companions of the founder of the faith, Prophet Muhammad.

So you know, that claim is very important because that claim connects this local region with the founding place of that faith, whichever it is. So, in fact, only in Islam and Christianity in Kerala, these connections grew richer over time. You can see that there is now excellent research going on about Islam's cosmopolitan links, especially the Indian Ocean connections of Islam in Kerala. There is also excellent work on the early Christian cosmopolitan. There's a lot of interesting material one could share here. But I just want to point out one, which is the first travelogue in Malayalam called Varthamana Pusthakam by two scholars. We know that it is Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar and Kariattil Yusef Malpan who undertook this journey in the 18th century. And these were extraordinary people. They were great scholars. Malpan himself was a student in Rome, in between 1755 and 1765. And he was well versed in Latin, Portuguese, Italian, Malayalam and Tamil and Kathanar himself was a Greek scholar of Sanskrit, Syriac, Tamil, Portuguese, and Italian, Latin. So these were extraordinarily, you know, accomplished people. And they travel interestingly. They go from here to Madras and then take a ship, which goes to Cape of Good Hope in Africa. And then they set sail for Europe, but a storm takes them to South America. So they land up in Bahia. They live in Bahia for a year, and then take another ship to Lisbon. And then from Lisbon, they

go to Rome, and Varthamana Pusthakam is the story of that trip to Rome.

## Casteist cosmopolitanism

This Varthamana Pusthakam is also an important book because it shows that despite the cosmopolitanism that these two scholars, clergymen, actually display, they were also acutely aware of how unequal it is. So they were actually going to Rome to petition the Pope against the Portuguese clergy, which was creating a great deal of trouble for them. And so many of the things that they point out to the Pope are very interesting. There's a passage there which says that we were already Christians when you were running around in your grass skirts in Europe. And the big parishes among them have been built before your forefathers heard anything about Malabar. So it's like clearly saying that, you know, cosmopolitanism requires, if you're talking about Christian cosmopolitanism, then you better be aware of the fact that you have to practise this. This equality has to come not because of white skin, and they clearly talk about white skin, and say that we don't care for your white skin. Your white skin does not give you the right to boss over us. So these are things that this book says however, there are also problems with celebrating this cosmopolitanism. So like I told you, we are interested in this topic, because we want to think of resources for the present. Now, is this a great resource for the present? I would think not, partly because this kind of cosmopolitanism is talking about cosmopolitanism of the clergy, not of Christians. So, the duo are very upset when Portuguese priests treat them kind of shabbily on their way to Chennai, to Madras, putting them up in a common inn with ordinary people. So, they say that we are not ordinary people. In the complaint by Malpan, there is a sharp tinge of casteism, which insists that the clergy are high and mighty



and above man. They should not be put among ordinary people. I'm not trying to idolise this. I'm actually trying to develop a critique of this.

So yeah, this pre-modern kind of cosmopolitanism, I think we should be very careful in trying to celebrate it. Somebody like Ashish Nandi, for example, talks about Kochi as a prime example of non Eurocentric cosmopolitanism. But I think this cosmopolitanism which Kochi is celebrated for where you had Jews and Muslims and Christians and everyone living together in the same space. I would call it casteist cosmopolitanism, because these groups were actually integrated into the caste order here. They were not just living as cosmopolitans. They were living here as caste groups. And the kingdom of Kochi was clearly ruled by a majoritarian King, who was committed to defending the caste order. The Savarna king of Kochi, the Savarna regime, was committed to defending the caste order. And each of these communities were integrated into the cost ordered as vaishya. And there was no one indigenous vaishya, so these other communities fill that gap. And so I would call it the casteist cosmopolitanism, but at the same time it raised other subaltern cosmopolitanism, which did exist here. For example, the paranghis of Kochi are an interesting group, not just because they are a mixture of Portuguese and local. They are not actually. They are, you know, the descendants of people from Indonesia. And you know that, Pegu, Indonesia, Malaysia, who were brought here in the 16th century by the Portuguese as boat builders and carpenters and so on. It was their descendants who became the paranghis, who then married locally and settled down. They also intermarried with the Portuguese. So the real cosmopolitans, here are the paranghis. But the paranghis, you have, how many people even really know anything about paranghi culture

and no one celebrates them as cosmopolitans. So, they will be the subaltern cosmopolitans, which is erased by this discourse of caste cosmopolitanism, which is supposed to have flourished in pre-modern Kerala. And of course, what do we celebrate? We celebrate the cuisine cosmopolitanism, you know, which is the food and that's because it is eminently sellable in terms of tourism.

## 19th and 20th CE Cosmopolitanism

So, with that critique let me move on to looking at the cosmopolitanism of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. So what is the context of this cosmopolitanism really is the coming of British rule into Kerala and the integration of the local economy into the capitalist world systems. So, the products of Kerala are now being traded in the global world system. And Kerala becomes a producer of raw materials valued in the world economy. For example, coconut based products attain a great deal of market value in the late 19th century, and communities that were highly invested in coconut cultivation like the Ezhava begin to profit from it. The British domination in Kerala, of course, brings modern missionaries here and they begin to offer education to the lowest classes. Then, the 19th century was also a time of vast expansion of opportunities for migration. Because the British Empire started setting up plantations, especially tea and rubber plantations, for example, in Malaya and Sri Lanka, which needed a large number of labourers. In the 1860s, I've seen a letter from a collector in the Palghat district, desperately writing to the authorities in Madras saying that something must be done to stop the conversion of the low caste or agricultural labourers. Because what they're doing is they're all converting into Islam. And then there are these little offices set up all over the Palghat District, which are

recruiting labourers for the Malay Peninsula. So the young men of the lower caste communities are converting into Islam, going to these recruitment centres, and taking a ship to Malaya. So clearly, this was an opportunity for Dalits in Malabar particularly, to escape the terrible torments of caste exploitation in Kerala, and move to Malaya. Some of the educated upper caste men, who were annoyed by the families, who had some kind of quarrel with their families found the opportunity to run away to these other places and find work.

Many of you who have studied Malayalam cinema know that in the first film, *Vigathakumaran*, the plot unfolds in two places. So part of the plot unfolds in Colombo, in Sri Lanka, and part of it in Trivandrum. It is about a child who is kidnapped from a family in Trivandrum and taken to Sri Lanka. So you know, that way, the opening up of global geography through trade brings many opportunities. Then, of course, very widespread because these plantations are sugar plantations in Fiji, all of this attracts labour from this region. Then the spread of modern education among the elites. So people get to know more and more. And not only the elites, for example, the CMS missionaries, the early efforts in education. When they discuss caste, they bring in texts, like the writings of Booker T Washington on American slavery, the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, etc. So, you know, lower caste people are exposed to the world at large and begin to recognize the oppression that they suffered as no longer just a local phenomenon. So, more modern at this point emerges as a possibility to defy traditional authority, to find alternative ways of living, to escape caste oppression, and to gain some self reflexivity and that is what presents itself as the modern at the stage.

So, if you look at the early 20th century, so much of what we eat is so blandly identified as part of Kerala Navodhanam, which is a

very misleading word that consists of exogenous arrivals. So the first generation feminists for example, are talking about suffragist struggles in London. In fact, in 1903, Lakshmi amma in Trivandrum wrote about how unfair the British Prime Minister is, for having unleashed the police on the suffragettes and beaten them up and how that is very important for women in Travancore to understand. So, you have the first generation when women like Kochattil Kalyanikkutty Amma in the 1930s are completely, I mean that the sense of identification with the local is actually weakens to a huge extent and they do not some simply believe themselves to be subject to the local patriarchy. So, that defiance of local patriarchy is so unique. It is you know, it can only be described as a mindset that is focused on the world rather than on the region.

Then the anti-caste missionary network as I just mentioned, who introduced Booker T Washington and anti-caste literature from the American scene here. Then the rationalism of Sahodharan Ayappan and others, which actually draw on American rationalism. And in fact, Ayappan had very, very strong correspondence with American rationalists in the 1930s and 40s. Then, of course, there was Buddhism by C. Krishna and and others in Malabar. C Krishna actually converse in close touch with Buddhists from Thailand onwards, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and so on. And there was an active communication between these regions and the area of Kerala at that time. Then we are of course number of the literary cosmopolitanism of figures like Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, who kind of rejected the British literature as inferior and looked at the continental literature, who introduced literary theory and aesthetic theory into Malayalam and completely revolutionised Malayalam literature, literally pulling very hard at its Sanskritic roots. And you know,

making this whole idea of making it modern, was firmly planted in Malayalam literature by him.

Then, Marxism, socialism, all of which came into being in the first half of the 20th century. Marxism as an ideology comes from Europe, as we all know, but it had its own version of cosmopolitanism. So AK Gopalan, for example, was a wanted revolutionary, not just in India. He was also wanted by the police in Malaya, and Sri Lanka because he travelled in those regions organising labour there in Sri Lanka. He travelled extensively in Sri Lanka, to end the animosities between Sinhala labour and Malayali labour. Because there were accusations that these Malayalee men were just, you know, marrying Sinhala women and then abandoning them and so on. And AKG actually travelled in that region to settle disputes and to actually bring together the labour force. So Gopalan was a wanted man not just in British India. He was also wanted in Malaya and Sri Lanka.

A large share of what we realise is Malayalee Navodhanam, which we believe is mostly endogenous, was not endogenous. It was exogenous. In fact, even a poet like Asan, who we all would think his work is endogenous, it's not, because if you look at his major poems, long poems, the themes of those poems are drawn not from some indigenous source. They are drawn from all over India and some are based on Persian myth, some are from Buddhism, and other sources. So, what appears to be endogenous, is not so, and we have still not acknowledged that. So, we still conceive of Navodhanam as the Malayali Renaissance and what is Renaissance? It is the rediscovery of a buried culture. So, imagine it in indigenous terms, it is not. My contention is that if at all we should use that term in the Malayali context, it has to be understood as essentially a confluence

of all these different kinds of forces, cultural forces that are exogenous.

And what is the nature of migration in the spirit, as I told you, there was a massive opening up of opportunities, especially for the subaltern poor to migrate. But the point is, this changes in the 1920s, for example, the migration of poor labourers is actually begins to fall, and instead, educated Millennials are now moving towards Malaya, especially Malay Peninsula. So, you will notice many of you might have noticed in your own environment. So many houses in Kerala, somebody should do a photo exhibition on that. There are houses called Ipo cottage, Penang villa, Malaya cottage. In fact, I've seen a house called Bungaraya, which means hibiscus flower. So, many of the houses here are named after places. Modern houses that were built in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, were named after the places from which the wealth to produce those homes were produced. So you had the elite stream of migration. Now, of course, the subaltern stream preceded it. So you will see that there's a difference. If you look at the literature, you'll see that there's a difference in the way these two streams relate to home. The elites were much closer to home. So, you know, after the Second World War, most of the elites returned. The elites had enough salaries, resources, networks, connections, to marry among each other. And, for example, INA recruited mostly the highly educated Malayali elite, who were working in Malaysia at that time. And if you read the the autobiography of Nair San, well known Nair San, who ended up in Japan as a student, and then could not come back and then became well known as a nationalist and a supporter of Rash Behari Bose and other Indian revolutionaries stayed in Tokyo all his life and never returned to India. And it's very interesting that they had to choose a side. So you can see it KP Keshava Menon, for example, returned to

India and became a famous nationalist, whereas James Joseph Puthucherry was also recruited in the INA, and he was one of the few people who actually survived the Battle of Imphal. So he returned to Malaya and became one of the most respected socialist politicians in Malaysia and he became a very well known economist as well. His whole family, his son, Janel Puthucherry, was a politician and his grandson Dominic Puthucherry, was a very well known trade unionist in Malaysia. So you can see they had to choose. James Puthucherry went to Malaya in the 1920s as a translator, and then he became an excise officer. James was raised in Malaya and became a Malaysian. In fact, that whole family is invested very heavily in Malaysian politics. But these are all elites.

But there is another group which are the migrants, what I call the migrant subalterns, who did not choose one nation or the other. Then if you want to read more about them, you should read S.K. Pottakadu, fabulous travelogue in Southeast Asia, where he meets a number of these migrant subalterns. So for example, he meets this guy called Harry Joseph, who left Kerala when he was 11 years old. He was an orphan and mistreated by his father's family. So he took a ship. He ran away from home and took a ship from Nagapattinam for Malaysia, and the rest of his life till youth he took refuge in a mosque in Penang where they educated him and you know, taught him some skills with which he worked all the way between Laos to Indonesia and settled down in Indonesia married an Sumatran Muslim. When Pottakadu met him he was a fairly rich local contractor, who had five daughters, all named after heroines of Bengali novels. In his house, his wife knew how to make a perfect sambar. So, Pottakadu was served with Sumatran food as well as Malayali food and, particularly, absolutely amazed by the ease with which

he moves across cultural registers. There is no tension, there is no sense of hierarchy between these registers; he's able to be Sumatran Laotian Malayali all together and there is no contradiction. And there is no play acting, nothing. So he's called the real Vishwa Pournan, who's able to treat borders as completely irrelevant.

Then there is Narayana Pillai who he meets in Jakarta, who is exquisite, who left Trivandrum as a Sanskrit scholar. But there, he attained a great grasp of Bahasa Indonesia and he was publishing a bilingual newspaper. There is one sheet in Malayalam and the other sheet in Bahasa. There he also meets a senior man who ran a very successful hotel restaurant in Jakarta. It was named the Malabar Pakistan hotel. And on being questioned about this strange name. He told Pottakadu that Malabar is my native place, and Pakistan is my faith. So Malabar Pakistan hotel. Then of course, there are many, many people whom he discusses, but I mean, I'm just choosing a few. Then he meets this girl called Kamala, who is very Chinese. But she was raised as a Malayali, because when the Japanese attacked Malaya, the Chinese workers in the plantations ran away. And when they ran away, they took only their boys, they left all their girl children behind. And the managers and supervisors of these plantations were Indians, mostly Tamils and Malayalis and they took pity on these girls and basically adopted them. So, I myself have met a family where the senior lady is called Sarojini amma and the youngest is a very well known lawyer in Penang, Lalita Menon, and all four sisters are Malayalis, speak perfect Malayalam except the fact that they are all Chinese actually by birth. They were babies adopted by a childless Malayali couple. So, if you read Pottakadu's famous story Avalude Keralam where he says that this whole idea of Kerala as a shared homeland was actually produced outside

Kerala. So he talks about an Onam celebration in Penang, I think, where people from Kasargod and people from Kanyakumari, and all kinds of people are there and they imagine it's through their eyes that this Kerala is born.

Yeah, so it's now so you basically the cosmopolitanism of this time is the ability to absorb two or more cultural worlds, basically to to maintain different cultural registers in your mind without getting them into a conflict. So there's no conflict, there's no question of choosing. So if Harry Joseph is asked to, and in fact, by the time Pottakadu has met him, Harry Joseph is in the process of trying to process his Indonesian citizenship. So some people are accusing him of not being Indonesian. So you see, our point is he was now being forced to choose a side. Earlier, he did not have to do it. So in between colonial geography, it was possible, you know why? Because someone who migrated from Kerala to Malaya. Kerala was under the British so was Malaya. So Malayali people did not have citizenship. The Malaya people also did not have citizenship. So someone moving from here to there were equal. They would be equal with a local folk, where we're both equally under the British. So this kind of sharing was possible. But what happens afterwards, changes this completely. So in the second half of the 20th century, our migration changes and when our migration changes, so also the nature of cosmopolitanism.

### Parallel Cosmopolitanisms

So, as I told you the effects of this cosmopolitanism, which can carry different registers. Does cultural registers without making, you know, arranging them in some hierarchy? First of all, this is about modernity, as modernity is understood as a critique on rebellion against traditional

forms of power. So even elites like N.N. Pillai, for example, ran away from his tharavadu. People who migrate very often are runaways, they're running away from power, even elites. Then social capital is not understood as some local business, you know, creating local networks, etc. It's about being able to imagine a larger connection. So even the Panchayat president who comes to clean wells with potassium permanganate will give this big speech on the Soviet Union. Those guys that imagine a world that is much bigger than your local, you know, that you belong to that kind of a world, then the openness to the world as a virtue not as the other way around. So people who were soldiers, for example, from Kerala after the First World War, coming back with very defined attitudes, and refusing to acknowledge their former landlords and so on. And, of course, this was often at loggerheads with Indian nationalism, because, well, Indian nationalism wanted you to essentially take a quick aside to say that your Indian identity is primary, it's above everything else. But, of course, it did not. The point is that, at no point did this translate into some kind of uncritical, nationalist sentiment, that was the great advantage, in my view of the cosmopolitanisms of this time.

In the 1940s and 50s world politics changed. After the Second World War the nation state system was coming into being with the decolonisation of the entire world, all the world being divided into nation states, all of them have immigration, they have passport systems. So, if you migrate to another country, you are not a citizen there and you cannot be on equal terms with the local people. So it is not like the pre-nation state system. So, you can't really migrate from Kerala to Malaya and, you know, be really equal with the people, the people they think that they are superior, because they are actually citizens of that place. Then there is

the Cold War. So the Cold War changed the whole, you know, you have to agree either with the American pole or with the Soviet pole, and Marxism, of course, this is internationalism, and internationalist cosmopolitanism is now fixed around the USSR. It's all fine, but the USSR is central to it.

Now Buddhism again, which people like C. Krishna and wanted to experiment with, gets identified with the Dalai Lama and Tibet and China and so on. Then you have rationalism therefore, become atheism. So, the anti-caste, anti-power kind of orientation strongly there in the earlier invocations of rationalism are now gone. Then feminism, of course, is now really forced to be under nationalism. So, feminists are told that you know, they have to be nationalist first. So, they have to be Indian, in some ways International. So, Indian culture you have to take into account. So, the first generation of feminists in India also become, for example, reservations for women, you know, the demand for reservations for women, because they are convinced that kind of a demand is really anti-national.

Then the only exception you can say that this reversal you did not see was in the Malayali literary public, where we still were talking about the continent and the fascination with continental European literature continued. So, Kafka and Camus and all these other figures became very important and continue to be very important to us. So, along with this, you also see some new trends in migration. And for example, post second World War, Europe is utterly devastated. And there is a resurgence of Catholic cosmopolitanisms, which is very elite. There was a very interesting proposal to move Kerala Catholic farmers to Brazil through the church. In fact, 12 families from Kerala actually migrated to Brazil. At that time, of course, that didn't

work out, which is another matter, nobody went after that. But in Europe it was needed. A lot of nurses basically help paramedical medical and paramedical personnel. And the Catholic Church mediated the migration of a very large number of nurses to Germany, to Italy, to France, Switzerland, and the European countries. There was a flow of teachers through the Catholic church again, to African countries, Ethiopia, Nigeria, wherever oil money could pay substantial salaries. And of course, from the 1970s onwards, we know that the Gulf opens up a window of opportunity, the petro dollar crisis opens up a window of migration of semi skilled labour from Kerala into the Persian Gulf.

Now, this migration is very different in nature from the first wave that we've just discussed. Now, this seems to be animated completely by a different ethos of family. For example, the ethos of family is very, very important, dutifulness to family is very important here because you have a family community. Catholic mediation was important, but even when there was no mediation, like for example, the Gulf migration, which happened purely through networks, individual networks. So even there, the support of family, community, caste and religion are very, very important. And you can see that this actually leads to a strengthening of these local power structures. And so conservatism are some were refurbished not undone. If the earlier kind of cosmopolitans undid local power, these actually reinforced it. And the major aim is really the family's upward mobility, through status, securing consumption. So people are migrating to Nigeria, for example, or the Gulf, to get a better salary to remit home. So this is transnational. You know, this is hardly running away from home and settling in another country and acquiring a new identity. It's not that this is

transnational, you're just moving to another country, where they pay a better salary. So that you can send more money back home and facilitate higher consumption by your family. And so, these people are interesting because they are politically marginal in the host land. The earlier generation was not like that.

Now in Malaysia, if you go to Kuala Lumpur, there is a huge building, which houses the offices of the trade unions. The name of that building, if I remember right, was PV Narayan memorial building. PV Narayanan was a worker from Kannur, who migrated to Malaysia and built one of the largest trade unions there. So not politically questioned, which is in sharp contrast to the post 1950s migrations, where you have Malayalis essentially being the good subjects, the easy and quiet subjects, politically docile subjects in the host land. So yeah, there are similarities, no doubt, because both have waves of poor migrants and there are poor migrants going but look at the differences. The differences are very striking. So the new wave migrants are poor, but they have already benefited from the Kerala model achievements. So they have basic education, their health is much better than the first generation migrants who left. The first wave, the Dalit presence, including the lower caste. In fact, I shouldn't use the word Dalit. I would say the avarna presence was very strong, the dalit avarna presence. As I told you, dalits often converted to Islam and ran away from the caste order here, they could do that. But in the second wave that is minimal.

In fact, you actually find that among the communities of Kerala, it is the Dalits who have not been able to migrate. I mean, in comparative terms. Then, the secondary migrants had no chance of settling in the host land, they had to come back. So transnational migration became the rule rather than the exception. And of course,

they were sharply divided from the locals, the host land because they could never be citizens there. Then again, here in the second wave, the driving force is family status mobility and not the defiance of power or any of those concerns. And of course and following this, you can see that the second wave migrants are very dependent on family, community resources and networks. Very often this migration is funded by selling family property. It is the family who takes over the financial burden of supporting the migration process itself, unlike the first generation, where people ran away from the house and somehow got on a boat.

Yeah, so, but then, in the late 20th century, there are cosmopolitanisms in our culture in the cultural political horizon of Kerala, which doesn't come from migration, which comes through networks of culture. So you have feminism for example, late 20s In the first feminist evocations of politics in Kerala came in the 1980s. And they come from Indian feminism and inspired by feminism elsewhere. And environmentalism for example, again, is a worldwide concern. There's a whole network of global you know, movements, which environmentalism in Kerala also finds itself to be part of. So there is the anti-caste politics, which is actively now connected with the anti race politics in other parts of the world. Then there's the new Marxism of the 1980s, which was Euro-Marxism, the Sachithanandan, P. Rajeev generation, which also thought themselves as the new radical Marxist cosmopolitan, who were interested in Latin American literature, in European cultural theory and so on. And the new Islamic thought that has been flowering since the 1990s. In Kerala, after the Muslim migration began to bring resources into the Muslim communities in Kerala. The Literary public sphere of course, remains as cosmopolitan. So if there is a Latin American novel, which

is a hit, then within like three months, you have a Malayalam translation of it in Kerala. If you go into the bookstores, you think that Kerala is absolutely unbelievably cosmopolitan.

But if you visit, you know, it's funny because in the public sphere we are all great cosmopolitans until we go back home. So that contradiction is explained, I think, by this history. And then, of course, there are good and bad here. There's good and bad, all connection to all globalised versions of these politics is not good. Feminism, for example, in Kerala is deeply under the sway of what I call global governance feminism, which is very elitist, which actually reworks elitism in ways that are completely unfavourable to the poor. For example, POSCO, the child sex abuse law is used most frequently against tribal men, against the most powerless men. And in fact, it is the tribal men who marry according to customary law, except, and those are not forced marriages. But nevertheless, the women they marry are underage according to the state. And so it's those men who go to jail who are punished. So I don't know if that is great, but so, I'm saying that we need local feminism, not just a global feminism. And there is a struggle to then attain a balance between the good and bad and what appears to be universal and so on.

So, you know, what we have then in the final analysis, if you look at this 20th century and try to distil the essence of what transpired, you will have two different senses of the model, you have modern as questioning power, which is liberatory. Then you have the early 20th century sense of the modern, associated with most marginalised groups, which is very suspicious of universals, but also aspiring for you know, Global Connections and so on. And the second is modern of high consumption, combined with the tools of community.

## A Cosmopolitanism of Things

So what makes you modern, in the second half of the 20th century? it is your access to modern things, to consumption. It's no longer the kind of ideas that you espouse, like it was in the earlier part of the century, but to be modern was to question power, question community, bring new senses of liberation, and so on. But in the Second part of the 20th century, it's not any of that. It has to do with consumption, with family upward mobility. And, of course, this is a modernity that seems to be highly invested actually in culture, and tradition. So high consuming individuals buying up temples and trying to organise, you know, religious festivals and trying to revive old feudal customs, and so on. And they are, of course, in the second order this, whatever claims we border are politically conservative, and subservient to all these neoliberal regimes. So this is the legacy of the 20th century.

I want to basically take your attention back to the cosmopolitanism of things that I mentioned in between, of objects. I think the most important thing here is to remember that the manner in which we connect to the world shapes our understanding of our cosmopolitanism, how we relate to the world. So that's one thing. So it is in us, in some sense, very transient to identify with one or the other depending on the times that you live in, in a way. But I don't think we should forget at all the fact that our everyday lives, the kind of things that surround us in our everyday lives, do not belong to any one place. I mean, what you would think as 100% Malayali, it's not 100% Malayali at all. Historically, the Kaili that you wear, the designs from those, are from Indonesia, perhaps, or they're from Malaysia. They are not from around here. You may think it is from here, only that the same garment is given a different name, or the food that you eat, the kind of the house



that you live in, even the words that we use. So these are all things that actually have come from somewhere. And they have found a temporary virtualized anchoring in our place. So I think the moment we become aware of this, I mean, we live immersed in that kind of cosmopolitanism.

When we are in our kitchen and grinding our Chammanthu, we don't even know that some woman in Sri Lanka or somebody in Malaysia is also doing the same, with the same instrument. You know, the same style of cooking. Meen thala curry you will find in Kuala Lumpur or in Penang, the same meen thala curry, only that it has a different name. And, then you know the famous Malabar metre chai, that is a national drink of Malaysia. They take pride in that and they believe that it belongs to them. While we all know that this is like all over Malabar, and it went from Malabar. It's essentially the malabaris who took it to Malaysia. So in some sense, almost all parts of our culture are permeated by exogenous factors. And we are so immersed in it, we don't remember it. I think when we become aware of it, that is when our sense of belonging matures and becomes richer. And that is when I think we can escape the clutches of Hindutva. And which says that, okay, everything is Hindu, and it proceeds from Varanasi or something like that. I mean, so, which erases regions totally. And we can also then resist the exoticisation of parts of Malayali culture as essentially coming from Portugal or someplace or the other. It's not even that, in fact, we can resist both these poles, we can actually think about our everyday lives as essentially shared among so many different peoples. And that, I think, makes us richer, you know, much richer open, and a people who are able to reflect on our chain.

I chose this topic for today's talk, because I think that the JANAL series, and also the other work that institutions like the

museum should be doing should be to take us towards that kind of culture, which is not exclusivist, and is constantly open to change and welcoming of all, all things good. So I will stop there and sorry for taking so much time, but there were too many things I had to say. So, thank you for your patience.

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