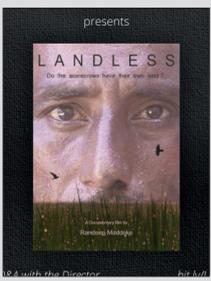


MOVIES

Screening of Landless + Q&A with director Randeep Madokke. Details on FB page of Vikalp@Prithvi. **Date:** Till February 21



CONFERENCE



Indian Democracy at work: Annual Conference Series, Second Edition on Rule of Law. On YouTube channel of Indian Democracy at work Conference. **Date & Time:** February 20-28, 5pm-7pm. Organized by Centre for Constitutional Rights, Research and Advocacy

WEBINAR

Webinar on Maternal Obesity. Organized by Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaec. Society of India in association with UNICEF For registration: <https://forms.gle/GUXWBdikWdqVbVP7> **Date & Time:** February 26, 5-7p



ART



Grihathura Varnangal, an exhibition of paintings by Aswany Kumar VS. Venue: Lalithakala Akademi Art Gallery, Vythilly Samskriti Bhavan, Thiruvananthapuram **Date & Time:** Till February 21, 10am-5pm

PERFORMANCE ART

Prabandha-koothu (Gangavatharanam: Ramayanam-Balakandam). Presented by Nepathya Rahul Chakkar. On the Facebook page of Nepathya Centre for Excellence in Koodiyattam. **Date & Time:** February 21, 6.30pm



SERMON ON THE MOUNT

A remote hilltop academy run by a Catholic priest is turning out some world-class cricketers and hoopsters



Jaikrishnan.Nair@timesgroup.com

About a 20-minute drive away from Kottayam town on the route to Mannanam there is a sports centre perched atop a hilllock. Under the watchful eyes of a priest, the centre has been producing a string of top sportspersons in recent years and quietly revolutionising sports training in the state.

Father Antony Kanjirathinkal, a priest belonging to the congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) who runs the basketball and cricket academies of St Ephrem's Higher Secondary School has a lot in his mind for the promotion of sports at the grassroots level. Besides spotting talent and nurturing it, the primary aim of his initiatives is to build a world-class sports training centre and help students from poor families get more job opportunities. Already, around 40 students from the academies have been offered jobs in the armed forces, police, KSEB, customs, banks and railways.

Mohammed Azharuddeen, who smashed an unbeaten 137 off 54 balls in a game against Mumbai in the domestic T20 Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy tournament recently, and was bagged by RCB in the IPL auction on Thursday, is a product of the cricket academy.

Fr Kanjirathinkal, fondly called Achan celebrated the famous century the same day by cutting a cake along with other students in the cricket academy, just the way he did when India snatched a historic win at the Gabba. "Achan understands our difficulties. He helped us get trained in a focussed way," says Azharuddeen.

Sijomon Joseph, a key player in the state Ranji Trophy team, still comes to the academy for training. Joseph loves to use the training facilities in the academy as he feels Achan brings about a positive energy with him. "The ground here is the best one for training and the coaches are well-qualified. Above all, Achan is there to support me all the time," says Joseph, who represented India in the U-19 series against England in 2017 and scored an unbeaten 62 and took seven wickets in his debut match.

Mohammed Shiraz, a promising basketball player too visits the academy whenever he gets time. The 21-year-old currently employed with the Kerala Po-



A KNACK OF NURTURING YOUNG TALENT: Father Antony Kanjirathinkal celebrated Mohammed Azharuddeen's brilliant knock at the academy by cutting a cake

lice has represented India in the FIBA U-19 championship held in Iran in 2016. "I learned the basics at the academy. Achan's support inspired me to succeed," says Shiraz.

Fr Kanjirathinkal, who is 49, did his graduation in Theology from Dharmaram College in Bengaluru as well as in Economics from KE College, Mannanam. He completed his masters in Physical Education before joining St Ephrem's School. He started the basketball academy in 2003-04 and the cricket academy in 2009. The basketball academy has the aid of the state sports council while the cricket academy is supported by the Kerala Cricket Association. The cricket academy started enrolling girls from 2014 and is only the second academy after the one in Krishnagiri in Waynad, which has a KCA women's training centre. Both the academies boast of the best trainers in the state in cricket and basketball and the priest shares a special relationship with them all. VM Premkumar, one of the basketball coaches, has the experience of working with the national women's basketball team.

Fr Kanjirathinkal has been trying his best to keep up the spirits of the boys and girls for the past one year during the unprecedented times of the pandemic. Covid-19 disrupted the sports calendar of around 60 boys and 12 girls in the academies. There were no events and restrictions were imposed on training. "Since sports events were cancelled, the

students were not in a position to get grace marks," said Fr Kanjirathinkal who is trying to bring these issues to the attention of the government. Though the events were called off, the priest did not want his wards to sit idle. Online programmes were regularly held for them by seniors who passed out of the academy as well as others who have made their marks in different fields.

Improving the infrastructure and facilities at the academy is now the priority for Fr Kanjirathinkal. The cricket academy has got a ground with lush-green grass where there are three nets. There are an indoor net and a gymnasium on the top floor of the hostel building which has a mess hall, a study room, and rooms for the students. At the basketball academy, there is a cement indoor court and a wooden court in the nearby college. The academies admit students from Class VII-XII. All the students have to leave their mobiles with the priest by 10pm every day. "Good sleep is essential for a healthy body. I don't want my students to stay awake till late night spending time on their phones," says Fr Kanjirathinkal.

The fish, meat and vegetables for the students are procured by the priest himself from the market. The money he gets as a daily allowance for each student to run the hostel mess is never enough. "I don't want to compromise on the food. The daily allowance comes to about Rs 200-300 for each student. That it is not enough for giving protein-rich food for them four times a day," says the priest. Since the vendors know him well they never insist on immediate payment. That is a relief, he says.

Fr Kanjirathinkal goes wherever the players go. He says he wants to ensure the students get professional treatment. "I don't believe in making my boys and girls participate in each and every tournament," he says. The priest has selected a handful of tournaments, which happen to be the best in the state in which his students take part. He is also very particular about the accommodation and food provided by the organisers. "I send my students only if they are provided good accommodation and food," he says.

The priest describes the location where the centre is situated as "God's gift". It is serene, pollution-free, calm, and quiet. The centre is on a 45-acre land belonging to the CMI. There are a couple of schools and colleges, a pilgrim centre and a church.

SLOW Motion

An auteur demonstrates why cinema should look beyond speed and slickness

Binu.Karunakaran@timesgroup.com

Don Palathara hails from Karunapuram in Idukki, barely three kilometres from Kambammettu in Tamil Nadu. The 34-year-old director has four films to his credit - Savam, Vithu, 1956, Central Travancore, and Santhoshathinte Onnam Rahasyam, two of which are being screened at the ongoing International Film Festival of Kerala. Considered as an auteur director by critics, Don is heralded as an exponent of contemplative cinema. Among other things he talks about his fascination for minimalism and why slow-burn films matter:

Your first three films - Savam, Vithu and 1956, Central Travancore - were all shot in black & white. The latest one Santhoshathinte Onnam Rahasyam, though in colour, uses a limited palette. Have you changed as a filmmaker since your first film in 2015?

I was never stubborn about all my films being in monochrome. Initially, I had planned to shoot Savam in colour. But after a test shoot with cinematographer Prapat Joseph, we felt that certain colours would be out of place and hard to control. That we were low on budget also weighed in. But both Vithu and 1956, despite being shot in B&W, had grading to enhance them.

You are seen as a practitioner of slow cinema. Do you believe in the popular dichotomy of the mainstream being fast-paced and arthouse being slow? What does the aesthetic of slow cinema mean to you?

I was someone who enjoyed fast-paced films. It's a taste that changed fast and is still evolving. I watch the filmmakers I like and make films in a way that I as a viewer would like. An ideal audience doesn't exist. There's always a demanding inner viewer that I need to satisfy. What is fast and what is slow is also a perception. The film 1956 has a scene from a play that was 14 minutes long, which I trimmed to eight because I felt it unbearable. In the hands of someone more patient than me, the film would become longer.

The average shot length in a commercially successful film would be two seconds to three seconds. The longest would be four. They do not want us to approach it analytically, the next shot would be thrust on us even before we can think, forcing a subjective view. I want to provide space for more objective viewing. People should be able to reflect. I don't consider my own view as absolute and above all, it opens up a space for conversations. What filmmakers like Lav Diaz try to do is also political in that sense. To hold the viewers, not thinking of them as consumers alone and prodding them to wait and think.

Your films are often compared to

the ones by Lav Diaz and Bela Tarr. In what ways have their aesthetics of slowness influenced you?

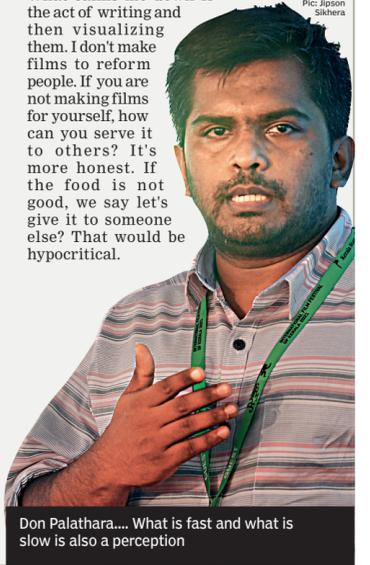
I am not a blind fanboy of any filmmaker. If I like a film, I would watch it repeatedly. I was greatly drawn to the film *Butterflies have no memories* by Lav Diaz about a girl who migrated to the US returning to her roots. The minimal use of resources and the treatment of time influenced me. Another director I like is Tsai Ming Liang, not his new works, but his earlier films from the 90s. In the case of Bela Tarr, I like his later works more than the earlier ones which have a documentary character.

You always seem to work within a set of self-imposed restrictions, like setting out to write a poem with a set form, a limited palette, a static camera?

That's true. But every time I impose such restrictions I would see if it would go with the story. If it tampers with it or negates it I would do away with them. I feel I can craft something more beautifully while working within limitations. Something that can be told in a single shot does not need three. Perhaps this sense of minimalism comes from the milieu that I was brought up.

You once referred to filmmaking as a kind of self-therapy. What are the traumas that you are trying to confront, the anxieties that you are trying to heal?

I've read somewhere that Vaikom Mohammed Basheer wrote stories to treat his own madness. People often go to therapists to talk. I am not someone who talks a lot. What calms me down is the act of writing and then visualizing them. I don't make films to reform people. If you are not making films for yourself, how can you serve it to others? It's more honest. If the food is not good, we say let's give it to someone else? That would be hypocritical.



Don Palathara.... What is fast and what is slow is also a perception

The Malayali has a beef with 'cow science'

Few Takers For UGC's Online Kamadhenu Gau Exam

AnanthaNarayanan.K@timesgroup.com

University Grants Commission (UGC) recently issued a notice to all the vice-chancellors in the state instructing them to encourage students in their universities and affiliated colleges to take the "indigenous cow science" examination, a national-level exam to be held online on 25 February, but the suggestion has been met with little enthusiasm. The reason? Most academicians and educationists find the claims made in the study materials to be unscientific.

Besides hitting out at the UGC's endorsement of the test, they say the move also exposes a communal agenda and that

it is an attempt to manipulate the higher education system to create loyalists.

The letter from UGC secretary Rajnish Jain requests the universities to give wide publicity to 'Kamadhenu Gau Viryan Prachar-Prasar Examination', organized by Rashtriya Kamadhenu Aayog (RKA), ministry of fisheries, animal husbandry & dairying.

While several universities say they are not aware of any such direction, a few like Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) are yet to decide on whether they should promote the exam which raises many "absurd claims".

"The letter has been received by the varsity but we have not taken any decision about its implementation. It is difficult for a varsity to promote such initiatives which do not have any scientific support," said a KVASU official.

The one-hour-long exam is touted as an attempt to disseminate information on the "economic, scientific, environmental, health, agriculture and spiritual relevance of indigenous cow in the country".

Rajan Gurukkal, educationist and vice-chairman, Kerala State Higher Education coun-

cil said the initiative was obscurant and unnecessary.

"It is good to acquire scientifically-valid knowledge but this initiative cannot be seen as scientific and there is no need for varsities to specially focus on cow. The concept of holy cow is a myth and such initiatives are attempts of social preparation for communal politics. It is yet to see how the varsities in Kerala would respond it," he said.

Educationist PK Ravindran said it was unfortunate that UGC seems determined to promote such attempts. "The exam trivializes science using pseudo-scientific facts," he said.

Sebastian Joseph, historian and general secretary of Kerala History Congress, said UGC's move is not acceptable and that it is an indication of the manipulation of the higher education system. "Universities should promote critical knowledge formation instead of creating loyalists through such initiatives," he said. "It cannot be called science as most of the claims made are presentation of ritualistic beliefs in the name of science. I don't think any institution in Kerala

will support the move," he said.

The study material for the exam claimed a link between cow slaughter and earthquakes and posits that indigenous cow milk is yellow because it has traces of gold. Also, it said India and Russia use cow dung as a protection against nuclear radiation. It is a multiple-choice test and successful candidates will be given cash prizes/ certificates.



Illustration: Gireesh



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