

EDITOR'S NOTE

March on. Do not tarry. To go forward is to move toward perfection. March on, and fear not the thorns, or the sharp stones on life's path. (Khalil Gibran)
March on courageously, bellyful of unpronounceable delectable delights, determined that this time the hammock will not let you down. Give someone else's dessert the benefit of a taste even though your heart is forever faithful to your mother-in-law's payesh. March on and write for therapy, to impress, earn money but most of all because you have something you wish to say. March, hop, skip, jump, stumble. March again. Moving towards a perfection where differences add colour to the greater canvas. Perfection, after all, is constant transformation.

MUNIZE MANZUR

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THE KERALA JOURNAL

SABRINA ISLAM

DAY 3: VIZRAMA - RELAXATION

The alarm rings at the crack of dawn, but my body and mind fight. The comfort of the cozy blanket, the birds chirping, the humming of the air-conditioning keep me in bed. I tell myself: five more minutes and doze off. Suddenly I wake up to the soft knock of housekeeping. It's already past nine and my dosa idli time is running out!

Two new guests arrive at the resort. The setta saree girls welcome them with flowers while the musicians play the flute and tabla. My soul is at peace.

It's hot and humid today. I stop by a shed selling green coconuts. He cuts the top off and hands it to me with a straw. I finish it in one go. I want to have the soft coconut flesh inside, so I take it back to him. He cuts it in half. I ask for a spoon. He takes it back and cuts a thin slice from the side that I can use to scoop. How ingenious!

The Ayurveda doctor is standing near by. He has an amazing smile. I have a thing for smiles. I keep a secret list of people with great smiles. He is now number 18 on my list. (Abhishek Bacchan is number 5). I tell the doctor I will come soon for my daily dose of Ayurveda after my rendezvous and photo shoot with the butterflies.

I tiptoe my way into the butterfly park. Somewhere a cuckoo is fearfully announcing spring. The butterflies are all made up and ready. But they don't sit still. I am going to get a chase today. One poses. As soon as I am done, he flies off. I am guessing it's a he. Apparently all males in the animal, bird and insect kingdom are prettier than females. Or so I was told. Although I have my reservations. A big bumblebee flies in to get photographed. This time I run away.



The butterfly and bumblebee chase has prepared me well for my Ayurveda treatment. Yesterday it was 'Rasayana Uzhichil'. Today it's 'Kizhi'. Hot, and I mean HOT, herbal pouches are placed on strategic points on the neck, shoulders and back. It magically takes away all the joint pains. I feel as light as the Blue Mormon butterfly I had just photographed.

Famished, I walk into the restaurant by the backwaters. Lunch is a Kerala thali. I opt for chapati instead of rice.

The 'Tendli', an okra and yoghurt concoction blows me away! I can't pronounce the names of two other dishes so the setta saree beauties write them down for me. The 'Kootucurry' and 'Mezhukuvarty' are delectable combinations of everyday vegetables like yam, carrots and chickpeas. They are mixed with curry leaves, mustard and coconut which turns them into delights from heaven. To finish off, there's the famous Kerala payasam. Despite being an ardent fan of my

mother-in-law's legendary payesh, I take a small spoonful to taste. There's a cooking demo that's held every day in the afternoon. Initially I hadn't been too keen. After this thali lunch, I change my mind.

As I wait in the garden for the cooking demo to start, I am given complimentary Chaya Vallam - masala chai - made by a woman on a Vallam (country boat) nearby. The vast backwaters in front invite me. I must make plans for my houseboat trip.

At the cooking demo, I discover the secrets behind the divine taste and colour of the curry. I learn to make mouthwatering Kerala Fish Curry with coconut oil, curry leaves, kokum (Malabar tamarind), Kashmiri chili and rock salt water. Recipe, anyone?

There's a hammock just outside my bungalow that entices me every day. I weigh the chances of climbing on it and tipping over on the other side into the water. It has happened to me once in Pokhara and I was twenty kgs thinner then. I succeed this time. I am three pages into 'The Moor's Last Sigh' before the lapping water, the breezy coconut trees and the chirping birds put me to sleep.

My second awakening with a jolt! A speedboat has stopped in the water just beside me with two guests back from a ride. It's good timing. The evening meditation session is about to start. Coconut Lagoon resort is beautiful. There are water bodies all around which means that even if the meditation place is just across from my bungalow, it's a long meandering walk along the canals and water ways. This is a great way to get my daily dose of ten thousand steps.

In the evening, still full from lunch, I skip dinner. Instead I watch a Kerala folk dance performance under the open sky. The dancers try to teach me the name of the dance: 'Thiruvathara Kali'. The name is difficult to pronounce but the fluid movements and incredible South Indian music mesmerizes me.

Reading, writing, meditation, and coming face to face with my inner self is what 'Vizrama', as they say in Sanskrit, is all about. I am finally getting a dose of that.

Q&A with Farah Ghuznavi: The Writer's Wilderness Survival Kit

QTN: Should a writer write to please the reader or himself/herself?

ANS: The answer to this comes down, partly, to the question of why we write. Most writers I know write because they have to. They are compelled to write in order to communicate with others, to make sense of the world around them and to silence some of the voices that keep them awake at night. In this form, writing can be considered a kind of therapy. And just like therapy,

it doesn't always achieve the desired results. But it's the best tool at hand for the person concerned.

It's probably true to say that most writers want to see their work published. That is true even in the cases where writing is a compulsion, and a form of therapy. After all, by reaching out to readers, the writer can validate the value of his or her work - and, in extreme cases, justify her own existence.

But the key question here, in assessing a writer's motives is whether or not she would continue writing even if she were never to be

published (however sad that might make her). In such cases, the answer to this question becomes clear: the writer is writing because she is, as Mario Vargas Llosa puts it, exorcising her demons. And that is something she needs to do in order to retain her sanity, regardless of whether there is going to be a reader at the end of the process.

Of course, there are writers who go into the field because they want to be famous, or because they want money or attention. I have often wondered if these are not some of the worst possible reasons to become

a writer. Not for reasons of shallowness, but simply because it's so damn difficult to earn a living by writing, let alone achieve fame and fortune! But getting back to the point, it seems clear that for those writers, writing with an imaginary audience in mind would be perfectly reasonable, since it is that imaginary audience that will bring them - in theory, at least - the fame and fortune that they crave.

I'm not sure though, that focusing so much on a potential audience is in any way helpful in enabling a writer to produce her best work.

Speaking for myself, I think that trying to write to an audience would make me very self conscious. And by trying to figure out what that audience might want, I would entirely lose the thread of what I was trying to write. So here, my feeling is that if a writer wants to produce the best work that she is capable of, she would do well to focus on producing work that she is herself satisfied with. As Allen Ginsberg memorably said, "To gain your own voice, you have to forget about having it heard."

I tend to believe that if I can

produce a story that I'm reasonably happy with, then the likelihood of anybody else finding it interesting, once I have completed my final draft and I'm ready to show it, is probably greater. So I would stick to the advice from the inimitable Kurt Vonnegut who said, "Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia." I think Mr Vonnegut's words display great wisdom. And I would therefore humbly suggest that the one-person audience that you aim to please is, in fact, yourself.

IN A PERFECT WORLD:
A TRIBUTE



S M SHAHEER

Sadaat Hasan Manto, one of the most prolific short-story writers to emerge from the subcontinent, described the murder of a 'Muslim bastard' during the riots in his most famous short story 'Toba Tek Singh'. He concludes that the murderer had killed only a human being and the murder had neither killed the 'bastard in him' nor his 'Muslimness'. Taking a cue from this, I say this to the killers of freethinkers: You neither kill their skepticism nor their knowledge-based pursuits; you just kill human beings. Enlightened people will still seek knowledge, will still show skepticism, will still question many beliefs accepted in society. They will never come out with meat cleavers to hack people who hold a contrary position, because true knowledge does not teach anyone to become unduly defensive about their belief and counter their stance with violently offensive actions.

In a perfect world
The eagle will fly with the dove,
John Lennon would be an old man in his seventies;
Grey hair, round lenses settled on the bridge of his nose
Living and not dreaming of the words of 'Imagine'.

In a perfect world
People will learn to live in harmony,
Race will have no role to play.
Men will look at others with colour-blind eyes.
The colour of earth will become the colour of skin.
No high brows, no untouchables,
All standing on the same line for a bus ticket to a happy place.

In a perfect world
My neighbour will argue with me
But he will keep his arguments civil;
Our swords will only fill our scabbards.
Dissent will be a right for all,
Doubt and contradiction will be wisdom,
Self-righteousness will be abhorred.
A tongue lashing will be the height of anger.
But at the end of the day the adversaries
Will share a plate of biriyani while sharing happy memories.

In a perfect world
Well...
Who am I kidding?
Nobody wants perfection!
Of all the perfect stamps minted
We look for the one with a printing mistake.
We thrive on imperfection
'Cause imperfection is we.
Maybe that was the grand design;
A fixed game is a boring game.

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