

Kovalam Literary Festival 2009



Yesterday (Oct 9th) I went for the final day of the Kovalam Literary Festival 2009 held at the Taj Green Cove in Kovalam. I was accompanying my journalist friend, who was doing an interview for *The Hindu* newspaper, as a photographer.

When we entered a question answer session with Om Puri, the famous Bollywood actor, was going on. He

easily won the hearts of everyone there with his friendly tone and witty remarks. An interesting remark made by a freelance writer from the North East (I couldn't catch her name or place) impressed him – the fact that the North East was neglected in mainstream cinema and the people from those parts were portrayed either as tribals or as terrorists. Om Puri acknowledged this fact and said he would try to influence his friends on this matter. He later came down and talked to her and introduced his wife who, as he said, too had 'chinky' eyes which he 'loved very much'.

Next was a reading by Chandrakanta Murarsingh, a Korobok poet from Tripura. His poems showed images of violence and referred to the changes that were taking place in Tripura. As his English was bad I had a hard time following what he said. He seemed like a nice person though.

This was followed with readings by different upcoming writers – Ira Trivedi, Mathew Menacherry, Anuja Chauhan and Palaash Mehrotra. Ira Trivedi is a former Miss India contestant and so, goes without saying, is very beautiful. But I wouldn't say the same about her writing. Or rather, about her language. It seemed pretty ordinary. She read excerpts from her novel 'What Would You Do to Save the World'. I guess most of it is based from her experiences, bitter ones, in the world of modeling and fashion shows. She also read from a book she is working on. I found many statements very silly – especially the ones surrounding a cell – yes a cell in the body which had fallen 'sick'. So this cell had to realize that it couldn't exist alone and should love the other cells and only then could it survive. Or something to that effect. Maybe I didn't get the context correctly but I couldn't help giggling. But I was touched when she said she had spent months with a kid who had fatal pancreatic cancer and her writing was based on that experience. I hope you do justice to her Ira.

Next was Mathew Menacherry, grandson of M P Paul who was a well-known literary critic in Kerala, who read from his first novel 'Arrack in the Afternoon'. I loved this guy. He is settled in Bombay and calls himself a salesman. He was quite frank about his drinking (same pinch here) and 'exotic' life. He was very funny and quite cool. And at the end he even said sorry if he had offended any sensibilities. One lady, a half-Malayalee, wanted to know if the fact that he was a Malavalee was the reason for

him drinking since 'weren't most Malayalees chronic drinkers.' Mathew stoutly defended our honour (the whole bunch of male – drinking – pretending to know nothing about it – Malayalees) and said it wasn't so.

Finally came the damsel Anuja Chauhan with her book 'The Zoya Factor'. She was easily the most popular writer around there as she was very easygoing and accessible. She promptly sat with folded legs on the chair, as if she was sitting on the ground talking to children, and her book was quite amusing. I would later be proved right when I bet with my reporter friend that her book would be the most selling one below in the lobby. She works in the advertising field and was the creator behind many famous captions including 'Oye Bubbly' and 'Dil maange more'. She faced very few questions. I guess this was since her book wasn't on serious issues. It was about a girl who was born on the exact moment India won the world cup in 1983 and becomes sort of a lucky charm to the present (imaginary) cricket team.

The final writer before lunch break was Palash Mehrotra with his short story collection 'The Eunuch Park' which had, as suggested by the title, lots of soft porn and sexuality. Just the thing you look for in literary and film festivals. I admit it does take a lot of courage to write on these topics. However what surprised me was that he denied there was anything from his experiences in the stories. The 'serious' audience liked his writing and as a foreigner pointed out his was the only one so far that was different from the earlier writers who all followed a writing style that could be said as 'filmy'. The unfortunate thing was someone had muttered 'lunch' during his session and almost all the audience which included a lot of students walked out. There were only a handful of people left in the hall by the time he finished. That was bad management by the organizers. They shouldn't let such things happen. I hope Palash didn't feel that it was due to his reading!

Then lunch break was formally announced to the 20 of us who were still remaining in the hall, all who I bet were sitting in the hope of free lunch coupons, and finally my friend got her interview

I wanted to sit and hear the rest of the sessions but unfortunately my office where I had my regular job called with threats of firing me (again!) if I didn't get there within half an hour and so I had to reluctantly leave this beautiful place with the beautiful scenery and beautiful people (beautiful inside and outside) who wrote beautifully for all us beautiful people.

Posted by Don Suseelan at [11:39 PM](#)

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