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Whom Watery Eyes Search For in Emptiness?

by Subin Mananthavady



Kairali Pravasalokam narrates the story of a television programme engrossed in discovering the missing Malayalees in Gulf countries which later evolved into a socially dedicated activism.

Who knows their agony?

'The false notion prevalent in society that people who go to Gulf countries are secure and affluent was torn to pieces by Pravasalokam, bringing the harsh reality that they still work like slaves'- claims P.T. Kunjumohammed. According to the unofficial reports, around 30 lakhs of Malayalees from Kerala work in gulf countries. The mutant government hardly attend to their safety so these abandoned lot create many problems for the modern world. Their miserable plight with no labor rules, meager salary, lack of proper treatment when ill, solitary life, forfeited of their basic right to keep custody of their passports while travelling add to their woes.

Hundreds of social and labor organizations, women's associations, political parties, all turn a

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blind eye to their miserable state. Many jubilate at the expense of the money tainted with their sweat and blood. Many go to Gulf countries to raise funds, to conduct cultural programmes, to receive awards but none to voice the grievances of these depraved people.

The sad tale of women too who lead a similar miserable life in Kuwait, Saudi, Muscat which leaps in number day by day is also no exception. These women who are employed as housemaids suffer badly without any food or medicines. A great majority are poor. ' we have many crew in different parts of the country to search for the missing people'- says P.T.Kunjumohammed. We also get aid from cultural organizations from Muscat, Saudi, Singapore and Malaysia in our activities. We also do a weekly visit to hospitals and prisons. There are many in gulf countries who are deceived with the false promise of offering a visa by the agents, or jobs. We telecast thousands of cases like these through our programme. As the number of cases mount up day by day, we now inquire into such cases only who have disappeared within two years' pauses Kunjumohammed.

Gopalan and Raju

M. Gopalan who hails from Vengara Moolakal house in Kannur reaches Muscat in 1988. in the beginning he used to send money and letters to his family but afterwards there was no information about him. His wife lodged a grievance with Pravasilokam. Due to improper health she had to do menial jobs to bring her five children up. In between she had to stop her daughters' studies to bring her sons up as she found hard to meet both ends. Finally the crew of Pravasilokam found him in Bisiya in Muscat. He was in hiding without any legal documents of his job. The friends of Pravasilokam arranged a visa for him. He now works in Muscat.

Parakatt Narayanan and his wife Gauri of Kasargod had no expectations about their son's return who left for Sharjah. When he disappeared Narayanan contacted Indian embassy for four years and raised a complaint about it. But it was all in vain. After that he sent a letter to Pravasilokam. With the efforts made by the architects of pravasilokam they released Raju who was imprisoned for a small offence in jail. They also arranged a job for him in gulf.

Waited for one but came another

A native of Nadapuram, Devi's husband Kanaran went to gulf to earn his bread and butter 12 years ago. But later it turned a strange story when he disappeared. Devi told her sad story to the crew of Pravasilokam. The friends of Pravasilokam did a thorough search for the Indian embassy of Bahrain. Finally he was found astray abroad. Then he was immediately sent to his homeland with a ticket by Pravasilokam. Devi's eyes searched for each passenger who departed from karipur airport in Calicut. The last passenger too came out. But her husband, Kanaran for whom she was desperately waiting did not come.

When contacted the embassy in Bahrain, it was told that he was already sent to his homeland. According to the chart of airport authorities, he had reported to be arrived. With the information received from the embassy, the Pravasilokam reached Kanaran's . But instead of Devi's husband, it was another Kanaran who too left gulf 18 years ago and roamed about without any information. The family was in a celebration of their joy in recovering him.

Having lost all hopes and totally shattered, devi was taken back home. While leaving her, nobody can ever forget her sad face. It was a smile at first which slowly turned into an outburst of tears. When it was copied for the camera their eyes too filled up. Many incidents like these had to be presented in Pravasilokam which had completed 325 episodes. Many people who were straggled abroad like these were brought back to life by the programme. Despite all these many helpless situations too occurred. Devi's incident is one such.

In 2000, when Kairali TV was launched, Mr Rafiq Ravuthar suggested the idea of presenting a half an hour programme for gulf Malayalees ' recalls P.T. Kunjumohammed. ' At that time we had only an idea of presenting a half an ordinary programme in our mind. In the first few episodes we were just introducing some of the eminent personalities in the gulf countries. It would have been confined to an ordinary programme had it not turned to a creative activism. Few people sent a person named Kunjumohamed from Edapal district to participate in Pravasalokam. He sold his kidney for 25,000 rupees to live happily with his family atleast for one day in his life for last and ever before he end his life. Instead of presenting a well-known personae in that episode, kunjumohammed was introduced to the viewers. It was his tragic tale which paved the way for the possibilities of the programme 'Pravasilokam'. After listening to his sad story, the M.A.K Group owner, Mr Yousuf Ali took mercy on him and offered a visa and a job. He now works in U.A.E. Many similar incidents are many to quote ' says Rafiq Ravuthar.

When telecast ends activism begins

After this incident many families were continuously contacting us of whose people who went abroad in search of a job and were missing. We found 250 of them- recalls Kunjumohammed. After each episode the visual pattern of the programme changed. It got a different form. Then it was no more a programme. Our work really starts when an episode is telecasted. we became conscious of the fact that we are handling a serious social issue. After each episode we got completely involved in finding the missing ones.

It was Madathil Rajan hailing from Kozhikode whom we regained first through the programme. Another memorable incident to cite is a military man, Mathew from Tiruvalla who were found after 23 years. He reached his homeland for his son's marriage. Many dramatic moments like these are many to be cited- says Rafiq.

The unfortunate lot who fell into trap

After completed telecasting of 150 episodes about 30 families about Pravasilokam could not find any information were called for a programme at Ernakulam. Their absconding did not arise out of the escapism from life. Can we say that those who went in search for a living were escaping from life? The great majority of the absconding resulted out of deceit from the agents. They were the bait of the trap laid by the visa agents. When people who go to gulf with the desire of minting money, have a nightmare of the debts which crops up in their hometown , people who are jobless and spend their life in prisons take refuge in absconding.

A person's disappearance is a terrible condition than his death. When a person dies it is certain that he will not come back. But when a person disappears, it is indefinite whether he is alive or dead. Their relatives are not free from this uncertainty. They become anxious about their missing people's terrible condition abroad. The relatives send all the details and photographs of their missing people to Pravasilokam. Based on this, the presenter of Pravasilokam, P.t. Kunjumohammed contacts the relatives through phone and collects more details about them. The photograph presented on the screen for five minutes can be viewed by the Malayalees all over the world. Viewing this, if someone could give any information about the missing person,

would contact the representatives of Pravasilokam. It is through this way that the missing people are searched for and brought back to their native land.

Fathima of Kozhikode decided to leave for gulf to raise her family comprising of her five year old son , her mother and her sister when her husband deserted her. Finally she reached the house of an Arab woman, Affat Mohammed Mulla for a job in Kuwait. Her days of torture began from that day onwards. She was thrashed with long stick and sandals. She underwent starving for many days. Most of the days she would be given dry *Kuboos* (a loaf in Gulf made of flour and yeast) to eat. She passed her days of misery like these for four years. Since she was illiterate she couldn't even write a letter to her house. Neither she was allowed to contact her house through telephone. She was denied her salary too. By that time her passport also began to expire. It was not renewed until Affat's sister intervened with Fatima's signature on the condition that she received her full salary. She was finally presented to the embassy with a ticket. She reached Mumbai. All these time Fatim'a mother was searching for her daughter without any information.

Alavi's Tale

Alavi is the son of Chiranjan Marrakar and Lyaatutti. He left for Gulf for a job in 1975 to look after his family including his aged father and mother and his wife. Afterwards he came twice to his native land. When he went back again in 1986 he had to wander about in search of a job in gulf for fourteen years. In between he was imprisoned. But fortunately he did not have to starve with the kind heart of his natives. In 1987 and 1991 when amnesty was declared he did not surrender himself to the police. But that did not stay too long when he was finally caught by them in 1998.

He was imprisoned for one month. The court questioned him why he refused to go back to his native land when amnesty was declared. He replied that he was helpless due to poor living conditions in his land. Later the court of immigration took him. After the expiry of his visa, since he stayed back he was fined heavily with 36,000 rupees for one year. His advocate told if he had that money in hand he could have gone back to his homeland. Unfortunately his destiny again was reverse. He was again imprisoned for one month. Later he was sent to Mumbai. But he did not go back to his homeland.

In search of missing ones

In between Alavi's family searched for him in many ways. But it was fruitless. Those people who absconded like Fathima and Alavi were brought back to their homeland by the workers of a channel. It deserves special mention and commendation, the people who worked for the programme 'Pravasilokam'.

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