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**SASHI THAROOR**

## ***Onam on the Yamuna Banks***

This Onam season Malayali Delhiites got an exciting collection of short stories to read and enjoy... "Onam on the Yamuna Banks" is written by KRG Nair. Born in Kerala, KRG Nair went to college in Delhi soon after Independence and over the years has become an inseparable part of the city's academic milieu. A distinguished teacher, he was the Head of Delhi University's Business Economics Department. A prolific writer on socio-economic issues, he recently published his memoir, "Road Not Taken". "Onam on the Yamuna Banks" is Nair's first foray into fiction writing. KRG Nair, a distinguished academic who taught post-graduate students in the Economics Department of Delhi University for decades and held many important positions in the world of academia, looks back on life in these stories. "Onam on the Yamuna Banks" (Palimpsest, 2012) centres around the themes of radical social reforms in Kerala half a century ago and the journey of the Malayali people in many directions. At a time when the short story as a genre deals more with the fragility and flaws of urban life, Nair takes the reader back to the 1950s when radicalism was in the air, when individuals raised voices against the conservative traits in society.

Every journey combines the trauma of separation with the excitement of discovery. The new people in town carry the past from a faraway home and face the uncertainties of arrival. During the day they struggle to adjust to unfamiliar life. By evening, longing for what they have left behind intensity and grandeur, for living is mere repetition unless it is on the road. The tales of the new settlers capture their struggle and give an account of love and losses that makes up what life is all about.

"The twelve stories in the collection broadly fall into two categories: the era of radical social reforms in Kerala and the journey of the people from the state to many parts of the country. In some of the stories the characters question the matriarchal tradition in society, reject the role of horoscopes in marriage and revolt against the stifling nature of the caste system. In the other segment Nair recaptures the colourful social melange catalyzed by journeys of people from different directions." said Bhaskar Roy, CEO Palimpsest Publishing House, New Delhi, India.

Nair journeys back a time, long before globalization and reforms, when social issues were important. His stories are a testament to the horror newborn girls dying 'mysteriously' before their second birthday, bride burning and superstitions perpetuated by orthodoxy. Structurally, the stories are like their author -- simple, transparent with a distinct subtext.

"Easily charming and lucidly rendered, these stories evoke treasured memories of bygone times, celebrating the stoic journey of ordinary men and women across life." Sashi Tharoor commented on this book.