

WINSTON CHURCHILL TRAVELLING FELLOWSHIP 2013

The education system and story-telling traditions of
Kerala

including Kathakali performance theatre and the

Onam Festival



To support the teaching and learning of Malayalee children
and celebrate cultural diversity in UK schools

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The Project

I was awarded a grant to travel to Kerala in India to find out about the education system and cultural influences on education. I also wanted to collect traditional stories and to reflect on how these can be adapted for UK schools. I decided that I needed to be in Kerala during September so that I could experience the Onam Festival which this year fell on September 16th.

I work as an advisory teacher for Ethnic Minority Achievement in Torbay in Devon. In our schools and nurseries we have a small but significant number of children of Indian heritage. The largest group of families come from Kerala and speak Malayalam as their first language. The children tend to be quite isolated in our schools, culturally and linguistically, and sometimes the schools struggle to meet their needs. The aim of my project is to support the teaching and learning of reading and writing and to raise awareness of cultural diversity among all children in the schools. The travelling fellowship enabled me to visit Kerala and spend a little time in schools.

I wanted to find out why so many Keralans had migrated to the UK in recent years and to learn about the social and economic factors that had influenced their decision. I also wanted to experience the life and culture of Kerala by learning a little about the geography, history, religions, festivals, food and family dynamics. By spending time in schools, I hoped to learn about the school system, teaching methods, curriculum and materials as well as the hopes and ambitions of the students.

Discovering traditional stories to develop into teaching materials that can be used in schools in the UK and India was an important feature of my quest. Before setting off to India, adult members of my local Malayalee association completed a questionnaire about traditional stories that they had read or heard when they were children. I also asked Keralan children in the schools the same questions. The stories that they evoked fond memories in the adults, were extracts from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, ancient Hindu epics, full of power struggles, battles and mythical creatures. Other favourites came from the *Panchatantra* fables and moral tales warning against such faults as greed or laziness. Nearly all the adults had learned the stories by hearing them read or told by their grandmother. Those children who had arrived in England as children rather than infants also remembered some *Panchatantra* stories and moral tales. A few others had become familiar with one or two stories and characters, mainly through cartoons on Malayalam TV. It seemed probable that with the loss of close extended family connections, grandmothers for the most part remaining in India, the tradition of passing stories on to younger generations was being lost. After doing a little research, it was also interesting to discover that, although there was an oral tradition of story telling within families, which may explain why the stories have survived, the original stories first appeared in written form in ancient Sanskrit texts.

My Journey

At the end of August 2013, I flew to India to spend six weeks exploring the culture and education of Kerala. I started out in Thiruvananthapuram, known as Trivandrum, the capital city of Kerala. This is an expanding city with a mixture of traditional and modern in architecture and industry.

On the coastal edge of the city is the fishing village of Shangumukham, where men pursue the ancient industry of fishing, mending their nets and pushing their little boats through the pounding surf out into the Arabian sea, returning to sell their catch at the fish market on the beach. Here, the

fish are sorted in to a wide range of varieties, like squid, mullet, bass, barracuda and pomfret. Some of the boats have engines but many are old, heavy wooden vessels that have to be powered by oarsmen.



In stark contrast, from the end of the fishing beach, the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre is clearly visible. The Centre carries out research into the development of new launching techniques for space vehicles such as satellites.

Between the city centre and the beach is the Technopark, spreading over nearly 300 acres with 4 million sq. ft. of built-up space currently available, the Technopark accommodates over 290 IT companies, employing over 42,500 professionals, many of whom live in purpose built high rise flats in the adjacent area.

Alongside the advance of modern technology, traditional industries continue to thrive, notably the production of mats and other goods using coir from the coconut husk and handloom weaving which turns out beautiful fabrics. Small tailoring or garment workshops are still in high demand. Rather than buying ready made clothes, many women choose material which they then take to garment makers to be made into clothes.

Trivandrum University, which was established in 1866, houses a rare and extensive collection of palm leaf manuscripts that are kept in a special room at the library of the Faculty of Oriental Studies. The librarian, Shaji, allowed me to examine the manuscripts and explained the techniques used. The writing is scratched onto strips of prepared palm leaf using a special tool then brushed with lemon oil and dusted with charcoal to highlight the lettering. The leaves are held together with string and protected with wooden binding. The art of writing on the palm was very skilled work, handed down through apprentices. Each palm leaf book lasts no longer than 200 years and each manuscript had to be laboriously recopied in order to preserve the ancient texts. The language used in the manuscripts began with Sanskrit and then evolved into Malayalam and Tamil. Old Malayalam is quite close to Tamil and is difficult to read now. This makes the scripts difficult to copy accurately by hand and more recently, etchings have been made on copper in order to reproduce the writing and maintain an accurate copy of a book. The content of the manuscripts in the library covers a wide range of topics, such as astronomy, astrology, medicine, yoga, politics, architecture and literature. The literature includes stories from the *Ramayana* and the myth of the creation of Kerala by *Parasuram*, a warrior sage incarnation of the Hindu god, Vishnu.



In Trivandrum there are many examples of places of worship for all three main religions in Kerala. New churches, painted in pastel shades seem to be springing up in parts of the city. The Shri Padmanakhaswamy Hindu Temple is a huge and magnificent gold painted building and the Palayam Juma Masjid is the most important and impressive mosque in the area. Although in the figures for the 2001 census, Hindus comprise 56% of the population, Muslims 24.3% and Christians 19%, nearly all the Kerala children attending schools in my local authority in the UK are Christian. Catholics and other denominations make up the Christian population, but one important ethnic group is the community of Syrian Christians. The Syrian Christians are followers of St Thomas the Apostle and believe that St Thomas landed on the coast of Kerala, north of Cochin in 52 AD, converted a number of Brahmins (Hindu priests) and went on to found several churches before being assassinated in 72 AD. The term 'Syrian' refers to the Syriac/Aramaic language used in the church's liturgy.

Kochi/Cochin

Cochin and the district of Ernakulam were very good places to gain a little insight into the history and diversity of Kerala. There are landmarks left by Arab and Chinese traders, as well as Dutch, British and Portuguese colonial settlers and the fascinating Cochin Jews who may have arrived in Kerala over 2000 years ago. The Museum of Kerala History has an exhibition which gives a visual chronological history of all the different periods and the scenes from the *Ramayana* depicted on murals on the walls of the Dutch Palace at Mattancherry in Kochi are breathtaking.

Education

Kerala is the state with the highest literacy in India – over 90%. The school system is structured into 3 main sections: Kindergarten for children up to the age of 5/6, then usually a single school for Standards 1 – 10 (Years 1-10). Some schools have separate Lower Primary and Higher Primary sites and Lower Secondary. Older children move on to a separate school for 2 years to complete Standards 11 and 12 in a Higher Secondary school, graduating at the age of 18.

Each school works within a curriculum framework and is affiliated with one standardised school certificate provided by one of the three main education boards, the Central Board of Secondary Education – CBSE, the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education – ICSE and the Kerala State Education Board.

Kerala has the highest proportion of private primary schools in India, 60% compared to a national average of 5%. However, government subsidies ensure that education is accessible to nearly all

children. The Keralan government pays the fees of almost half the children, a higher proportion of government subsidisation than any other area of India.

Many of these private schools are run by various religious groups. The relationship between religion and education is interesting. All schools are multi-faith in pupil population but many of the private schools have been set up by Christian groups, either Catholic or Syrian Christian which may be a legacy from the work of Christian missionaries.

Travelling on buses between different areas of Kerala, I came across new college campuses for higher education courses, nestling on wooded hillsides. These new colleges tend to specialise in one area of study such as Business Management, Engineering or Social Sciences. When I asked secondary school students what they wanted to do when then finished school, most of them responded by saying either Business Management or Engineering. Smaller numbers wanted to follow a career in Medicine or Tourism. While some were keen to travel abroad to work or study, others were very attached to their home country and wanted to stay and work in Kerala.

I visited a few types of schools in Kerala: government schools, a private school run by a charitable trust, a private school set up by an individual from the Syrian Christian community and an ashram residential exclusively for children from the tribal communities.

Christ Nagar Higher Secondary School, Trivandrum

The first school I visited was Christ Nagar Higher Secondary School, a co-educational Catholic secondary school with 2,500 pupils. The pupils have a smart uniform in navy, white and maroon. The female teachers all wear saris as a dress code, most with bindi dot in the middle of the forehead. The bindi is a traditional Hindu decoration with many different interpretations. It sometimes signifies that a woman is married. However, the bindi is now widely applied by women from many different religious and cultural backgrounds, sometimes for cosmetic reasons.

Each lesson lasts only 40 minutes and there are eight lessons during the school day with two short breaks. The school day begins at 8.00 a.m. and ends at 1.45 p.m.

The school building is new and modern in design, but each classroom is quite small and crowded. The pupils sit in rows at old style wooden desks. The teachers' visual aid is a blackboard and chalk at the front of the class.

St Jude's Global School, Kottayam

www.sjonsite.com

St Jude's is an English medium private school which takes children from Standard 1 up to Standard 10, which is similar to Year 1 to Year 10 in English schools. It was established in 2000 and now accommodates around three hundred pupils. The school is affiliated to the CBSE which covers a broad range of subjects summarised in this model from the curriculum handbook:



SEWA – Social empowerment through work and action

The English curriculum includes the art of storytelling, using popular stories written in English, including *Goldilocks*, *Black Beauty*, *Wind in the Willows* and Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Learning and reciting poetry is also given high importance. The older pupils are expected to take an active interest in current affairs and the politics of India. Part of the Performing Arts syllabus focuses on the music of India, traditional music and dance, both folk and traditional. In some schools, extracts from the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are sometimes produced for classical performances. Traditional Indian stories are included as reading comprehension material in text books for teaching Malayalam. These are often *Panchatantra* stories, animal fables with strong similarities to the fables of Aesop.

I stayed at St Jude's for two weeks, lodging in the teachers' guest house with two other teachers, Reny and Sudha. In the main school, every day starts with an oath of allegiance to the Republic of India. All the teachers and children stop what they are doing and stand still with their right arm extended in front of them during the recital of the pledge.



General Pledge

India is my country. All Indians are my brothers and sisters. I love my country and I am proud of its rich and varied heritage. I shall strive to be worthy of it. I shall respect my parents, teachers and all elders and treat everyone with courtesy. To my country and all my people, I pledge my devotion. In their well being and prosperity alone lies my happiness.

The school day is divided into seven 40minute lessons, followed by compulsory after school clubs offering activities such as martial arts, yoga, dance, language lab, music or revision. The children bring their own lunch, or tiffin, which always consists of traditional Keralan food, rice, spiced vegetables, sambal, which is a spicy sauce, and curd, a kind of home made yogurt. Food is eaten in the classroom from a tiffin container. No cutlery is used in Kerala, so everyone eats with one hand, washing before and after eating.



I slotted in to cover lessons for teachers who were away or busy with other commitments. This gave me the opportunity to work with classes of all ages. The children came from different religious groups, Christian, Hindu and Muslim. I asked each class if they had a family member currently living abroad and nearly every child could name at least one relative. Keralans are working or studying in many different countries. The most common ones are the Gulf states, America, Germany, the UK, New Zealand and Australia.

Early Years education at St Jude's takes place at the school's Little Kingdom kindergarten on a separate site, which meant I was only able to make one visit to see and interact with them. This was a fun morning when the children were having 'Family Day' and had dressed up as grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, mother, father, etc. It was interesting to see how the different generations could still be identified by their clothes.



The older, secondary, classes were quite confident and competent with their English and asked me to help them to improve their writing skills. My own materials, written to support advanced learners of EAL in the UK, worked well. The upper primary children read, told and wrote personal stories about a significant experience in their own life. For this, I used materials and a scheme of work that I had developed for pupils who need writing support at KS2 in the UK.

Working with the younger children gave me the chance to put into practice the advice I give to KS1 and KS2 teachers for including EAL children with limited English in their classrooms. I had taken with me books and print outs of traditional stories that are familiar to children in the UK. The print out versions, each page printed on an A4 sheet, with one or two sentences of text worked very well and my own dramatic story telling techniques seemed to improve with each retelling. Favourite stories were *The Gingerbread Man* with the youngest groups, *Goldilocks*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* with Standards 2 and 3 and above and *Little Red Riding Hood* with Standards 4 to 6. The children in each class, listened to the stories, acted out sections, and retold parts of the stories, the older children reconstructing the whole story collaboratively.



Mainstream subjects are mainly taught from course textbooks and the children have to provide their own writing materials. Quite a few of the younger children had no pen, pencil or paper and I soon learned to carry extra in my bag from the stock I had brought with me.

As well as teaching, I was able to observe the children putting their learning into practice. Standard 9 senior school Youth Parliament staged a Mock Parliament, which was a debate on a bill to improve women's access to parliamentary representation through a quota system. The speakers were very passionate and articulate, with startlingly polarised views that left me alternately open mouthed and thumping the table in agreement. The bill was defeated in the vote but I had a great conversation with Keerthana, its main proponent.



The school hall is a huge open sided barn at foot of a slope on the drive up to the main building and all the children and teachers gather there for whole school activities. This was an ideal setting for everyone to gather in the heat of the day but led to a hasty reshuffle of children and chairs when a monsoon downpour washed through the barn turning the floor to mud! The day of the Talent Competition provided a great opportunity for everyone to show what they had learnt and practised. In the English section, recitation was a category of major importance in which children of all ages recited poems by Wordsworth, Longfellow, D.H. Lawrence, Yeates, T.S. Elliot, Tennyson and Philip Levine featured frequently, with Walt Whitman's *O Captain, My Captain*, proving to be the most popular choice. Other recitations included Shakespearean monologues from *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Indian dancing and recitals of stories and poems in Malayalam also featured. A winner was chosen by a board of judges for each category and year group and there were a few tears from children who forgot their lines or were overcome by nerves.



I left St Jude's as the school broke up for a week's holiday to celebrate the Onam festival. Every year, during August or September. Keralan people celebrate the homecoming of King Mahabali on his return from the underworld. The date coincides with the first month of the Malayalam calendar, Chingam, and doubles as a harvest festival. Onam is the most important festival in Kerala. I have written a separate resource detailing the festival celebrations, together with a book to retell the story of King Mahabali and I will use these to help my local schools to celebrate the Onam festival with their Keralan children in 2014. A dual language picture book telling the story of King Mahabali in English Malayalam is currently awaiting translation and illustration.



Pallikoodam

www.pallikoodam.org

While in Kottayam, I also visited Pallikoodam, a co-educational private school with up to four hundred and fifty pupils, one hundred of whom are boarders. Although it is a secular school, most of the pupils are from Christian minorities, Syrian Christian or Catholic. Most of the children are day pupils but the school also has around one hundred boarders. The children who board at the school either come from outside the area or have parents who are working abroad, mainly in the Gulf states.

Pallikoodam is affiliated to the ICSE for the secondary exam curriculum. The ICSE English exam syllabus contains classic texts including a Shakespeare play and short stories by Indian, European and American authors, e.g. Kipling, Tolstoy, Hemingway and R.K Narayan. There is a similar mix of authors in the English poetry section. The Malayalam syllabus has a reading list of books with links to Kerala, including biographies and poems by Balamani Amma

In the lower year groups, the school has freedom to develop its own curriculum as long as it maintains a good standard of education. In the first two years, education is delivered in Malayalam, switching to English in Standard 3.

Pallikoodam is a beautiful school with a very interesting history. It was started by Mary Roy, who returned to Kottayam with her 2 children after her marriage broke down in 1967. She started teaching her son and daughter at home and then opened a school for any local children who wanted to come along.

Mary Roy is an important and influential figure in the improvement of women's rights in India. She is part of the Syrian Christian community, who were excluded from the Indian Succession Act of 1916, which gave brothers and sisters equal rights of succession to intestate property. Mary pursued a relentless campaign with the Supreme Court that lasted for 25 years and eventually succeeded in changing the inheritance laws to include Syrian Christians in the Succession Act.

Pallikoodam now owns an area of land that Mary inherited in her final property settlement and the school has used this to grow and harvest its own rice and to create a lake for fish. The children in the school learn about sustainable agriculture and eat the produce from the land and lake.

Mary's daughter, Arundhati Roy, won the Booker Prize in 1997 with her debut novel, *God of Small Things*.



Stained glass windows made from coloured bottles at Pallikoodam

Pallikamkara Government Lower Primary School

This is a little school on the outskirts of Ernakulum. It only has 25 children who come from the poorest families in the area. They are all children of migrant workers from places like Nepal and Bihar and mostly live in small one room apartments. They have to learn Malayalam as their second language for school.

Pallikamkara has very few resources but the teachers are really dedicated and provide the children with a hot midday meal, cooked in a kitchen in the main buildings. They also use the small piece of land behind the school to grow a few crops and teach the children how to plant and care for basic staple foods like tapioca and beans. The small group of kindergarten children have a nap on mats on the floor after their lunch.

The children had learnt a few words of English and we had a great time with lots of laughter, storytelling and singing songs. By using dramatic story telling techniques and showing a series of pictures, along with a little translation from one of the teachers, Sheela, the children were gripped by my collection of traditional stories from the UK and were keen to join in with refrains and practise new words and phrases.

This school gave me a glimpse of the poorer side of India that still exists in Kerala and to a much greater extent in other states. There are still many children in Kerala, mainly from migrant families, who do not go to school at all.



Government Ashram Residential High School, Thirunelly, Wayanad

This is the place I will always remember as the best. Thirunelly is in a high valley surrounded by lush green mountains, little streams and with a river running through the middle. The air is cool and clean with wafts of smoke, incense and cooking. There is an important Hindu Temple in Thirunelly too.

The school I visited is an ashram residential school which is only for children from the tribal families who live in scattered settlements around the area. The school provides health care as well as education for about 350 children aged from five to fifteen, although sometimes some of them tend to take a long time to return from school holidays and the drop out rate increases in the secondary sector.

The walk to the school from where I stayed took 15 minutes through fields of rice and ginger and I could hear elephants hooting in the forest. Thirunelly is inside a wildlife park so the hotel, school and houses at the edge of the forest have electric fencing around them at night to keep the animals out.

The children don't often meet 'outsiders' and were a bit shy but they have a strong musical tradition and love singing tribal songs, some of which I managed to video. After a little while, they asked me questions and conversed through their English teacher, Mr Joshi.



Kathakali School

www.kathakalischool.com

An interesting, sometimes bizarre week at the Kathakali school, in Cheruthuruthy in the district of Thrissur, an area of beautiful countryside with temples and paddy fields. I only had one Kathakali movement lesson, as I was the only student there that week. However, I was fortunate to be able to spend a lot of time with the troupe of performers and watch them rehearse, put on costumes and make up and perform.

Kathakali dance drama originated in Kerala in the 17th century. *Katha* means story and *kali* means dance. Cheruthuruthy is a centre for traditional performance arts, including Kathakali. Just outside the town there is Kerala Kalamandalam, known as The University for Art and Culture, and The Kathakali School, which has a training and performance programme. During Onam week, Kathakali performances take place around Kerala, often in Hindu temples.

The performers study for years to master the art of Kathakali which involves the application of mask like make up as well as precise movements and facial expressions. The actors do not speak during a performance. Stories from the *Ramayana*, an ancient epic Hindu story, are told through movements of the feet, hands and eyes and a sophisticated sign language based on Sanskrit. Traditionally, performances lasted all night, although now they are usually shortened to a few hours. To make the story more accessible to a modern audience, a pair of narrators stands at the back of the stage area to recite the story in Malayalam.

The most memorable performance I attended was at a small Hindu temple at the end of an almost waterlogged track. The venue was a small 'barn' in front of the temple with open sides and a dirt floor. Dressing rooms and a stage area were set up with mats and sheets or backdrops. In the make up section, 2 bright light bulbs were hastily strung up on a line tied overhead. The make up is mixed from powder and water on a stone with a pestle and then scraped onto a palm leaf and applied with a pointed stick. The make took 4 hours to apply and the performance lasted 3 hours. The door to the temple was opened to display a candlelit shrine and most of the audience were Hindu women who were absolutely enthralled.

Although very little English was spoken it was a really friendly and joyous evening. Amazingly, one lovely, shy lady approached me at the end of the performance and told me that she had worked in a care home in Exeter for a year in 2006. The others seemed thrilled that she could act as an interpreter so that they could ask me lots of questions and tell me all about the temple which is dedicated to snake gods (serpents). After a long drive home and a search for an all night chai shop, finally got back at 3 a.m.

The whole company included a group of lovely girls who performed traditional songs and dances as well various young men who gave displays of martial arts.

More details and photographs are included in the separate Onam Festival resource pack, together with ideas for activities related to Kathakali for children in schools. The techniques of visual story telling, using gesture, facial expressions, masks and make up, are valuable practical strategies that can be adapted to support the understanding of children who have limited English.



Pulikali

As I was staying in the Thrissur district during the week of the Onam festival, I decided to go to see the Pulikali carnival procession that takes place in the city of Thrissur every year.

Thousands of people come into the city to watch the procession, which also has elaborate carnival floats, with religious or mythical themes. The procession moves around the Swaraj Round, a circular road around the Guruvayoor Temple. The whole area becomes extremely crowded through the afternoon and evening. Fortunately, everyone was very good natured and kind people helped me to find the right bus, hauling me inside to join the crush of families hurrying home as monsoon rains and darkness descended.



More details and photographs are included in the separate Onam Festival resource pack. In my area of England, the West Country has an important annual tradition of carnivals with processional floats. These provide a great opportunity to work with the local Malayalee community to help them join the parade.

Political and Social change round

The Keralan government has made considerable efforts to remove social advantages and disadvantages associated with the caste system by taking steps to introduce positive discrimination in favour of disadvantaged castes, or Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This affects exam requirements, educational fee exemption and priority for jobs and has led to some resentment from those who have to pay fees and fears that standards of work may fall.

Over the last decade, Keralan people have become more aspirational and young people aim to move into highly skilled, well paid jobs. However, this has led to a problem of unemployment at the upper end of the employment scale, which in turn has led to international migration from Kerala in search of more highly paid jobs in line with qualifications. At the other end of the social scale, many less skilled workers are moving into Kerala from poorer states to take up lower paid jobs in the domestic work and the agricultural sector, which produces tea, coffee, spices and rice . Poorer migrant workers also play a large part in the tourist industry. Many waiters in Keralan owned restaurants come from Nepal and I met people desperately trying to set up small shop or stall outlets selling clothes and souvenirs to tourists. Many of the children of these families do not go to school.

Keralan Culture

Life in Kerala today is a rich and colourful mixture of traditional and modern, east and west. The contrasts that I saw in Trivandrum are reflected in every aspect of life. Traditional Indian clothing is still dominant. I found it fascinating to see how women manage to ride motor scooters and perform everyday activities so efficiently while wearing a sari.

Keralan cooking uses coconut in various forms in every meal and coconuts can be seen lying open on mats, drying out ready to be prepared for use in spaces outside house. Everyone eats with the hand, without using a utensil, even on trains, where a little washbasin is provided between the carriages.

Ayurvedic medicine and treatments that combine philosophical and spiritual aspects of healings with medication and massage is part of life and long queues can be seen outside Ayurvedic pharmacies in rural areas. This holistic approach to life is reflected in the mission statements of schools.

Ancient Hindu culture and stories suffuse life, art, literature and celebrations across all groups of Keralan society.

Hindu temples are often very old and built in beautiful, peaceful places, like forest areas or islands. The dedication of temples to specific gods is very complicated. There are a number of temples dedicated to serpent gods. The Nagaraja Temple at Mannarasala has 30,000 stone snake images in the surrounding forest.



Elephants are revered by all Keralans and have been used in Hindu temple ceremonies and festivals for hundreds of years. However, the life of the temple/procession elephant is not one to be envied. Although the females seem to be quite docile and can be fed by hand and petted, the males are temperamental and unpredictable. Captive elephants are not really domesticated and need to be

shackled to a tree stump or the ground by one hind leg. Some elephants are kept at larger temples like Thrissur, others are 'stabled' in the country and hired out for ceremonies. This may mean being transported long distances on a trailer and/or having to walk several kilometres on hot tarmac roads.



Hindu festivals like Onam, are celebrated as cultural events by Keralan people from all religious groups and the ancient stories from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Panchatantra* stories, as well as the creation myth of *Parasuram*, are treasured traditional tales. Modern artists like Prince Thonakkal are still producing murals of the Ramayana to display in art galleries.

The next steps

When primary schools are looking at different religions, Hinduism is generally covered through activities relating to Diwali. While this is a very important festival, the subject also provides a key opportunity to consider significant events and practices that are particularly relevant to the local community. For Keralans, the biggest celebration of the Hindu year is the Onam festival. I have produced a resource pack to help children to learn how the Onam Festival is celebrated by Malayalee children and families. This includes a dual language book telling the story of King Mahabali.

I am working with other traditional stories from Kerala to produce a pack of resources that schools in this country and India can use with their children to help improve storytelling, reading and writing. These include stories from the *Panchantra*, the *Ramayana* and the creation myth of *Parasuram*. The pack will include dual language books to support newly arrived children and help children to maintain and develop their literacy skills in Malayalam. The stories will also provide reading material and ideas for all children that can be included within narrative literacy units looking at stories from a range of cultures.

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