

BHASHA SAMVAD – A Panel Discussion on Village Festivals**A Report on Aranmula Vallamkali by Ms Kavitha A**

The department of languages conducted a panel discussion for the I BA/BSc language students on 14 November 2016, between 3 and 4pm. The second semester students learning Kannada, Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil and French attended the program. The Head of the Language Department, Dr. Krishnaswami P initiated the Discussion and acted as the moderator of the session. A brief of the famous Aranmula Vallamkali, a traditional boat race was given by Aswathy Anil (2 EPS), Ganga P S (2 EPS) and Parvathy Manoj (2 CBZ). The energetic and vibrant girls took the audience through an enormous presentation lasting 30 minutes.

They enhanced the interest level by commemorating the session with the beautiful visuals of Kerala, the so called God's own country. The musical clipping flaunted the beauty of backwaters of Kerala. There was a portrayal of the long boats which move gently between the rows of palm trees. These unique snake boats with a pointed ending are called *Palliyodam*. These boats are constructed maintaining the streamline alignment to move faster and there is a special type of glue which is used in the making of the boat. An annual boat race is conducted in the backwaters of Aranmula, including only the people from 48 villages around, with a lot of cultural beliefs. The boats used for the race are constructed abiding the rules of *Vasthu –Sasthra*, and carries around 150 men in it. The name Aranmula means six Bamboos, and it is in the Pathanamthitta district which is closer to the famous *Sabarimala Temple*. It is believed that the ornaments from Aranmula Parthasarthy Temple are carried to the Sabarimala temple on festive occasions.

The people participating in this race undergo training for 62 days in the month of August and September. During this period, the participants are restricted from consuming Non-vegetarian food, takes shower three times a day, follow strict diet, practise Yoga & Meditation and take a lot of physical training. This competition involving participants from different religion, castes and creed carries a high secularism and brotherhood among the fellowmen. On the day of the competition the oarsmen row the boats by repeating the song enthusiastically, sung by the leader of the boat, try hard to win the race abiding all the rules, including not wearing footwear. The folk origin song which is sung praising the God during the race by the participants is called *Vanchipaatu*. The pioneer of this boat song form of poetry sung in Malayalam is considered to be Ramapurathu Warriar. This boat race which celebrates Culture, Ethnicity and Tradition is renamed as Nehru Trophy boat race, as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru made it a National sport. The revenue of the state has bloated, thanks to the tourists visiting and sponsoring the race.

Once the competition gets over, the participants are welcomed and given a feast by the villagers. This is supposed to be the largest vegetarian feast in India and is called *Valla Sathya*, also known as feast of the Devine serves 68 dishes including 5 types of payasam on a plantain leaf. This feast which is believed to be a ritual offering to Lord Parthasarathy is

consumed by 1 lakh people on this occasion. The feast needs a 60 day preparation to be offered in the fest. During the feast, the oarsmen sing the vanchipattu for every dish served. One such video was played to fill the emptiness during the session. The video song showcased a man singing a song asking for curd. It is believed that 3500 litres of curd are carried from Kollam to serve on this occasion and it is also noticeable that the people prefer butter to Ghee for the food as it is the favourite of Lord Krishna.

The presentation tempted and thrived the want of the audience to get to the Boat race and to feel festive. The eminent girls brought both culture and backwaters together for the christites. Sunanth, a I year Sanskrit student stated vote of thanks.



