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PRESS RELEASE

Travel writing is a wide spectrum: Shehan Karunatilaka

Booker Prize winner holds a conversation with KR Meera and Pallavi Aiyar at Yaanam Travel Lit fest

Varkala, Oct 18: Booker Prize winning Sri Lankan writer Shehan Karunatilaka has said travel writing has immense possibilities as the genre carries a wide spectrum in it.

“Travel writing can be anything, it can be political, subjective, and sometimes it reveals who the author really is rather than the destination,” said Karunatilaka in an interactive session with Malayalam writer KR Meera and writer/ journalist Pallavi Aiyar at the three day Yaanam Travel Lit fest, which began here last evening.

Yaanam Festival director and curator Sabin Iqbal was moderating the inaugural session of India’s first Travel Literature festival organised by Kerala Tourism.

“While there are many forms of travel writing, one writer I am particularly interested in is AA Gill who in his narratives shows absolute contempt towards the places he visits,” said Karunatilaka, in his conversation.

Speaking about his works, Shehan observed that distancing himself away from Sri Lanka helped him to write better about the island nation. “I got obsessed about my country when I was outside of it rather than I was living there,” he said.

Remembering fondly about her journey through Central Asian country Kazakhstan, writer KR Meera said, “Travelling helped realise that humanity shares a collective wisdom and knowledge.”

“Some of the shamanic practices I saw in Kazakhstan is similar to the rituals we see in Kerala, which made me think about our origins, how humans spread all over the world might have a commonality,” said Meera.

On travelling, the Kendra Sahitya Academy winning writer said all her works are based on travel. “Travelling helps me grow. All my stories started with my travel and my work Aarachar is a result of my extensive travels inside Calcutta,” she noted.

Agreeing with Meera’s view on the commonality of human conditions all over the world, Pallavi Aiyar said people all over the world have similar concerns. “During my journeys through Japan,



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China, places of Europe, one thing I've noticed is that people share similar concerns in their daily conversations like traffic, food, etc.

"Travelling for me is a process of becoming transparent to yourself. I learned a lot about what it is to be Indian while I travelled outside the country," she said.

Pallavi also observed about the nuances of travelling, when she said "Travelling as a refugee to cross borders to escape from war or conflict is not same as backpacking across Europe".

Around 50 renowned speakers from India and abroad will narrate their perspectives and experiences at the festival.

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