

**Radha**

Hi, Anjana, welcome to Mrigashira I must say you're probably one of those few guests that we've had. In a quick span of time, probably I spoke to you just What about five, six months ago. And here we are talking again, and this time about your second book Onam in a nightie,

**Anjana**

Thank you so much for having me on the show. It's a pleasure as always.

**Radha**

So I just wanted to know, you know, this book. In fact, when we spoke last time, I guess it was not even there on your radar. And now I see that it's, it's published,. Must have been one of those most unplanned, unscheduled kind of a book that got published in quick time. So how did this all happen?

**Anjana**

So, um, you know, actually, the book is quite true to how it how the whole thing unraveled, I was in Kerala, you know, when I moved, moved to Canada to be with my parents, when we had the first series of lockdowns and in 2020, and I was, you know, forced to quarantine like everyone else who came into Kerala had to do a rule quarantine for 14 days irrespective, and then house quarantine after that. And it was also the period where generally I think everything had slowed down, because people were grappling with, you know, a virus they didn't know much about, everyone was careful, there wasn't much happening outside. So I think it kind of forced you to look inwards a little bit. I would say in many ways, you know, time as we knew it, or as we typically tend to know what a city folks, right, we're always hustling, we're always rushing from one thing to another, that concept of time changed for me dramatically when I was sitting at home. And the book, incidentally, started as a series of Facebook posts. So I because I didn't have much to do when I was, you know, confined to my room, I was kind of, you know, very law abiding quarantine, so to speak, I would write these Facebook posts. And I started getting a lot of responses to that. In fact, at some point in time, after I'd written the first three or four posts, I would get messages from friends privately on WhatsApp, saying, Hey, why isn't your post for today up? What happened today? You know, what happened during the quarantine. And then I realized, well, maybe there is a bit more to it. And then a couple of other friends suggested, look, this is not for a book, you know, the great Facebook post, but really, there's a book in this somewhere. And so that's how the book started, I started keeping a daily journal, so to speak of everything that I was experiencing. And I then, you know, through the book, I've kind of woven that in with my experiences of living in other parts of the world and international experiences. And before I knew it, you know, it was a substantial number of words, which I then took to the publisher, and they said, Look, we'd love to publish this. How soon can you put it together? And so that really is the story of the book, it was, I would say, happenstance, and because life kind of slowed down, and you start observing things more closely.

**Radha**

That's very interesting. In fact, genre of the book itself, it seems to touch upon several categories at once. And I guess that also happened because like you said, when you're not in that hustle, bustle, and that fast tracked life, you really start observing a lot of things, isn't it?

**Anjana**

Yes. So it you know, it captures Kerala, of course, quintessentially, from the point of view of someone who hasn't ever lived in Kerala, really. I mean, I've I've only been here for holidays, and so on. And, you know, I was born and raised in different cities. So for me, I'm kind of an outsider who's looking in. And it captures a little bit of that. Just observing what Kerala is about and writing about it. It's also kind of, because it's my experience, and it's my world, which is, you know, around me within this 1520 kilometer radius, because you can't really travel and go out much in a pandemic. It's also really in that way, part memoir, part travelogue, but the way it's put together is its humor. So I would say it kind of straddles a lot of categories. It captures Kerala, you know, someone wants to visit Kerala. It gives you this bird's eye view of what what Kerala is all about what makes Kerala unique and different. Um, it's also kind of Personal tape, but at the same time, it's I've tried to make it a funny book. And a lot of people say that half have said to me that they've laughed a lot while reading the book. So I assume it's kind of hit that spot.

**Radha**

it's also interesting that you point out the outsider perspective. But how have many of the readers taken it because, you know, it's in a way you have demystified the God's own country to, , to a lot of common people outside of Kerala. But how is the book perceived inside the state?

**Anjana**

Well, so far, the reviews, you know, there have been a couple of posts inside the state and people who've read it, keralites who read it, have loved it, because they think it's kind of a funny take, it's, you know, there is a deep amount of affection for the state, which comes across as genuine. And I've only really just observe, so I think I've been quite careful in that I haven't tried to add my own take on anything, I've just really observed it and written it in such a way that it comes out as a story, you know, it's really just how the people around me, you know, how does a shopkeeper behave? How does you know, a restaurant or behave? How does someone in the carpark behave? You know, it's really about ordinary people, there are no celebrities in the book. There are no, you know, famous people per say, it's really just about ordinary stuff that you would encounter in everyday living. And by exposing that, you know, those everyday encounters, you see how it is extraordinary how the state is so different to other parts of India. So, I think, you know, we're living in the state, there's this old saying that after 150 days, you lose perspective on anything new, right? So I suppose if you're living in the state, you just take things for granted, and you don't see it that way. So for those who are in the state, to have someone else, kind of lay that out for them, I think, has been heartwarming.

**Radha**

It's also I see that, you know, the reporter in youhas stayed on course. I mean, when I read the book, I realized that, you know, there is no over dramatization, so to speak, or, for that matter, opinionating on something. So, I guess, that has really helped the book.

**Anjana**

Yes, so um, you know, you're very right, in pointing this out, I didn't realize this when I was writing the book, to be honest. Also, because I was just enjoying writing it right. I didn't started in many ways,

saying, Oh, this is going to be a book, I started as a journal as a record, it was giving me pleasure and happiness, and then it just, you know, evolved into a book. And when I look back, though, I think you're very right, in pointing out that I think the reporter in me helped a lot, because I just talked to observation, I didn't want to color it with too much of opinion, and, you know, a different, different different skew. And that has worked quite magically for the book, because though it's, you know, it's my account, it's the first person account, it still keeps a little bit of a distance.

### **Radha**

I think, you know, the variety or the diversity of a pure observation, so to speak, because at some point of time, you know, you're talking a lot about coconut oil, and, and the kind of, you know, a kind of negativity the oil had couple of years ago to what it is today. And then you also talk about the hassles that one goes through when somebody has to deal with land, either buying or selling. So there's very diverse set of observations, so to speak. And was that something that you intended to be so when you started writing?

### **Anjana**

No, absolutely not. You know, for me, what has been what has been a revelation to me as a writer as well, is how you know, you can capture extraordinary stuff in the ordinary, you know, we, you know, we all grow up hearing things like, oh, life is stranger than fiction, and there are stories around you every day, you only have to pause and whilst I have been a writer, you know, pretty much throughout my entire professional life that's not how I viewed things, right. You just because partly because you don't stop and you don't observe. And so all of these things that you talk to me because you know, the book covers cuz like you pointed out everything from, you know how state prisons are being run to the coconut oil to, you know, there's there's whole lot of stuff on food to lands and property and how do you deal with that, but that's really the stuff that we all deal with every single day of our lives, it's just that we're in such a rush that we never stop and think a bit more about it. But all the touch points are everyday touch points. And I think that is what makes the book very relatable to almost everyone who's read, it has come back to me saying, oh, you know, this particular character, I know a person like this, or you know, this episode that you remind that you talk of this have something similar happened to me, or this particular individual, the way you've described them, I can see what you're talking about, or it took me back to a lot of times I get this passages about my childhood, a lot of people come back and say it reminded me of my childhood. So I think for me as an author, the pleasure is, is in that I've captured everyday living that we all go through, but it's it's like a story.

### **Radha**

And for you, the icing on the cake, in this entire journey is the Kerala tourism collaboration. how did that happen?

### **Anjana**

Oh, so that was quite interesting. I sent them the book when, you know, we had done it. And, you know, when the book was ready, the manuscript, things gone into print. And I felt that this tells the Kerala story really well. And I, you know, I'm asking if there were ways in which we could tell that story to the world. And they read the book, and they loved it. And they said, Yes, because you really have captured Kerala, you know, like you pointed out rather without any over dramatization, it's just completely just

observing it. And it's what makes Kerala unique and human and unique and resilient. Because, you know, that's how Kerala sees itself as a state. And it just so happens that someone who's looking in from the outside, is also able to absorb absorb those things. So Kerala, tourism is running a really interesting contest for the next couple of months, I think it's on till the end of April, where they will give, you know, they will host three lucky winners for an all paid stay a five day four night stay in Kerala. And, you know, readers have to send their invoice and the details to the publisher HarperCollins, to direct message to Harper Collins handle. So they doing that, and then a couple of other activities as well, which we'll get to when everyone starts to move around a bit more.

### **Radha**

I know, it's not an apple to apple comparison, but now that you have written two books, how does the review for this book being different from the earlier one?

### **Anjana**

So I think, you know, the first book was called, What's your story? It's a business book, I co authored with two of my two American authors. And the feedback for that book was that it's probably the most comprehensive ready reckoner on storytelling, you know, that people have read in a long time, and that it's useful for startups, it's useful for business leaders, it's useful for journalism students, it's useful for communications personnel. So it's almost like a book that tells you how to go about storytelling, whatever be your medium, as long as you know, you want to tell a business story. That book was very well received. It did really well in a lot of categories. This book, of course, I mean, this is far more recent. I think more the overwhelming response that I have from people is, oh, this book brought us so much joy. So I think that book brought people learning. And this book has brought people joy. So mostly people come back to me and say, it was just fabulous. I loved it, because, you know, it took me back to my childhood or memories or was so funny. I was laughing through the book. I just felt happy and uplifted after reading the book. So I think it's two different categories that both books have served?

### **Radha**

That's great. And what would be your suggestion to budding authors?

### **Anjana**

Um, well, I guess the biggest thing that I have, you know, which is my own learning is that you just have to start writing if you want to write, postponing it is no use, it's no good. You know, and as writers, I think almost all writers will tell you this, that, you know, you all go through, we all go through moments, when we say, Can I do it, will this be completed? Am I you know, why is my next chapter, not sort of the way I want it to be? Or can I do it better, obviously, that, you know, does have everything in the world that you can do better always. You know, that's the whole point of, in some ways, you know, living, you just want to do everything better, I guess. But you have to start. And until you start, all of these other questions are kind of irrelevant. Once you start, you have to stick the course, by having some kind of a discipline. And this doesn't have to be an external discipline, what I found is that you need to have your own internal discipline and your own goals, which is, do you want to write once a week? Do you want to write once a fortnight Do you want to write for 30 minutes every day, do you want to write every weekend, whatever it is, try and take that time out, it's almost like, you have to be in love with the idea of writing that book, so much in love with it, that you decide to take that time out, and

just stick with that. And you there will be days when you feel that that's not the best story or the best chapter or your best writing. But that's okay, as long as you put it down. Because you will get two, three chances to revise your manuscript, you will get you know, you'll hopefully get editors who will tell you, Well, this works, this doesn't work, you will probably, you know, get peers who go through it and say, Well, I love this, but this doesn't work for me. So you will get chances to improve what you've written. But you really have to go with the flow.

**Radha**

That's great. And what next for the book, you know, I mean, are you looking at serializing this? any plans to make this into a movie?

**Radha**

Yeah. I mean, most of Kerala loves serials is what I hear and what I've read. And I mean, you know, I think that this book has every potential and opportunity to be a serial.

**Anjana**

Oh, um, you know, thank you so much for seeing them. It's heartening that you say that, and finally, you know, the commissioning editor at Harper, when I first submitted the manuscript, one of the first things that he said to me is, gosh, this can be serialized, you know, that, don't you? And I said, Well, you know, I, I can drag it for any of those things. I wrote it because it brought me joy. And it was a journal. And, you know, I just started penning things, and it turned into a book. But yeah, I mean, that's the feedback that I'm getting a lot from people that, you know, you're going to take it to some OTT platform, or you're going to take it to Netflix or Amazon. And, you know, right now, I want people to read the book. I want as many people as I can read. I want people to read the book and enjoy it and say that they loved it. And, you know, it brought them joy.

**Radha**

Great, thanks, Anjana. It was a pleasure talking to you. And thanks for coming on the show again.

**Anjana**

Thank you so much for having me on the show. And thank you for your lovely questions.