

Letter from **Ms. Lakshmi Puri**, Assistant Secretary General of the
United Nations & Deputy Executive Director of UN Women

10 March 2016

Dear Dr. Nair,

Writing is often a political act. Nowhere does a woman's voice come across as proficiently as it does in the oeuvres of literature and poetry which have had the capacity to tell the truth of her struggles and her victories throughout the ages.

Literature, specifically fiction, has a unique capacity to touch the hearts and minds of people and engage them in a way that is distinctly different from political or academic texts. It has the potential to lead to personal or social change as it reaches beyond governments, past the conference rooms and presidential palaces, to help us connect with the voices and the stories women have to tell.

I am delighted to learn of the initiative by you and Dr. G. S. Jayasree to archive the contributions of women writers of Kerala on a digital platform. The website Samyukta: Women Writers of Kerala will be a repository of works produced over the last 200 years, and will therefore serve as an invaluable documentation of women's thoughts, emotions and experiences, about which little is known.

It is only fitting to shine a light on the women writers of Kerala, considering it has historically been the Malayala land of women. An unusual place where women ruled. Not on royal thrones with giant armies but as heads of households--positions often more powerful. Here, women were educated, respected, moved about without fear or censure, participated occupationally wherever they wished, and were the major force leading Kerala to become India's first near-100% literate state.

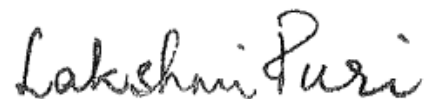
This has led to the birth of some of the most important and prominent women writers of India. In the case of many women writers, the narratives also contest the stereotype of women as eternally suffering and forgiving, unable or unwilling to seek justice for wrongs committed against her. Writing is a form — and a tool — of empowerment.

The website represents an important cultural space, making women's literary work more visible and accessible to thousands of people who might have never seen it otherwise. I have been a great admirer of Kamala Surayya's writing and I look forward to a portal that will showcase the work of many other path-breaking, iconoclast writers like her.

UN Women's core mandate of gender equality and women's empowerment is driven by a strong focus on amplifying women's voices and an enduring belief in women as agents of change. I hope that *Samyukta* will expand to include stories and voices from many other languages, bringing an even wider range of women's narratives to light.

I wish *Samyukta*-Women Writers of Kerala all success.

Yours sincerely,



Ms. Lakshmi Puri
Assistant Secretary-General
Deputy Executive Director

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