

Diary of a Malayali Madman

N. Prabhakaran

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In N. Prabhakaran's postmodern short story collection *Diary of a Malayali Madman*, people are touched by madness and constrained by the traditions and politics of their Indian societies.

A man finds himself pressed into service as a result of his brother's political machinations. He, like others, finds himself at odds with, and pressed by, social norms, including marital pressures, political uprisings, and corporate greed. In "Pigman," a man journals about a surreal pig farm; there, even junior accountants are asked to learn every aspect of pig farming as the farm becomes stranger and stranger. And in "Tender Coconuts," the memory of a patient plagues a doctor who can't understand why the patient acted as he did.

Strangeness dominates these dreamlike tales. Their narratives are nonlinear; they value experience and the act of articulation. Often, their characters are obsessed with language; they use it to try to divine the keys to their own madness, which does not always seem mad. Speaking out and writing are acts against such madness; the details shared in both forms of expression are layered and many, revealing divisions between the political turbulence outside and the personal turbulence within. Still, the outside forces accrue, represented by family in-fighting, parties at odds, violence in the streets, pay-offs, and lies told without reason. As people become surrounded by such forces, they are pushed to respond in what ways they can, even if that is limited to chronicling their own seeming lunacy in the manner of the grotesque.

Character-driven, postmodern, and bizarre, the short story collection *Diary of Malayali Madman* gives voice to those who are constrained and who are driven somewhat mad by the social constraints that bind them.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (March / April 2023)

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