



a tribute to
asokan v s

Tributes by members of the Photographic Society of Madras. Edited and designed by **Thomas T Abraham**

he writes his name and all in small case,
with the humility of a seasoned traveler in life.
he detects frames we don't see, in anything & everything,
finds inspiration in the common crow and dried leaves.

the frills and flourishes are for lesser mortals
the master knows what is what and what he wants.

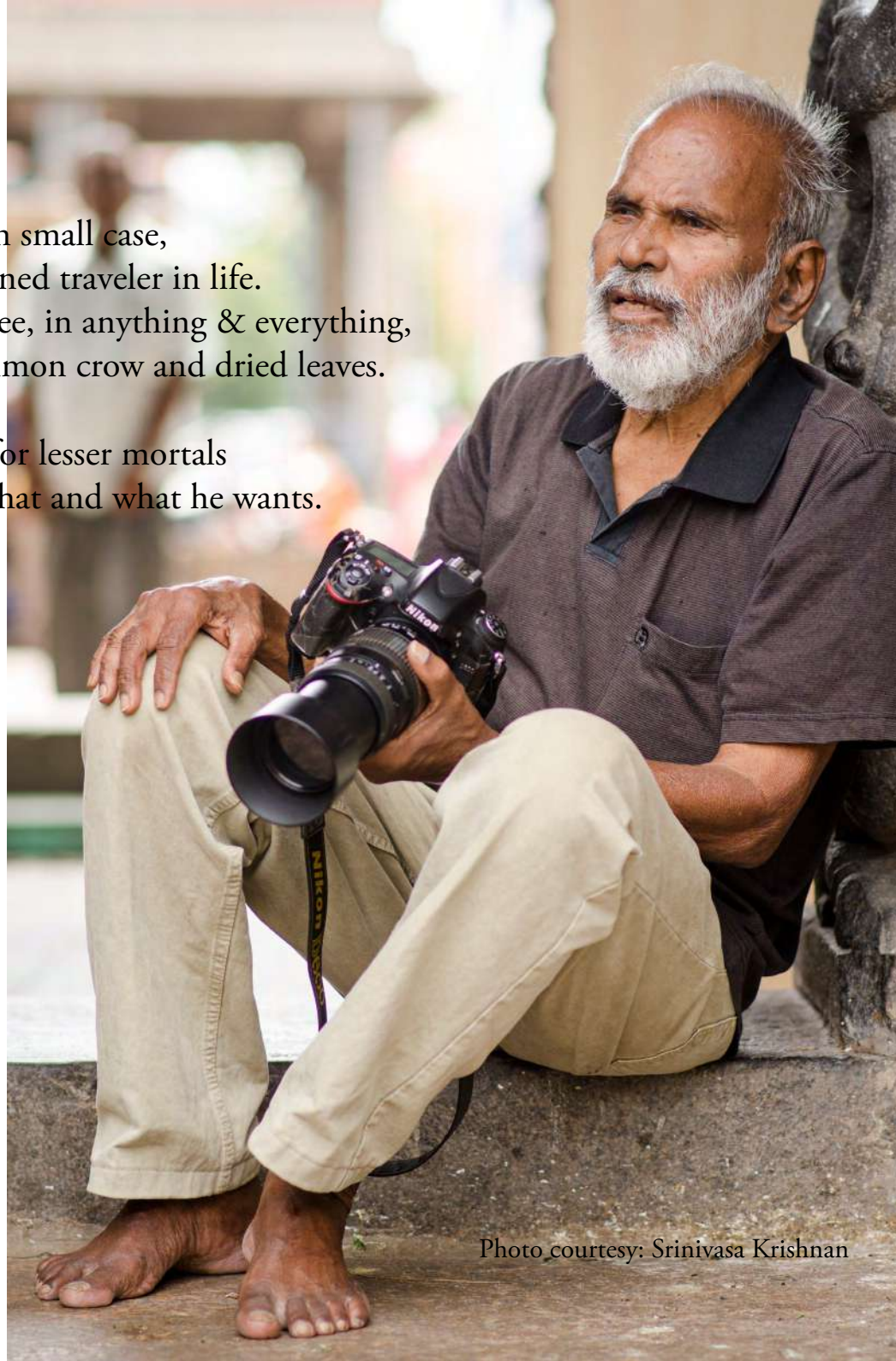


Photo courtesy: Srinivasa Krishnan

I know that like me, many in PSM have lost a very dear friend.

Asokan was full of a child's energy. Today and tomorrow excited him. He had a childlike goodness as also a zest for life. He was a sensitive human being and possessed an empathetic soul.

New members or old friends, he was always ready with his honest comments on their portfolios, typed in his inimitable style, like a poem without capitals. He had a well developed sense of aesthetics and a unique eye to notice the unusual in the commonplace, detect awesome patterns in what others dismissed as mundane. He never allowed technique to enslave him but was unafraid to use technology to produce stunning results.

Asokan is simply irreplaceable.

The outpouring of tributes to Asokan puts in perspective the loss. That he has touched so many hearts is obvious.

This is a modest tribute to a remarkable man with whom I shared the joy of words, visuals and thoughts, who showed us that happiness lies in being simple, humble and caring for others.

Thomas T Abraham
30th Nov, 2015

In 2013, Asokan commented on my boat race pictures. He had some candid views. I judged the writer to be some 35 years, visualised a Malayali idealist with a socialistic inclination - an inevitable stage (with varying durations) in every Malayali's life. I matched his candor with mine, addressing the 'young man' Asokan. Several mail exchanges later, when we met, I realised that this Asokan was young in a different way. I was already close with Asokan, so there was no question of switching to Mr Asokan, the respect due to him on many counts notwithstanding.

We had enjoyable regular email and telephonic exchanges. I came to believe I had a special friendship with him. Now I realise that it was Asokan that was special, to give so many friends that pride of a special friendship with him. He will advise me on what he believed was good for PSM, will mark me on his letters to members, commending and commenting on their photos.

In August 2015, Asokan sent me what looked like a poorly printed pirated edition of a thin book: *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom. Then he wrote to me asking how I was progressing with the book. When I confessed to tardy progress, he pleaded, "Thomas, please read it in full, at least for my sake". I started liking the story about an ex Professor affected by muscle atrophy and sinking fast, which doesn't stop him from joking about himself or dictating motivating mails to people with much smaller problems.

I realised that Asokan had a message for me. I realised that Asokan was doing something similar to what the optimistic Professor was doing. With his simplicity and sensitivity, Asokan touched many hearts. He enhanced the self-worth of all he interacted with.

The first time Asokan hinted at time running out for him was in a short mail of Oct 17th. I tried to meet him in his neighbourhood. That didn't happen - maybe he was unwell, but not in his nature to say so.

That meeting will never happen.

Asokan missed John Isaac's lecture. I gave him a detailed description. His concern was whether the sound and visuals were satisfactory. He wanted PSM to maintain world class standards.

That is the last letter I will ever receive from you. Bye my friend,

Your friend,
thomas

All of Asokan's letters are typeset as he did, sans capitals, in Arial italics,

dear thomas

HOW IS THE 'TUESDAY' WITH YOU?

*don't leave it midway, please read it full,
at least for my sakethanks*

*asokan vaikkattil
21 sept 2015*

*the time is also getting/ thinning out fast! a feeling of
'thidukkum' has crept into my mind recently*

good night and good morning

*asokan
17 oct*

dear thomas

very loving words, they moved me beyond words.

*by the by, how was the sound and projection,
especially the sound system?*

*these are the TWO areas where we should improve;
it should be top-class, professional standard just like
we see in tv's live programs.*

*asokan
2 nov*

Mr Asokan's words of encouragement to all members, senior of beginner, spoke of the fire and energy in him to urge people onward in this fine art of photography. To one of my album contributions in our forum, he replied :

Dear friend, Unbelievable! every frame of your is a Masterpiece! Great going indeed! Hereafter, I shall not even miss a single mail from you, because it is a source of INSPIRATION for me; I mean it!

For senior photographer to get inspired by others work spoke of his persistence to learn regardless - as photography is an eternal journey of learning...

The guns fell silent from the first week of November and I involuntarily realized something was wrong. From where he is now at the Happy hunting grounds, I am sure he continues to review all our pictures. Rest in Peace, Mr. Asokan

Rags Raghavan

Sri Ashokan was a man of few words. But those few words would be effective & meaningful.

He was truly honest & open in his comments.

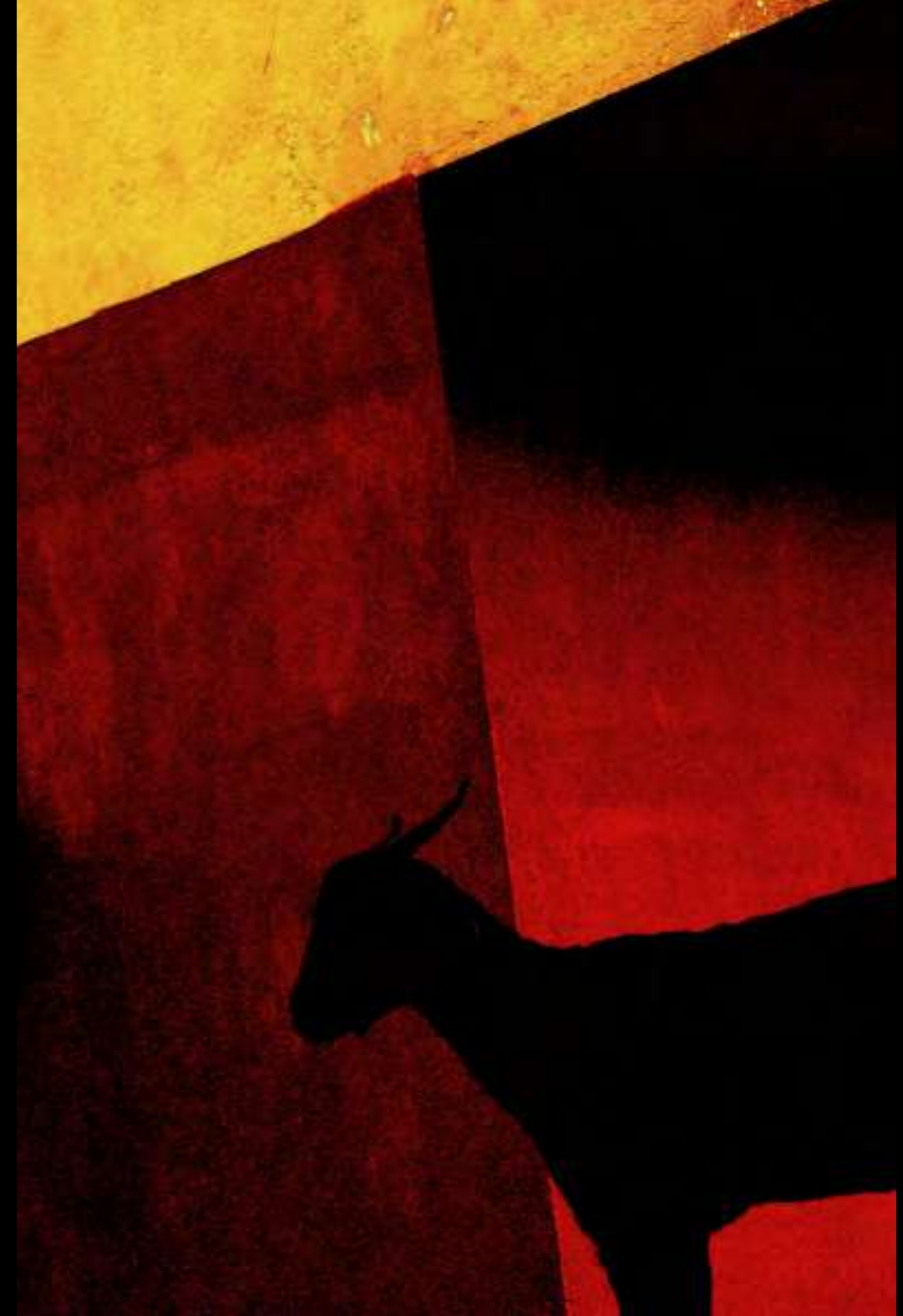
If he came across a photo from you and if that was good according to him, he would hold your hands when he met you during monthly meet, so hard that it might even hurt sometimes. And wd give a smile with his eyes closed, uttering few words like, "Swami that Aanai, Ayyoo, too good".

That was his candid and honest way of expressing appreciation of your good work.

At the same time, he had also blasted me once for a poor mike arrangement in our monthly meet at SVS Club.

We all will miss him for sure.

Swami



The sudden passing away of Asokan Sir has left a big vacuum in my passion as a photographer. The first time I met him he left a lasting impression on me. Such a docile, passionate and kind gentleman - ever smiling. His hardly audible and soft voice gave very clear and hard critiques to every photographer, including me.

His first email to me was criticizing me for having shot Jallikattu. He did the same to another member who shot a parrot in a cage. I was upset at first but next when I met him in person I realized he was more than just a photographer. He was very vociferous in his passion towards animals.

When I was President, I invited him to speak at a monthly meeting. That's where I saw his creativity - in his mind, in his eyes and how beautifully he had captured it on film. His shots showed a sense of space, a sense of freedom and you could hear his soft delicate laughter of happiness while capturing the image. I related his pictures with his passion towards animals and realized he was not only a photographer but first a human, with a heart of gold.

I wanted to visit his house to see the rest of his pictures but to my bad luck, I kept postponing it. I could have learnt a lot am sure, if I did go. I have lost that opportunity and thus the vacuum. Even in life, as in photography, An opportunity lost is an opportunity lost.

I will miss Asokan Sir always.

May his soul rest in peace.

Sanjay Sridhar



ASOKAN V S

He truly understood photography as an art form and used it as a means of expressing his soul. His photographs are a testament to this. He also had a sound idea about the art and art critique. Asokan definitely puts people into a plane of vibration where there is pure photography and art. A well read man of conventional wisdom.

There are many who have inspired me here. But Asokan sir stands apart in the way his expositions are about the art and about the critiques. He was truly a child at heart and of which I have experienced the love hate relationship with him many times. Those are my standing memories with him which I am going to cherish.

I will truly miss a great friend and philosopher. May his soul rest in peace.

Rithwik V J

Whenever I look at Asokan Sir's mails or himself, it evokes a strange phenomenon in me.

I could easily relate Jiddu Krishnamurti's words on Passion with Asokan's Sir life: "The clear mind alone can be passionate. Without passion you cannot see the breeze among the leaves or the sunlight on the water. Without passion there is no love".

His energy, honest opinions, clear thinking cannot be simply ignored. Neither he is biased nor opinionated. I have never seen him talking about his past glories or good-old-days .He is not too much carried-away by techniques and neither he is averse to using Photoshop or any editing software.

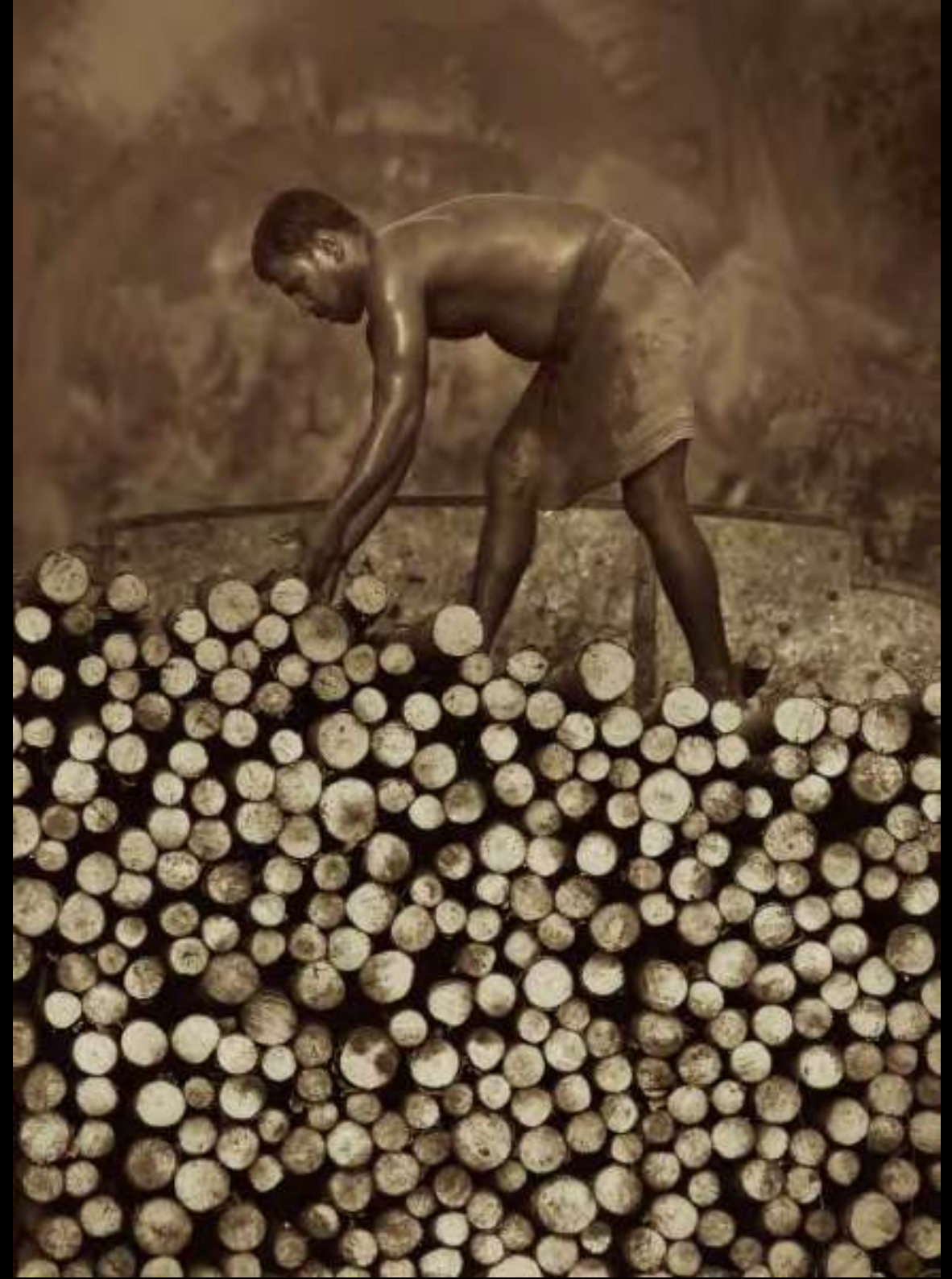
He enjoyed photography. He motivated many of us (I'm one among them) to do better photography.

His straight-from-the-heart emotions, child-like attitude to do photography and ego-less criticisms all bring a simple proposition of his life:

A life lived in full, with the past and future in harmony, and not at all at out the loggerheads.

Nara

ASOKAN V S



A very sad news indeed. We have lost a good friend and a fine photographer who infused art into the art of photography.

To him photography was more an artistic expression than mere technicalities.

We will also miss him for his reviews of the pictures, his inimitable style of writing and communication.

May his soul rest in eternal peace and tranquillity.

Shankar Adisesh

Asokan Sir is no more!!!!
Unbelievable.....
It struck me like hell.

Such a nice person and passionate photographer he was.

I used to look forward to his words of criticism whenever I used to post any picture. He used to highlight aspects which made an image good, very good, excellent or have spoiled the frame.

He had a rare blend of art, passion, energy and simplicity. His sweet smile and sparkling eyes will remain deep inside my heart as fond memories.

I have lost a great friend, the society have lost a friend.
May his soul rest in peace.

SUPRAKASH GHOSH



ASOKAN V S

It is indeed a shocking and a sad news. Asokan had a unique eye for details and was bold enough to express his views when it came to critically analysing photographs. He had a his own style of photography and was always ready to share his knowledge with everyone. He had no ego and was readily approachable by, one and all irrespective of age.

He had a special liking for me and encouraged me in every step during my Presidentship. His instant smile, the firm handshake, the artistic approach and his bold criticism, where shall I find in this world hereafter. Not only myself but entire PSM has lost a a Friend, Philosopher and Guide.

May his soul rest in peace.

Vivekanand Srinivas
Secretary, PSM

This is very heartbreaking and sad news to hear. One of the most humble, creative and constant appreciator of new talent and an admirer of photography all through, PSM and its members have lost a very ver valuable member.

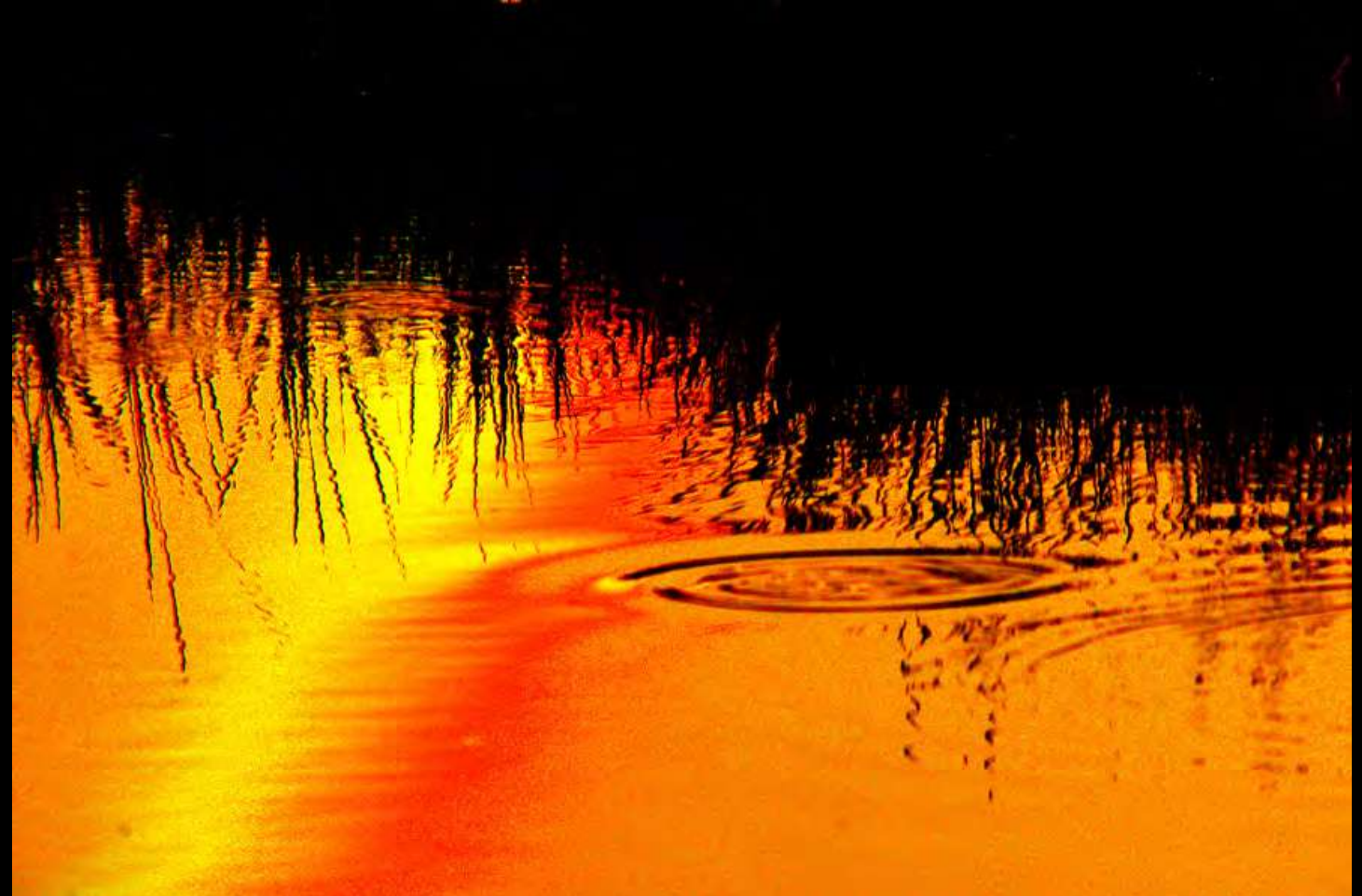
I have had chance to personally interact with him on varied topics and discussions during our monthly meetings and it was always enlightening to know his views. The man so humble yet so passionate and enthusiastic about the community in general.

While I was leaving Chennai and he could not make for the last meeting due to his bad health, he send me a handwritten letter in his very beautiful handwriting, almost poetic and still encouraging me to achieve further in photography.

I am sure, lot of members, who had interacted with him through emails or personally will share this thought.

May his soul rest in peace and May we all get a slice of his humility and passion towards photography to achieve laurels for our community !

Samyak Kaninde



ASOKAN V S

Shri. Asokan was an artist in a photographer. Who can forget his exhibition where he made mundane images into work of art. His experiments with low light, slow shutter and fully opened aperture delivered great results. All interactions on photography with him were mentorship for me. His eye for identifying art in anything was remarkable.

My experience with him was unique. I got a pat in my back for one of my shots, which I considered a very ordinary shot posted in flickr. He explained about a portrait in a single light source and identified the image as a very good one. Further to his reviews, when I saw the image I began to like it.

His demise is a personal loss for me as I have lost a good Friend, Philosopher and a Guide. Asokan lives in each of our hearts and the works when we begin to put to use his words of wisdom into our images.

B Ramanakumar

I reproduce the mail from him on 14.1.2013

dear friend

your dance (men) pictures go to prove that single, one directional light make the picture stand out from the rest; if you keenly go through european painters like rembrandt, van gogh, etc, you will understand this much more deeply. i faintly remember our rautam rajadyaksha (or avinash pasricha?) in has come to stress this point in one of his interviews.

my son-in-law (sri lankan, colombo)) uses multiple flashes for his wedding portfolio, but he ensures one light always dominates with the result his pictures have a unique three dimensional effect; he has made wedding portfolio an art.

good effort



Without him knowing me or me knowing him I took this photograph of him at the Mylapore Festival in January 2013.

Met him twice, once in the AGM of PSM in Sept 2014 and the next in September 2015 in the inaugural function of Diverse Visions. His detailed comments on the images submitted for review by members has made everyone anxious to know his views. In one of the images I posted in FB, he commented on November 6, 2015 “too much high brow (ed) picture”. I wanted to ask him what he meant, as I was hearing the term for the first time. Alas, he is no more to answer me. I find that once he quoted Confucius in a PSM Guest Lecture: “There is beauty in everything, but not everyone sees it”. The man who saw beauty in our photographs is not among us today and his absence will be felt by all PSM members.



Martin Luther (German Monk and church reformer) said: “If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write”. This is what Mr Asokan did to photography, in addition to being a talented photographer.

G V Balasubramanian



ASOKAN V S

Shattered hearing about the sudden demise of Asokan Sir, a passionate photographer who is well known for sharing his bold critics and humble views. He attended my wedding with his family and gifted me a handwritten greeting card with a personal message. I'll cherish the moments which I spent with him discussing about photography and doing photoshoots.

Last year, on the Ayudha Pooja day, we had a great time testing my brand new Nikon D750 in his garden (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/srinivasakrishnan/15241913919/>). I also tested my Nikon 85mm along with him during one of our photowalks (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/srinivasakrishnan/15092257555>).

Recently, he felt that he should avoid carrying more load in his camera bag and decided to go for a full-frame travel lens. After several discussions, he bought a brand new Tamron 28-300 just in the first week of September. He was eager to add a macro lens in his kit. Participating in a PSM photowalk conducted at the Vandalur Zoo Butterfly Park was one of the items in his wishlist. His child-like love and energy towards photography never failed to inspire us. As our President Thomas said, Asokan is irreplaceable.

Srinivasa Krishnan

Shares his excitement of buying a travel lens which he was looking for.

*DEAR SRINI
WHERE ARE YOU?
28-300 IS IN MY POCKET.*

Expresses his fascination towards macro.

i have a nuclei idea of going for a tamrons 90 mm macro; i will decide about that by this week end; after seeing some macro shots thru vivi'sd forwards, etc; i am simply bowled over by these macro; it can do wonders, if you are a bit lucky and persevering; let me see.



ASOKAN V S

I have not taken part in any photo walks with him. Missed his spontaneous comments / critiques. But I followed all his comments about the pictures taken by the members of PSM through the group mails.

One important fact I noticed about him was that his comment will never hurt the photographer, instead it will boost his/her knowledge and morale, as a photographer.

Very generous in pouring out appreciation and that will be made public. The criticism will be addressed in a personal way.

He has not made any comment about my pictures which made me feel that I have to learn and improve my skills, a lot. A personal loss to me in this aspect because I will never be able to get his critical evaluation.

A Great Artist, a simple person with an open mind, very quick reflexes and poetic words.

We are going to miss you, dear Asokan Ji.

Rest in Peace.

R.Ramanidharan

Its an irreplaceable loss to our society...

He passed bold reviews; gently expressed his views;
was lighthouse for stranded freshers in society.

May his soul rest in peace.

When we lose a loved one here, we gain an angel in heaven...

Lets take comfort in knowing; there is an angel watching over our Society.

Shan

*Once you are
a traveller, your pictures take a different
hues; in a way, you, nara, ramana jayanand,
sastangi, etc., etc., are fortunate in this aspect.*

*since i don't travel beyond my pallikarnai,
except a few trips to my village, i am stuck here
and so my pictures are very much repetitive
and even to me they are a bore
but there is a positive side to this unenviable situation*

*that is, i am forced to see things more closely and consequently
i get more intimate with my subjects and
understand them a little deeper, though they are quite often
inanimate (parthiban and vivi call them
abstracts!) but in spite of these shortcomings,*

*i don't idle my d600! to a certain extent,
thanks to psm and friends like you, thomas,
srini, parthiban, sarith and a few others.*

Letter to Rithwik VJ

dear thomas

*looking through dr srinivsan's and some other friends
frames early in the morning, i am more than convinced that
PSM has real talent within its fold & you are its PRESIDENT :*

great!

*dr.s frames are unbelievable; do all these
come from a lens, which i am also using?
i doubt.*

the mind counts.

good morning

*asokan
29 sept*

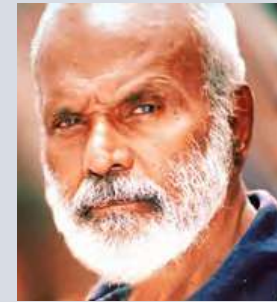
*you have always a frolicking mind like a child, always doing
something unexpected, which keeps the onlookers bemused;
keep going ; people like you makes PSM an interesting "mix ".*

good luck

*asokan vs
chennai 100
10.3.14,*

Letter to Dr Raj

PSM meant a lot
to Asokan. He
was proud of the
members' talents.

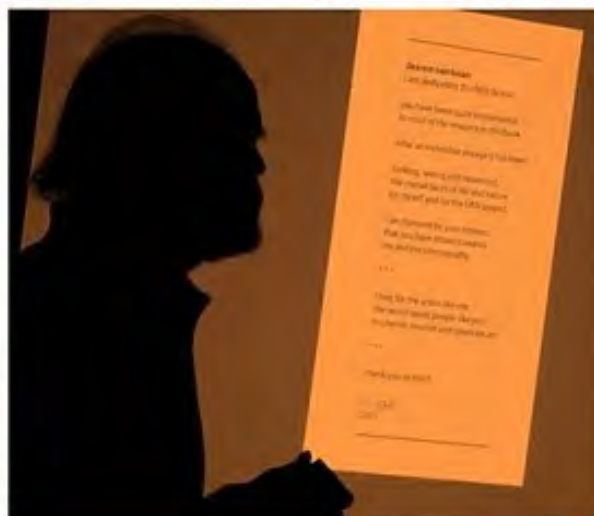


The man who sees beauty in a dry bark and a wet leaf

“Photography has been with me since my school days. It became an obsession. But my photography was no beanstalk. It took time to grow”, that was V S Asokan narrating to fellow members of PSM, the first chapter of his love affair with photography.

Despite being a law graduate, his “soul was always in photography”. So he co-founded ‘The Innovators’, a studio in Chennai to serve the ad industry. Soon the venture developed into a fully accredited Ad agency, ‘Chhaya Advertising Pvt. Ltd.’. “The agency people carry the client’s brand, product and brief in their head”, he recalls. Advertising photography is restrictive and has to satisfy the art director, the copywriter and the client.

Asokan regained his artistic freedom by selling off the Agency and plunging into photography for self-expression and pleasure. But one visitor to his Bangalore exhibition bought 15 of his frames in one sweep and commissioned him for more, to decorate a prestigious Hotel project in Bangalore. For three months, Asokan got busy shooting, mostly in his backyard.



“Tell me the negatives”, he genuinely challenges the audience, as he presents his pictures that are also sign posts of a life going strong at 80. The pictures combine an artist’s sense of composition with advertising’s result orientation. The many-layered meanings of his frames are spelt through contrast of shapes, colours, textures and tenses (Past and Present, Today and Tomorrow). Many of his crops are unconventional, revealing a philosopher’s irreverence for convention. He is unafraid of fully saturated colours but can also pull off soft and wistful, out-of-focus compositions. Asokan has shot his amazing pictures with uncomplicated inexpensive cameras, and does not swoon over high-end gear. “I mostly use just

one exposure, f/5.6”, he says disarmingly, and with a suppressed half chuckle. He has no compunctions about manipulating pictures. Result matters.

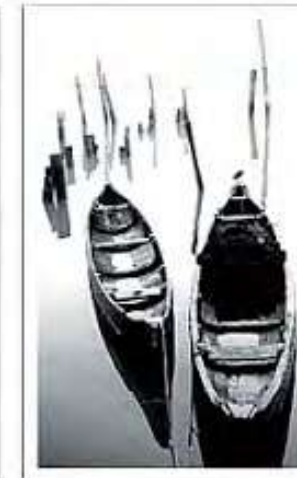
“Colour or B&W?”, someone ventures. “Should Pather Panchali have been made in colour, or Lawrence of Arabia in black and white?”, Asokan answers with a question.

The last quote on Asokan’s exquisite photo album is from Confucius: “There is beauty in everything, but not everyone sees it”. Apt for a consummate artist, who effortlessly finds beauty in a dry tree bark and graphic perfection in a tilted orange tower chosen by a bird to sit awhile.

Asokan addressing a PSM monthly meeting

Photo/layout courtesy: PSM Blog/ T Parthiban. Middle, left: Srinivasa krishnan

Text: Thomas T Abraham, from PSM Blog





“There is beauty in everything, but not everyone sees it”.

- Confucius

Quoted in Asokan's exquisite photo album