

for: *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (1989), *Kadavu* (1991), *Sadayam* (1992), and *Parinayam* (1994), which is the most by anyone in the screenplay category. In 1995 he was awarded the highest literary award in India, *Jnanpith*, for his overall contribution to Malayalam literature. In 2005, India's third highest civilian honour, *Padma Bhushan*, was awarded to him. He died in *Kozhikode* on 25 December 2024.

Madath Thekkepaattu Vasudevan Nair was born on 15 July 1933¹ in the village of Kudallur, then in Ponnani Taluk (now in Pattambi Taluk, Palakkad District). His birthplace fell under Malabar District in erstwhile Madras Presidency of the British Raj. He was the youngest of four children born to T. Narayanan Nair and Ammalu Amma. His father was in Ceylon, and he spent his early days in Kudallur and in his father's house in Punnayurkulam, a village in the present-day Thrissur district.

Although his family did not nurture an interest in reading, Nair started writing at an early age and had his work published in magazines.

Nair attended Malamakkavu Elementary School and then Kumaranelloor High School. He had to break education after high school, and when he joined college in 1949, he was advised to opt for the science stream as it was felt that a degree in science secured a job faster than any other degree. He obtained a degree in chemistry from Victoria College, Palakkad in 1953.

He taught mathematics in Pattambi Board High School and Chavakkad Board High School for over a year and worked in M.B. Tutorial College, Palakkad during 1955–56. He also worked as a gramasevakan at a block development office in Taliparamba, Kannur for a few weeks before joining Mathrubhumi Weekly as subeditor in 1957.

Nair began writing at a very young age, inspired by his elder brother who wrote time and again in several literary journals and poet Akkitham Achuthan Nair, on this who was his senior at high school. He initially wrote poems but soon changed to prose writing. His first published work was an essay on the diamond industry of India, titled "Pracheenabharathathile Vaira Vyavasayam", which appeared in *Keralakshemam*, a biweekly published by C. G. Nair from Guruvayoor. His first story "Vishuvaghosham" was published in Madras-based *Chitrakeralam* magazine in 1948. The story explores the feelings of a boy too poor to have firecrackers of his own, as he stands listening to the sounds of crackers coming from the houses of the rich celebrating the new year festival of Vishu: an overwhelming sense of loss, the painful realisation that this is the way things are and the way they're likely to stay. His first book, *Raktham Puranda Manaltharikal* was published in 1952.

Nair's first literary prize came to him while he was a student at Victoria College, Palakkad - his short story "Valarthumrigangal" (Pet Animals) won first prize in the World Short Story Competition conducted by *The New York Herald Tribune*, *Hindustan Times*, and *Mathrubhumi* in 1954. It was a short story delineating the pathetic plight of circus artistes. The numerous stories that followed dealt with themes culled from widely different milieus and contexts but were uniformly successful and popular.

The noted collections of his stories are *Iruttinte Athmavu*, *Olavum Theeravum*, *Bandhanam*, *Varikkuzhi*, *Dare-e-Salam*, *Swargam Thurakkunna Samayam*, *Vaanaprastham* and *Sherlock*. "Iruttinte Athmavu" ("Soul of Darkness"), one of the most celebrated among his short stories, is the heart wrenching story of a 21-year-old man, regarded as a lunatic by everyone and treated abominably. The story reveals the insanity behind the civilised and supposedly sane world. The story "Sherlock" moves between the rural milieu familiar to Nair's readers and the sophisticated world of Indian