



Literature Residency at the Toji Foundation in Korea

Writer and editor, Ajay Krishnan, currently based in Bengaluru, India, is the next writer-in-residence at the InKo-ARKO supported Literature Residency at the Toji Foundation in Korea. Ajay, who will be in residence at Toji from **1-30 September 2018**,- hopes to complete work on a play titled *The Rascal Quixote* and to research and work on a few short pieces of fiction during his stint in Korea.

In the writer's own words...



The main writing project I will work on while at the Toji residency is a play called "The Rascal Quixote". In 2011, I grew obsessed with Miguel Cervantes's classic novel *Don Quixote*. But though I was fascinated by it, I was also unable to explain what had gripped me so powerfully about

it. There was much that I could see was unusual – a meandering plot, an episodic structure that does not quite build towards anything climactic, a somewhat vague moral vision. Yet, there was also something utterly compelling about the central character and his squire, and their determination to wander through the world in search of adventure and glory. As I thought more about the novel, I realised that one of the most powerful things about it is how different people take different things away from it. This is true of any great literature, but *Quixote's* open-ended narrative makes this effect even more pronounced. To one reader it may be a story about love, to another about friendship, to yet another about the imagination.

I realised that the central idea that riveted me was that of madness. And in *Quixote*, I felt that this idea of madness is closely tied together with that of storytelling and narrative. It seemed to me that *Quixote* is ridiculed and even feared because of his absolute commitment to his make-believe reality and to his fierce passion for the stories that he weaves as he blunders his way through the world. This is apparent in a haunting scene early in the novel where *Quixote's* acquaintances burn down his library thinking that books are the source of his "madness". There is comedy in the writing, and

centuries have passed since it was composed – yet it remains deeply disturbing. It serves as a reminder that stories are powerful creations that can change the fabric of the world; and that creating and spreading them are in many ways acts of madness. Inspired by this, and using elements from the novel, I wrote a draft of a play titled "The Rascal Quixote". The primary conceit of the play is this: the central character is an old man who loves stories, but lives in a land where stories are feared and controlled by the State. When his library is destroyed, he decides to live out a fantasy (perhaps as an act of madness and/or resistance) as the knight *Quixote*...

I have already begun reworking my play, and have been struck by how potent the idea of a wandering fiction-spinning madman is in these times when narratives and cultures are so easily oppressed by the ruling dispensation. I have a draft ready, but it needs considerable work before it can be considered finished. A month of uninterrupted work at Toji would be an absolute blessing in helping me do this. From past residents I have heard that it offers an atmosphere of quiet and solitude, which are the most difficult things to come by for a writer trying to work in a city alongside a hundred distractions. In addition to the play, if I am selected I also plan to use part of my time to work on a few pieces of short fiction. The questions of language and style that arise with fiction are vastly different from those in plays. So far I have been drawn to a style of quiet realism in my fiction (very different from the boisterous energy that I seek in a lot of my playwriting). At the Toji residency, I would love to spend focused time on exploring this voice and approach more closely and growing as a writer of fiction also.

- **Ajay Krishnan**

The Toji Cultural Foundation was established to support work created by Korean writers, scholars and artists. It started with the firm belief that writers, scholars and artists should be liberated from their busy daily lives to dedicate their time entirely to creating their works. The numerous creative works generated by domestic cultural artists and scholars in Korea has made the Toji Cultural Centre a major place for creative activities in Korea. Based on the success of its domestic programme, The Toji Cultural Foundation in cooperation with the city of Wonju launched a new initiative in 2005, the Programme for Supporting Creative Works and Cultural Exchanges by Foreign Writers, Artists and Scholars.



Writers who attend the Sangam House Residency in Bangalore, India are eligible to apply for the Literature Residency at Toji Foundation. Sangam House is an international writers' residency programme which brings together writers from across the world to live and work among their peers in a safe, supportive and nurturing space. The writer-in-residence for the Toji residency in Korea is selected from a shortlist prepared by Sangam House which is vetted by InKo Centre, Arts Council Korea (ARKO) and the Toji Foundation.

Every year, a Korean writer, following due selection, attends the Sangam House Residency in Bangalore, India with support from InKo Centre and Arts Council Korea (ARKO).

The Literature residency programme in Korea and in India is supported by Arts Council Korea (ARKO)



한국문화예술위원회
Arts Council Korea

Arts Council Korea was established to promote creativity and enjoyment of the art by supporting diverse arts and cultural activities in Korea. The Council consists of eleven

dedicated professionals of the cultural and art sector in Korea. The Art Council also places emphasis on the establishment of arts infrastructure. It facilitates the rise of practice-oriented policy implementation in line with the increasingly sophisticated cultural environment of Korea.