

WHAT SAYAHNA IS  
AND WHAT IT IS NOT?



# What Sayahna is and what it is not?

Sayahna Foundation

(English: Manifesto)

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## What Sayahna is and what it is not?

In an age and time where there is a proliferation of portals vying for our online space and attention, a few of our friends have raised the very valid question of whether there is really a need for yet another Whatsapp group to add to the general hullabaloo. One can't really blame them because, though it has been nearly a month since the launch of this new initiative, none of us here at Sayahna have yet comprehensively presented to them, the real objectives behind the formation of these groups. So, here is our attempt at addressing these concerns and letting you in on what makes Sayahna so different from the multitude of other literary initiatives.

As CVR had indicated in one of his initial posts, Sayahna is a group conceived in a spirit of inclusiveness. All our activities are centered around promoting a spirit of community, trust and camaraderie among people through creative collaborations. Still, even in this, our prime focus is limited to the fields of typography of Indic languages with special reference to Malayalam, typesetting, digital and open access publishing and free copyrights. The idea behind presenting these short snippets of exceptional material from great masters of the language on a daily basis is also done in this light. We believe that it is high time that the world gets to behold the leaps and bounds made by Malayalam in the field of typography that needs to be propagated to other Indic languages. What Sayahna ultimately strives for is only that—to reveal to the readers of the language, the true linguistic beauty of Malayalam! Using these groups therefore as venues for elaborate literary criticisms and appraisals, we fear, would be digressing from such a mission. This is why we respectfully request members who wish to continue along the former lines, to take their conversations and discussions elsewhere.

Your response to this venture of ours has been nothing short of overwhelming. With each encouraging comment and feedback, our team gets infused with a new impetus to trudge on ahead unflinchingly. The content that Sayahna is now disseminating through these groups have been digitized over the past five years. Through them, we are hoping to give you a peek into the limitless possibilities of Malayalam publishing and readership. Our single minded goal is to get the members of our groups to share in this vision and thus to collectively chart out our new path, rewriting old established rules. Discouraging comments, forwards or posts in the groups, even if they concern matters of cultural, social or political relevance is done only with this sole intention. Kindly do not construe it as an intolerance for differences or as an endorsement of fascist tendencies. We simply believe that concentrating all our dedicated efforts on an unfaltering, worthy, creative cause will eventually trigger enough ripples in the literary spectrum so as to transcend our own proscriptions and mushroom into the spheres of language, literature and life.

### 1 Open Access Publishing

Sayahna has thus far digitized and published over two hundred works. All of these have either been willingly authorised by the copyright owners for free publication or are ones for which the copyright period has expired. Sayahna only publishes works that fall into one of the above categories. Besides exploring novel, innovative ways of rendering the contents, Sayahna also ensures that they are preserved in XML formats so that they can be easily retrieved by future generations.

The volume of books that Sayahna has digitized and published since its inception can be accessed in the below link:

<https://ml.sayahna.org/>

Initiated during the lock-down days, Sayahna's move into WhatsApp started with a decision to release short extracts from Malayalam literature and bring it to interested readers on a daily basis. These offerings are made available in beautiful, rich, easy to read, PDF formats customized for use in smart phones.

To access the phone PDFs that have been released thus far, kindly visit the below link:

<http://www.sayahna.org/?p=531>

Also, to check out the comments and feedbacks received from the users thus far, click the link below:

<http://www.sayahna.org/?p=19>

For the benefit of authors considering the publication of their works through Sayahna, we have compiled a series of commonly raised doubts in question-answer format. After going through the guidelines below, if the terms are still acceptable, you may directly contact us and we will send you the agreement form. You will need to fill up the details, sign and forward us the scanned copy before our editorial board begins work on your book.

**Q:** To get a book published in Sayahna, what should an author do?  
**A:** The first step should be to make out a definitive agreement entrusting Sayahna with the authority to publish the work, in keeping with one of the licenses under [Creative Commons](#). The original copyright will remain with the author. Once this is acceptable by the author, notify the same via email to [info@sayahna.org](mailto:info@sayahna.org). The editorial board of Sayahna will then scrutinize the work and notify the author if it is selected for publication.

**Q:** Whom should I contact?  
**A:** Mail to either [info@sayahna.org](mailto:info@sayahna.org) or to [ashok@sayahna.org](mailto:ashok@sayahna.org).

**Q:** In which font should the work be typed?  
**A:** Can be in that [Unicode](#) font. The only condition is that it should be encoded in utf-8 format. Rachana font is used for all digital editions of Malayalam books published by Sayahna.

**Q:** What will be the cost for publishing a book of 100 pages?  
**A:** The expense will be nil.

**Q:** How can I get the printed copies of the book?  
**A:** Sayahna does not distribute printed copies of books. But the author retains the right to print and distribute his books. If the author requests, he will also be provided with a print ready PDF format for this purpose. Printing and distribution will be the responsibility of the author. The PDF that is hosted on the web is not suited for creating printed copies.

**Q:** Will the PDF of unpublished works be accepted?  
**A:** Yes, but the below stated points have to be noted.

1. You should have the authority to hand over the publication rights to Sayahna.
2. The contents should be original.
3. For translations, the written consents from the original author should be presented. If necessary, they might even have to be presented for legal scrutiny.
4. The content should satisfy the existing guidelines for publication in Sayahna.

If all the above conditions are acceptable, the work can be submitted for review by the Editorial board. The mail id for contact is [ashok@sayahna.org](mailto:ashok@sayahna.org).

**Q:** Can you publish the poems of G Kumara Pillai (a poet in Malayalam who passed away in 2000)?  
**A:** The poems of G Kumara Pillai will not be in the public domain until after September 2060. Usage of works while in their copyright period including distribution or reproduction leads to copyright infringement. Sayahna does not endorse it. All works published by Sayahna are either ones for which the copyright period has expired or those, for which, publication has been legally authorised by the copyright holders. Other works cannot be found in in Sayahna.

**Q:** When I publish with Sayahna, can I concurrently give the same book to the traditional publishers?  
**A:** Yes please. However, the author needs to take care of the license terms of the other publisher if digital editions are also released. The license for digital editions granted to other publishers shall not violate the provisions of Creative Commons license under which the author has permitted Sayahna to publish his/her work.

**Q:** When I publish with Sayahna can I get hard copies, say 20, from you for giving to my friends? What will be the cost?  
**A:** Sorry, no. Sayahna will not publish printed editions. However, Sayahna will take care of providing a print quality PDF to the author free of typesetting cost if needed since the PDFs released in the web are not of print quality. The author has to make arrangements for printing and distributing the work by him/herself. Sayahna will not appear as the publisher of author's printed editions for reasons of avoidable tax liabilities.

### 2 Webinar, Training, etc.

Sayahna will shortly be conducting a webinar on the advantages and possibilities of its declared objectives which will include discussions on a wide array of subjects from linguistics, unicode, typesetting, typography and font development to open standards based publishing and the digital preservation of texts. We are in the process of identifying and inviting apt intellectuals and activists in concerned fields so as to ensure that the event is beneficial to all participating members. Since the group size in WhatsApp is restricted to 256 members, presently, there are seven groups for Sayahna in WhatsApp. Additionally, we also have presence in Facebook and Telegram. A schedule for the webinar is being charted based on the convenience of the members of our various groups. Until that is sorted, we hope you will bear with us.

### 3 Academic texts published by Sayahna

All the books that has been digitized by Sayahna is free for printing and distribution by any college cooperative society or department of Malayalam. The Malayalam department of Christ College, Irinjalakuda, Kerala had made use of this in the last academic year. For societies or departments coming forward with such a request, Sayahna will be more than happy to provide them with print ready PDFs. They will not be charged for this. However, the responsibility of printing and distributing the copies will solely be vested in them. The concerned department or society will have to take on the role of the publisher, and not Sayahna.

### 4 Digital preservation of texts

At the root of all the other reasons that led to the founding of Sayahna is one pivotal objective that can never be discounted. A rough estimate indicates that over seventy thousand books have been published in the Malayalam language till date. The actual figures could probably be even higher. However, the unfortunate fact is that none of these books are preserved in a format suited for longevity. Even among the technically educated folks, many still assume that saving a text in a word processor is enough and more to preserve the content across all time and spanning centuries. Such belief is but mere foolishness born out of ignorance. The word processor is an operating system dependent application. The way in which the data is encapsulated in the application varies based on the whims of the designer behind the app. This plan of encapsulation and data structure are never disclosed and therefore, with each new version of the application and changes in the operating system, the accessibility of the content by the user is much at risk. The only choice for the user to evade this risk would be to upgrade the application or operating system in keeping with the latest releases. This rarely comes without a price. And even then, there is no real guarantee that the content will remain accessible. And these are but a few of the issues that you may face in a short span of three or four years. So then, imagine how effective a tool this will be in preserving content for the future generations. In contrast, our ancient palm leaf manuscripts seem to have a longer life span!

It was to plug this huge lacuna in the field of digital preservation, that Sayahna was conceived. The preservation efforts started with the digitization of scientific and mathematical research journals so as to ensure their preservation across epochs by enabling their retrievable in a format independent of the technical advancements. Prior to Sayahna, efforts at preserving Malayalam texts were non-existent. Along with preservation, some of the founding goals of Sayahna in this area included, establishing a standard model for archiving, transforming contents into formats compatible with new age reading devices and discarding outworn ways of disseminating academic content by reframing them using superior technological advancements.

A lot of these goals are still underway; some yet to begin. Scarcity of volunteers and resource personnels is one reason behind this laggard pace. It is quite a tall task to carry out such missions without the support and cooperation of the academic community. Universities take on these tasks in most other countries. In the European Union, the technical leadership of such preservation efforts are carried out by the [Text Encoding Initiative](#), a non profit organisation centered around Oxford University. Will our universities ever rise to this task? Sayahna will find it immensely gratifying if its efforts in digital preservation will one day propel our universities in that direction!

### 5 Challenges in the study of language

The note posted by Silpa (a researcher in Malayalam, Central University, Kerala) in Sayahna Group 3 (started by Prof. Lizzy Mathew of Shri Shankaracharya Sanskrit University) conveys concisely, but forcefully, the situation, often faced, by students of Malayalam literature. Rather than discomfiture over the sad ways in which these students struggle to buy their books, the real issue highlighted is of the sad state that language study is currently in. How many students are denied access to the pleasures of reading, simply, because the books they seek are not available in the libraries and they have no other means to purchase them? Silpa says that to all these very relevant issues, digital books could become the panacea! Her words barely contain the glee at having discovered an immense treasure trove of digital literature through Sayahna. As a concluding remark, she voices her desire to see *the distance between such freely accessible quality content and the students, getting bridged forever*. This desire is no longer confined to Silpa alone. Sayahna has taken it upon itself to see this dream to fruition. It is now both our duty and responsibility!

Similar to our groups that were started in the past weeks for academicians, friends and expatriates, Sayahna is now planning to create a new collective for BA, MA students titled 'Sayahna BAMA'. The existing material archived by Sayahna will more or less suffice to meet the objectives of this new group. Since this content will also be released as phone PDFs, we are confident that it will make a dent in the academic lives of these students. Sayahna hopes that through such measures, the study of literature can be steered into a divine, new territory of unconstrained learning.

A few more things are to be added here.

Waiting for the contents in academic textbooks to be made available in the public domain is a futile exercise. Though the government and educational institutions have been preaching relentlessly of the advent of Open-NET classes, the fact remains that our textbooks are still confined to the outmoded ASCII format. Moreover, for the last five or so years, the SCERT and other University publications have been broadcasting their fear over the use of the Unicode. Even then, the PDFs being produced are quite bland and far inferior to the ones created by Sayahna. Lifeless, dead pages can only contribute to further alienation of students from the classrooms. Also, the possibility of releasing free children's books or references enabled with hyper texts has been ruled out unequivocally by our Education Minister in response to a query on the subject raised by Tyson (a member of Legislative Assembly of Kerala). The same response was later echoed by the 'IT@School' chief, Anwar Sadat.

Anyway, the good news is that Sayahna is now equipped with the technology to provide an alternative. Any free spirited, independent minded teacher, can now get their notes and materials, collected over the years, structured and presented in a superior quality format meeting international standards. In her post, Silpa had revelled at the possibilities that this unfolds. Apart from the option of having this content made available in phone compatible formats, the material can also be printed into copies that easily supercede the quality offered by most leading publishers in the country. Moreover, exceptional student contributions can also be identified and appended as required. With these measures, Sayahna is equipping the teachers and students to collaboratively ignite a quiet revolution against the non-availability of academic content in the digital format.

This will be an initiative quite similar to wikipedia—the only difference being that the output will be even more user friendly and versatile. Let us, finally, put an end to the poverty of words that our children are subjected to. For once, let us give them the chance to take pride in the fact that the technology advancements in their own language is no less superior to ones in the great languages of the world; English included. Gradually, may these collaborations grow and move on to other expansive, independent platforms like Telegram.

I dream of the day when the students of BA and MA will join 'Sayahna BAMA' with the same verve and hope with which they enroll for their academic courses. Such a time is nearer than we think. Free and openly standards of publishing faced by students like Silpa. Six years back, when CVR laid the foundation for Sayahna, this was the future he envisioned. I am now looking onto Prof. Mathew to spearhead this movement in the right direction. TV Sunitha (Malayalam University), Subaida (Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan College), Ushakumari, Sumi (Maharajah's), Sheeba (Univ. of Kerala), Myra Umaiban, Santhosh Sunil, Pavithran, Valsalan (all are faculty members of Malayalam departments in various institutions of higher learning in Kerala)—are all people whom we hope will take on the baton. The ripples set in motion by Sayahna are now beginning to reverberate like never before. Together, let us empower it to knock down, once and for all, the old and archaic shackles that have been crippling our education system!



## Epilog

- The content that Sayahna includes in these Phone PDFs are those that can be read in under thirty to forty minutes. Computers or Desktop applications are not necessary for reading them.
- The PDFs are made available in beautiful, rich formats and can be easily read from your smart phones. They are customized to adhere perfectly with the dimensions of your phone screen.
- Most smartphones these days are equipped with in-built readers for PDF content. However, the free Adobe Acrobat Reader application offers the best reading experience. We would recommend that you install Adobe readers in your phones and use them for reading our content.
- Anybody who is interested in open access publishing and want to submit their work to Sayahna may do so by mailing it to <info@sayahna.org>. The work could be anything from stories, memoirs, articles, interviews, movie reviews, poems, plays, sketches or paintings; the only stipulation being that they should be succinct enough to be read under thirty to sixty minutes.
- Sayahna welcomes all your thoughts on our efforts! You may either mail them to <info@sayahna.org> or post them under the Comments section in this web page. We eagerly await your feedbacks and hope to derive from them the necessary impetus to drive Sayahna to new heights.