



The world-renowned nose

Stunning news - a nose is the subject of heated debates and arguments among intellectuals! I record here the true history of that nose.

The story begins at the point where our hero entered the twenty-fourth year of his life.

I wonder whether there is anything special about that age. If you care to look into the annals of history, I am sure you will find something remarkable about the twenty-fourth year in the lives of all great men. It is needless, of course, to point this fact out to students of history.

Our hero was a poor illiterate cook, not particularly known for his intelligence. His kitchen was his world. He was not bothered by anything that happened outside it. And why should he be? His routine consisted of cooking, eating heartily, taking a good pinch of snuff, sleeping, waking up and busying himself with his cooking again.

Mookken did not even know the names of the days or the months. His mother would come to collect his wages when they were due. She would bring him his snuff. Thus, he lived happy and contented till the twenty-fourth year of his life.

And then - it happened!

Mookken's nose started growing all of a sudden - it extended past his mouth and down his chin in no time. Within a month, its tip was level with his navel. It was not something you could hide from people's gaze for long. But did it make Mookken uncomfortable in any way? Not

*translated by
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a bit. The nose still did what all noses usually do – breathe, take in snuff, distinguish one smell from another. It behaved like a perfectly normal nose.

Perhaps there was nothing unusual about it. The occurrence of such noses have been recorded in history. But do you think *this* was just another of those rare cases of nasal aberrations? No, it definitely was not. For, this nose got our poor hero dismissed from his job.

No union fought for his reinstatement. All political parties turned a blind eye to this act of gross injustice. No philanthropist cared to raise this issue. Where were our socially conscious intellectuals and philosophers when Mookken, a poor cook, was thrown out into the street? But then, he was a mere kitchen hand.

Mookken knew very well why he was being dismissed. The family that employed him had not had a moment's peace after his nose started growing. Large crowds gathered before the house to take a look at his nose. Photographers, reporters, TV crews ... it was a roaring sea of humanity that laid siege on the house. It was burgled several times and there was even an attempt to kidnap the attractive, teenaged daughter of the family.

As he languished in his humble hut, the poor retrenched cook was forced to concede that his nose had acquired everlasting fame. People continued to arrive from far and near to have a look at it. Amazed by the sight, some of them even ventured to touch it.

But nobody, not a soul, bothered to ask him why he looked so weak or whether he had had any lunch. There was not a paisa at home to buy even a pinch of snuff. Was he a starving animal on exhibition? At last, he called his mother and whispered to her, "Tell those horrid pests to leave me alone and shut the door on their faces." Mookken's mother tactfully persuaded the curious visitors to disperse and closed the front door.

This proved to be a turning point in Mookken's life. Fortune smiled

Mookken: A name not uncommon in Kerala, it means one who has an extraordinarily long or big nose.

on the old mother and her young illustrious son. Thousands of visitors, their curiosity not satisfied, offered to pay to take a look at Mookken's nose. After all, the mob is a stupid lot, isn't it?

A group of conscientious intellectuals did raise their voice against what they described as "an open swindle." But their protests fell on deaf ears. The government initiated no action against Mookken. Enraged at this criminal abdication of responsibility on the part of the government, the conscientious intellectuals joined hands with subversives and saboteurs of various shades.

Mookken's income increased. To cut a long story short, in six years' time, our poor illiterate cook became a well-known millionaire. He acted in three films. *The Human Submarine*, the technicolour extravaganza on his life attracted millions of viewers. Six renowned poets wrote encomiums on Mookken. Nine biographies were published, earning fame and money for Mookken's biographers. He kept open house at his mansion. Anybody could get a free meal for the asking. A pinch of snuff too!

Mookken had two secretaries. Both were charming and educated. Both loved Mookken ardently. It may be mentioned here that there are some women who can always be relied upon to fall in love with even highway robbers or homicidal maniacs. If you turn the pages of history, you will find that there has always been trouble when two women have loved the same man. This happened in Mookken's life too.

Like his beautiful secretaries, the general public too loved Mookken to distraction. If a universally acclaimed nose, long and beautiful, reaching down to the navel, is not a sign of greatness, then what is?

Mookken gave statements on all events of international importance. The reporters jotted his words down eagerly. "Talking to newsmen about the introduction of the new generation of jets capable of flying at speeds up to 10,000 miles per hour, Mr Mookken remarked that ..." or "After Dr Bundros Furasiburos announced his miraculous success

in bringing a dead patient back to life, Mr Mookken commented ...” When news came about the conquest of the highest peak in the world, people asked one another: Well, what does Mookken think about it? If he did not have anything to say about it ... tcha, the matter was of no consequence at all!

Soon Mookken’s views were solicited on a variety of subjects – the origin of the universe, interplanetary travel, photography, the painter’s art, techniques in fiction, the publishing industry, journalism, killing animals for sport, mesmerism, the existence of the soul and life after death ... There was nothing under the sun or beyond it that Mookken was not aware of.

At this juncture, a series of conspiracies were initiated and plots hatched to appropriate Mookken. If you have read enough of history, you will know there is nothing very original about appropriation. In fact, the history of human society is the history of appropriations. What do I mean by appropriation? Let me illustrate. You plant a few coconut saplings on a plot of uncultivated land. Fence it. Water the plants everyday. Years pass. The saplings grow into tall handsome trees, heavy with bunches of large coconuts. Anybody who sees the grove is tempted and tries to grab it by hook or by crook. This is appropriation.

The first attempt was made by the government. It was indeed a clever ploy! The government conferred on Mookken the title of “Chief of the Long-nosed Worthies” and awarded him a gold medal. The medal was given away by the President at a special ceremony. Instead of shaking Mookken’s hand, the President shook his long nose. The newsreels of the function were shown on television and in cinema halls across the length and breadth of the country.

It was the turn of the political parties next. Comrade Mookken should lead the historical struggle of the people! “Comrade” Mookken?

Poor Mookken! He was unwittingly dragged into politics. But which party should he join? There were many. The prime objective of all of them was to bring about a people’s revolution. But Mookken could

not possibly give his allegiance to all the people's revolutionary parties at the same time.

Mookken said to himself, "Why should I join any party? Oh, I can't be bothered with all this!"

One of his secretaries seized the opportunity. "Comrade Mookken, you must join my party if you really love me."

Mookken said nothing.

"Should I join any of these parties?" he asked the other damsel.

She immediately understood what was going on in his mind. "Oh, why should you?" she said with a shrug of her shoulders.

But the workers of one revolutionary party were convinced that Mookken was their man. "Comrade Mookken zindabad! People's Revolutionary Party zindabad!" the slogans resounded.

The other people's revolutionary parties were not pleased with this development. They forced one of his secretaries to give a damaging statement to the press.

I regret the fact that Mookken, the worst bourgeois reactionary of our times, made me a party to the appalling fraud he devised. I apologize to the people. Let me reveal, though belatedly, the truth about Mookken's nose. It is only a piece of rubber!

All the newspapers in the world splashed the news on their front pages: Long-nosed miracle exposed! A clever conman! A political opportunist preying on the gullible public! The connivance of the powers that be - natural nose, what nonsense!

It was only logical that the news should send shock waves through the centres of power. The President was bombarded with telegrams, phone calls and letters. "Death to the Chief of the Rubber-nosed Worthies! Down with Mookken's reactionary clique! Inquilab zindabad!" shouted the workers of the People's Revolutionary Party (Anti-Mookken).

But the People's Revolutionary Party (Pro-Mookken) soon joined the fray. The result was a press statement by Mookken's other secretary!

Comrades and friends! My colleague has distinguished herself with convincing but totally fabricated lies. Her statement is merely a piece of malicious propaganda. She is taking revenge on Mookken for having spurned her advances. As everybody knows, she only wanted Comrade Mookken's money and the mileage she got from being his secretary. Besides, her brother is a member of that party of shameless opportunists who *call* themselves People's Revolutionary Party. I use this opportunity to expose them for the scoundrels and bloodsuckers they are. As the trusted and loyal secretary of Comrade Mookken, I know his nose is natural - and as true as my heart. I salute the people who have rallied behind the leadership of Comrade Mookken in this hour of crisis. Comrade Mookken zindabad! People's Revolutionary Party zindabad! Inquilab zindabad!

What were the people to make of all this? There was utter confusion everywhere. The People's Revolutionary Party (Anti-Mookken) hurled a volley of accusations against the government. "It is obvious to all, except the most gullible, why Mookken was made the Chief of the Long-nosed Worthies and awarded a gold medal studded with diamonds. The President and the Prime Minister are directly involved in this gross deception of the people. No doubt, it is part of a wider conspiracy. The President has to go - and the Prime Minister too. The best thing under the circumstances is for the whole cabinet to resign. The rubber-nosed swindler must be brought to book at the earliest."

The President was provoked. So was the Prime Minister. Tanks rolled towards Mookken's mansion. He was arrested.

There was no news of Mookken for several days after that. People forgot Mookken and his nose. Everything was calm and peaceful.

And then the President dropped a bombshell! When Mookken had almost faded from everybody's memory, there was this communique from the President's office.

There will be a public trial on the ninth day of March of Mr Mookken, Chief of the Long-nosed Worthies, who is now under detention facing charges of fabricating a rubber nose of extraordinary dimensions and extorting money from the people by exhibiting it as a natural nose. Medical experts from forty-eight countries will examine this nose in order to determine whether it is natural or artificial. Reporters representing all the major dailies of the world and radio and TV crews will be present on the occasion. People are requested to remain calm.

But the people were an asinine lot. They did not remain calm. They flocked to the capital, raided restaurants, ransacked newspaper offices, burnt down movie theatres, looted liquor shops and destroyed police stations and government installations. There were several communal clashes. Hundreds of men and women became martyrs in the cause of Mookken's nose.

March 9: Millions of people congregated on the lawns and roads near the Presidential Palace. When the clock struck eleven, the loudspeakers positioned around the palace boomed, "People are requested to maintain self-restraint."

The medical experts surrounded the Chief of the Long-nosed Worthies in the presence of the President and the Prime Minister. The multitude, which had gathered outside, waited with bated breath.

One of the medical experts blocked Mookken's nose. Mookken opened his mouth. Another expert pricked the tip of Mookken's long nose with a pin. And ... wonder of wonders! A drop of blood appeared on the tip of the celebrated controversial nose.

"The nose is flesh and blood. It is natural." The verdict of the medical experts was unanimous.

Mookken's trusted and loyal secretary, who had stood by him through thick and thin, kissed him passionately on the tip of his long venerable nose.

“Comrade Mookken zindabad! People’s Revolutionary Party zindabad! Hands off Comrade Mookken’s respected nose!” The slogans shook the walls of the Presidential Palace.

When the slogans died down, the President came up with another of his shrewd manoeuvres. It was announced over the loudspeakers that Mr Mookken would soon be honoured with a Mookkashri and nominated to the Parliament.

Mookkashri Mookken, MP!

A prestigious university honoured Mookken with an MLitt, while another went a step further and conferred a DLitt on him.

Mookkashri Mookken, Master of Literature!

Mookkashri Mookken, Doctor of Literature!

But the People’s Revolutionary Party (Anti-Mookken) formed a united front to fight the government. Undeterred by the verdict of the medical experts, they cried,

Down with the President!

Down with the Prime Minister!

Death to Mookken and his rubber nose!

Death to the abettors of this colossal fraud on the people!

As they say, the course of people’s revolution never did run smooth! And the conscientious intellectuals? What were they to make of all the din and confusion? Oh, the poor intellectuals!

This story was first published as “Viswavikhyatamaya Mookku” in the anthology of the same name (1954).