Culture
Voices of Sisters
Arts and Media



Siju David and friends were the subject of the movie "Manjummel Boys." (Courtesy of Siju David)



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The season of Lent for every Christian is a time of prayer and penance. So it was not surprising to me that some of my community members raised their eyebrows when I

suggested that we watch a movie running in the nearby theater. I had already briefed them on the story. I was even willing to let go of my desire to watch it, to help all others to go. However, only three out of the 10 dared to go for the movie with me in the season of Lent! In fact, I knew it was going to be a resurrection story for me.

I watch only selected movies, that too when I am sure that it is really good. And nuns watching movies in theaters is rare in India.

It was an accident that I came across the movie trailer of "Manjummel Boys," which collected more than 200 crores (US$25 million) since its release in February. Somehow, I was hooked on it. During my spare time, I collected information about the film, like the content, actors and place of shooting.

The film, based on the true story of 11 friends from a village in Manjummel in Kerala, in South India on a trip to Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu, prompted me to search for the original characters.

In fact, I spoke to them.

The eagerness was thus built up to watch the movie, and I searched for the theaters where the film was currently running in Goa. To my surprise, I found it running in a nearby theater. The movie released on Feb. 24 in Kerala had already made a mark in South India, the United States and the Gulf countries. There were people who had watched it even seven times.

"How can I miss this chance?" I said to myself. And to our luck it was the last show in this theater.

When we came out of the movie, one sister confided, "Oh, I feel a kind of relief. Something has gone out of me. I feel so light." I listened to her as I wiped my tears rolling down my cheeks.

She agreed: It was also relaxing and inspiring.

For another, it was like Jesus himself saving a lost sheep leaving all the other 99 (Matthew 18:13).

The film "Manjummel Boys" touched me too deeply.

I came out of the theater wiping my tears. The film director had certainly achieved his aim to drive home the value of sacred and genuine friendship.

Something had really happened within me. It was as if I had come out of a retreat. I have gone through retreats annually and I had done a wonderful one in February 2024. Yet nothing had captured my heart as the spirit of this film.

As the days passed, I would with amazement watch the changes within me. There was this attitude of "letting go," allowing space and opportunity for another wherever there was a choice and I felt immensely happy. To reach out to another, leaving aside my needs, I also realized that I was less anxious about forthcoming events and could trust everything in the hands of God, believing all will be well. And it was. Yes, I had indeed encountered the Lord in the theater.

I paused for reflection. The film continued to probe me.

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"Teach us, Lord, to offer ourselves this morning for our fellow beings, and strengthen us to do your will throughout the day." As I prayed this during the morning prayer with my community, once again my mind returned to the film.

I wondered if Siju David, the protagonist in the team, and his friends had prayed this before they left for their unforgettable trip to Kodaikanal.

He had certainly ingrained the words of Jesus in his life. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

These words of Jesus have been an inspiration for many throughout the centuries to venture into saving a fellow being. History tells us many examples of this. Maximilian Kolbe gave up his life for a fellow prisoner. Teresa of Kolkata left her once beloved congregation to follow her new vocation to serve the poor. In each instance, they gave up their life.

Let us have a glimpse into the story of the film.

Siju and friends were walking relaxed in the hills of Kodaikanal where the Guna cave was situated, crossing over the little pits and holes, when suddenly they noticed one of them, Subhash Chandran, disappear from their sight into a ditch. They hoped he

would come out of it quickly. There was no sign of him even after a few minutes of waiting. He did not respond to their calls either. Anxiety welled up on their faces.

They were alerted to a hidden danger. From local people, they realized the gravity of the danger. "About 13 people have fallen into it. And none of them could be saved," the locals told them.

The 10 friends began to think of the means of saving him. Three of them went to the police while others stood around the cave calling out to him until he responded.



Siju David, left, and Subhash Chandran (Courtesy of Siju David)

And they took a decision when all others discouraged them from venturing out to rescue him: "We will go home only with him."

Their decisive reply reminds us, especially during this season of Lent, of the words of Jesus, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

When the police and fire force failed to help save their friend, Siju David volunteered to go down the deadly cave of 300 feet not knowing whether he would find Subhash Chandran. The fire force helped him with rope and necessary kits to aid his highly risky rescue operation.

After three hours of waiting, David came up out of the cave with Subhash Chandran.

I realized how true God's promises are: For he commands his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways, on their hands they will bear you up so that you will not dash your foot against a stone (Psalm 91:11-12).

With bated breath, I watched the scenes of the rescue operations and the rescue. These men were of strong spiritual bonding beyond friendship, growing up in the countryside, sharing the life of fun and frolic. The message "Love one another" was ingrained in their being.

Now, as Siju David and friends are in the limelight of the media receiving accolades, the Psalmist's words come alive once again: Those who love me, I will deliver, I will protect those who know my name. I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them (Psalm 91:4).

Certainly, "Manjummel Boys" is the love of Christ translated into life. It is indeed, a story of resurrection.