Who is UK academician Filippo Osella and why has he moved Delhi High Court?

In March, renowned anthropologist and social scientist Filippo Osella was deported from Thiruvananthapuram airport. Till date, he has not been informed why he was denied entry, despite having worked here for more than 30 years

An anthropologist and academician from the United Kingdom on Monday approached the Delhi High Court against denial of entry into India and his deportation upon arrival at Thiruvananthapuram airport earlier this year. The High court sought a stand of the central government on the plea of Filippo Osella, a professor of Anthropology and South Asian studies at the University of Sussex in the UK. **Who is Filippo Osella?** Osella, who has been involved in research on fishing communities in Kerala, has been visiting India on work for more than 30 years. A fluent speaker of Malayalam, Osello is one of the world's most eminent researchers on the society, economy, and religion of Kerala. According to *The Indian Express*, Osella's research has focussed, among other areas, on Hindu backward communities, Sabarimala, modernity, social trends, migration, and fashion in Kerala's Muslim community, and Muslim charity organisations in Sri Lanka and Kerala. His defining work, 'Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict', co-authored with Caroline Osella, is study of the Ezhavas, a formerly untouchable Hindu community that has gained economic, symbolic, and cultural capital by negotiating their social exclusions. He has done extensive work on religion, gender and trade, centred around the lives of people of Kerala. Some of Osella's works include books 'Men and Masculinities in South India' (2006), 'Migration, Modernity and Social Transformation in South Asia' (ed., 2003), 'Islamic Reform in South Asia' (2011), and 'Religion and the Morality of the Market'

(ed., 2017). Osella's 2012 article 'Malabar Secrets: South Indian Muslim Men's (Homo)sociality Across the Indian Ocean' discussed homosexuality among the mainly Muslim men of Malabar through the characters of Usman and Zakeer, *The Indian Express* reported. The article 'Muslim Style in South India' (2007), while discussing the shifts in Muslim women's dressing, pointed out that "the dress code for all communities and both sexes have been continually reworked since the 19th century". *What happened to Filippo Osella on 23 March?* Prof Osella had landed in Kerala on 23 March to mainly attend a two-day meeting on the seafaring communities of the state. The BBC reported that he and local meteorological scientists had been developing early warning weather forecasts to secure the lives of millions of fishermen. However, he was in for a rude shock this time as minutes after landing the 65-year-old was whisked away to immigration. Osella claimed that officials took his photograph and fingerprints and told him that he would be deported back to the UK immediately. Within half an hour he was on a plane to Dubai. He spent the next 36 hours in different airports and planes before reaching London. When he switched on his phone, he found that news of his expulsion had gone viral in India and some 400 emails and messages of support had poured in, the *BBC* said. In his plea, Osella said that till date, the reasons behind his "forceful" deportation from Thiruvananthapuram airport and denial of entry on 23 March in spite of a valid visa are "unknown" and his representations to the authorities remain unanswered. The social scientist said that the conduct of the authorities was "unfair, unjust and arbitrary" as well as ultra vires the Constitution of India, international law, and fundamental human rights and dignity. "Shockingly, when the petitioner landed in Thiruvananthapuram at 3.05 AM after a journey of about twenty hours with a layover in Dubai, he was denied entry and was forcibly deported. Reasons were disturbingly absent in this high-handed and arbitrary conduct of the Immigration authorities at Thiruvananthapuram airport. By 4:30 AM, the Professor was literally marched back and bundled into the same aircraft, in which he had arrived and was unjustly deported - much like a hardened criminal," the petition said. "The Petitioner's request for his blood pressure medications from his

luggage was also not allowed creating extreme anxiety, hypertension, and panic," added the plea which also informed that the incident invited "a huge backlash in the national and international press as well as in the wide cross-section of the academic community". The plea submitted that the petitioner had valid multiple entries twelve months research visa for India and has an unblemished travel record and none of the legally valid reasons for deportation applied to him. "Petitioner strongly believes in academic integrity and transparency, as so every time the Petitioner applied for a research visa to India, he declared his visits to Pakistan or elsewhere in South Asia. It must be noted that despite the fact that the Petitioner has visited multiple South Asian countries including Pakistan, he has always been granted appropriate visas for India," the plea said.