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## **Teresian Journal of English Studies**

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It is dedicated to all the former teachers of the Department who cherished the desire to see the Department grow and reach excellence in various fields, and who still encourage us with their valuable support.

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# **Under the Oppressive Gaze of the Dictator: Herta Müller's *The Land of Green Plums* as a Subversive Re-presentation of Ceau'escu's Romania**

Ramesh K. G.

Nicolae Ceau'escu was the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party from 1965 to 1989 and he was also the head of the state from 1967 to 1989. His regime was an oppressive one. When he was in power, people and the media had minimum freedom of expression and no manifestation of dissidence was left unpunished. The whole state was under the constant surveillance of his brutal secret police force—the Securitate—and their undercover agents. Many of the novels of Romanian-born German writer Herta Müller are set in the oppressive regime of Nicolae Ceau'escu and her dissident novels are alternative histories of Romania—histories written not from the centre but from the periphery as Müller often adopts the perspective of the German minority in Romania. Müller has suffered severely under the abusive power of the Securitate and therefore her novels can be aptly termed “autofiction” as she herself calls them. Herta Müller's most popular novel *The Land of Green Plums* is set against the backdrop of the suffocating regime and it vividly portrays the impact of the all-pervading oppressive power on human beings. In the novel, overwhelming fear is the blatant emotion of the citizens of the totalitarian regime and the members of the Securitate are always vigilant to add to the fear by subjecting rebels to frequent interrogations and intimidations. The study is an attempt to analyse Herta Müller's subversive re-presentation of Ceau'escu's Romania in *The Land of Green Plums*.

*The Land of Green Plums* is set in Romania in the 1980s and it recounts the trauma of living in an oppressive totalitarian regime. In the 1970s and 1980s Ceau'escu intensified and ramified his power to strengthen the disciplinary mechanism of the state. To keep his control over the state and the people intact, he empowered his secret police

force—the Securitate. In his text *Romania: An Illustrated History*, Nicolae Klepper says:

The Securitate was again empowered to clamp down on perceived dissidents, and from early 1970s onward, it expanded into one of the world's most dreaded state police forces. By 1989 it employed an estimated 2,400 officers, and its agents and informers were to be found everywhere. Any information could be used at any time to have someone dismissed, blackmailed evicted from his home, or barred from higher education. (229)

As mentioned earlier, Herta Müller herself was a victim of the abusive and intrusive power of the Securitate and *The Land of Green Plums* reflects her bitter personal experiences. Common people of Romania were under the constant surveillance of the ever watchful Securitate. No one was reliable in the country because any one could be a secret agent/informer of the Securitate. As the title of the novel suggests, the brutal police force of the dictator never allowed the green plums of his land to be ripened. They were plum suckers, green plum suckers.

The unnamed female narrator of the novel belongs to the German ethnic minority in Romania and she begins the novel with the words of her close friend Edgar: “When we don’t speak, said Edgar, we become unbearable, and when we do, we make fools of ourselves” (1). Silent suffering is unbearable to the terrified and unsatisfied subjects of the tyrant and it is psychologically damaging too. But dissent will be followed by terrible consequences. In order to convey the depth of the trauma suffered by the citizens of the land of green plums, the narrator again depends on the words of Edgar: “. . . even we considered ourselves a mistake. Because in this country, we had to walk, eat, sleep, and love in fear . . .” (2). They are forced to live in fear because they live under “a master mistake” (2).

The narration of the novel is non-linear and it follows the stream of conscious of the narrator. In the initial pages of the novel, the narrator speaks in detail about the plight of her friend Lola. Lola was one of the roommates of the narrator. There were six girls in a little

cube of a room. Lola was from the south of the country, from a poor province. The narrator says: “There was poverty in every province in the country, and in every face” (2). However, Lola was from a draught affected province and therefore it was poorer than the rest of the provinces in the country. She bore the marks of poverty on her face. Her cheek bones, mouth and eyes vivaciously conveyed the poverty of her province. She came to the city to study Russian and to become someone in the city. She was the poorest among the six girls in the room. At night she used to walk to the tram to lure one of the detergent factory/slaughterhouse workers to the Scruffy Park. In the park she made love with men to receive tongues or kidneys of animals as reward. Later she got involved with a political party and frequently attended party meetings. One day her gym teacher called Lola into the gym and he locked the door from inside. They made love and after lovemaking, Lola followed him to his home because she saw a better future in him. Nevertheless, it was unacceptable for him. He reported it to her department head and later Lola was found hanging by narrator’s belt inside the closet.

Two days after Lola’s death, she was expelled from the party and exmatriculated from the university. There was a meeting to expel Lola from the party and the university. In the meeting, speakers concentrated on projecting the image of the Lola as a deceiver. The gym instructor was the first to vote against Lola. The participants of the meeting were too afraid to challenge the opinions of the speakers. Therefore, everybody applauded. The narrator says:

. . . Everyone felt like crying, but couldn’t, so they applauded too long instead. No one dared to be the first to stop. Everybody looked at each other’s hands while they were clapping. A few people stopped for a moment, then were so frightened they started clapping all over again. By that time most of the people wanted to stop, you could hear the clapping in the room lose its rhythm, but because those few had started again, everyone else had to keep going. (25)

From the narrator’s words, it is obvious that fear ruled their lives. After the so-called “suicide” of Lola, there were frequent official searches

in the cube room. Before her death, Lola concealed her notebook/diary in the suitcase of the narrator. After a few days, the book had disappeared from the suitcase.

In the novel, the peasants of the country are dissatisfied. After work, they spend time in the bodega and drink. However, no drink is powerful enough to drive away their fear. They are always conscious not to utter anything political because they know that they are under surveillance. The waiters of the bodega report everything to the officials. The narrator says: "Even when the tongue can only babble, the habit of fear does not desert the voice" (31).

Edgar, Kurt and Georg are three major characters in the novel. They are young students and they belong to the German ethnic minority in Romania. From the perspective of the state, they are dissidents because they have some "transgressive" books that convey some revolutionary thoughts. They keep their books in a summerhouse in an overgrown garden. They think that the summerhouse is safe because it belongs to a man who attracts no suspicion. The narrator says: "The books in the summerhouse came from far away, but they know about every province in the faces of this city, every tin sheep, every wooden melon. Every bout of drunkenness, every laugh in the bodega" (36). The books in the summerhouse are written in German and they are smuggled into the country. The young students think that the books come from the land of thinkers. Edgar, Kurt and Georg are looking for one of the roommates of Lola because they are suspicious of Lola's death. They don't feel that her death is a suicide. One day they approach the narrator and become friends with her. They tell her about the books in the summerhouse and she becomes a visitor there. She takes books from the summerhouse and reads them sitting in the graveyard bench. She becomes an accomplice in their "crime".

The suffocating ambience of the regime, frequent official searches, constant surveillance, interrogations and invasions into the privacy turn many people frustrated. Some of them become insane. The narrator thinks that they have exchanged fear for insanity. In the novel, Herta Müller portrays many of them. For example, the narrator speaks about one demented person:

The philosopher's beat was around the station. He mistook telephone poles and tree trunks for people. He talked to wood and iron about Kant and the universe of the ravenous sheep. In the bodegas he went from table to table, draining the dregs from the glasses and wiping them dry with his long white beard. (40)

There are guards everywhere in the country. Young men stand guard at the entrances of big buildings, on squares, in the scruffy park, in front of the dormitories, outside the station, in bodegas, at tramstops and outside shops. People live under their oppressive gaze. When a young woman passes by them, they stare at her legs. The narrator says: "The decision to grab her or let her go was made at the last minute. They wanted to make it obvious that legs like that don't need a reason—just a whim" (52). Of course, women are not safe in the dictator's land. The dictator is concerned only about maintaining his control over the state and the people. He is indifferent to the sufferings of his people. Herta Müller highlights one of the habits of the guards. The guards fill their pockets with unripe green plums and eat it while guarding. The portrayal of this habit in the novel is highly metaphorical. It implicitly conveys the plight of the citizens of the totalitarian state. Under the abusive power of the dictator, no citizen gets an opportunity to ripen his/her individuality and identity. In the novel, Georg quite aptly says: "No cities can grow in a dictatorship, because everything stays small when it's being watched" (44).

Everyone in the country, other than the dictator and his guards, wants to flee from there. Living with the constant fear of persecution is intolerable. The narrator says: "Everyone lived by thinking about flight. They thought of swimming across the Danube until the water becomes another country. Of running after the corn until the soil becomes another country" (47). Whenever the dictator is on foreign trips, many of his people attempt to escape from the country. However, each attempt to evade the dictatorship is a dangerous act, a bid for death because the dictator's guards and dogs often hunted the evaders until their death.

Edgar, Georg and Kurt live in the same dormitory, but in different rooms on different floors. There are five boys in each little room. The

state somehow recognizes that the three friends of the narrator are transgressing the norms of the state. The members of the secret police force search their rooms and threaten other boys in the rooms. The frightened fellows of Edgar, Kurt and Georg behave rude to them and demand them to either follow the norms or leave their rooms. Later, some officials search their homes and their family members plead with them to succumb to the dictator's overwhelming power. Friendship is highly discouraged in the land of the green plums because unity and solidarity can threaten the absolute power of the ruler. Therefore, the narrator's friendship with Edgar, Kurt and Georg evokes suspicion. Officials search her room and home. The cubes and homes of the three boys are searched three more times. The narrator and her friends meet every day to survive their extreme fear. Captain Pjele, an arrogant and indifferent official interrogates them. They often recite a poem from one of the smuggled books. Captain Pjele thinks that the poem is an indirect incitement to flee the country. After completing their course, they get jobs at different places, but secret agents follow them everywhere. Captain Pjele interrogates them again and again because he likes to see them afraid. During one of the interrogations, Captain Pjele indirectly calls the narrator a whore as she has three male friends. He asks: "What does a woman do with three men?" (97). She feels an intense urge to commit suicide. She says: "One of the books in the summerhouse was called *On Suicide*. It stated that only one way of dying can fit into a given head. But I was caught into a cold circle between the window and the river. Death was whistling for me from afar, I need to sprint to get him" (102). During another interrogation, Captain Pjele forces her to take off all her clothes. She stands nude before him and he enjoys immense pleasure by humiliating her.

Later, without giving proper explanation, the authorities dismiss the narrator and two of her friends—Edgar and Georg—from their posts. Interrogations, threats and intimidations relentlessly continue. They suffer intense existential angst. In order to endure, the narrator decides to give private German classes for the children of a family. Captain Pjele intervenes and she loses that job. Surviving in the land of the dictator becomes impossible. The narrator says: "When we lost our jobs Edgar had said: Now we've reached the end of the line. Georg

shook his head: No, this is only the second-to-last stop, the last one is out of the country. Edgar and Kurt nodded” (185). They feel an intense desire to emigrate from the country. Georg is the first to be possessed by this obsession. He fills in applications and applies for the passport. But the officials re-directs him to Captain Pjele and Georg loses his hope. Finally, somehow he crosses the border without necessary documents and reaches Germany. But after six weeks, he is found dead on a pavement in Frankfurt. The narrator says: “Early in the morning, six weeks after emigrating, Georg lay on the pavement in Frankfurt outside the transit hostel. Six floors up was an open window” (224).

Newspapers of Romania reject the narrator’s request to publish Georg’s obituary. Georg’s death leaves his friends dejected. The narrator spends several nights without sleeping. Finally, the narrator and Edgar decide to leave the country and emigrate to Germany. Kurt says that he will emigrate later. However, even after leaving the country, the narrator receives death threats from Captain Pjele by mail or by long-distance telephone. He even sends narrator’s friend Tereza to Germany to spy on the narrator. Tereza’s deception really hurts the narrator and helplessly she forces Tereza to leave Germany. To their dismay, the narrator and Edgar receive telegrams that convey sad news. Kurt has also committed suicide. He has hanged himself with a rope. Brigid Haines says: “Though the narrator and her friend Edgar succeed in reaching the West, they look back with no sense of closure, intactness, safety, or relief. Overwhelmed with survivor guilt, they remain traumatized, isolated in their grief, unable to rest or to thrive” (91).

In his text *Citizenship and Identity in the Age of Surveillance*, Pramod K. Nayar says:

What if our lives are being played out under somebody’s watchful gaze? What if the theological fetish of many cultures, that an omniscient eye of the Supreme Being watches our every move to reward or punish us, is merely a version of the observational mechanism of laboratories? In such idioms of the visual, we can discern a continuing obsession of the human race—watching. Or, more troublingly, surveillance. (2)

Herta Müller's *The Land of Green Plums* is a postmodern alternative history written from the perspective of the marginalized German minority in Romania and it documents how common people have suffered under the watchful eyes and disciplinary mechanism of the dictator, Nicolae Ceau'escu. The dictator enjoyed absolute power and subjected all aspects of human life to the surveillance mechanism of the state. The citizens of the state lived under the oppressive gaze of his security force—the Securitate. During his reign, many of the provinces in the country were suffering from abject poverty; human rights were neither given, nor respected; women were violated inside and outside their homes; many people were frustrated and some even insane. In her novel, *The Land of Green Plums*, Herta Müller frankly portrays many of the brutalities of Nicolae Ceau'escu's totalitarian regime.

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# **Coerced into Silence: Subaltern Voice and Agency in Anosh Irani's *Dahanu Road***

Ramachandran K.

The concept of the subaltern has triggered a wide range of literature in the current scenario of research in disciplines such as historiography, sociology, psychology and literary criticism. The Subaltern Studies Collective launched in the 1980s by a group of Indian historiographers problematized the subaltern subject and its representation in the Indian historiography. The representation of marginality and subalternity in literature has gained new dimensions with themes such as, deprivation, displacement, oppression, dispossession, gender discrimination, getting a wider canvas in the literary circle.

The term 'subaltern' was originally used to denote a low ranking officer in the army, before the Italian Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci used it in the non-military sense in his famous *Prison Notebooks* to refer to the proletariat whose voice could not be heard being effectively written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative. In the post-colonial setting, the term is applied to a person or a group, inferior in rank and station in terms of class, gender, race, and culture. The subaltern classes suffer under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. It was the oppression and discrimination faced by the peasants and workers under the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini that made Gramsci reflect upon the subaltern subject.

Gramsci's explanation of the notion of the subaltern had tremendous impact on the Indian historiography when a group of Indian historiographers and literary theorists, such as Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak introduced elaborate strategies to read Indian and South Asian histories and analysed the contribution of the peasant groups in India's freedom struggle. The 'subaltern' is a definite entity for Ranajit Guha and is

demographically different from the 'elite'. The members of the SSC posited that India's national history was the product of colonial elitism as well as nationalist-bourgeois elitism which were created by the British colonialism in different historical periods. Guha held that such an elitist historiography would fail to represent contributions of the common people and this failure, in his view, is a matter of serious concern in the historiography of colonial India. The study of the subaltern subject took a different turn with the publication of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" a path breaking essay by the post-colonial feminist critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak lays stress on the gendered subaltern-the women who are doubly oppressed. "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (Spivak, 287). Her statement "subaltern cannot speak" has given rise to confusions and misinterpretations as it is often taken out of context to mean that Spivak denies voice to the subaltern.

The aim of this paper is to study how the subaltern subject is represented by a writer from the dominant class in a historiographic fictional discourse and how such a discourse fails to give agency to the oppressed class. It also attempts to problematize the silencing of the subaltern subjects by the dominant ideologies of colonialism and patriarchy. Anosh Irani is a Canada-based Indian novelist and a member of the Indian ethnic minority group known as Iranis, who like Parsis, are Zoroastrians. In his third novel *Dahanu Road* (2010), he interweaves the history of his own land and people with the setting and characters in the novel. Dahanu is a coastal town where Anosh spent much of his childhood and it is located 110 kilometres from Mumbai, where he was born. He seems to have read extensively about his land and religion, Zoroastrianism, and illuminated the facts with his own childhood memories before writing this intensely personal novel.

The novel blends personal family memories with historical truths by relating the saga of a family of Zoroastrians who, fleeing from Iran to escape the persecution of the Arab invaders, settled comfortably as landlords in India. A tale of four generations of cultural battles and unintended consequences, the novel begins in 1920 and covers eighty

years of the history of the Irani-Warli conflict (Warlis are an indigenous tribe inhabiting the mountainous and coastal regions of Maharashtra-Gujarat border). Vamog and his motherless 10 year old son Shapur are forced to leave Yazd in Iran, the land of their birth and they seek asylum in India in the aftermath of the Arab invasion of Iran. They fear forcible conversion to Islam, for their faith in Ahura Mazda was unshakable and Zoroastrianism for them was life breath. The father and son undertake a hard trek over land to Bombay, but the journey ends with the father's death and the boy's future in the hands of another displaced countryman.

The theme of dispossession runs through subaltern discourses in general and tribal narratives in particular. History has ample instances of the tribal population being driven out of their land and made to work for the usurpers for near to nothing. The mainstream narratives, before the 1980s, either fully sidestepped or limited such aggressions to passing remarks in an attempt to cover up the inhumanity meted out to the aborigines of the land. Anosh's novel lays bare the deprivation and brutality the tribal people had to face even after surrendering their land and freedom to their 'colonizers'. The dominant Irani clan, once persecuted in the land of their birth, takes the same whip of oppression to subjugate the Warlis forcing them to live a wretched and ignominious life.

Shapur Irani, who fled Iran along with his father to escape religious persecution, establishes himself as a chickoo farm owner, like the other Irani Seths in Dahanu. He is in his 90s now and lives a life of solitude in his bungalow with tales of Irani brutality buried in his mind. His own act of dispossessing a Warli of his land seems to hang heavy on his mind, but the manner in which he disposes the body of his Warli servant, Ganpat, clearly exemplifies his upper class mindset. When his grandson Zairos brings Shapur the news of Ganpat's suicide, he dismisses the idea of informing the police and asks Zairos to make arrangements for the disposal of the body. Ganpat worked in Shapur's chickoo farm and was the son of Vithal whose land Shapur had taken as Vithal failed to pay Shapur the money for liquor. To his conscience-stricken grandson, Shapur says, "Goodness will not take you far, my

son. Only courage will....If this land belonged to Vithal, then how can it ever be mine? It is always somebody else's land. We were chased out of Iran. That was our land. What about that?"(79).

The novel gives glimpses of the unspeakable cruelty and oppression the Warlis are subjected to by the Irani and Muslim landlords. While trying to chronicle the sociological and cultural history of the Iranis in India, the novelist also juxtaposes the luxurious and carefree life of the Irani masters with the unimaginable hardships and exploitation the Warlis encounter in their day to day existence. They were treated as mere instruments to work the farms and were assigned a place much inferior to their masters. If ever they show signs of rebellion, violence is unleashed on them. However, any attempt of subjugating a community through brute force is to meet with resistance, though that does not last long enough to liberate the oppressed. The novelist recounts the War of the Warlis and how they tried to retaliate when they could no longer endure the beatings. They attacked an Irani landowner being inspired by the Lady of the Red Flag. "For the first time, the Warlis were united. They had a voice, they were being educated, and they were being reminded, that they were humans, not animals. They were being taught self-respect"(83). The War brought only loss of Warli lives and greater distress to them. Even Shapur, who takes a sympathetic stand towards the Warlis, is unable to save them from the unscrupulous landlords who unleash torture on them. The journalists and the police connive with the perpetrators and rewrite the plot in their favour. The Warlis go on a strike refusing to gather chickoo, the fruit of their bondage. They are forced to give in, left without their leader (as the Lady of the Red Flag is murdered in cold blood) and under pressure from hunger.

The Iranis, as Zoroastrians, are guided by the teachings of their prophet, Ahura Mazda-*Manashni*, *Gavashni*, *Kunashni* (Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds), yet in exploiting or torturing their victims, they pay no respect to the prophet. Shapur Irani and Zairos Irani ostensibly take to sympathize with the Warli men and women, but fail to liberate or abate the affliction of the oppressed tribe. They have, albeit without malice, added their share of distress to the hopeless life

of the original owners of the soil. In his determination to regain what he and his father had to leave behind in Iran, Shapur went to the extent of entrapping the poor Vithal in liquor debts and took his land. Zairos, on his part, is moved by the ill-fated experience of the Warlis, but is unable to help them out of the ditch. He feels sorry for Kusum, the daughter of Ganpat and who is tangled in a hopeless marriage with the drunkard Laxman. His sympathy for Kusum develops into a love relationship and leads to her pregnancy, the inability for which she gets beaten up by her husband Laxman. Zairos even arranges Chambal, a former dacoit, to beat Laxman into agreeing to leave Kusum forever. Zairos delivers Kusum from Laxman and takes her to his home, where, to his dismay, he finds her being treated as a maid. He is unable to declare to his parents that he wants to marry Kusum, nor is he ready to accept responsibility when Kusum reveals that she is pregnant. He cuts a sorry figure and falls from the pedestal, when he tells her, "I'm not ready to be a father. It could be Laxman's. When was the time you last had sex with him?"(253). Zairos suddenly becomes aware of the fact that he belongs to the class of landowners and does not want to be a champion to a tribal woman.

While delineating the plight of the subaltern Warli tribe in general, the novel also sheds ample light on the miserable condition of the doubly-marginalized subaltern tribal women. The words of Rami, Kusum's aunt, underlines this, "'Seth, you will never know what it's like. First, I am a woman. That is one leg cut off. Then I am a tribal. Now both legs gone.'"(234). The limited scope of this paper does not warrant a detailed critique of the marginalization of the gendered subaltern in the novel. Living in Vancouver, Anosh Irani has taken pains to depict the subaltern subject in his novel. He has flashed his torch at the tyrannical oppression his own people unleashed upon the tribe on whose sweat and blood they built their farms . He has succeeded in bringing the subaltern plight to the fore, but has not thought it necessary to give voice/agency to the oppressed. He remains loyal to his clan and leaves the reader with the Spivakian question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" reverberating in his mind. To cap it all, he seals the fate of the subaltern thus, "The only statement of revolt the poor could make was to put an end to their own misery" (70)., suggesting that the

misery of the marginalized is pre-ordained and only death can release them from their affliction.

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# Voicing the Poetics of Responsibility : Sara Joseph's *Aathi* as an Ecocritical Document

Shanthi Vijayan

What is the role of literature in a time turbulent with capitalism - sponsored ecological disasters? How does it contribute to arriving at a praxis by creating ecological awareness? How does it provide sources for highlighting and redefining our attitudes to nature? Even a naive reading of Sara Joseph's novel, *Aathi* - translated into English from Malayalam by Valson Thampu as '*Gift in Green*' - suffices to answer all these questions in addition to emphasizing the role of letters as an effective instrument for social change.

*Aathi* shows its creator attaining greater dimensions of sublimity in her office as a writer - activist. The text, in itself an ecocritical document, clearly draws to focus the various critical paradigms involved therein - ecofeminism, eco-socialism, third world environmentalism and Deep Ecology - all of which, beyond doubt, work at the level of both discourse and praxis. *Aathi* brings together a culture's ecological approaches as well as problems thereby laying bare the anthropomorphic, patriarchal and capitalist attitudes towards the non-human, women, nature and landscape.

Sarah Joseph claims that *Aathi* is not a utopian world of make-belief even as the many *Aathi*- like places of pristine purity are being choked to death in the contemporary world. In the wake of nuclear readers going berserk, tsunamis and the myriad faces of pollution wreaking havoc, history cannot afford a return journey to these *Aathis* (*Aathi* 350). She writes in the author's note, "In a world, where the water, the air, the food and even breast milk are polluted by lethal radiation, I, too, need a fountain-spring of life in which to remain submerged like Hagar and her imperilled son in the wilderness. This novel is my quest for such a haven" (350). In the translator's own words : "A novel more sensitive to nature - more lyrical in rendering the joy and fulfillment of a wholesome relationship with her and at the same time,

as graphic in the portrayal of the wounds and atrocities inflicted on her - I am yet to come upon” (358).

The people of Aathi destined to bear painful witness to its death and decay, and their woes and worries weave together the narrative structure of the novel. Sheltered and resourced by the virgin purity of Aathi's waters, their lives were quite unsuspecting of any technological molestation waiting in the wings. They had led a life of infantile innocence indulging in interpreting the amazing messages nature and water hold out to them. The water-locked marshy fields of Aathi easily yielded to the requirements of her children. They farmed rice for six months and fish for the rest of the year without ever making any exacting demands of compromise on her resources and resilience. This peace is marred by the entry of Kumaran, a former son of Aathi who had deserted her to pursue his greed. Kumaran returns as an ambitious entrepreneur with plans to transform Aathi into a fertile ground for commercial enterprises. With his gift of the gab he succeeds in convincing the indigenous community there, that he has come with the best of intentions all directed towards their well-being. Dreaming a life of comfort outside Aathi's sluggish pace, one half of the gullible folk pledge the documents of their lands to Kumaran. In return, they accept a cloistered life - one they are unaccustomed to - in the crowded apartments Kumaran has erected in the outskirts of the nearby town. Kumaran faces stiff resistance at the hands of Dinakaran, Ponmani, Markose, Shylaja, Kunjimathu and a host of enlightened supporters from the adjoining villages - Porinju Master, ChandraMohan, Adv. Grace and others - who ultimately fail to hold back the exodus of Aathi's population.

The narration of this everyday reality that has become an oft-repeated occurrence in the contemporary world is saved from a monotonous rendering by the periodic ceremony of story telling nights. As long as hearts remain throbbing in Aathi, with expectations of story nights, story tellers are sure to emerge out of the blue to relate tales diverse in their sources, ranging from myths, through epics and legends to Sufi/Zen episodes and even technology. So tenuous is the line between fact and fantasy in the novel that it makes reading a pleasure and

knowing an instinct. This combination of the mundane and the mythological not only screens the reader from the jolts of everyday reality, but also identifies the local with the universal. The story tellers offer them solace and instill in them new hopes. Disregarding the canons of a linear narrative structure, it is a sui-generis road map that the plot follows with a lot of twists and turns that make sense only from a holistic perspective. None the less, each change in direction is oriented towards completing the journey with an unwavering eye on the destination that the author has preordained. The story-telling nights appeal to a sense of community response and responsibility, where as M.Padget says in "Native American Fiction", "Much oral story telling conveys a "The author, a religious sensibility that stresses ideals of reciprocity, wholeness and beauty and so expresses a deep sense of attachment between a people and the land they inhabit" (18). In Aathi every one contributes to and benefits from the formation of a narrative memory of the community.

Prof. Valson Thampu testifies, "The author, as is her wont, crisscrosses time zones, leaves narrative threads in suspended animation, toggles between stories gleaned from diverse sources and the overarching rainbow of the tragedy of Aathi. But to a discerning reader who has the imaginative intuition to discern the capillaries of connectivity, the schemata of the novel offers sustained scope for the delight of discovery, as has been the experience of the present translator" (Thampu).

The novel undoubtedly deserves a place in the canon of environmental studies. Environmentalist claims embedded in it make crucial contributions to modern politics and culture thus making the whole enterprise of writing this novel a political project of cultural critique. Without compromising on the aesthetic aspects, Sarah Joseph shapes her material with apocalyptic imagery, rhetorical strategies, literary allusions and use of the pastoral. The metamorphosis of Aathi - partly mythical and partly realistic (featured on the ecocide prevalent in Chakkam Kandam near Guruvayur) - from being a gift in green to a stinking mire of dirt, is indeed a shock treatment that elevates one to the realization of how fundamentally interconnected are all life forms

and natural features. *Aathi* remains, once again, a testimony of how, for Sarah Joseph, as for Mahaswetha Devi, the process of writing by itself becomes the process of activism.

Conscious of her role as an environmental activist, Sarah Joseph incorporates into the scope of fictional frame work, a 'literary' and 'cultural' analysis of environmental problems through an earth-centered approach. Such an analysis is what Glotfelty terms, 'ecocriticism' in his 'introduction' to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (xix). The ecological awareness that the novel engenders shows its writer in the capacity of an ecocritic tying her cultural analysis explicitly to a green, moral and political agenda. Her gradual shift from exclusive feminist concerns in *Aalahayude Penmakkal*, *Mattathi* and *Othappu* through cultural and ecological paradigms in *Oorukaval* to purely environmental activism in *Aathi* is clearly discernible. Developing the insights of earlier critical movements, the activist emerges in *Aathi* as an ecofeminist, social ecologist and environmental justice advocate aiming at a coalescence of environmental and social concerns. As Kerridge puts it,

The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations where ever they appear to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crises. (5)

Greg Garrard's analysis of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* offers a striking parallel to the reading of *Aathi* for its concerns are largely social and environmental rather than literary. *Silent Spring* has been criticized by the agro chemical industry for its literary qualities, which are at logger heads with the appropriate scientific rigor. Popular belief demands that ecological problems are scientific problems rather than objects of cultural analysis. "Ecocriticism cannot contribute much to debates about problems in ecology, but it can help to define, explore and even resolve ecological problems..."(6). The distinction between 'problems in ecology' and 'ecological problems' can be deliberated through the definitions offered by John Passmore. 'Problems in ecology' he maintains,

are properly scientific issues to be resolved by the formulation and testing of hypothesis in ecological experiments, while ecological problems are features of our society arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves and which we do not regard as inevitable consequences of what is good in that society. (44)

Thus pollution becomes an ecological problem since it does not name a substance or class of substance, but implies that too much of something is present in the environment in the wrong place. *Aathi* with its focus especially on water pollution, has a problem in ecology to investigate, but it undertakes a cultural analysis to argue the moral case that it ought not to be. Thus the text turns a scientific problem in ecology into a long identified ecological problem that is being encountered politically and legally and in the media and popular culture.

An ecocritic addresses serious ecological disasters with the methods of cultural analysis - most of them rickety. Still it is a moral and political necessity even though the problems perpetually dwarf all possible solutions. This is exactly why *Aathi* employs specific ecocritical tropes which offer the only way to produce a desired effect on a specific audience at a given point of time in history. Thus the 'toxic discourse' in *Aathi* unfurls itself through four of Fredrick Buell's criteria, which deserves a detailed speculation. These include

1. "a mythography of betrayed Edens" (37)
2. "horrified totalizing images of a world without refuge from toxic penetration" (38).
3. "the threat of hegemonic oppression" (41).
4. "the gotheicization" of squalor and pollution characteristic of the environmental expose (42).

The first of these – "the mythography of betrayed Edens" - is clearly visible in the idyllic representation of Aathi and Chakkam Kadam of the past, in the narration of Hagar's weary way to the spring of life and in the myriad images of water, to cite a few. Invoking the ancient

tradition of the pastoral, one of the chief operational strategies of ecocriticism in its infantile stages, the narrative lays bare images of natural beauty and the harmony of humanity and nature. The rural idyll takes us through Aathi, an enchanting world in itself, its waters cool and serene, nestling in that rare world of impregnable silence, immune to the noise of men and machines. As Noor Muhammed wanders through the thick mangrove forests of Aathi, affectionately called by its people 'Green Bangle', we listen with him to "the blossoming of flowers, watch the moss dance, the glow worms emerge from their hide outs and read the trails of tiny worms" (*Aathi* 25). Floating through the entire body of the text are impassioned descriptions of the vitals of Aathi - its waters, the circulatory system that sustains its life. In close synchronization with these, runs the prologue to the story telling nights, beginning, "Jhalam Saakshi".

To the virgin waters of Aathi, her Guru directs Geethanjali and the seven year old Kayal. Geethanjali tells Markose, "Water...water is your only hope, my guru advised me. Stay close to the water for a few days. Let her see water. she is sure to improve" (57). True to her words, the ailing Kayal responds to the healing music of Aathi's water. Unlike the invocation of the Romantic Pastoral, this ecocritical pastoral emphasizes a working rather than an aesthetic relationship with the land. Romantic nature is never seriously endangered; it is loved for its vastness and beauty. But ecocritical pastoral, guided by preservationist politics, focuses on places that are more important and under more severe pressure ecologically but less picturesque like fens, bogs and marshes.

An island dotted with water bodies, marsh land and slush surrounded by backwaters, it lay secluded from the rest of the world. The forest on the island stood nearly submerged in water. It slopped from the east to the west. During high tide, salt water rose and climbed on Aathi (43).

The Wordsworthian aesthetic relegates these quotidian landscapes to the realm of the merely beautiful. On the other hand, Sarah Joseph here tries to promote the poetics of responsibility that takes ecological

science rather than pantheism as its guide. She circumvents with a pragmatic and political orientation, false dichotomy of the choice between monolithic, ecocidal modernism and reverential awe.

Scott Slovic's classification of nature writing texts into 'rhapsodic' and 'Jeremiad' deserves special mention in this context (qtd. in Gerrard 89). By its standards, *Aathi* is primarily Jeremiad, 'the warning or critique' that challenges the reader to political action and social reform. In *Aathi* we find a movement in ecocriticism from a preoccupation with pastoral towards a social, ecological perspective. Here is an ecocriticism that seeks not a truthful or enlightening discourse of nature but a more effective rhetoric of transformation. Sarah Joseph formulates a land ethic, one that changes the role of man from conqueror of the land community to a member and citizen of it – taking us from the landscapes of leisure to the rough terrains of labour; from the poetics of authenticity to the poetics of responsibility.

It's again water that becomes the chief pre-occupation and obsession with Shylaja. Enchanted by the dreamy narrations of Chakkam Kandam, an Aathi-like place abundant in backwaters, mangroves, fish and mussels, Shylaja arrives at Chakkam Kandam, as the bride of Chandra Mohan. Chandra Mohan's mother relates to Shylaja the Arcadian beauty of yester year Chakkam Kandam,

Paddy fields, that yielded harvests of gold, the lagoon waiting to be milked of bounties worth millions, fishermen and mussel pickers, boats loaded with coir... Chakkam Kandam lagoon resounded with noise and bustled with activity....The enchanting blue back waters of Chakkam Kandam... I felt blessed by its exquisite coolness. For years thereafter, the backwaters of Chakkam Kandam were the unfailing source of our livelihood and well-being. (83-84)

In sharp contrast to these scenes of sylvan scenes, the chronicle juxtaposes "horrified totalizing images of a world without refuge from toxic penetration"- the second of Buell's criteria. Geethanjali narrates to Markose the terrible account of how a monstrous and impersonal city had snatched her little Kayal and played havoc with her. Kayal, at the age of five, lost in crowded metropolis, becomes the victim of

a gang rape. She is found four days later, abandoned on a street, crying hysterically. Then on, Kayal began screaming with pain and fear before any male presence. Recoiling at the hysterical shrieks of his daughter even in his presence, Ravi - Geethanjali's husband - goes away leaving the woman alone to cope with the tragic plight. The episode voices painfully the predicament of thousands of women in the world today choked by the uncompromising smokes of patriarchy. It largely aids the writer's purpose to bring to light the fact that the exploitation of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand.

On her first day as bride at Chakkam Kandam, Shylaja confronts her dream island in a similar state of necrosis. She is shocked, as she discovers that none of Chandra Mohan's relatives or friends would eat a morsel of food or drink a drop of water in Chandra Mohan's house. Chakkam Kandam is now in a sorry state. The wells, the ponds, the channels, the streams and backwaters, which spread like an ocean in front of the house, are infested with deposits of human waste.

Every day, seeing the shit floating on the thick black water of the canal that cut across the courtyard, how could she eat any food? That was what Shylaja could not help asking? How could she even think of giving birth to children after watching the children of Chakkam Kandam play in that black, gluey thing they called water? (82).

Realising that she cannot go on living in this squalor, Shylaja urges Chandra Mohan to leave the place with her and go to Aathi. But he refuses since he finds no meaning in saving himself and leaving his people and land, heirs to the same misery. Thus on the fifth day after his wedding, Chandra Mohan brings his wife Shylaja, still a virgin, back to her house in Aathi. As they part, she tells him, "I shall return when the waters of Chakkam Kandam clear" (85).

Shocking statistics slowly unravel in a later chapter acquainting the reader with the source that putrefies and poisons Chakkam Kandam. Sitting on the verandah of the District Collector's Office, with documents, reports and petitions in their hands, Jayan Munakkakadavu, Porinju Chakramakkal, Chandra Mohan and Dr. Johnson discuss. They have come with hearts weighed down by the horrendous consequences

of the developmental behemoth, the author's evocative symbol. The various reports submitted to the 10th Assembly of Kerala by the Pollution Control Board wax eloquence the truth of how the Chakkam Kandam lagoon has been poisoned to death over the last forty years. "The clinching proof of Guruvayoorappan's divine powers is that no epidemic has so far broken out in Guruvayoor... What tens and thousands of devotees drink as tea, coffee or *theertham* is actually water contaminated with shit and urine" (92).

The septic tank facilities in at least 90 percent of the hotels in Guruvayoor are insufficient and substandard. The actual number of people using them exceeds the norm by 3 or 4 times. It should surprise no one, then, that these septic tanks collapse. The excrement, as a result, flows through the drains and falls into Valiathodu or the big canal. This canal, which runs for two kilometres through Guruvayoor Municipality and thereafter for another two kilometres through Thykkodu Panchayath, finally reaches Chakkam Kandam Kayal. (94)

This "gothicization of squalor and pollution, characteristic of the environmental expose" – the last of Buell's criteria, makes the reader brood over the state of many of our rivers including Pampa and Periyar as the news report in 'The Hindu' of Jan.12, 2013 goes,

The Njunagar stream leading to river Pampa in the forest interiors of Appachimedu remains polluted by faecal matter, posing alarming health risk to pilgrims visiting Sabarimala and the people residing in the down stream reaches of the river. The authorities concerned have failed in their efforts to ensure safe disposal of the huge quantity of human waste generated at Sabarimala during the annual pilgrimage season. (7)

The novel becomes a giant canvas wherein the writer also brings in other related contemporary issues like the ruthless sand mining that causes vast sand banks to disappear leaving thousands landless.

It becomes yet another traumatic shock to Shylaja when she discovers that the hospital, where she works as an attendant, ejects out

into the surrounding backwaters all its waste of blood, leftovers like placenta, severed umbilical cord, sanitary napkins, blood soaked rags, cotton packs, mutilated fetuses, chemical agents, plastic bottles and bags. Her belief that the resources for human survival rested in water for generations to come, is thus shattered.

“The threat of hegemonic oppression” - the third of Buell’s criteria - comes from Kumaran. He is a representative of those cornucopian economists, politically opposed by social ecology and eco-marxism. Eco-marxists and social ecologists argue that environmental problems are caused not merely by anthropocentric attitudes but follow from hegemonic dominations and exploitations of humans by other humans. Kumaran, the cut throat capitalist easily influences the bureaucracy and acquires the land farmed for generations by the people of Aathi. Dinakaran warns them that if Kumaran fills these farms, the whole of Aathi will go under water. This is exactly what happens at the end - an apocalyptic flood engulfs Aathi encoding the vision of a prophetic imagination. Drawing upon the tragic apocalyptic rhetoric, *Aathi* presents the warning in terms of absolute authority. The material threat is evil, and so by association are its authors. The consequences of failure to heed the warning are catastrophic and the danger is not only imminent, but already well under way. Buell has argued that “Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (285).

However, *Aathi* does not end with visions of apocalyptic doom but it holds out an optimistic prophecy, though at the cost of a sacrifice with Dinakaran’s body washing down to Aathi’s shores. The novel begins with Aathi’s Thampuran floating down the backwaters, wrapped in a mat, to die on her shores on Pathamudayam. Ever since, every pathamudayam became a festival for Aathi when people invoked Thampuran’s blessings to keep them from harm. Dinakaran’s sacrifice at the end foretells a new lease of life for the people of Aathi who showed extraordinary gallantry to uphold the sacrament of Thampuran’s shrine in the midst of all Kumaran’s endeavor to make it a tourist/pilgrimage centre.

*Aathi*'s brilliant hybridization of oral tradition, realist novel and apocalyptic fable, effortlessly serves the author's political purpose. It provides a fictional version of the developmental projects which, as Ramachandra Guha points out, serve only in "pauperizing millions of people in the agrarian sector and diminishing the stock of the plant, water and soil resources at a terrifying rate" (196). The ecocritical tropes made use of in the novel have been manipulated with care so that they don't mar its aesthetic rendition. Nevertheless, *Aathi* emerges more as a political text with a cultural project than as a literary novel with a romantic purpose. In it theory emerges from the narrative exemplifying the spontaneous evolution of a theoretico-narrative. Thus as an ecocritical document, *Aathi* successfully makes a conscious attempt to jerk the complacent literary audience into a shocking sense of the current ecological crisis.

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# Uncanny in the Making: The Arcane Lure of *Francis Itticora*

Jose Cardoz

The various critical elaborations on the topic uncanny make us aware of its making, recognition and acknowledgment. Sigmund Freud's essay entitled *Das Unheimlich* (The Uncanny) which appeared in the year 1919 can be viewed as foundational in the history of the conceptualization of the term uncanny. Freud's essay is a direct response to the psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch's study "On the Psychology of the Uncanny." Freud begins his essay with a detailed discussion on the lexical meanings of the German word *unheimlich* which is considered untranslatable. The rough English equivalent, "uncanny," is itself difficult to define. This indescribable quality is essentially an integral part of our understanding of the uncanny experience, which is terrifying precisely because it cannot be adequately explained. The word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general.

Freud in his essay argued that 'uncanny' is a subject of aesthetics because it is concerned with a certain kind of feeling or sensation or emotional impulses that can be provoked in the viewer. He relates the 'uncanny' to something that has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar in order to make it uncanny (4). Freud further says that the uncanny is "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar," but which has become alienated from the mind through the process of repression (4). In the essay of Freud, many psychoanalytical terms ensemble to form a concept of the uncanny. These include castration complex, Oedipus, narcissism, compulsion to repeat, the death drive, repression, anxiety etc. Though it provided an anchoring point for the history of the conceptualization, Freud's essay was hardly noticed. However, with the advent of post-structuralism a growing interest in the uncanny in literary studies became explicit and many readings of Freud's 'uncanny' were published. The bulk of the critical and theoretical reception of "Das Unheimliche"

is located in the field of aesthetics: literary theory and criticism, art history, philosophy, architecture and cultural studies (Masschelein n.p.).

The uncanny triggers in us uncertainty, disturbance, and doubt as the boundaries between the living and the dead are blurred. They challenge rational modes of knowledge because they confuse the spatial (inner/outer) and temporal (past/present) dimensions of reality. More specifically, they echo the Freudian understanding of the uncanny, according to which “everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, [comes] into the open” (5). In other words, Freud believes that the uncanny manifests itself when the repressed aspects buried in our unconscious suddenly return. There are myriad ways in which the concept is used, theorized, or applied in 20<sup>th</sup> century art and criticism. With recourse to the founding text, this paper will look into the construction of the uncanny in the Malayalam novel *Francis Itticora* with the principal focus on the fear of castration, the play of doubles, subversion, the repetitions, the mix of real with unreal and the stylistics of narration.

The Malayalam novel, *Francis Itticora* by T. D. Ramakrishnan elicited many debates regarding the nature and characteristics of contemporary Malayalam fiction writing. The wide ranging critical responses for or against the novel from academics and reading public were unprecedented in Malayalam literature. The novel’s narrative structure, plot, theme, and character sketches might definitely be ‘new’ in the Malayalam literary scenario. The novel which was released in 2009, has been reprinted seven times till date. The fictional world of *Francis Itticora* maneuvers the readers into the interstices of imagination and reality. Uncanny becomes the melting point of all the diverse dispensations on *Francis Itticora*. A boulevard of opacities and uncertainties, the uncanny swings between the realms of reality and fiction. This paper attempts to initiate a conversation between *Francis Itticora* and the tumultuous egos of “uncanny.”

The novel, *Francis Itticora* is a hybrid of literary and best-seller aesthetics. The novel deals with a time span of seventeen centuries across different countries and the fictional ambience of Malayalam

literature has never ventured into the areas which the novel sumptuously engages. The novelist deliberately veers away from the existing mode of postmodern writing in Malayalam literature pushing it to a larger canvas where easy crisscrossing of art, science and business is made possible. Spacio-temporal dimension in the novel is ruptured through crisscrossing the notions of time and place with imagination, and the novelist makes the reader ready for other elements of the uncanny. The writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know whether he is taking us into the real world or into a purely fantastic one of his own creation. *Francis Itticora* is a story of conspiracy which tries to establish connections between the chaotic and coincidental events in the past and the present.

Analyzing Hoffman's story *The Sandman*, Freud remarks that it is the fear of castration that creates the uncanny effect in the story (12). Sigmund Freud never wanted to abandon the sexual character of castration. *Francis Itticora* constantly ensues and returns to the concept of the father, which the castration myth implies. The novel depicts the incidents after the castration of the protagonist, Xavier Itticora. The uncanny in this novel is evoked by the attempt of Junior Cora to revive his sexual potency. Xavier Itticora's loss of potency and his search for his ancestors, which leads him to Francis Itticora, is the broad structure of the novel in which other events are woven in. The violent sexual instincts of Xavier Cora can be traced back to his forefather, the 'God' of the *Pathinettamkoottukar*, Francis Itticora.

The uncanny can be connected to the phenomenon of the 'double,' which appears in every shape and in every sphere of development of the novel. Freud explores the theme of the Double in his essay "The Uncanny" (12). The 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death.' In the novel the doppelganger effect abruptly comes into view, impedes the subject and apparently fades away to return even more intensely. Helen Cixous claims that the double is a "ghostly figure of non fulfillment and repression, [rather than a] counterpart or reflection [and it] also absorbs the unrealized eventualities of our destiny which the imagination refuses to let go" (540). This observation can be extended

to the relationship between Francis Itticora and Xavier Itticora. Xavier Cora is the double of Francis Cora and the realization would cost his life. The formal distance between Francis Itticora and Xavier Itticora, whether it be temporal and spatial, is the uncanny area between the living and the dead. The subject is confronted with his double, the very image of himself and this crumbles the self leading to the shattering of the bases of his world, producing a terrible anxiety. The moment one encounters one's double, one is headed for disaster; there seems to be no way out.

P. K. Rajasekharan in his article, "Plot/ 'plot': Itticorayude Upajapalokangal" ("Plot/ 'plot': The conspiring worlds of Itticora") critically explores the significance of *Francis Itticora* in the contemporary milieu. He gives a broad description of the enigmatic nature of Francis Itticora. Gluing together diverse opinions disseminated across the text, one could speak of Itticora as follows: son of a Keralite with a Jewish tradition and an Italian mother, Francis Itticora was born in 1456 and died in 1517 in Florence, Italy. He studied Mathematics and Astrology in the secret Hypatian schools in Alexandria (Egypt) and Timbuktu (Mali), during the period from 1471-74 and was proficient in seven languages. Itticora became a wealthy merchant by trading black pepper even before the arrival of Vasco de Gama. But with the explorations and the discovery of sea routes to India by Vasco de Gama, he lost his monopoly in trading and so he settled in Florence and gained political influence by procuring ladies for prostitution. Itticora was the harbinger of many developments in the fields of Mathematics and Astrology in Kerala and also in the Philosophical realms of Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. He brought Hypatian theorems to Kerala. There exists an unapproved myth that Itticora was killed in a battle with the Portuguese whereupon he transformed into a winged panther and steadily rose in the sky. Francis Itticora who had 79 children out of 18 maidens each from 18 different lands, created an anti-Catholic cult, *Pathinettamkootukar* shrouded in utmost secrecy and established a Holy Book too. After death invaded him, he became their forefather, idol and God; he savoured the maidens offered to him by his people and bit their necks like a blood-sucking vampire and drank their blood. Itticora, whose name appears nowhere in the approved histories is either

the creator or the perpetrator of many crucial and noble events in history.

Francis Itticora can be seen as a culmination of many paradoxes. “He was a saint, a lover, a murderer, a moral and an immoral person, a procurer, a smuggler, a slave merchant, a revolutionary and above all a conspirator”. The enigmatic nature of the depiction of Francis Itticora evokes the feeling of uncanny. He is a familiar figure as a forefather of Xavier Itticora but something prevents us from understanding his character completely. The people from whom we get to know about Itticora and their paranoiac mental state add to the uncanniness that looms around Cora. Bindhu, Rekha, Reshmi, *Kadhayezhuthu* and others sum up their quest for Xavier Itticora’s filial roots thus, “Our investigation about Itticora doesn’t lead us to any history but to a parallel culture which science or rationality cannot answer. An underground culture. Itticora is its icon. A secret Icon. They will never allow it to be exposed” (Ramakrishnan 102). The cult of Itticora is kept secret by many situations which together conjure up a distant yet familiar figure. Those who are part of the Cora myth and those who oppose it vehemently join together not to expose the Itticora myth. As Benny says, “we have to be careful confronting them [*Pathinettamkoottukar*]. They cannot talk about Itticora out in the open. The Catholic Church cannot either admit that Itticora did exist. The matter is complicated” (104).

The secret sect *Pathinettamkoottukar* can be viewed as the double of the Francis Itticora who lives among them controlling their lives as *Corapappan* or as their ‘God.’ The mysterious life of Itticora and the mysteries behind the sect influence each other in evoking a feeling of uncanny. In the course of time, the ‘double,’ the *Pathinettamkoottukar*, fear Francis Itticora and they themselves become a thing of terror for others. The *Pathinettamkoottukar*’s fear of extinction ensures the firm establishment of the Cora cult who anticipate it as a means to transcend death. In the novel the “double,” from having been an assurance of immortality becomes the uncanny harbinger of death. As Morigami in her speech reveals:

Francis Itticora who had 18 wives and 79 children in different parts of the world entrusted with his descendants the duty of popularizing the Hypatian philosophy. They later evolved into the secret sect called *Pathinettamkoottukar*. Unfortunately during the course of time they detached themselves from Hypatian philosophy completely and became superstitious, selfish and cruel. They use any vile means to get profit in business and these days their actions are shrouded in mystery. Morigami says that she suspects *Pathinettamkoottukar* behind the murder of Xavier Itticora. (Ramakrishnan 303)

The writer at the very outset of the novel gives the hint that “the story is not a history, but an attempt to cook up a story from hearsay, tall tales and lies” (19). But as the novel progresses, the novelist incorporates many historical figures and documents along with many pseudo documents thereby leaving the reader in sheer uncertainty. The uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced. It happens when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality. It may be true that the uncanny is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned.

The primitive fear of the dead is still strong within us and always ready to come to the surface at any opportunity. The feeling of uncanny is evoked when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed. The direct figure of the uncanny is the ghost. The spectacular and baffling ritual of *Coraykkukodukkal* is a case that precisely confirms to the point. Our primitive fear of the dead coming back to life, taking control of our lives is addressed in that ritual. In that ritual every girl on the onset of menstruation is to be offered to their idol, Francis Itticora, the next Christmas night. The family, which has a *Corapennu* (the girl who is offered to Cora) becomes rich in no time. The readers get a slice of the *Corakkukodupp* custom through Susanna’s mesmerizing account of her experience as a ‘*Corappennu*.’

The ritual begins late in the evening, the *Corappennu*, adorned with new clothes and surrounded by women who have already been offered

to Cora, sit in the middle. The chief of the house performs certain rituals using an ash coloured cross made of animal bone. The eerie music of some strange instruments adds to the atmosphere. A banquet follows and the girl is given wine till she succumbs to its seductive trance. The girl is then stripped naked and whipped several times before she is sent to the *Nilavara*. It is believed that on that night *Corapappan* will descend from the sky to take the offering. If pleased with the girl, *Corapappan* would leave a love bite anywhere on the body of the girl and she was forbidden from disclosing anything that happened on the night she was offered to Cora. The whole ritual is cloaked in mystery. Apart from all these externalities, the text itself expresses a feeling of fear and awe. Susanna ends her narration of the incident thus:

The morning was just dawning; I woke up to some knocks on the *Nilavara* door. I opened my eyes with a passionate longing to see my Prince Charming who was sleeping within my hands. I was stunned! That gorgeous body has shriveled into something like an Egyptian Mummy. While I was trying to pull myself up, shuddered at this sight, it transformed into a small spider and crawled its way from my navel down to my left leg's thumb where it changed to a butterfly and fluttered away. The *Nilavara* was opened and when they let me out, I ran out like a child in search of that butterfly. (Ramakrishnan 67)

The human body occupies an ambiguous and even paradoxical dimension throughout the novel. It is evident from the ritualistic practice *Coraykkukodukkal*. The human body is depicted in its conflicting aspects - the sudden shifts that the human body undergoes from a sheer material reality of feasting, drinking and pain, to one of mere abstractions in the *Nilavara* where, it is believed that *Corapappan* savours the chastity of the girl. What happens in the *Nilavara* is kept unknown from the reader. From a world of material existence which is familiar to everyone, the readers enter a world of imagination where impossibilities can happen.

The uncanny is deeply concerned with all that is unrepresentable but it is through the very same that the unrepresentable finds its most

accurate representation. The novel intriguingly captures the variants of ritualized sex. *Corakkukodupp* is a ritual unknown and unrepresentable. Both the readers and the characters in the novel read into it. This enigma finds different cultural representations exemplified through Susanna, Katrina, and The School (Bindu, Resmi and Rekha). The wine, the gothic tapestry, music, the perforated suit, the spider, the entangled snakes, the whipping and the perversions that accompany it are some of the common grounds between the three cultural trans-representations. What is even more interesting is that while *Corappapan* remains a constant in all the cultural representations, the *Corapennu* emerges as a mysterious variant through Katrina, Morigami, Violatta, Susanna, Leena and finally Bindu as Angelo Pereira. Bindu represents the *Corapennu* of the new episteme. In that sense, the *Corapennu* is a double of the trio (Bindu, Resmi and Rekha).

The trio do not realize that they themselves practice and are part of what they are hunting for. *Kadhayezhuthu*'s spontaneous creativity of Vespuchi's experience as a *Corapennu* well fits into the jigsaw of representation. *Kadhayezhuthu* conjures up a story in order to free himself and Bindhu from those who torture them, "a girl sees Itticora only once in her life. But it's alright I'm there in every nook and corner of the world. There sleeps within every man an Itticora. Your strength rests in awakening him. I just initiated you into that. Learn the rest by yourself" (Ramakrishnan 235).

Xavier Itticora is on a voyage to reclaim his sexuality; he meets women of extra-ordinary sexual skill in different cultures, the different cultural representations of the *Corapennu*. Bindu, Resmi and Rekha have been performing the myth in their lives. Unfortunately, they do not realize this. Xavier Itticora is confronted with a return of the repressed; the latent consciousness of *Corappapan*. As soon as Bindu meets her double, Angelo Pereira, within herself, she meets death. The repressed returns, but is buried before it emerges. The concept of the 'double' and the primitive beliefs coming to life conjoin here like the entangled serpents in a *Corapennu*'s navel. The uncanny here ascends through a strong feminine repressed sexual consciousness-the *Corapennu*. From Hypatia through Iyyalakotha to Bindu, one can read a legacy of

subversion, consequential of a legacy of repression, forbidding sexual perversions and the dominance of women in love-making. These women become cartographies of a repressed feminine writing, a counter performance through their bodies.

Contemporary writers engage themselves in popular fiction genre for the purpose of subversion as a literary technique. Subversion plays an active role in the creation of uncaniness in the novel. T. D. Ramakrishnan in this novel subverts the accepted history of Kerala especially the history of Christianity. The uncanny unsettles history. The novelist quotes from Umberto Eco: “Why write novels? Rewrite history. The history that then comes true” (34). The novelist critically addresses the history of Kerala and creates a parallel history to the mainstream history of Kerala. The characters in the novel express their dissatisfaction with a singular history several times in the novel.

The novelist’s suspicions are evident when he writes “It is the problem of thinking within the limits of the accepted history. That is why I keep my investigations out of the history” (Ramakrishnan 61). He further says:

Why not tell our history? It has been written by the Lords, the Nambhoodhiris and the Nairs. Do we have an exact account of the events that occurred 200 or 300 years ago? The Europeans have exact records of the year, the month and even the time of the events which happened about 500 years ago. (62)

The writer subverts the hegemonic history with the aesthetics of a history built on the premises of some assumptions and some imaginary documents and books. The thematic world of *Francis Itticora* travels across two worlds: one of pseudo documents and imaginary texts and the other being established scientific documents and texts or between religion and science (Rajasekharan 20). The novelist presents many pseudo documents in the guise of factual history. The essays on Mathematics appeared in Hashimoto Morigami’s blog, the short story written by the Spanish writer Isabella Swan *The True Story Of Hypatia*, the story of Francis Itticora written by Porinju B. A, titled *Nakshathracora Adhava Itticora Enna Navikan (Nakshathrcora or Itticora, the sailor)* of which

only the proof copy is preserved. It is said that the secret sect *Pathinettamkootthar* burned the copies of the novel on the eve of its publication, *Corayude Suwishesham* (The Gospel of Cora) written by Francis Itticora and translated by Alok Chandra Chattergie from among the documents kept by Xavier Cora, essays written by Claude Andhrew on Hypatia and the relation between Itticora and Raphael, *Aduppootty Padayola* of 16<sup>th</sup> century are some of them. These pseudo/imaginary documents are presented along with historical persons and facts and thus produce ambiguity in the reader about the real status of the events presented in the novel. The reader is placed amidst the world of the known and the unknown.

The unreliability of the narrator is a stumbling block that deters the reader from unravelling the text completely. The unreliable narrator destabilizes the reader's position. We are made unsure whether an impression reported by the narrator is to be accepted as actually happening within the context of the story or whether it is the product of the narrator's imagination. In both unreliable narrators increase the text's uncaniness by destabilizing the readers' evaluation of reality. As readers, we are contaminated by the paranoia of the characters because of the uncertain status of reality in the text. The text takes advantage of the structural similarities between our activities of 'reading into' what we perceive as clues in the text and the characters' tendency to selectively read 'into' their experience. It is evident at the end of the novel when the narrator, *Kadhayezhuthu*, hears the calling bell alarms ringing the last words of Thupak Amaru, "Ccollanan Pachacamac ricuy auccacunac yahumly hichas cancufo" (Ramakrishnan 308). (Mother earth, witness how my enemies shed my blood). This can be seen as a paranoid delusion of the narrator.

We perceive some uncertainties about the regularities that we perceive. Are the coincidences accidental or do they indicate a plan? This does not mean that the text forces upon the reader the obsessive conviction of a paranoid individual that his or her interpretations are the correct one. Nevertheless the text represents its reality in selective fashion and guides the interpretive activity of the reader. The uncanny aspect of the novel at the level of the reader lies ultimately in their

helplessness to trust the narrators or to take sides with any of the characters in the novel. The name given to the narrator of the novel, *Kadhayezhuthu* which means the very 'act of writing', itself throws light on the unreliability of the narration. The reader is almost left alone without being able to take sides with any of the characters in the novel. How could the reader possibly like Xavier Itticora, the cannibal, or Francis Itticora, a paradoxical figure or the elite prostitutes in 'the School' or the secret sect *Pathinettamkoottukar* or any of the characters in the novel?

In the final part of the novel Morigami makes a speech at the Gandhi University. She says, "I have often suspected a mathematical order in many things which we habitually call coincidences" (Ramakrishnan 305). True coincidences are uncanny because they mean a deviation from the randomness we come to expect from experience. The author's exploitation of our willing suspension of disbelief alerts us to the epistemological foundations we depend on to evaluate the reality of an event.

The representation of the 'uncanny' in literature has a more 'fertile province' than the 'uncanny' in real life (Freud 10). The uncanny in literature creates the characters' paranoia on the level of the reader's aesthetic experience. Every piece of literature itself is in some sense uncanny because it is populated by un-dead figures; they exist in the boundary between the animate and the inanimate because they are animated by our imagination (Falkenberg 191). Uncanny presented in the novel *Francis Itticora* lends itself to a multiplicity of interpretations. Attempts at analyzing the ambiguity of the text reduce the unfamiliar and thus runs the risk of repressing its uncanny effect. The unfamiliar and mysterious aspect of the texts can never be completely replaced by an explanation which integrates unfamiliar into the familiar context. This logic explains well the incomprehensibility of *Francis Itticora* and the other elements that are left unconnected in the novel.

The uncanny aesthetic, disturbing and unsettling, is the natural artistic by-product of a cultural response to postmodern living. Postmodern techniques like self-reflexivity, pastiche, intertextuality or

the blurring of fact and fiction cannot only serve the purpose of metafictional play or stylistic radicalization but can also generate profound uncanny effects. *Francis Itticora* weaves the unfamiliar past in the space time of today leaving many ambiguities and uncertainties. The novelist's genius lies in making the familiar develop into something strange.

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# Literature and the Female Body: The Shifts in the Functions of Eroticism in Modern Fictional Narrative

G. Sujatha

Feminist scholarship records two dominant registers on female body in literary discourse. Noting that right from the ancient days the female body appears either as an object for satiating men's sexual cravings or as a site of their fear and hatred, it reveals how in either way the female body is objectified in literature. While one could testify the presence of the former from classical epics to modern films, the latter predominantly is identified in religious literature be it Hindu, Buddhist or other religions, where the women's body is seen as an obstacle to a man's spiritual progress and thus symbolized as an object of horror, hatred and even disgust.

Are these two functions that feminism notes for the 'female body' in literature down the ages unaltered by history? Apart from these two modes where the female body functions either as an object of male desire and its gratification or that of his fear and disgust, does it have any other function? In the same way, does the erotic description of the female body in different genres of literature in different historical periods do the same function? If prose narratives in general and fictional writings like novel and short story in particular emerge via the complex interaction of specific historical transformations that altered even one's sense of self, how come the description of woman's body in them do the same function as the ones in classical genres? This paper attempts to investigate this by taking the context of Tamil modernity as a case study. More specifically it concentrates on the fictional works of C.N. Annadurai, a significant founding member of the DMK (*Dravida Munnetra Khazhagam* or the Dravidian Progressive Alliance) who played a decisive role in shaping both modern Tamil culture and politics.

C.N. Annadurai (hereafter Anna) is a person who straddled different spheres like the social, political, and cultural and brought about

significant transformations in them. As a person from a lower-middle class weaver family having nothing but his M.A. degree to deserve some respect in the political sphere comprised landlords and upper caste elites, he emerged as a significant political leader of Tamil Nadu. Beginning his political career as a member of the South Indian Liberation League (popularly known as the Justice Party) with competence in Tamil and English, he emerged as a significant orator and journalist. In the meanwhile, he associated himself with E.V. Ramasamy Periyar's Self-Respect Movement and vibrantly participated in its first Anti-Hindi protests during 1938. He emerged as the significant leader in the Dravida Kazhagam next to EVR Periyar through his active participation in the Anti-Hindi protests of late 1930s and 40s. In 1949, he broke ties with Periyar and founded the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* (shortly known as DMK). Within a short period Anna and his party, the DMK, emerged as a major political force in the state. In 1967 elections, following the vehement self-immolations and continuous violent protests of 1965 against the Congress government's introduction of Hindi as an official language, Anna became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu by sweeping out the Congress away from the central stage of the politics of the state.

In addition to the significance in transforming the mode of doing politics in the state, Anna's role in transforming the Tamil cultural sphere – be it language, literature or cinema – is equally irrefutable. In spite of the fact that language, literary and film histories in Tamil Nadu repeatedly establish and reestablish the telling role of Anna in transforming their respective fields of study there has been no serious attempt made so far to study this transformation critically.

Anna's literary works are placed in two extreme positions as "garbage" and as precious monuments, both interestingly for their 'popular' and 'reformist' characteristics. Attracting the wider popular readership that the evolving bazaar novels of modernity had within their clutch towards himself with the help of his rhetorical skills, Anna dispelled his reformist ideals through this genre. The significance of Anna's literary contribution lies in the way he intervened into and transformed the field of the popular literary taste – the taste of the

majority and the ordinary who during modernity emerges as a power that pushes history forward.

During modernity it has been noted by scholars like Sudipta Kaviraj that there occurs a dethroning of the *shringaric rasa* – the erotic representation of love which derives its full meaning with its connection to *rupa* – “the beauty of the physical form, primarily, though not exclusively associated with feminine figures” (166-167) as something to be enjoyed both by the possessor and the onlooker – as the *adivasa*, the primal *rasa* (164-165). This dethroning of *shringaric* aesthetics happens with 1) the emergence of a new conception of love, *prem* – the emotional one, that which concentrates on the interiority, to pre-eminence and 2) through establishing the former as obscene, mean and as something that “cannot be uttered without a shudder of revulsion” (163). This signifies the emergence of a new relation with the female body in the literary discourse which happens with a sense of historicity and proclaims the overt erotic focus on it as obscene, regressive and the feature of the ‘pre-modern’. As an extension of this perspective, the erotic description of female body in modern literary genres like novels has been quite often appraised as a work of patriarchy to renew the regressive, pre-modern gender perception – which establishes the female body as an object of male sexual desire and satiation – during modernity. While undoubtedly one can see the making of the female body as a site of male sexual gaze in such descriptions, there also seems to be many subtle functions that an erotic description of a female body gains in modern fiction especially in the plane of narrative. I would attempt to trace and investigate some of these in the fictional narrative of C. N. Annadurai. For this purpose, I have taken two of his well-known short stories – “Samooga Sevagi” and “Kumarikottam” and his famous novel- *Parvathi B.A.*

Charubala, the protagonist of the short story “Samooga Sevaki Charubala” which narrates story of a pampered child of a wealthy Brahmin family who indulges in social service as a hobby for the sake of fame and vested political interests is introduced with a strong physical thrust as follows:

Charubala got cold and fever. Shanthibhavanam was in a lot of commotion. She is the only daughter of the income-tax officer Kothandarama Iyer. Won't then it be amplified like this? That too Charubala was attaining popularity by doing social service. Cloud like hair, full-moon shaped face that it was caressing, half-moon shaped forehead, talking eyes, quivering lips, body is gold, walking dance, speech music – age 22, education inter. Decorative spectacles, decorative bag, ultra decorated boots, diamond earring, wrist watch in her hand, a thin gold chain in her neck – always smiling, pleasant-faced with everyone – won't Charubala become a spectacle of the town? (173)

Though Charubala's educational and social background and her interest in social service are described, this introduction effortlessly and predominantly accommodates a description of her body. The description of her body parts like hair, face, forehead, eyes, lips, body and the attractiveness/charm with which she walks and talks occupy a predominant place in her introduction in the story. In addition, the story describes her as a "golden statue" that incites whirlwinds in the onlooker. Similar is the description of Kumari in "Kumarikottam", a significant short story of C.N. Annadurai, which narrates the story of how a poor, underprivileged, innocent, lower caste girl Kumari is tricked and raped by Kuzhanthai Chettiyar, an aged wealthy landlord known for his Bhakthi, spiritual character and caste-mindedness. Due to his strong belief in caste system he even sent away his beloved son, Pazhani, when the latter falls in love with an educated, reformist lower caste girl named Nagavalli. The story is about how with the help of Pazhani and Nagavalli who are now married, Kumari marries Kuzhanthai Chettiyar. The following is the way in which Kumari is introduced in the story:

There were also many women among the workers who are involved in the construction of the temple. Kumari is one of them. Neither too fair nor dark, but a body glimmered by work. Inquisitive look. A smile would naturally crawl on her face. Whatever work she does, she would be singing in a soft voice. She is below 20 years old. A kind of bewitching force is there in that girl's look that stands

erect with the pride of youth. Her rugged speech would stimulate desire even in a saint. (77)

These descriptions form the context of introduction of these women characters in the stories. As we can see, there is a predominance of physicality in such descriptions which ponder on their body and the way they stimulate sensuousness in the onlooker. Likewise, the descriptions of physical intimacy/sexual contact in which these women are involved are also characterized by a preponderance of women's physicality. The description of Charubala-Raguraman's sexual intimacy goes into the details of how hard Raguraman pulls and kisses her, how she struggles without getting breath, how he caresses her feet to wake her up for a 'love game', how he bites her lips and how he takes pleasure in seeing the marks of their love games on her cheeks, forehead, thighs, waist and so on (179). The description of Chettiyar-Kumari's sexual act also relies predominantly on Kumari's body to attain its intended sensual effect.

The place in which Chettiyar stayed is a small room in the half-built temple. An earthen lamp was blazing with not much brightness. It was the time when the workers were sleeping. Kumari came running there urgently. (84)

The narrative which begins like this develops as,

As someone who is in a hurry to see the rats Chettiyar went near the sacks by rubbing on Kumari. He attained a pleasure in it. She was a little frightened. After cleaning the place she stood there wiping her sweat with her saree's free-end. Chettiyar gave the *legiyam* (an electuary made up of herbs) to Kumari telling "Here a gift for you! Eat, it is very tasty and also is good for health". (85)

and reaches its apex as follows:

She started laughing in a loud voice. The whole room appeared illuminated for her. An exhilaration started brimming in her. Without paying attention to her clothes slipping down and hair getting loosened she was laughing and singing. Kumari's eyes

started to roll. She started feeling sleepy – she felt as though her pupa is moving upwards and penetrates into the upper eyelid and she is going higher and higher. She got an indiscrete courage that she never had before. *Legiyam* (herbal electuary) started to take over her....After this Chettiyar couldn't be controlled even by fear. By cajoling her as "kannuKumari" he hugged her, attached his face with hers, also lips... Kumari by erupting "*Cha! Kattailaporavane!*" (an abusive word referring to a corpse, uttered during heightened anger) started to go/get away from his grip. As her dress slipped down on the floor and her leg got tangled in one end of her saree, she tripped and fell down. Chettiyar made her to stand. She lost her stiffness. The sense of dizziness increased more and more for her. She lost even the tendency to resist. She also started to play by giving a hug for a hug and kiss for a kiss. (86-87)

The focus on the lighting of the place, the physicality of the sexual drive of Chettiyar towards Kumari, the description of Kumari's vulnerability reveal the predominant reliance of the narrative on Kumari's body to induce the sensation of sensuousness or titillation. Clearly, in these descriptions women's body appear as a physical, sensational, titillating and even a voyeuristic object. However, in spite of their erotic characteristics, one could note a significant shift here from the premodern *shringaric* aesthetic. While in the *shringaric* aesthetics women's body in general is invested with an erotic signification be it the goddess or the demon, heroine or the villainous character, woman in a romantic situation or in anger, in the modern literary discourse there emerges a framework of discipline and discrimination for eroticism. Not all women are described erotically in it. While there is a preponderance of eroticism in the description of Charubala and Kumari and the sexual act in which they are involved, Parvathi the protagonist of *Parvathi B.A.* and the sexual acts of Radha-Paranthaman in *Rangoon Radha* and Nagavalli-Pazhani in *Kumarikottam* are devoid of eroticism. *Parvathi B.A.* tells the story of a young, educated, orphan girl who is involved in social reform with real societal commitment and high reformist ideals. Her ability and beauty attracts Parthiban, the only adopted son and heir of a wealthy local landlord. She falls in love with Kumar a poor, innocent but vibrant man committed to social

reformation and emancipation from the evils of caste and class discrimination. The story develops showing Parvathi and Kumar face the troubles and hardships caused by Parthiban boldly and successfully. They unite in the end putting Parthiban behind bars for his illegal activities. The following is the way Parvathi is introduced in the novel.

Parvathibai B.A. is a modern girl. She is brought up in an orphanage, secured a degree with the help of her intelligence, joined the Society of Rationalists due to her interest in propagation and became a person worthy of Parthiban's love. Parthiban has said that they can get marry in a year or two. But she did not become a Shakuntala! She kept Dushyantha in some distance. (15)

As against the description of Charubala and others one can note a complete absence of physicality in the introduction of Parvathi. The narrator introduces her as a "modern woman" hinting at her cultured character which is foregrounded by her educational qualification – B.A. stands as a signification for it, and her social concern her interest in doing propaganda and creating social awareness against class and caste discriminations. Her social background is explained through her condition of being an orphan. Though the description that "She did not become a Shakuntala. She kept Dushyanthan at some distance" seems to have a physical and sexual signification it actually refers to her awareness and astuteness and stands as an indication of her individuated, thinking self.

In the same way, in contrast to Charubala-Raghuraman's and Chettiyar-Kumari's, the description of Pazhani-Nagavalli's sexual intimacy is devoid of overt physicality. Body in general and the woman body in particular appears here just as a sign or an indication of the physical involved in their pleasure rather than an embodiment of the pleasure itself.

When Nagavalli was writing a letter to her friend Amsa about her victory in love, Pazhani was reading *Naidatham*. When he was reading the situation where Nalan and Thamayanthi involve in the games of love he felt like sharing the aesthetic beauty of the poem with Nagavalli. He came inside. Took the letter, read it and felt

happy. Also gave her a present. A usual present only. What else does he have with him? If Kuzhanthaivel Chettiyar had agreed for their marriage not just a diamond necklace, or different sorts of bangles he could have given many other things. But now the groom couldn't give the bride anything else but a garland of kisses. "It is enough (for me)" said that *sarasi* (the woman in love). In what way the diamond necklace that an old husband gives is equal to it? (72)

In spite of a focus on the physical, this description strikes a stark difference from that of Charubala-Raguraman's and Chettiyar-Kumari's. Though the act is very much physical in Nagavalli-Pazhani too, the description focuses mainly on the interior pleasure that the subject derives from unlike the others that predominantly focus on the physical act itself. More significantly, as against the latter, there is no focus on the body of the woman to exhibit that pleasure. While the description of the former is short and focuses on the interior pleasure of the physical relation, the description of Charubala-Raguraman and Chettiyar-Kumari's sexual intimacy is long, detailed and focuses on the condition of physicality itself: like Charubala's lips, forehead, cheeks, thighs, hip;; Kumari's clothes, hair, body, voice; or the physical drives and pleasures of Chettiyar.

What constitutes this difference in the narration? Firstly, when Charubala, Parvathi and Nagavalli are all educated, modern women involved in public life, there is a significant difference between Charubala and others at the plane of selfhood/subjectivity. This difference is produced in the story via the kind of objects associated with them. An enquiry into them would help us map the emergence of a new disciplinary apparatus via the feature of eroticism in the modern fictional narrative.

*In Kumarikottam* there is a comparison between two kinds of families. The first one lives in prosperity and takes pride in telling others that they have "bought a house, bought a piece of land, made *irattai* chain [a gold ornament worn around woman's neck], bought a new Nellore cow which gives two *padi* (a large measuring vessel for

liquids and grains) of milk” (74). However, in spite of the material prosperity they live worrying that “the house that they bought is just one-storeyed, that their land is not on the river banks, that the chain they made is just eight sovereigns, that the cow they bought is old” (74). In contrast, the conversation in the second kind of family - the family of Nagavalli and Pazhani - reveal their poverty. The first kind of family is in a position to buy properties whereas the second does not even have money to spend for their basic needs. In spite of the materialistic prosperity and a pride in it, while the first family is unhappy and discontented, the second one neither have the “pride nor the kind of apprehension” that the first possesses (74). The following conversation between Pazhani and Nagavalli - the representatives of conjugality – reveal this to us.

“Where is the chain (neck wear) Nagu?”

“In school.”

“Don’t play like this. The beauty of your neck has lessened without the chain.

Where is it?”

“I’ve pledged it with Sett Sitaram (Marwadi) for Rs. 25.”

“Why?”

“Mm... Just for fun. You say that the landlord’s son-in-law is naive. But you don’t even know that you’re going to become a father in another three months. Only by getting Rs. 25 on the chain I paid the last two months’ doctor’s bill. And for the remaining ten rupees I bought Bernard Shaw.” (75)

Pazhani, the husband indulges in social reformism without taking up a job. Nagavalli, his wife is the bread winner of the family. She works as a school teacher. Since their relationship is based on love, breaking caste and religious norms, she is often transferred from one village to another every six months and lives in a financially deprived condition. As the conversation reveals to us they do not even have

money to spare for the doctor's bill. However, even in the midst of such depravity, she buys the books of Bernard Shaw and takes pleasure in it.

Pazhani-Nagavalli's happy family is differentiated from and legitimized over the first kind of family which takes pride in buying properties and other materials. Such discrimination is done not merely in terms of the nature of the objects that they collect. Talking about the function of two collections of objects that are mentioned in the early Malayalam novels Udaya Kumar notes that they, "are distinguished from each other not merely in terms of the nature of the objects and of their interrelations, but also in terms of the subject's implication in them" (164). As he rightly observes,

The mode of enjoyment of objects in the new domestic interior involves a new set of acts on the subject's part, different from those which characterise the old notion of the collection of precious objects. The history of self-fashioning in the early novel is in some sense inseparable from the story of the differentiation of these objects and their collections. (164-165)

The land, gold, cattle and other material properties to which the first kind of family attaches itself to and the books of Bernard Shaw, that Nagavalli buys even in the midst of their deprived condition, make a delicate suggestion about the subject. The value that the first type of family attaches to certain kinds of objects is connected with the "traditional signs of wealth" which they see in gold and other material properties "the original and authentic sign of wealth and value". In contrast, Nagavalli's treasuring of Bernard Shaw's book over a gold chain indicate a sense of taste closely connected with reformist ethics and indicate the will to desire and take pleasure in objects that leads to the cultivation of a modern, progressive and reformist self.

The desire and pleasure that this subject feels in buying Bernard Shaw's books is discriminated from the craze of accumulating valuables and taking pride in it by the other one. Here one can see that the discrimination between the two types of families is based on their respective presence and absence of a will to desire, choose, value and

take pleasure in a specific kind of object over the other. The new pleasure that marks the love relationship of Pazhani and Nagavalli in the text – the pleasure of the interiority – is constituted primarily by this individuated selfhood which objects like Bernard Shaw’s book indicate for Nagavalli.

While the objects related to Nagavalli indicate her individuated selfhood, the objects associated with Charubala also function as an indication about the nature of her self but in a different way. Charubala as we saw from her introductory description is said to be wearing “decorative spectacles, decorative bag, ultra decorated boots, diamond earring, wrist watch in her hand, a thin gold chain around her neck” (173 *Annavin Sirukathaigal*) and her room is described as follows:

On teakwood cot, a bed and pillow wrapped with Tabela covers are kept. On the wall Nehru’s photo captioned with “Everyone has got their share in the five years plan” and an image of Bharata Mata. On the table Bharathi, Saratchandra, Shelley and Shakespeare! By the window a Buddha statue in little defected condition and a brand new Saibaba statue by that side. (174)

In addition to these Charubala is said to receive “a hut and an *erkalappai* (the rod connecting the plough with the yoke used for ploughing the land) made up of silver and coated with gold” (178) as a token of honour appreciating her service to the poor. In the case of Nagavalli, while the contrast between the set of objects that she values and that which is valued by the other family functions as the indicative of her ethical interiority and subjecthood, in the case of Charubala there is a contradiction between the very set of objects associated with her. One set of objects like decorative spectacles, bag, boots, diamond earrings, wrist watch, gold chain, teakwood cot, the bed and pillow wrapped with Tabela covers indicate not just her economic prosperity and sophistication but also her delectation of it and her interest in showing them off.

Another set of objects like Nehru’s and Bharat Mata’s pictures refer to her political leanings towards Congress. This also has a close connection to her communal identity. Non-Brahmin reformists in Tamil

Nadu often have criticised the Congress and Brahmin affiliation and their fake interest in social reforms. The next set of objects like books of Bharathi, Saratchandra, Shelley and Shakespeare and the statue of Buddha and Saibaba while actually signify an intellectual, progressive and reformist will, enters into a conflict with the first set of objects that denote a desire for and valuing of material wealth. While Nagavalli's will towards reform and progress is hinted clearly by her devaluing of gold and physical beauty for Bernard Shaw's book, the co-presence of the objects that denote material wealth and sophistication and those that denote reform create a kind of confusion regarding the self of Charubala. This confusion is settled via two significant actions on her part: 1) in spite of her claimed 'interests' in the poor she marries a wealthy and well-settled doctor from her own community and 2) how she causes the death of a young child due to her immature social reformism aimed only at attaining the target of her organisation, the fame that she would attain due to it and her vested personal interests. These two acts on her part settle the confusion created by the different sets of objects associated with her and reveals the absence of an ethical will that desire and value one set of objects over others. The motive of faking or duplicity that the contradiction among the different sets of objects imply is established to present in the character of Charubala who indulges in fake social services like "Removing the moss from the temple tanks and cleaning its steps", "Giving sermons (ithabathesam) for hut-dwellers immersed in ignorance and are ignorant of living cleanly and hygienically and teaching *kolaattam* (a popular group dance in which generally women move around striking short coloured sticks to the rhythm of a song) and other dances for poor children and by that creating pleasurable pastimes for many villages" (178) and so on. Even when she involves in certain activities like repairing the huts of poor villagers, she does them just for attaining the target of her organisation and for the sake of attaining fame. The duplicity of Charubala's social concern and the absence of genuine sense of social righteousness in her – i.e. a real awareness and critique of class and caste discrimination – has a discursive relation with her protruding neo-conservative Brahmin, Congress identity in the story which is indicated by the pictures of Nehru and Barat Mata.

In contrast to this, Parvathi, as it has been mentioned in the description, is an orphan and is someone who is genuinely interested in societal reforms. She is deeply aware of the class/caste discriminations in and is critical of them. She raises her voice for the poor and the needy and works for their welfare and rights. As a result of this she effortlessly throws away the offer of marriage extended by Parthiban, the adopted son of a wealthy local landlord who is involved in public life for fame and personal political gains and instead chooses Kumar, a poor jobless youth who is cheated of his only property -a little hut-by the land lord. He is someone with real interest for social transformation and the upliftment of the poor and needy. While Parvathi's references to/interest in Stalin or French revolution etc stand as an indication for her genuine libratory and revolutionary self, the books of Saratchandra, Bharathi, Shelley and Shakespeare and the statues of Buddha and Saibaba in Charubala's room, indicates only the duplicity of her claim of social concern and emancipation. The wedding gifts that Charubala receives like "A hut and an *erkalappai* (the rod connecting the plough with the yoke used for ploughing the land) made up of silver and coated with gold" (178) as a token of honour appreciating her service to the poor shows her duplicity and that of society of which she is a part. Both Charubala and the society are indifferent to the real emancipation of the poor but fake an interest in it only for fame and personal gains. It is thus against a poor man's continuous insistence that she won't be able to do it properly, she repairs his hut by force which later falls on his child's head and causes its death. This indicates the absence of an ethical will and its constitutive plane - the plane of interiority in her.

This absence has a discursive relation with how she is produced in the text and sanctions a narrative freedom to present her as a mere female body meant for the erotic satisfaction of male gaze. Due to the absence of interiority Charubala, just as the objects associated with her, remains an object - a mere female body - in the narrative without having any implication for the subject's interiority. It is this difference which constitutes the difference in the way Parvathi and Charubala are represented in the respective stories by the narrator.

The new discourse on pleasure that we noted in the context of the difference in the way the two families are represented in “Kumarikottam” sees pleasure as the product of the active will that the individuated self possesses which in turn enables it to discriminate between objects, identify their respective values and choose a legitimate one out of it. While the absence of desiring, choosing and valuing in the first kind of family reveals the absence of individuality in them, the absence of it along with the fake social commitment and concern in Charubala nullifies the individuality that the objects in her room propose for her. Thus, in spite of a pride over their materialistic prosperity the first kind of family leads a life of anxiety and discontentment. Since the sense of social righteousness and commitment enables the subject to recognise itself as a subject in this discourse, Charubala who lacks it remains an object along with the other objects in her room without any legitimate claims to selfhood and agency.

While the absence of ethical will in Charubala and the duplicity of the self that she fakes to possess provides a voyeuristic freedom for the narrator and establishes a disciplinary framework via the mode of discrimination in the way she is represented in the modern fictional universe, the case of Kumari stabilises this disciplinary framework in a different way. If the narrator’s voyeuristic freedom is justified by the absence of an ethical interiority in Charubala, in the case of Kumari, a young and innocent village girl who though does not possess any will to transform the society she does not fake any reformist self. This is evident in the narration after the titillating description of Chettiyyar-Kumari’s sexual act. The narration enters into a field of conflict between titillation and a sense of guilt.

After the erotic description of the sexual act with a focus on Kumari’s body, the crudeness, duplicity and selfishness of Chettiyyar are repeatedly mentioned in relation to the innocence and pitiable condition of Kumari. Chettiyyar’s desire for Kumari transforms from *kaadhala* and is de-promoted to become *ichchai*, *kaamam* and *moham*, *mohanthakaaram* and *veri* highlighting the crude physicality of his desire towards her.

It is a pleasurable night for him! But for her it is a night of deceit. She does not know that she has been scapegoated for his *kaamam*(lust) – she lost her self-control, he attained pleasure. He didn't even think that he attained her by doing trickery. He only felt satisfied that “anyway I got what I wanted”. Not just that. He also felt happy that he obtained the skillful lover in her in a very clever way. It is a pleasurable night, that's all he knew! She is a pretty girl, that's all he knew. He attained her, that's enough for him. (*Annavin Sirukathaigal* 88)

The elaboration of complete absence of conscience in Chettiyar functions as a bridge for the narration to jump from titillation to a sense of ethics. The conflict that the guilt of the erotic description of an innocent, undeserving girl of this crudity is handled by repeatedly highlighting the innocent, cheated and pitiable condition of Kumari who without knowing about the treachery “sleeps like a child” and wakes up in the morning “with scars on her cheek” to know her dreadful fate. When the innocence of Kumari brings in a conflict in the narration to oscillate from titillation to guilt to ethical consciousness, the duplicity or lack of interiority in Charubala justifies the narrative's bold, explicit, unrepentant voyeuristic freedom.

With the emergence of a new conception of selfhood during modernity in which the individual is perceived to have the responsibility in the development of interiority, in the modern novels there emerges a new ordering of things that discriminate the women characters without it in the narrative by producing their body as an object of eroticism and voyeurism. One can note a new function that the feature of eroticism attains in this ordering - as a force that discriminates and disciplines. This shift in the functions of the feature of eroticism in literature encompasses the complexities of the process of identity construction in the context of Indian/Tamil modernity where individuation and gendering happen as a combined and inseparable processes. It is precisely this characteristics of eroticism in modern fictional narrative that attracts/seduces the attention of gender studies towards it to investigate its new and subtler functions.

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# Performing Power: Play and Gender in Kodungallur *Bharani* Festival

Nimisha K. Jayan

*“All play means something.”*

*-Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens*

*Bharani* festival held in in KodungallurSree Kurumba Bhagavathy temple is notable for its animated features and theatricality. This unique festival has a curious history to claim. As in any performance, temple premises along with the performers undergo a huge transformation and the whole area is infused with vibes of energies that emanate from the vermilion costumes, thick streams of blood, heavy jingling of ceremonial swords, anklets, *aramani*(string of small bells worn in waist)and the turmeric powder. Held mainly as a religious ritual, *Bharani* has a significant socio-political connection with the history of Kodungallur. *Kaavutheendal* is a major ritual performed in *Bharani* festival during which thousands of devotees including *komarams* run around the temple wielding their ritual swords and sticks in wild frenzy.

One group of scholars believe *Bharani* to be a festival of resistance. But what we actually get to see mostly in here is submission. For instance, in the final stages of *Kaavutheendal* when the royal head sits in the *nilapaduthara* (platform built around a banyan tree)to give permission for *Kaavutheendal*,large numbers of devotees hustle up to bow before him and touch his feet to have blessings. Police and other authorities stand around him to control the crowd and what we see is that devotees are pushed and shoved out by these authorities.Still people swarm around him regardless of the ‘humiliating’ experience.

In the past, the royal head was the king and he ruled over the country. Even today, in the changed scenario, the mindset of these people remains unchanged. For them, their pilgrimage is incomplete without the blessings of the royal head. Here, royal head stands in power

almost equal to the goddess herself and it underlines the general belief that kings are the representatives of gods on earth.

There exists another temple called *Pulappadam*, about half kilometres east of the Kodungallur temple at Kaavilkadavu. In relation to Kodungallur temple it is called *keezhkavu* (lower grove) and Bhagavathy temple is known as *melkkavu* (upper grove). Here, we see a small raised platform without roofs and walls and there Bhagavathy is the deity. This temple belongs to Pulaya community. The main priest of the temple is known as *Vallon* and this title is given by Kodungallur *Thamburan*. There is a story behind this place. One day *Vallon* and his wife Chakki returned from their work to see a dark woman sitting in their hut. Upon inquiring she reveals that she is Kurumbakkali and is returning after the killing of demon king Darika. She expresses her wish to remain in *Pulappadam*. Pulaya community worshipped her for thirteen days with alcohol, meat, fish and grain powder and on fourteenth day she blessed them and said she will be present thereafter and she will be happy if they worship her using these very things. Devi went to the Pilappilly (Nair ancestral house) and asked them to inform *Thamburan*. And upon her wish, *Thamburan* built this temple and installed Pulaya as the priests. Even this story is a part of Dalit appropriation. In the past, when there occurred a need for accepting this temple, Savarna groups used divine elements to aid this appropriation. When the lower caste groups were uniting and becoming a power, Savarna always tried to bring them under Savarna rules. For this purpose, they made stories which explained and justified their actions as divine wish. Today Savarna society finds it difficult to allow for the importance given to this temple. In the past, this allowance might have emerged from a social crisis affecting Savarna domination. Today, they question the implausibility of such a story and feels if goddess can reach *Pulappadam*, there is no need for her to rest there as Kodungallur temple was just a few distance away from *Pulappadam*. When *keezhkavu* began to be famous and made more income, a coffer from *melkkavu* was placed in *keezhkavu*. Then, as per an agreement made between the then *Vallon* and *Devaswom*, this custom was changed and instead *keezhkavu* submitted fifty one rupees every year to the *melkkavu*. This is still practiced (Chandran 58).

This again points to the Savarna attempts to have control over the *keezhkavu*. On the day of *kaavutheendal*, *Vallon* bows before Thamburan with offerings and adorns himself with the sword, *paricha* (round shield), bangle, chain, silk and stick. He wears a cap similar to that of royal head and with all adornments circambulates the temple three times and pays homage to Devi. After this ceremony, he seats himself in a raised platform about ten centimeters from the ground. This custom is known as *vallonthattukayari*. All the devotees who reach *keezhkavu* ascends this platform and receive his blessings and submit offerings. Only after *kaavutheendal*, he descends from the seat.

On this day, *Vallon* becomes a shadow image of the royal head. He is only an instrument in this play of savarna patronage. He enjoys power and fame just for one day and this again asserts their superiority. The gradual losing of importance and place of *Keezhkavu* points to a significant period in the history of Kerala: the rise of Brahmanical hegemony in eighth century and the subsequent marginalisation of local groups.

During *kaavutheendal*, the priests known as *adikal* comes out of the inner sanctum. *Thamburan* gives long sticks known as *mudravadikal* to these adikals and Nair chieftains. This symbolizes the ancient incident that after the battle the *Thamburan* gave weapons to the soldiers of her battle as a representative of goddess. (Chandran 54). Then, accompanied by the young heirs of royal family and the chiefs of *onnukureayiramyogam*; an association of Nair members in Kodungallur which literally means 'an association of one minus one thousand', he seats himself in the chair specially ornate with silk on the *nilapaduthara* of eastern Side of the temple. Then, he opens the silk umbrella signalling the permission to start the *kaavutheendal*. Along with the *thamburan* we can see police men, Member of Legislative Assembly, District Collector and other eminent personalities on that *thara*. Thus we see political power, administrative power and royal power combined in this festival.

The idea of 'pollution' is very much alive in this festival. The word '*teendal*' literally means 'to touch' but by cultural assimilation it has come to acquire the added meaning of 'to pollute'. Even before touching the temple the pollution takes place when they enter the temple. The barrier existing out there is rather a psychological one than being a

physical boundary. The wall around the temple thus becomes a boundary for the pilgrims and in *Bharani* this is surpassed ceremoniously. Arnold Van Gennep in his book *The Territorial Passage* opines that “the prohibition against entering a given territory is therefore intrinsically magico-religious. It has been expressed with the help of milestones, walls, and statues in the classical world, and through more simple means among the semi civilized”(Gennep28).

A transformation of the whole place is evident. The factual world gets transformed into a spiritual realm and for the spectators it is a pilgrimage. They travel far, spend sleepless nights and neglecting the scorching heat of summer stays at temple for worship. They have the anxiety of a borrowed space but the religious fervour and their blind devotion to the goddess make them forget their pain and suffering. Gennep observes:”a rite of spatial passage has become a rite of spiritual passage. The act of passing no longer accomplishes the passage; a personified power ensures it through spiritual means” (Gennep31). Therefore, to cross the threshold is to unite ourselves with a new world. This space is significant as it witnesses an important phase in the life of the individual included. Entering the space of temple thus marks a new phase in the life of the devotee. Through this act in his psyche, he is demolishing the walls constructed by the hegemonic powers and entering a sacred space which is prohibited to his mattered body, which is a carrier of his caste and gender distinction.

After *kozhikkallumoodal* ceremony, the presence of Kodungallur Valiya Thamburan accompanied by his family is a must in the *balikkalpura* in east fort to measure the rice grain for *uchapooja*. After *uchapooja* he goes back. In the evening, till the *deeparadhana* is over *thamburan* has to be present in *balikkalpura* (Chandran 57). These festivals, in reality, serve to assert upper class superiority and indispensability. Upon close examination, we realize that the customs and rules of these festivals are carefully designed in such a way as to ensure the Brahmanical hegemony.

We see some instances of *komaram* posing for photographs. Here, they know they are ‘playing’ and are conscious of the attention they attract. The whole of the atmosphere, their costumes, jewellery and the

accessories as swords and anklets heighten the elements of 'play' and they are made into believe that they are goddess incarnate. Devotees in their delirium do serious injury to their bodies, but through self-inflicted torture, the expression that we find on their faces is that of pleasure and content and not of pain. Thus, pain for them is a path to divine existence. Our body is the reminder of human mortality and triviality and by trying to deny this protected body, they try to be in communion with the divine.

Why do we play? Johan Huizinga unmistakably gives the answer: For fun. But he himself states that it involves much more. Huizinga defines play in following terms: "Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is "different" from "ordinary life"(Huizinga34).

In naming his book *Homo Ludens* which literally means Man, The Player, Huizinga asserts the essential play nature of human beings. Huizinga constructs his whole concept of play around his conviction that "civilization arises and unfolds in and as play"(Huizinga 39). Huizinga finds play at work in language, myth, and ritual. The relation between them is complicated and evolving. Yet the fact that they constitute the basis for human existence by lending meaning to his otherwise absurd life remains undeniable. He states: "Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play. Wisdom and philosophy found expression in words and forms derived from religious contests. All are rooted in the primaevial soil of play" (Huizinga39).

Rituals create a separate world parallel to the ordinary world which makes sense to only those who are willing to believe in it and step into that world. Hence it becomes play- like. In man's persisting endeavors to find his actual place in this shifting world, language, myth and ritual are his trusted companions. "In giving expression to life man creates a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature"(Huizinga39). In myth, primitive man "seeks to account for the world of phenomena by grounding it in the Divine"(Huizinga39).

Play also permeates poetry, which Huizinga regards as its purest cultural expression. Poetry creates a new world separate from mundane life. He notes: "All antique poetry is at once and the same time ritual, entertainment, artistry, riddle making, doctrine persuasion sorcery soothsaying prophecy and competition" (Huizinga 120). We realize that play is not useless; it has sense, utility and hence a relevant place in the scheme of life. Also play is not only a source of fun and mirth. In its dangerous form play can put us in pressure, it can drive us mad, and it can even put our life at stake. Whether we are aware or unaware of, whether we want it or not "we can deny seriousness but not play" (Huizinga 38). Richard Schechner in his book *Future of Ritual* explores the Hindu concept of Maya- Lila and views performance as the projection of multiple realities inherent in human persona. Schechner notes: "Performance is ritualized behaviour conditioned/permeated by play" (Schechner 99). Play does not mean folly or non-seriousness. Play can be very serious affair as we see in rituals.

That is, from the Indian perspective, "Playing is what the universe consists of" (Schechner 34). He opines that there is a marked difference in the approach of western and Indian concept to play. In India, it is a positive, divine and creative process whereas western society tends to attach a low status to "play".

Schechner develops his concept of "play" further into "dark play". He argues: "Dark play subverts order, dissolves frames, breaks its own rules, so that the playing itself is in danger of being destroyed..." (Schechner 36). The devotees of *Bharani* are involved in this kind of "dark play" where they are simultaneously their real selves and the goddess herself. This shifting to and fro between these two identities can be conscious/unconscious. The play may start from a conscious level and enters the threshold of unconscious dark play in the zenith of religious fervour and ecstasy. This transportation to another existence is possible through the spiritual devotion of the performer involved. Thus, he/she becomes something "other" in the heightened state of emotional intensity the devotees might be experiencing different levels of play as after they reach the culmination point of ecstasy; they either lose consciousness or come back to their serene state. We often

seekomaram in delirious state with uncontrollable energy and suddenly they seem to cool off.

In this festival, the goddess enters into a battle against a male opponent who poses a threat to the chastity of women. In Kerala, the myth is that a demon named Darika received a boon from Lord Siva that he could not be killed by any man. Blind with power, he began harassing men and raping women. Lord Siva then created Bhadrakali to kill Darika. She with her demons and ghosts went to the battlefield and killed the Darika. One group of scholars believe that the *Bharani* Festival is the representation of this legend where thousands of men and women in primitive form clad in red war-dress with swords race around the temple recreating the impression of a battlefield.

Thus, Bhadrakali stand as a symbol of motherly love, affection and protection to their devotees and at the same time, dreadful and violent to their enemies. In them, two contradictory facets of nature are contained, which must be rightly balanced, as procreation and destruction are essential in ensuring the continuity of life.

As in other social dramas, “the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (Turner 77). According to Schechner, “Any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted or displayed is performance” (Schechner 36). Butler argues that “Gender ought not to be construed as stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 59). Our identity or ‘self’ is not something we are born with, but something born out of a complex process of recognitions, comparisons, exclusions, demarcations, divisions, alignments and re-alignments. We identify ourselves within a shifting field of images defined by language, and imbued with power relations.

*Bharani* celebrates the valour and energy of womanhood. Here the experience is close to primitive being without considerable restrictions. They are free to move freely and are not concerned of female propriety.

This freedom to an extent is granted by the narrative that forms the backdrop of *Bharani* festival. For the devotees it is the celebration of the triumph of goddess Kali. She is fierce, demonic and uncontrollable. She is energy and vitality and at the same time a loving mother to her devotees. This duality is present in the nature of her devotees as well. The devotees as well as the oracles are easily provoked as they are in an ongoing communion with some other-worldly energy.

Judith Butler explains performance as “not a singular act or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production” (Butler 95). Nowadays, we see that male oracles outnumber female oracles and they are clad in beautiful glittering silk sarees and adorned with heavy gold jewellery. Thus the male body is decorated and adorned projecting female identity. There is no attempt to hide the masculine identity as some *komaram* retain their moustache and beards. This ambiguity or erasure of sex is a unique feature of *Bharani* festival. *Bharani* also lends space to the transgender groups and for them this transformation is relatively easy.

Though not directly linked to *Bharani*, we see certain identifiable elements in *Ramlila*, a Ramayana based performance staged during *Dussehra* festival in North India. The first obvious similarity between these festivals lies in the fact that these two fests in essence celebrate the triumph of good over evil. But *Ramlila* is a celebration of the upper class sectors of the society whereas *Bharani* is a subaltern festival down to the core. In *Ramlila* performance, Maharaja is an indispensable factor as *Lila* cannot begin and end without the sacred presence of Maharaja. Maharaja is seen as the representative of Lord Shiva and he acts as one of the characters of *Ramlila*. He interacts with Lord Rama as if he is the contemporary of Rama and thus enters into the performance. About *Ramlila* Anuradha Kapur comments in her essay “Actors, Pilgrims and Kings”, “Here is a rare example of political power being buttressed by theatrical spectacle” (Kapur 209). What appeals to the common man is the vivid spectacle and the entertainment it provides. The power relations and hierarchy it generates in the process are hidden by clever technicalities.

In *Ramlila* towards the final day Maharaja invites gods to feast in palace. Such a practice is outside the scope of narrative, but it is allowable as both Rama and Maharaja are kings and it is seen as a feast of friendly royal families.

Schechner notes, “The Maharaja is the causer of the Ramnagar *Ramlila*, but he is caused, or kept in his special existence, by the *Ramlila*. The *Ramlila* and the Maharaja are in a symbiotic relationship...” (Schechner210).

Lord Rama, who is believed to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is playing his part in this human world. He was born with a goal and being born as a human, he suffers the tribles and tribulations that a mortal being has to undergo in this world and with the killing of Ravana, the demon king, and Rama ascends to heaven. He has played his part which is far from joyfulness and happiness. The atmosphere is usually festive and free with the audience whistling and commenting as the story proceeds. The most unique feature of *Ramlila* is that it is not singularly acted on stage. Anuradha kapur notes, “During the course of the performance, there is a double transformation of the space within the city, as it first transforms from a city to theatre and then to mythic geography...”(Kapur 209).

Anita Singh in her essay, “Staging Gender in *Ramlila*”, maintains that *Ramlila* becomes a space for celebration of Indian masculinity. Analyzing the gender hierarchies in *Ramlila* is in another way exploring gender relations in the Hindu epic Ramayana. Ramayana celebrates the masculinity of Rama, who is hailed as *uthamapurusha*, the ideal man. But the ideals embodied by Lord Rama is critiqued and questioned by later generations; especially the way he treated his loyal, obedient wife Sita. She is put to number of tests to prove her chastity and finally a fully pregnant Sita is exiled to forest to have birth there and raise two kids all alone. This image of Rama is in stark contrast to his popular image as *maryadhapurusha*. Yet this is dismissed as just a part of Lila of the gods, everything is predestined and predetermined. Sita in *Ramlila* is the epitome of the Indian concept of ideal woman, who suffers and accepts her destiny without complaining. She remains loyal to her

husband till her last breath.”The epic story functions as a legitimation of the existing power relations, customs and cultural values. Overall, the traits sought in every Indian man/woman are foregrounded in the epical characters” (Singh121).

Anita notes that even the language is biased. Language, as we know is a powerful tool of manipulation and it serves its purpose in *Ramlila* performance. Female role players use an invented repertoire of language that endorses the hegemonic ideology of civil notion of the norms by referring to husbands with superior titles as *prannath* (Lord of life, husband), *swami* (master) or Maharaja and referring to her own female self as *dasi* (servant).”Language may be considered as an ongoing means by which gender differences are circumscribed and perpetuated. Different dialects are prescribed for the male and female voices” (Singh117). There exists another female character, Surpanaka, the sister of demon king Ravana who serves as a foil to the character of Sita. She is the antithesis of Sita and projects the ideals of sexuality and is immoral, outspoken and undisciplined. She is punished for being the outlaw, the punishment that affects her sexuality. Her body is mutilated, her nose and breasts are cut off but interestingly her punisher goes unpunished. This is against the Hindu belief that severely criticizes any kind of violence against women.

In *Ramlila*, the role of Sita is played by a boy as the villagers believe that if a girl acts the role of Sita, no person will marry her in real life. While performing, she will have to perform the scenes of marriage and this is not desirable as *Ramlila* performing is close to real life existence. Anita notes that nobody wants to perform the role of Surpanaka that shows the Indian society’s attitude towards the outspoken women even today.

Victor Turner asserts that most rites and rituals tend to occur in a “liminal” space of heightened intensity separate from routine life, much like a dramatic theatre performance. Both festivals offer an interesting site where histories and narratives, cultures and sub-cultures intersect, interact and complement. Meaning is drawn from a rich storehouse of myths and folklores and the constant interaction of

polyphonic voices within these festivals serve to democratize these performances. Here, *Bharani* and *Ramlila* are elevated from being merely a festival to the life-force of a generation.

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# **Identity Shifts in Transnational Lives: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke***

Elizabeth Renu

Amitav Ghosh, in his second novel in the Ibis trilogy, *River of Smoke*, delves into the opium trade operations conducted by the British and the other foreign merchants in China in the nineteenth century. The novel highlights the plights of the people entangled in the opium business and the hybridisation of cultures that occur in Canton which is portrayed as the trade hub of China. The success of the Indians involved in the opium trade is rendered ambivalent as it is at the cost of health, family, and home. This paper tries to explore the ways in which the protagonist, Bahram Modi undergoes an identity shift in the transnational space of Canton.

Steven Vertovec, on the basis of his research on transnationalism aptly states that transnationalism is a cross-border movement (“Transnationalism and Identity” 575-576). Amitav Ghosh’s novel *River of Smoke* has a rich variety of characters from various cultural and geographical backgrounds, who get displaced from their homelands and whose primary motive is trade with China. In the year 1838, three ships were caught in a raging storm near Canton- the Anahita, owned by Bahram Modi, a Parsi opium trader from Bombay, the Redruth, owned by Fitcher Penrose, a botanist trying to collect rare species of plants from China and the Ibis carrying convicts and indentured labourers. The convicts Neel Rattan, a Bengali Zamindar and Ah Fatt a criminal from Canton, escaped from the ship along with a couple of lascars. The story traces the lives of these principal characters in Canton within the context of domination and resistance. The plot is set in Fanqui town, the area used by the foreigners to trade with the local Chinese traders. The merging of different cultures takes place in Fanqui town and in the words of Robin Chinnery, a gay Eurasian painter in the novel;

...Fanqui-town is like a ship at sea, with hundreds - no, thousands- of men living crammed together in a little sliver of a space. I do

believe there is no place like it on earth, so small and yet so varied, where people from the far comers of the earth must live, elbow to elbow, for six months of the year...Everywhere you look there are khidmatgars, daftardars, khansamas, chuprassies, peons, durwans, khazanadars, khalasis and laskars. (Ghosh 185)

Ghosh provides a detailed account of the murky opium trade operations- the crabs and the kitchen boats, the newly formed families of the traders, the formation of Chinese names, the nicknames given collectively to foreigners by the Chinese, the opium addicts, the cracking down of the opium business by the High Commissioner Lin Zexu and how the lives get affected in the multi-cultural and opportunistic Canton. The European powers, especially the British, advocating the rubrics of free trade and internationalization of commerce, attempted to sell opium in the Chinese markets which was in huge demand there. Initially the Chinese authorities turned a blind eye to the opium trade but by the 1830s when the well-being of the people and the local economy were clearly compromised, steps were taken to put a stop to the import of opium. The corruption of the Chinese officers and the strange practice of exempting the foreigners from having to obey the Chinese law prevented the curbing of opium trade. The problem of the Chinese administration was further escalated by the mutual profiteering of the Indian and Chinese merchants.

Bahram Modi is portrayed as a very successful Indian businessman in *Fanqui* town. As Bahram's story begins, his ship, Anahita carrying tons of opium chests, lies offshore from Canton after a storm and he expects some leniency from the Chinese administration regarding the opium trade. Bahram had arrived in China years before to test his luck in the opium trade though the pioneers in the opium trade were from Britain and America. Bahram was an outsider, an Indian trader trying to compete with these long-established traders to supply the drug. He would leave his family in Bombay, his wife and children for months and come to Canton for doing the business. After making a profit he would return to his native place thereby shuttling between his two homes, one in Bombay and the other in Canton.

“Transnationalism implies a process in which formations that have traditionally been perceived as restricted to well- defined political and geographical boundaries have transgressed national borders, producing new social formations.”(Khan 2). Bahram embraced the Chinese socio-cultural practices and his identity simultaneously straddled the cultures of India and China. He engaged in self- critical distancing from his own culture and enabled a reconstruction of his identity, his self. As Caglar argues, people who live transnational lives “weave their collective identities out of multiple affiliations and positionings and link their cross-cutting belongingness with complex attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, peoples, places and traditions beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-states.” (“Constraining Metaphors”610).The voluntary or forced movement of the people across the world lead to intermixture and hybridisation of cultures. In the novel when the characters settle down in Canton for different purposes, they experience the constant undermining of older certainties and foundations of identity. In the unfamiliar space of the Manchu Empire, Bahram discovers his other self: “In Canton, stripped of the multiple wrappings of home, family, community, obligation and decorum, Bahram had experienced the emergence of a new persona, one that had been previously dormant within him: he had become Barry Moddie” (Ghosh 52). The name of an individual suggests his fixity in family, nation and ethnicity. While Barrie Moddie is “confident, forceful, gregarious, hospitable, boisterous and enormously successful” (52) in Canton, when he returns to Bombay his other self would be veiled and “Barry would become Bahram again, a quietly devoted husband, living uncomplainingly within the constraints of a large joint family” (52). He had a son Ah Fatt born out of an illicit relationship with a boat woman, Chi Mei whom he met during his early years in Canton. She was his companion in his loneliness and was heartbroken in her death when he was away in Bombay. Even in his last days when he was in a state of delirium and depression, he imagined Chi Mei was with him, consoling him which no one else could do, not even his wife Shireenbai with whom he had a strained relationship. He took immense pride in being invited to the Committee of the Chamber which controlled and regulated the trade in Fanqui town. The transition from

being a poor, unworthy son-in-law of the affluent Mistris family to a wealthy, highly regarded leader of the *Achhas* (the Indian traders in Canton) was a fulfillment of dream for Bahram. The transnational subjects are often bilingual, straddle different cultures, maintain homes in two countries and pursue social, economic and cultural interests which require their presence in both the countries. "...in the space of transnationalism, cultures undergo a dialectical interplay and create interlayered and mixed identities." (Khan 108) The identity of Bahram undergoes striking shifts throughout the novel, shifts between original identity associated with his homeland and claimed identity as the borders of homeland blur or disappear with movement and displacement. "...Identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories, et cetera." (Malkki 281). Bahram was well respected and loved by his employees and his occasional outbursts were not taken personally by any of them. He was also popular among all the wealthy Chinese merchants. When some of those merchants were arrested by the authorities as a warning for the foreign traders, the only person who was really worried for them was Bahram which indicates that he was a man of conscience. For Bahram, Canton was an essential part of his life- apart from becoming a successful businessman "... in Canton he had always felt most alive- it was here that he had learnt to live" (Ghosh 347). He escaped from his dominant in-laws, made friends, wealth and social acceptance which were denied by his homeland. "If not for Canton he would have lived his life like a man without a shadow" (348).

Ghosh makes Bahram's story movingly complex and consistently maintains a humane interest in this character who is a privileged merchant accepted by his British colleagues but always aware of his colonial roots. As a Bombay trader Bahram was aware that he would not enjoy the high and mighty principles of British justice and that the exemption from prosecution was reserved only for White Men by the Cantonese authorities. He was aware that his hands had been tainted when he said that he was only a link in the supply chain of opium. The readers can understand the predicament of Bahram from the ways he relates to the English, to the Chinese, and to his own community.

Being a trader in Canton for several years, Bahram ignored any moral compunction he felt about his participation in the opium trade. In the novel, he disregarded the suggestion of Charles King (the only foreign trader who sympathizes with the Chinese authorities) to agree to the ban on opium for financial safety. The readers can notice Bahram negotiating with his sense of morality when he replies to Napoleon who questioned the ethics of opium-trade. "Opium is like the wind or the tides: it is outside my power to affect its course. A man is neither good nor evil because he sails his ship upon the wind. It is his conduct towards those around him—his friends, his family, his servants—by which he must be judged. This is the creed I live by" (175). He was stressed when an arrest warrant was issued against his name and it escalated when he learned that the British, in a strategic move, had decided to surrender their stock of opium to the Chinese authorities.

Bahram, who was hoping for a change in the attitude of the Chinese government, became devastated when he learned that Allow, the drug trafficker, had been beheaded. Allow's execution was a warning for the opium traders in Canton. Bahram was driven to severe anxiety and distress, haunted by the guilt of introducing Allow to opium when he was a little boy. The Parsi New Year, Navroze, is the day of purification and cleansing, the day when the dark shadow of Ahriman (evil) is driven from the mind and the house. Bahram's mind became greatly agitated on that day and remorse takes over him when he tells his friend Zadig Bey, "I gave my soul to Ahriman... and it was all for nothing. Nothing" (520). He had become a victim to opium addiction and his sense of guilt and hopelessness led him to suicide by drowning himself. The readers feel sympathy for Bahram Modi, the challenges and misfortunes endured by this character caught against the whirlwinds of forces beyond his control.

Examining the transnational experience of Bahram Modi we understand that in the alien space of Canton, it was his sheer determination and will power that made him a successful businessman though it was at the cost of his life. Amitav Ghosh highlights the issues and complexities of the transnational characters and how their identities undergo constant transformation. He treats his characters as individuals

moulded and confronted by their cultural and socio-political environment. The characters encounter a new world, a new cultural paradigm while trying to preserve their own individual identities. In the words of Shashi Tharoor, this novel is in fact "...a monumental tribute to the pain and glory of an earlier era of globalization, an era when people came into contact and collision, intermixing costumes, customs, convictions, consonants, couplings and cash...." (*The Washington Post*). In this way, *River of Smoke* portrays an early era of globalization across a different landscape, where bonding takes place among people of various cultures, customs and languages and their lives get transformed in many ways.

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# **Body, Power and Inhumanity: A Biopolitical Analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go***

Liz Mary Antony

Biopower operates through numerous techniques of power which function in order to subjugate bodies thereby obtaining control over life and death. The body is a product of knowledge and power. Michel Foucault argues that power is implemented on and from bodies. It is something which is subjugated and made subject to. Giorgio Agamben re-established Foucault's notion of biopower. Biopower should be understood not only as the power of life but also as the power of death. But the capacity of power cannot be limited to death. He created the concept of bare life which is equivalent to lifeless existence. This paper is an overview on the concept of biopower put forward by Michel Foucault and later developed by Giorgio Agamben. An attempt is made to study the Japanese born British writer Kazuo Ishiguro's dystopian science fiction novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005). The novel brings to light, how human clones are exploited under the facade of organ donation. The writer communicates how modern medical science ignores humanity and drags human souls to the stage of "bare life". The prime focus of this paper is to understand the concept put forward by Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben. Death has been politicized by the modern medical world. So it becomes imperative to examine the profound consequences of capitalization of medicine on human life.

Biopower and biopolitics are varying terms used by several writers in distinct ways. The concept of biopower was proposed by Michel Foucault to elucidate the regime of power that emerged from 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, causing a fundamental reversal of the principle of power's operation. He claimed that sovereign power operated on the principle of the right to commit its subjects to death in order to enhance the strength of the sovereign. Foucault's book *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* can be identified as the first book which discusses the concept

of biopower. Later it became an inspiration for theorists/ philosophers like Giorgio Agamben, Wolfe and so on. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault found “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of biopower” (1). Biopower means subjugation, manipulation and exerting power by those who possess political sovereignty on the bodies of local masses. Foucault states that “production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power” (1).

Foucault used this term biopower/ biopolitics differently in different contexts. His flexibility in using this concept resulted in the creation of different meanings connected to this notion. There is biopolitics in green studies, biopolitics in gender, biopolitics in race and so on. Biopolitics seeks to find answers to these questions: Who determines life and death? Is life a result of any political thought or action? How can one define life? Who has the power to control it? Biopolitics put forward a specific politics where biological existence of human beings depends on biopolitical action. It implies that government can control natural and health sciences, through which they can exert power over its citizens. So administration of life has become a pivotal characteristic in this power operative world. Foucault connects this with a thought put forward by Aristotle. Aristotle saw man as a living animal with an additional capacity of political existence. Foucault revised this to acknowledge that modern man is an animal whose politics places his own existence as a living being in question. Foucault had keen interest in investigating the relations of power and knowledge. He found that power is the only perception which abides in individuals. Power exists only when it is put into action. A large number of people can be controlled by smaller number of humans if power is put into action. It is “always a way of acting upon an acting subject” (Foucault, “The Subject and Power” 220). Power can be constituted through knowledge and accepted forms of scientific truth. And the practice of these truths affects reality.

Power is generally measured in terms of law and sovereignty. But is it possible to fix power by laws or institutions? Power means certain

practices through which human beings or their actions can be controlled. When we hear the term 'power', immediately we think about a powerful social community, a government or a master. But, Foucault stressed the importance of relationships of power like human relationships, sexual relationships or economic relationships. All human concordance is controlled by a power structure, but this power varies according to situations. Power represents supremacy. "It is a total structure of actions brought to bear possible actions: it incites, it induces, it seduces. . ." (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 220). Power exerted during sexual relationship is not the same as governmental sovereignty. In this case we can generalize that Foucault saw biopower as an expository apparatus with certain set of practices, which seeks to change human life.

A ruler can capture things time, bodies and even life. This kind of power remained unaltered for a long time. In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault came up with a new definition of biopower, where he focused on the politics of human body. He saw body as an element on which new kind of political struggles could emerge. These struggles were based on right to live, control over body, health and sexual needs. Biopower works in the form of an understanding of prohibition and restriction of rights of the people. Within the realms of biopower, we can call biopolitics as the strategies adopted for the problematization of human life over certain forms of knowledge, authority and practices.

Foucault's desire to break from the sphere of sovereign power was successfully implemented by an Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. He took up Foucault's analysis and re-established it by creating deep interpretations and intricate conceptual apparatus. Through *Homo Sacer* (1995) Agamben extends the concept of biopower to a different level. The concept of bare life/ life equal to death was the central thought in Agamben's philosophy. For him all sorts of power rest ultimately on the ability of one to take decision regarding the life of another. It is this concept that he studies through *Homo Sacer*. Agamben created a distinction between bare life (zoé) and political existence (bíos). When biological life subjects enter into the scenario of sovereign power, biopolitics occur. 'Zoé' constitutes natural existence, whereas 'bíos'

results in the entry of humans into the world of political framework. This binary division between *zoé* and *bíos* is explained through the metaphor of 'Homo Sacer'. Homo Sacer is an obscure figure from Roman law, who was banned from his political and legal community. Because of his crimes, he was reduced to bare life. *Zoé* and *bío* are marked as an integral part of biopolitics. Agamben uses the example of Nazi concentration camps to explain this lifeless existence of bare life; which is nothing less than thanatopolitics. Biopower thus can be understood as a power of life and also a power of death. Under the light of thanatopolitics Agamben clearly specifies that there is no secure borderline which separates democracy and dictatorship.

Agamben's concept of power was different, yet the main thought proposed by Michel Foucault was never displaced completely. Catherine Mills points out that, "Agamben's idea of politics as the sphere of pure gesture. . . that divides and articulates identity/ difference, life/law, fact/norm, culture/nature, human/animal or *bíos/zoé* and so on" (133). Human beings and their lives are connected to such divisions controlled under biopolitical sovereignty. This is required to create a happy life or "form of life" in which humanity lives in the perfection of its power.

Biopolitical interventions were mainly executed by the state during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today biopolitics means much more than what it was before. Now the control of state over this concept has reduced, in fact competence of decision making is decided by autonomous consumers. On the other hand Agamben's analysis on biopower/ politics largely depends on the structure of states. The study of biopolitics is not only meant for those who were denied of legal rights and their right to live but it is meant for all those who were excluded from their social rights both explicitly and implicitly.

Agamben's concept of bare life can not only be considered as a life equal to death. The notion of bare life is a diagnostic tool which entails the adoption of intricate conceptual apparatus. This leads us towards the question whether this tool fulfills the political, social and ethical aims of sovereignty. Foucault believed that bio-political and sovereign power had right over life and death. This means it has the power to cause death or to let live. For Agamben democracy was always

in question. He knew that democracy had the power to challenge sovereignty. But sovereignty gave rise to some dreadful situations every now and then, overcoming democracy.

Agamben argues that death is not the limit of power but it is only one of the dimensions on which it operates. Biopower enters our life in different forms like rules, bureaucracy, governmental decision etc. Modern ways of living has extended the arena of biopower to different stumping grounds. Countries control life and death through their own rules. Today these rules are exerted in different domains of life as population control, surrogacy, birth control rules etc. Other than an autocrat, decision makers can be a scientist, a doctor or a priest. Such kind of biopolitics is another form of thanatopolitics- a politics of administrating death.

Kazuo Ishiguro is a Japanese born British writer. He is known for his works that are preoccupied with various themes. *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is a thoughtful and haunting dystopian science fiction, which takes us to the world of dehumanization. The plot is set in the background of genetic engineering and associated technologies in the medical world. *Never Let Me Go* is narrated by Kathy.H, representing her past life and the story is set in late 1990s in a fictional place called Hailsham. The entire plot is filled with strangeness. The reason for this ambiguity lies in the fact, that the characters are meant to donate their organs till death to provide a healthy life to an outside world. Ishiguro's characters are human clones and they are the epitome of humanness living a life already sketched by someone else. We can see a world outside Hailsham looking up to these human clones because the external world can survive only through their organs. These students from Hailsham create false attempts to live a life equal to normal human beings. But they were unsuccessful in their attempts to escape from their fate. They even believe a fabricated story that if two donors love each other they can put on hold their donation. Kathy becomes a carer of the donors, a job which one does before starting organ donation. Kathy takes care of her friends as they "complete" their organ donation. Towards the end we can see Kathy completely isolated and left alone without her dear ones, waiting to "complete" her own life.

Medicine is not just science. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault has recognized it as a high form of culture:

To those who study it, it gives access to knowledge of great importance since it concerns health and the preservation of life. Thus, medicine was not conceived simply as a technique of intervention, relying, in cases of illness on remedies and operations. It was also supposed to define, in the form of a corpus of knowledge and rules, a way of living, a reflective mode of relation to oneself, to one's body, to food, to wakefulness and sleep, to the various activities and to the environment. (3: 100)

Science and medicine are meant to safeguard human life. But on the contrary, a body undergoing medical treatment is under the control of physicians. They take decisions and we are forced to depend on them. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* manifests a group of human clones whose life is designed for medical clients from an outside world. Donors are created for donations, which they blindly obey till they die. A reader can never see them objecting against their fatal atrocity even though they are talented and educated.

*Never Let Me Go* is an amalgam of various themes. But the most important theme of this work is the use of biopower, and how this power is executed on human clones and how it is altered for the benefit of the sovereign community. In *Volume 1* Michel Foucault identifies biopower as the "administration of bodies" (140). Here power rests in the hands of normal humans who live outside Hailsham. Biological distinction among the population is an actuality. Such differences are seen when we observe diseases in different regions. These disparities create a barrier among the people itself. Biological differences are not based on nationality but mostly under the name of health. How racial discriminations are formed based on colour is a prominent example. A similar discrimination is exerted over the clones by forcing them to donate their organs and by denying them a social life:

The basic idea behind the possible theory was simple . . . since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on

with his or her life. This meant, at least in theory, you'd be able to find the person you were modeled from. That's why, when you were out there yourself- in the towns, shopping centres, transport cafés- you kept an eye out for "possibles"- the people who might have been the models for you and your friends. (Ishiguro 137)

It is clear from these lines why students from Hailsham were denied their right to avoid "possibilities". This is a visible reflection of biopolitical racism forcefully allocated on the subordinated class.

The human clones from Hailsham are kept aloof from a normal world. These children were brought up by their guardians. Their childhood remained as a training period for them to mould themselves for organ donations. Kathy once discusses with Tommy "how one day we'll start giving donations. I do not know why. . ." (Ishiguro 31).

These children spend their childhood in anticipation about organ donation. They were not fortunate enough to receive the love of parents instead they were surrounded by guardians who were guarding and preparing them for organ donation.

One of the biopolitical strategies was concerned with the issues of illness and health. Issues related to illness have been an exemplary field for the individual and consolidated vague functioning and create a barrier between normal and the therapeutic. The biopolitical field grew from wellbeing to usual health checkups, to vaccinations, to the advancement of scientific machines for scanning and surgery. Ishiguro's fiction advanced much ahead to a level where humans are cloned to increase the longevity of normal humans who are rich enough to afford organ transplant. Clones are subordinated for the medical purpose of the society. "all clones . . . existed only to supply medical science" (Ishiguro256).

A patient who is undergoing transplant accepts a naturally grown organ of a cloned human being. So body of the patient becomes an open canvas for rectification of design. Here the body becomes a tool for regenerative medicine. Ishiguro explores existing practices of regenerative medicine in his fiction:

When the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly . . . there were all these new possibilities laid before us, all these ways to cure so many previously incurable conditions. This was what the world noticed the most, wanted the most. (Ishiguro 257)

Kathy and other students were created with this intention.

. . . for a long time, people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most that they grew in a kind of vacuum. . . But by the time people became concerned about . . . well by then it was too late. There was no way to reverse the process. (Ishiguro 257)

A biomedical body differs from a eugenic body in many aspects. Most importantly it is conceived in a different way. The clones in this novel thus illuminate the definition of what it means to be a human in a biomedical orbit.

The clone creators mould the perception of students from the very beginning. Power holders smuggle into their head the thought that their prime aim in life is organ donation:

Your lives are set out for you- you'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do . . . you were bought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. (Ishiguro 80)

Clones were forced to remain in the shadows. Despite the fact that, "If students were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (Ishiguro 256).

Clones knew about their future as early as six or seven. They accepted it as their future. Such an acceptance is a sort of biopower control, where they were seen as, organ producing machines.

Biopolitical existence of human beings rests in the hands of the guardians, who make the clones endure the process diverse times, or

until they “complete”. “There was no going back” (Ishiguro 257). Such biopolitical contracts determined the rights of the clones.

Here was the world, requesting students to donate. While that remained the case, there would always be a barrier against seeing you as properly human. . . . No one wanted to be seen supporting us anymore, and our little movement . . . we were all of us swept away. (Ishiguro 258)

A biopolitical world encouraged dehumanization to cater to the longevity needs of the rest of the nation. The needs of a superior race were always encouraged and clones were subordinated indeed. They were treated with care at the donation centres. But it was not sufficient to eradicate the exploitation of human bodies. What remains at the end was “The donors will all donate, just the same and then they’ll complete” (Ishiguro 276).

The spuriousness of humanity is clearly specified by Madam Marie Claude. She “saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific and efficient . . . more cure for old sicknesses. . . . But a harsh, cruel world” (Ishiguro 266).

The guardians like Marie Claude were blindly safeguarding the policy of Hailsham to protect a group of clones, who can be later exploited for their bodies. Kathy strongly felt that “these dark by ways of the country existed just for the likes of us, while the big glittering motorways with their huge signs and super cafés were for everyone else” (Ishiguro 267). Humanness ‘more or less’ will never reduce their role as organ donors. But to retain life as an exclusionary class one must forget humanness. Here clone community is equal to an oppressed, powerless class. Agamben explains that the power to take decision on life and death remains with the sovereign; in *Never Let Me Go* it rests in the hands of multiple figures like guardians and doctors. Decision about death has become more legalized; this defines the life of clones which is nothing less than bare life. We need to find some way to resist powers that can give and take life. Purpose of medicine is to treat abnormalities, but now normality is under medical supremacy. This is a violation of human right.

Most people see human body as tangible body. It is this body that we try to perfect through diet, exercise and cosmetic surgery. Human body is the focal point of modern medicine:

Revealed to the gaze of the physician after death in the post mortem dissection, visualized in the anatomical atlas, accessed in life through any number of devices . . . and allow it to peer into the organs and systems of the living body. (Rose 11)

Today medicine acts upon the body at different levels. Medical treatments have grown to an advanced stage with new properties and possibilities. Human body is subjected to different forms of experiments. Body is a living system, a unified whole

. . . interconnected with organs, tissues, functions, controls, feedbacks, reflexes, rhythms, circulations and so forth. This unified clinical body was located within a social body made up of extracorporeal systems- of environment, of culture- also conceptualized in terms of large scale flows- of air, water, sewage, germs, contagion, familial influences, moral climates, and the like. . . . (Rose 44)

Such bodies are used to create new forms of molecular life. Clones are conceived in this way. In the novel *Never Let Me Go* they were created with a purpose. Except their conception, everything about them was very much similar to normal human beings. Still many of their hopes got vanished; many of their fears were ignored as reasonless. Medical interventions are revolutionary, but considering body only as the subject of therapeutic procedures is disheartening. Maintaining bioethics and biomorality is the possible solution to retain humanity to a certain extent. Health is important, as is humanity.

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# **Conceptualizing Ethics in Trauma: A Study Based on the Malayalam Movie *Apothecary***

Shobha S. Nair

This paper aims at researching the problematic stance of the notion of 'ethics' within trauma theory. It focuses on how the concept of ethics simultaneously deconstructs the binaries of the personal v/s the professional and the individual v/s the collective. The Malayalam movie *Apothecary* is taken as the text for study as it overtly portrays the delineation of ethics in the individual and social spheres. The movie provides a medial space for conferring on the ideological colonization taking place within the contemporary society. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that it addresses several socio - cultural issues from the perspective of humanitarian thoughts and theories thereby providing significance to the discussions on identity, nation and culture.

The twenty first century has been aptly described as "the century of trauma" (141) by Shoshana Felman. This century has been an arena for diverse sociocultural issues which have shaken the foundations of modern society. This century has witnessed the growth of new avenues of academic learning leading to a renewed interest in the quest for knowledge. The sociologist and theorist Zygmunt Bauman has commented upon this thirst for knowledge as:

Modernity reaches that new stage when it is able to face up to the fact that the growth of knowledge expands the field of ignorance, that at each step towards the horizon new unknown lands appear, and that, to put it most generally, acquisition of knowledge cannot express itself in any other form than awareness of more ignorance.(qtd. In Waugh 417)

This self-contradictory nature of postmodernism has given rise to a number of counter discourses and new vistas of enquiry into the various canons of humanitarian disciplines and theories. This has in turn resulted in the proliferation of academic theories on the nature

and scope of the contemporary theories. Trauma theory has become an inevitable part of academic and critical discourses since the latter half of the twentieth century. Innumerable debates and discussions have had its focus on trauma narratives. With the advent of humanism and the clamor for human rights, the studies on trauma victims and survivors have gained momentum. The acute consumerism, a hall mark of the twenty first century, where the truth of experience is just a misapprehension, provided an added impetus to the study of trauma studies as a discipline.

The word trauma has its roots in a Greek word meaning 'wound' or 'injury'. Though the word was not in vogue, trauma had existed as a concept since time immemorial. It was with the holocaust that trauma studies got attached to humanitarian concerns. The testimony of victims and witnesses of the holocaust ushered in a completely new discipline of trauma narratives. These narratives were accepted and ingrained into various literary genres and canons. Over a span of a few decades, trauma studies developed as a metanarrative which included narratives from all over the globe.

In the process of getting established as a metanarrative, trauma theory has been influenced by a number of theoretical and political perspectives. Within the canon of trauma studies, numerous narratives have cropped up as a means of resisting political and ideological suppressions. These counter narratives use trauma as a means of negotiating their rights. This paved the way for the entry of trauma into social and academic disciplines. The multiple manifestations of trauma theory has rendered it an unique position which enables it to converse with the existing gamut of literary and critical theories.

The theoretical background of trauma studies can be located within the framework of postmodernism which brought to the forefront those narratives and discourses which were marginalized till then. As Homi K. Bhabha points out in *The Location of Culture*:

The wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other

dissonant even dissident histories and voices- women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities.(qtd. in Sim 56)

The rise of post modernism inspired heated discussions on the relegated groups and topics which bellowed to be represented and heard. The existing array of theories began to enlarge their peripheries and included within its framework novel theories like trauma theory, travel theory, nego feminism and other offshoots of critical theories.

The pedestal for the development of trauma theory was laid by the conglomeration of theories like deconstruction, feminism, postmodernism and Marxism. Theorists like Foucault, Baudrillard, Paul de Man, Derrida, Althusser and others have contributed a lot in the making of trauma theory. According to Foucault, power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge. The domination of masses is ratified in the name of truth of events and existence. He says: “Truth is a thing of this world ; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true...” (Rabinow ).

It is the institutions and social discourses that define this “general politics “and “truth” in a society. Foucault sees power as a social phenomenon which is responsible for the metanarratives created in a society. Baudrillard feels that there is no space for resistance – “Everywhere always the system is strong; hegemonic” (163). Baudrillard in his discussion on postmodernism uses the term trauma to describe the loss of history. He says “The great event of this period, the great trauma, is this decline of strong referentials, there death pays of the real and of the rational that open into an age of simulation (43).

Trauma theory calls attention towards the role played by memory in conceptualizing and establishing trauma in the consciousness of people. Memory, though it sounds highly abstract, is in fact, a concrete collectivity. An acutely conscious process of selection and elimination takes place in the constitution of the memory of individuals. Every group has a shared past which binds them together and renders them a

collective identity. Over the years, innumerable influences and experiences have contributed in the formation of this shared past or culture of a community. As the Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit points out in his seminal work *Ethics of Memory* (2002), any cultural trauma process is closely linked to the question of ethics. He further points out that “ethics presupposes a shared past, memory and community.”(qtd. in Sundholm,4). Hence the notion of ethics is inevitable in the study of the culture of any community.

The conception of ethics in the study of cultural trauma is highly significant as it deconstructs the binary of the individual v/s the collective. The ethical space delineates the individual and the collective as complementary to each other. Ethics further plays a pivotal role in the transformation or rather identification of the individual as part of the collective space. Individual trauma remains unspoken and unheard until it reaches the realm of the collective. It is only when individual traumatic events tend to be a threat to the larger community, damaging their routine life, that they are alleviated as collective or cultural trauma. The dilemma between individual ethics and the ethical perspective of the community sheds light on the cultural mindset of people at large.

Trauma, being a universal phenomenon has been represented globally as well as at a regional level. The concept of trauma working at a professional level and then seeping into diverse sections of the society has formed the crux of numerous works of art. The commercial and consumerist scenario existing in Kerala has provided ample foundation for building the structure of trauma studies. This has been most vividly portrayed in the movies released during the past few decades. The movies *Mattoral* (1988), *Burn My Body* (2010) and a lot more have portrayed various socio-cultural problems and focused on the creation and propagation of trauma.

The Malayalam movie *Apothecary* (2014) directed by Ramadasan, lays bare the ethical issues related to the medical profession. The movie questions the socially constructed notions prevailing in the field of medicine. It is interesting to note that the movie was produced by two doctors who had first hand knowledge of the medical scenario. The protagonist of the movie is Dr. Vijay Nambiar, a reputed

neurosurgeon, who is working in the hospital named *Apothecary*. The entire movie revolves around the complex web of relationships shared by Dr. Vijay and his patients. In stark contrast to the meaning of the word 'Apothecary' which stands for a doctor who provides medicine to the villagers, the hospital in the movie is an institution which sells doom and death. Dr. Vijay is forced by the management to perform clinical trials in poor patients which leave them dead or in a condition that is worse than death. The dilemma between professional ethics and the lack of humanitarian values on the one hand and avaricious professionalism on the other pushes Dr. Vijay into a state of mental trauma. He hallucinates, has nightmares and is finally destroyed in an accident. His recovery from this state and the memories associated with his patients like Subin (Jayasurya), Prathapan (Asif Ali) and Sabira Usman (Kavitha Nair) form the crux of the movie. The final part of the movie pictures Dr. Vijay confronting the management about their unethical practices. He realizes the true worth of the word 'apothecary' and leaves the hospital with his wife and other staff members. Dr. Vijay's redemption symbolizes the inevitability of ethics in any profession and the pivotal position of humanitarian values contemporary society.

Though there is nothing novel about the theme, it is the way ethical issues are treated, that renders it an outstanding status. The social commitment of the producers and the director is worth mentioning, as the movie is devoid of any commercial or entertaining elements. The movie highlights the significance of ethics in maintaining a healthy personal and social life. Simultaneously the movie also adverts the labyrinth of political and academics within which ethics is caught up. The question of ethics is integral to the sphere of trauma theory. The catechism of ethics within trauma narratives has been closely studied and theorized by Sussanah Radstone in her work *Trauma Theory : Contexts, Politics, Ethics*. She defines the desideration of trauma studies as "... trauma analysis positions itself by analogy with witness or addressee of testimony to trauma and understands its task as that of facilitating the cultural remembrance and working through of those traumas whose absent presence marks the analysed texts"(22).

It is this politics of representation that has to be analysed. The movie foregrounds the mental trauma of the doctor who inflicts pain

and suffering on his patients rather than the patients themselves. The narrative tends to marginalize the actual traumatic experiences and instead dwell upon the remembrance of traumatic events. The intellection of memory hence turns out to be indispensable to the study of trauma theory. After the accident, Dr. Vijay who is very critical hallucinates and it is through the figments of his imagination that the breach of ethical protocols is revealed to the audience. Critics like Maurice Halbwachs have theorized the role of memory in trauma studies. He points out that individual memories are “socially mediated” and “relates to a group”(127). The recreation of Dr. Vijay’s professional life through his memories sheds light on his inner conflict between professional pressure and professional ethics. Being a doctor, the responsibility of saving a patient’s life or easing his suffering is instilled within Dr. Vijay. But the professional pressure sucks him with such a force which he is not able to overcome. He becomes a mute participant in the havoc wrought about by the authorities in the lives of individuals. Though he realizes the wrong in his actions, it is only when he undergoes the same traumatic situation that the horrifying nature of the action comes to the forefront. It is in his state of unconsciousness that he begins to empathize with his patients through his surrealist imaginations. This display of empathy has been discussed in detail by Carolyn Steedman as ‘Empathy Theory’. She says:

Using [empathy] theory, a sense of self (...) was articulated, through the use of someone else’s story of suffering, loss, exploitation, pain (...). In those moments of vibrating reception, when the heart throbs in sympathy and we are sublimely aware of the harmony of our reactions with those of the person we are sympathizing with...” (23)

It is at the expense of his life that he realizes the value of others lives. As mentioned earlier, the name given to the hospital is *Apothecary*. It is in stark contradiction with the activities in the hospital. The hospital is an institution which sells doom and death to the patients. Althusser has discussed in detail about such institutions within a society that become tools of the power relations at work. He points out how institutions like schools, hospitals, marriage and others propagate the power politics and also points out the conscious exploitation propagated

under the facade of service. He talks elaborately as to how ideologies colonize the minds of people in his influential essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses". He defines ideology as: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (126-27). It is this relation between the imaginary and the real that defines the life of the patients within the hospital.

The hospital squeezes money and life out of the poor in order to run their clinical trials. The helpless nature of the victim invites crucial attention as it is an indicator of the socio-economic and cultural imbalance prevalent in society. Here trauma itself becomes a way of spreading more traumatic experiences. It is the patients' physically traumatic state that brings them to the hospital. Instead of alleviating them from their condition, they are further pushed into the chaos of mental trauma too. This mental trauma goes unnoticed till the point where the doctor himself becomes a victim. Dr. Vijay's identification with the trauma victims is of great significance in trauma theory. The positioning of victims within the frame work of trauma theory has been extensively discussed by the critics like Jeffrey C Alexander, Cathy Caruth and others. Alexander makes the noteworthy statement in his influential work *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*: "Only if the victims are represented in terms of valued qualities shared by the larger collective identity will the audience be able to symbolically participate in the experience of the originating trauma"(14). The significance of the movie comes from the fact that it deconstructs the binary of the perpetrator and the victim. The perpetrator himself gets relegated to the position of the victim and in this process destabilizes the power relations at work in the society by symbolically identifying with the collective.

In this age of globalization anything and everything is being defined on a pan-global level; boundaries, identities, ethnicities, regionalism, and other aspects of culture and nations are getting blurred beyond comprehension. The normalizing nature of victimization actually points to the political nexus at work which establishes perpetrating trauma as rational and normal. This has to be seen as

a kind of neocolonialism wherein power is expressed through violence and pain inflicted upon others. The victim is narrowed down to an object who becomes the focal point of power relations. The victim's identity and existence is of no value in the larger sphere of power politics. The traumatic experiences bind the people together and provide them with a sense of community having a shared past which defines their existence in the present.

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# **The Sites of Resistance in *Thakshankunnu Swaroopam***

Manu - Khader

The cardinal idea behind this paper is to figure out the sites of resistance involved in the historical novel, namely, *Thakshan Kunnu Swaroopam* written by U.K. Kumaran and to analyze the self-evolution of Ramar in the light of Marxian aesthetics. This novel deviates from the experimental patterns often employed in postmodern novels and instead focuses on narrating the different layers of human existence in the place called Thakshan Kunnu, which is the cauldron of many social and political movements spearheaded by the real heroes of history. In this polyphonic novel, the writer concentrates on the character called Ramar, an underdog by birth, who reaches the zenith of life through brave and selfless efforts. He is a rare human being who never flinches an inch while acting in accordance with the real spirit of justice. He is accompanied by many other characters coming from the lowest rung of society, who in a similar manner, raise their fiery voice against the prevailing injustices of that time, namely the obnoxious practices of casteism and other forms of exploitations. Their multiple voices truly weave the texture of resistance in this novel, which can be considered as an epicenter of motivation for the present which has been entrapped in the vortex of the same challenges met by our forefathers. The writer wisely employs the elements of myths in this novel and derives inspiration from his rich native traditions. As Marx said “history becomes a material force” in this fiction and bygone ideals appear again enthralling the reader’s buried conscience. At the same time it escapes the features of propagandist fiction. Forgotten ideals again come to the Centre defying the aesthetic temptations of postmodern narratives. The author gives expressions to many marginal voices emanating from the diverse corners of life and elucidates the crucial role played by them in shaping history.

*Thakshankunnu Swaroopam*, a polyphonic novel written by U.K. Kumaran stands closer to the realist literary narratives of the previous

decades in Malayalam literature, totally immune to the epidemic of postmodern stylistics. This bulky book carries the reader towards the forgotten landscapes of the past which were impregnated with the sagas of nameless men who sacrificed themselves for a hopeful morrow. History pervades this work as a hurricane that shakes and then shapes the texture of many characters in this novel. The real heroes of national history such as Gandhiji, K. Kelappan and Muhammed Abdhul Rahiman make their inevitable entry in this work and show the tremendous influence cast by these great men in sculpting the destiny of a nation. The landscape of this novel, namely Thakshankunnu, though a small local place in Kerala has been a metaphorical projection of the then India which had been subjugated under the Colonial rule and confronted with the malign issues of casteism and communalism. Hence this work runs analogous to the events and struggles that actually happened in our history and tries to see the indissoluble tie between the individual and the society. In life we often are prone to segregate the individual self from the multiple voices of the other called the History. Each individual thus becomes an isolated island cut off from the rest of the society and pursues his aims and reaps his or her success or failure totally negating all social and historical forces operating in the larger ontext. For Marx “every act is a social act’ and there is no individual success or creativity unaffected by the process of history. History is a material force that catalyses many the human actions of the present despite all human attempts to negate it. As this novel intends to speak of a period which is so conspicuous in the history of Kerala, each character in this work is possessed by the spectre of history, its motifs and undecipherable aims.

An attempt is made to give a concrete theoretical frame work to this work in the light of Marxian aesthetics, linking it with the social vision of Gandhiji. Gandhiji who puts in an appearance once in this work has been the subject of the discourses threaded through the novel and should be read along with Marx because of the indigenous and native factors of this work. As both these organic thinkers envisaged the dissolution of the self-interest at the altar of the social good, many of the characters in this work represent the immaculate social awareness that surpasses their egoism. This paper attempts to focus on the central

character of this work, and on his self that emerged from the downtrodden realm of an underdog finally evolving into a human being through sheer perspiration and noble values.

Ramar, a socially disadvantaged boy is ousted out from school for wreaking vengeance though in humorous ways on his class mate Leela, a member of an elite family, who often ridiculed him calling “black monkey’. The class teacher and other influential men collude in weeding him out and Ramar is engulfed in bitter humiliation and pain. He bore severe lashes from his father for his rebellious act. With a body blemished by scars and blood he weeps near the grave of his mother. Being a dropout he remains illiterate, and he does manual work such as taking care of the horses of a rich man and then engaging in the coconut business owned by Kannachan, a benevolent landlord, who later bequeaths his business to Ramar.

Ramar at the outset seems apolitical and unaware of the implications of the Indian Freedom Struggle and other progressive movements that enjoyed wide currency in Kerala during that time as he was more pre-occupied with the problems of his livelihood and taking care of his sick father. But he was edified and enlightened by his best friend named Kunjikelu a tailor, who was adept in social and political matters. Kunjikelu becomes instrumental in initiating Ramar into social and historical consciousness. At that time K.Kelappan, a great social reformer in Kerala used to visit Thakshankunnu in pursuit of his noble goals. He intended to bring social changes through the path of Ahimsa as envisaged by Gandhi. Many people in the village were inspired and motivated by the charisma of Kelappan and Ramar was one among them. The fast undertaken by Kelappan during Guruvayur Satyagraham and the attack on A.K. Gopalan by the orthodox men shake all men from their lethargy and kindle a fire of rebellion in their hearts. When Gandhiji paid his visit to Thakshankunnu, the zest of Ramar reached its zenith and he touched the sweaty hand of Gandhi. For the young Ramar, these historic individuals become the symbol of universal good and help him to hold fast to the principles of service and ethical means. The death of Gandhiji cast a shadow of sadness over him and that brought him closer to the principles of Gandhiji’s life. The drastic

changes effected in Ramar surface forth and he restrain many elders from straying into a toddy shop during the course of their journey to attend a marriage. The vigor and sincerity of Ramar was appreciated by a smart girl named Kalyani, who fell in love with him and married him. Even when he was engaged in social activities, he carried out his coconut business with added energy and alacrity.

Parallel to the peaceful means supported by many there were a couple of men in this village like Kanaran who are involved in subversive activities. Kanaran was a frequent visitor to the court and earnestly listened to the arguments going on there. Thereby he could learn English and join INA headed by Netaji Subash Chandra Bose and commit his life on the altar of freedom. One day he vanished from the village and soon it came to be known that he had joined the INA. Kunjichekku, another close friend of Ramar was an active participant in the movement initiated by Abdul Rahiman Sahib. When Sahib was killed Kunjichekku got frustrated and felt forsaken. Ramar rehabilitated him as the driver for his vehicle when he became the sole proprietor of his coconut trade. These strange men in the village lent Ramar the windows to the wide and vast world beyond his native place. Ramar thus humbly maintained and refined his apprenticeship in social life. He was growing and expanding much to the delight of Kunjikelu.

The other important men in this novel are Sreedharan Doctor and Pokker Haji. Doctor was a votary of K. Kelappan and he used to help Kelappan and his comrades to arrange political meetings in his home. An important feature of these meeting was the loud reading of newspapers. People got informed about the current events in the country through this practice. Dr. Sreedharan did not take part in direct political action, he believed in using his profession as the best tool for social change. From morning to night he observed and treated his patients, and did not charge any fee from the poor people. Apart from this, he lends financial support to many needy people. Never claiming any credit for his actions he silently extends his support for the prevailing struggles of that time. He was loved by Kunjikellu and Ramar. His small clinic thus turns to be the epicenter of humanity in that village. Pokker Haji was another wise philanthropist who lived in that village.

Through his selfless work for social harmony and progress he becomes the very breath of this village. When small pox struck the village he set apart an empty shed of his for treating the patients. But fate finally takes its toll on Haji as he succumbs to the same fatal disease. Ramar, minor Balan (his constant helper) and two other young men, bearing the hearse of this old man, chanting the Koran, irrespective of their castes, is a touching scene in this novel. It truly evokes the spirit of religious brotherhood that prevailed in Malabar during the Freedom Struggle, which now seems to be disappearing. Ramar and Kunjikkelu also worked hard to launch a rural dispensary to meet the medical needs of the people.

Being a polyphonic novel this work is able to contain various voices issuing forth from different layers of life. The most effective female voice is that of Kalyani, the better half of Ramar himself, who plays a vital role in mentoring the character of Ramar. She is not a marginalized character or a shadow of her husband. She teaches Ramar to read and write. When Ramar falls prey to depression after the death of Kunjikkelu it is none other than Kalyani who pulls him out of it. By then she had become the proud mother of two talented sons of Ramar and at the time of the physical and mental break-down of her husband she carries forth his business very skillfully and also brings up her sons.

Burning the midnight oil, Ramar turned his business into a very profitable one, and his sons, who followed the ethical footsteps of their father, became the owners of large companies such as Ramar Builders and Ramar Transporters. Ramar becomes a respectable man in the society. It is not here that Ramar attains his greatest feat. The supreme feat brings a lasting tragedy to his life when while saving the lives of two children from a fire-engulfed house on hearing the lament of their mother, the 'spear of fire' damages his left eye and he suffers terrible burns over his entire body. Thereafter he becomes 'one-eyed' and is able to see only through a single eye. This act of matchless sacrifice corresponds to the greatest deeds done by legendary heroes in history who actively participated in the direct struggles for social justice. Though he is not a proclaimed rebel like Pavlev in Maxim Gorky's *Mother* or the Protagonist in Thakazhi Shivasankara Pillai's *The*

*Scavenger's Son*, he proves himself to be a more comprehensive example of selfless social service. His life and unconscious motifs are antagonistic to the early and late capitalistic systems of the past and the future. During his past he was a toiling worker and later he becomes a capitalist himself. But that is done through honest means. His capitalist identity may not be ratified by the orthodox Marxian perspectives, but a subtle reading helps the reader to identify the subversive ingredients in him as opposed to the interests of the particular class he belongs to. The explosive possibilities of a critical insider are latent in Ramar.

'The structure of feelings' entrenched in his self is able to defy and transcend the walls built by his own class and connect with the rest of humanity.

In the last phase of the novel Ramar is found to be an old man walking alone on the road witnessing the drastic changes that has taken place over the past decades. Many buildings have emerged, roads replace old dusty pathways, and new generations have been brewed up. The people respect Ramar, just because he is the living father of two big proprietors, a status that is coveted in accordance with the hegemony of a capitalist society. They are totally unaware of the mighty storms weathered by this old man or the priceless service he has rendered to his society. The history of this legendary place seems to have been plunged in to fathoms of oblivion and it has culminated into the oblivion of one's own self. The new generation attaches absolutely no value to history and hence they remain rootless. The concept of 'social being' or 'society' has been fragmented and the tales of old ties are forgotten. Ramar is too helpless to see any bridge that could link this dreary present with his vibrant past. His existential puzzles do remain unsolved till the end.

This novel discusses many political ideologies but, refuses to be a propagandist one. It does not revolve around a single idea or value and never culminates into a message or philosophical certainty. As Althusser said, this novel keeps a distance from any fixed ideology and enjoys in depth, the autonomy of art. At times it dares to confront many of the existential dilemmas of life that often compel us to ponder over the absurdist elements in life. These elements are in asymmetry with

values and emotions charged over this work. For example, the altruistic doctor Sreedharan is plunged into chronic depression as a result of his wife eloping with his compounder. These are the insurmountably shocking instances during which the ideals are insufficient and cannot withstand. Hearing this ndeeply insulted and pained. The charitable work do not suffice to redeem his broken self. His place in the village is substituted by the greedy man, Dr. Krishnan, who is malignly proud of his caste lineage. He even dares to directly ridicule people on account of their caste and charges enormous fee. Still the society that took much from Sreedharan did not enquire as to his well being and eventually he was washed out of their memories. Kunjikelu and Ramar ever remember this kind doctor and do 'resist the sin of forgetting'. They are constantly worried about the ungrateful behavior of their people.

Sreedharan is shamelessly substituted by Dr.Krishnan in their minds as prudently forecast by Kunjikelu. The story of Chekku raises certain riddles in the minds of the reader. When a bloody communal riot devastated the country after the partition its repercussions spread everywhere and a bloody murder of innocent Chindan Mambyar takes place amid the proceedings of the court. The culprit who killed him choking his throat with sword is Chekku himself: the man who had thrown his own life into the crucible of political struggles for attaining freedom. He committed it as a result of a misunderstanding and his incontrollable, impulsive nature. When he realized he was wrong, he surrendered himself to the police. Ramar was unable to bear the tragic plight of his friend. The discourse of fate subverts the noble ends of noble humans.

Another striking event is from the life of great Kelappan. He had built a small house for the homeless out of the money he got after selling his ancestral properties and taught the people to sew and bought them a good number of charkas with the sole aim of giving them a financial assistance. He had not been to that place for a long time. By chance when he called at that place he saw a dilapidated house there and people making arrack behind it. Are these selfless deeds of great men mere words writ on water? Is there any abstruse phenomena in life which can outwit the tremendous willpower demonstrated by the

men in history and defeat the vigour of their ideals and ideologies.? The strange and indescribable designs woven by destiny prompt us to interrogate the mysteries of life which could not be solved by an ideology. Here the text resists to be the mouthpiece of political correctness and is broad enough to incorporate a subversive nature that might contradict and destabilize its paramount stuff. This absence of an ideological fixity and stability prevent the text from minimizing the aesthetic quality.

Ramar, never fails in any roles allotted to him. Ramar is a man who is fighting against his limitations, not flaws. Inch by inch he erases his limitations, enriching himself with direct raw materials of life called experiences. He somehow justifies the Shakespearean maxim, "Character is destiny". His material success in life is not 'brutal' as in the case of many and his losses make him more ennobled. The final pages of this novel prompt the reader to suspect the enduring nature of success, because failure always lies embedded in any success. Even after living a 'meaningful life' he feels the covert implications of nothingness within and without. It remains unclear whether society or the incomprehensible fate is at the root of it. But by grace he is not prone to any existential puzzles at last. He could empty his mind of thoughts and completely relax.

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# Reading Habit among the Entry-level Undergraduates

Dalia D.

“To acquire the habit of reading is to construct for yourself a refuge from almost all the miseries of life.”

*-William Somerset Maugham.*

Sir Richard Steele has logically remarked, “reading is to the mind what exercise is to body.” It is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth. But the definition of reading has undergone. In the past, reading simply meant to extract visual information from any given codes or systems. However, thereafter, reading became much more complex and involved the understanding of a whole text composed of written signs. Smith and Robinson in their study regarded reading as “an active attempt on the part of reader to understand a writer’s message” (3). Devarajan defined reading as “the art of interpreting printed and written words” (14). Judith Irvin (37) describes the reading process as “the interaction of what is in the head with what is on the page within a particular context that causes students to comprehend what they read.” It “loads the mind with new software” commented Satija (55). Thus, reading is the ability to recognise, and examine words or sentences and understand the information within. It is a cognitive process of understanding a written linguistic message and to examine and grasp the meaning of written or printed characters, words or sentences.

Reading as a habit is regarded as an essential life skill which not only increases knowledge, but also builds maturity and identity, sharpens our thinking, and increases awareness in all daily life issues. A person who widely reads exhibits progressive social skills, as he can interact with others in a far better way because reading widens his vision and point of view. Reading is usually a private act, a personal and individual

relationship with a book; but then, “it is the environment as long as it is favourable,” which according to Michael Gault (16), encourages the setting up of this relationship.

Educational researchers have established that there is a strong correlation between reading and academic success. A student who reads widely is more likely to do well in school and then in college and pass exams with excellent grades as he can comprehend and appreciate the organizational structure of a piece of writing. He can comprehend ideas, follow arguments and detect implications. There is also a strong correlation between reading and vocabulary. Students who have a large vocabulary are usually good readers.

With the cinema, television and internet taking up a great deal of the attention of children, teenagers and even adults, the habit of serious reading seems to take a low graph. It is proven that in this technological society the demands for higher levels of literacy are creating unfavourable consequences for those who fall short. This is the main reason to get into the habit of reading books.

Students are under pressure to score high marks and concentrate on their careers that they only read textbooks. With the technological advancements in this satellite and i-net era, reading habit seems to have taken a beating, or was it ever a habit of common people? What appears to have changed over the years is the taste of youngsters who are more inclined to light readings with the plot they identify themselves with than the one filled with heavy philosophical concepts.

There are different causes for poor reading habits among the undergraduate students. The nature of reading ability is very complex and one could risk the generalization that most students do not know how to read effectively and as a result they are faced with reading problems especially during examination. The researcher discovered that during her teaching periods many of the students were not able to read their textbooks properly, the notes given to them in various subjects or even the question papers of their examinations. As a result of this they failed in their examinations if the questions were not read

to them. These reasons stimulated the present study on the reading habits among the entry-level undergraduate students.

Reading is a demanding task which has to be skilfully developed over the years and, it is important to note that there are many complex problems that may result in poor reading habits among students. It could be the instructional standard of the school attended the environment and several physiological factors. Some students tend to read poorly because of their inability to discover their reading problems. Lack of positive motivation by parents and teachers also affects the student ability to read.

Reading has increasingly been the object of empirical and theoretical investigations for a long time. Norvell as cited by Hanna and Marriana identifies that sex and age are the two principal factors that affect reading habits. James Moyes, Catherina Stenberg, Catherine Ross and S.Abram report that female read more than males. Clark and Foster report that girls enjoy reading more than boys and boys tend to hold more negative attitudes towards reading than girls. McKenna, Kearn and Ellsworth and Hassell and Rodge reveal that girls have a more favourable attitude than boys towards both recreational and academic reading. Igun and Adogbeji report that nearly two-thirds (61.5%) of postgraduate students are motivated for study and reading primarily by the desire for knowledge and skills, while (22.5%) study mainly to pass their examinations and tests and for self development. In their study concerning the students reading habits, Cabral and Tavares reflect that students read for academic purposes (97.8%). Kaur and Thiyagarajah interpret that while many students prefer spending as much as 3-5 hours per week in reading yet the breakdown of the responses indicate that (69.8%) of them spend this amount of time on literary works, (28.6%) on newspapers and (25.4%) on novels. G. Devarajan reports that irrespective of the socio-economic background, the majority is interested in reading literature (51.96%) especially novels followed by Science (34.66%). Clark and Foster (2005) report that 83.9% of pupils admit mother teaches them to read, followed by their teacher (72.2%) and their father (65.0%). Ashu Shokeen is of the opinion that it is the duty of parents and

librarians to promote a love for reading among students. However, all parties concerned- parents, teachers and librarians should work together to infuse a habit of reading in children at the young age when the mind is most impressionable.

Studies on reading habits and reading interests of school students of varied age and the role of library and family in developing and inspiring the love of reading in particular were conducted by Karen Anderson, NoormahShahriza, Briony Train, Boström and Lassen, Elena Corradini, Valeda Dent, Celep and Cetin and Brier and Lebbin.

In our state, the undergraduate curriculum integrates a communicative and exploratory form of interactive education system, so that the students may develop an inquisitive mind and discover the power of self-determination and discipline to grow up into successful professionals and good human beings. So, the present study caters solely to the need of the undergraduates.

The present study is limited to the undergraduate students currently in semester two in a famous women's college in Trivandrum, under the University of Kerala. All informants shared almost the same linguistic environment. They all had Malayalam as their mother tongue.

The specific objective of the paper is to find out the reading habit among the undergraduates- time spent for serious reading, use of reference materials, academic journals; spells of light reading for magazines, novels and newspapers. The purpose is to study thoroughly the reading habits of the students aim to identify their reading attitudes, purposes, preferences and tastes. This would lead to develop some suggestions for solution of the expected lack of passionate reading habit among the undergraduates. This study will help to establish whether our undergraduate students are on par with the expected academic parameters in the acquisition of intellectual skills.

This case study method used well-structured questionnaire for collecting data. To find the reading habit of the undergraduates, a survey was conducted among the fifth semester students of a reputed college in Trivandrum under the University of Kerala. 200 question-

naires were distributed among second semester Mathematics, Botany and English undergraduate students. Questionnaires, with varied choices of reading and enjoying English comics, novels, newspaper, magazines, academic journals and using dictionary, were distributed to them. The reading corner of the library was chosen in order to have minimum outside intervention and least disruption while marking the frequency of their choice and use. Thirty questionnaires returned from Mathematics optional, thirty five from Botany optional students and fifty six from English optional. Of the thirty five attended questionnaires from Botany optional, only thirty were complete. There were just forty completely attended questionnaires from English optional. Therefore, a total of 121 questionnaires were returned but only 100 were used. So, informants for this study included 100 students from Mathematics, Botany and English optional. All the informants had Malayalam as their mother tongue.

The chief objective on assessing the data was to find the reading habit of the undergraduates. The data was subjected to statistical analysis to assess the focus of the study. The rate of recurrence of the informants was recorded and assessed. Data analysis was done to get a more accurate view of the findings. The analysis helped to understand the numerical scores received when assessing the elicited data. The results of the findings in percentage are as in the tables below.

Table 1: Informant Reading Frequency

Kinds of Books	Informant Reading Frequency in Percentage				
	Always	Mostly	Often	Rarely	Never
English Comics	0%	8%	26%	42%	24%
English Novels	2%	23%	35%	25%	15%
English Newspaper	12%	33%	35%	18%	2%
English Magazines	5%	31%	42%	19%	4%
English Journals	0%	0%	6%	39%	54%
English Dictionary	54%	20%	18%	6%	2%

Table 2: Reading Habit among the Entry-level Undergraduates (Optional Break-up).

Reading Habit among the Entry-level Undergraduates						
KINDS OF BOOKS		FREQUENCY				
		OPTIONAL	ALWAYS	MOSTLY	OFTEN	RARELY
ENGLISH	MATH	0	7	7	13	3
COMICS	BOTANY	0	0	7	11	12
	ENGLISH	0	1	12	18	9
Findings in Percentage		0%	8%	26%	42%	24%
ENGLISH	MATH	0	4	12	10	4
NOVELS	BOTANY	0	0	7	13	10
	ENGLISH	2	19	16	2	1
Findings in Percentage		2%	23%	35%	25%	15%
ENGLISH	MATH	0	9	14	6	1
NEWSPAPER	BOTANY	0	6	13	10	1
	ENGLISH	12	18	8	2	0
Findings in Percentage		12%	33%	35%	18%	2%
ENGLISH	MATH	3	6	13	7	1
MAGAZINES	BOTANY	2	6	13	8	2
	ENGLISH	0	19	16	4	1
Findings in Percentage		5%	31%	42%	19%	4%
ENGLISH	MATH	0	0	4	15	10
JOURNALS	BOTANY	0	0	1	10	19
	ENGLISH	0	0	1	14	25
Findings in Percentage		0%	0%	6%	39%	54%
ENGLISH	MATH	15	6	6	1	2
DICTIONARY	BOTANY	11	11	5	3	0
	ENGLISH	28	3	7	2	0
Findings in Percentage		54%	20%	18%	6%	2%

The result of the present study revealed that the motive for reading motive for a majority of students was getting information to improve their general knowledge. The findings of the study showed that most of the students preferred reading materials in Malayalam and that a large number of informants read materials related to their subjects. English magazines and novels emerged as the favourite among a vast number of informants. 23% of the informants read English novels mostly while 35% read them often. Students found reading Malayalam

newspapers more comfortable than reading newspapers in English but of the hundred informants, 33% mostly and 35% often read English dailies. The study indicated that academic journals were the least popular among the undergraduates but most of the students used reference materials like dictionary. 54% of the informants always considered dictionary as their study companion while 20% used it less frequently.

An informal conversation with the informants revealed that only a minority had separate reading space at their home and most of them preferred watching TV shows of their choice than reading books or magazines. They also disclosed that the source of their non-academic reading materials is either their college library or individual subscription of their parents.

The above findings of this study leads one to conclude that the undergraduate students need to improve their reading habits. Their lack of interest in reading books and newspapers in English is one of the reasons for their poor mastery of the language, anxiety in presenting term papers in seminars and poor conversational skills. Inappropriate vocabulary and want of fluency in using the language are the disquieting after effects of poor reading habits. The students should be made aware of the fact that reading is an indispensable tool of learning and that every course of study is accomplished partly through good reading. For effective promotion of reading habit among them, it must be made pleasurable and voluntary. Therefore, one of the major goals of the college library is to inspire a love for reading - to promote a reading culture among its users.

The library of an educational institution is generally regarded as the central focus in the teaching and learning process. The emphasis these days is very much on learning and developing information acquisition skills, instead of teaching. Rather than mastering facts, students now need to be taught information acquisition skills and how to learn. The role of the teacher or a librarian, therefore, includes encouraging students to cultivate both individual and collective habits of reading especially when reading is not part of our background at home.

This implies the need for promoting a variety of activities that could enhance love of reading and libraries, providing skills on how to find books and maximize their utility, offering tips on reading skills through interactive talks, video tapes and films and also help them to “engage in creative, leisurely, and pleasurable reading” (Segum 42). Undergraduate course instructors can assist the librarians to have a heightened awareness of the reading difficulties faced by our students. One of the steps taken to minimise reading problems can be by “incorporating study skill components within the courses or to make reading lists in particular literature texts more manageable” (40). This activity can assist in the promotion of autonomous learning and make students more independent and resourceful. Book-discussion-clubs or Reading clubs may be encouraged in each college in order to cultivate healthy reading habits among students. Here the students get the opportunity to read books and meet weekly to discuss on the books they have read, thus finding a new sort of fellowship where they will be able to speak perceptively not only about books, but also about the issues they faced in the content, while reading it.

Teachers and librarians can also arrange field trips to make reading social and exciting. The students may be allowed to visit a local library, a university library or a bookstore. Than checking out or buying books, they get an awesome experience of being surrounded by thousands of books, seeing the world of possibility in print, meditating over what there is to know and explore. Also, this is an event that parents can organize and administrators can support or encourage.

Inviting authors to speak is another activity to enhance the habit of reading. Students can be greatly inspired by hearing an author, if possible, one from a similar background to theirs, speak about reading and how the habit had influenced them in their own creativity.

Furthermore, at home, parents can allow their children to spend time with different books or magazines. Now, the teenagers tend to indulge in social media websites and get wrapped up in a non-existing, virtual world. This brings down their social interaction and reading habit. The usage of new abbreviations to express oneself on the social

media hampers the language development which in turn affects writing and reading. But with the help of caring parents around them, they can be better at reading because disinterest in reading is mostly seen due to no encouragement to reading. To amend this, parents have a prominent role to play rather than blaming the social media through which the teens are getting connected instead of being alone.

Moreover, the government can take some measures in promoting the habit of reading by creating more public places to read. We have many parks, cinemas and entertainment centres, but it is necessary to have more libraries in our state. Also, the government can provide a large number of books to each school and student centres which are designed for the cultural development. In spite of celebrating reading for a week in a year, it should facilitate to celebrate reading every day.

Reading is surely a remarkable habit that pours rich thoughts in young minds. It can make a stagnant, barren mind rich. Reading enriches ones' intellectual abilities. Depth in reading helps to develop the mind and personality of a person; it provides insights into human problems, and influences attitudes and behaviour. In other words, reading helps to mould a person's character. It is well known that books can be a stimulating agent for building oneself. In this technological era, books and reading habit must be made relevant by developing age-appropriate and quality literature. It is commonly believed that there is a lack of literature which can suit contemporary needs and thoughts. The classics might be good but may not necessarily suit the taste of everyone. The college libraries must in this case serve as a conducive environment by integrating completely into the educational system to achieve the overall objectives of the system. Libraries must transform as the optimum spots to stimulate the intellectual growth of the students through the provision of appropriate instructional as well as reading materials for students, thereby helping to foster a reading culture in our society.

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# Democracy in Exile: A Tibetan Model

Dr. Appu Jacob John

The concept of nation in its western perspective is not the same as the eastern notions of nation. A nation in western ideology is undoubtedly a device of colonial practice. The theoretical stance regarding the concept of western nationalism has been studied and represented right from Daniel Defoe, Walter Benjamin, Victor Turner, J. A. Armstrong, Partha Chatterjee and Eric Hobsbawm to Homi K. Bhabha. Such intense studies have not been conducted regarding eastern nationalism. The very few conducted, produced a confused yet fascinating picture regarding nationhood as having a mystical/degraded stance. Though theoreticians like Edward Said upheld the eastern spirit most of the world still believes in the western notions that considered the African continent as “the Dark Continent”.

In the eastern sense a nation is not a tool of colonial ideology as colonialism was never an idea shared by the east. Here the nations were often related to tribes and clans. They had colonial aspirations but in a limited manner unlike the Europeans. The brotherhood shared inside each nation helped them to convey the idea of a family more than a nation. This is true with regard to the Tibetan concept of nation also. The king was more than a ruler; he was the father of the tribe. This is the attitude of all theocracies where the unmarried high priest of the clan was the father rather than the leader of the clan.

The concept of a nation can be traced back to the first days of community living. In fact community in its greater context can be called a nation. Ernest Renan in an essay titled “What is a Nation?” asks the basic question of the existence of a nation. He considers the notion of nation as a two pronged idea. Firstly nations are made of a set of collective memories about the past; the communities fostering these memories cherish them and bequeath them to the future. Secondly the community shows a spirit of collective unity by which it stands together ready to accept all the challenges – a “we feeling” (*Nation and Narration* 12).

Ethnicity is a term which these days has become the watchword of scientific research that ranges from literature to sociology and anthropology. Hansaki Kohei in the foreword to the book *Ethnicity: Identity, Conflict, Crisis* mentions that “ethnicity” is a term that came to existence with the 1972 supplement of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This is what Kohei has to say:

It is with the crash of the geo-political hegemony of the colonial first worlds that the third world ethno-identical struggle began. It is with the rise and success of the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America that the two words became representative of the many realities of the oppressed few. The first world had been prophesying a ‘Theology of Progress’ to the colonies. This philosophy based itself on the fact that ‘progress in commercialisation, assimilation, cultural unification, equality and freedom based on atomised and abstract individuals’ (iv).

The awareness that the above mentioned development was false brought in many radical changes in the third world which redefined the meaning of the pair of words “ethnicity” and “identity”.

Ethnicity has become one of the serious topics of study and discussion in the literary and the critical world of today. Studies are also being conducted regarding identity and the search for identity. Ethnicity is a live issue that is being addressed in various ways by the global bodies. The year 1992 was celebrated by the United Nations as the “International Year of the World’s Indigenous People”. The same year the UN brought out a declaration regarding the rights of the indigenous people. The thrust of the declaration was that the indigenous people should be given due recognition. The rights of the indigenous people are set in the larger context of all minorities so that all people grouped under this label could be given their due share of importance. However, this declaration too, like so many others of the same kind, continues to remain a worthless paper.

An ethnic thirst as well as a search for one’s identity are two pressing issues in the world today. Ethnicity is self-esteem, a search for rediscovering the history, culture and traditions of a race. It is an

attempt to preserve and protect one's own heritage against the constant action of the majorities to eliminate or to efface the ethnic symbols of the minorities. This feature of a re-search for one's identity has created a search for ethnicity. This search is often positive though the ruling classes also make use of the same consciousness to promote narrow ethnocentric and blind chauvinism which ultimately leads to conflict (*Ethnicity: Identity, Conflict, Crisis* v). Thus it becomes the duty of the ethnic minorities to put them on high alert regarding the motives of the ruling classes.

In human beings ethnic sense has its beginnings from time immemorial. It began when agriculture developed and human beings started living together in groups. The nomadic life of hunting and gathering gave place to a more settled way of life with the need to work and live together in order to survive. Institutions like the family and ceremonies like marriage developed as the years passed by with groups of people forming themselves into communities. Religion was a very important factor of community life. People lived together, ate together, slept together and prayed together. This togetherness gave rise to a group consciousness and a "we-feeling" (*An Introduction to Sociology* 220). This we feeling originated because of a shared meaning that each group of individuals possesses. It is based on the life experiences of the community as well as individuals. A shared life and a shared culture add strength to the group and community life. This created shared meanings based on their life experiences as a community, in many respects including those in literature. Such groups are known as "ethnic groups" (*An Introduction to Sociology* 230 and 430).

J. P. Deniker in his book *The Races of Man: An Outline of Anthropology and Ethnography* has explained ethnicity thus; "ethnic groups are formed by virtue of community of language, religion, social institutions, etc., which have the power of uniting human beings of one or several species, races or varieties..." (3). Hence an ethnic group varies from others based on its separate individual traits. Within itself it is unified by a group of arbitrary characteristics which are inclusive of a common goal and a set of common beliefs. This is what makes the ethnic group exclusive.

Ethnicity here is an umbrella term referring to a “set of people sharing common origin, culture and language” (*Cambridge English Dictionary* 268) which is essentially an ethnic group. Ethnography is a multi-disciplinary approach involving all aspects of the ethnic group. Ethnography is essentially a community oriented study. Such a community centering is also the basis of literature.

Tibetans as an ethnic group share the same meaning in many cases including religiosity and literature. In other words it can be said that the whole group’s “we feeling” rests on these meanings. These meanings are independent and intertwined with others. In the case of Tibetans in exile they are four as follows

- (1) Religiosity – religion is the most important factor that unites the feelings of the Tibetans. Buddhism was the single thread that had conjoined the various tribes in the historical Tibet. Even today the Tibetans in and out of exile are joined together by the thread of religion. This is also how the Dalai Lama has become an international symbol of Tibet.
- (2) The reality of exile – Being in exile is the most powerful reality faced by the Tibetans in exile. They face the challenge of building a life in unknown lands at the same time their hearts are longing for the unknown mother land. They wish to return to a land which is only known through religion and myths. The Tibetans accept exile hence they opt for other ways to overcome these experiences.
- (3) Desire to return – Even in the midst of the problems of exile the Tibetans all over the world feel a spirit of return to their mother land. This is the same for Tibetans born outside Tibet in exile. It is much similar to the feeling shared by the Israelite community all over the world when they were in exile. It has become the life mission of the Tibetans in exile to return to their land of origin. This often becomes a despairing reality for the Tibetans in exile.
- (4) Presence of a voice of hope – Even in the midst of all these miseries Tibetans are sticking with their desire to return. In their entire literary renderings one can find this positive note of return. It can

be concluded that along with the protection of their culture; the reopening of the Tibetan traditional institutions in their land of exile; was surely a sign indicating the Tibetan hope.

The history of Tibetan writing goes far back into the seventh century AD. Thonmi Sambhota is believed to be the inventor of the Tibetan script. He was the minister of the Tibetan king Song-tsen Gampo, who was sent to India to form a script for the Tibetan language. The script has striking similarities to the Indian scripts of Pali, Hindi and Bengali. The first writings in the Tibetan script were translations of many Buddhist religious texts written in Sanskrit. Padmasambhava the Indian sage reverently called Guru Rimpoche by the Tibetans is the father of the Buddhist faith in Tibet. Several monastic orders like Nyigma, Sakya, Kagyu, Gelugpa and others brought out translations of the primary texts of Buddhism which gained popular importance ([http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history /index.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/index.htm)).

The establishment of a separate religion, a separate kingdom and a separate script promoted genuine studies in Tibet, particularly studies in medicine and philosophy after the seventh century AD. Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, the Elder, who is regarded as the founding father of the Tibetan school of medicine, is of special importance. His *Rgyud bzhi Gyüschi* is the seminal text regarding Tibetan medicine. By the eleventh century Tibet saw the rise of another great sage – Milerepa. He is second only to Padmasambhava in the Tibetan tradition. He has written a number of songs of philosophy and devotion. Significant developments in the other schools of Buddhism were the product of this century. The age also saw the systematization of the Tibetan Buddhist texts. Nampar Nangadze Lotsawa, Lochen Ringchen Tsangpo, Drogmi Lotsawa are some of the prominent translators of the kind. However nobody till date has written a literary history in English; what exists is mainly in Tibetan and not yet been translated to English.

Exile is a reality which has become an integral part of the Tibetan community for the last fifty and more years. This is a painful reality which each Tibetan has to reckon with – those who are inside as well as outside Tibet. Exile has revolutionized the perceptions of Tibetans.

They were forced to step out of the borders of their country which till then had been forbidden terrain for all outsiders. As the native Tibetans had to flee the land of their birth and take refuge in strange lands, they brought with them their culture which had till then been unknown to the rest of the world. Thus the secretive nature of the Tibetan community had been lost in exile and on the contrary they have become more open. The new openness has allowed the community to flourish in exile with the outside world. Today the Tibetan diaspora has made its mark worldwide. This experience of exile is poignantly described in many of their experiences.

The revival of the community and the various facets of tradition was the first and foremost concern of the Tibetan community in exile. Most of the traditions have been reset so that the modernisation of the community was made possible. The introduction of major reforms like the building of new schools with international curricula, democratisation of the community which resulted in the parliamentary elections of 2001 and 2011 and the reduction of the powers of the Dalai Lama were path breaking in nature. In the introduction of *Exile as a Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* written by Dagmar Bernstroff and Hubertus Von Welck the Tibetan experience has been described as follows:

The Tibetan community in exile is one of the most resilient and successful refugee groups in the world. The Tibetans people who had lived for at least the last two hundred years secluded on the 'roof of the world' with hardly any contact with other societies and cultures, have in exile performed three remarkable feats. First, individual Tibetans and their families stand on their own feet economically and are able to maintain themselves. Second, a school system has been built up, which has transformed a largely illiterate society (as far as lay people were concerned; the monastics were of course learned) into a fully literate society within two generations – a testament to political will. Finally, His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama, the temporal and spiritual leader of the Tibetans, introduced democratization and reduced his own power step by step, so much so, that in 2001 the prime minister of the Government-in-Exile (the chief kalon) is no longer appointed by

the Dalai Lama, but directly elected by the Tibetan diaspora. (1-2).

The success of the Tibetan refugee community is chiefly due to their culture of hard work. In all the exile communities they had reset their culture by rebuilding the monasteries and restarting the rituals like Kalachakra as well as centers for preserving medicine and traditional dances. They have started schools and have taken sincere efforts to educate and equip the younger generation. As part of exile the Tibetan society has been transplanted to countries which were till then for them distant unknown lands. The rulers of the countries where they had taken refuge had sent them to distant terrains in their lands; so that they will not be bothered by the exiles. In India the first Tibetan settlements were in the barren Majnu ka Tilla in Delhi. Then they were shifted to earthquake prone Mac Leod Ganj in Himachal Pradesh as well as the barren lands of Bylakuppe and Kollegal in Karnataka. Even today new refugees come to India, visit the Dalai Lama and get educated in the Tibetan schools and later move on to the various locales around the world. However exile had influenced the community in a rather positive manner. This had done more good to the refugees as they could organize their own internal administration, preserve their culture and choose their own leader. Such a measure had helped to rebuild their lives in a very positive manner. Bernstroof and Von Welck in their introduction to *Exile as a Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* has continues as follows:

The Tibetans retained their organizational structure, however, with one important difference: the influential abbots of the major monasteries as well as the big landowners have lost their power and influence with their land. In the settlements, every adult, whether farmer, nomad, business man or monk, was allotted half a hectare land – a drastic change in the society dominated by monastics. The young Dalai Lama was thus able to bring in modernization and democratization without much resistance. (2).

Exile for the Tibetans is a bane and a boon at the same time. Exile becomes a bane as it uproots the Tibetan out of his native land. It is

a boon because particular care was taken in preserving the Tibetan culture and identity. The preservation of culture helps in understanding the traditions of the community as well as finding a place in the international arena. Sherab Gyatso in his essay “Of Monks and Monasteries” comments “Exile, statelessness and a rude encounter with modernism have presented the Tibetan society a whole new raft of challenges.” (*Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 241). However, traditional values like ahimsa and other Buddhist values are given much importance even in exile. The care given to the preservation of the culture has helped the community to flourish preserving its own distinctive nature. It has become a pivotal point around which the modern world is attracted to the idea of Tibet.

Gyaneshwar Chaturvedi’s article “Indian Visions” gives a good report of the Indian way of handling the situation. He calls the Nehruvian politics over Tibet as “semantic jugglery over sovereignty and suzerainty” (*Exile as a Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 75). The Nehruvian policy unleashed controversy in India and rigorous criticism came from three main groups. Chaturvedi has classified these criticisms as those from “(1) supporters of realpolitik (2) Gandhians and religious leaders and (3) opposition parties.” (*Exile as a Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 75).

Tsewang Phuntso’s article “The Government in Exile” states the answers the Dalai Lama received in connection with the issue of exiles from his own community was as follows:

The Dalai Lama said ‘Some Tibetans at that time, however, put forward the idea of temporarily settling all the Tibetan refugees along the border areas of the Himalaya so that we would be ready to return to Tibet at the first opportunity. But we decided to give priority to more permanent rehabilitation with facilities to enable all the Tibetans to live in homogenous communities and provide the young with good education, modern as well as our traditional education, so even if the struggle takes a generation, new generations could replace the older ones and take on responsibility’ (*Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 137).

This vision was useful for the Tibetan community and it created a sense of continuity and unity for the Tibetans settling all over the world. The same policy is the secret for the modernization of the community which in turn had helped it to prosper ever in exile.

Once in exile the flow of refugees started to double and this had created a great problem for the Tibetan leaders. It had thus created the Government in Exile to work for the welfare of the Tibetan communities in exile. From its humble beginnings it had turned out to be the central administration of Tibetans. The initial problem it had to face was the sudden rush of the refugees from Tibet. They had to be resettled as well as cared with due importance in protecting the culture. This they had done with international and national aid from many countries where they had settled. Tsewang Phuntso in his essay "Government in Exile" gives us a clear picture of the Tibetan administration and about the exile issue it had to face in its initial days. He mentions about the flow of refugees following the death of Mao Ze Dong and the Cultural Revolution. Taking the period from 1986-1996 he says:

Between 1986-1996 some 18,700 refugees arrived in India and Nepal. The situation became still worse after 1994 when the Chinese government introduced harsher policies to deal with Tibetan nationalism. More than 44 percent of the new refugees are teenagers and young adults (age 14-25); 33 percent adults (age 26-59); more than 17 percent young children (age 0-13); and only 5 percent over the age of 60. (*Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 142).

It required utmost care in analyzing and catering to the various needs of the exile communities as each decade passed. The Dalai Lama and the Government in Exile adapted three strategies to handle the problem of exile. They are rehabilitation, education and preservation. These have remained the major concerns of the Government in Exile or the Central Tibetan Administration since the last fifty and more years. The colonies, cooperative societies, Tibetan schools, children's villages, handicrafts stalls, reception centres, libraries and institutes are evidence for the success of the strategies.

The desire to return never left the Tibetans instead it had become stronger and stronger with each passing year. Hence new strategies had to be adopted to tackle the issue. It was in 1987 that the Dalai Lama formulated his Five Point Peace Plan. The proposal was rejected by the People's Republic of China but it became the Tibetan stand regarding its existence before the countries of the world. In his Five Point Peace Plan the Dalai Lama made the following demands to the Chinese government. Michael Von Bruck "Tibet, the 'Hidden Country'" describes the plan thus:

1. Creation of a zone of peace in Tibet.
2. Stopping the Han Chinese resettlement plans.
3. Adherence to basic human rights including cultural and religious self determination.
4. Ending the exploitation of Tibet's natural resources and the stockpiling of atomic weapons.
5. Starting negotiations about the future status of Tibet and its relationship to China. (*Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 40).

The above mentioned were the manner in which the Tibetan state and the people have found a practical answer to the question of exile. They have understood and accepted the state of exile and have used it for the betterment of their society. This is true with all Tibetans of all generations and of all ages. Many of the Tibet support groups also aim at the same goals of rehabilitation, education and preservation. Wangpo Tethong's article "Between Cultures: Young Tibetans in Europe" discusses the same ideas. He says that the Tibetan nationalism was based on four major points. These points he says were not there before the Chinese invasion of 1950. They are as follows:

1. The cultural and political differentiation from China, with a strong focus on Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism at its core.
2. The unity and equality of the three regions of Tibet, and the unity among the different religious groups, with the goal to create an egalitarian society in an independent Tibet.

3. The Dalai Lama as a symbol of the Tibetan struggle for freedom.
4. The experiences of the uprising against the Chinese between 1956 and 1959, and the ensuing glorification of the resistance organization and its leaders (*Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 412).

In the modern day the Tibetans in exile have developed much. The young and the old worked together to develop the community in exile. The Government in Exile co-ordinates these operations. Thethong continues:

Today's adult generation is able to master their day to day life without depending on their children. And the young people move in circles that don't necessarily consist of Tibetans. Many young people have severed their ties with the exile Tibetan community and the only contact they have with Tibet is through their parents. In the political arena the situation is similar. There is an air of normalcy with no real sense of crisis any more with regard to Tibet. (*Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* 417).

An interesting feature one can find about the Tibetans in exile is the presence of Tibet Support Groups worldwide. Alison Reynolds, co-chair of the International Tibet Support Network, in an essay titled "Support for Tibet World Wide" puts in two opposing views regarding Tibet support groups. While China believes that pro-Tibet opinion is an organised international anti-China force, the Tibetans believe that to "be pro-Tibet is not to be anti- China but rather pro-justice" (*Exile as Challenge: The Tibetan Diaspora* p 419). Reynolds makes a random classification of the 300 odd Tibet Support Groups all over the world. It was between 1980 and 1990 that many of these groups began. This developed as a response to a period of uprising and crackdown in Tibet which coincided with the country being opened up to foreign tourists. Tibet Society of the United Kingdom is considered as the oldest Tibet Support Group. It was formed in 1959. Tibet Support Groups are the most in India where the largest number of Tibetan refugees are present. These support groups all over the world are political and the best proof for this was in the worldwide protests regarding the 2008 Olympics.

It is through the active participation of the support groups that the movement was a success in that it brought the question of Tibet to the centre stage. The groups are used to educate the world on the importance of the Tibetan cause.

Finally it was in exile that the Dalai Lama took two major decisions one is to leave the political powers and to announce his successor as a woman. The Dalai Lama's efforts are path breaking ones when seen against the frame work of the traditions for which Tibet was known till now. These experiences have molded Tibet from the past to a present nation in exile.

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# Trissur Pooram: A Cultural Study

Arya

Thrissur Pooram is popularly known as “Pooram of Poorams”. It represents the innate cultural ethos of “God’s own country”. Thrissur Pooram is commonly held for eight days in the Malayalam month of “Medam” and the Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple plays the key role in it. It is situated in nine acres of the total sixty acres of Thrissur district. Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple is one of the ancient temples of Kerala that has earned the “position of National Monument by Indian Government under Ancient Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains Act.” The temple opens at 3:00 AM in the morning and closes by 10:30 AM and in the evening the temple opens by 4:00 PM and closes by 8:30 PM after Thrippuka.



*The main entrance of Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple, Thrissur*

Similarly, in almost all the temples of Lord Shiva, “Jaladhara” is the main “Vazhipadu”. But in Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple instead of “Jaladhara”, “Neyyabhishekham” is done to ensure the strength and durability of the main deity. According to a legend that mostly prevails, Lord Shiva disguised as Kirathan got injured when he had a fight with Arjunan and to get an immediate cure from it, Dhanvantharamoorthi

advised Lord Shiva to apply ghee. He applied ghee and immediately got cured. As a mark of remembrance Lord Vadakkumnathan is covered in ghee through “Neyyabhishekham”. More and more people offered “Neyyabhishekham” as the main offering to the deity, and the practice ghee was established permanently. In all other temples the ghee offered to the deity melts down. As the ghee did not melt, the formation of a mountain structure similar to Mount Kailash can be seen.

Dr. K. K. Shivadas in his book “*Thrissur Pooram : Pakittum Perumayum*” explicates that :

Thrissur Pooram began to be observed two hundred and eighteen years before by the strong and efficient ruler, Shakthan Thampurn. The first Thrissur Pooram is believed to have taken place in 1798. Legend explains that before Thrissur Pooram, Arattupuzha Temple Festival was the significant and popular festival for the common folk of Thrissur. But during 1798, the inhabitants around Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple and other adjacent temples were not able to arrive in Arattupuzha Temple Festival due to incessant rainfalls. As a result, the king of the land was angry with the common mass and denied them entry into the temple festival. As a mark of protest, the people went back and complained to Shakthan Thampuran. Immediately Shakthan Thampuran asked the temple authorities to act as the nodal centre and the adjacent temples to jointly conduct a festival that would surpass Arattupuzha Temple Festival. True to his strict orders and determination the temple authorities of Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple along with the cooperation of the nearby temples conducted Thrissur Pooram successfully and allowed people of all sorts, irrespective of caste, race and gender to participate in it (52).

What is culture is a question that has been asked continuously for a quite long period of time. In a society, culture is often expressed as the way of behaving and what we speak defines the culture we practice. It is at this juncture that two types of culture emerge - high culture and low culture. In Thrissur Pooram, one can see the juxtaposition of both high culture and low culture and it can be called popular culture.

People act as a link between the events of Thrissur Pooram with their whole hearted participation. People from all walks of participate in their own way to make Thrissur Pooram a great cultural and art festival. So, if people act as the axis of low culture, then different melams and the entire code of conduct occupies the central axis of high culture of Thrissur Pooram. Hence, undoubtedly one can say that Thrissur Pooram is the apt product of popular culture”.

In Thrissur Pooram, culture gets defined in an altogether different way as it conveys “a way of life” to native population of the district of Thrissur for whom Lord Vadakkumnathan is their sole supporter of their life. A festival to honour him means to serve him through their own small ways as well. Thrissur Pooram is an exemplary work of art designed for art thirsty audiences as a means of entertainment. Various levels of bliss can be attained by keenly listening to various artistic festivities like “Panchavadhyam”, “Ilanjitharamelam”. Culture can be considered as a prominent discourse where meanings are carved out like materials are carved out from wood.

The formula of the twenty first century is the wide concept of globalization: the entire world is becoming a global village. At this moment the indigenous cultures stand as a complete parallel to globalization as culture represents the pulse of all elements that brings together a common goal of unification that needs to be uniquely viewed from different angles of perception. In Thrissur Pooram one can witness communal harmony through artistic endeavours that merge ethos of people, music and modes of festivities and relaxations.

The global aspect of cultural harmony is closely examined by looking into different elements of cultural diversity. Pooram is one of the official festivals of Kerala that is being held in different temples during the different months of the year like Arayankavu Pooram, Cherthala Pooram etc. Dr. K. K. Shivadas in his book “*Thrissur Pooram : Pakittum Perumayum*” explains that the very word Pooram itself refers to “different meanings like festivals, complete offering to the deity as a visual treat” (17) and the concept of Pooram can be traced back to the following sloka :

“Aayathu Shivalokam Na  
 Kalavidhi Vilokanaal  
 Chindhyan Sathbhiraarmbhi  
 Devapooramahothsavam” (34).

The meaning of the sloka states that even during Kaliyuga, Shivaloka should be attainable for its citizens, for this discussions should take place. Apart from Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple, nine other temples take part in Thrissur Pooram annually. These nine temples include Paramekkavu Devi Temple, Thiruvambady Shrikrishna Temple, Kanimangalam Shastha Temple, Kanimangalam Shastha Temple, Karamukku Bhagavathi Temple, Panamukkumpilly Shastha Temple, Laloor Bhagavathi Temple, Choorakkattukavu Devi Temple and Ayyanthol Bhagavathi Temple and their offerings on the main Pooram day are known as “Kadapoorams”. Alternative name for “Kadapoorams” is “Cherupoorams”. It is these diverse temples “Kadapoorams” that add beauty to the complete structure of Thrissur Pooram.

Another noted characteristic associated with Thrissur Pooram is the simultaneous “Kodiyettu” in nine other temples along with Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple. It is a very rare phenomenon. Usually in a place only one temple will be having “Ulsavam” with a “Kodiyettu”. “Kodiyettu” is the official beginning of a temple festival initiated by “Melshanthi” of the concerned temple. The combined “Kodiyettu” acts as the conch of perfect cultural diversity. Thrissur Pooram is an eight day festival. The number of days of the conduct of a temple festival depends on the penultimate decisions of the temple authorities and of the public of that particular place.

The most significant day of Thrissur Pooram is the seventh day as the entire celebrations reaches the zenith in collaboration with the enormous public participation and artistic endeavours. On that day, the celebrations begin with the ritual called “Shasthamkotta Ezhunnalliuppu” by Kanimangalam Shastha Temple. According to the myth, Lord Ayyappan was born out of the combination of Mohini (the female form of Lord Vishnu) and Lord Shiva. Later Lord Ayyappa was merged into

Lord Shastha form. He acts as the protector of all Devas participating in Thrissur Pooram and hence he arrives first. It will be followed by the “Kadaka-poorams”, the offerings and artistic endeavours of six other temples. After that Paramekkavu Devi Temple and Thiruvambadi Shrikrishna Temple arrive to offer their festivities to Lord Vadakkumnathan. Apart from Ayyappa temples of Kanimangalam Shastha Temple and Panamukkupilly Shastha Temple, Devi is the supreme deity participating in Thrissur Pooram. Devi occupies a strategically important position in the hierarchy of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and is considered to be the epitome of wealth and prosperity. In the offerings, dual boons of security by Shastha and prosperity by Devi can be seen perfectly.

In the offerings of seven temples apart from the temples of Paramekkavu Devi and Thiruvambadi Shrikrishna Temple, ‘Panchavadhyam’ is an inevitable component. ‘Panchavadhyam’ offers the wide spectrum of cultural rhythms of Kerala. It is the official temple performing art. As the name suggests, it consists of five ‘Vadhyams’ that include ‘Thimila’, ‘Maddhalam’, ‘Ilathalam’, ‘Idakka’ and ‘Kombu’. The absence of ‘Chenda’ is to be noted in this context. ‘Panchavadhyam’ begins with the blowing of conch and it has five phases. The ‘Melam’, gets more synchronized and reaches the zenith according to different ‘Kaalams’. Hence phase by phase, ‘Panchavadhyam’ soothes the art thirsty public.

Since its inception, of all the temples participating in Thrissur Pooram, Paramekkavu Devi Temple and Thiruvambadi Shrikrishna Temple occupy supreme positions with respect to the different cultural dimensions that it offers. Of these temples, the entry of Paramekkavu Devi Temple marks the official beginning of Thrissur Pooram. Once Paramekkavu Devi Temple reaches the interior premises of Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple, around two hundred artists stand in front of Ilanjithara to perform ‘Ilanjitharamelam.’ This marks the official status of cultural diversity due to the peculiarity involved in the name and the artists who may not belong to Marar community, the community noted for playing Kerala’s indigenous instruments. ‘Ilanjitharamelam’ is the official ‘Pandimelam’ of Thrissur Pooram and it is the sole

authority of Paramekkavu Devi Temple to perform it annually. The name of the artistic expression is attributed to the place in front of which it is performed. The 'Pandimelam' of Thrissur Pooram is known as Ilanjitharamelam. It consists of Chenda, Kuzhal, Kombu and Ilathalam. The importance of Ilanjitharamelam increases in accordance to the number of artists who perform. The artist who leads the performance is termed as 'Pramanakaran'. As the artists in right hand position of 'Pramanakaran' increases, his duty increases. The role of 'Pramanakaran' is taken by top art experts of the state like Aravindhaksha Marar and Peruvanam Kuttan Marar..

In the initial years strong competition prevailed between Paramekkavu Devi Temple and Thiruvmbadi Shrikrishna Temple. But now there prevails an atmosphere of friendly competitions with the sole aim of providing joy to the spectators who are caught up in the pressure of daily life. Once the 'Ilanjitharamelam' ceases, the audience comes out from the interiors of the temple to the external premises of the temple to see the succeeding exquisite festivities. After some time Paramekkavu Devi Temple and Thiruvambady Shrikrishna Temple enters Thekkinkadu Maithan with fifteen elephants on either side. Thiruvambdi Shrikrishna Temple's official entry into Thrissur Pooram is known as 'Madathil Varavu. Within no time Paramekkavu Devi and Devi of Thiruvambady Shrikrishna Temple come face to face with fifteen elephants on each side. And the much awaited neo - spirit of Thrissur Pooram emerges steadily.

The cynosure of the main day are the elephants who are completely unique and distinct from one another. A field study was conducted on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and according to the temple authorities of Paramekkavu Devi Temple, the idol of the main deity is taken by a potent elephant based on the following parameters : (i) height of the elephant, (ii) once the 'Vigraha' of Devi is kept, then the 'Masthaka' of the elephant should come upward and the trunk should touch the ground, (iii) large flapping ears, (iv) lengthy tail with lot of hairs at the end of it and (v) white tusks. Usually only Kerala elephants are considered for it. One elephant is said to have three mahouts. According to Dr. K. K. Shivadas

Kerala elephants affectionately called Nadan Elephants are distinguished through their tusks, scar on forehead and ears. The mighty elephants become more attractive by the lifting of traditional 'Alavattom' and 'Venchamaram'. The most astonishing fact is the lifting of 'Alavattom' and 'Venchamaram' at regular intervals of time in the correct sequence. It is the unique hallmark of Thrissur Pooram that makes it completely different from other Poorams of Kerala (*Thrissur Pooram: Pakittum Perumayum* 86).

One can also witness lot of ardent elephant lovers who add more charm to the never say die attitude of Thrissur Pooram through cheering. According to Dr. K. K. Shivadas in his book "*Thrissur Pooram: Pakittum Perumayum*" "Jute materials are used to weave and make 'Nettipattam' and it ensures durability" (88).

Then by evening, Thekkinkadu Maithan prepares itself for famous 'Kudamattom' as Paramekkavu Devi and Devi of Thiruvambady Shrikrishna Temple with fifteen elephants each stand face to face with a marvelous crowd in between. "Kudamattom" is one of the major highlights of Thrissur Pooram that has caught the world's attention. It was officially started by Thiruvambady Shrikrishna Temple. As time went by both Paramekkavu Devi Temple's and Thiruvambady Shrikrishna Temple's intense rivalaries started getting reflected through 'Kudamattom'. In all other temples that practice Kudamattom the same umbrellas are used annually by the concerned temple authorities. But in Thrissur Pooram, both Paramekkavu Devi Temple and Thiruvambady Shrikrishna Temple manufactures new umbrellas for 'Kudamattom' every year. The umbrellas for 'Kudamattom' are manufactured by hand and not by sewing machines even in twenty first century. 'Kudamattom' comes to an end by night.

After 'Kudamattom', 'Rathri Pooram' takes place to pave the path for traditional 'Vedikketu'. Fireworks are another typical stereotypes of Kerala Temple festivals. But the fireworks of Thrissur Pooram surpass all the other fireworks within the state. Dr. K. K. Shivadas in his book *Thrissur Pooram : Pakittum Perumayum* says that

Three months before the inception of Thrissur Pooram, the

preparation work for the manufacture of fireworks start off. The major types of fireworks include Olappadakkam, Gundu, Amittu and Dynamite. The initial task of the people who engage in fireworks include digging up of holes for keeping Amittu” (92).

On the next day after the supreme day of Thrissur Pooram, ‘Pakal Pooram’ takes place. In ‘Pakal Pooram’, the objective is the wide participation of women. By afternoon 12:00 P.M. ‘Pakal Pooram’ concludes. Then the famous ritual of ‘Upachramchollipiriyal’ begins. For ‘Upacharamchollipiriyal’, both Paramekkavu Devi Temple and Thiruvambadi Shrikrishna Temple along with the elephant with “Thidambu” stands face to face and ‘Chendamelam’ takes place in ‘Sreemoolasthanam’. Thrissur Pooram ends officially and then ‘Poorakanji’ is distributed to devotees.

Thrissur Pooram is a blend of celebrations as , financial activities and artistic endeavours merge. At the primary level it is a *Carpe diem* philosophy at work. Common man considers this festival occasion as a feast of celebration with no responsibilities. At the secondary level, Thrissur Pooram offers a meeting ground for business enterprises financial activities and tourists from across the world. One of the festivals of Kerala highly enjoyed by tourists across the world is undoubtedly that of Thrissur Pooram. It is the tourists who give a cosmopolitan outlook to the greatest festival of Kerala through their participation. Dr. K. K. Shivadas in his book “*Thrissur Pooram : Pakittum Perumayum*” says that “Due to its international outlook Thrissur Pooram has been documented by British Broadcasting Corporation (B. B. C.) in 2000” (119).

To get a clear idea of cultural diversity, Thrissur Pooram can be considered as a cultural artifact. A cultural artifact gives an idea of what a specific culture is. Thrissur Pooram is a cultural product since its inception. The basic concept of Thrissur Pooram is that it is the exotic Pooram of Thrissur, but it brings in people from different walks of life to a common meeting ground irrespective of caste, class and gender.

The cultural artifacts of Thrissur Pooram include elephants. Elephant is the official state animal of Kerala and it forms a central

aspect in Pooram offerings of all temples that take part in Thrissur Pooram. Elephants are inevitable components of Kerala temple festivals as a temple festival will be totally incomplete without elephants. 'Nettipattams' add more beauty to elephants as gold ornaments add more charm to the ladies. 'Alavattom' and 'Venchamaram' are cultural artifacts of Kerala and especially that of Thrissur Pooram as both of these represent "God's own country's" cultural ethos.

'Kudamattom' can be considered as another cultural artifact where umbrellas of various colors appear as the potent agents of powerful and friendly competitions between two famous temples of Thrissur. Pooram Exhibition that is held annually is an apt example of cultural artifact. For Pooram Exhibition, a committee consisting of more than two hundred persons are selected initially and then plans will be drawn accordingly to implement it successfully. Dr. K. K. Shivadas in his *Thrissur Pooram : Pakittum Perumayum* says that

Since its beginning in Thrissur Pooram, Pooram Exhibition follows the same structure. The initial task is to decide for what all activities are the stalls required. The basic financial source for Thrissur Pooram is that of Pooram Exhibition. On the main Pooram day, the tickets are charged higher than the normal price. Hence, Pooram Exhibition provides a spectrum for large number of products that range from kitchen items to bed sheets (94).

Cultural Artifact can be taken as the continuity of cultural diversity and it describes the historical pathways in the development of events and places. The tradition of Thrissur Pooram lies in the history of Thrissur Pooram in all its forms of conduct. Along with this the redefining of the term art in adjective terms like descriptive, linear, spatial has to be read in between since it is difficult to say what is art and non - art. Hence the very concept of art itself has undergone lot of redefinitions. Similarly when considering the deities of the temple, lot of the elements of cultural diversity can be seen. The different forms of Lord Shiva that exists in the temple act as the similar pathway for the different types of personal traits that exist within a human being. The notion of multiplicities get further impetus in this context.

From all the facts mentioned previously related to Thrissur Pooram and the ancient Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple it can be said that culture is unique in all aspects. It is the conglomeration of various elements as diversity stands as the apex element of it. The cultural harmony gets established through the synchronization of different elements of cultural diversity. It is the cultural harmony that gives rise to the concept of totality. Culture has direct links to arts that gets established through active participation of all people. Cultural diversity and cultural harmony represent two sides of the coin of culture. And the motif of “Arts for Arts Sake” gets radically changed to the paradigm of “Arts for People’s Sake” as people come together irrespective of caste, creed, race and country to view Thrissur Pooram despite living in a digital age. This can be read together with the aspects of gender, business and tourism that underlie the biggest cultural manifestation of “God’s own Country” and Thrissur Pooram is the apt example of it.

#### APPENDIX

“Alavattom” - a round decorative item adorned with colourful guilts and peacock feathers.

“Balikkal” - the stone structures that exist in the “Prathakshina Pathas” of the temple.

“Bhakthan” - devotee

“Chenda” - the traditional Keralite musical instrument like drum.

“Chendamelam” - the orchestra involving “Chenda”.

“Cherupooram” - alternative name for “Kadapoorams”.

“Chuttambalam” - the outer building of the main shrine.

“Darshanam” - the seeing by the general public

“Gopuram” - the ancient gateway of Kerala

“Goshalakriushnan” - a rare form of Lord Krishnan existing in the multi-shrined complex of Lord Vadakkumnathan.

“Idakka” - one of the native instruments of Kerala used in “Panchavadhgyam”.

“Ilanjitharamelam” - the peculiar artistic expression of Thrissur Pooram that is equivalent to “Pandimelam” of Kerala.

“Ilathalam”- the native Kerala instrument in small size used in “Panchavadhyam”.

“Jaladhara” - main offering to Lord Shiva with water that is absent in Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple.

“Kadapoorams” - the offerings of seven temples apart from Paramekkavu Devi Temple and Thiruvambady ShriKrishna Temple on the seventh day of Thrissur Pooram.

“Kodiyettam” - the official flag hoisting that represents the starting of a temple festival.

“Kodiyirakkam” - the official ending of a temple festival.

“Kombu” - indigenous instrument of Kerala used in “Panchavadhyam”.

“Kudamattom” - the ritual of the continuous change of umbrellas by priests standing in elephant’s back.

“Madathil Varavu” - the ritual of the official entry of Thiruvambady ShriKrishna Temple in Thrissur Pooram during the seventh day.

“Maddhalam” - one of the exotic instruments of Kerala used in “Panchavadhyam”.

“Medam” - one of the Malayalam months in which Thrissur Pooram is held annually.

“Melam” - the synchronization of various instruments to achieve the artistic pleasure.

“Melshanthi” - the supreme priest of a temple

“Mukhamandapam” - the building structure existing in front of the main deity.

“Nadan” - indigenous

“Nalambalam” - synonym for “Chuttambalam”.

“Nandhikeshwaran” - the form of worship of ox, the official vehicle of Lord Shiva.

“Nettippattam” - the decorative work used to adorn elephants.

“Neyyabhishkham” - the main offering to Lord Vadakkumnathan in which ghee is the major component.

“Pakal Pooram” - one of the rituals of Thrissur Pooram

“Panchavadhyam” - the official instrument orchestra of Kerala noted for the absence of “Chenda” and the use of five instruments.

“Pandhal” - the protective cover made by the labourers to ensure the protection of people from heavy rainfalls.

“Pandimelam” - the instrument orchestra that involves the use of “Chenda”.

“Poorakanji” - the food served to the public as a mark of the ending of Thrissur Pooram

“Pradhakshina Pathas” - the traditional pathway that a devotee follows while visiting a temple.

“Pramanakkaran” - the leader of “Ilanjitharamelam”.

“Prathishtta” - the permanent fixing up of the idol of a deity in a temple.

“Sreemoolasthanam” - the place where the main deity of the temple has given his initial manifestation in different forms.

“Thekke Gpouram” - one of the four “Gopurams” of Lord Vadakkumnathan Temple.

“Thidambu” - the main idol in which “Vigraha” of the main deity will be kept and the same will be held by the priest in elephant’s back.

“Thimila” - one of the native instruments used in “Panchavadhyam”.

“Ulsavom” - the temple festival.

“Upacharamchollipiriyal” - the official concluding ceremony of Thrissur Pooram.

“Upadevathas” - the deities of a temple.

“Vazhipadu” - offerings to the deity.

“Venchamaram” - a decorative item in white colour used by priests standing in elephant’s back.

“Vedikkettu” - the display of fireworks of a temple festival.

“Vigraha” - idol of the deity held by the priest in the elephant’s back

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## Poetry

### Walk Away

Wake! walk away...  
Away, from the fallacious world.  
Say “goodbye” to fake smiles.

Cease! Walk away from false souls,  
Flattering words and flawless gifts.  
Realise! It’s a realm of fantasies  
Light years away from reality.

See! They’re all unreal,  
All this, a glimpse of shimmering mirage...

### Let Me Live I’m Human

Wan, withered, is my face  
Worsened by ignorance.  
A man nor a woman am I, still-  
It’s a human heart that beats inside.

Can’t you see, the same  
Red blood oozes when I’m wounded,  
The same salty tears roll down my cheeks,  
The haunting roar of hunger,  
The lust for air and care,  
It’s the same. I’m human.

You are either a man or a woman;  
You are adored and accepted.  
I am a man and a woman.  
Why am I being loathed?

You love me not, but curse me lot;  
You help me never, but haunt me ever.  
A man nor a woman am I!  
Still, it's a human heart that beats inside...

## **The Tide Would Return**

The tide does never stay,  
It comes and goes,  
It comes and goes.

The sea is salty,  
Boundless, but unstable. Still,  
For the transient tide's  
Froth of love,  
The shore does wait  
All day and night.  
The tide does never stay  
And the shore knows it so well.  
Still, all day and night it waits  
With love laden soul  
For it knows the tide would return  
To moisten its dry sands...

## Mirror Mirrors Not Mind

Mirror mirrors me,  
Eyes, curves and smiles I fake.

Mirror mirrors me.  
But, not my mind-  
Wound, wound in whorls  
Of world-  
Thousand tales untold, unheard.

Mirrors don't see.  
Mirrors don't cast.  
Only I sense and hear mind speak  
Unseen, unheard its timeless tastes.

Years fade fast, others walk past.  
Unseen unheard does last  
Real me, real wishes of mine.

Let them sleep!  
Silent. Unseen. Concealed.  
If real wishes run,  
And true dreams I chase  
Won't I be unknown,  
Strange even to the self that  
Mirror mirrors and cast?

Mirror mirrors just me; that  
Masked visage I forged for myself.  
Never it casts my mind - mend,  
Wound in dreams unsaid.

I'm glad!  
Mirror mirrors them not,  
Only I sense;  
They could be silenced.

Mirror mirrors not mind  
And thousand dreams that roar inside...

## **Away She Sauntered in Syria**

Amidst all strife and heaps of corpse,  
Blood stains, bizarre roars of war  
She strolled sans pause,

Her baby close in the warmth of her bosom.  
Stream of tears acetic than acids  
Frozen with fierceness, numbness of pain;  
Knowing that no where can soothe her or please  
She babbled and wiggled, begging for mercy.

Noxious fumes flew all way round,  
Blood thirst, wrath, resounded terror  
Gunshots replaced the chime of church bells,  
Gospels did swoon and peace begone.

The gleam in her eyes is lost for long  
Her kith and kin have all turned ashes,  
The grace of lies is all that surrounded  
Horrors of war is all that resounded.

No where to go, nobody to rescue  
She wandered and wandered  
Her baby held close, close to her bosom.  
She believed with might  
Though starved, abandoned :  
The war will end,  
Ordeals will fade,  
Peace will revisit,  
My baby will soon grow.

Beaten, bruised, abused and cursed  
Ripped and torn, bitten to bits  
Soaked in blood, flesh fresh and red  
Iced with love, she ran she ran  
Masked midst wreck  
For trace of rest  
Breastfed her kid  
Embraced too close.

Afraid she is, not of wars  
Only of men with no glimpse of mercy.  
Oppressed all life, distressed  
She mutters,  
“Conquer the whole world,  
Kill all you envy,  
Is that your success -  
A world devoid of love and life,  
A world so laden with remorse and pain?”

No where to go, nobody to rescue  
She wandered and wandered  
Her baby held close, close to her bosom...

## Book Review

# The Immortals of *Meluha*

Mareena

Siva, the chief of Guna tribe along with his people sets out to migrate to Meluhan empire due to increasing atrocities from Chandravanshis and Nagas and also due to the severe crisis in their land. Immortals of Meluha, the first edition of the series of Siva trilogy presents the mythical story of lord Siva on the ground of practical human lives, making the reader ponder deeper into the idea of attributing human character to all Gods worshipped in and around the world.

Siva, a Hindu god with a blue throat or neelakanth has been portrayed as a vibrant human being, in fact a hero of the heroes whose life is constantly engaged in a battle of ideas, ideologies, possession and love. Siva has been accurately pictured a voracious leader who is ready to place even his life at stake for the welfare of his people. Siva's arrival at Meluha fleeing from his mother land entails his evolution into Neelkantha, with the consumption of somaras and from then on the Suryavanshis (Meloohans) consider him to be their savior. Even though visible and feeble disagreements prevailed among few of the Meloohans, Siva being raised to the honorable title of protector could easily have king Daksha and most men with him.

Sati, the daughter of King Daksha who belongs eminent mythical significance brings in a huge overturn in the tale. Siva's romantic interest towards Sathi, their love tale, marriage and Siva's breath taking attempt to save Sathi from the Nagas, further adds to the human side of the myth wrapped story, attributing human elements to Siva who is today hailed as a God. Even when the story primarily revolves around the agitated battle between the two kingdoms, the love plot of Siva and Sati further adds realism to the story. Amish Tripathi's effort to corroborate realism and practical life elements into mythology and the

elaboration of his idea of gods existing long ago as humans have been intertwined perfectly. The values and virtues preserved by mythical leaders and their divine portrait blends smoothly into the never ending battle for existence.

The story is a major throw back to a world where even existence was a continuous struggle and life was governed by the interwoven ideas of virtues thus limiting the contours of fighting for just life. The true color of a very ancient period has been coupled well with realistic ideas invoking curiosity and sense of pondering among the readers. The story elevates heroic deeds of great leaders to gracious heights such that their image becomes tantamount to that of gods. They become messengers and agents of god to those people who donot stand a chance to fight for themselves. God himself finds a place amidst the most unfortunate of the unfortunate beings and lead their path aiding them to drink from the pure ocean of humanity and taste the sweetest pie of life.

Amish Tripathi, counts on the imaginative power of the readers to extend their thoughts to reveal the wildest figments of their imagination. He looks at the whole tale and narrates it from the perspective of a third person, making the level of an individual's imagination evident and renders encouragement to every reader to go on expanding their thoughts.

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