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Dr. Celine E. (Sr. Vinitha)
Professor Emeritus and Director
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Cochin-11, Kerala, India.



From Director's Desk

Teresian *Journal of English Studies* has been well received as a journal in English Language and Literature published by St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) at the keen initiative taken by its Department of English and the University Research Centre in English.

In an attempt at enhancing the quality and standard of the journal, the journal will be a quarterly publication from January 2020.

More research papers will be included in the quarterly publication. This is a welcome change, the English research department of St. Teresa's College has undertaken.

We wish we could get our journal enlisted in as many data bases as possible so that the authors can avail themselves of the process of easy knowledge dissemination.

We wish all involved in the publication of the journal a great success!

Dr. Sajimol Augustine M.
Principal-St.Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Cochin-11, Kerala, India.



Message from the Principal

The College acknowledges and recognizes the importance of research journal publication in the domain of higher education. We extend to all teachers and researchers every possible support to start and sustain journal, maintaining high quality of academic research. We publish only top quality research papers. We meticulously carry out peer review process, abided by COPE regulations.

International Editorial Board of the journal has been recently reconstituted and reinforced with a great end in view that, with the advent of the Teresian Jubilee year being celebrated in 2025, Teresian Journal English Studies shall reach the top of the table among International journals.

The National Accreditation and Assessment Council on the strength of its report on the performance of the College, comprising attainments and research performance achievements, resolved to award the College A++ in the fourth cycle.

We welcome papers from researchers and authors and assure them that the process followed in selection of papers will be properly executed.

We hope that you will find the journal a valid source of knowledge. It will provide an ideal platform for academia.

**Professor Emeritus and Director
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)**



Dr. Celine E. (Sr. Vinitha)

**Principal
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)**



Dr. Sajimol Augustine M.

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Teresian Journal of English Studies**



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Research Guide - Department of English
and Centre for Research
St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

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Editorial



Teresian Journal of English Studies is an international blind peer reviewed journal that is published by the Department of English and Centre for Research, St.Teresa's College (Autonomous). The biannual journal will henceforth be a quarterly journal. The format of the journal has also been changed.

The objective of TJES is to provide a platform for academics to publish innovative, insightful and original research papers. The papers selected by the peer review team for publication will definitely engage the attention of academicians and scholars who are involved in active research. We are presenting a diverse range of thought provoking articles in the current issue.

English Literary Studies in the contemporary age include a plethora of topics. Research in these areas is transdisciplinary as the boundary between disciplines, is becoming increasingly blurred. Within the domain of Cultural Studies spatial studies and the impact of globalisation is being discussed from multiple perspectives. It is modern physics that put forward the idea

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Editorial Assistant:
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that space and time form a continuum. Geocriticism incorporates the study of geographic space and provides the tools of analysis for literary cartography. As writers map a world within the domain of creative writing, readers engage with such narrative mappings to come to terms with a changing world order.

Following the work of Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Lefebvre and Bakhtin the representation of space is being problematized. Cartography is no more the drawing of imaginary lines over a geographical terrain, it is also the representation of geographic spaces with different effects. A Spatial study by its very nature, it is multifocal as it examines ideas from the point of view of various disciplines.

Queer theory is also transdisciplinary in approach as it brings within its ambit social theories as well as developments in the field of medical research. This theory attempts to problematize the politics of the body and it is inclusive in nature. Queer is a position that challenges accepted notions of the body that attempt to naturalize patriarchal denominations of power. The modes and modalities of literary production have also undergone a huge change. E-books and other digital forms of literature have changed the experience of reading. Hypertexts and games are also the topics of serious research.

We welcome scholarly articles that you may wish to submit, either individually or collaboratively provided that they follow the MLA 8th edition and that the content is innovative and original.

A Christian Culture?: Thinking about T.S. Eliot's Late Works in these Dangerous Times



Dr. Simon During

Professorial Fellow, School of Culture and Communication
University of Melbourne, Room W209, West Tower
John Medley (Building 191), Parkville 3010, Australia.

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The paper attempts to read T.S. Eliot within the ambit of identity politics and the emerging political scenario. Recently, liberalism, swamped by its unruly offshoots, "neo-liberalism" and identity politics, has been losing ground. The most recent evidence of this is, of course, Trump's ascendancy, based on the resurgence of a popular anti-liberalism partly fuelled by antagonism to new forms of elitism, free markets, and so-called "political correctness." Brexit and the rise of the nationalist/racist right across Europe are clearly further signs of this. Likewise India and Turkey-to go no further-have taken steps back from liberal governmentality. In this context, it is useful for academics in literature and the humanities to take stock at least of those forms of anti-liberalism that belong to our own heritage. We need, I think, to understand and may be even conditionally to empathize with the enemy, especially where, as with Eliot, that enemy is an intimate one. Although culture mainly proceeds spontaneously without its participants being conscious of its workings, Eliot argues that those with most social status will typically have the fullest awareness of their culture's extent, depth and purposes.

Keywords: *democratic liberalism, political correctness, cultural criticism.*

I want to take advantage of this occasion's quasi-academic status to ruminate over a question that falls a little outside scholarly bounds.

That question is: what is *my* relationship to TSE's late work? Or to put this less personally: are there still good reasons in these dangerous times to read the cultural criticism that Eliot wrote after his conversion to Anglicanism? Might it even contain something to affirm? If so, in what mood might we affirm it? Ambivalently? Ironically? Seriously? Regrettably? Hopefully?

These are questions that draw their energy from the fact that Eliot's cultural critique—as developed in: *After Strange Gods* (1933), *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1940) and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948)—turns on positions that have, for good reasons, fallen out of academic favour.

Those positions are:

1. That democratic liberalism is unable to prevent cultures from falling either into chaos and desuetude or into a spiritual and emotional emptiness that Eliot called "boredom."
2. That cultures are based on religions and always require support from religion to flourish. That is how and why cultures can protect us from liberalism's depredations.

Because these positions are all but impossible to hold today especially in the academic humanities, TSE's cultural criticism has been neglected. It does not help that, in the seventies, it was taken up by neo-conservatives who named their journal, *The New Criterion*, after Eliot's.

Nor does it help that, at least up until about 1937, Eliot's work was brushed by racism, especially anti-semitism.

But despite this there are reasons to return to Eliot's work on culture and religion. These include:

1. Recently, liberalism, swamped by its unruly offshoots, "neo-liberalism" and identity politics, has been losing ground. The most recent evidence of this is, of course, Trump's ascendancy, based on the resurgence of a popular anti-liberalism partly fuelled by antagonism to new forms of elitism, free markets, and so-called "political correctness." Brexit and the rise of the nationalist/racist right across Europe are clearly further signs of this. Likewise India and Turkey—to go no further—have taken steps back from liberal governmentality. In this context, it is useful for those of us in literature and the humanities to take stock at least of those forms of anti-liberalism that belong to our own heritage. We need, I think, to understand and maybe even conditionally to empathize with the enemy, especially where, as with Eliot, that enemy is an intimate one.
2. Religion has returned as liberalism wanes. This recrudescence has taken various forms: from Hindi and Islamic nationalisms in Asia and the Middle East to academic "postsecular" arguments like those that Charles Taylor makes in his *A Secular Age*. Taylor insists not just that religion's shaping power on Western modernity has been downplayed by secular intellectuals, but that secularism does not involve the final elimination of religion at all. (And of course arguments about secularism have particular intensity in countries like India, Iran and Turkey).
3. Eliot was a progenitor of academic literary criticism—I accept that his 1920 essay collection, *The Sacred Wood* can be understood

as inaugurating the modern discipline. He was also a trigger for cultural studies: his *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* triggers the cultural turn taken by Raymond Williams in and after his *Culture and Society* (1958), and which was itself an impetus for that increasing interest in “cultures” across the humanities from the eighties on. Cultural studies in Williams’s wake borrows its key concepts—culture as a “whole way of life” assembled out of various “sub-cultures”—from Eliot. (303-28) This means that those of us who work or think or create in the wake of those humanities lineages are, as it were, umbilically connected to Eliot, like it or not.

Let me now offer a brief sketch of Eliot’s cultural criticism, before returning to the question of how to receive it today.

As you will know, Eliot was an American who, after years studying ancient Hindi religion and culture, settled in London in 1914. At that point he was writing a dissertation on the British idealist philosopher, F.H. Bradley. In 1921 he published both *The Waste Land* which set the course for one stream of European—and indeed global—modernism, and *The Sacred Wood*, which, as I say, helped enable the English department to become an innovative and energetic academic institution. In 1922, he founded and began editing *The Criterion* which became one of the more influential intellectual journals of its time. In 1927, he converted to Anglicanism, or perhaps better, to Anglo-Catholicism, and repositioned himself as an orthodox Christian polemicist. His creative work of the period was also Christian, culminating in the *Four Quartets* published between 1936 and 1942, which led to him being awarded the Nobel Prize and Order of Merit in 1948. His later career was largely devoted to the stage, and he wrote one commercial hit—*The Cocktail Party* (1950).

From my point of view, the most puzzling moment in this astonishing career is Eliot’s baptism into Christianity. Of course, his private motives for that baptism remain beyond inspection. But he does himself, more or less explicitly, give less personal reasons for his conversion to Christianity.

Of these, I’d emphasize:

1. His understanding that death and evil are constitutive of human existence: no social structure can overcome them. (This line of thought is presented in summary form, early on, in essays on Dante and Baudelaire). Because of this—because of humanity’s mortality and fundamental transgressiveness—any progressive political program works within tight limits. Furthermore, because the enlightened concept of “history,” along with its understandings of time itself, is based on the concept of progress, modern lives are decreasingly framed by eternity. This matters for literature too because, at least in its most powerful works, it is backdropped by a form of eternal simultaneity which Eliot in his literary criticism called “tradition.” This insistence on human, non-progressive finitude also drives Eliot’s refusal of humanitarianism and the ethics of empathy. For him, as an orthodox Christian, love of God and the sacrifice of the individual self, trump sympathy and improvement.
2. For Eliot too, the world is organized around a logic of incarnation. By incarnation, I mean the manifestation of a universal or abstract or transcendent entity in an embodied one. His belief in this structure predates his conversion to Christianity. After all, F.H. Bradley’s rather recondite theory of how (to use Bradley’s own lexicon) “experience” relates to the “Absolute” is, in effect, incarnational. Likewise the

aesthetic school to which Eliot was loosely attached as a young poet—symbolism—already had an incarnational aesthetics: a symbol worked as the mysterious articulation of something universal in something particular. Eliot’s “objective correlative” is another version of this conceptual architecture. In his Christian period, his incarnationalism, now connected to Christ, is everywhere, but perhaps best articulated in his essay on Pascal and “The Dry Salvages” section of *The Four Quartets*.

3. Eliot also supported Christianity on the grounds that, at least doctrinally, it is open to all and treats all individuals equally. For him, this means that a Christian society can be organized hierarchically (in a filiative class system for instance) without being oppressive or unequal in a spiritual sense. It thus means, once more, that a Christian is under no strong compulsion radically to reform (i.e. overturn) actually existing social structures in the interest of social justice—efforts which, from his point of view, are likely to lead to unintended immiserations and confusions. In particular, orthodox Christianity resists political democracy, which, as I say, puts both Christian attentions to the individual soul and to community at risk.
4. Eliot also turned to orthodox Christianity because it grounded institutions—in particular, the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches—that could contest the state’s monopoly of sovereignty in Europe. His Christianity connects him to a political pluralism suspicious of state power shared by figures as far apart as the young Harold Laski and Cardinal Newman.
5. For Eliot, I’d argue, Christianity could stand against liberalism because liberalism is ultimately a procedure not a program (it asks for tolerance and the extension of recognition

to all individuals). In the end—and cutting across a library of academic debate—it doesn’t have positive values of its own outside its commitment to its own versions of procedural fairness, and so, as the critique goes, when it becomes dominant, it tends to empty out concrete beliefs and values. It ironizes. For Eliot, religion is much more able to resist liberalism than Arnoldian culture in particular, both because religion requires a faith that cannot be reconciled to irony, and because it has a stronger relation to the actual conditions of human existence, especially, to (the mysteries of) sacrifice, love, death and sin.

On this basis, between about 1930 and 1950, Eliot developed a sophisticated social and cultural critique, probably most successfully worked out in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*.

The book was occasioned by the concept of culture that underpinned UNESCO’s constitution: namely the promise:

To co-operate in extending and in making available to all peoples for the service of common human needs the world’s full body of knowledge and culture, and in assuring its contribution to the economic stability, political security, and general well-being of the peoples of the world (14).

For Eliot, culture was being destroyed by liberal commitments to “general well-being” and “common human needs” of this kind just because they were a-cultural and a-religious.

Let me summarize *Notes towards the Definition of Culture’s* firmly anti-democratic, anti-liberal arguments just by saying that it accepts a historical sociology in which advanced societies have gradually increased their “functional complexity and differentiation” (25). The way that this has happened in the modern West, has, however, put

the coherency and purpose of its “whole way of life” at risk, and by the same stroke, European culture’s capacity to reproduce itself. Culture is what “makes life worth living” as Eliot puts it: it is via culture that lived meanings, purposes and values appear and are transmitted (100). That transmission, however, is filiative and hierarchical, requiring inherited class or caste differences to flourish. (Eliot’s defence of the class structure and the aristocracy against levelling moves is one of the book’s most radical conservative moves). But culture also finds energy in frictions between different sub-cultures or local cultures. And it is multi-levelled, based in families, in localities or regions and in religious denominations. Although culture mainly proceeds spontaneously without its participants being conscious of its workings, Eliot argues that those with most social status will typically have the fullest awareness of their culture’s extent, depth and purposes.

It follows from this that when the democratic state monopolizes power and control and deploys knowledge—especially scientific knowledge developed by experts—in the interests of national prosperity and security, thought of as the sum of individual satisfactions, culture is damaged.

More particularly, Eliot argues that the democratic state gives power to those who lack cultivation and the time and training for deliberative reasoning. It is largely to resist this that states commit to planning and regulation as well as to compulsory state education systems aimed at producing citizens fit for democracy. In Eliot’s time the education system remained committed to the Arnoldian culture-idea of “sweetness and light,” “seeing things as they are,” the “best that has been thought and said,” which proposed itself as a substitute for religion. From Eliot’s perspective, then, in attempting to displace religion for a secular perfection, Arnoldian culture

was as corrosive of culture as a whole way of life as anything else.

At any rate, Eliot’s main target here is the secularizing of culture in the interest of the social-democratic state’s secular commitment to its citizens’ prosperity and security. This makes sense of what, looking back, may seem a little odd about Eliot’s cultural criticism—that it doesn’t concentrate more on how capitalism had shaped culture and class composition (Williams 224). Eliot is, of course, dismissive of what, in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, he called “the organization of society on the principle of private profit,” and seems not to care whether the economy is expanding or contracting which was, of course a key concern of democratic administrations. But this is much less in his sight than relations between Christianity, education and government (69).

Let me now further contextualize Eliot’s *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, since, for our purposes it can be best understood in relation to two specific opponents, both, importantly, committed to education and meritocracy as government instruments.

The first is the theory of social planning outlined by the sociologist Karl Mannheim in his *Man and Society* originally published in Germany in 1935, and written in response to the Weimar republic’s failure to prevent Hitler’s coming to power. Mannheim was widely-read in Britain in the forties, and his work helped legitimize the post-war welfare state, which is indeed another of Eliot’s targets here. Mannheim insisted that democratic liberalism had to learn from totalitarianism in order to remain secure: it too required central planning and what Mannheim called “social co-ordination” (i.e. control of the nation’s opinions and sensibilities) based on a

scientific social psychology and organized by trained, non-oligarchical, affiliative, rational, elites (or “experts” as would now say). Only that way might it protect itself against what he called, “negative liberalism” and “negative democratization,” that is to say, against liberalism’s and democracy’s capacity to undo themselves. Planning for freedom, as Mannheim called it, was also implicitly positioned against neo-liberal principles—the primacy of competition, and “market justice” — which were then being explored by Hayek and von Mises, both of whom polemicized against Mannheim’s theories.

The second of Eliot’s opponents, whom, however, he does not explicitly mention in *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*, was the then strongest descendent of the secular Arnoldian culture idea—F.R. Leavis. Like Mannheim, Leavis was attempting to secure non-liberal forms for a social-democracy. He believed that the welfare state could transcend liberalism and democracy by training students properly to respond to those rare, canonical, literary works through which full “mature” sensibilities (sensitive to history but resistant to relativism) could develop. That way, students would be immunized from utilitarianism, instrumentalism and materialism too. For Leavis, this required the state to support a meritocratic university system centred in an English school to which his affiliative “minority” (i.e. trained élite), selected by examination, would be admitted. Unlike Arnold, however, Leavis did not think about literature as a substitute for religion. For him, literature was less a spiritual matter than a linguistic and ethical one.

Against Mannheim, Eliot turned to his quasi-anthropological spontaneous culture concept, not just because culture is what “makes life worth living” but because, for him, it cannot be “deliberatedly aimed at” (92). Indeed in Eliot,

culture becomes the name for all that which lies beyond state planning on one side; democratic individualism on another; totalitarianism, on a third; and (largely in the shadows) profit-driven, private-property-based capitalism on a last. And as I say, for him, class hierarchies and inherited rituals were more supportive of culture thought like this than any governmental system managed by elites selected via the education system.

Against Leavis, Eliot turned to religion on the grounds that culture as a whole way of life cannot be grounded just on reading literature. It must be based on more vernacular practices as well as on those that engage the most intractable needs, problems and limits of human existence—i.e. on religion. In fact, Eliot’s account of the relation between religion and culture is complex because he recognizes that religion is present even where we don’t realize it (103-04). Thus for him, European literature was a province within Christian culture even where it was not *ostensibly* Christian at all. This meant that Christian culture covered much that was apparently secular, and that literature could—and did—harbour heretics. In *After Strange Gods*, Eliot memorably branded Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield and Joyce precisely such: for him, their fictions, committed to secular values and experience that involved sin (and sex), were touched by evil. It is worth adding that, from that point of view, Leavisism, in endorsing Lawrence as the greatest twentieth century writer of them all, a touchstone for a democratic citizenry, was itself propogating heresy.

To end, let me return to my beginning? In what way, in what mood, can one—do I—take all this?

Certainly not a dismissive one. I hope I have given, even in this brief talk, sufficient reasons why Eliot’s cultural criticism is still worth reading. It

can be viewed as mediating between us liberal humanists and our illiberal opponents and fellow citizens. Indeed I think that something true lies at its heart, namely the notion that for societies to be as confident and secure as they can be, they need to be based in a faith that binds them to existential and moral questions, as well as to lineages which reach far back into the past. In that light, it is perhaps possible that a postsecular Christianity—Christianity thought, not as a personal faith, but as a heritage which has shaped Europe’s conceptual and moral system and turned it towards particular virtues—love, charity, prudence, humility—as well as towards spiritual equality— may yet provide terms for a communal unity across differences adequate to this dangerous moment in which Western liberalism is stalling. Possible. But, I know, very unlikely.

Leaving that aside, for me, the problems with Eliot are of two broad kinds:

The first is political. Even if we accept Eliot’s critique of liberalism we are still left with the politics of difference as they now exist. He takes no account of the wills to emancipation and recognition that have played so large part in European history since the late eighteenth century. And, of course, since his death, the colonized, people of colour, women, LGBT communities etc, achieving at least some fairness and inclusion, have reorganized societies, cultures and institutions around the globe, including the academic humanities. From all this there can and should be no going back. Which makes Eliot’s idea of a Christian society, based as it is on filiation and class hierarchies, committed as it is to narrow spiritual-ideological unity, not just unpractical but utopian.

The second is religious. Eliot’s arguments for Christianity’s shaping power over European

culture do not of themselves provide reasons for faith, i.e. for converting to Christianity or, to quote Orwell’s characteristically blunt words in his review of the *Four Quartets*, for assenting “to doctrines which no-one [like us!] seriously believes in.” And that is a real problem not just because grace and revelation do not appeal to reason but also because in Eliot’s model it is unclear what faith’s role is. Eliot wanted society to be led by those “who think in Christian categories” whether they have faith or not, but these leaders themselves would be inspired by a “Community of Christians,” that is, by “consciously and thoughtfully practising Christians”(26, 34). But what exactly are “Christian categories”? Where do they end? What is left in Eliot’s scheme for non-believers? (Blackmur 184-219). How might their secondary role be enforced? And so on.

We should note another political aspect of Eliot’s Christianity: it strengthens Eurocentrism just because for itself Christianity is the Word, and those outside it are infidels. Thus, in regard to India, Eliot argued that the British rule had failed because the imperialists had only offered British enlightened “civilization” to the Indians, not British religion. It would appear that Eliot believed an effective imperialism would have required India’s full conversion to Anglicanism. On the other hand, he does sometimes seem to accept not just that different religions can coexist and that his arguments about culture and religion might work for other religions, but that transmissions across religions and culture are possible. Indeed his own poetry was partly shaped by Hinduism and Buddhism. Is it, in fact, that Christian categories might also be Hindu or Buddhist ones?

Ultimately then, my relation to Eliot’s cultural criticism is qualified. I am attracted to it as a

conduit into a mode of illiberal thought which we need to apprehend as sympathetically and pragmatically as possible especially now that liberalism is once again being negated. But I am also attracted to it in the hope that it might indeed show a way towards social cohesion and purpose. Lionel Trilling in a puzzled review of *The Idea of a Christian Society*, could only “recommend it to the attention” of his readers (29). Raymond Williams, more warmly, noted that Mill’s remark about Coleridge— that “an enlightened Radical or Liberal” “ought to enjoy such a Conservative” — applies to Eliot too (224). I stand with Williams here.

But of course all this is still not to agree with Eliot.

So what is it to sympathise with Eliot’s cultural criticism without agreeing with it? As far as I am concerned, it is not to hold hopes or regrets for it. Nor to take it cynically as Stefan Collini does: that’s too easy and dismissive. Nor to be ambivalent about it: I don’t really feel torn by Eliot’s cultural criticism. Nor ironical: Eliot is too sound on liberalism’s limitations and too embedded in the history of cultural and literary criticism, for that to be quite right.

My relation to his cultural critique is, rather, fictional or imaginative. It can be affirmed *imaginatively* not as a practical possibility but as a potentiality, an obscure source of energy. A literary, political, spiritual, potentiality, all at once.

That is itself a rather Eliotian thought: he insisted we should not measure the life of the mind by its chances of being socially enacted. Indeed, he thought what he called “the full cultivation of a spiritual life” —let me say rather “the full cultivation of the imaginative life” — required us to stand away from the practical and behavioural, and, if he finally insisted that full cultivation

required faith, he also understood that faith and imagination were hard to separate (*Notes* 32). In these dangerous political times, one can add that politics always happens in the passage between what we can imagine and what can be implemented, and it is that which gives Eliot’s impracticable account of a Christian culture, which I can hold imaginatively, suspending disbelief, its *political* potentiality. And also its literary, cultural and spiritual potentialities.

To talk about its political potential is not quite fanciful: Raymond Williams, for instance, was able to draw on Eliot’s model to imagine how a secular *socialist* culture as “whole way of life” would work. It would be one in which liberalism would be marginalized by communitarianism; in which specialized cadres would take the place of both classes and elites; in which would be no cultural equality or democracy, and in which the fullest consciousness of the whole culture and society was available only in arts that would be more accessible than they are now but still not accessible to everyone (Williams 234).

For all that, it remains true that there are risks in imaginatively affirming Eliot’s cultural criticism. Strange as this may seem, that strikes me that a thought of this kind is the point of Michel Houellebecq’s remarkable recent novel, *Soumission*. Its hero, François, is a Joris-Karl Huysmans scholar and admirer—Huysmans being, like Eliot, a modernist writer who converted to Orthodox Christianity. But François sells out to a rather corrupt Islamic theocratic regime that has taken over the French government in a constitutional coup. He’s a traitor to liberal secularism which, indeed, he finds empty, “boring” in the Eliotian/Baudelairean sense. And so *Soumission* seems to indicate that a position like mine—a hedged imaginative sympathy with

Eliot's cultural critique— may soften us to follow François, i.e. to give up on the kinds of freedom that political liberalism, for all its insufficiencies, protects.

Perhaps.

I hope not.

But Houellebecq turns the screw. Paradoxically, in his fiction, French Islamism turns out to be a beneficiary of liberal tolerance while at the same time Islamic theocracy wins democratic assent because the French liberal regime in place is so little worth fighting for. Certainly François's profession—the literary humanities—has little ethical substance left. There, anything goes. The humanities don't really connect to their students' lives. They are now a career like any other. From that point of view, to recommend illiberal Eliot to humanists just as an imaginative power, as a kind of fiction with fiction's mute potentialities, may to be not illiberal enough.

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Aspiring Immanence: Deleuze's Conundrums and Nagarjuna's Space of Emptiness



Dr. Krishnan Unni P.

Senior Associate Professor

Department of English, Deshbandhu College
Kalkaji, University of Delhi, New Delhi-110019.

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This paper attempts to chart out some of the philosophical concerns that are put forward by two philosophers from the East and the West - Nagarjuna and Gilles Deleuze. This comparative framework tries to make the "differences" between the two systems of thought and then to make the comparisons of such differences useful for a philosophical analysis. Nagarjuna and his varied systems of thought can only be comprehended by understanding the Buddhist tradition behind him and by realizing how Nagarjuna was able to shuffle and reconstitute a new system of thought within *Mahayana* Buddhism. Digging deep into the annals of Buddhist thought, he proposes that Buddhism has two truths: the lower and the higher and it become imperative for the seeker to attain the higher from the lower. The "highest truth" is not a test in itself; rather, it opens up the possibility of attaining something from the hard features of labour. However, this labour involves the act of recognizing *Sunyata*. Since *Sunyata* functions against absolutism, it is evident that in his text Nagarjuna is rejecting all forms of "becoming" and ultimatum. In many ways, a sense of engagement of Buddhist sects with the world and Deleuzian ideas such as "overabundance," "repetition," "affect" are deeply connected some of the central ideas, though not concepts in Buddhist streams of thought. Deleuze's whole oeuvre was to destabilize and distance concepts from their axiomatic pronouncements and to make them more perceptive and clear in the light of the mechanized world where one encounters a number of psychotic phantasms.

Keywords: *philosophy, becoming, overabundance, destabilization.*

This paper will attempt to chart out some of the philosophical concerns asymmetrically organized and set out by deviant ways in two philosophers from the East and the West - Nagarjuna and Gilles Deleuze. At the outset, one gets the impression that such a comparison and framework may not exist at all, but the more deviant its conundrums are, the background is set for a series of debates and introspections. Of course, this comparative framework is not meant to create a mere awareness of the East and the West; on the contrary to make the "differences" more prominent in the systems of thought and thereby, to make the comparisons of such differences useful for a philosophical analysis. Philosophy, above all, is a discourse of thought which incorporates all innate and inanimate notions of being, questions and concepts doubtful at times, and language as the centre of interpretation. More than a mere system of exposition, philosophy is getting reflective and expressible in terms of thoughts and certain mode of action in both the above philosophers' systems of thought. This aspect need to be theorized in the contemporary modes of introspection. The answer to the question Why Philosophy can only be answered and explicated then only.

Nagarjuna's philosophical tradition is quite old and dates back to the early conflicts and consolidations of several Indian philosophical traditions. These traditions, needless to say, owed a lot of debt to many systems of philosophical appropriations and confluences in Indian philosophy and the traditions from where they derived their energy. At the core of the Indian philosophy is the tussle of traditions – most of them derived from the roots of systemic thinking of certain classes that both appropriated certain things from their observations and other group of scholars, who denied certain observations as they

were not sufficient to organize a discourse of thinking and being. This particular feature of Indian philosophy laid its foundation upon a number of deviant situations – most of them reflective in their own nature. How do we place in this interesting context Nagarjuna and his varied systems of thought? On what grounds can we extrapolate his thinking and constitute a separate awareness of Indian philosophy? An enquiry into this can only be provided by understanding the Buddhist tradition behind him and by realizing how Nagarjuna was able to shuffle and reconstitute a new system of thought within *Mahayana* Buddhism.

Right from its inception into the various disorganized castes and contexts, Buddhism offered a thought of difference from the asymmetrical Hindu religion in India. Standing within the swelling tide of the Brahminical schools of thought, which asymmetrically created a number of gods and goddesses, texts that became part of the Indian tradition of *smriti* and uneven thoughts that pervaded the philosophical systems all around, and the texts written for the rulers; Buddhism in India braced a lot of man's aspiring ideas – particularly, those concerned with self, redemption, labour, aspiration and after life. The intervention of Buddhism in Indian philosophy created a new sensibility of thought that later culminated in the life style of North India at a large scale. To step into Nagarjuna's concerns with such issues, a careful analysis of Buddhist streams of thought is essential as such thought would help us revisit the deviance of the Buddhist tradition and orient us toward a new idea of systems that struggled against monolithic interpretation. No philosophic thought in India before Buddhism was properly codified. This is not to say that Indian philosophy was always a mixture of coagulated ideas primarily stemming from different schools

of thinkers; on the other hand, to make the point clear that no philosophical school was successful enough to spread its message efficiently to create a system of followers and ideas. Since the central thinking in the Hindu religion was always dependent on the *vedic* traditions and the Sanskritic opulence, the “others” such as the lower castes in India, who were divided according to the caste divisions were far removed from realizing the texts and their goals. Removed from any learning and a school that could contain them adequately, they were always outside the systems of learning. Apart from that, Hinduism was an amalgamation of different creeds and desires produced by the ruling classes and its divergent philosophy never appropriated into it any dissenting voice. In such a context, Buddha’s stream of thought produced a difference of its own. The question before us is how to theorize Nagarjuna’s *Sunyata* in relation to other Buddhist strands that set them apart from Indian philosophical traditions.

Toward a Harmony of Emptiness

David Kalupahana has attempted to deconstruct the myths associated with Nagarjuna and comments on the some of his texts very extensively. For Kalupahana “Nagarjuna’s Buddha was no doubt Gautama ... who attained enlightenment and turned out to be the most formidable opponent of almost every major philosophical ideas that came to be presented by the Indians” (9). The material philosophy that was in its own development at that time offered a counter-discourse against existence (*sat*) and it headed toward an analysis of the philosopher’s position within the status of Hindu / Buddhist tradition. The binary of the Hindu / Buddhist became powerful during the Maurya dynasty in North India and that created further schisms in the public by dividing people into several groups

and sects. Hinduism was never organized as a sect; but Buddhism became a sect by the 2nd B.C. and its dissemination across the country was phenomenal as it could manage to attract thousands across the several regions and spaces. The materialists were more interested in a theory of the indestructibility of matter as they believed their theory created huge divisions in the body/soul duality, much cherished and nurtured by the *vedantis*.

Nagarjuna’s pivotal contribution to *Madhyamika* tradition of the Mahayana Buddhism was his rejection of absolutism. What did Nagarjuna mean by this? It is important to get into the intractable debate of the first century Indian philosophy that forcefully appropriated a sense of “absolutism” from a set of standards followed by the *Vedantins* School. However, among the many disciples of *Vedanta*, one group definitely stood apart, which consequently challenged the perception of the world and its finalities. While the *Mahayana* sect of Buddhism spread across the Magadha Empire, it was obvious that they faced a number of challenges within. One such challenge was to view and interpret the notion of “absoluteness” from the viewpoint of empirical evidences. While the notion of “absolute” was conceived in the duality of mind and body, many of the preachers of the *Mahayana* sect could not explain it from a particular stand point that would convince the masses. The relationship between the king and his subjects, the state and the people, and many others were rendered doubtful due to such a spreading of the idea. It is in this context, by the middle of the 2nd A.D., Nagarjuna developed his thesis of the rejection of the “absolute,” which stressed the pedestal of the Buddhist thought. His argument that all reality is nothing, but “empty” opened up the foundation of the *Madhyamika* strand. This that prompts us to some sense of

illegible and senseless universe? What about the feats of learning that slide into un-learning as *Sunyata* overpower our systems of thought?

The above mentioned questions apart, Nagarjuna's quest for creating a new pantheon in the *Mahayana* school has to be considered from certain other areas of introspection. While a great many debates started about the way of recognizing the *Sunyata*, the central stream of thought was thrust on the recognition of the world by empirically emptying it from those that tempt others – such as, those that are like the power to reclaim the titles, desire for war and kingdom making, amassing wealth out of illegitimate proportions and above all, the claim of superiority both in thoughts and in deeds. Very few of the *Mahayanins* understood Nagarjuna's philosophy in such a context. Indeed, such an understanding stuttered the existing thought of the sect and even many thought that such an understanding is anti- Buddhist. In such a context, how to reclaim the world became a problem with Nagarjuna's awareness. Of the many questions that haunt the concept of *Sunyata*, one question asked by David F. Burton seems to be very important. Burton by teasing out the threads of Nagarjuna's philosophy asks: "Does *Sunyata* entail nihilism" (78). In Burton's study there is a negation of the negation connected to *Sunyata*; but such an analysis needs more explication. Rather than viewing *Sunyata* as fully "emptiness," it is important to relate it as the possibility to know the world and surroundings more positively by emptying out the "contained" and contaminated from the mind comprising thoughts.

As *Sunyata* raises further doubts about the relationship between truth and untruth, self and

the other and vision and reality, this concept need much more elaboration in the precincts of Eastern systems of thought. This is not to claim one set of philosophy over another; but to make the idea of philosophy the root of all by understanding the concept. Michael G. Barnhart states that "... A neopragmatist might argue that the insistence on *Sunyata* over strengthens the incommensurability thesis on the grounds that it fails to resolve the issue regarding the openness or closure of conceptual schemes, worldviews, and the like" (650). This observation finds perfectly true with a number of other thesis involving Nagarjuna's challenge against the yardsticks of the conformist Buddhist teachings and the sects. The sects, it seems for Nagarjuna, were meant to spread the strictures of firmness – the one of abnegation and later the paradoxical message of redemption. Nagarjuna fought against both the normal assumptions of redemption and abstinence from daily life by outlining the feature of *Sunyata* as the inner harmony that would operate at the level of human consciousness. The interdependence of things expressed in *Pratityasamutpada* generates the notion that a full abstinence from duties and other contexts of human life is not a possibility. Railing against the features of Indian philosophical stream, Nagarjuna's fight against the conformist system was break from the diehard principles in Buddhism. In other words, *Sunyata* as Barnhart says, "Opens up the incommensurability thesis" (650). Rather than dismissing the notion of *Sunyata* as anti-ethical or anit-duty wise, one need to concentrate on its multidimensional aspects of possibilities. The relationship between dependence of things in this world and emptiness are related in such a way that it is the emptiness that expresses all dependent nature of all things in this world. The world, as certain schools of philosophers would imply, need not to be seen as

“empty” without essence, but it is the overwhelming emptiness that connects the dependent things in existence.

Mulamadhyamakakarika is the best text of Nagarjuna that opens the tussle between concepts and perceptions, the world and viewing and above all, ideas of redemption and perseverance. The text in contemporary times requires more introspections as its ideas are more tenuous and related to ideas of language connected to incommensurability, a particular feature of Western post-structuralism, slipperiness and ontological digressions. In this text, Nagarjuna makes it clear that Buddhism is not a religion or practice that is happy with the proclamation of just one truth or one way to attain truth. Digging deep into the annals of Buddhist thought, he proposes that Buddhism has two truths: the lower and the higher and it become imperative for the seeker to attain the higher from the lower. The disciples are committed to attain the ‘higher,’ a point worth debating. The “highest truth” is not a test in itself; rather, it opens up the possibility of attaining something from the hard features of labour. However, this labour involves the act of recognizing *Sunyata*. Since *Sunyata* functions against absolutism, it is evident that in his text Nagarjuna is rejecting all forms of “becoming” and ultimatum. But I will argue here, such a rejection itself is a form of “becoming” as it creates fractures and fissures in our thinking process, where we destabilize the concepts and categories. This is the roadmap to relate Nagarjuna with the Western philosophy.

In *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, Nagarjuna writes: “*pasyatti darsanam naiva naiva pasyaty adarsanam/ vyakhyato darsanenaiva drasta capy upagamyatam*” (Seeing does not perceive, nor does non-seeing perceive. One should admit that a seer is explained

by [the analysis of] seeing itself). Bringing the duality between “seeing” and “unseeing,” Nagarjuna operates here to get into the central debate of vision and perception. In most of the Buddhist traditions such as that of agamas, seeing is rendered deeply critical and problematic as it enforces desire in the humans. But for Nagarjuna, such desire need not to be completely neglected; on the other hand, by the act of “non-seeing” that functions as the root of the mature realization, one constantly need to see more. In other words, “non-seeing” is an act of more seeing as the normal idea of “seeing” does not suffice us to reach any valid stand point of realization. Hence, it is true that Nagarjuna tries to open up a “Middle Way” in Buddhist philosophy that could counter the strictly disciplinarian sects and their beliefs. In the same text, in the section “*Dhatu- Pariksha*” (Examination of Elements), Nagarjuna develops another idea of the space. He writes: “.... There is neither an existent nor a non-existent, neither the characterized nor the characteristic, neither space nor the other five elements similar to space” (151). This complicated and confusing statement is indeed beyond any particular explanation. One can only approximate how this philosopher here is juggling with the aggregates and the space around. It is clear that Nagarjuna here is developing a thesis of “spaceless space” – that is, something akin to the understanding of the modern Physics – resonating ideas of Max Planck’s *Quantum Mechanics* and later Werner Heisenberg’s theory of the uncertainty, which complicated the notion of space as a mental phantasm that made the movement possible, but confused the nature of objects and situations. In Nagarjuna, this question is more centered on his thinking of the objects and their positioning in space. Though more probable analysis of such a situation is possible, our way of interpreting it would perhaps go awry as its ramifications are

far too beyond comprehension. But a careful scrutiny of this statement would reveal the fact that Nagarjuna is not completely divorcing himself from the notion of “aggregates,” their arrangement and space as the traditional Buddhist thinking does.

Buddha’s idea of human personality into five aggregates he calls “*Pancakkhandha*” was the epitome in the Buddhist thought. Nagarjuna, however, develops a new idea of the self in *Atmapariksa* in *Mulamadhayamakarikā*. This is perhaps not an assertion of the self as we do not see in the Western philosophy nor a negation in the Eastern philosophy; but the idea of rejection is very clear when he writes: “Whosoever is free from selfishness and egoism, he too is not evident. Whoever perceives someone as free from selfishness and egoism, he too does not perceive” (265). How do we read this complicated nature of the “self”? It is clear that Nagarjuna is developing a different context of the self against the assumptions of the Metaphysicists that include in itself reify entities and persons. The dualism between “I” and “You” is minimized here and a way of perceiving the second person as someone who resides within the perceiver is highlighted. By doing so, Nagarjuna fights against the tirades against the “Ego” and makes it clear that when the other is perceived within, the “I” dissolves into nothingness. In other words, the challenge against Mahayana Buddhism was centered on the concept of the Self since the first century, is getting normalized in this concept. Gradually, Nagarjuna develops his thoughts to conceptualize truth. He writes: “Independently realized, peaceful, unobsessed by obsessions, without discriminations and a variety of meanings, such is the characteristic of truth” (*Mulam*, 270). If such is the condition of truth, does it posit the notion that

it is highly relative – an idea much in favour of the poststructuralists and postmodernists?

Before examining this problem, one needs to examine the connection between truth and self. As in Nagarjuna’s philosophy, self is diluted, it is imperative to realize the force and power of the self perceived as nothingness and from nothingness developing as a platform where truth can rest. But how can one perceive what is truth from nothingness? Most of the ideas in Buddhist thought are derived from realization and not from the *vedatin’s* point of view of attaining *moksha* (redemption). Nagarjuna’s idea of *apara-pratyaya* is a condition that transcends empirical conditionality. To put it in another sense, one can think about truth by rooting firmly in *Sunyata* and by redressing all other possibilities. Nagarjuna does not develop any idea to renounce all empirical possibilities; on the other hand, he claims to situate his thoughts in the “Middle Way” of negation that may open up the possibility of dissolving finally all material aspirations lying deep inside the empirical conditionalities and such a dissolving is what we call truth. In other words, truth can be attained by dissolving all conditionalities. Examining this condition carefully, Kalupahana writes: “A pluralistic view of the world is not incompatible with dependent arising (*pratisamutpada*). Pluralism in the context of dependent arising does not imply the existence of self-contradictory truths. It need not necessarily lead to a notion of an Absolute that transcends such self-contradictory truths” (272). As *Mulamadhayamakarikā* is written as a commentary to Buddha’s Discourse to Katyayana, one need to remember here several strands of inclusions and exclusions of questions – primarily, those turned up from the Indian philosophical systems of questioning the master and receiving the replies.

Kalupahana's commentary also needs to be critiqued as that leads us to some kind of perplexity regarding truth, materiality and perception. It is clear that in his philosophy of the "Middle Way" Nagarjuna is not turning toward nihilism at any point. On the other hand, this philosophy is meant to create a new pathway to cross the stringent understanding of reaching a path by experimenting one form of idea or another.

Looking at the strategic methodology of negation of Nagarjuna, Ramendra Nath Ghose comments: "The meaning of negation depends on the type of negative and on the context in which a negative expression is used. The context fixes the meaning of as statement its reference to the problem and intention of what one who makes it. Nagarjuna's specialty consists its applying the concepts of Simple Negation and Relational Negation to his own theoretical problem of determining with definitive checks and checks of logical absurdities and ways of knowing, governing the methodical thinking" (174). Negation does not mean the rejection of all previous systems of thought. It has the potential to evolve certain things out of consistent thinking and pondering of the circumstances. Nagarjuna's oeuvre in all the major four texts and the later commentary he added signifies to this aspect. Negation is an idea that needs to be seen from the angle of many other conundrums in Buddhist and *vedantic* philosophy. It is evident that Nagarjuna did not develop the notion of negation as an antithesis to all belief systems; on the contrary, one should understand negation developed in the texts of Nagarjuna as a platform to delve deep into the internal dichotomies of redemption and salvation. When the philosopher is incapable before a set of questions that constantly thwart the realms of salvation, negation of the same ideas seems to be

the vantage point of recognition. This is not to state that Nagarjuna's ideas of negation are the first to prove its value in Indian philosophy, but rather to state that the rejection of any particular principle or creed is the best way to perceive philosophy. In this sense, Nagarjuna develops a system of thought against the conformist Buddhism and Hinduism.

Now the question is could Nagarjuna really develop a thesis of his own in relation to time, space and absoluteness as opposed to the rigid parameters of the Buddhist thought and against the fluid Hindu systems of philosophy? Perhaps, this question needs to be answered from the perspective of the ways of reaching his famous concept *Sunyata*. Unlike in the Western philosophy, Nagarjuna developed this idea not by deductions and inductions; but by the method of rethinking all traditions through constant negation. This negation, as we have seen, is not the one of pure abjection. Nagarjuna refrained from the exuberance and extravagance of the worldly pleasures by engaging with the fundamental corpus of living – that is, by placing himself at the centre of the fundamentals that constitute the world and then by distancing from the hilarious outbursts of its "becoming." In that sense, Nagarjuna was not advocating nihilism, as we see in the philosophy of Nietzsche and with some existentialist thinkers, but was developing a platform to counter the rigidity of belief in one god or in the universe. Contrary to the popular belief that Nagarjuna was a nihilist in Indian philosophy, we need to articulate a discourse by postulating the fundamentals of *Sunyata*. The immense potentialities of *Sunyata* help us understand the world and the universe in a far better sense than the reduction of the world into one principle or equation. The intrinsic nature of *svabhava* he advocates in *Ratnavali* can be

pervasively seen in the agamas tradition and in the Chinese philosophy. The idea of relativity, thus expressed, states Kalupahana, "That which is the element of light...is seen to exist on account of [in relation to] darkness, that which is the element of good is seen to exist on account of bad, that which is the element of space is seen to exist on account of form" (96-97). Such a detailing, needless to say, opens up the room for the relative conceptions of *Sunyata* that constitute the time and space, and also the idea that functions as the base of *Sunyata*. Further, we will see its importance in relation to certain debates in the Western philosophy.

As in his texts, Nagarjuna never developed the idea of *Sunyata* as "pure emptiness," one need to understand this concept in multifold ways of developing a new method of looking at the world and the universe by interpreting it constantly, developing a sense of newness in relativity of time and space, time and space as the intricate matter of engulfing the human cycles and above all, a methodology that would help us to move beyond certain idea of "oneness," that is the singularity attested to God and everything. Thus, the potentiality of *Sunyata* is multifold. It is neither the negation of one concept for the sake of another nor the proclamation of the 'absoluteness' in its own sense. It is the realization that can be achieved through constant efforts of the mind – the one that experiments all suffering and other constitutedness. Nagarjuna, it is clear, is moving away from certain discourse of Buddhism, particularly from Buddhist commentaries and discourses to his disciples here. But this moving away from the texts and commentaries is not to reject them fully; on the contrary, to engage with them to develop an internal congruence, where *Sunyata* is the core that would destabilize the existing systems of

doubts and confusions underlying human thoughts and perceptions.

Gilles Deleuze's Immanence and Gateway to "Becoming"

Though several centuries separate Nagarjuna from Gilles Deleuze, an attempt to read Deleuze's ideas in conjunction with Nagarjuna's concepts invites lot of pervasive challenges than similarities. There is no direct comparison of these two philosophers possible. At such a stature, one would look at the mammoth differences primarily underlying the concepts and then would try to engage in a debate of / within such concepts for some contextualization. Deleuze's theoretical postulations need to be seen far different from the set of ideas underlying Buddhist philosophy and its traditions. In many ways, a sense of engagement of Buddhist sects with the world and Deleuzian ideas such as "overabundance," "repetition," "affect" are deeply connected some of the central ideas, though not concepts in Buddhist streams of thought. In Buddhist philosophy, we never use the term 'concept,' but idea. Concepts are the Western philosophical constructs that developed from Aristotelian times and gained some sense of challenge and maturity in the 20th century. In Deleuzian philosophy, we use the "concepts" as Deleuze's whole oeuvre was to destabilize and distance concepts from their axiomatic pronouncements and to make them more perceptive and clear in the light of the mechanized world where one encounters a number of psychotic phantasms.

Deleuze's beginning of the philosophical explorations owe a lot to the French school of thought in the 1960s and the consequent understanding of several epistemological clashes that followed. The 1960s French school comprised thinkers such as Althusser, Foucault, Lacan and

many others, who primarily came to the philosophical debates under the tutelage of Jean Paul Sartre. However, the rifts between their thinking were deep and serious that there was no point of agreement or a particular thought never overruled their philosophical domain. In many sense, the Western philosophy was undergoing a radical change in the French school of thought as it deviated completely from understanding philosophy as a subject of the elite and further recognizing its greatness ascribed to certain particular thinkers. As the division between the analytical and continental philosophy widened, the French school started giving more importance to the continental philosophy as they were primarily influenced by great thinkers such as Merleau Ponty, Martin Heidegger, Sartre and Husserl. Such a turn made their concerns occupy in the socio-political sphere of thinking connected to activism and social life. An involvement with the public thus constituted their fundamental aspiration of linking their thoughts with the masses and further to develop a train of thought concerned with the evolution of new concepts. It is in such a situation, Deleuze started formulating his ideas concerned with thoughts, assemblages, differences and finally about repetition. Deleuze's concerns were centered on a number of different strands of the socio-political and scientific areas linked to psychoanalysis and abnormality.

Though it is difficult to condense and comment on the vast oeuvre of Deleuze's philosophic trove, this paper will look at only a few central ideas such as "immanence," "repetition," "deterritorialization," celebration of schizophrenia and the idea of multiplicities and multitudes to point out how such ideas function as the other side of "negativity" and perform the function of a new evolutionary mode in Western philosophy. The contours of Western philosophy, deeply structured

on metaphysics and certain ideas of negativity, are here deeply questioned in Deleuzian thought as it move beyond the one sided and narrow confluence of locating ideas and times. Such a variety of areas Deleuze covered, mostly in collaboration with Felix Guattari, need to be seen as the liberation of philosophy from the cloisters of strict regimentation of thoughts. At the same time, this vastness never gives us any particular assumption regarding what this collaboration intended to systematize. The entire system of Western philosophy was topsy – turved by this collaboration and the publication of *Anti-Oedipus*, the text that questioned Freudian ideas and postulated the celebration of schizoids, more than schizophrenics as the subject of interpretation. By questioning Freudian psycho-analysis, Deleuze and Guattari were developing a stream of philosophy tied up to the sophisticated and intensified systems of capitalist culture and desire. The stringent Freudian measures of looking at the patient from certain disturbances of the unconscious are overridden by the question of desire connected to capitalism, desire producing mechanisms and relating unconscious a part of capitalism. Such a step, needless to say, opened up a terrain of looking at the subject not as a fixed entity of any particular malaise; rather a product of a whole web of complicated issues and ideas of a post-industrial society filled with desire and cravings. The celebration of the "unconscious" is what may Lacan would further claim, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (20).

In their formulation of the schizophrenic, Deleuze and Guattari write: "the schizophrenic is capitalism's inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel" (*Anti-Oedipus* 32). Forcing the realms of the unconscious more into the hidden charters of the untabulated circumstances,

where desire is produced and multiplied as a great potential, Deleuze and Guattari, it is clear are celebrating the French thought of deviance that popped up from the 60s by claiming the madness has its own reason (resonating Foucault) and the deviant are more powerful in a society thwarted by multiple desires. Though the aim of these thinkers is very clear in *Anti – Oedipus* and in *A Thousand Plateaus*, their methodologies at times differed in postulating certain other questions of philosophy. While the French school of thought gave more importance to the celebration of the deviant and multiplicities, certain other issues tying them up to metaphysics, logic and paradoxically the ideas of science remained unanswered. The whole of Deleuzian thoughts can be seen addressing such issues and expostulating them further.

Across the vectors of medicine, schizophrenia, resistance, negation, sexuality and arts, Deleuze gives us a sketch of his ideas centered on concepts, systems of recuperation, difference and repletion. Challenging the usual assumption that multiplicities are number multiplied, Deleuze proposes the idea that what constitutes multiplicities are the intermeshing of structures, thoughts, perceptions that finally get entangled into a confluence called “rhizome.” He writes: “Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and engage arborescent pseudo-multiplicities for what they are. There is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort in the object or “returns” in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort in the object or “returns” in the subject. A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the

multiplicity grows)”(30). Inherent in this assumption lays the idea that multiplicities are the focal areas that constitute the ways in which our thoughts can be arranged or structured. Deleuze, unlike in the Indian system of thoughts, definitely articulate strands of differences, which in other words, are the ways of seeing the “other” as a formation of multiplicities. Rhizomes help establishing connections between different streams of thought and hence it is not something based on any particular premediated or pre-meditated things; it opens up the dimension of knowing the world in a far more connected and interrelated way of all knowledge systems. Rhizome, writes Deleuze, is “a map and not a tracing” (35). As maps are at one looking more interlaced and interconnected with asymmetrical lines and disjunctions, the human thought assumes their physical geometry.

The conception of rhizome and its multifarious ramifications lead Deleuze to reach his most famous idea of immanence – which, in many ways, is connected to expressibility, representation, urge to know the world far better and beyond than the available tools and further to connect the multiplicities with the conundrums of changing patterns of life. To reach at the idea of immanence in Deleuze, one need to travel through certain pathways – complicatedly interweaving and intersecting as the combination of the strange and fascinating partnership between Deleuze and Guattari. Since such pathways are perplexing in nature and intertwining in their sub-ways, it is not possible to reach a particular point of closure. Hence, it is better to take a few Deleuzian meeting points that function like concepts or ideas. One such idea is “Event.” Deleuze dismisses the common idea of event as something that happens before us or a narration provided to us from any source. For him, “The event is not what occurs (an

accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and awaits us" ("Ethics 79). The event in such a condition is not resonated and manifested through magnitude and ineffability; but it exhausts the power of all enunciations and creates a different trope where one need to seek the "inside" of an occurrence. This understanding gives us the idea that a journey to the core of what occurs is essential to locate and internalize the event. Seen in this light, the student unrest of the 68 and Vietnam War may not be events for Deleuze. But if they were not events, what were they? To what sort of conclusions and perverse understanding is Deleuze leading us? These questions need to be seen from the psychoanalytic and interweaving philosophic and political issues of our time. There definitely is something that is at stake in this statement. One can clearly analyze the anti-Kantian paradigm that is in development here as event as a category or occurrence is negated.

Immanence is not something to be sought by constant striving only; on the other hand, its overwhelming presence needs much more elaboration. Most of the best Deleuzian scholars such as Ian Buchanan, Brian Massumi, Constantin Boundas and Paul Patton have developed their theses on this. However, their analysis varied with respect to their perceptions and contrary theoretical commentaries were made by all of them on Deleuzian immanence. Immanence contains topological characteristics – in other words, one can find a different set of ideas connected to mathematics is on rise here. Such a development thwarts questions of fixed representations of space and time. As the Western concept of time is linear, this idea of a new topological awareness raises a few questions. For Ian Buchanan, the notion of immanence needs to be traced from concept only. Looking closely at Deleuze's notion of the concept, Buchanan writes:

"... the concept does not describe or contemplate a scene, it cuts it out. Not as a sculptor reveals form in scene, but as a porter wrenches a lump of clay from the earth. Now this does not mean the concept is entirely freestanding, but it does mean its organization is intensive rather than extensive. It is not freestanding because it presupposes a plane of immanence" (57). In this context, one finds out how a concept is perceived and not created. Such an awareness, as Buchanan states again, "Deleuze's plane of immanence is the creation of a context in which competing voices can function as perspectives on a particular problem. In effect, it is the presupposition of a form of expression into which concepts can insert themselves as a form of content" (57). Such a new awareness is indeed a step to understand concepts afresh as Deleuze indicates that they are the formation of several singularities. Thus, the fixity of the concept is negated. Deleuze liberates concept from a standard belief of what it is and suggests that the singularities or ideas behind that are more important to conceptualize it. He states that concepts need to be constructed in "an intuition specific to them, a field, a plane, and a ground that must not be confused with them but that shelters their seeds and the personae who cultivate them" (*Difference* 7). This statement further invites the notion of immanence – to receive and accept everything as they are and to outline, that is, to design the world according to our proportions.

Though critical and philosophical commentaries vary on the question of Deleuzian immanence, we find somewhere most of these Deleuzian scholars reach an agreement: that is, at the plane of understanding Deleuze's idea of empiricism. It is widely debated now how can one theorize this empiricism. The world where subject-object relationships are postulated is not the plane of

empiricism and Deleuze posits the idea of “transcendental empiricism” in contrast to that. Contrasting the effect of a particular sensation over the other, Deleuze outlines the passage of one sensation to another as the crux of becoming, “as increase or decrease in power” (as qtd in *Pure Immanence* 25). Hence, one never can claim pure immanence is not something connected to the hegemony of a structure or any phenomenon. It is immanence to itself, which later he identifies as Bergson’s “a life” (28-29). This is immanence to itself. Manuel de Landa in a recent lecture tried to elaborate this further by examining the relationship between immanence and transcendence. For de Landa, “the structure of the space is what we call the immanent pattern of becoming.” But how do we internalize this structure of space? Though de Landa in his speech gives references to graphs and mathematicians, one best way to understand this would be through “difference.” The differential spaces and compositions are what constitute the structure of space.

Paul Patton further extends the above notion and states that “Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism attempts to go beyond experience to the condition which account for things, states of things and their mixtures given to experience” (87). While Patton’s statement does not provide us any particular headway to distinguish the actual and the virtual, one may assume here that both are interrelated in Deleuzian system of thought. The difficulty here is since such a thought based on the proposition of “transcendental empiricism” is a network of concept of concepts, idea of ideas, methods of assemblages; how are we oriented toward a systematic analysis of such a thought in the Western philosophical traditions? Deleuze, it is clear, is breaking the normative tendencies of

viewing the Western philosophy as a unilinear or singular idea or event. From his idea of the rhizomes to multiplicities to that of assemblages and “body without organs,” Deleuze builds up a platform to resist “oneness” as opposed to the majoritarian framework – where, thoughts codify to produce hierarchies, conglomerate material to form systems of governance, where religion, politics and other human engagements are examined. No doubt, such a tendency runs against the grain of the Eastern systems of thought as well, where the predominance is given to redemption, salvation and abstract concept such like those. In Deleuze, the pure immanence that matters, woven out of the threads of Nietzsche, Bergson, Spinoza and Leibniz function as the core of his notion of liberating thought from angular conceptions of “ideas” – definitely an anti-Platonic stance (though Deleuze refers Plato very rarely in his texts) and a counter mechanism to understand the libidinal and instincts of desire.

Immanence is, therefore, a way to perceive connections more with clarity being rhizomatic as the age demands us. Though there are several other contours connected to this, we must examine Deleuze’s notion of the “minority” and “signs” in relation to the above. Deleuze develops these ideas not in relation to the capitalistic tendencies of the post-industrial society; on the other hand, from his studies of authors like Franz Kafka and Marcel Proust. In “Minor Literature: Kafka,” Deleuze writes: “A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constitutes writing a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature is in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (152). As is clear from this statement, Deleuze is getting intensely political about the need of deterritorialization, which would thwart the center and the state in all

its means and break the hegemony of language, and further the idea of literature and greatness of it lies, he implies, rests in the recognition of minority. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, he voices and extends his concern from *A Thousand Plateaus*, where he expressed it clearly in "nomadism." This intervention in language and literature, unlike the attempts of other philosophers who saw only philosophy and linguistic conundrums in literature, makes Deleuze more political in the realm of Western philosophy. For him, "... every language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth" (156). As the language inside inhabits the nomads, the resistance is possible if one lives within / inside that.

Seen in the above light of "deterritorialization," one can very easily surmise that how some of the modern and postmodern writings really push this idea ahead. One particular example is the works of Samuel Beckett. Beckett operates Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the "order-words," where language in its neutral description also functions as order-demand. In another essay titled "Representation of Masoch," Deleuze elaborates this idea further by stating language in the minority writing faces stuttering. He writes: "The problem is analogous in both Kafka and Masoch. Masoch's language is a very pure German, but a German that is nonetheless affected....by a certain trembling. This trembling need not be actualized at the level of characters, and one must even avoid miming it, it is enough to ceaselessly indicate it, since it is no longer merely a trait of speech, but a superior characterization of language..... A trembling that is no longer psychological but linguistic" (55). More than such concerns, Deleuze looks at "signs" as the constituents of constituting difference in his work on Proust. Proust, for Deleuze, "sets up an image of thought in

opposition to that of philosophy" (Proust 94). This, Deleuze claims, is achieved by creating a number of signs, which function against any expression of truth. Throughout in his analysis of signs, Deleuze counters the notion of truth in philosophy. Proust's search of time helps us to identify how the text is constructed on a series of signs and "it is on the lines of time that the signs intersect and multiply their combinations" (87). These reflections are clear to enlarge our notion of immanence, which Deleuze developed all over his philosophic oeuvre. Immanence is, we can surmise, a progression to understand the universe far better than a set of standards, a priori constructions, methodologies of looking at the nature of philosophy and life, and above all, the strangeness and perplexities of/in "living." Deleuze's study of Nietzsche, Bergson, Leibniz and Kant has immensely helped him to develop this idea. This idea, if one may call it so, is both an address to the capitalist society, a world of artificial intelligence, sophisticated mechanical productions, schizophrenics and schizoids, cyborgs and cybernetics and post-humanized and post-synthetized world, where desires are proliferated and constituted.

Where the Differences Merge for Immanence

So far we have seen two dissimilar philosophical traditions from where entirely different approaches to thinking, ways of codifying life, and dimensions of philosophy are created. Now, it is important to analyze these differences to posit some kind of parallelism. While the twentieth century philosopher Deleuze's concerns are far different than the questions of Nagarjuna of the second century, would it be possible to consider the latter's "Middle Way" as a step toward immanence? One can only make certain conjectures here as such a comparison would be off-

track. Nagarjuna's *Sunyata*, derived out of the questions and negations of methods and scriptures, opened up the "Middle Way" between traditions and systems of Buddhist thought to know the world. But Deleuzian idea of "immanence," it should be noted, stems from the systemic rejections of attesting truth and method to philosophy. However, this crucial difference itself can be a point of study as both in Deleuze and in Nagarjuna, we come across the possibility of a new "opening" of philosophy. While Nagarjuna as some of his commentators such as J.F. Staal, R.H. Robinson and Shotaro Iida would say, created a system of new negation in Indian philosophy, Deleuzian ideas traversed different spaces and places to outline the complexities of life and desire. Ramendra Nath Khose cites Chandrakirti's interpretation of Nagarjuna's "Middle Way" and comments: "Chandrakirti thinks that the Middle Way is not itself a different position, i.e., it does not differently represent the real. It is according to him. [Nagarjuna] a state of intuitive ambivalence between the extremes. The Middle Way is also not a different position according to Nagarjuna, but by it he aims at a unification of the fundamental Buddhist truths of *sunyata*, *pratityasamputpada* and *Nirvana* rationally in the concept of the Middle Way, as Einstein and his followers in the modern times aim at a unification of all physical forces into one richer Truth of Relativity" (281). Certainly, Nagarjuna's "Middle Way" has such a potential to chart a different dimension of immanence, where negation turns out to be the substratum of thinking.

Codifying his systems of thought, Nagarjuna was assuming a certain dilemma was essential to develop *Sunyata*. This dilemma, though inherent in Indian philosophy, was not recognized properly prior to Nagarjuna's times. Opposing the

constraints of rigid Hindu systems of thoughts and methods, he was also aspiring toward the creation of a "minor language" in philosophy as Deleuze outlines in the narratives of Kafka. However, Nagarjuna's idea of *Sunyata* cannot be considered as a perfect exemplum of the minor as it has systems of inclusion in it from other languages and thought streams. But it is very much a minor or "nomadic" in the sense that such an idea stood outside the mainstream Indian philosophical thought and traditions. Moreover, *Sunyata* accommodated a sense of marginalized as this concept and its range, in all possibility, sprang from the margins. Though it is difficult to theorize the margins of India in the second century and prior to that, it is evident that a whole range of people including the lower caste, subalterns (imagining this term and referring to such a condition of people who really served the society for its cultural productions) and others definitely constituted a sense of "minority" discourse. To a great extent, Nagarjuna coming from an elite tradition of Buddhist thinking, was well aware of this class and caste constitution, which definitely had played a crucial role in developing *Sunyata* – as a method, not to fall at the center of Buddhist idea of abnegation fully; but to reconstitute a set of meanings from Buddha's teachings to resist the hegemony of the teachers and their teaching. *Sunyata*, seen in such a perspective, is both unwinding the contours of learning, as Deleuze did with ontology and empiricism. Middle Path of Nagarjuna in some pervasive ways anticipates some kind of "immanence" here.

Paradoxically, one may find some resonance between Nagarjuna and Deleuze if one goes by Nagarjuna's *Sunyata* as outlined by Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest, "emphatically not nonexistence but, rather, interdependent existence. For

something to have an essence (Tibetan: *rang bzhi*; Sanskrit: *svabhava*) is for it to be what it is, in and of itself, independently of all other things" (6). The collaboration of Deleuze with Guattari in some sense, outlines this inter-dependence when seen in the light of rhizomatic production of knowledge systems and deterritorialization of the center in many ways. The emptying of "everything" in Nagarjuna gave way to the understanding of "everything" of emptiness. In Deleuze's philosophic journey, by inter-dependence, a sense of "becoming" is created. In the wake of the 1968 philosophic and historic turn of the Western world, such interdependence was very much in demand to create a new trope of philosophic outbreak. What Deleuze and Guattari achieved through such interdependence is, beyond doubt, the configuration of a number of philosophic and social thoughts to relate to the human question concerned with medicine, psychiatry, history, visual narratives and science. In yet another sense, one can argue that this collaboration gave way to the "plural" assemblage of human condition since this amalgamated a number of differences rather than locating the singularity of human thought. Ian Buchanan further elaborates this by stating that "According to Deleuze and Guattari, the intersection or convergence of heterogeneous elements is first of all a problem of consistency every artwork, they say, whether it is a film, sculpture, novel or rock opera, has a plane of consistency, where the sense of that film, sculpture or rock opera is in fact to be found. In their view, narrative is primarily a power of consistency: in effect, it is the text's unconscious, or at least Deleuze and Guattari's version of it (110). The intersecting enterprise is meant to produce a series of differences, as Buchanan's analysis tells us, to give us the manifold ideas of

the world and existence. Tracing Deleuzian thoughts to Nietzsche, Peter Hallward comments: "Nothing is more foreign to Deleuze than an unconditional concern for the other as other" (92). It is clear that Deleuzian ideas are meant to create a deep sense of recognizing the other as "Other" and thereby understanding the sameness to realize the "Other."

Above all, Deleuze's entire philosophic oeuvre centered on the idea of "becoming" is different from Nagarjuna's "Middle Way" as the latter is more inward looking and aspired for the rise of the liminal as its manifestations go to the margins and to those who are compressed to live around the center – that is, of those of the scholars and *Satavahana* dynasty. But Deleuze's consistent efforts to reach this philosophical pedestal can be traced back in a deviant sense with Nagarjuna's notion of *Sunyata*. The biographer of Deleuze and Guattari comments: "Deleuze differentiated history from becoming. The creation of something new was always inactual and constituted a becoming, which certainly needed history and situations in order not to remain completely undetermined, but they eluded it at the same time. Becoming breaks out of time and is never reduced to it" (323). This statement, taken in its seriousness, makes it clear that in many ways the "intersecting lives" of Deleuze and Guattari was meant to orient a sense of "becoming" beyond all borders and historical postulations. Nagarjuna, on the contrary, also created a sense of difference by assuming what Buddhist philosophy can undo, rather than imposing a set of principles and codes. *Sunyata* in all sense is "becoming." Seen in this light, Nagarjuna in many ways, though disparate and different both in practice and in theory, is one of the antecedents of Deleuze.

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The Generation Famous: Celebrity Culture in the Age of New Cultural Fabrications



Dr. Sunitha Srinivas C.

Assistant Professor

PG Department of English and
Centre for Research, Govt. College Mokeri
P.O. Kozhikode-673507, Kerala, India.



Dr. Arunlal K.

Assistant Professor

PG Department of English and
Centre for Research, Govt. College Mokeri
P.O. Kozhikode-673507, Kerala, India.

A b s t r a c t

This paper attempts to problematise celebrity culture within new media. A different sense of community culture lies enclosed within each of the social media. The vagaries of hyper-mediation are used today to build one's own audience (micro-celebrities whose fame is relatively narrow in scope and likely to be transient) and a sense of connection. Celebrities as cultural intermediaries are imperative, as they shape both use values and exchange values, and exert cultural authority as determiners of taste and architects of new consumer dispositions. One of the new marketing phenomena that the management sciences were intrigued with in the beginning of the twenty-first century was 'stealth-marketing'-a shrewd online strategy wherein the companies paid 'ordinary' consumers to promote new products.

Keywords: *celebrity culture, symbolic capital, idealized image, social affiliations.*

Celebrity culture occupies diverse social, cultural, political, artistic spaces of contemporary world. Recurrent media representation and the consequent social visibility create a special iniquitousness for present-day celebrities. In fact, the urge to be visible, and a manipulation of the visible aspect of celebrity-hood validate the twenty-first century celebrity's social identity and belonging. To be available visually for consumption has become a means for a celebrity to ensure that he/she *exists* (with a rupture between the 'veridical self' and a self 'as seen by others'). It also denotes a struggle for recognition, involving a person's relation-to-self—the way in which he/she evaluates and understands him/herself in everyday thinking and acting. A visible celebrity status in a context of rampant social media usage also means an expertise over creating a virtual 'profile' that could be 'tagged' to other celebrity accounts, decked with trending hash tags or producing online content that could become viral. The celebrity profile, in this sense, exercises a command over the circulation and popularity of social media content. When similar celebrity 'values' are shared it becomes a part of the common world, as a kind of 'voluntary association' (constituting a kind of 'social affiliation' and characterized by the fact that a person makes an autonomous choice to be part of them. It becomes all the more empowering by offering 'recognizability' ('symbolic capital') and a 'publically recognized authority' (Swartz 84). On the other side, the visibility-factor of the celebrities invites control and surveillance on themselves, less subtly as privacy intrusions and more subtly through a disciplinary control of one's own behaviour (Brighenti 335). The idealized image (ephemerons) constructed out of the visual specimen of the celebrity body creates a seemingly new aesthetic of social appearance. This spectacle (of the celebrity) traverses the cultural circuits in

numerous ways, forming alliances of a psychological nature. It could, for instance, create a double-edged anxiety of not being known or visible enough; it could emerge as a privileged space (of 'appearances' and 'reproductions') where there is a framing and humanizing of desire (a desiring object and an object of desire), and so on. In the wake of modern mass media and mechanical reproduction, Walter Benjamin had argued that the 'celebrity achieves an aura through mass reproduction' and the reproduction of a celebrity image makes seeing them 'in the flesh' even more captivating (236). Caught in the cusp of another media revolution, defining celebrity logics now involves looking at the evolved media field where the reproduction and circulation of celebrity happens.

Essentially a media is any transactional channel that connects a mass of 'consumers.' The 'intertextually' constructed celebrity body is placed at the centre of the production, circulation and consumption of contemporary fame and not at the periphery of the power networks that circulate in and through the popular media. The singularity and uniqueness of the individual is replaced by a mechanical 'swarm solidarity' in the public space. These spaces are in due course redesigned towards achieving a sense of belonging (which also qualifies as a particular relation-to-self). It incorporates the sense that the celebrity is a part of a larger social unit; a sense of oneself as 'attached.' Celebrities of any historical period were those who knew how to stay in and use the media which connected the mass during their times. Consequently, as the nature of the media underwent a revision, so did the nature (skill-set, factors of fame, social relevance, factors that added to their glamour etc.) of the celebrities. For the past few years various social media platforms—most of which take effect through a

hyper-visual mode—have mediated the rise and obsolescence of ‘celebrities.’ Since a celebrity is a function of the market at large, and the advertisement industry in specific, in the present moment when market and advertising are both co-opted into the cyber culture, it is only natural that celebrity culture gets revised via the syntax of the online dimension of everyday life. Being a part of digital technology people are always connected and comfortable with a range of cutting-edge technologies which marked the birth of the digital native. ‘Socialized’ differently they are used to receiving information at a fast pace. The changing times as well as the emergence of digital speed in contemporary times have had a tremendous impact on celebrity making. Social media celebrities have been able to gain more audience in recent years. According to David Marshall, online celebrity practices unfold in accordance with a particular temporal and spatial logic characterized by what is referred to as ‘narrowing of the gap’ between celebrities and their fans or followers.

A different sense of community culture lies enclosed within each of the social media. The vagaries of hyper-mediation are used today to build one’s own audience (micro-celebrities whose fame is relatively narrow in scope and likely to be transient) and a sense of connection. Celebrities as cultural intermediaries are imperative, as they shape both use values and exchange values, and exert cultural authority as determiners of taste and architects of new consumer dispositions. One of the new marketing phenomena that the management sciences were intrigued with in the beginning of the twenty-first century was ‘stealth-marketing’—a shrewd online strategy wherein the companies paid ‘ordinary’ consumers to promote new products. The targets were ‘friends’ and ‘friends of friends’ of these ordinary people whose

disguised promotional messages (as email, or Facebook post, or YouTube video, or Instagram story) would push the brand in a very convincing manner to a very ‘personal perceptual space.’ By 2010, management studies had named these brand-pushers: ‘influencers.’ With the arrival of the influencer global celebrity culture underwent unprecedented scales of change (it is significant that these changes were more than local and surpassing the circle of influence of the influencer-like media figures).

In today’s (social) media the longevity of celebrity-hood matters less; what matters more is the mass impact of a particular moment. Celebrities as objects of mass consumption mushroom across the society, wielding authority in various ways in their respective fields (especially when it comes to influencing the mass to choose from the market excesses). The longevity of consumption being determined by various factors like the field of expertise, the nature of the media that upholds the celebrity, the interval before the next viral sensation hits online platforms and so on. It thus paves the way for a discourse community with its structured communication and system of information. The nature and impact of mass media before the cell phone and data revolution was largely regional. Changes that happened in the society were communicated across boundary but with a good deal of delay and loss of immediacy. The most important change that happened to the media world in the wake of the data revolution was that the boundaries that separated different mass media collapsed. With the emergence of cell phone apps, changes in nature happened simultaneously across the globe—an app update could change the very nature of Facebook transactions completely; a change felt and responded to by all users of that app across the globe as the update reaches the international

consumer-world, in an instant, simultaneously. The data-based cell phone transactions affected a seamless convergence of media and created its celebrities who did not have to, if at all they needed to, be aware of shifting from one media method to another. From politicians to rock stars to the housewife who cooks great or the student who dances well, everyone had more or less the same variables to deal with when it came to claiming their share of media attention and fame.

The new media redefined the individual—the visual focus of the new media platforms contributed to what we now identify as the ‘selfie culture’ which is essentially a specific category of self-representation. Travellers to artists and politicians to the aforementioned ‘ordinary’ promoters subscribe to this representational model. One could think of family influencers, digital media entrepreneurs, tech analysts and such online celebrities who all could claim micro-celebrity statuses. Using early studies of internet culture one may still categorise them as people with individual blogs/accounts albeit with accounts on most social media. They accrue, in effect, sufficient cultural, economic and social capital to enable them to occupy dominant positions in the everyday experience of the consumer mass. It may be noted that not a few print magazines have gone out of business over the last decades, and that web editions of news dailies have become an important sub-field. If the traditional mass media embedded advertisements and promotional content, the selfie-celebrities literally live as the advertisement and the postmodern market. Like an Instagram post, they appear to the mass as a simple picture and command a fee from the manufacturer-distributor chain. To create this post, it is true a set of skills are necessary, such as engineering a good photo angle, lighting or ambience. Through their

association with the products they sell—and, presumably, their physical attractiveness—they are able to command influence in the marketing world, live a celebrity lifestyle, and accumulate yet more followers on social media, even to the point of being able to charge for personal appearances in publicity events. The internet transformed the definition of celebrity giving it newer attributes (the oft mentioned popularity of Justin Bieber). Unlike celebrities created by television, newspapers or print magazines, or any of the twentieth-century mass media, celebrities that are born in social media (the digital natives) command great proximity and a very high degree of immediacy. Celebrities of the earlier period of mass-media were segregated on the basis of their achievements in their own special fields. It was an age of celebrity-actors, celebrity-writers, celebrity-musicians and so on. The media that celebrated, or rather ‘celebrified’ them sought to sanctify and justify their necessary aloofness from the mass. Like gods, kings or queens they were made aloof and special through an enveloping mythology. The mass-media churned out mythologies of the popular kind to create stars out of them, in their unique fields. More, this earlier set of celebrities, in general, was not ones who would easily survive the media platform where their mythology was made. To put it clearly, a literary celebrity, with all the mystic hype failed to impress an audience on television, on a stage-show, or on radio. In the same manner, an actor-celebrity would find it very difficult to impress a literary audience. These media were discrete units of myth-making and circulating and did not easily connect on an inter-platform basis.

The creation and commodification of celebrities as such have become a source of popular fascination. Celebrities serve as the focus for gossip and exchange of information. Such gossip

is not simply part of an isolated and arbitrary exchange between individuals but an integral constituent of a culture in which the narratives of everyday life are frequently recycled through conversations about celebrities. Through Twitter and online portals, celebrity gossip becomes national obsessions and provides a unifying experience across various social groups. The commodification of celebrity culture both fuels and responds to a market for new but readily recognizable and reassuringly familiar celebrities. The easily disposable celebrity symbolises the imperatives of mass consumer culture. Minor celebrities are mass produced and then devoured with extraordinary speed. It is possible to see the ascendancy of celebrity culture as reflecting a cultural shift from the valuation of character to that of personality. The 'celebrity victim' (someone who gains fame for his/her failures, illness or misfortune) has also come to fascinate numerous observers. The victim celebrity personifies a wider sense of powerlessness and estrangement, and helps give meaning to the difficulty many have in coping with the routine problems of existence. The fame that society accords to those who are prepared to disclose their private troubles and intimate thoughts is a development that has engaged the attention of writers on the growth of the confessional and therapeutic imagination. These quasi-charismatic figures do not have to justify their moral status. Celebrities like M.T. Vasudevan Nair, K.J. Yesudas, Mammooty, Mohanlal or Dileep do not have to worry about being deposed. Nor does society hold contemporary celebrities to account. When the media become disappointed in their performance once in a while, they simply look for a fresh face and a more convincing personality. Online social platforms offer an entry to this celebrity culture, challenging conventions of the traditional celebrity system. The celebrity-scape has thus

changed with the new media. The new model of sociability offered by the social media also creates more of individualized social networks—each working towards a 'celebritization' (the societal and cultural embedding) of the self (and of the 'celebrity'). And despite the 'remoteness' of the celebrity, the bonds of collective life (socio-political-cultural-artistic) are reaffirmed by (and a status of 'institutionalized cultural-capital' assigned to) the focused images deployed over media; a constant negotiation taking place between the celebrity, media and audience (with an increase in outreach, to a global audience).

Pierre Bourdieu has observed regarding modern mass media that the media-field becomes "the locus of a struggle to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy, that is, to determine which properties are pertinent, effective and liable to function as capital so as to generate the specific profits guaranteed by the field" (*Social* 11). Now, as the contemporary celebrity profiles are constructed by collective action (through media), the network of relations between social positions, the positions and their interrelations are parallelly structured by the distribution of economic, social, and cultural capital. Each 'field' is characterized by its own logic. Celebrities function within this field (social fields get 'celebritized'), accumulate and monopolize capital based on the field-specific rules. The contemporary celestoids (the critical articulation of the celebrity as disposable commodity) engage with the world creating 'fragile patterns of expectation'—forming networks through associations and thus embedding the celebrity in society and culture. Power operates within the 'social stratification' thus formed, influencing the nature of preferences (which come to function as a sort of socio-cultural orientation—a 'sense of one's place'). These

“cognitive structures... internalized, ‘embodied’ social structures,” become a natural entity to the individual (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 468). What falls outside the celebritized ‘taste’ (and thus the given ‘social space’ of the celebritized) is rejected. People also experience the celebrity multi-sensuously through activities such as dining at celebrity restaurants or ‘perform’ing their recipes at home (allusive of the abstracted, anticipatory, reflective and conjectural consumption of celebrities as well as the physical consumption of their cuisine). A celebrity such as the Malayalam film actor Dileep shows how contemporary celebrities cash in on the possibility of making the masses feel that the celebrity is right in the middle of their everyday experience. The actor chose the tag of “janapriyan,” which literally translates as “the one liked by people.” It was usual among the popular actors of Kerala to choose for themselves a tag of stardom—Mammootty has been called megastar and Mohanlal, superstar. Rajnikanth uses superstar tag and Kamal has the tag ‘universal star.’ Divergently, the ‘star’ tag was dropped by Dileep and the next generation of popular actors, though their claim to star status did not wane much. Dileep took this strategy further by founding a chain of restaurants which used the theme of ‘puttu,’ a food item that appears most prominently in the menu of the lower castes and common classes (popularized in Kerala by Sree Narayana Guru, one of the Renaissance figures, a champion of the oppressed castes and a very pragmatic reformer). Dileep’s chain of restaurants successfully customized the recipe of making puttu, like bread in western recipes, the “Dhe Puttu” kitchens use puttu for a range of stuffings and complex mouldings. A feat of celebrification (a transformation of the ‘ordinary’), this restaurant chain soon added to the popularity of the actor. It worked as a very effective endorsement of the tag of ‘janapriyan.’ Cashmore and Parker describe

instances like this as “the commodification of the human form” —the process by which people are turned into ‘things,’ things to be adored, respected, worshipped, idolized, but perhaps more importantly, things which are themselves produced and consumed (215). As Bourdieu points out, social activity differences lead to various, relatively autonomous, social spaces in which competition centres on particular capitals. These fields are treated on a hierarchical basis— with economic power usually governing— wherein the dynamics of fields arise out of the struggle of social actors trying to occupy the dominant positions within the field. The position of each particular agent in the field is a result of interaction between the specific rules of the field, the agent’s habitus and capital (social, economic and cultural). The celebrity fields interact with each other, and are hierarchical; most being subordinate to the larger field of power and class relations. Specific benefits flow from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with these social networks.

A tacit, almost unconscious mode of cultural/social domination (akin to symbolic power) occurs within the everyday social space (a relatively autonomous, yet heteronomous space, now occupied by social media influencers) as categories of thought and perception are imposed upon dominated social agents through the celebritized image. This, in turn, perpetuates a social structure favoured by and serving the interests of those ‘agents’ who are already dominant. The numerous processes of mutual consecration lead to a homology between the celebrity spaces (Bourdieu, *The Field* 182).

The networks of power and influence created by celebrity discourses have become more and more fleeting in present times. The prevailing celebrity system creates a ‘field’ of social positions

structured by power relations over the social media—a field seeking advantage through the influence of wealth (economic capital), their social networks (social capital), and their taste for and knowledge of those aspects of culture that confer honour and esteem (cultural capital). It involves a deploying and legitimizing of power and domination that is transitory unlike early times. One's experience of this media 'flow' generates a transitory numinous experience and consequently there emerges the need to reflect on the relatively fleeting nature of such an experience—a reflection that opens up the possibilities of new perspectives on the presence and absence of the celebrityized (social) self. The aesthetic field here embraces the social and cultural variations of the space occupied by the subject; at the same time acknowledging that the *form* of experience is dictated as much by cognitive structure as it is by social structure ('shared social conditions and cognitive structures'). The social capital offered by the existent media grids sets of contacts, relationships, knowledge, as well as friendships which allow the subject to extend to some degree his/her network of social relations, and to exercise a rather significant amount of power in a media generated field of social positions structured internally in terms of power relationships. These autonomous, independent spaces of social play within a liquid modernity force the celebrity to function under conditions of endemic uncertainty. Anthony Giddens has observed that in social analysis, the term structure (the 'recurrent patterned arrangement') referred generally to 'rules and resources' and more specifically to "the structuring properties allowing the 'binding' of time-space in social systems." These properties make it possible for similar social practices to exist across time and space and that lend them 'systemic' form. Celebrities, as 'agents'—groups or individuals—draw upon these structures to

perform social actions through embedded memory ('memory traces'). The 'duality of structure' emphasizes structure's nature as both medium and outcome and is conceived by Giddens as:

...the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of reproduction of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution. (Cohen 42)

Structures exist both internally within agents as memory traces that are the product of phenomenological and hermeneutic inheritance and externally as the manifestation of social actions. The *milieux de memoire* has moved from the level of interpersonal interactions to a space of mediated reality of the media within modernity. The sense of belonging and individualism that one experiences as a celebrity becomes more pronounced with media convergence. The celebrity culture involves the transmission of power relations, reflecting an ever shifting liquid social culture. The element of legitimacy (here socially approved) is vital to the notion of authority, and a means through which the celebrity status is distinguished from the more general concept (and dominant status) of power. This diffuse network of people with a patterned variety of interaction now needs to be directed towards a shared goal—that of resisting a media onslaught that renders them increasingly redundant in quick short time spans.

Social systems have patterns of social relation that change over time; the changing nature of space and time determines the interaction of social relations and therefore (a celebrity) structure. This

has made possible the operation of a 'celebrity culture' embedded in 'national and transnational cultures,' even functioning as 'metaphors for globalization.' 'Instafame's' glamorous nature derives from its visual, or photographic focus. But it is more than just a photographic medium, since its visuals are accompanied by texts and these can be replied to by other members (and reciprocated by the account owner). Admittedly, most of the verbal interaction is minimal, consisting of short phrases at best and often just a single word or a few emoticons. There is no restriction (unlike Twitter) on the amount of text a user can post, and some accounts feature more extended discussion than can be found on that particular medium. The hash tag (like on Twitter) serves an important communicative function—not just thematic (grouping together pictures on a similar topic) but rhetorical, inviting certain interpretations. A rather different type of Instafame, and one that could not be predicted from studying the intended affordances of the medium, concerns a new generation of poets known as Instapoets. By framing a few lines of verse in a picture, these writers, completely unknown prior to Instagram, have grown audiences, signed publishing deals, and, in some cases, released best-selling volumes of poetry far outstripping anything produced in the conventional literary field. Rupi Kaur, a Canadian poet of Indian heritage, whose first collection *Milk and Honey* has sold in excess of a million copies, is a pioneer in the field. Tyler Knott Gregson, has combined his interests in poetry and photography in order to upload a daily haiku over several years and further best-selling hard copy books. Rupi Kaur's creative activity also extends to other art forms, notably performance art; she attracted much publicity by apparently being censored by Instagram for posting a picture of her menstrual blood staining her trousers and bed sheet. While the company claimed that it had

deleted the post in error, Kaur welcomed its restoration as a victory for sexist taboos around menstruation. As Horkheimer and Adorno made clear, celebrity and capital are inextricably linked in the modern age; the former exists to prop up the latter. The idea foundationally theorised by Theodor Adorno, that popular cultural products can serve capitalism most profitably when they are reduced to a simple formulae, replicated and re-introduced to the mass market with slight variation that produces the illusion of differentiation for the consuming audience works on a social media platform today. The widely prevalent spectacle of 'ordinary' people grabbing the media spotlight as 'celebrities' is also an offshoot of the digital revolution that has taken place. The overt link between commerce and media performance marks the distinction between social media influencers and traditional discrete celebrities. This situation where the celebrity gathers capital enough to become his or her own investor has resulted in 'self-branding' par excellence. The hash tag attached celebrity-genre is therefore more than digitized versions of former genres. For instance, what would in the earlier media world be looked upon as an unlikely source of fame, say stand-up comedy or mountain climbing, will now potentially create influential individuals with a substantial following on social media through sponsorship activities, Instagram pictures and YouTube videos. The profile identity matters much more than the athleticism or aestheticism of the celebrity in question. This has necessarily engendered a general anxiety around the usurpation of 'expert status' by people who cultivate a large audience for claims that are not informed by traditional sources of knowledge or supported by traditional forms of evidence (like lifestyle bloggers with little or no education or training promoting diets and health treatments).

The 21st century has revised the rules of celebrification radically; so much so that the apotheosis of the celebrity is now not confined to movie stars, singers, sports heroes or even the easily-disposable, banal, reality television constructions. The term celebrity has moved from a noun to the status of an adjective that signifies anyone who possesses the quality of attracting attention. Success in virtually every profession, provided it is represented in the online world, is associated with a celebrity status. The trajectories of the celebrity and the fan too have grown ever closer online. The fickle nature of the current media makes it very difficult for the 'self-made' stars (of the previous decades and earlier media paradigms; their celebrity status almost always axiomatic) as well as the 'manufactured' (celebrities born after the proliferation of data and cell phone; usually understood as manufactured celebrities 'made' famous through media publicity) to stay in the limelight for an extended period of time. Whereas the former set are actors, singers or writers, the latter mostly comprise of activists, netizen journalists or accidental viral-video influencers. In either case, the celebrity is more than just a well-known person—they are the products of a cultural industry devoted to the fabrication of interchangeable statuses. YouTube and Instagram have made possible the production of a factory line assembly of celebrities. Today's celebrities are promoted as both special and utterly ordinary. They are celebrated for their unique personality and attractive qualities while appearing to treat them as 'ordinary' people facing the humdrum problems and disappointments of everyday life. These make the celebrities appear to be people everyone knows or ought to know. This affectation of familiarity (like the endearing familial addresses Lalettan, Mammooka and Dileepettan) conveys the implication of the removal of social and cultural barriers between

the celebrity and the consumer of popular culture and offers the promise of a relation of intimacy. Although they are not quite like ordinary people, their problems and predicaments are sufficiently familiar to everyman to allow for the forging of an emotional bond. Contemporary celebrity culture succeeds in transforming the powerful and the well-known into intimate and familiar figures. Through reducing the psychic distance between the public and the famous, the celebrity is drawn into the routine everyday experience. There was even a celebrification of rescue volunteers during the last Kerala flood (like K.P. Jaisal) whose rescue gestures went viral online. Their presence and moral pull made the media experience of the flood a very different one from what it was in the previous decades. With the new grading system and corporatization, even higher education has embraced celebrity culture. The system now endorses self-promotion and has created celebrity academics, whose orations and presence across seminars and conferences in Universities and colleges slowly put in place a new circle of celebrification. The word 'celebrity' has become a social category of ephemerons occupying a position of 'being known' (in the present often devoid of charismatic effects and functioning more as 'self-promoters').

Ever since the mass uptake of the Internet in the late 1990s, scepticism about online 'disinformation' also has been prevalent. 'Digital dualism' offered by the online and offline constitute discrete social worlds, the former being a poor simulacrum of the latter. This is a contentious issue that feeds into many contemporary post-truth debates around knowledge, culture, legitimacy, and representation. Instances of cognitive dissonance surface wherein direct encounters radically conflict with the mass circulated images of the celebrity. One cannot

overlook the power dynamics of identity and difference in relation to the recognition demands attached to the 'celebrity status.' The struggle for celebrity-hood in a way also becomes a perpetuation of domination and oppression through the power relations of identity formation (the celebrity as a 'site' where power is enacted, resisted or reworked). The fame of the celebrity is also not confined to a localized one; not bound within the particular social assemblage of which he/she is a part (but more inflated). The celebrity's sense of who he/she is (determined through their interaction with others) initiates a shift from a monologic to a dialogic model of the self as well. Paradoxically it also involves an inevitable dependence on others for identity formation which renders people vulnerable to recognition. The concept of being a celebrity has come to be redefined in contemporary times, making the new age celebrity more accessible and participatory, yet ephemeral.

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Solitude, Vulnerability, Victimhood: The Experience of 'disablism' in Malayalam Short Fiction



Dr. Chitra Panikkar

Professor of English
Bangalore University

Ashoka Bhavana, Jnanabharathi Campus,
Bengaluru-560056, India.

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The paper proposes to examine the representations of 'disablism' in three short stories in Malayalam: K.R. Meera's "Ekanthathayude Noor Varshangal" (Noor's Hundred Years of Solitude),¹ Padmarajan's "Moovanthi" (The Dusk), and Subhash Chandran's "Daivavum Sarkaarum" (God and the Government). It is an attempt to highlight the points of solitude, vulnerability and victimhood -- attributes that seem to characterise the experience of 'disablism' projected by these stories. There is a conceptual distinction between 'impairment,' 'disability,' and 'disablism' in the way each one is marked out within the theory of Disability Studies. If 'impairment' is a biological, physical category, 'disability' is the result of material, sociocultural, political, and psychological exclusions. 'Disablism' is a furthering of the above; it indicates a phenomenon that prevents people with disabilities from living up to their potential in communities, owing to societal constraints. The three stories chosen for translation and analysis specifically deal with physical and sensory disabilities.

Keywords: *impairment, disability, disabilism.*

The paper proposes to examine the representations of 'disablism' in three short stories in Malayalam: K.R. Meera's "Ekanthathayude Noor Varshangal" (Noor's Hundred Years of Solitude), Padmarajan's "Moovanthi" (The Dusk), and Subhash Chandran's "Daivavum Sarkaarum" (God and the Government). K.T. Mohammed's story, "Kannukal" (Eyes) and Gracy's story, "Paavakkutti" (The Doll) are briefly invoked in order to highlight the points of solitude, vulnerability and victimhood — attributes that seem to characterise the experience of 'disablism' projected by these stories. The first three stories have been translated into English as part of writing this paper and that can serve as an appendix to the ensuing discussion. This may in turn warrant at least a sketchy introduction to the three writers I have chosen to translate K.R. Meera and Subhash Chandran are established and recognised names, identified with young contemporary talent in Malayalam. K. R. Meera's novel, *Aaraachaar* (*The Hangwoman*) and Subhash Chandran's novel, *Manushyanu Oru Aamukham* (*A Preface to the Human-being*) have won much appreciation and recognition in recent years. Padmarajan, in comparison, belongs to a slightly earlier period. But an old hand at both writing and film-making, he has often served as an inspiration to young writers since his sensitive interventions have often been characterised by a radical newness. However, it is not their established stature in the field which made me choose to translate or discuss these writers' stories; it is the powerful way in which these three stories deal with the issue of disablism.

Here, I wish to draw a conceptual distinction between 'impairment,' 'disability' and 'disablism,' the way each one is marked out within the theory of Disability Studies. If 'impairment' is a biolo-

gical, physical category, 'disability' is the result of material, sociocultural, political, and psychological exclusions. 'Disablism' is a furthering of the above; it indicates a phenomenon that prevents people with disabilities from living up to their potential in communities, owing to societal constraints. The three stories chosen for translation and analysis specifically deal with physical and sensory disabilities. These do not cover developmental, psychiatric disabilities or other illnesses. The restricted sphere of reference in a way helps us to concentrate on 'disablism' pertaining to the particular.

K.R. Meera's story brings us to a paraplegic Muslim beauty, Noor, whose life-long solitude is broken into by Satyan, a hired Hindu goonda who is a killer and a criminal. It then becomes the story of a strong, passionate, vibrant love-affair between two ostracized lonely souls. (As a criminal, Satyan is also socially ostracised). The story carries all the trappings of latent sexuality and desire, inspiring and motivating two cursed existences to dream, to love, to live. Till the two find each other, they seem to have led meaningless individual alienated lives. But once the two start bonding, they seem to draw sustenance and strength from that togetherness. The last part of the story where Satyan releases Noor from her physical suffering by hugging her closely, tightly and passionately to his chest till she can literally breathe no more, ought to be read as an act of love and compassion, a moment of sacrifice. After that, his life is predictably marked by total solitude.

In the story, wherever Noor is, she is alone. She sleeps with Marquez's book, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, kept open on her chest. In her house, bed-ridden, she occupies a secluded corner-room. Even when she goes for specialized treatment, she is kept in seclusion, always alone. In fact, secluded spaces characterize her existence. And this is the

space Satyan walks into. Thereby, it is transformed into a space of longing, desire, and deep love. As a hired criminal, Satyan has to keep his secrets, and is a loner. In spaces where they meet and where their dreams meet, the worlds around the spaces get automatically marginalised. The narrative has a steady way of neglecting other people's lives and reactions.

It is possible to bring in a few sections from the story to communicate the levels of meaning the narration spans to express this larger idea. The narrative says:

He had met Noor in Nadapuram. He was called upon to kill. The Hindus had lost two lives. To make up for this loss, two groups were set after Muslim houses identified for the purpose. Satyan had forced the teak-door open and had broken into the double-storeyed bungalow as one among eight to kill the prey, destroy material, rape women, and set fire to the house, to avenge the wrong done, wearing black shirt and pants, brandishing kumkum on the forehead, with head, nose and mouth covered. The screams of women and children rose. Satyan could not remember the rooms of the house or the things he saw there. Nothing blocked the eye... a kind of madness. Satyan found himself inside the house. In each room, he destroyed everything that came into sight and moved on to the side-room. While pushing the half-close door open, he noticed a wriggly movement on the cot by the light of the bedside lamp. Satyan was awakened; he became alert. He recognised it as a woman: a piece of flesh lying on its back, chest upwards. (my trans; 123)

The narrative records how Satyan falls in love with her:

That moment onwards, that day onwards, she disturbed his sleep. The nights following that, Satyan dreamt of the slum, the cemetery, and the beach. Running through the slum, he sought refuge in a hut, and on its bare floor, there lies her body. In the cemetery, through the burnt woodpiles when he gasped, in a to-be-burnt pile, her body. On the beach, when on the solitary sands, his legs gave way, immersed waist-deep in water, like a mermaid, she. In all his dreams, she came naked. In all his dreams, she was lying on her back, reading a book. In all his dreams, the book was the same: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. (my trans; 124)

Later, when they meet in the Cheshire Home and renew their friendship:

That night Satyan went to the beachside. He rested on the sands on his stomach, and cried. The sea stretched its thousands of hands and crept over the sands to him, to touch him just once. A limbless, legless sea. Each time it failed and retreated through the lines of sand. The waves wrote letters for him on the sand, with their fair fingers. He hesitated to touch that fairness with his blood-stained hands. But in spite of that, like on any sand-grain, with him too, the tide played havoc. While rolling into the hands of the sea on his own accord, Satyan realized that his tears and the sea have the same salt-content. (my trans; 125)

To maintain the contact, they write letters to each other. Note how the worlds of fantasy they create are unpeopled by others and free of real situations:

When the lower court convicted him, from the jail, he wrote letters to Noor and Noor also wrote him letters. Like that, Satyan studied the alphabets of language. (my trans; 126)

In these letters, interestingly enough, Noor's disabled body becomes the location of desire, as in:

—Why did you lie there waiting for me whenever I came? Satyan asked. You who have no legs, why do you so persistently follow me?

— I'll come to the jail too. Like in Basheer's novel, we'll stand on either side of the wall and love each other. Life is the freedom between two walls, and religion—the wall between two freedoms. (my trans; 126)

And, then:

—When will you come? I'm getting scared. I fear that the numbness in my legs is slowly spreading to my hips. Then, when will I give birth to your children? With red tilak on the forehead and kajal in the eye, how will they gambol on our seashores?

—Nothing will happen to you Noor. I'll come. I'll lay you on my chest and chest upwards, swim into the outer sea with you. Around us, the sharks will be our sentinels. (my trans; 127)

Thus, in Meera's story, two people sidelined by society, get together to fight

the disablism they experience as a result of unnurturing and indifferent social environments. When they are together, they succeed in building a hopeful world of mutual caring all their own, but when one goes, the other collapses into solitude. The loneliness experienced by each of the characters in this story fits the conceptual term, 'disablism.'

According to Goodley and Lawthorn, disablism may be caused because of structural or psycho-emotional reasons. While structural disablism refers to physical environmental barriers, psycho-emotional disablism refers to the socio-cultural barriers people with disabilities encounter in their daily lives and which affect their well-being. The central characters in the above story are victims of socio-cultural barriers that force them into seclusion. In a way, this is how ableist cultures impact upon non-normative bodies and non-normative ways of living.

Namitha Kumar clarifies on this conceptual dimension in her unpublished thesis on disability. She coins the term, "biopsychological tattooing," noting it as different from Giorgio Agamben's 'biopolitical tattooing.' She argues how in biopsychological tattooing, the ableist culture marks out disabled bodies and subjectivities, exerting control over the latter. Disabled subjects consequently become alienated within their own culture. Kumar differentiates between stigma and biopsychological tattooing to observe how stigma openly discredits while the latter discredits and alienates through subtle concealed operations.

Socio-cultural barriers are the agents of exclusion in the story examined above, though the inflictions do not seem considered or deliberate. Rather, they reflect on day-to-day societal impositions on the disabled which result in inescapable solitude,

vulnerability, and victimhood. One is reminded of Padmarajan's story in this context. Padmarajan's story, "The Dusk" brings us to the vulnerability of a blind girl's world where she has no way to know who is responsible for the rape inflicted on her. Though at the end of the story, her blindness is directly referred to, and her own father is recognised as the perpetrator of the assault, the girl's victimhood is endorsed by the nature of the domestic crime and her lack of agency within her helplessness. She is an object who is acted upon, and even her best form of resistance during the entire struggle meets with crude male aggression. The blind girl's shattered world of trust is made to look irreparable, and one wonders whether casting her in this mould, can only help recirculate the stereotype of the blind girl-child's absolutely vulnerable existence which in turn connotes 'disablism.' The story is short and crisp, critical of male patriarchies but sensitive to vulnerable female worlds, as also reminiscent of Gracy's story, "Paavakkutti" (The Doll) where an under-developed girl-child fond of dolls is lured by the promise of a live doll into the rabid male world of sexual abuse.

Subhash Chandran's story, "God and the Government," on the other hand, once again sensitises us to the solitariness of disabled bodies. It celebrates the friendship between a paraplegic lottery-ticket seller who traverses the railway station on cart-wheels and a blind Government employee, an announcer of railway-timings. If in Meera's story, two people try to fight the hostility of the world, with their love for each other, the blind man and the paraplegic here establish a friendship to fight a conspiring God and an unkind Government who act as the agents of disablism. The growing, empowering, meaningful friendship of the two is trodden upon and broken by a Government dictate transferring the blind

Kunjikannan to a faraway Railway Station. In a way, both God and the Government seem to have worked in tandem to ensure the victimhood of Avookker who had all along drawn emotional sustenance from Kunjikannan's diligent example. Unable to resist these authoritarian encroaching on their life and friendship, both Avookker and Kunjikannan submit themselves to the verdict of the controlling forces but they may hence remain friendless and isolated within their afflictions. Subhash Chandran's anger seems to be directed against the twin-forces of power that seem to be directing all people's lives, especially so, the lives of an already trampled-upon people, the differently abled. All along, the writer's tone is critical and disapproving of both God and the Government but sensitive to and observant of the daily trials of the two gentle sufferers.

The following vignettes from the translated story may testify to this:

Avookker who sits on the Railway Overbridge notes the celebratory nature of other people's arrivals and departures only to reflect on his own desolation. The narrative reads:

Loneliness sometimes transformed his sadness into rage and revenge. On such occasions, he felt like spraying something like DDT powder from above, destroying those antlike crowds on the platform below. (my trans; 53)

The narrative closely observes and records the laboured everyday movement of Kunjikannan and Avookker, as they climb the steps of the Railway Bridge:

Kunjikannan didn't have eyes. Even then, Kunjikannan said that it was only the first and the last step that posed difficulties. On the plain surface, when suddenly a step

sprouted, he stumbled. Likewise, when the imagined step disappeared, he lost balance. (my trans; 53)

By the time the steps were navigated, Avookker's hand would go limp. The steps were narrow. It was hard for him to balance his body on those. Those who build Overbridges are not bothered about the Avookkers. And among pedestrians, one doesn't include those who walk on their hands. Avookker had to sit on one step and plant one hand each on the step below and the step above to raise his body. If the concentration flagged, Avookker knew he would end up as a tumbling sack-bundle. (my trans; 56)

Subhash Chandran also takes care to offer differing perspectives on God through his central characters. While Avookker is a believer, Kunjikannan is a non-believer who is often bitter in his criticism of God. Nevertheless, Avookker seems to respect Kunjikannan's hard work and talent, and finally admits to his friend that though there may be a God, he cannot be trusted. In the story:

Whenever Avookker lamented over the imperfections of his form and his life, Kunjikannan used to say: "Even God may be suffering from the complex and stage-fright of not being perfect. That's why he does not show himself to human-beings and remains hidden. Avookker did not like listening to the criticism of God...All day, Avookker sat on the platform envisioning a shy God. (my trans; 55)

When Avookker gets scared of Kunjikannan's defiance to God who according to the former, resides above and who may overhear these

blasphemous words, Kunjikannan says: "There is no one above, Avookker" and continues, "God is somewhere under the Earth. We are the ones above, you and I, on this Overbridge," (55) thus gesturing to the palpable reality of their sordid existence.

The constant control that is exerted by God as well as the State on ordinary mortals is also remarked upon:

From within the control of the Gods of luck—Avookker, and groping in the dark under Government surveillance—Kunjikannan, loved each other. The Over bridge became the common path for the two miserables. (my trans; 57)

Before taking leave of his friend, Kunjikannan fondly remembers how, every morning and evening, in his blind journey across the Overbridge, he had a legless charioteer in Avookker.

Like in Meera's story, when one leaves, the other seems to be facing an inevitable loneliness. That only those with disabilities understand each other, and that without this bonding, life would present itself as an unending solitude to the rejects in society, seems to be a persistent refrain in Malayalam short fiction. An archetype to this pattern, I think, is supplied by K.T. Mohammed's story of the 1970s, "Kannukal." In this short story, a physically deformed character bonds with a blind beggar-girl, and leads a meaningful married life with her. The highpoint of the story is how the husband cleverly sidelines the offer of the doctor who attends to her delivery and who promises to restore her vision. The husband who mentally engages with the idea of her restored eyesight feels threatened. He decides not to help her with it, fearing a possible rejection of his

deformity from her if she gains sight. Towards his own survival and due to a fear of the return of his solitude, he tells his wife the lie that the doctor who promised her vision is no more. Later, though he loses her to a fall that is caused by her lack of sight, he finds comfort in the thought that she alone till the very end, had not rejected his deformed physical self. Much space in the story is devoted to the husband's mental agony over his wife's prospective cure and his decision not to risk it. The story ends with the first-person-narrator, the husband, wondering as to what would have been his plight if on top of his deformity, he was also blind. The character is obviously made to address the unthinkable in terms of personal trauma and disablism which could result from social exclusion.

The above examination of select stories have specifically dealt with the theme of physical disability and its depictions in Malayalam, but Malayalam short fiction on the whole seems to have responded sensitively to issues pertaining to the differently-abled. Not only has it dealt with a wide range of problems in this category, the term differently-abled has also been accommodated into Malayalam critical terminology; these stories

are identified in Malayalam as belonging to the stream called, "bhinnaseshikathakal." And whether this response characterises other *bhasha* literatures in India too and if not, why, are points one may look into.

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The Art of the Possible: Discursive Contexts of Kerala Modernity and Early Historic Subjectivities in Kerala Renaissance



Dr. Ajay S. Sekher

Assistant Professor, Department of English
Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit
Kalady, Kerala-683574, India.

A b s t r a c t

In the contexts of severe backlashes and crises in the modernity of Kerala in the present, the paper explores the socio political and cultural contexts that eventually led to the renaissance movements in Kerala. Narayanaguru and Ayyankali movements were preceded by the pioneering attempts at social reform by Ayya Vaikundhar, Tykad Ayya and Chattamby Swamikal soon after the missionary intervention in south Travancore in early 19th century. A parallel subaltern movement of PRDS by Poykayil Appachan was also prominent in early 20th century in mid Travancore. The unique Dravidian Buddhist interventions of Ayyothee Thasar in Tamilakam in late 19th century is contextualized as the first neo Buddhist movement in India even before Sahodaran, C.V. Kunjiraman and Mitavadi in Kerala in 1930s and the one led by Ambedkar in 1950s. The defiant cultural and political resistance to caste and caste Hindu hegemony as expressed in the life and struggles of Arattupuzha Velayudha Panicker a mid 19th century anti caste crusader and martyr is also critically rehabilitated in hindsight. The basic ethical and egalitarian epistemological tradition of Sramana or Buddhist anti caste and anti Brahmanical legacies and the ancient Sangam cultural genealogies of modern Kerala and its renaissance are also exposed and explored in the contexts of reactionary regressions in Kerala and India at large at the wake of cultural Nationalism and totalitarian projects of othering and exclusion.

Keywords: *modernity, varna, avarna, amana, sramana, caste, renaissance, neo buddhism, brahmanism etc.*

**All are but soul-brethren if you
think and speak...**

-Narayana Guru

**No caste, no religion and no god;
But ethics, ethics and ethics...**

-Sahodaran Ayyappan

**Grief begins to fill within as
we remember...**

-Poykayil Appachan

In modern times the social change in the caste-ridden society of Kerala was possible in the context of colonial intervention and colonial modernity. It is a generally perceived reality that in this mixed context of partial modernity of Europe the Narayana Guru movement and Ayyankali movement in Kerala transformed the society and polity in late 19th and early 20th century. This is often called the renaissance of Kerala and the formation of Kerala modernity. It is under serious challenges and contestations in the present of hegemonic cultural Nationalism and right wing formations in the country at large. Regional elitism and linguistic regionalisms of various sorts are also contributing to these hegemonic contexts of totalitarian genocidal projects against the other and the outcasts. Social and gender equality are in question even in Kerala as exposed by the recent riots following the Supreme Court verdict on Sabarimala temple entry in 2018. Casteist slurs were used against the chief minister of Kerala who tried to implement the decree of the constitutional bench of the highest court of law in the country by caste Hindu women in public. The constitution and its ethical core as in the social justice paradigm are gradually abolished through the ahistoric and reductionist economic criterion pushed through the caste elites and cliques in the left itself as in the “economic reservation” agenda of the

traditional monopoly groups. This is the context in which the social struggles of the people at the bottom in Kerala that eventually created the modern Kerala become significant and imperative.

As we know, in early twentieth century the light kindled by the guru on education and organization as epitomized in his Aruvipuram installation of 1888 was extended by Pandit Karuppan and Sahodaran Ayyappan into Kochi as well. Mitavadi and Murkot spread it to Malabar. Social leveling in Malabar began much earlier in early 18th century with the Mysore occupation of Hyder and Tipu (Balakrishnan, *Narayana*). In the case of Travancore social change was possible in the context of colonial and missionary intervention (Pandian, *Church*). The CMS and LMS missionaries were working in the Nanjinad region of south Travancore from early 19th century onwards. Basal mission and people like Herman Gundert were active in Malabar in tandem with the local experts in pedagogy like Urachery Gurus. These pioneering efforts under colonial justice and modernity created a space for the subaltern in the region to challenge the age old shackles of caste imposed on them from the early Middle Ages onwards by Brahmanical Hindu hegemony and its repressive oligarchies (Sanalmohan 2015; Dharmateerthar 1992; Reghu 2006).

The Rise in Ethics and the Liberating Ways of Ayya

Ayya Vaikundhar (1809-1851) emerged from this subversive discursive context that shook the foundations of the Varnasrama and Manusmriti rule (Pandian, *Meaning* 177). As an early Avarna sage who emerged from the Chantor or Nadar social strata he challenged both western imperialism and the internal imperialism of caste

and Varna by calling the British the white evil and the Travancore kings Anantapuri evil (“Neechan” or the evil man or men literally). He was the first to organize an intercaste brotherhood in south India called Samatva Sangham in 1932 (Sekher, *Nanuguruwinte* 29) like the Satyasodhak Samaj or Bahujan Samaj of Phule in the 1840s and 50s.

He also consecrated shrines and sacred groves called Pati and Nizhal Tangal for the Avarna and was the first sage in modern times to proclaim one caste, one god and one religion in Tamil that was philosophically and socially developed and perfected later by the guru in the literary culture of Malayalam and it became one of the basic edicts of Kerala renaissance. Ayya was arrested in November 1839, tortured severely even without giving water and imprisoned by Swati Tirunal for 141 days and it required the strategic intervention of the then manager of the British Residency; Tykad Ayya in releasing him from the panther den of the Anantapuri king. He adopted a strategic Vaishnava saint image to address and organize the people against the prevalent questions of internal and external imperialisms.

His wisdom is preserved in his verses *Arul Nool*, *Akhila Tirattu Ammanai* and *Uchi Padippu*. He strategically adopted a Vaishnava name, sainthood and even claimed to be an avatar of Vishnu in order to escape the wrath of the Brahmanical ruling classes of his time. The same strategy is seen in Nanuguru’s adoption of the Vaishnava name Narayana at the age of 33 after the 1888 Aruvippuram installation. The Vaishnava Hindu name was adopted by Nanu Asan when his consecration was increasingly questioned from various Brahmanical quarters. He already knew about the panther den or Puli Madai of Travancore kings and the bloody murder of Arattupuzha. His original name was Nanu (1856–1928) that represents the non Brahmanical Dravidian

Sramana culture of Kerala. (Sekher, *Nanuguruwinte* 20)

The Proliferation of Resistance and Countering Hegemony

Ayya of Tykad (1814-1909) was a younger contemporary and spiritual companion of Vaikundhar. He was from a minor community of Saiva Vellalas in Travancore. As an exponent in Hatha Yoga and Cita (Siddha) traditions he became influential with the kings of Travancore. He became the manager of the British Residency at Tykad. He was the one to teach Chattamby Swamikal and Nanuguru Hatha Yoga and Balasubramania Mantra. His role in releasing Ayya Vaikundhar is also well known from the panther den of Swati Tirunal Maharaja. He in the 1880s itself promoted various Avarna seekers and friends including Ayyankali. He was a prudent who predicted Ayyankali entering the Prajasabha and meeting the kings. He also regularly involved in inter dining with various Avarna leaders like Ayyan. The egalitarian compassion in Chattamby Swamikal and guru was further elaborated with their historic contacts and conversations with Ayya.

This egalitarian culture of mixing with the people at the bottom as an anti caste way of life and objectively using inter dining and further extending this anti caste praxis into inter marriage is clearly visible in full fledge in Nanuguru that he developed as a movement by giving encouragement to his leading disciple Sahodaran and his Sahodara and Misravivaha Sangham. (Sekher, *Sahodaran* 13)

Genealogies of Caste Humiliations and Missionary Intervention

Along with the early efforts of Ayya Vaikundhar and Tykad Ayya we also need to look into the ground work done by the missionaries. The

missionary educational and reformist zeal created a modern awareness among the Avarna, especially the Nadars of south Travancore in early 19th century itself and it created an awareness of nakedness and barbarism among the people (Darwin, *Nadunartiya* and *Oru*). The converted Nadar women began to cover their breasts in public which was taboo in the caste customs of Varnasramadharm till then. This also prompted the Hindu untouchable Nadar women to follow this modern model and they also began to end this age old caste custom that was enforced as a humiliation on the untouchables as a religious persecution. The untouchable Avarna were originally Buddhist people who refused to submit to Brahmanism and its priestly-militia patriarchal nexus (Sekher, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar* 98). As Ambedkar has rightly pointed out untouchability and public humiliations like exposing the breasts in public before the caste lords were thrust upon them as a form of disciplining and punishment for not submitting to Brahmanic religion and hegemony (Rodriguez 2002).

The colonial justice and the missionary ethics and modernity of Europe provided a break for the subaltern to defy these humiliating and dehumanizing barbaric practices enforced on them by Brahmanism and its henchmen (Pandian 2006). The priestly – militia nexus was enforcing these barbaric caste rituals with sword and bloody caste violence. As an act of ending this bloody caste regime the Nadar women and men fought bravely with the henchmen of Brahmanism who tried to shame them in public (Darwin, *Nadunartiya*). There were a series of uprisings against the barbaric caste practice of exposing the breasts in public and at least two waves were in the 1820s and 1850s. While Nanuguru was being born in Vayalvaram house near Chembazhanti in

Travancore the second wave of Nadar Rebellion and Breast Cloth Struggles were on in south Nanjinad (Sekher, *Nanuguruvinde* 12).

Recovering the Ancient Legacy of Enlightenment in Tamilakam

If Christian missionary intervention created the groundwork for Nadar struggles for self respect it was the Teravada Buddhist missionary intervention in 19th century from Sri Lanka that enabled the voices like Pandit Ayyothee Thasar (1845-1914) who went to Sri Lanka and took Deeksha from a Sinhalese monk Mahamangala Tera and came back to Tamil Nadu and founded his Sakya Buddhist Society in Chennai and the Nilgiris in 1901 (Aloysius, *Religion*). It was Anagarika Dharmapala the Sinhalese Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka who recognized and encouraged Ayyothee to pursue the erased legacy of Buddhism in Tamilakam that was part of its Changam legacy. He also wrote *Adivedam* the ancient metaphysical discourse of the Paraya in Tamilakam and *Indirar Desa Saritram* or the Buddhist History of India (Geetha and Rajadurai). He inaugurated and instituted the Dravida Kazhagam or the Dravidian movement in Tamilakam with his journals *Dravida Pandian* and *Tamilan*. Apart from Anagarika it was Rev John Ratnam and Colonel Olcott who helped him in this endeavor. He was apath breaking scholar and activist in 19th century South India who was equally competent in Tamil, Pali and English with his family's historic relations with the British in the Nilgiris and the ancient legacies of the Paraya in peninsular India. He inaugurated the first neo Buddhist movement in the whole of India in the 1890s even before Sahodaran and Mitavadi in

Kerala in 1920s and Ambedkar himself in the 1950s. It might not be unlikely that Nanuguru was aware of such a rudimentary voice in South India who was his elder and contemporary.

Articulating the Subaltern; Poyka and His Movement

If the imprint of Theravada Buddhism or early southern Buddhism is explicit on Ayyooshe Thasar as an early dalit reformer and leader of the people in Tamilakam; it is dormant and suggestive in the voice and praxis of Poykayil Appachan (1878 – 1939) in Kerala. His dalit organization that he founded in a British colonial court is called Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha or PRDS (1910). It is significant again that it is the western colonial justice and modernity that provided though with its own limits the space for such a radical dalit articulation of spirituality and community in early 20th century Kerala (Sanalmohan). This reminds us of Nanuguru's own proclamation in 1914 that it is the British who gave him Sanyasam, the right to education and knowledge and if it was in the time of Rama he would had met with the fate of Sambuka (Balakrishnan, *Jathivoyavastitium* 56).

In Poyka's songs and spirituals and in his community sect we find indirect and suggestive influence of early Buddhist Sanghas. He is often called 'Jnanaswaroopan' or the embodiment of knowledge and enlightenment by his disciples in the PRDS songs. The master-disciple relationship is given extreme importance in the PRDS worldview. Many of Appachan's songs like "Ahoy from the Aryan land... Ahoy Aryan Ayyars from the Aryan lands..." allegorically narrate the early Buddhist missionary intervention in South India that happened from Asokan times in BC third century. The tone of cultural wailing and lamentation in such songs invoke the tragedy of the monks and nuns who adhered to non violence.

Before the genocidal violence of Brahmanic Hinduism the Dhamma or ethics and Ahimsa of the Sanghas have perished in vein. Only Poyka is able to invoke these obliterated dimensions of the people's history in his songs and spirituals. Appachan's praxis of walking his talks and itinerant speeches and long journeys giving lectures and spiritual communitarian discourses to the followers exactly remind us about the long journeys and sermons of the Buddha. Nanuguru's own long walking tours, Rickshaw and motor journeys all over South India and to Sri Lanka twice in 1916 and 1926 through the season the British steamer across the Gulf of Mannar; signifying which he created the immortal metaphor of the great steamer or *Avi Vantoni* as the abode of the absolute; could be remembered here. This image is so potent and polyphonic that it could also be read as a metaphor of colonial modernity and the mobility and justice it provided to the people.

Arattupuzha, an Anti Caste Crusader and Martyr in Mid 19th Century

If Appachan came just after Nanuguru and addressed his own people at the bottom of society Arattupuzha Velayudha Panicker (1825–1874) was an immediate predecessor of Narayanaguru in social reform. He was from the western land strip of Kayamkulam backwaters between Trikunnappuzha and Valiyazheekal. He was from an Avarna family called Kallingal in Arattupuzha. He was the first social reformer to make an idol installation in Mangalam Jnaneswara temple for all the untouchable people in mid 19th century in Kerala. This was in 1854 and the next one at Cheru Varanam close to Putanambalam near Chertalai was in 1855. He is also the pioneer in founding schools, night school, library, Kalari and Kaliyogam (Kathakali School) for the Avarna. After the 1806 Dalavakulam massacre at Vaikom,

Arattupuzha fearlessly entered the ancient shrine in the early 1850s that was a Buddhist sacred grove shrine before the middle ages, disguised as a 'Vesha Brahman' and observed the Tantric practices. He also led the first agricultural strike and breast cloth struggles locally against the brutal atrocities and caste violence of local feudal lords in Kayamkulam and Pandalam. He was a true predecessor of Ayyankali (1863–1941) who organized the larger agri-struggles in 1907 beginning in Venganur and spreading to various neighbourhoods. Arattupuzha is also known for his defiant defense of the honour of Avarna women in public life. He had a special squad that resisted the Nair lords who disrobed Avarna women in market places and public roads for wearing the breast cloths and using gold ornaments in the manner of caste Hindu women (Satyaprakasam 112-24). The crucial role played by the Ezhava woman Nangeli of Chertala in ending the infamous breast tax of Travancore through her sacrificial act of chopping off her breasts and throwing it on the face of the royal tax collector; and her husband Kandappan's self immolation on her funeral pyre are also vital here.

The Polyphonic and Pluralistic Praxes and Philosophy of Nanuguru

Arattupuzha was murdered through cheat while sleeping in his row boat amidst the Kayamkulam Kayal by a hired henchman of caste Hindu feudalism and Brahmanism. He had married from Varanapally where Nanuguru resided during his early studies at Kummampally Kalari. Nanuguru's own strategic adoption of the Vaishnava name Narayanaguru owes much to the covetous bloody caste murder of Arattupuzha. As an intelligent social interventionist he was strategically appropriating the Vaishnava Hindu name for the purposes of self defense while violating caste

taboos in a caste ridden society. But the people have forgotten about this caste Hindu hegemonic context of his self nomenclature and the Parivar and VHP forces are today misusing this Vaishnava Hindu name as an easy proof for his Hindu Sanyasi status.

It is important to recover the secular and polyphonic legacies and credentials of the guru today as all that is under erasure and only this syncretic and pluralistic tradition of Nanuguru can resist the mass Hindu mobilization of the Bahujans. Non Hindu readings of his life, acts and works are the need of the hour to save him from the VHP forces. The Brahmanical and elitist appropriations of the guru as a Vedic and Vedantic Hindu Sanyasi must be checked and resisted through an Amana or Buddhist reading of his key works and teachings. He was rightly identified and called "Narayana Buddha" by his leading disciples who also shaped the language, literature and culture in Kerala as in the poets Muloor, Karuppan and Sahodaran. Compassion, ethics and enlightenment are at the heart of his philosophy and praxes as that of the Tathagata. His critical praxis and liberating discourse are based on Ahimsa and are specifically anti caste at the same time. In simple terms he could not be categorized under the caste Hindu fold. The Trisarana and Panchaseela accents are also explicit in his teachings and compassionate discourses. His very name testifies the Amana or Sramana legacy of Avarnas in Kerala. Nanu which is a condensed form of Nanan or Nanappan is an ancient Amana name that survived among the people of Kerala that represents the Tirthankara or the Buddha himself (Sekher, *Nanuguruwinte* and *Putan*). His supports to Sahodaran, Mitavadi and C.V. Kunjiraman in their efforts in the Neo Buddhist movement in Kerala in the 1920s also testify his firm foundations in the Dhamma or

Buddhist ethics. His disciple Swami John Dharmateertha's own critique of Brahmanism in the *History of Hindu Imperialism* and appraisal of Buddhism in the same work are again expressions of this Buddhist affiliation. His great message of liberation through education and empowerment through organization clearly and evidently echo the Trisarana or Triratna of the Buddha; Buddhah, Dhammam and Sangham, like the educate, organize and agitate dictum of the neo Buddha. He has made it clear while visiting Sri Lanka in 1918 that his opinion or religion is that of the Buddha ("Nammuttetum Buddha Matam Tanne" or Ours is also Buddhism). He quoted the *Amarakosa* composed by the Sinhalese Buddhist monk Amara Simha to prove his point that the real Advaya Vadi is the enlightened one: "Dasa Balo, Shadabhijno, Advayavadee, Vinayaka..." (These are part of the 18 synonyms of the Buddha in *Amarakosa*). This greater anti caste egalitarian and ethical legacy of South India or ancient Tamilakam that created the cosmopolitan Sangam culture and literature along with its Tinai aesthetics that is ecologically and ethically inclined are the real heritage of our land that must be critically recovered to resist the killing regime of caste and the second coming of Varnasrama. The historical and archeological studies at Pattanam and Keezhadi have unearthed the concrete material evidences of this South Indian legacy. Let us recognize the real legacy of South India in the anti-caste and Sramana epics of Silapatikaram and Manimekhalai and let us critically rejects the narratives of killing and caste that were imposed on us from early Middle Ages. Guru's own translations from the *Tirukural* and his original Tamil works indicate this liberating path. Ayyothee Thassar's works testify it. Let there be a southern push towards north or Dakshinayana as G.N. Devy puts it.

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Representing Civilian Trauma on Screen: A Caruthian Study of Select Movies Based on the Sri Lankan Civil War



Preethu P.

Research Scholar

Department of English, St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)
Ernakulam, Kerala, India.

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The paper attempts to view select films made on the Sri Lankan Genocide using the notions of trauma and testimonial narratives. Trauma is seen as a 'recurring sense of absence' that splits apart knowledge of the severe experience, putting off a linguistic significance other than just a reference. There exists an 'unspeakable void' of trauma in the centre of any discourse in this school of thought. Trauma, which repudiates representation, also causes dissociation and irrevocable injury to the human psyche. The Caruthian model of trauma claims that language is unable to find truth of the experience. The human mind which fails to process and symbolise the traumatic event when it is witnessed, revisits the experience, in what is known as latency or delayed action, as flashback, nightmare, or other repetitive behaviour. Trauma is thus part of the human unconscious. The trauma of the Sri Lankan War has left massive black holes in the lives of many, which would, if left unaddressed, suck in and destroy their futures. The stepping stone in the addressing of the issue is to get an understanding of trauma, its nature and inherent complications, and formulate ideas on how to move on from it.

Keywords: : *trauma, PTSD, Sri Lankan cinema.*

Shoshana Felman, in *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, has rightly defined the twentieth century as “a century of trauma” (171). This holds true for the island nation of Sri Lanka too. The last two decades of the century witnessed the outbreak and progress of the Sri Lankan Civil War from an ethnic riot into a full-fledged war that challenged even the global power structures. The ethnic tensions between two communities in a tiny island nation blew out of proportion and the world witnessed a brutal genocide along with other human rights violations. The voice of the civilians, who had their psyches scarred, witnessing and suffering the effects of the war, was silenced by trauma. The lack of acknowledgement of what they suffered has become a challenge against their identity. Trauma makes suffering an unspeakable affair for the victims; hence, it becomes necessary for representations to emerge so that the suffering can be addressed. This paper discusses how Cathy Caruth has theorised the concept of trauma and studies how effectively Sri Lankan War movies have portrayed the trauma of civilians. In *Trauma Explorations in Memory*, Caruth defines trauma as

a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event... solely in the structure of the experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. (4)

Staying true to the Lacanian tradition, Caruth proposes trauma to be an unfathomable dilemma of the unconscious that sheds light on the intrinsic inconsistencies of language and experience.

Trauma is seen as a ‘recurring sense of absence’ that splits apart knowledge of the severe experience, putting off a linguistic significance other than just a reference. There exists an ‘unspeakable void’ of trauma in the centre of any discourse in this school of thought. Trauma, which repudiates representation, also causes dissociation and irrevocable injury to the human psyche. The Caruthian model of trauma claims that language is unable to find truth of the experience. The human mind which fails to process and symbolise the traumatic event when it is witnessed, revisits the experience, in what is known as latency or delayed action, as flashback, nightmare, or other repetitive behaviour. Trauma is thus part of the human unconscious.

In *Unclaimed Experience – Trauma, Narrative and History*, Caruth explains the Freudian theory that human consciousness, which has once encountered the risk of annihilation, can do nothing but replicate the destructive event over and over again in a vicious circle, which in itself is a traumatising experience. Confrontation of the threat of death over and over again can pose a risk to the natural chemical configuration of the brain leading to its deterioration.

The trauma of the Sri Lankan War has left massive black holes in the lives of many, which would, if left unaddressed, suck in and destroy their futures. The stepping stone in the addressal of the issue is to get an understanding of trauma, its nature and inherent complications, and formulate ideas on how to move on from it. Caruth explains Post-traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD as

The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the

one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (*Trauma* 4-5)

Let us now discuss some of the traumatic experiences that civilians have suffered during the Sri Lankan War, as featured in testimonial narratives. Fear is the most common response to a traumatic event. Unlike in a natural disaster or an accident, the civilians in the northern parts of Sri Lanka lived in a constant state of fear. At any point of the day, shells would strike their homes, killing their beloved ones. They would have to rush to pits or bunkers and spend their day in the cramped spaces. Soldiers or militants may barge into their homes killing or taking away a family member. There would be nothing much to eat as the rations provided would not suffice, if at all they manage to get it. A wrong fateful step would activate a mine that can shatter their bodies. Houses were bombed, people were gunned down; vehicles were set on fire with people inside. Even now, after nine years since the war ended, the survivors have not overcome their fears. Interviews and testimonies still appear with the 'name changed on request' tag. They never talk about the Tamil militants even if they were sympathetic to the cause. The continued presence of the Sinhalese military unnerves many. As if atop a volcano that can erupt anytime, they exist, guarding the light of peace that have finally seeped into their lives.

Frequent riots disturbed civilian lives. During the Black July riots of 1983, Sinhalese mobs, armed with copies of electoral rolls, burned down and looted Tamil homes. Those Sinhalese civilians who provided refuge to their Tamil friends were also in grave danger. During the Sri Lankan War, anyone could be gunned down with the accusation of being a rebel. Heavily armed military men were present in every frame of their

life. One of the most haunting killings portrayed onscreen is in the movie *In the Name of Buddha*, by Rajesh Touchriver, where soldiers kill a baby in front of its mother. The movie also portrays bombing where civilian homes are destroyed by the army. In *Saroja*, we see how Sarojini's mother is gunned down by the rebels, in front of the child.

Civilians suffered from poverty during the war. In *Ira Madiyama* by Prasanna Vithanage, Duminda, a young soldier, meets his sister at a brothel and is enraged. Once he realises the circumstances that forced her into prostitution, he accepts the situation. When men were in battlefields, either in the army or rebel faction, or in some secret prisons, women had to resort to anything that would feed their families. In Prasanna Vithanage's *Purahanda Kaluwara*, Wannihami's younger daughter finds work in a sweatshop after the death of her brother. This irks her lover who holds on to patriarchal values of the rural society he is a part of. Along with poverty, the civilians also had to suffer extortion. Rebels would demand resources from them, in cash and kind. In Sanjeewa Pushpakumara's *Flying Fish*, the rebels ask for money or their young daughter from the Tamil family and when she escapes, they gun the rest of the family down. The war shattered families. The families of rebels and those who the Sri Lankan Army suspected to be rebels suffered the ordeal of having their family members going missing. Abductions were so common, even after the war ended. Forced recruitments from schools by the LTTE were also rampant. Many children were forcefully taken away from their homes.

The trauma faced by the family members of the rebels, soldiers or the missing and dead has featured in many films. In *Ira Madiyama* the plight of Chamari, the young wife of a Sinhalese Sri Lankan Air Force pilot who was shot down in

flight, is featured. She believes that he has been taken captive by the Tamil Tigers and goes in search of him. The documentary, *White Van Stories*, by Leena Manimekalai deals with the theme of enforced disappearances in the country. Many civilians have gone missing, allegedly kidnapped in the notorious 'white van' and have never returned. In *Purahanda Kaluwara*, Prasanna Vithanage captures the pain of an old blind man who loses his soldier son in the war, whose death he is not ready to acknowledge. In *The Terrorist* by Santhosh Sivan, there is a scene in which a young Tamil boy narrates to the protagonist how he lost his family. His father was a priest and was murdered, with all other members of his family except the boy. The lonely child still sees nightmares and cannot bear sights of death.

Matha (2012), by Boodee Keerthisena, shows how the LTTE cadres recruit forcefully, shattering families. Young boys and girls were forcefully taken away from their homes who, in turn, would return for their siblings later. Mani Ratnam's *Kannathil Muthamittal*, the first film that Indians associate with the Sri Lankan war, is the narrative of a child of Sri Lankan Tamil parentage, Amudha, reared by her Indian adoptive parents. She yearns to meet up with her biological mother amidst the Sri Lankan Civil War. The questions Amudha ask her mother reflects the mind of every child orphaned by the war. There comes a point when Amudha's innocence wins over her mother Shyama's seemingly tough mind. The film offers a child's perspective on the loss of her mother.

The number of widows continued to escalate exponentially during the war in Sri Lanka. With widowhood came the socio-cultural stigma of being 'unlucky.' In rural Asian societies, widows were marginalised as bad omen by the members of their own community. The radical alteration in identity, coupled with grief and humiliation,

pushed those young women into depression. They suffered 'social deaths' at the hands of their own people who discriminated as well as abused, branding them the bearer of ill-luck. With no support from the family and thoughts of their husbands having suffered violent deaths, women were pushed into long-term depression. Economic conditions forced some women to assume the role of the breadwinner, which, in the highly patriarchal society, made them more vulnerable.

The lives of war widows were extremely traumatic on many levels. In the anthology film *Flying Fish*, the story on the mother and son portrays the life of a young Sinhalese widow. The fact that the Sinhalese faction won the war does not mean that the Sinhalese civilians did not have their share of woes. Here, in the movie, the woman is in extreme poverty and tries to make both ends meet by selling curd. She falls in love with a man and the news of the affair reaches her son, who stabs her and his siblings. The psychological, physical and economic needs of a widow are not considered sympathetically in a patriarchal society. The son is enraged at his mother who had to take charge of the family after her husband's death. The burden on his shoulder is no less. The boy, still a child, works at the fish market to support the family. He cannot stand the humiliation he has to suffer due to the rumours about his mother's affair. When he witnesses her having sex with her lover, his mind reaches the breaking point of sanity. The ordinary lives of common people are thus affected by the miseries of the war, most at the psychological level.

Considered as part of the spoils of war, female bodies are also arenas of war which are tortured and brutally raped to disgrace, control, extract information, scare or celebrate acquisition, masculinity and triumph. Some of the notable

cases of murdered raped victims and the massacres associated with the rape incidents are that of Krishanti Kumaraswamy, Arumaithurai Tharmaletchumi, Ida Carmelitta, Ilayathambi Tharsini, Murugesapillai Koneswary, Premini Thanuskodi, Sarathambal, Thambipillai Thanalakshmi, Kumarapuram massacre and Vankalai massacre. Accused of being LTTE sympathisers, most of them were abducted, tortured, raped and murdered. Some had their bodies were dumped in the wells or bushes. A woman had a grenade exploded in her abdomen while another was shot through her *vagina*. Worst are the cases of those who have to live their lives with the feeling of being violated.

The horrors of rape were portrayed in *In the Name of Buddha*. The controversial scene in which soldiers brutally rape a woman and places a grenade between her legs that blows her up is very haunting. To realise that it is not just a figment of fiction increases its magnitude. In the film, the protagonist's lover is shown to be raped by the soldiers of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) after stuffing her mouth with soil. *Uchithanai Muharnthaal*, 2011 Tamil movie by Pugazendhi Thangaraj, is the story of Punithavadhi, a 13-year old girl from Sri Lanka, who gets gang-raped by Sri Lankan soldiers. She, along with her mother, crosses over to India illegally and is looked after by a kind local. The film ends with the death of Punitha, who also have contracted HIV from her rape. *Vanni Mouse*, an award-winning internationally acclaimed short film by Tamiliam Subas, features rape, among many atrocities, in a refugee camp in Vanni.

The war, especially in its final stage, witnessed mass displacements (some of them forceful while others were flights from death) and migration. Those who could not afford migration to other countries had to leave in haste, moving to

wherever they were herded to, with whatever they could carry in their hands. A lot of their hard-earned possessions remained scattered in the makeshift houses they erected on barren fields. Some travelled to India illegally on ferries, holding on to their dear lives. Some were accommodated in overcrowded refugee camps, while some sought asylum in foreign countries trying hard to adapt to the drastically different environs of their host countries. Life in refugee camps was worse, where they existed malnourished in unhygienic conditions. Life in war-infested areas was impoverished due to the lack of sufficient rations.

Life in refugee camps was portrayed in *Vanni Mouse* as snippets of dialogues and shadow figures enacting brief scenes. It touches problems of impoverishment, lack of sanitation and facilities, suppression, physical torture, rape and murder. Health, physical and mental, was in deterioration in the Tamil areas. *Dheepan*, by Jacques Audiard, is the story of Sivadhanan, an ex-cadet of LTTE, who seeks political asylum in Paris, travelling with a dead man's passport, along with a woman and girl posing as his wife and child. They try to begin their lives fresh in France. Memories haunt them as they try to set up a family atmosphere. *In the Name of Buddha* begins with Siva reaching Britain as an asylum seeker. He narrates his story to the immigration official who empathises with his situation. She looks at a number tattooed on her arm and it is evident that she was once a refugee. The loss of possessions when moving from one place to another was another matter of concern for the Tamils. In *Ira Madiyama*, eleven-year-old Tamil Muslim boy Arfath's struggle to keep his dog along when the family is fleeing the village and his sorrow is depicted.

Tamils, a minority with strong cultural pride, suffered humiliations against their very identity in the forms of suppression, dehumanising, scapegoating and stereotyping. Alienation and emotional numbing were common. The society turned sour with hostility, suspicion and indifference. During the last stage of the war, the LTTE is accused to have used civilians as 'human shield' by prohibiting their leaving the war zones. In *Ira Madyama*, the suffering of Tamil Muslims is portrayed. They were doubly marginalised. Even the LTTE were against them. A Tamil Muslim family is fleeing the village which is forced to be evacuated by a rebel army. Their helplessness is captured onscreen. Tamils had to face a strict pass system and check-posts that restricted their movement within their own country. *Flying Fish* depicts a haunting scene in which a Tamil girl gets her first menstrual period, which is revealed when checked by an army man, while she travels in a bus. *Alimankada* by Chandran Rutnam also shows the terrors of the pass system.

Dead bodies lay scattered in lagoons and marshes and for a community who believed in rebirth, not giving a decent burial to their dead was close to blasphemy. Tamils believe in reincarnation and gives much importance to giving a proper funeral to the dead. During the war, people suffered gruesome deaths, their bodies exploded or burnt, strewn somewhere in the marshes or buried in unmarked mass graves. *Purahanda Kaluwara* depicts the community's need to offer a decent funeral to Wannihami's soldier son whose corpse had arrived in a sealed coffin. Wannihami cannot believe that the war has killed his son and he breaks open the coffin to have himself proved right. The coffin did not hold a corpse. The villagers pressurise Wannihami to conduct his son's death rites. In *Alimankada*, there is a scene in which Kamala buries the corpse of an LTTE

rebel she encounters on her way. Despite realising the risk that pushes her into, she spends time there to bury him.

The most pathetic situation was of those who could not get a closure. They were prohibited from mourning or remembering their dead. No memorials were erected to acknowledge the sufferings they have undergone. Though the end of the long war was a matter of relief for the nation, the way it ended, for the victims, was not something to be jubilant about. War later became a commodity in Sri Lanka that could be used as a tool to promote tourism. For a community which suffered immense physical and mental trauma during the war, the government's policy of denying / not acknowledging the sufferings the civilians had gone through was a challenge to their very identity. Rehabilitation, according to the authorities, confined only to relocation. Like scattered beads, they existed in silence, in refugee camps and foreign countries, with nothing to mark their losses.

Though not acknowledged by those in power, trauma of civilians has found place in the war movies in Sri Lanka. The threat of bans and stringent censorship poses challenges to movie makers in the country, but it would help if the trauma of civilians gets represented. Trauma is, according to Caruth, something 'unspeakable' and therefore unrepresentable. It gets embedded into one's personality and stays there as a relic of the event. For survivors who suffered trauma, the first step towards recovery is the integration of his/her memories into the personal lives, creating meaning out of it. Like how a spirit in folklore cannot rest in grave until its story is told, trauma cannot heal unless it is acknowledged and shared. After the Sri Lankan War, the sufferings of the civilians were not even acknowledged during the

process of rehabilitation and reconciliation. An impartial and sensitive probe into the traumatic experiences of the survivors can be facilitated by the production of more narratives that create a collective sense of reality. Theories should not be Procrustean beds that cripple cultural nuances. Trauma does not begin and end with the Holocaust. Forms of representation suitable for the non-western cultural scene of Sri Lanka should be made use of to promote a cross-ethnic understanding.

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Email: editor.tjes@teresas.ac.in teresianjournales@gmail.com

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