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Contents

Editorial

"Literature exists at the same time in the modes of error and truth; it both betrays and obeys its own mode of being." - Paul de Man

The arteries of violence that get scripted seem a probable impossibility at times. The human bestiality seems unbelievably true as we read the writings from the margins. Writings often carry the carcasses of hate, violence and everyday mutinies of human beings. The text itself problematizes the concept of being human. As Derrida pointed out writing becomes a signification of one's experience and there is of course the desire to construct a totalizing experience.

The triple alliance of language, culture and ideology do intensify and sharpen debates about the social fabric and reminds us that they challenge any rigid demarcation of event and representation. As Foucault argued the discursive practices make it difficult for individuals to think outside of them and hence writing exerts power and control. Writing is a journey through time. We have moved across time, from Adam to atom and have deliberated with realities and non-realities. The experiences of human beings have created discourses. Our meandering stories carry the vocabulary of truth, falsehood, adequacy and inadequacy of our diverse heritage and culture. One notices a strong tendency among scholars to interrogate the conventional order of representation, adequacy and truth.

A search for the "hinges" of the text as *de Man* suggested would give a series of Meta critical statements that illuminates the complexity of writing. It becomes a valuable interrogation that provides "transactive reading." The whole concept of situating literary theories within the context of the text shows the desire of the writer to destabilize the thrust towards a single interpretation.

contd..... page-6

This edition of *TJES* has looked at the entire rhetoric of representation. Taking a cue from Derrida, most of the readings/writings exemplify an attempt to translate the emblematic technologies of power that still hold the humans in a world fraught with anxieties. What we find is a fluid and diverse array of narratives that capture the rich trove of lived experiences that reflect on the role of culture in fashioning the contours of literature. The contributors have discussed important implications of ELT in post-colonial times, representation of Dalit women in Malayalam movies, cultural and media imperialism, reconfiguring public memory, the questions of subalternity, sexism and significantly poverty as the greatest pollutant and dehumanising agent. The politics of antagonism is waged not only at the level of existential struggle but are also coupled with the ontological demands for freedom and inclusion. The will to live means that you will not be at the receiving end of any unwarranted violence that surfaces in racism, exploitation, and dispossession. It is these gripping tales of humanity that make us strong as we strive to become whole in a society confronted with cracks and contradictions of a lifetime. Recent years have witnessed an insurrection of subjugated voices that demand a revisioning that returns the colonial gaze by neutralizing its sealings and perplexities.

Dr. Latha Nair R.

Daughters' Narratives: The Dialectics of Silence and Memory in Second Generation Holocaust Memoirs

Dr. D. Laura Dameris Chellajothi*

Abstract

The dialectics of silence and memory, both of which are equally traumatic and painful, form a very essential part of the Second Generation Survivors, who are the children of Holocaust survivors. The second generation testimony and memoir is also an act of translation which is mediated through the parents 'uncles,' aunts' memories or by its lack, or by their journey back to the places of incarceration in Germany, Poland or Austria. These experiences are mediated/translated through variables like people, places, languages and time. Though there could be differences in memory or factuality, the essence that remains constant in almost all the testimonies and memoirs, is the terror and the trauma. This is not negated by the spatio - temporal distance or by forgetting or adding a detail. This paper would then like to enquire into the dialectics of silence and memory and also the given nature of the terror and trauma of the Holocaust as presented through two memoirs- Helen Epstein's *Where She Came From – A Daughter's Search for Her Mother's History* and Helen Fremont's *After Long Silence.*

Keywords: *Holocaust, Memory Writing, Trauma and Silence, Memory and Identity, and Personal Narrative.*

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Life narratives also perform as history, when history is distorted, misrepresented and silenced. They bring the hidden, the lost and the forgotten into the social consciousness of the readers by the act of documenting and narrating the past in the present. This task of rememorying history becomes quite complicated when the memory has to reconstruct a horrifying Holocaust past, genocide without compare, where six million Jews were butchered by Hitler's Nazi Germany.

This paper proposes to explore the narratives of daughters of the Holocaust survivors and the trauma that has been handed over as definite as a family heirloom. The consequence of the Holocaust percolates to the Second Generation of survivors, the so-called "hinge generation," who have inherited the scars without the wounds. Their secondary witnessing is therefore an outcome of their synthesis of their parents' first hand narrative memory and the historical reality in an ongoing process of self-discovery.

This paper attempts to explore how the life narratives of the Second Generation Holocaust women create images and identities of and for Jewishness, and how they are recreated, reconstructed and retold by the daughters who relentlessly search for the silent spaces of the lost history.

Helen Epstein's *Where She Came From – A Daughter's Search for Her Mother's History* offers a second generation glimpse into a vanished world through the lives of three remarkable women: Helen Epstein's great grandmother, Therese, whose life was marked by tragedy; her grandmother Pepi, whose fashion career took her from pre war Prague to Paris and Berlin and her mother Frances whose liberated existence came to an end with the German invasion of Czechoslovakia. Epstein recreates the society that shaped her female ancestors and the forces that shaped her own life as a child growing up in the safe harbour of post war America.

Helen Fremont's *After Long Silence* is a disturbing memoir that describes what it was like to grow up as a child of Holocaust survivors who converted to Catholicism. Two sisters, Helen Fremont and Lara start on a quest for unearthing their Jewish roots and finally retrace their family's past which in turn leads to painful confrontations with the surviving members of their families. They switch over from Catholicism to Judaism and start attending synagogues. This digging up for roots by the Americanised daughters reawakens past dreadful memories in their parents. However this is the real breakthrough for the Second Generation as it becomes therapeutic to loosen the knot that had held them captive for so long.

Memory is described by psychology as the ability of an organism to store, retain and subsequently retrieve information. Memories are a part of one's psyche, right from the womb to the tomb. One's identity and sense of self is formed primarily in relation to one's past and to the past of those connected or related. This relative memory then leads to self introspection and construction of a self's identity. Barnett defines identity as the understanding of one's self in relation to others.

Memory and identity are interdependent on each other and it is difficult to decide upon the primacy of either. Memory plays an important role in identity formation because it is through memory people, picture themselves. The formation of identity in relation to the past is binary-either complete rejection or absolute adoption of past memories. Complete rejection of the past creates a maimed sense of self, for the past is an integral part of one's being. On the other hand, absolute adoption or obsessive clinging to one's past makes one a slave to one's memories. However to maintain an equilibrium sense of self,

there has to be a balance between these two conditions.

Memory envelopes different categories like personal, cultural, autobiographical, collective etc. There is always some past context in which these memories are created. In this sense, memory is not just a record of a past occurrence, but a construct formed while bearing testimony to those events. Events of atrocity and suffering create traumatic memories in individuals and these can be triggered time and again, even ages after the lapse of the trauma. Such traumatic memory attacks keep shattering and corroding the self chronically.

Extreme stress borne of trauma has a long term effect on memory. Yehuda Bauer comments thus,

> The catastrophe experienced by European Jews still resounds powerfully in the collective memory and is a major subject of study across a variety of disciplines. The Holocaust was a massacre of inconceivable cruelty and magnitude, a traumatic event of enormous scope and immeasurable repercussions and, therefore, it is impossible to think of the Holocaust within the temporal framework of 1933–1945 alone. (92)

The First Generation survivors were eager to bury these horrific Holocaust memories. They wanted to sever all ties with the past and were keen on establishing new vistas for their future. So they kept their past buried in their consciousness. However it kept resurfacing in fragments at unexpected places and moments creating for them a permanent survivor syndrome, characterized by anxiety and fear of loss, disturbances in cognition and memory, chronic depression, isolation, withdrawal, psychosomatism etc. The children of these disturbed parents were in turn raised in chaotic households.

With the death and passing away of the First Generation and the emergence of the Second Generation, there has been a shift in Holocaust response from first hand experience to secondary knowledge. This knowledge is constructed out of myriad fragments of images, narrative etc. and is deeply ingrained into the Second Generation consciousness.

The Second Generation felt drawn to their parents' Holocaust experiences. They wanted to unearth the facts of what their parents underwent in the concentration camps to understand their own lives better. Even without a clear verbal picture from their parents about their past, the Second Generation seemed to have imbibed it by a kind of wordless osmosis. Unexpected torrents of tears, sighs, groans and similar nightmarish outbreaks were covert revelations of the past traumatic memories simmering deep within.

Many Second Generation survivors imagine themselves to be mediums into which the Holocaust memories transmitted themselves and they took upon themselves a sacred duty to transfer the legacy of their memory to posterity. The knowledge of these traumatic memories caused irreversible setbacks to their psychological growth and development. Kellerman captures this ambivalence between silence and transmitting memory thus,

> For children of Holocaust survivors the trauma of their parents may be perceived both as a curse and as a legacy. Some children grow up with terrible anxiety provoking Holocaust associations that haunt them day and night. Others experience their heritage as a powerful legacy that gives them a sense of purpose and meaning in life. (269)

As children, the Second Generation witnessed snatches of their parents past through liminal

channels in the form of missing relatives, abnormal parental behaviour, old photographs etc. And as they reached adult hood the childish curiosity about their parents past metamorphosed into a serious quest for their own roots and identity. Their epiphany gained momentum with the publication of Helen Epstein's seminal book, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors.* The invisible community had got global recognition instantaneously. Since then the second generation has crystallized into a recognized hybrid entity, holding international meetings and conferences and starting a new body of writing. A whole new Second Generation memory writing and witnessing had come into being.

The constant irrepressible stream of memories disrupts the normal everyday lives of the Second Generation. It has a detrimental effect on their cognitive capacity and they feel lost in trying to remember something which they had never experienced. Without the original, contextual memory these recalled events might prompt the second generation members to perceive themselves as emotional or irrational people. They are trapped between the reality of their everyday lives and the elusive, enigmatic constructed memory. They are unable to differentiate the past from the present and also sort out actual memories from imagination. Therefore their testimonies are often contradictory and confusing. This perhaps is always the way in which the second generation receives their legacy.

The children of Holocaust survivors have carved a Second Generation collective identity for themselves despite their diversity in nationality, social status etc. The Second Generation were mostly born in a new country where their parents had emigrated after the war. As a result, these children grew up in a completely strange environment with no extended family. So the Second Generation were adversely affected by their parents' Holocaust experiences. This is what psychologists term trans generational trauma – a psychological condition wherein the Second Generation experience trauma symptoms despite not having undergone the trauma. This post traumatic disorder continually intrudes with their present and disrupts it.

Helen Epstein, daughter of first generation Holocaust survivors, Franci and Kurt Epstein is a renowned second generation Holocaust writer. She has written several memoirs, novels and travelogues to explicate her second generation legacy. This paper attempts to trace the trajectory of second generation siblinghood as revealed in Epstein's paradigmatic memoir, *Children of the Holocaust.*

As a child, Epstein had had a very disturbed childhood – haunted by nightmares of barbed wire, skeletons and rotting flesh. Although she was born ages after the end of the Holocaust, she could still imagine visions of ghettoisation and incarceration: "piles of skeletons…barbed wire… bits of flesh" (9). Her psyche had been bogged down by the presence of an "iron box" (9), but she was never sure what it was. Perpetually conscious of this unfathomable burden, only later did she realize that it was a luminal manifestation of the horrors of the Holocaust, whose secondary witness she had become by inheriting its legacy in her subconscious.

Desperate for a release, Epstein set out on a quest to find a group of people, who, like her were obsessed with the Holocaust and she wanted their endorsement of her obsession:

> There had to be I thought, an invisible, silent family scattered about the world. I began to look for them, to watch and listen, to collect their stories… I set out to find a group of people who, like me, were

> possessed by a history they had never lived. I wanted to ask them questions, so that I could reach the most elusive part of myself. (21)

Starting in 1977, from Toronto, Canada, Epstein flew to many cities spanning the Americas to Israel and met hundreds of children of survivors and started interviewing them about their Holocaust legacy. The first child of survivors whom Epstein met was Deborah Schwartz, the first beauty queen of Toronto. Deborah's unequivocal identification of herself as a child of survivors, shocked Epstein who felt embarrassed to acknowledge that her parents had to live in subhuman animalistic conditions during the Holocaust.

Deborah introduced Epstein to Irvin Diamond and Eli Rubinstein, two other children of survivors. Both these young men had married daughters of survivors and felt obligatory about propagating their Jewish race through their progeny:

> It isn't just the normal parental instinct; I really feel that my raising a family is of cosmic significance. I feel that my raising a family is of cosmic significance. I feel I have a sacred duty to have children. I feel it's the only way to respond to the evil of the Holocaust and to assure that the death of my family and the six million was not in vain. (23)

Eli's parents had constantly eluded his repetitive queries regarding their past. He had great admiration for his parents for resurging so successfully after the Holocaust, instead of succumbing to despair. However his attitude to God was one of rebellion – he could not accept the stock answer that God in his wisdom knows what He is doing and that mortals should not question His ways. Similarly, Epstein too had dreaded going to Sunday school. She did not believe in God more than she believed in Santa Claus. She could not worship this God who had let her mother suffer.

There were multifarious responses from the children of survivors to Epstein's queries. While Aviva was preposterous about answering Epstein, Sara could not stop once she got started…

> I still feel ashamed and sad and guilty about my parents. The only thing I had heard from my parents was that the world was a jungle and there are no friends. There's nobody. It affected my relationships with people. I created walls… It's something I live with now, all the time. I'm afraid of my husband being taken away from me, even if he goes on a fishing trip. (125)

But after avoiding her hitherto suppressed Holocaust pangs, Sara felt liberated. After the interview with Epstein, Sara decided to see a psychiatrist who had worked with survivor families, as she felt that it was high time that she let go of her burden.

Epstein too had been drawn towards Israel, as she was irked by the assimilationist culture of the American melting pot, which sucked away her Jewishness. She wanted to relish the purely concentrate essence of Jewishness without any compromise or contamination. So she joined the Hebrew University in Israel and started metamorphosing into a typical Israeli by shunning all her American appendages. She felt elated that Israel had finally provided the answer to the unquenchable quest in her life and identity. But by the time of her second year in Israel, she realized that her true identity could only be a hybridized one – an East-West combo. She also found several other hybrids like her, who too had come to Israel in quest of roots. And Epstein began tracing their sagas.

It was an altogether different journey back in time for Helen Fremont and her sister Lara. Till the age of 30, Helen Fremont did not have the slightest idea that she was Jewish. Though her parents' closest circle of friends was Jews and Holocaust survivors, the children were thoroughly grounded in the Roman Catholic tradition.

An acquaintance of Helen Fremont told her squarely in the face that she was Jewish. That astounded Helen and when she tried to pry about the past; she faced her mother's stony silence. Just about the same time her elder sister had also started to search for their roots. Lara her elder sister later told her mother that her dead grandmother that is her mother's mother came to her in a dream and to tell the story of her death.

Enquiries to Yad Vashem, brought out legacies scorched in the crematoriums of Poland. It was very traumatic for the sisters, firstly to know that they were Jewish much late in life and secondly the trauma compounded with baffled pain, when their parents stoically maintained the Catholic story.

The remoteness of the past and the decided silence of the parents accelerated the siblings to dig deeper into the family history. Not only did they start piecing information about their dead relatives from Yad Vashem and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, they both made a trip to Europe, the very places of their parents' childhood. It was the photographs of those landscape and the buildings of their childhood, thawed the ice and their parents reluctantly parted with bits and pieces of their past.

Here the memory is revived from the markers of the present, that is, the snapshots taken by the daughters from the very place of birth. The photographs play an important part in remomorying of the parents past and bringing it in vivid detail after having forcefully banished evens the thoughts of the past for many years. Even the acknowledgment of their past and Jewishness was confined to satisfy the curiosity of their daughters. The parents were averse to let the truth to be revealed that they in face Jews.

The memory did not come easily and it was not always true. The mother had agreed to share her story with the daughters when her sister would visit her from Italy. When her sister came and when the daughters were eagerly awaiting to hear the family past, the mother abruptly decides not to let her sister know of the fact that the daughters know their Jewish past. Instead she takes her daughters to a mall and speaks her story for four hours.

In the recounting of her past, their mother said they were assimilated Jews and they never went to a synagogue and that her father wouldn't know even if a synagogue fell on him. When the father heard, he said that the mother's story was not true and that her father had been in fact an orthodox Jew. So this is the problematic of memory, that a person may not recover the incidents of the past with the precision of its occurrence , but when the narrator willfully suppresses facts then the narrative becomes complex.

It can be seen very clearly that there is always an active dialogue between the silence of the past, hidden memories and the negotiation of the two. The dialectics of silence and memory produce a history that is not altogether new, fabricated but it presents a history mediated by the silences and memories of the past as the daughters' narratives which are nevertheless as reliable as the recounting of historical sources. This complexity has to be negotiated by the Second Generation daughters, who are perpetually caught in a dilemma of pain, memory and historical realities. Sadly Helen Fremont and her sister connected with their long lost history, but their relationship with their parents for having revealed their Jewish-

ness, was completely severed. The trauma continues for the Second Generations albeit in different ways. Hence in the daughters' world silence and memory are the deep waters they navigate to find some light or to make sense of their hybridized world and experiences.

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Simulated Fantasies: Revisiting Late-Capitalist *Tawaifbaazi* as a Writ of Economic Destabilization

Dr. Sabitha S. Babu*

Abstract

Visual culture, particularly films, employs an effective mechanism to have a direct hold on the perceptual domain of the spectator. Filmic mode is "the mode of presence," and "to a great extent it is believable" (Taylor 4). The present paper focuses on such convincing and hyper-real destabilizations of the financial stability of *tawaifs*, who had once been the affluent, educated dancers cum singers of Mughal courts, in Indian films. In a capitalist film making industry *tawaifbaazi* has been zipped into a system whose parts are debased to a subsidiary magnitude. Patriarchy, spiced up by the consumerist capitalist societal notions, has been writing the history of *tawaifs* with their will and consciousness. The pseudo-approach of film makers is proportional to the conservative outlook of the society which in turn resultant in the stigmatization of *tawaifbaazi*. The embedded narrative structures on *tawaifs'* neutralized history are locked up in the containers of libidinalization and commoditization. Frederic Jameson's, an American Marxist literary critic, theoretical framework of media society, hegemony, pastiche and nostalgia is used to deconstruct the repugnant portrayal of *tawaifbaazi* in the Indian films.

Keywords: *Tawaifbaazi, Nostalgia, Media Society, Pastiche, and Pop History.*

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"In films a woman is an essential commodity . . . you need the glamour that women can provide" (*Full Rendezvous with Jayalalitha,* 1:05:29).

The foregoing excerpt from the interview of former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu testimonies that feminine visual representations have been formulated conditional to the materialistic and patriarchal ideologies of the society. Thus, the degraded historical filmic reconceptualization of robust women, particularly *tawaifs*, has been welcome to lament over the cultural deteriorations. The predominant status of *tawaifs* reserves them distinctive spaces in Mughal society. The subordination of the values of *tawaifbaazi* (the status of being a *tawaif*) under the system's imperative structure ensures their economic and administrative exploitation. The blurred visual misrepresentations on *tawaifs* would exemplify Frederic Jameson's ideology of pastiche. Taking his words into credit, one could decipher that the visual representations on *tawaifs* are nothing but pop histories which assert the normative historical measures in the portrayal of *tawaaifbaazi*. The tendency to impose cultural stagnation in the lives of *tawaifs* is enhanced by the seemingly rational and objective approach of the filmmakers. The steering, decision making role of *tawaifs* is superseded to bring forth a new discourse of libidinal pleasure. The present study focuses on the reasons of the proliferation of Indian filmic parodies on *tawaifbaazi* by giving special attention to the economic aspects of such misrepresentations.

Tawaif, (etymologically derived from the Arabic word *tawaf)*, refers to a group of women whose lives were sparkled with glamour and luxury. Having been educated and emancipated, *tawaifs* manifested autonomy in the various aspects of their lives. Despite their rich erudition and knowledge, a loathsome rendering of *tawaifbaazi* has been disseminated by the film industry (Ganti 14-15). The ensuing factors viz, traditional norms, power-structures, voyeurism, and media society could be estimated as the reasons for the augmentation of such deplorable sketches of *tawaifbaazi* wherein *tawaifs* live at the mercy of the misogynist society.

Individualized social formations gleaned from the superstructure of the society could be treated as the first reason of the misrepresentations of *tawaifs* in visual narratives. The raw materials for such social formations are extracted from traditional norms and customs; furthermore, they are instrumental in deteriorating the social status of historical *tawaifs*. The canonization of traditional femininity accelerates the debasement of *tawaifs*. Hence Dev is seen as ridiculing Chandramukhi, the *tawaif*, in 2002 film *Devdas* as, "*hath math laganamujhko, naheendekhsakthaaurath ka yah roop*" (don't dare to touch me, I can't see woman in such a degraded status). As Indrani Sen says, "Behind such perspective, there obviously lay a Victorian outlook that glorified gentle and sacrificing womanliness" (Prem Misir 63). Thus, the moral and cultural dominance of the society propagate a perverted perception of *tawaifbaazi*, since it has been one of the rarest professions that challenges the norms of stereotypical femininity and secures financial autonomy for women. The efforts of a group of men in transferring a *tawaif* from her *kotha* in the Malayalam film *Arapetta Kettiya Gramathil* has been justified on the grounds of such traditional moral values.

The second cause for the cultural stagnation in the lives of *tawaifs* could be traced back to the power structured biases existing in the society. The hegemonic power structures and social institutions dismiss *tawaifs*' preponderance in art, archery and governance from the realm of academics. By borrowing the words of Jameson, the meaningless materiality and the meaning endowment of the society communicate the fetishization

and perversion of *tawaifs* (Jameson 1-8). The productive capitalist society marginalizes *tawaifs*, as passive recipients to nullify the threat posed by them. By depriving *tawaifs* of their articulating powers, the film makers call the attention of the audience to the voice of men even in their heterotopic habitats viz, *kothas*. Thus, in films like *Mukandar Ka Sikandar,* and *His Highness Abdulla* the male leads are seen as singing songs to speechless and spellbound *tawaifs*. On the other side of the coin, when aphasiac *tawaif* tries to voice out her feeling it would be nothing more than a vilified lay. Accordingly, Sulthana in *Tawaif* says, "*tawaifhonamajboorihain*" (being a *tawaif* is really depressing). Another example is visible in the eponymous film, *Umrao Jaan*(2006), where she crosses all boundaries in defaming *tawaifbaazi* by seeking the approval of patriarchal society in her song: "*main kaunhuun, aur kyanhuun . . . vo raaz mujhekahiye*" (Who am I, What am I . . . please disclose that secret). To the surprise of a sensible cinephile, the autonomous *tawaif* tries to unlock the mystery of her identity with a masculine assistance. In films, *tawaif*s' stories are narrated by misogynist moderators guided by hegemonic perceptions only to oust *tawaifs* from their monitory eminence.

The voyeuristic pleasure derived from the objectified visuals occupies the third strata in the list of factors which bring about the feigned visual representations of *tawaifs*. The autonomous status of onlookers in the darkroom of a theatre transports them into another realm of personal identification with the fictional characters on the screen (Furstenau 205). *Tawaifs* have permanently been captivated by the masochistic and sadistic society which finds happiness only in their spectacular performances. The sadistic and exhibitionistic tendencies of the misogynist society permeate into the various spheres of *tawaifbaazi* by giving birth to distorted and salacious songs like, "*in aankhonkemasthike," "beedi jalaile," "chiknichameli," "raamchaheleela,"* etc. These musical blockbusters reiterate the words of Laura Mulvey, where she talks about the fetishization of women in films. Mulvey opines that the clothes, make-up, hairstyle and jewels of women on the screen are combined "to create an image which is constructed for the camera and the screen" (206). The filmmakers catapult impoverished *tawaif* figures and ironically, they accumulate wealth by showcasing such dispossessed persona of financially unfettered *tawaifs*.

The concept of media society could be treated as the fourth and the most significant reason for the misguided visual representation of *tawaifs*. The consumerist capitalist society with its exploitative means of production leaves no stone unturned in delineating the shaded figure of *tawaifs*, because the customary libidinal development and genital sexuality of the society is disturbed by the divergent behaviour of *tawaifs*. Indian film makers have been conditioning *tawaifbaazi* as a conventional social formation, because "if a social formation did not reproduce the conditions of production while producing, it would not last a year" (Goshgarian 47). The merging of various factors, specificallylate-capitalism, hegemony, post-modernization, nostalgia, and pastiche supervise the foundation of all social and economic propositions in a media society.

The facet of media society pressurizes the superficial and stylized interpretations on *tawaifs* to manufacture their cultural experiences as fragmented and randomly piled and "ensures reproduction of the material conditions," in *tawaif* films under "strictly regulated proportions" (Goshgarian). Thus, Chandramukhi (*Devdas*) laments over her supposedly fallen state by negating her erudite experience: "*rishthon ki duniyaanmeintawaif ki keemath hi kyahothihain, kuchbhinahim*" (What is the value of a *tawaif* in the world of relations; nothing). The insecurity complex of

Chandramukhi could be explained using Indrani Sen's comment on Indian women as they are "socialized and resocialized in terms of the patriarchal ideology, its normative regimen inclusive of gender, caste, and class implications, and also the relationship between sexual inequality and foreign domination" (Misir 12).

Late-capitalism, which manifests an impression of periodization, refers to an economic and social system noted for its whole range of consumerist ideologies. The legitimization of knowledge is carried out with the conjuncture of capitalism and consumerism. Indian film makers, especially Bollywood *auteurs*, standardize the superficial and stylized portrayals of *tawaifs* to meet the economic standards of capitalist society because *tawaif* films have "the appeal of a presence and of a proximity that strikes the masses and fills the movie theaters" (Taylor 4). Hence in films, *tawaifbaazi* is sensualized and used as opium to captivate the audience. By fragmenting their reality, the film makers imprison *tawaifs* in their *kothas* and "*badnaamgaliyonmein,*" infamous lanes (*Paakeezah*) to entertain guests with *mujras*, the contemporary sensationalized dance performances of *tawaifs*. Even if Umrao considers her *kotha* as "*anjuman,*" constellation of stars (1981), Muzaffir Ali converts it into a mansion for the exhibition of her erotic capital. The case is not different with Sanjay Leela Bhansali and J.P. Dutta (2002 and 2006 respectively). The flamboyant and extravagant mise-en-scene has drawn a veil over the academic efficiency and administrative expertise of *tawaifbaazi*. In short, it is deciphered that the business minded film industry utilizes the principles of late-capitalism to exploit *tawaifbaazi*.

Tawaifs, having been the highest tax bearers, indexes the superstructure of the society and exemplifies the inversion of power structures that mark the archetypal hegemonic relations. Media and capitalism with their global political agencies subvert the mutinous reforms of *tawaifs*. The anatomy of *kotha* authorizes the superiority of *tawaifs* over their male customers and their excellence in education, art, administration and what not. Since, such heterotopic conceptualizations interrogate the governing notions of hegemony, patriarchal film makers have dislodged *tawaifs* from their royal *kothas* and place them in slums as in *Mandi* and *Rajjo* to preserve the hegemonic patriarchal status quo in the society. The luxury of Mughal period and the sumptuousness of *tawaifbaazi* are synchronized in *kothas*. A.L. Basham opines that "the constructional methods" distinguishes Mughal buildings like *kothas* from others of the time. Antithetical to the hegemonic structures of *kothas*, film makers have been trying to appropriate them to the conventional power structures of the society. Hence, one would locate a typical macho man in the film *Tawaaif* who boastfully says: "*kothe ki dahleez par aaghotihain, aur us par pair rakhthe hi ladki ki izzathjaljaathihain aur voizzathdaar se tawaaif ban jaathihain*" (there is fire in the manor of *kotha;* the moment a girl steps into it, her honour is gone and she gets transformed into a *tawaaif*). In other words, *tawaifbaazi* is distorted as it does not comply with the predominant notion of hegemony.

Post-modernization, to an extent, noted for commodity fetishism which in turn is expressive of "alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation, and isolation" (Jameson1-8). Accordingly, *tawaif* films could be treated as the virtual expression of the anxiety of filmmakers in a post-modernized era. The virtual destruction of the very aesthetic of *tawaifbaazi* takes place on the silver screen to safeguard the pervasive cultural environment of postmodern society. The hyper-real aesthetics of post-modernism ensnares the qualified labour power of *tawaifbaazi* by means of slavery and servitude. So Devdas asks Chandramukhi: "tum paise lethi ho na," demeaning her only as a gold digger, forsaking her academic and

artistic excellence (1955). Blind adherence and submission to the dominant patriarchal ideology boxes *tawaifs* out of the professional ethics of *tawaifbaazi*. Even though post-modernism glorifies creativity and plurisignation, the divergent approach of *tawaibaazi* is rejected owing to their sexually and artistically active life. The foundational illusion of post-modern homogeneity dismantles the cultural heritage of *tawaifbaazi*.

The metaphoric and metonymic meanings of *tawaif* visuals' is exemplification of random cannibalization of their past (Jameson Chapter 1). Nostalgia has always been the generalized manifestation of the individual and social eagerness that is resultant in the aesthetic colonization (Taylor5) in Indian films. As a result, the historical *tawaifs* are replaced by the commercialized, voluptuous and tantalizing modern *tawaifs* in visual narratives. The reception and consumption of romantic past is celebrated to debase the present circumstance and the testimonies are abundantly found in a series of *tawaif* films. One instance is in 2006 film, when Umrao Jaan, by being emotional about the past, grieves in pain on her lost glory: "*agalejanammujhebitiyanakeejo*" (don't make me daughter in the next birth). The films concentrate solely on the idyllic pasts nullifying the rich lives in the *kothas*. The contemporary nostalgic measures aim to romanticize *tawaifbaazi* so as to utilize them as cultural intermediaries. By ritualizing the moment, nostalgic portrayals evoke disgraceful meanings of *tawaifbaazi*.

Pop historical pastiche films on *tawaif* are synonymous with the textual play or parodies of historical *tawaifbaazi*. The pop historical aspect justifies the objectified representation of *tawaifs*. By losing the historicalness, the *tawaifbaazi* appears as a glimmering mirage. The representation of *tawaifs* in films is based on a mode of production supervised by the dominant bourgeois ideology. The social adaptability of such portrayals is prestigious as the "structure, persistence, development, stagnation and decline of societies" (Goshgarian 18) has been chaperoned by them. The mode of production is constituted by the unity of its dominant forces and dominated entities. The materialistic productive forces corresponding to the relations of production reinforce the archetypal *tawaif* images in the films. Hence *tawaifs* are underrepresented in visual narratives to assert the stereotypical notions of femininity and commoditization in the society. But the non-correspondence between the dominant prejudices and dominated identities would bring in revolutionary changes.

Thus, one could comprehend the fact that films have been keen in deteriorating the *tawaifs* as penniless and inconsequential over the years. Needless to say, such abominable actions were accelerated by various post-modern ideologies like commoditization, objectification, fetishism and media society. Hence *tawaifbaazi* that had once been synonymous with luxury, safety, freedom, education and openness, is demeaned in the present-day Indian films to problematize the image.

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Dalit Woman in Malayalam Cinema

Dr. Anilkumar P.V.*

Abstract

The article attempts at a methodological inquiry into the discursive matrix of identity construction of Dalit woman in Malayalam cinema. In doing so, it raises two significant questions with regard to the Dalit woman identity: (1) "Who is the ideal woman, the ideal actress, suited to perform the role of a Dalit woman character in Malayalam cinema?" and (2) "How is the discursive formation of the Dalit woman self made possible in Malayalam cinema?" The article attempts to answer these two questions by silhouetting the grand political transformation that was instrumental in changing the socio-political and economic texture of India from a Nehruvian Licence Raj economy to that of market economy. The change, the article argues, is encapsulated in the form of an aesthetic representation getting transformed itself from the domain of metaphor to that of metonymy. In other words, the answers to the questions raised are sought in the force-field of the "real" and the reel.

Keywords: *Malayalam Cinema, Identity Construction, Caste, Gender, Dalit, Woman, Metaphor, and Metonymy.*

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Malayalam cinema's dynamics with Dalit woman is quite interesting in two ways. With regard to the woman of the real, Malayalam cinema, like the cinema industries in the rest of India, presents a bleak picture. A female actor from Dalit community in the role of a heroine is still a distant dream. Even if we allow room to entertain the idea that there might have been Dalit female actors in the Malayalam film industry and it is just an accident that we do not recognize them in their caste identity, this very erasure of the Dalit caste identity of woman from memory and history itself is problematic. Before going into the details of the problematic field, we must set in place a qualification here: the absence that we have just alluded to is not a problem that the Dalit community alone experiences. There is similar absence as far as some other communities are concerned. For example, we do not see many female actors emerging from the Muslims, Ezhavas, Adivasis, Malayali Brahmins and Other Backward Castes. There may be religious, cultural, political, symbolic and economic reasons, which prevent the potential female actors from the communities mentioned from entering a career which is highly "plastic" and which is still seen in certain corners as a threat to "the modesty of woman." As my aim is not a sociological understanding of the factors that contribute to the absence, I will stick to another question which is more idealistic in nature: is the very idea of an ideal woman capable of becoming a heroine of Malayalam cinema; of an ideal heroine representing the hopes, aspirations, pains and traumas of a "Malayali woman" exclusive?

With regard to the question, the question of a Juliet ("What's in a name?") becomes problematic. Malayalam cinema, apropos of woman identity, reverses the wisdom of Juliet, and places everything in name. This superimposition of identity on name has historically manifested itself in two ways. While the films produced in the era of Nehruvian socialist and secular visions exhibits one tendency, the other is visible in films produced in a chronotope defined by neo-liberal shift of the Indian political economy.

Up to 1990, Malayalam cinema seemingly possessed the innocence of Juliet who thought that the changing the surname (of her beloved from Montague) to some other name would solve the problem of identity. Take a cursory glance at the names of a whole lot of known heroines from 1950 to 1995: Kumari, Lalitha, Padmini, Ragini, Sheela, Jayabharathi, Vijayasree, Vidhubala, Seema, Jalaja, Shobhana, Madhavi, Geetha, and Ranjini. It seems all of them have materialized the radical potential of Juliet's question: all of them have thoroughly done away with their surnames. But have they become truly, to follow Juliet's thoughts, what they are ("thou art thyself, though not a Montague.") with this emptying of surname? Or, better still, who have they become after making a void in the space of surname?

The question unsettles everything that Juliet imagines to be there in a name-change. As most of us know, the surnames in India usually carry people's caste/religious identity. But In Kerala, due to many historical reasons, this is not true of lower caste Malayalis. The initials that accompany their names could be expanded to their *veettu peru* (literally, this can be translated as house name, but the "house" in this phrase does not refer to an erected building but to genealogy along patriarchal lines. House, in this sense, is an extended family in time and space, at the origin of which, posits our mathematical logic and reasoning, a single male ancestor) and their father's name. The house name does not throw much light upon one's caste/religious identity because there are instances in which people with different religious and caste identities having the same *veettu peru*.

Even though the *veettu peru* does not reveal anything to a stranger regarding one's caste/religious identity, the name of the individual often gives sufficient clue as to the religious identity of the individual. Simply put, one does not expect the bearer of name like Raman or Krishnan in Kerala to be a Muslim or Christian. This is to say that although the lower castes, by dint of their naming strategy, have escaped a caste-based identification; it is still possible to decipher the fact that he or she is not a Muslim or Christian.

In a way, this has set the platform for the "progressive" politics of Kerala. When Kerala was thoroughly mesmerized by Sree Narayan Guru's famous and powerful embargo on publicly asking other's caste and also his emphasis on "One caste; one religion; one God" for mankind, asking about caste and displaying caste in the public sphere started to be seen as reactionary and against the zeitgeist. Although Narayana Guru's could be seen as a powerful message calling for the overcoming of caste and caste prejudices from the deeper level of one's unconscious, one gets the impression that the Kerala society took the message in the other sense. They took it as a practice, as a ritual to be enacted in the public sphere. Instead of overcoming caste from *within*, some of them did away with caste from *without*. In other words, some of the upper caste Hindus, unlike the Chatterjees and Shastris at the national level, stopped the practices of displaying their caste and asking other's caste publicly even when they remained casteist at the private sphere. The most catching image with regard to the scenario is that of Mannathu Padmanabhan. In him we find the irony and difficulty of the Kerala progressive politics. The founder member of the Nair Service Society (NSS), an organization exclusively for the betterment of the Nair community, Mannthu Padmanabhan Pillai dropped the suffix "Pillai" to "assure the Hindus that he had renounced his caste affiliation and stood for the unification of the fragmented Hindu society" (Sadasivan, 546). In Kerala a mere dropping of a suffix from name would make one revolutionary. But the revolution is such that everyone in Kerala *knew* that he could *simultaneously* be a Nair at the NSS office and progressive Hindu in the public sphere. In the progressive political terrain of Kerala, there was nothing contradictory about his positions.

With that, we are in a position to appreciate the question that we asked earlier: who did the female heroines become after renouncing their surnames? The heroines who dropped the surnames also reproduced the same ambiguous politics that Mannathu Padmanabhan displayed. Their changed name situated them within the progressive and secular politics of the Kerala left and of Nehru. In both political modes, the individuals who dropped their caste-suggesting part of their names would be easily registered as those who transcended caste. But the irony is that despite their swerving away from caste, their names placed them with the large undivided Hindu family. They lost their caste identity but they remained Hindu. Their body was capable of representing every Hindu identity.

If we look closely at five early Malayalam films—*Neelakuyil* (P. Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat, 1954), *Randidangazhi* (P. Subrhamaniam, 1958), *Mudiyanaya Puthran* (Ramu Kariat, 1961), *Punnapra Vayalar* (Kunchakko, 1968)and *Ningalenne Kammunistakki (Thoppil Bhasi, 1970)* — the point will become clear. In all the five films, the heroines who played the role of Dalit woman were not Dalits. They were all either upper caste Hindus or Christians, all having Hindu-like names: Kumari (Thresiamma) in *Neelakkuyil, Mudiyanaya Puthrani* and *Randidangazhi;* Sheela (Clara Abraham) in *Punnapra Vayalar;* and Jayabharathi in *Ningalenne Kammunistakki*.

Here one could expect a naive reaction from the secular and liberal aestheticians and readers. They would argue that an actress is merely an

actress and that she can represent any role, provided she can act well and do justice to the role given. That is a misrepresenting logic. This is not the point that I have articulated. Still I can make my point clearer by resorting to the logic of this hypothetical objection. If acting is simply acting, then it must be that it can work both ways: not just an upper caste woman can play the role of a Dalit woman but a Dalit woman can also play the role of an upper caste woman. This is our predominant point is: the latter form of acting does not happen in Malayalam cinema. It is in this connection that the above observation is made. This could have been overlooked easily if it had been a matter of aesthetic concern only. But it is more than that. Behind this form of representation of Dalit woman, one perceives a whole structure of representational strategy that made Gandhi the iconic figure of Indian independent struggle.

In his classic indictment of Gandhi titled*What Gandhi and Congress Have Done to the Untouchables*, Ambedkar quotes Gandhi:

> I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchables, their vote, and that I would top the poll... Therefore, with all my regard for Dr. Ambedkar, and for his desire to see the Untouchables uplifted, with all my regard for his ability, I must say in all humility that here the great wrong under which he has laboured and perhaps the bitter experiences that he has undergone have for the moment warped his judgement. It hurts me to have to say this, but I would be untrue to the cause of the Untouchables, which is as dear to me as life itself, if I did not say it. I will not bargain away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world. I am speaking with a due sense of responsibility, and I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr. Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of the Untouchables of India. (Ambedkar 67)

What is most problematic about the passage is the binary produced by Gandhi. He, an upper caste Hindu, could represent the Untouchables better than Ambedkar, who was an Untouchable. In other words, the truth of the Untouchable could be put forward by the upper caste Hindu better than the Untouchable. What is the basis of this claim? There is nothing except that Gandhi *knew* that he was better suited for the job. If Ambedkar's claim for speaking for "the whole of the Untouchables of India" is not a "proper claim"; if Ambedkar cannot even represent the whole of Dalits properly, how can he ever hope to represent a larger mass beyond his caste, that is, the whole of India? Gandhi and other congress leaders could easily do that. They, in their secular and liberal veneer, could represent the whole of India if they chose that way or could represent the whole of Untouchables if they desired it so. They would do the job better than the most educated Dalit. Their claim was proper because they knew it. Dalit cannot represent anything beyond their respective caste.

The filmscape, with regard to the question of representing Dalit identity, is structured on this logic. If an elite female actor from the extended Hindu family sheds caste from her name and embraces a liberal identity, she can represent Dalit self on screen better than Dalits themselves.

Now let us focus on the second tendency which defines the ideal woman of Malayalam cinema. This is, in a way, a continuation of the process we have just mentioned. But at the same time there is a marked difference here. If earlier, as men-

tioned, the heroine did away with that part of their names which carried their caste identity, from late 1990's onwards only certain class of actors were required to do that. The heroines who were forced change their real names were mainly from the Christian community (Sekhar 124-131). In the case of female actors like Meera Jasmine (Jasmine Mary Joseph), Nayan Thara (Diana Mariam Kurian) and Gopika (Girly Anto), the de-Christening has an additional dimension. Their new names not only have uprooted their original names from their religious anchoring but also from their patriarchal lineage. Religion and father are matters to be concealed if you are a Christian girl. This is the continuation of a tradition that we have mentioned. Already, in the early years of Malayalam cinema female actors belonging to Christian community like Thresiamma and Clara Abraham had changed their names to Hindu-like names like Kumari and Sheela respectively.

The difference from the tradition is the difference imparted by the upper caste Hindu actors. The upper caste Hindu actors like Swetha Menon, Samyuktha Varma, Manju Warrier, Sindhu Menon, Renuka Menon, Remya Nambeesan, Nithya Menon, Navya Nair, Karthika Nair have no trouble in suffixing their upper caste identity to their names. One must also talk about a concomitant idea. Two female actors from the North Malabar, Samvritha Sunil and Kavya Madhavan, from two predominant lower castes, are allowed to carry their father's name as their surname. One significant exception to this general observation is the female actor Bhavana, whose real name is Karthika Menon.

What made this transformation possible? As an answer I will point out three events of the 1990's, which changed the texture of the Nehruvian secular and socialist dreams for ever: the liberalization policy initiated by the Congress party, the demolition of Babri Masjid and the tabling of the report of the Mandal Commission in the parliament. With the full unfolding of liberalization and its logic, "merit" has become the catchword of the new-era elite, the idea of the term being that they have become what they are because of their talents, of their merit.

Since acting is not a field where there is no reservation policy, it is quite "natural" to assume that the high number of upper caste female heroines in the film industry is the result of their being the seat of merit. When we make an exploration into the concept of acting, which also invokes the idea of meritorious and non-meritorious acting, it will explain the other reason why Dalit woman is an absence in the coveted space of the heroine. If we "naturally" think in terms of merit as the reason for the absence of Dalit woman, then the reason is quite obvious: Dalit woman is absent as heroine in Malayalam cinema because there is no reservation for her there. She does not possess the gifts to become the heroine of the Malayalam film industry.

Now on to the hard question: Who is an actress in Malayalam cinema? Who possesses the gift to be an actress? If we just go through the profile of the female actors mentioned, we can easily know that none of them had any training in film-acting prior to their entry into films. This clearly indicates that they are there not because of their skill as an actress but because of some other reasons. The predominant reason one could point out is that in Kerala film industry acting by a woman is not what it is taken to be by, say, an Alfred Hitchcock, who famously remarked that "actors should be treated like cattle." It is because of this differential understanding of acting by Malayalam film industry which makes these strangers to film industry the de-facto gifted actresses.

The idea evoked by Hitchcock's rather dismissing remark is clear: if camera is positioned in the

best of place and the editor does the work cleanly, then that is precisely what counts in film making, not the talent of the actors. He was famous for his reticence when it comes to giving directions to the actors. But this is not how many film makers of Kerala perceive cinema or acting. Here a potential actress could be easily spotted in advance. Is it not the reason why some of the well-known female actors of the Malayalam cinema industry were spotted from the venues of State Youth Festival? Is it not the reason why many film makers are in talent-hunt in such venues where there is competition on dance and music? Is it not a well-known fact that their hunt for talent is often limited to female actors only?

This enables us to answer that tricky question: who is an actress in Malayalam cinema? What should be the gift she should possess in order to be the ideal actress of Malayalam cinema? The first criterion, of course, is she must have what the filmmakers call "photogenic face." It does not matter whether she has any insight into people's psychology or the motives, social, cultural and psychological, that make people act and react in particular manner in particular contexts. Any amount of deficiency in this regard on the part of the actress could be overcome if she has a "photogenic face," which is actually a metonymic marker of a body which fits the aesthetic standards set by the filmmakers themselves.

Once the potential actress meets the bodily requirements, that is, once she is perceived to have "photogenic face," then the search is for the talent. This search must be construed in a context where an actress is understood to be talented if she has learned what is called "classical dancing" and the exaggerated form of acting derived from it. No wonder, some of the "talented" female actors from Kerala like Jayabharathi, Shobhana, Monisha, Manju Warrier, Navya Nair and Kavya Madhavan had a solid training in "classical dancing."

There are two reasons for this strange process, which, for the Malayali audience, is quite natural. As we have already noted, Indian cinema has for a significant time never looked at cinema as an art of its own. Rather it was seen as a possibility for exploring many other skills. One art form that found its way to film was theatre. The popular plays produced by the famous professional theatre groups of Kerala like the *Kerala People's Arts Club* (KPAC) and the *Kalidasa Kala Kendram* were operatic in their performing, with lot of music, songs and dance. In this context provided by drama the talent for acting was defined beyond any doubt: the actors must have the ability for singing, dancing and exaggerated form of acting because in a medium where the filmic technique of close-up is not possible, emotions could be communicated with exaggerations only. Naturally, when the patriarchs of Kerala theatre looked for actors, they looked for people who could do these things. And they got what they were in search for: women who were trained in dancing and music. As the drama found its way into film, some of the consequences of which we have already seen in an earlier chapter, this selection process also found its way into films. The talent hunt by the filmmakers that is happening in school cultural festivals is an ample proof that when it comes to defining acting and actress, Malayalam filmmakers have not gone much beyond its founding fathers' understanding of the female actor.

Here one could locate the central irony of the Dalit exclusion from the terrain of acting. Unlike the venues of the "classical arts," which were fixed and whose scholarship is confined to the elite, the theatre groups mentioned were travelling theatre groups. The venues shifted from performance to performance. The idea of make-shift and moving theatres was already there in the Dalit performances. Since Dalits were not the owners of land, they could not erect permanent

theatre buildings. On the contrary, their performing space was temporarily constituted. Any clearing could form the performing space, provided Dalits had access to it: the little bit of yard near their hut, the harvested and thus emptied paddy field; these were the places they could gather and share their experience. From such a perspective, one could easily argue that the venues of some of the Dalit performing art forms have a drifting form, a form that repeats itself in the travelling theatres that were instrumental in changing the sense and sensibility of the Kerala audience.

Another significant feature of such temporary and make-shift performing space is that, unlike in the *koothambalam* or other performing spaces of the elite, the viewer is not defined in advance. No doubt, the viewers who watched the entertaining performances of the Dalits were predominantly Dalits and lower caste people. But that does not mean that only they were entitled to watch them. The power structure of the society was such that the elite could watch them if they desired so because, unlike the elite who could keep Dalits at an untouchable distance from their performing spaces, Dalits had no power to keep the former from their performing spaces.

The travelling theatres of Kerala, if we stick to the above exposition, are the result of a melange of two opposing performing systems. While, at the level of the conception of venue and spectatorship, they followed the constitutional logic of the Dalit performing spaces, at the level of acting and performance, it remained within the citadels of the "classical" art forms. It is a known fact that Dalits' access to the mummified and codified form of the "classical" arts is a recent phenomenon because their birth and wealth statuses had for long prevented them from acquiring the knowledge and skills of the "classical" arts. One does not need great reasoning faculty to understand the fact that in a theatrical/filmic context in which classical performances defined and shaped the idea of acting, those who had not studied "classical" arts, either as a practioner or viewer, would never become an actor. No wonder, a Dalit heroine who can proclaim her caste identity is still a distant dream in Malayalam film industry!

If that is the situation of the Dalit woman of real, what is she in the reel? More than anything else two experiences mark Dalit woman on the screen: heterosexual love in search of a fulfilment in the family mode and the ethics of work. Let us take two groups of films that operate within the matrix of Dalit woman's love. While the first group is from the early Malayalam cinema— *Neelakuyil* (P. Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat, 1954), *Mudiyanaya Puthran* (Ramu Kariat, 1961), *Punnapra Vayalar* (Kunchakko, 1968) and *Ningalenne Kammunistakki (Thoppil Bhasi, 1970)*— the second is from the post-90 Malayalam cinema, which includes the films *Veendum Chila Veettu Karyangal* (Sathyan Anthikad, 1999), *Varnakazhchakal* (Sundardas, 2000), *Jalolsavam* (Sibi Malayil, 2004). Now we need to set in place one more qualification: the reason why we have excluded the film *Randidangazhi* (P. Subrhamaniam, 1958) from the schemata proposed above is due to the differential mode of love that happens in this film. When the Dalit woman in the films included in the schemata fall in love with upper caste or other caste man, in the film *Randidangazhi* the love happens between a Dalit woman and Dalit man. The love that is to be understood from the perspective of this work is that love that goes beyond caste barriers and not the love that happens within the set boundaries.

With that qualification, let us shift our attention to the texture of the films. Since these films are not known for their formal experimentation and innovation, we have to delimit our inquiry within the terrain of the content analysis. At this level

of analysis, the parenthood of Dalit woman is a striking phenomenon and it displays considerable variation in the two historical junctures that form the basis of the schemata. In the first group of films, Dalit woman is located within the matrix of patriarchal family: all the four Dalit women in the four films have their father as the authority of the family, as the mediator between the community and the family, as the one who enacts the symbolic transactions leading to the maintenance and continuation of the lineage. In that respect, the mother's absence in *Mudiyanaya Puthran* and *Ningalenne Kammunistakki* is not very striking as long as the father is alive to help us situate the woman within history and society. She is not rootless and nomadic. In contrast to the firmly fixed filial roots of Dalit woman of earlier films, the heroines of *Veendum Chila Veettu Karyangal, Varnakazhchakal* and *Jalolsavam*, whose Dalit identity is either directly discernable (in the first two films) or subtly hinted at (in *Jalolsavam* only in s song sequence that it is mentioned she is a *Cherumi*), are portrayed as either orphans (*Varnakazhchakal* and *Jalolsavam)* or as having lost only the father (*Veendum Chila Veettu Karyangal)*. One could say that the survival of the mother in *Veendum Chila Veettu Karyangal* is still entrapped in the world of absence in the sense that being insane she is already beyond the realm of the sensible, of the world of the presence. She is not dead. Yet she is dead.

How do we understand this transition of Dalit woman from rootedness to rootlessness? Already, we have seen a similar process with regard to the naming of Christian actors. They were delinked from their roots and given a more or less rootless and mobile identity while the upper caste Hindu actors were solicited to keep their fixed caste identity. If we think about the impact of the major three socio-political and economic events (Mandal, Masjid and liberalization) on the consciousness of the people, we can clearly discern that the three cumulatively had a contradictory effect on people: there was a simultaneous expansion of the self into an integrated world market and a shrinkage of the self into a regional, religious, ethnic and casteist dimensions. Within the force-fields of these contradictory movements, nation-state is getting revealed in its arbitrariness. It is in this context that the proper subject of the nation has to be imagined again. The consciousness proper of the nation has changed. The re-imagination has constituted a changed national subject, a changed consciousness. He is no longer the upper caste Hindu male couched in the form of a universal liberal who has incorporated the values of modernity and has discarded tradition. He is just the upper caste Hindu individual without any liberal garb. He or she does not mask herself in other forms; he or she is what they are owing to the pull of tradition. He or she does not have to renounce tradition to be modern. He or she is simultaneously the one who clings to tradition and imbibes the value system of modernity.

In other words, the transformation that we have just seen is actually a transformation from metaphor to metonymy. In the metaphoric mode, the Indian elite, with his liberal and secular anxiety, stood for the consciousness of the entire nation, displacing all other consciousness. He knew everything and everyone and he could, like Gandhi himself, represent the whole of the nation without any fissure in the consciousness. His problems and anxieties had universal dimension because he was standing in for the universal. But when it comes to metonymy, the whole political project of the universal man becomes problematic to the very core. In metonymic mode, there is no longer this aspiration for a universal being capable of representing the whole. In metonymy, instead, what we have is a process by which the whole is reduced to the part or the part is elevated to the whole. In other words, in metonymy the

deception involved in a metaphor is no longer there. It stands in its pure nudity. In metaphor, I have to presume that my concern is your concern because through me what is represented is the universal. Metonymy does away with this universal dimension. Here the universal and the particular are one and the same.

In other words, with the metonymic shift the Indian elite does not have to represent the totality of the national consciousness. He can be just what he is. His interest is the interest of the nation. Other interests are just nuisances to be removed. Or more precisely, there is no other interest other than his interest. The point will be clear if we recall the innumerable instances of marginalized people being forcefully uprooted and made homeless in the name of development. The development mantra is set in such a tone that one longer hears the complex questions as to the need for development, the constitution of the beneficiaries, the manner in which development is to be achieved. The question "What is the use of development to the people who are forcefully uprooted?" is more or less left unaddressed. There is no longer a liberal apology for the violence and inhumanness unleashed in the name of development. The apology belongs to yesteryears. The rules of the game have changed. That is precisely the reason why the struggle of the forcefully driven, in the eyes of the power managers, has become simply a law and order problem.

Now let us shift our attention from roots to the rhizomic connections of heterosexual love, which is a temporary flight in search of another fixed point and the roots of family. Here the picture of the inter-caste love involving a Dalit woman is quite revealing. In three films out of four mentioned (that is, *Neelakuyil, Mudiyanaya Puthran* and *Ningalenne Kammunistakki)*, she falls in love with a man hailing from one of the Nair communities and in the remaining one (*Punnapra Vayalar*)she falls in love with an Ezhava, who, in caste hierarchy, is above Dalits but is still at a distance from Nair. This is the most interesting point about the love affairs: the only love affair that ends up in conjugality is the love between Dalit woman and Ezhava man! What does it indicate?

We must go deep into the texture of the films to even attempt an answer for the question asked. Let us ask a naive question here: who/what prevents the love life between a Dalit woman and Nair man from getting unfolded into a conjugal relationship? The three films give three different reasons. In the first film of the group *Neelakuyil* it is the Freudian super ego at work in the hero is the prohibiting agency. The hero Sreedharan Nair (played by Sathyan), a poorly paid school teacher, seduces a Dalit woman Neeli (Kumari) who on a rainy day when she accidently seeks shelter in his house. The seduction is followed by intense spiritual intimacy, sharing dreams and pranks. But everything comes to a standstill when the hero realizes that the seduction has also resulted in her pregnancy. Within the time span of a few months, the empty bubble of inter-caste love bursts out. Suddenly he is conscious of the society and community. He realizes that it is impossible for him to marry a Dalit woman and live with her. He rejects her, completely.

The rejection has damn consequence for the woman. She cannot go back to her people because she is pregnant. An unmarried woman becoming pregnant is against the ways of the community. The outcastes of the society outcaste her. She is outside caste order. Her home is the world outside caste order, which, in the context in which she lives, is a no-man world. Everybody is safe inside the universe of caste, be it the caste Hindu, Muslim or the outcaste Pulaya.

As in every prohibited love, here too emerge two incompatible time-spaces: the time-space of the

lovers, the private dreams, desires, joys and sorrows and the shared moments of two lovers, and the time-space of the larger society, the laws and prohibitions. One does not conclude from this schema that while one time-space is rule based the other is not. That is not the case. The time-space of heterosexual love is also strongly codified as societal laws. If one does not follow the private rules set by the other in a love relation, one may be punished as in the case of a violation of the societal code. What makes this film appear as a tragic one is the difference in the modes of behaviour of the heroine and hero: while the female shows extreme fidelity to the private world of the lovers, the male sticks to the world of the community.

But the action does not stop at this reversal of the commonplace notion in which Dalits are equated with treachery and the upper caste people with integrity. Her next existential decision elevates her to a tragic queen of unnatural heights: even after the repeated query she refuses to divulge to the public the identity of the brute who has made her pregnant. She suffers all her ill fate without any complaint. Like a "real woman," she protects the honour of her lover. She could have dragged him into the mud, but the exemplary woman that she is, she does not engage in such savage and desperate action. She suffers alone, struggling in her newly made nomadic condition. Her suffering comes to an end when she commits suicide. But before committing suicide or, more precisely, as she was crawling toward to the railway tracks to commit suicide, she gave birth to a boy child.

To put it bluntly, her silence is resistance of the supreme order. This is what makes her a rightful candidate for the post of a tragic heroine. It is precisely at this point that we must avoid the temptation to bracket her off as a tragic queen. If we do that, its implication is simply that her silence is more or less a choice, an existential decision, a sort of the exercise of a freedom of the Sartrean variety. That is, she is responsible for her own decision, for her own wretchedness, because she could have acted otherwise.

This logic needs to be questioned, which is to say that we must save the heroine from her present status. Such a saving will not only shed a new light on the whole melodrama unfolded in the film but also give us the cue to unearth the logic of the strange world of the Malayalam Dalit writer C. Ayyappan.

C. Ayyappan's short stories present an unusual space: it is a space filled with the discourses of the dead, the ghosts, the mad. The discourse is always that of the other. It is the dead and the mad of the Dalit self that talks. The other always talks about the wound the Dalit human self experienced here. This clearly suggests that C. Ayyappan's fictional narratives try to articulate an experience that cannot be rendered in the ordinary parlance of Malayali. The Dalit self in Kerala cannot directly articulate the truth. If such an attempt is made, then it will be something else. It has to seek recourse to the discourse of the other to narrate the truth. The paradox is: one cannot be oneself while one speaks as oneself. One can only be oneself while one speaks as the other.

How do we connect this aspect of Ayyappan's fictional world with the silence of Neeli in the film? We will do that by positing a rather uncanny, speculative question: what would have happened if she had broken the silence and revealed to the world the identity of the person who was responsible for her pregnancy? What effect would it have had in a society which was not yet fully democratized? How could an outcaste and helpless woman defend her position if she was alleged by the powerful feudal coterie as engaging in an exercise of tarnishing the image of a good school master? Is it because of her knowledge that her

revealing of truth would in no way help her that made her silent? Is it not this plain commonsense that made her silent? Since these are speculative questions, these questions need not be answered here. The principle idea such questions would bring into light is an insight that her silence could be more of a forced nature than that of an existential decision, which is the consequence of one's freedom to choose. If one goes along this line of thought, one could be blunt and say that it is not the freedom to remain silent that is instrumental in the making of her silence; on the contrary, it is the absence of freedom to reveal the truth that forms the core of her silence.

But one does not have to believe in this line of thought in order to understand the structural consequence of silence on Sreedharan Nair's universe. Even though he initially rejects Neeli and her child and gets married to a woman from a nearby Nair family, as time progresses he is forced to engage with the spectral presence of Neeli.

As we know, within the changed landscape of Kerala, the symbolic transaction of Nair family too underwent a change. Here the symbolic transaction assumes a new form: from father to son. It is within the context of the nuclear family and patriarchal form of the symbolic transaction made possible in the Nair nuclear families by colonial modernity that the spectral presence of Neeli becomes so powerful and crucial. In addition to this, the new liberal discourse, which is another by-product of colonial modernity and whose obvious figure in the film is Sankaran Nair, the spectral form has further grip on the hero. The void in the family due to his wife's barren condition; the sense of abandonment and orphanage developing in his child born to Neeli despite the fact that the child from birth onwards has been well taken care of by Sankaran Nair just as father would his son; his wife's love and devotion, everything slowly starts to act upon him so much so that he is finally forced to reveal the secret that he and Neeli could have revealed but did not. More importantly, he is forced to act. It is the dead Neeli, with her silent spectral accusation, which then gets direct verbal forms in his wife and Sankaran Nair's accusations after the secret is out, who is more powerful than the living Neeli. The bareness of his wife is more metaphorical than literal. His impotency to act at decisive moments in his life is the idea that is driven home with the metaphor. It is from this impotency that he *acts out*.

This exposition sheds light on the spectral world of Ayyappan's fiction, whose paradox we have only formulated already: one cannot be oneself while one speaks as oneself. One can only be oneself while one speaks as the other. Neeli's dead discourse is a discourse that is impossible while she is alive. She can only make this discourse once she is dead. The silence that Neeli assumes or is forced to accept is in fact the symptom of the discursive system of modernity and its blind spots. In order for it to function smoothly modernity has to repress certain voices, which could only make it appearance as spectral disturbances. This is what makes the film tragic: it is not the existential decision of the heroine to stick to the private world of love whose rules and commitments she and her loved devised and from which the lover backed off, but the film's unconscious insight into the discursive dynamics of the emancipatory potentials of liberal humanistic discourse, whose triumph the film proclaims at a conscious level. Colonial modernity's universal human discourse in the liberal form has always been produced from above by silencing certain voices from below. Dalit woman's discourse is one such silenced discourse. It did not have any space in the liberal discourse of the time. It could only make it presence through spectral gaze from nowhere, from the zone of the dead. It

is no accident of history that in the film all the liberal anxieties of modernity fell upon the shoulders of two Nair males: Sreedharan nair and Sankaran Nair.

There is yet another dimension to silence. Unlike in the earlier case, this time silence cannot even invade as spectral presence. This is a silence that is forever foreclosed. In *Ningalenne Kammunistakki* one of the heroines, Mala (played by Jayabharathi), is forced into that silence. She is the illiterate daughter of a bonded Pulaya worker, whose wife was brutally killed by the *janmi* (the feudal landlord) when Mala was a tiny kid because the woman refused to sleep with him. Even though the *janmi* has not changed after all these years, the times have changed. When Mala is approached by the *janmi* for the same purpose for which her mother had been approached years ago, she refuses him in the most stubborn of ways. When the incident is reported to her father by her, he tells her about the death of her mother, which has been a secret hidden from her. Father's disclosure does not frighten her; instead she seems more determined to fight such inhuman brutalities her people have been facing.

Soon we realize that the determination has its roots in the altering political climate, a climate in which the working class has begun to organize for their political rights. This new movement in their village, which has its ideological source in communism, is lead by Gopalan (Prem Nazeer), the son of one of the prominent *janmis* of the village, Paramu Pillai (Sathyan). In a way, one could argue that he is actually the source behind her newly-found courage. His relation with Mala's family is quite interesting. It has simultaneously the traces of his feudal anchorage and a flight from it. He is remarkably cool with the untouchable people and has no problem in having the little bit of food that they share with him. He even teaches the illiterate Dalit woman to read and right. But his feudal political unconscious is quite evident from the way he addresses Mala's father: he calls the latter by his name Karumaban (literally, the black one) without using the term of address "comrade" that the people actively engaged in communist politics used worldwide during the time. This is quite problematic given the fact that it is only within the political economy of feudalism that in Kerala a person would call another person who is just old as one's father by his name.

His revolutionary closeness to the family makes Mala fall in love with him. She gives him enough hints regarding her secret love. At one point, their discourse has this form:

> Gopalan: "Bye the bye, what was that quarrel in the paddy field?"
>
> Mala: "Tampuran (the lord, that is, *janmi*) said that there is night class here (at Mala's house)."
>
> Gopalan: "It's true, isn't it?"
>
> Mala: "For that, I asked tampuran what is it that he wanted. Then he said unnecessary thing."
>
> Gopalan: "What did he say?"
>
> Mala: "That I am in love."
>
> Gopalan: "With me? You are a worker, right? I am an organizer of the workers. Janmi won't love me the way you love me."
>
> Mala: "That you too love me."
>
> Gopalan: That also is true. Those who have human sentiments will all love you.

It is pretty clear that she has conveyed her feeling for him in the clearest of fashion, which he refuses to understand because he has subsumed her particular love under the universal love of

the worker and liberal humanist. That is pretty interesting. While the universal love of the proletarian is what the worker has, his love toward the worker is liberal humanistic (like every good liberal, he has to seek recourse to nature, to natural human sentiments to justify his paternalistic political gesture), a split which clearly affirms the difference in stations.

So far, so good. She is the typical woman, the woman whom G. W. F. Hegel has characterized as the "inner enemy" of the community because she acts as a stumbling block in the smooth passage from the particular to the universal:

> Since the community gets itself subsistence only by breaking in upon family happiness and dissolving self-consciousness into the universal, it creates itself on what it represses [*erzeugt es sich an dem, was es unterdüuckt*] and what is at the same time essential to it – womankind in general, its inner enemy. Womankind – the eternal irony of the community – alters by intrigue the universal purpose of government into a private end. (Zizek, 149)

The community of the workers, their international solidarity, can only be constituted by breaking in upon private happiness. This is precisely what the hero does, consciously or unconsciously: he represses the particular feeling of the woman, her intrigue toward private end for the sake of forming the universal brotherhood of the workers. Placed within the philosophical rigor of the German idealist thought, one cannot say that caste is the problem that motivates the hero to act in such manner, to repress the private feeling of both. That is the repression one has to make in order to form a community of people and universal love.

But we perceive at a later point in film that the same individual who has failed to notice the private feeling of the Dalit woman easily perceives the private feeling of a woman from his own caste, Sumam (Sheela), who, in fact, is the daughter of his class enemy, the landlord who had killed Mala's mother. His initial response is repression in more a direct way: he dishes out grand eloquent theories about politics. He tells her that he is a political worker and that he has to turn his face upon much of realty which includes the facts that his sister is ripe for marriage and that his family is slowly disintegrating.

This initial rejection changes later when he realizes that she is also fighting for the same cause that he is fighting for, that she too has reason to hate *Janmitvam.* If he fights the battle at the public sphere, her politics is oriented toward restructuring the private space. It is because of *janmitvam*, she says, that her mother has been made a mute and helpless object, who does not receive any respect from her husband and who cannot just do anything about the licentious life style of her husband. The realization that she is on his side of the battle brings retrospection and then he realizes that he is in love with her. He immediately identifies with her pain, her isolation, and he decides he will love her back! With that we have the first proper revolution of the communist politics of Kerala! The son of a *janmi* from a disintegrating feudal family falls in love with the daughter of a *janmi* from a booming feudal family on a platform set by the proletarian ideals of international communism!

If one counter-argues that caste is not the problem proper here because what prevents him from realizing the fact that Mala is in love with him is his own over proximity to her: for him she is his sister. From the beginning he has seen her as a little sister and it is her blindness to his true attitude toward her what causes her love in the first place. This argument is paternalism at its purest because such an argument does not take into

account the dimension of sublimation that is in operation here. At level, one could easily say that it is the fear of the Dalit woman body which gets circumvented in this sublimation of sexual. By already positing her as his sister, he has ensured that he does not have to cross the barrier of caste in any way and that he can deal with untouchability in a very superficial way. He will dine with this Dalit woman; he will teach her; but he will not sleep with her because that is incest. In other words, here there is a reversal of the logic of the very institution of casteism: it is not because the woman is located at an untouchable distance that she is not fit for matrimonial love; on the contrary, it is because of her over proximity to the male Nair subjectivity that makes her unfit for a subject to be loved as a potential wife. Here incest prohibition does not generate the kind of difficulty that it generated for a theorist like Claude Levi-Strauss, who thought that incest prohibition is a scandal within the binary of nature and culture due to its ambiguous nature.

As we know, Levi-Strauss conceptualized nature as that which is spontaneous and universal and culture as that which is particular and governed by prohibition. In that sense, we can argue that while the feeling of thirst, which is spontaneous (we do not decide whether we will be thirsty or not) and universal (wherever there is human being, there is thirst) belongs to the realm of the natural, what one must drink in order to quench one's thirst is a cultural decision. It is cultural because it is particular (the drink varies from culture to culture, society to society) and is governed by prohibition (we should not drink acid or water from the gutter, etc). It is within the matrix of this definition given to nature and culture that Levi-Strauss finds incest prohibition scandalous. Incest prohibition is scandalous precisely because it simultaneously shares the characteristic markers of both nature and culture so that one could not decide for certain if incest prohibition is a natural or cultural phenomenon. As far as Levi-Strauss is concerned, incest is practiced nowhere in the world. Hence it is a universal phenomenon, a phenomenon that is seen across cultures and societies. This universality of incest prohibition makes it a natural phenomenon. But at the same time it is a prohibition, which is to say that it is governed by particular cultural and societal rules, governed by certain do's and don'ts. So the vital question that troubled Levi-Strauss lies in the fact that one just cannot determine the exact location of incest taboo; that is, one simply cannot state whether it belongs to the realm of nature or it belongs to the realm of culture (Derrida 94).

It is this uncertainty, it is this aporia, at the heart of incest prohibition is what we find missing in the brother-sister relationship of the film. In the film the incest prohibition is purely a cultural phenomenon that structures the so-called natural and biological behaviour of the woman. She falls in love with him and lets him know in a very plain manner that she is in love, which then gets subsumed under the towering universal love of/ for the proletariat. And when the hero falls in love with a woman of his own caste, he needs the permission of this very Dalit woman, his socially constructed sister, for the marriage to take place. It is only at this moment he reveals that his feeling for her has always been in the nature of brotherly love. This is where silence becomes too terrible because from here onwards her silence will have no haunting presence as it is in the case of Neeli in *Neelakuyil*. It is forever killed. It is through her permission that her own sacrifice has been achieved. She is the liberal Goddess who has wilfully accepted the sacrifice. She could have avoided the sacrifice and if she did not, no one else could be blamed.

And she is blamed! The blaming occurs when Mathew, a friend of Gopalan and also a leader of the proletariat, reads her feelings and its causes,

following the information given by her father to him that she sobs at night and does not sleep. We need no more theoretical subtlety but the exchange between Mala and Mathews to explicate our minor thesis about the silence that cannot form a spectral presence of its own:

> Mathew: "Younger sister, can I ask you a question? Will you tell me the truth?"
>
> Mala: "I will."
>
> Mathew: "You love someone. Who is it?"
>
> (Mala starts sobbing)
>
> Mathew: "When such a thought formed in your mind, you could have told Gopalan about it at that very instant."
>
> Mala: "I didn't have the courage."
>
> Mathew: "Why?"
>
> Mala: I am a Pulaya woman.
>
> Mathew: "Gopalan is the sort of guy who, before love, does not see caste and religion as obstacles."
>
> Mala: "Now I know that."
>
> Mathew: "You are late."
>
> Mala: "That too I know."
>
> Mathew: "Don't ever let Gopalan and Sumam know about your heart feelings."
>
> Mala: "I have decided that."
>
> Mathew: "You must forget this pain."
>
> Mala: "Is it possible from now on?"
>
> Mathew: (forcefully) You must, must forget.
>
> Mala: "How is it possible for me?" (and she runs off the scene)

After the running off, there is no coming back to the scene of the Kerala liberal politics. Unlike Neeli who made spectral presence in the scene even after her death, she is forced to wander in her own interiority as a spectre to her own self. She is very much within the space of Kerala modernity, as a proletariat, as a slogan calling party worker, as the potential wife of a Pulaya, but at the same time she is also a stranger to herself within that space. It is this feeling of alienation, the becoming of a spectre before one's death, the living spectre who can never be a source of anxiety and guilt for the violator because of her non-death, that constitutes the most hidden grammar of violence of the Kerala politics. You are already dead, but you are still living a happy life in the eyes of the other. You are already a ghost, but you are still a proper woman in the eyes of the other. You have language to talk to others, but you can only sob at night in your solitude.

The above scene reveals the charade of the Kerala left politics. One simply fails to understand why Mathew and Mala believe that Gopalan has transcended caste and religion, especially with regard to the question of love, even after he has fallen with a woman of his own caste and who is better positioned than him in terms of economic status. Falling in love with the class enemy's daughter is a revolutionary symbol that can stand in for all other transgression loves! Is it not the reason why the left leaders of Kerala, even when they have remained conservatives and traditionalist in their private life, especially in relation to marriage, are still seen as people who have transcended the narrow worlds of caste and religion? The Mathews of Kerala taught the Malas of Kerala to believe that there was revolution happening and that people had changed. Both of them, it seemed, believed the story. It is on this blind belief of Mathew and Mala that, symbolically speaking, Kerala revolutionary politics has been erected. From Land Reform Bills to the Edu-

cation Bills, the left of Kerala have in many times fallen in love with the class enemy, which then got passed off as revolutions standing in for all the revolutions possible in Kerala.

In *Mudiyanaya Puthran* we have a different idea of love. The title, despite its evocation of the parable of the prodigal son in *The New Testament*, is not really Biblical in its structure. In fact, here the prodigal Nair son, after repentance, does not come back home but goes to the prison (for a murder that he has not committed and for which he may be given death sentence), giving his Dalit lover-woman to his mother and sister as a substitute for him. If in *The Bible* the prodigal son returns from the dead (that is how the father conceives his younger son's journey, a fact that is evident from his response to the elder son's angry and envious questioning), in the film the prodigal son goes to the other world (prison/death), leaving his memories and traces in a Dalit woman. That is quite striking? What is that he finds in her that he believes that she is the gift that he has to offer to his helpless mother and sister?

The prodigal son is prodigal in every sense of the term. He has no respect for the ways of the (Nair) community. He does not respect the ways of the family. He is a spendthrift and a local goon. He has never been forced to do any kind of work for a living. Worst of all, he does not even understand the love and devotion of his *murappennu* (the woman who is one's by birth) and leaves her permanently in a fit of fury for her overindulgent attempts in correcting him.

But conferring him the status of a stranger is a dubious thing to do because after all his disavowal of the existing moral and political economy, he is still very much caught up in the very same economy when it comes to the most significant aspect of that economy: the caste. He firmly believes in the feudal value system pertaining to the hierarchical division of castes: he believes that he does not have to work for a living; that his slaves should work and behave as befit the slaves, etc.

That is to say, he is simultaneously a stranger and a close relative of the same universe. He could have continued this double life if it had not been for an attack plotted by his elder brother. His both hands are broken in the attack, and the enforcer of the village suddenly becomes dependant on others for his recovery. But his sense of pride does not allow him to go back to his home, to his mother and younger sister. Nor does his paralytic situation allow him to commit suicide. The only option left for him to accept the protection and care offered by his own slaves and workers. That is how he ends up in front of the Pulaya hut. The Pulaya worker, the chief worker in the former's field and a bonded slave, assigns his daughter, who was once assaulted by the same guy and who narrowly escaped from his attack because of her courageous resistance, with the task of looking after him till he recovers from his dependant status. She follows her father's order. Slowly, a bond develops between them. Now when she looks at his hand, she is tormented by the sight of a mark of a bite. She is tormented because it is mark of a wound she inflicted on him some time back when he tried to sexually assault her. But then this mark, for him, is pleasure! It is at this stage that another local goon, a former friend of Rajan, is killed. His own brother contrives the whole episode in such a manner that Rajan becomes the prime suspect of the murder. This forces him into hiding, where he realizes what true love really is. He decides to surrender to the police. When he does the surrendering, he gifts Chellamma to his mother and sister.

The gift, from Marcel Mauss to Jacques Derrida, has been a very interesting object of many theoretical forays. Instead of delving into the com-

plexities of the inquiries conducted by them, we shall ask a different question apropos of the gift that we are dealing with, Chellamma. We swerve away from Mauss and Derrida precisely because Chellamma's status in the narrative is not in the nature of a gift which forces reciprocal obligation on the receiver or a free gift which involves no such obligation. She is actually a substitute for him. This is the most difficult part of the film because we just cannot make out what he means by substitute: does he mean that he has become a woman and Dalit so that a Dalit woman can substitute him or does he mean that Chellamma is masculine and elite enough to be the right replacement for him? Or is there any other possibility of deciphering this coded message?

It seems there is one. In order to understand that we must inquire into the ideology of labour that informs the film. We have already seen that even though Rajan has problems with the ethical and moral dictates of the society, he is an absolute traditionalist and believes in the hierarchical division of labour ensured by the caste system when it comes to the question of labour. Gopala Pillai, his brother, on the contrary, represents, being a contractor who disregards the agrarian tradition of the landed Nair aristocracy, the entrepreneurial rigor of the emerging middleclass in Licence Raj. Rajan has problems with Gopala Pillai on account of this. His prodigality, from this angle, consists in his refusal to entertain the fact that the old form of social formation is no longer possible. If he is a stranger, he is a stranger to the values of the emerging middleclass, the emergence of which in Kerala context, at the point in time, was the result of the self-conversion of the landed gentry into service sector or entrepreneurial middleclass. But, at the same time, he is partially a stranger to the values of the old system as well: he cannot play the role of a traditional land owning class which is the supervision of land, the capital, and the slaves, the labour. This forces us to assume the fact that he is an alien to the world of the labour. Simply put, he does not and cannot understand a world order in which a person like him has to work for a living.

When everyone advises him to be a good, what they precisely mean is that he must find an anchorage in the world of labour, either as the landed gentry should or as his brother is doing, as entrepreneurial capitalist. The two women who are most influential in his life, his *murappennu* and his mother, when they entreat him to lead a good moral and ethical life, they do not want him to follow the ways of his elder brother. They want him to be good in tune with the old world order. But this entreats, too, do not work.

When he becomes a total invalid at the mercy of his bonded slaves, he gets a true insight to the mechanism of feudalism, which he only vaguely, if not truly, realized earlier. Earlier he used to boast about his independent status and even went to the extent of saying that if there emerged a situation where he had to depend on other people he would commit suicide. But when such a situation emerges, when he is challenged by a worker to whom he earlier boasted to fulfil that promise of committing suicide, he is unable to do that because body is almost paralyzed. From here on, he slowly realizes that feudalism, just like him, is a paralyzed body depending on its slaves. He, it seems, gets a true Hegelian insight into the nature of master-slave relationship: it is not the slave who is dependent on master; on the contrary, it is ultimately the master who is dependent on the slaves for his survival. Only the slave possesses the potential tool to freedom: labour. It is this unconscious realization brings the final insight to the hero: he understands what love truly is. Even though he could articulate the more daring idea that true love has its foundation in labour, that is, in freedom, he realizes that love is

something that exists on the other side of the caste division. Chellamma loves Rajan not because he is her *muracherukkan* or husband or because she is his agrarian slave or because of some such socially mediated obligations; she loves him because she is free to love him and care him. Her labour gives her this freedom, which both his mother and sister lack and as a consequence are starving. She knows very well that even if he is not able to work and provide her with, she can work and take care of him.

It is this Chellamma, the potential emancipator of humanity through her love and labour, is given as a substitute for the repentant prodigal son. By giving her as a substitute/gift and walking toward the other world (surrender, imprisonment, death), is he suggesting that the possible emancipation of human self consists neither in old feudal relationship nor in entrepreneurial capitalism of his brother but the labour of Dalit worker? That labour is the ultimate tool toward freedom?

This idyllic image of freedom of the labourer is further emphasized by a conscious juxtaposition of the lives of Chellamma and Radha, the hero's *murappennu*-lover forced to marry his elder brother. The woman, who has to give up her education and dancing to be a good wife in the eyes of the society, feels after becoming an ideal wife that she is a spiritless person, imprisoned like a caged bird. She has every material comforts that a married woman can hope for: a hardworking, speculating and wealthy husband, a bungalow, good food and fine clothing. All she lacks is life, which, she earnestly believes, people like Chellamma have. They have dance, festivities and freedom. No wonder, it is to this Chellamma he confesses her unfreedom. It is this Chellamma who is invited by her to be the witness of her final hysteric outburst of a dancing hitherto suppressed.

If Dalit woman in this film is burdened with the duties of the witness of human misery and the potential liberator of humanity because of her magical and mysterious access to labour, then the film *Punnapra Vayalar* unloads this entire burden from her shoulder. Instead of the idealization of Dalit self from safe and untouchable distance, this film unsettles the very edifice of Marxist thought in such a way that Marxism could easily be equated with what the so-called the left achieved in Kerala. We do not have to go into the details of the film in order to explicate our point. Rather, we would focus on two songs that appear in the film. In the first song beginning with the line *kanniyilam kili kathiru kana kili kolothum padathu koyyana poyi,* what is narrated is the experience of a worker who has gone for the harvest in the paddy field of the feudal lord. The lyrics of the song are not that important. What interests us in the song is the presence of the females. The lead actor and singer in this song sequence is the heroine of the film Chellamma (Sheela), an untouchable woman of Velan caste, whose traditional occupation is washing the clothes of other people. In the song and in most of the scenes in which she appears, she is accompanied by a group of women that includes women from the Christian, Muslim and Ezhava communities. In the song all the women carry sickle in their hands and are seen throughout the song doing some work related to harvesting. It must be emphasized that the predominant caste identities that appear in the paddy field are those castes that we traditionally do not associate with works in the paddy field. The traditional worker in the paddy field, the Pulaya woman, is not seen anywhere. More precisely, even if she is there as one of the workers, her identity is not made visible as it is in the case of the Muslim or Christian woman.

When we juxtapose the song with the second song (*angoru nattilu ponnu kondu poothalika*), we find the absence of Pulaya worker more acute because one line specifically compares the experience of a Pulaya woman with the experience of

an ideal woman (who has given a visible form in the fair naked thighs of a woman walking) in a distant utopian land (obviously, the erstwhile U. S. S. R.). Their material situations are clear from the following juxtapositions: while the woman in the utopia has a silver-roofed bungalow to live, the Pulaya woman has a thatched hut. This song is sung by Chinnamma (Ushakumari), the Christian woman, while others are taking bath. More interestingly, in this scene the Velan woman is seen washing the clothes in the river.

The full significance of the operation in question will be apparent if we recall some earlier moments from the movie when the same group of women under the leadership of Sheela is seen walking in and out of *Achutha Kayar Factory (*Achutha Coir Factory). This is the truth of the matter. All the women in the group are workers in the coir factory and could easily be categorized under the term the proletariat, the industrial worker. They are not workers in the paddy field. It is this truth of the earlier scene is concealed in the songs mentioned. The film, through this subtle operation, conceals the fact that the bonded slave in a paddy field is from a different rank than the worker in a factory. The trauma of an industrial worker is totally different from the trauma of a Dalit woman working in the field. If what forced the Muslim and Christian women to the factories was impoverishment, what forced Dalit women, especially the Pulaya women, was not just impoverishment. Behind the latter, there existed a whole systemic thought other than capitalist exploitation. An ideal woman's *material comfort*s, to put in the metaphoric language of the film, in an alien utopian land is no substitute for the experience of the caste, which operates within and above impoverishment and class dynamics. Caste may partially be a subset of class and class may be partially a subset of caste. But they are two different categories. It is this truth of a Dalit woman experience is subtly hidden in the film. Instead, what we get is a narrative which makes subsumes caste and caste pain under the totalitarian conceptual category known as class.

The films produced after the 1990's have not resorted to this formal mechanism to circumvent the subtle issues of caste and class. In the three films that I have taken for discussion from the period, all the Dalit women have escaped the work-world of the 1950's Dalit woman: In *Veendum Chila Veettu Karyangal*, the heroine Bhavana (Samyuktha Varma), a Mannan woman, is no longer engaging in her caste occupation (cloth-washing) like her aunts but is a travelling sales girl; the heroine of *Varnakazhchakal* Sreedevi (Poornima Mohan), a Malayan woman, is a bank clerk who nonetheless at times engages in the caste based performance of Theyyam; in *Jalolsavam* the heroine, Geetha (Navya Nair) an orphan from childhood, survives on many self-run businesses, which include micro-crediting and poultry.

Unlike the films that we have already mentioned (except *Punnapra Vayalar*), the Dalit woman in these films are no longer identifiable from the nature of their work. They engage in the sort of works that anyone in Kerala could do. This is the result of the disintegration of the old way of life rooted in hereditary division of labour, a disintegration which has been partially achieved by the welfare state and partially by the process of globalization. She has more mobility; her life has fluidity as compared to the Dalit women of earlier era. But she has had to pay a heavy prize for the fluidity she has achieved: she has been made rootless.

What then is her love? While both the heroines of *Veendum Chila Veettukaryangal* and *Varnakazhchakal* fall in love with a upper caste Christian and Nair men respectively, the heroine of *Jalolsavam* falls in love with an Ezhava man. A closer look at the films will teach us that the women are actually

the instruments for setting things right. Bhavana is assigned by her father-in-law to teach her husband out of his childish pranks. Sreedevi is also assigned similar task because her Nair lover has already suffered a mental break down due to the loss of his earlier beloved, a Tamil Brahmin woman. Geetha has no such duty to do because her man is not yet the proper subject of the nation. But she, like the other two heroines, shares the burden of the future-husband's family at decisive moments in their life.

In conclusion, one does not help being blunt: in the modern context Dalit woman can escape her caste with slyness, hard work and talent but if she falls in love, she must set things right by submitting completely to the patriarchal world. She must correct the prodigal and sick sons of the nation and make them right; her resources must also be directed to the maintenance of the larger family. In return, it seems, her children will get a name, a root, which she does not possess.

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Reading Memory in Prabha Narayana Pillai's *On Life, Death and the Art of Cooking: Reminiscences*

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Abstract

Our day to day life is imbued with multitude of thoughts, impressions and feelings that shape our self. In contrast with our body which undergoes a literal change, our self which is a product of thought and reflection, remains the hardest to pin down. Life Writings become tools of self-construction as the writer alone has the power to access her personal inner space. These writings celebrate the 'I' ness, the musings of the soul. Placing Prabha Narayana Pillai's memoir as a touchstone, this paper broadens the scope of discussion to 'spouse narratives' recording them as political, social and economic indicators of their respective milieus that open up discussion on gender roles and attributes. Reading memory in spouse narratives will unravel the pattern with which the writer has exercised his/her subjectivity.

Keywords: *Agency, Memory, Self, and Spouse Narratives.*

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People often narrate stories about their beloved who resigned from the journey of life. Through the narrative, the narrator is able to create in the mind's eye of the reader sketch/portrait of people and events that shaped their journey. What do they gain through this process of recounting? Is this recounting an act of purgation; a catharsis of the soul?

As these events take the form of words, they either turn a memoir or biography. In the process of turning to ink the eternal moments, the narrator excitedly interacts with and relives the past moments transcending him into a mood of rapturous ecstasy. In this ecstatic recreation, the narrative voice is able to bring in polyphony of voices in the text ensuring in the process that the events, people and places have their infinite lives – as their own, as experienced by the narrator and as deciphered by the reader/s.

Ormakalthan Mahanagarathil is a memoir by Prabha Narayana Pillai; better half of eminent litterateur Sri. M.P. Narayana Pillai. The work was translated by Rajasree R. into English as 'On Life, Death and the Art of Cooking: Reminiscences.' Prabha Narayana Pillai rekindles a fresh whiff of air to the inanimate past- and turns her memoir; a storied urn. Like the Keatsian urn, the episodes engraved in her memory are evergreen and not prone to the intricacies of time. Through the urn of memory weaved through words, Prabha Narayana Pillai, explores, the once, jointly (with her spouse) experienced moments alone. In this selfless examination of the self, the author tags events, places and people, thus transforming the memoir into a 'selfie' of the soul.

Every human being has carved for himself the colossal empire of memory without bloodsheds and violence. Sitting on the ivory throne of memory land, people, places and moments peep in with an elegant aura. "The dull cold ear of death" (Gray 15) is brought to life again to relish the joy of our being, our essence.

Recording memory thus becomes an act of liberation. The places, personages and events thus have their infinite lives - as their own, as experienced by the writer, as experienced by the reader/readers.

In this journey of the self, Prabha Narayana Pillai, weaves different textures of her childhood, reliving the age of innocence. "The songs of innocence" (Blake 15), that she had listened to in her childhood and which she recollects often in the journey of experience, help her to tag an important milestone in the evolution of herself. She is able to reflect on what she really was and what she has become.

Prabha's travel down the memory lane takes her readers to different locales and cultural spheres that mapped her reflections on life. The locations that life navigated her through shaped her socio-cultural identity. The act of recounting becomes a personal interior journey that chasms the world of memory and the real world.

A careful examination of 'spouse narratives' (penned by women) is hallmarked by testimonies of the indelible often unconscious role that their better half's played in polishing their rationale, their unbiased and impartial perception of the world and thus forging their empowered self; turning them into women of letters. Prabha says: "Nanappan (M.P. Narayana Pillai) became my mother, father, my elder brother and teacher. He had solutions for all sorts of problems" (89). She pins that with his endless talks, in the invisible guise of a teacher, employing a simple, comprehensible language, Nanappan sculpted her into a new person, clarifying her visions, interests and her course of reading thus lending her agency.

Food becomes an indispensable part of her memory narrative about Nanaappan. Preparing food loses its gender tag as she affectionately recalls 'Nanappan's *Nalapakam*'(97). She fondly recalls "how his face mirrored his emotions while cutting vegetables proportionately for the *aviyal* or while grinding the coconut for obtaining the coconut milk" (98). The normative nature of assigning the task of food preparation as a female domain undergoes a paradigm shift in her personal narrative as she describes how she was lovingly kept aloof during *sadya* preparations during *onam*. In an interesting exchange of gender roles, Nanappan imparts some basic culinary tips to Prabha.

Death becomes an important trope of this touching memoir as she puts to ink the infinite list of her dear and near ones who left her without asking a proper leave. Nanappan, her father, uncle, *ammavan*, Unni *Ettan*, Kamala *chechi* left their share of blankness in her brief but long journey of experience.

> You didn't say a word
>
> How strange is that
>
> We lived a life together
>
> And on departing
>
> I was about to tell you something, couldn't even ask
>
> 'When we would meet again'
>
> Without a word
>
> Without a word (38)

She talks about how on being left alone she was made to rise involuntarily with the absent presence of her dear and near ones. "In one way, I was growing. All those who brought me up, loving, caressing and fondling me left one by one; and I kept growing" (56).

As her cup of memory winks to the brim with reminiscences, the memoir serves the function of a living memorial to the departed. Pavanan, C.P. Ramachandran, Kadamannitta, Thakazhi, Kamala Das; an era of Malayalam literature is transported to her canvas.

In her capacity as the senior editor of *Economic and Political Weekly*, She stands true to her dictum "what women require is not pity or compassion. They need the strength to stand on their own; a stable and secure earning of their own; and the power gained from knowledge" (93). She achingly realises that her being in the whirlpool of letters- modelled her into this "career of consciousness" (Heehs 58). She experiences a cathartic pleasure as she indexes people who helped her to listen to her inner call, made her a woman of letters. Her journey through the multi-layered aspects of life become an instrument of self-recovery for Prabha.

Spouse Narratives "follow a recurrent pattern that record their selves deeply rooted in their families…there is so much to be explored and studied about women's self in life writing" (126). In mapping this terrain, Prabha Narayana Pillai, amplifies the voice of thousands of women who are echoing the language of their souls in different corners of the world.

"Every life is an experiment, but unlike an experiment in chemistry or physics, not one that can be replicated, or has procedures that can control the outcome" (Shands 40). The experiences of life that stand completed are brought back by the writer from the land of memory to make the ongoing episodes of her life comprehensive. The process of chronicling the inchronicular memory becomes an act of creation; creating a cenotaph of the once vigorous moments of one's life.

> "Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice

> to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning" (Angelou 78). The creative process of sk etching the frontiers of her soul metamorphoses into a process of healing. "One should move forth. What would remain with us are our karmas in the guise of a dog…" (55)

Writing her story and having it heard is an act of deliverance for Prabha Narayana Pillai. She fathoms the intangible memory through the process of writing. Writing, the power of the word becomes a powerful instrument for Prabha to restore a sense of self and the world. As she comes to terms with the past, the text becomes a site of memory. The eternal nature of words, reassures her that this site of memory (her text) will have a life beyond life.

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'Nairarchy' and the Muslim Other: A Case Study of *Tattathinmarayth*

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis of the politics of Muslim representation against the wider caste geography of Malayalam cinema. It attempts to do this by attempting a content analysis of the film *Tattatin Marayath.* The first part of the study is devoted to an interrogation of the caste issue in Malayalam films and the latter part attempts to pin down the contours of the Nair/Normative Vs Muslim/Other using *Tattatin Marayatt* as a clinical case. The attempt here is to pin down the contours of this biased portrayal in the wider dialectic involving the hegemonic and the marginalized, which assumes specific permutations in diverse cultural milieus while at the same time sticking to those firmly entrenched notions that govern hegemonic ideology and vision in widely differing historical and geographical settings.

Keywords: *Nairarchy, Hegemonic, Muslim, Other, Caste, Eazhava, and Biriyani.*

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Exoticizing the other into either a romanticised or demonic stereotype has been the staple trope of hegemonic politics even before the advent of colonial modernity. It was a means of domesticating the other and containing his/her contagious and deleterious effects that could impede the 'organic' and 'wholesome' functioning of the system. Patriarchy relied/s on this trope to confine and consign women to the periphery. The angelic mother figure (now officially canonized in the form of Mother Teresa) on one hand and the odious witch-image that counterweighs it on the other, point to this dichotomous mechanism of essentialization. The colonial constructs of the black man into the soothing, avuncular figure of Uncle Tom as well as its opposite incarnation as cannibals and barbaric sex monsters fit into the same category. All these and many more can be cited as instances of panoptic power mechanism that informs and deforms our conceptual geography.

Jack Shaheen in his *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* charts the nefarious operations of the same panoptic mechanism, where the negative dimension acquires such monstrous proportions that Arabs as subjects have been eviscerated of even the miniscule positivities that are granted to the other in hegemonic narratives. This is, no doubt, in keeping with the wider politics of Hollywood and its unholy alliance with Pentagon which has mis/shaped the American imagination. However, this is not something that the Hollywood culture industry alone does. All hegemonic discourses do it in varying degrees as expediency demands. This tendency creates a vicious circle in which political imperatives fuel popular imagination and provide the stimulus for market-oriented aesthetic goods that retrogressively fuel the same xenophobic passions.

Since art is always a bargain between business and aesthetics in capitalist societies, any work will have to satisfy certain consumer expectations to thrive as a market commodity. Cinema, being a composite and heavy budget venture, is most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the market. Hence, it has been used as a powerful weapon by hegemonic forces to suppress counter narratives, and promote dominant value systems.

In Malayalam filmdom, the tendency to cater to the hegemonic ideology is most visible in the way the movie industry makes accommodations to the normative Nair ethos. In Malayali public sphere, Nairs are considered to be not merely a community/caste among numerous others but the Community/Caste using which others are measured and calibrated. Thus Nambooris, Aiyars, Varriers and others who occupy a higher rung than Nairs on the hierarchy are considered supranormative and those like Muslims, Eazhavas, Latin Christians and Dalits infranormative. When P.K. Rosy, a Dalit Christian woman played the role of a Nair woman in the first Malayalam film *Vigathakumaran,* it caused such an outrage among Nairs that they tore down theatre screens, torched Rosy's shack and drove her out of the state, never allowing her to return.

Though Malayalam cinema has made several strides since then and notched up impressive achievements to its credit, this firmly entrenched hierarchy remains largely intact. So, those on the wrong side of the normative line are still portrayed in negative colours in Malayalam films. Most of the protagonists of the Malayalam films are either Nairs or those that can be identified with Nair ethos. Even in a recent super-hit like *Ennu Ninte Moideen*, where neither the hero nor the heroine is a Nair, every effort has been made to Nairize them. Thus the Eazhava identity of the Kanchana family has been carefully camouflaged to project them as more 'Nairish' than the real Nair. The relegation of Kanchana's father into the background, and the projection of her maternal

uncle as the patriarch who 'mans' the affairs of the Kottangal Taravadu is part of this strategy. What is being carefully sculpted here in the movie, which claims itself to be a true account of the fabled romance, is the normativity of the matrilineal system of traditional Nair families. In another instance, Moydeen's father is shown flaunting his 'secular' credentials by eagerly wearing a bindi, in a way that again fits the same dominant ethos. The unhidden message here is that only a Muslim who conforms to the dominant value systems can be imaged as someone worthy of even conditional adoration, the kind of which Sultan (Moideen's father) as a hero cum villain is expected to command.

While *Moideen* Nairizes an Eazhava family to reinforce the normative identity perceptions, most other mainstream films go to the other extreme and render them, i.e. the lower castes, invisible. This is a strategy that the panoptic mechanism has often relied upon with supreme efficiency to obliterate and erase the other into visible insignificance. Hollywood's relegation of African and Native Americans into an empty presence was part of this strategy. Since, Keralites do not openly sport caste markers, the process of rendering the infraclasses invisible was something for which the directors didn't have to go to any extra length. It was done by inserting subtle and often invisible cues that pointed to the caste identity of the hero and those around him. However, one particular problem that cropped up in this context was that of the Muslim. Unlike the Ezhava identity that could be subsumed under the normative Nair category by applying certain cosmetic therapies as it was done to Kanchana's family in *Moideen*, or by limiting their presence to the role of mere sidekicks, the Muslim characters-especially the Muslim women - presented an indissoluble and hence insoluble case because of their distinctiveness in food and habiliments, that set them apart as a distinct taxonomical category.

One of the familiar strategies used to render Muslims visibly insignificant is to deny them the role of heroes. Demographically, Muslims together with Eazhavas make half the Kerala population, but with the exception of Moydeen, there has hardly been a blockbuster in the last many years that has a Muslim protagonist. Though Mammooty, one of the superstars of Malayalam is a Muslim, he hardly plays a Muslim role, since the community to which he belongs has been relegated to the sub-normative category.

In the film FIR, where Suresh Gopi, plays the role of the protagonist Muhammad Sarkar, the film pulls no punches to project his Nayrized image: thus in one instance while confronting the villain he stresses his superiority by asserting his identity as a 'Hindu Muslim,' a species unheard of in Kerala's demographics. The semiotic of the mise en scene is unmistakable: Only a Hinduaized Muslim is capable of being an incorrupt and courageous officer.

The 1997 film *Dhruvam* is one in which the caste prejudices of the Malayalam cinema finds an unabashed assertion. The hero of the film is Narasimha Mannadiyar. For Mannadiyar, ironically played by Mammooty, his identity as a Kshatriya is vital. In one of the iconic scenes, he says how being a Kshatriya, he cannot help exacting revenge against those who wronged his family, which was a caste ordained duty. The climax depicts Mannadiyar taking law into his hands and hanging the villain Hyder Marakkar. Thus he fulfils the Kshatriya Dharma in a way that satisfies the deeply entrenched and primitive caste mentality of Kerala's upper class psyche. The name of the villain being Hyder Markkar is anything but accidental. Though Muslims are conspicuous by their absence as heroes they notch up impressive figures as villains.

The psyche has been conditioned thus through market-friendly templates that have a long his-

tory in Malayali imaginary. The legendary writer Vaikam Muhammad Basheer once mentioned how Muslim stereotypes were used as stock characters evoking images of criminality and vulgarity in early Malayalam fiction. According to him all the heinous characters of the Malayalam fiction in those days were Muslims. Basheer defined his own role as that of a rectifier of this historical injustice (Basheer 1659). However, the tendency continues unabated into our own times. In "Nalukettu" written by M.T. Vasudevan Nair, who considers himself to be a disciple of Basheer, we have this stale theme rehashed in a modernist garb. Appunni, the Nair boy in this story presages the more melodramatic Narasimha Mannadiyar of Dhruvam. Like Mannadiyar, M.T.'s child hero thirsts for revenge against Saidali, the supposed murderer of his father and fantasizes future scenes of the evil man being strangulated by a grown up Appunni.

The blanket ascription of the evil to the Other is part of a psychological defensive mechanism for the hegemonic classes. It helps them foist and project the base elements of their own id onto the other. This practice has been successfully made use of by the 'Nairarchy' in Malayalam cultural milieu. Since most Muslims in Kerala trace their descent to Eazhava and Dalit communities, this has added caste logic. For many of these disprivileged sections conversion into an alien faith was an act of defiance against caste hierarchy. The epistemological violence wrought on the Muslim ethos in Malayalam literature and films, in this sense, carries an element of cultural vengeance against those who defied the hegemonic norms. Thus both Appunni and Mannadiyar are anachronistic representatives of the archaic system that refused to recognize both the individuality and the independence of the Other. In other terms, they both represent the intolerance of the overdog against the insubservience of the underdog. Cast (e)ing the other as evil and wicked is simply an attempt at euphemizing this visceral mindset.

Colonial narratives of the orient and Africa have successfully made use of this trope through the figures of the cannibalistic natives of the new world, the barbaric African and the hyper-sexed and infernal Arab. *Tattathin Maryath* doesn't trade too much in such overtly aggressive images. Being a love story meant more to titillate the audience its stance on religious divide is purportedly gentle. But beneath the gentle exterior it hides a deeply noxious caste doctrine. Thus Vinod (Nivin Pauly), who eventually marries his sweetheart Aisha (Isha Talwar) cannot be considered to be imaged simply as an innocent teenager who valued his love above his religion and tradition. Rather, he shares the unmistakable hues of the colonial deliverer out to rescue an innocent girl caught in the seductively opulent trappings of her regressive traditions. In this equation, Aisha becomes the Malayali version of Pocahontas rescued, civilized (read Nairized) and 'rechristened' as Aisha Vinod Nair.

The film paints the Muslim space from which Aisha emerges and elopes in lurid orientalist colours. It was during a wedding that Vinod first bumped into Aisha. He was trying to run away from a friend who was playfully chasing him when the 'bumping' happened. Under the impact of the collision, Aisha was sent reeling down the staircase. She had to be rushed to the hospital. But it was Vinod Nair who took the real knock. Aisha's bewitching beauty had him spellbound. He couldn't knock out of his mind the girl whom he knocked down the staircase. He ventures on a mad pursuit of her and endures a series of travails and setbacks. He eventually succeeds in his mission thanks largely to the assistance of a police sub-inspector appropriately named Premkumar or the prince of love. The inspector is part Tamilish and is drawn caricaturi-

stically a la most Tamil characters in Malayalam films. The way this Thalassery police inspector behaves gives the impression that his only mission in that politically tense city is assisting star-crossed lovers. But since Premkumar has been conceived as Tamilish and not as a Nair, the spectators, schooled in the norms of the Malayalam filmdom can well construe it as something eminently conceivable. This trope, however, follows the same syntactic logic as the one which provides the rationale for orinentalizing the Muslim space [I am using the term 'orientalizing' in the wider sense of the term to mean the essentialization and exoticization of the other, relying on the colonial templates].

The initial 'bumper' scene itself is saturated with orientalist images. The Muslim wedding is a lavish and opulent affair with the aroma of steaming Biryani and the loud peals of hilarious music filling the air. But the deeper semantics that imbues the scene suggests an invincible denseness. It contrasts sharply with the serene atmosphere prevailing in Gopalan Nair's (Vinod's father) household, a space of pastoral simplicity and organic harmony.

The initial scene in which Aisha makes her appearance too is instinct with such images. Despite being portrayed as an intelligent girl, who won top honours in intercollegiate essay competition, she is portrayed as a damsel in distress, confined to the interior of the harem-like house, awaiting her deliverer, the charming Nair boy. The fact of Vinod being not merely a Hindu but a Nair is something repeatedly stressed in the film. Once while weighing the odds of his loves' labours coming to fruition, Vinod's friends tell him how difficult it would be to prise loose a girl who is such an Ummachi's kutty (mother's pet) from her family, Vinod retorts: If she is an Ummachi's kutty, I am a Nair Kutty. The fact of Nairs being a martial caste with a go-get attitude is here stressed by the protagonist to flaunt his credentials in the marital gamble. The distance between the macho Narasimha Mannadiyar seething with the lust for revenge on Hyder Marakkar and the affably feminized Vinod lusting for the conquest of his love here tapers into an indistinguishable gap.

While the Nair boy's conquest of the Muslim girl is presented as 'mission accomplished,' the film presents a counter plot involving Hamza (Bhagath Manuel), the Muslim boy and Sandhya Nair, Vinod's sister (Srinda Arhaan). Befitting the templates of the dominant aesthetic, the love of the Muslim boy is portrayed as crude and vulgar. Besides being Sandhya's lover, Hamza is Aisha's mathematics tutor. He agrees to act as a go - between in the love affair after considerable promptings and persuasions by Vinod's man Friday Abdu, who too has a legion of frivolous love affairs to his credit. The not too subtle message is: unlike the Nair boy, Muslims are incapable of taking love as a serious business.

Biryani is a dominant motif in the film. It is succumbing to the temptations over a sumptuous Biryani that Hamza agrees to get involved in what he considers to be a sticky issue. The fragrance of the Biryani that wafts from the first scene is a pervasive presence in this scene too, and it lends the whole story orientalist spiciness. Both the scenes subtly convey the image of Muslims as 'all belly and no brains.' One of the short stories that created quite a furore in Kerala's cultural circles recently was titled *Biryani* (Echikanam 12-21). In this story Santosh Echikanam uses all the stereotypical images to designate the Muslim domestic space as one peopled by wastrels and spendthrifts. The central character of the story is a filthy rich Muslim man called Kalanthan Haji. Haji is so rich that his four wives place little strain on his budget. In fact, the local grapevine has it that he can as easily support forty as four. The story

is set against the backdrop of a marriage ceremony in Haji's house. The marriage was an obscenely opulent affair; the rice for the Biryani was brought from Punjab in a special lorry. It was prepared in such quantities that even after guests numbering into thousands had had their fill mountains of it were left over. The story narrates the experience of Gopal Yadav, a Bihari hired to dispose the victuals. Describing the travails of Yadav engaged in digging up a huge pit to dump the leftover, the story ends with the revelation that Yadav's daughter had died years earlier due to starvation. The theme here is unmistakable: certain undesirable elements (read the Muslims) are flourishing and fattening at the expense of more desirable elements (read the Yadavs) in the national eco-system. This reasoning has an eerie parallel with the motifs in many Nazi artistic creations that found resonance with the German public in Weimar Republic. One of the cartoons thus created had an emaciated cat in the background of an over-fat rodent. The semiotics in Echikanam's story is the same. In fact one of the most lavish weddings in Kerala was one held by an NRI businessman belonging to the Nair fold (http://www.rediff.com/news/report/pix-this-rs-55-crore-wedding-is-like-nothing-you-have-ever-seen/20151127.htm). But placing a Nair in the role of Kalanthan Haji would not have satisfied the aesthetic expectations of the mainstream readers; hence the undesirable element has been made the repository of abomination. (The dynamics governing the caste and religious choice of characters and the market logic have amply been illustrated in Malayalam film world. The film *Kismath* (2016), for example, chronicles the love involving a Dalit girl and a Muslim boy. According to the director, many of the potential financiers of the film baulked when they learnt the caste of the heroine).

The rich Muslim with loads of black money is a recurring image in Malayalam films and novels. Echikanam's Kalanthan Haji, in this sense shares kinship with Abdul Khader (Ramu) of *Thattathin Marayathu.* Abdul Khader, Aisha's uncle, is filthy rich and a repository of all negativities. It is who stands as a stumbling block in Vinod's path. But things take an unexpected turn just when Vinod was plunging into an abyss of despair. An accident occurs at Abdul Khader's factory and the incident spirals into a communal riot. Aisha's father Abdul Rahman (Sreenivasan) is assaulted by the mob and has to be hospitalized. Abdul Khader is forced to leave Thalassery and relocate his operations to Trivandrum. This provides the opportunity for Abdul Rahman to be assertive in front of his elder brother. He stands up to him and affirms his decision to allow Aisha to marry the boy whom she chooses.

Meanwhile a dejected, Vinod has left his home and sought refuge on the Thalassery pier where he is secretly nursing his grief. Inspector Premraj traces him down and conveys Aisha to the scene. The story comes to a neat closure with the prospect the couple's imminent wedding. Aisha tells Vinod she is soon going to spread a prayer rug in Gopalan Nair's house. The figure of the Nair as tolerant and inclusive is once again stressed in this scene.

By portraying the Nairs as repositories of virtue and tolerance and the Muslims as the obverse of all these, the purportedly iconoclastic film, with its portrayal of inter-community love affair, effectively ends up as pseudo-iconoclastic. While Vinod's love eventually succeeds, Hamza is rebuffed by Sandhya Nair, accentuating the message that a Hindu girl marrying a Muslim boy is an unthinkable proposition. For the Muslim girl, a Nair boy is a deliverer whereas for the Hindu girl a Muslim boy is an enticer to a world of slavery and exploitation.

Thattathin Marayathu, however, is not the only post-millennial film that makes use of this trope.

The Muslim girl waiting for the upper-caste deliverer also figures prominently in *Ayalum Njanum* (2012) directed by Lal Jose. Though the protagonist of the story Ravi is Christian, his maiden name serves to 'Nairize' him to an extent. The opposite topos of the Hindu girl being lured into the trap is skilfully employed in the short story *Meen Oru Bheeshani Katha* (Fish- the story of a threat) by K.P. Ramanunni (56-67). This story traces the love of Firoz Babu, a Muslim boy and Anitha an upper caste Hindu girl. As the title indicates, it is by slowly enticing Anitha to eat fish that Firoz sneaks into her heart. Their love matures over several 'fishy meals' and eventually Anitha elopes to the utter frustration of her rich father. While *Thattathin Marayathu* depicts elopement of the Muslim girl with Hindu boy as a path to freedom and salvation, *Bheeshani Katha* portrays the Hindu girl's elopement with the Muslim boy as the culmination of an entrapment. In this film and the story, we have strong clues as to the caste dynamics and communal dialectics that operate in Malayali imagination.

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"The Human Cow": An Ode to Life

Meherun Nesa*

Abstract

The study briefly explores Rashid Askari's short story, "The Human Cow" as a blended discourse on socio-economic and metaphysical implications of human existence. Different economic schools of thought have been referred to while explaining the writer's eclectic approach to deal with the theme of poverty and exclusion in a Bangladeshi community. The story is constructed along the opposite binaries of power and powerlessness. The fundamental cognitive orientation of the story is towards encompassing life as a whole, from all possible dimensions. Underneath the politico-economic trajectories, the story captures a unique meaning of existence. For the metaphysical interpretation, I owe my insight to Nietzsche and *The Kybalion*.

Keywords: *Short Story, Feminism, Socio-Economic Implications, and Existentialism.*

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Rashid Askari, the literary name of Harun-Ur-Rashid Askari is a Bengali-English writer, fictionist, columnist and an academic in Bangladesh. Rashid Askari, the former vice-chancellor of Islamic University, Bangladesh has passionately and successfully imprinted his name in the academia and in the creative writing genres. Born in a sleepy little town of Rangpur, he grew up a contemplative person. Since his early childhood, his imagination was fuelled by his mother's nightly stories that lulled him to sleep. His father too carefully nurtured his fantasy with an abundant supply of story collections like, *Thakurmar Jhuli*, *Thandidir Thale*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Arabian Nights*, and many more. His upbringing and childhood experiences foregrounded his expertise as a storyteller. His narratives testify to the truth that he was born with an insightful mind strengthened by a wide-ranging reading habit. Prof. Askari has published a good number of books, both fiction and nonfiction, among which one is a collection of short fictions in English, named *Nineteen Seventy One and Other Stories*. The book is comprised of twelve stories which reflect 'the spirit of our Liberation War and the indomitable Bengaliness of our people' says Prof. Syed Manzoorul Islam. Prof. Islam captures the rhythm of his style,

> "He writes witty, racy stories with surprisingly serious undertones. Picking real-life events from the remote areas and the marginal people of the country and weaving them into various fictional forms are the hallmarks of his storytelling. ... Though not new in a ground-breaking way, his stories are both intense and original. The overall tone of his language is gently sarcastic" (Wikipedia).

Another critic Dr. Manohar Pawar notes,

> "The title of the book, reminded me of George Orwell's book, *1984*… The stories and their genre and endings leave the reader to interpret and make meaning of them, both in a philosophical and material sense."(Pawar 357-58)

Nineteen Seventy One and Other Stories has been translated in French and Hindi. His stories have been published from New York, Australia, and India. Prof. Rashid Askari's literary career includes a significant number of literary research articles published in reputed journals. His columns on national and global socio-economic and political issues have been acclaimed profusely and drawn readers from across the border. He has been awarded the '*Oitijjo* Gold Medal 2019' by Bangladesh Folklore Research Centre of Rajshahi University for his contribution to the fields of literature and education. He has also received 'Janonetri Sheikh Hasina Award 2019' for his outstanding contribution to education sector. Prof. Rashid Askari won the Dhaka University Alumni News Award 2020.

The current study examines Prof. Askari's short story, 'The Human Cow' from *Nineteen Seventy One and Other Stories: a collection of short stories* as a potential resource for highlighting the socio-economic phenomenon of poverty in a northern village in Bangladesh. The methodology employs empirical analysis leading towards an epistemological end.

The discourse is born out of a seasonal food in security called *Monga*. During *Monga,* income opportunities of the northern farmers strongly decrease. Poverty and coping strategies are combined to develop the plot of the story, 'The Human Cow.' Socio-economic history says that *Monga* mainly affects those rural poor whose income is directly or indirectly based on agriculture. 'Poverty,' the key construct of the narrative, needs to be defined at this stage. Generally, 'poverty' includes monetary, political and social exclusion issues. Classical economic traditions point out that individuals are responsible for poverty.

Neoclassical economics connects market failures beyond individuals' control, but individual's incentives and productivity have roles in generating poverty. Neo-liberal schools focus that the key role is to be played by the government by balancing economic agendas. Neo-liberal thoughts consider poverty as involuntary and mainly caused by unemployment. The Marxist views see the role of class discrimination as political issues which are central to poverty. These theories assign a central role to the state in its intervention of markets. Social exclusion and social capital theories recognize the role of social as well as economic factors in explaining poverty (Davis and Sanchez 50). A synthesis of these theories can put forward poverty as an economic condition impacting upon certain communities where individuals, the government, and social system have combined responsibilities and roles to play. Dr. Rashid Askari's story seems to be embodying this message. In his story, "The Human Cow," the lean season appears as a shock to the couple Ambia and Kashem every year. Kashem's access to income shuts down. As most of the other members of the community, Kashem is hit by this seasonal shock. His wife Ambia and he have to reduce their nutritional intake. Kashem is seen chronically poor. He desperately tries to combat *Monga* with the help of village money lenders or the Grameen bank. He is unskilled and illiterate, hardly aware of the strategic policies of how to cope with the *Monga* problem. There are people like Keramot B*epari* who exploit landless individuals in lending money with high interest rates, or in exchange of free labour. Kashem is virtually dependent on them and has shown to have no access to off-farm income. During *Monga*, the no- employment condition affects his physical health. He is weakened with chronic chest pain. When Kashem fails to repay the loan, Keramot approaches him with more money to lend him, which sounds like a very 'modest proposal' to Kashem,

> Don't bother your head about that. Leave it all to me. You'll just give your thumb mark on a piece of paper. It's a mere formality. After you pay back, I'll tear the paper. You now think. A lot of money! A new cow! Treatment to your wife's sterility! A new baby! (Askari 20)

Keramot is obsessed with Kashem's ancestral home which he very intricately plans to seize. This time Kashem knows that to remain silent would mean to be homeless. Thereupon he inwardly prefers the alternative proposal Keramot B*epari* puts forth, to use his wife as a proxy for another cow. Henceforth, he appears as a hypocrite to the reader who morally belittles himself to his wife who remains loyal to the ethical values of family bonding.

Another major politico-economic aspect for these poverty-stricken people is the microfinancing organization, the Grameen Bank. Kashem failed to repay the high interest rate of the Grammen Bank, and the loan officer takes away his plough cow:

> The day when the loan officer took away Kashem's cow at broad daylight, the sky over his head fell apart. They did not give him enough chance before the last straw. They even did not count the monga crisis. Now Kashem realized that all these seemingly humanitarian campaigns were all wind. They were virtually crueller than the Borgi. His cows were the real breadwinner of his family. As a small contract ploughman, he barely earned his living. (Askari 19)

Borrowing from different sources leads Kashem to unsustainable debt accumulation, and condemns him to an unending cycle of poverty. The writer deliberately criticizes the success of Grameen Bank system which is mainly attributed to high loan recovery rates. Kashem is caught

up within this debt cycle, a cycle which pushes him to irreparable financial damage.

The hierarchical power relationship between men and women is re-examined in "The Human Cow." In the story, Prof. Askari like a socialist feminist ignores patriarchy to be a universal system, maybe because of his commitment to the universal values of human existence. Prof. Rashid Askari's enquiry into the social foundations of this inequality and asymmetry is one of the major themes that cannot be overlooked. Kashem's wife, Ambia carries out the household chores, helps her husband in the field, and empathizes the husband when he is broken. She takes over when the husband fails. "The Human Cow" transcends the historical process of male-ness and female-ness. It is differently defined. The story suggests that it depends on decision making, self-esteem, and attitude. Kashem and Ambia traditionally stand, one for the patriarch and another the subordinate. But the storyteller liberates their roles, viewing them from a perspective where the wife is the protector:

> "How can you do that? You have a bad pain in the chest." Ambia was solicitous for her husband's comfort. "Suffering pains of the chest is far better than suffering pangs of hunger." Kashem was once bitten and twice shy." "Both are bad. But don't worry. We'll rid us of both." Ambia kept a stiff upper lip. Her last words sounded resolute. (Askari 22)

In "The Human Cow," Ambia appears as the producer of life, not of biological, but of a life when it is being deprived of its ethics and values. She is able to protect Kashem socially and economically,

> Kashem, however, was not without any sense of guilt. It was sure beneath the dignity of his manhood that he had used his wife as an animal to serve his purpose. He too could have done the same. But he didn't. Had he then escaped it on the pretext of chest pain? (Askari 18)

Historically women occupy a subordinate position. They lack access to resources and decision making to the patriarchal domination. The author in "The Human Cow" shows that women's subordination is a makeshift or imposed situation which arises out of a belief system that men are protectors where women are lowered to a tentative position forcing her to view herself with a reduced personality. In order to examine the construct, 'subordination' in the story, the author suggests that women are not fundamentally different from men. In the narrative, patriarchy is a system whereby Ambia's subordination is not in the form of discrimination, insult, control, oppression, or violence. She is abused because her husband is non-chauvinistic, incapable, unskilled and ego-centric. Kashem is scared to face life. His less than a human approach to life extinguishes his spirit to stand upright and announce the nobility of existence. Kashem could have found out other alternatives to plough the land rather than yoking his wife with the cow. During this critical period, Ambia supports and protects Kashem in a way that does not comply with the human value judgment. Maybe she feels that she is less worthy in the family because of her sterility. But the writer shows that even though in subjugation Ambia has the ability to outdo that to reach a higher level of being. In her acceptance, she appears to be a worthier person, an existentialist that the author is unravelling through the small episodes of her life. Ambia has the capability to function in a structured society within power relationships. She cannot do as she likes. But she is loyal to life. The value of her loyalty can be perceived by the reader.

The story is set in a structure where Ambia's relation to her husband is reduced to a binary opposition. For a seminal thinker such as Levi-Strauss, it is an anthropologically defined rela-

tion—men occupying a privileged position, women, a subordinated one. This structural paradigm of relations is reconstructed by Prof. Rashid Askari in "The Human Cow." He takes a close shot of this couple from an ordinary northern village in Bangladesh where people live in dire poverty. He places Ambia, the protagonist at the centre of the story. Ambia takes up life with all its squalor and ugliness, and then is recasting it with her metaconscious mind. She manages the home and shares her husband's professional challenges with unique expertise. The way Ambia perceives life is echoing the lines Nietzsche uses to declare his existence,

> It seems to me above all necessary to declare here who and what I am…It is a duty –and one against which my customary reserve, and to a still greater degree the pride of my instincts, rebel to say: Listen! for I am such and such a person. For Heaven's sake does not confound me with anyone else. (Nietzsche 1)

Dr. Askari's perception counter asserts to Simon de Beauvoir's argument that a woman

> .. discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness. (Beauvoir 37).

Prof. Askari does not view the domestic work of women with the same terror as Beauvoir. He is endowing Ambia, the protagonist with some artistic or creative skill that allows her the expansion of existence, or transcendence, that Beauvoir saw as only possible for men. As the story begins, we see Ambia and the cow are teaming up with each other. Yoking Ambia with a plough cow is symbolizing the frightening forces of the patriarchy which Ambia could not combat, but she could sublimate the terror and fright into a philosophical height. When Keramot is echoing Kashem's subconscious algorithm of power and patriarchy, Ambia asserts her creator's position. She goes beyond the dichotomy of power and powerlessness. When Keramot suggests that Ambia can be a proxy for another cow, it resonates with Kashem's passive patriarchy. He is inwardly delighted to find a solution. Even within a claustrophobic and precarious situation, Ambia's belief and endurance go beyond the limits of the story. The storyteller gives his protagonist work to do. The character would have collapsed if she would not have been observed *engaged* with her work. Ambia acts like the dancer thinking each step as it is performed. Prof. Askari's story is developing on a metafictional plane as the protagonist takes on power when she is transforming crudeness to creativity, indifference to empathy:

> Thank God Ambia had narrowly saved him at this go. Kashem wondered how she had realized the crux of the problem, and solved it as if by magic. When his future looked completely black after the sudden seizure of his plough-cow by the Grameen Bank credit officers for breach of loan repayment contract, she appeared before him like a living goddess. She put herself at his disposal, and did what was totally unbecoming of a woman. (Askari 18)

By telling the story from the third person omniscient point of view, the writer allows us to share Ambia's perceptions, and to recognize that those perceptions are highly transcendental and sublime. She sublimates the daily experiences to recognize the realities of existence. Initially her life seems to be trapped in confinement and appears to be merged with what de Beauvoir refers to as stagnation. But she achieves her

liberty in accepting her chains. She is justifying her present existence in expanding it into an indefinite openness. Ambia is not tough or intimidating. She is like water, like life—flowing and flexible. The line 'Ambia and the cow were dragging the harrow over the ploughed soil to break up lumps of earth' seems to convey a message of a human fetus emerging from the primordial Earth. The end of the story portrays her as an unidentified force of life representing the universal laws of existence.

The protagonist of the story, "The Human Cow" connects the reader to the universal laws as described in *The Kybalion, A Study of the Hermetic Philosophy of Ancient Egypt and Greece (The Kybalion* 30*).* She appears as the rhythm that connects humans to the entire cosmos. The universal laws enable us to get closer to reality. They connect us to perfect harmony with the universe. We cannot escape from them. When we know them, we act in accordance with them. The cosmic laws protect us from self-destruction. They keep us in balance.

Like an expert percussionist, Prof. Askari embodies perceptions societal and metaphysical, traditional and transcendental. Or rather he is using the traditional instruments to create notoriously powerful epiphanic moments. The socio-economic issues create a traditional setting for the story. Within the coarseness of texture a piece of very subtle music we hear—the music of life asserting itself,

> Ambia and the cow were dragging the harrow over the ploughed soil to break up lumps of earth. Ambia was breathing in short pants with a sway of her breasts. The bottom of her sari was lifted to her knees to allow longer footsteps. Its loose end was tightly wrapped around her waist. Her legs were covered in a thick layer of dust. Sweat was running off her body and soaking into the blouse. But she was taking no heed of this. She was pulling the yoke along with her animal pair. She was no longer feeling small. She accepted her place. (Askari 23)

"The human cow" by Prof. Rashid Askari manifests itself as a superb excerpt in tribute to Existence and to Life as the reader experiences a lyrical, poetic approach to accepting the universal craving for his existence.

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Journey through the Self: A Study of Amrita Pritam's Autobiographies

Jaspreet Kaur Sagoo* and Dr. Anurag Bhattacharyya**

Abstract

'Writing' is a difficult task, writing a literary piece is even tougher and writing an autobiography is the toughest as it involves truthful confession of one's life. 'Autobiography' as a genre was more in use by the male authors than the female ones in the earlier times. Women found expression in the form of writing diaries than autobiographies. Women were inclined towards the act of diary-writing because diaries never got published and served only as a secret form of writing, meant to be preserved by the writer. Besides this, diaries also lack the literary appeal of the autobiographies. For women autobiographers, writing an autobiography and their revelation of self might be a source of liberation from the clutches of the imposed identity. She transgresses the established social system and is carried by her personal wishes and desires. She lives her life on her own terms with utmost truthfulness and freedom. The paper intends to explore how the 'self 'of Amrita Pritam is free of all the established notions of the patriarchal society. She breaks away the fixed notions attached to the woman's identity and forms a distinct persona of her own.

Keywords: *Self, Autobiography, Identity, Freedom, and Dreams.*

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Unlike diaries, autobiographies portray the development of the personality of the writer. Linda Anderson, an American scholar, in her book titled, *Autobiography* (2001), defines 'Autobiography' as "a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person, concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (1). Anderson, in her book, also discusses the position of women, who write autobiographies. According to her, the identity of woman as a writer provides them space, standing where they can contest or challenge their socially sanctioned position of silence and submissiveness (15).

Autobiography, as a genre, was first developed in the West and then gradually became prominent in the East. In the East, it is first adopted by the male writers and eventually by the women writers. Naikar, in his book, *Indian English Literature* (2002) defines 'autobiography' as:

> ...the whole process of writing an autobiography is an act of assimilation, which involves articulateness, fidelity to experience, sensitiveness to small currents of feeling and above all curiosity. It is also a process of self-discovery and examination in leisure as found in the west, as well as in India. (34)

'Self' is at the center in the genre of autobiography and its revelation is the primary objective of an autobiographer. One cannot deny or resist the reflection of the writer's self in reading an autobiography. The writer is compelled to write about his or her own self and cannot escape it. In this context, Sarojini Jain, in her essay, "Autobiography: A Literary genre" writes,

> For some it might be an urge to articulate the historicity of the self, demonstrating their place in the cultural milieu, while for others self-portraiture might be an aesthetic artifact or a personal account intended to convey a moral or leave a record for posterity (202).

The act of writing an autobiography involves varied and personal intentions of the author. It is the most intimate literary account of an individual, thereby portraying their innermost selves depending on their personal objectives of self-portrayal. The aim behind writing an autobiography by different authors is distinct from each other. It relies on their personal urges of depicting a particular aspect of their personality partially or wholly.

Discussion

In her autobiographies, Amrita Pritam reveals her 'self' and also discovers it through various experiences of her life. Autobiographies by women are always perceived to be as more emotional than autobiographies by men. K. Satchidanandan in the introduction, "Relocating my Story" of Kamala Das's autobiography, *My Story* (1973) discusses the distinction between the autobiographies written by men and women. He writes that a woman is always aware of how her identity is determined by the male dominated society, and how she is defined as a woman. Male autobiographies are dominant as a genre and it seldom express the miseries, disjunctures, raptures and rifts of life; whereas female autobiographies display the traumas of life and the loss of cultural identity. Amrita Pritam satisfies her innermost soul, being least bothered with what others think of her. Being rebellious in nature, since her childhood, she questions everything she finds faulty as mentioned in her Autobiography, *The Revenue Stamp*, "I questioned what had been preached to me and I questioned the entire stratified social scheme...I was thirsty for life." (16). It indicates that she is a free soul, who always has a quest for freedom; a freedom which gives her peace against

her rebellious thoughts. Religion provides her no peace and so she gives up all meditation and prayer she has been brought up to. She finds all these an illusion through which she can seek no freedom and peace but only the burden of being untrue to herself. Though she never lies to her father, she somehow hides her personal desires from him but not for too long. She loves writing love poems but her father gives her lessons on religious scriptures and expects her to write religious poetry.

Unlike many autobiographies written by various women writers in India, Pritam's autobiographies are not an account of her suffering as a result of discrimination, subjugation or marginalization caused by the patriarchal society. She has not undergone the humiliations or oppression of the male-dominated society to a large extent besides she has been a free-spirited person living her life on her own terms. She experiences freedom through the act of writing and finds solace in it. Her identity as a woman is always secondary to her identity as a writer. She thinks of herself more as a writer than a woman. Her creativity is the source of her realization of her being a woman. It is through her creative writings, that she discovers her womanly self. Her 'self' as a writer is more assertive than her 'self' as a woman. Only three times in her life has her 'self' as a woman been more assertive than her 'writer self.' First, when in her dreams the vision of a child haunts her arousing in her a motherly emotion; second during Sahir's illness, she rubs Vicks on his chest and throat which awakens the erotic woman in her. Thirdly, when Imroz, with whom she has a live-in relationship, puts a red mark on her forehead with his paintbrush. These three instances create in her a womanly feeling but she is never oppressed with the burden of domesticity and motherhood.

The notion of 'self' many a time is comprehended as gendered. As a unified whole, it is more relevant to a man than a woman. Women do not experience an innate autonomous soul as they are meant to fulfill the oppressive expectations of society. Woman's selfhood as an independent entity is thus questionable in a male-dominated society as their lives are fragmented and lack agency. Feminists consider the self as an important aspect of understanding the position of women. Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex* (1949) states, 'He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other" (xxviii) Women's selfhood in this view is put at the secondary position next to man's and is subordinated and diminished. Amrita Pritam, in her autobiography, *The Revenue Stamp* (1976), never appears to be at a position secondary to any male figure in her life. She is not an 'other' rather always holds a strong position in relation to the male figures like her father, husband, Imroz, and Sahir.

Autonomy results in the truthful representation of self. "Feminist accounts view autonomy as an ongoing and improvisational process of exercising self-discovery, self-definition, and self-directional skills." (Feminist Perspectives on the Self). Amrita Pritam has been an autonomous being because she is clear about her intentions and motives in life. In *The Revenue Stamp* (1976), Amrita has many times mentioned about her quest for freedom. She desires to free herself even though she has never lived under any sort of domination. Her desire for freedom is spiritual and not physical. As she states "The layer deepest down was of the freedom of my own and other lands"(17). Pritam's quest for freedom is adamant in her sequences of dreams at different points of her life. She considers her dreams to be a 'steady ritual' to her. In her first dream, she finds herself imprisoned within a 'great big dark castle' without doors guarded by armed guards. She tries to escape but the walls do not melt away. She attempts to fly and slowly feels her feet rising above the ground and then she escapes as the guards fail to reach her.

Pritam sees another dream in which she is chased by a crowd of people and she is running ahead to save herself. As the crowd draws nearer her anxiety increases and then she finally sees a river. Finding no way out she calmly walks across the river and the river too supports her feet. No one from the crowd dares to step into the river fearing to get drowned. Thus, she escapes again in her dream. The two dreams clearly show that Amrita somewhere within her unconscious mind always desires to be a free being. The big, dark castle or the crowd of people symbolize the social conventions. It may also be symbolic of her engagement with Pritam Singh when she was only four or her father's desire of making her write poems only on religious themes. Apart from this, she never encounters any sort of coercion or pressure from anyone in her life.

Dreams have been interpreted differently by different philosophers. In the nineteenth century, 'dreams' are interpreted as the result of "dissatisfaction with its current state of society led to a renewed fascination with dreaming or dream-like states as providing routes to greater self-awareness and pathways to the unconscious" (Literature, Sleep and Dreams In). Amrita Pritam's dreams are also a result of her dissatisfaction with the prevailing state of society as she is very sensitive and rebellious towards the rigid social schemas since her childhood. Herodotus, the fifth century B. C., Greek historian viewed dreams as the 'mirrors of reality' (Literature, Sleep and Dreams In). Dreams reflect the reality of a person's life but in a symbolic form. Pritam's dreams are a clear instance of it. Sigmund Freud argues that dreams occur due to the repression of unfulfilled desires or tendencies to pain, pleasure, regret, repentence, guilt, gratification etc. He defines dreams as " the royal road to the unconscious" (Nayar 67). Since the repressed gets stored in the unconscious and it needs to get expressed somehow so it takes recourse to dreams. Amrita Pritam's dreams are indicative of her desire to escape and gain freedom.

Amrita Pritam's autobiographies *Shadow of Words* (2004) and *The Revenue Stamp* (1976) redefine the conventional form of autobiography as it denies linearity and chronological sequence of events. The beginning of the autobiography *The Revenue Stamp* is an attempt to provide coherence but since the nature of memory is fragmented the later part of the book is also disintegrated. In *Shadow of Words* also, there is no temporal and spatial representation of her life; rather, it is based on different themes such as shadows of death, dreams, weapons, rebirth, etc. She expresses her 'self' in her autobiographies defying the conventional form and structure of an autobiography. Her love for freedom is clearly visible in this form of the fragmented portrayal of her life and thereby authenticating her representation of the self. Pritam makes use of her autonomy while describing herself. For Beauvoir, women can take hold of their claims only through freedom and choice of their own, thus reclaiming their freedom and selfhood. The identity and roles of the 'women' as a category are imposed by the society and so the selves of the women too are an imposition by the society (Feminist Perspectives on the Self). Pritam, who hardly considers her identity as a 'woman' to be significant, does not fall under the category of those women who lack autonomy and choices. She is bold and rebellious enough to claim and achieve her freedom, and her 'self' is never determined by the situations and the contexts.

Helene Cixous states in her "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) speaking about the women's writing, 'Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies...Woman must put herself into the text..." (875). Pritam has successfully

portrayed herself in her autobiographies and also has written about the humiliations faced by the other women in her writings. She has never neglected raising issues sensitive to the freedom of women. She has been criticized a lot by her contemporaries, who also considered her works as pornographic (107). Many times she can relate her own self with the characters she has created in her novels and short stories. For instance, she identifies herself with the character of Alka in her *A Line in Water* (1963), "I recognized my own self then. Only Amrita could have said what Alka said. No other woman could have had the courage..." (174). It shows that she expressed her own self in the guise of her own female characters. As the gynocritics would call "the feminine mode of experience" is to perceive, think and feel the outer world (Abrams 103). Writings as such by the women writers disclose a distinctively female discourse and also reveal the internalized consciousness of the self.

There is another instance of Amrita Pritam's identification with her imaginative character, Sunderan from the novel *Yatri* (1968). She feels that the character of Sunderan is leaping at her from the pages of the book and it is not Amrita's life that creeps into the life of Sunderan. Amrita in her autobiography, *The Revenue Stamp,* states, "I have not consciously transmuted my own being into hers and so for years could not quite place her in the realm of my own creation. The thing kept gnawing at my inner self..." (120). Amrita even consciously weaves a male character, Jagdeep from her novella *Ik Sawaal,* into a real-life event of the death of her mother and her loss of faith in God subsequently. Jagdeep too stands beside her mother's death bed in the novella and after his mother's death loses faith in God. Cixous' idea of a woman writing for woman, about woman, and to woman is not entirely appropriate in this context as Amrita relates her personal experience to a male character in her novella. This is indicative of the notion that for Amrita the representation of self is not gender-biased. For her human experiences are same for both men and women.

Cixous also talks about the feminine and masculine mode of writing in her "The Laugh of the Medusa." Besides this, she also mentions the third form of writing, "that writing is bisexual, hence neuter, which again does away with differentiation." (883). Pritam's mode of writing can be said to be the third form of writing, that is, neuter or bisexual writing. She is much ahead of the time, does not focus much on her position as a woman. She is rebellious against the wrongs happening in the world as she states, "Wherever in the world wrong is done, I continue to feel a deep sense of outrage" (17). Though she lives in a male-dominated society, she never fights against the wrongs considering them to be caused only by the patriarchal system. For her anything affecting the freedom of an individual or a community is unacceptable and thus outrages her to fight back.

In *Shadow of Words*, Pritam makes a thematic description of the chapters displaying her unconscious mind at the various stages of her life. In the second chapter of the book, she mentions an experience of her early age in which she is standing at the window looking at the sky and asking another Amrita to come back to her. She compares this Amrita to the free birds flying in the sky and as they return back to their nests at the dusk she too wants her Amrita roaming around freely to come back to her. She says, "Amrita, come to me! It seems the bird of my soul has lost somewhere, now it should return as it is dusk ... to her home, to its nest and to me..." (12). This creation of an alternative Amrita by Amrita Pritam herself is an indication that whenever she will be alone and done with this world, then she can call her to rejuvenate herself. It implies that

Pritam herself is a free being like a bird and she is free of all inhibitions and boundaries. But when she will be fed up by the biases and prejudices done by the world she would get relief in the arms of this illusionary Amrita who would console her and caress her. Amrita's self is an independent and autonomous self, which is capable enough to take care of herself. She, calling the other Amrita back home also contradicts her desire for freedom. If she wants to be free then why does she ask her to come back? It suggests that Amrita is aware of her limits and she also understands that the excess of anything is harmful. Thus, she might be calling the other Amrita, which is her 'self' back so that it does not go away too far that it becomes difficult to meet her or return.

Amrita has always been preoccupied with the notion of truth since her childhood. She is true to her known ones and also to her own 'self'. This is the reason she regards an autobiography as "the Gospel of Truth" (178) and voices her desires and inner world truthfully in her autobiographies. She does not hide anything from her readers and she believes that the readers and the writer are always face to face. For her, "The basic truth is the writer's own need. This is a continuous process that leads from one reality to another." (178). Pritam's 'self' as a writer cannot be a liar to her readers as for her, a compromise with the truth is an insult not to the readers but to the writer. She is truthful to her writer's self.' She is even very obedient to her inner voice as she does not follow the advice of her friends to publish one of her books in all languages except Punjabi. She publishes it in Punjabi as the language is her first love.

Amrita Pritam never hides her feelings regarding her relationships with Sahir and Imroz. Once when her son asked her about whose son he is-Sahir's or his father's? (135). To this, Amrita gives a frank reply that she wished he was Sahir's son but in reality he is not. She is very true in revealing her real emotions and puts no curtain to her feelings. She has a broad vision of life and thus makes her autobiography a 'Stamp of Truth.' Her autobiography, *The Revenue Stamp* is multi-generic as it is inclusive of her poems, diary entries and stories; and her autobiography, *Shadow of Words* too includes short stories and poems. The titles of the autobiographies too are symbolic and metaphorical, thus foregrounding her creative and artistic sensibilities. She is very spiritual and has least connection with the materialistic world. She is also not fond of any recognition as taught by her father.

Amrita Pritam has a deep quest for love which arises with the loss of her mother. She suffers from loneliness after her mother's death which also is the reason for her loss of faith in God. Even in her marriage, she cannot fulfill her desire of experiencing the true sense of love. Her love for Sahir too is unrequited love. Even her father, after her mother's death wants to get rid of her and lead a life of renunciation. This leads to a strong desire for the fulfillment of love in her life. The last forty years of her life have been dedicated to Imroz with whom she shares a live-in relationship. But this relationship is the most spiritual one in her life as it does not consist of any complaints and demands. Imroz is a constant support to her life till her last breath. Her relationships are never based on social constructions or conventions. Factors like age, religion, community, marriage, etc. have never been the grounds to rely on for Amrita. The spiritual connection with the individual is of utmost importance to her. Hence, her relationships are the purest and real ones. It also shows her courage, independence, and autonomy in building such relationships which reflects her idealized self.

Conclusion

Throughout her life Amrita Pritam has displayed that the ideal 'self' comes into existence not when

a woman enjoys the physical freedom; but only when she starts asserting her freedom of thoughts and ideas. It can be claimed that autobiographies by the female writers are inspiration to the female readers giving them the courage to reveal their consciousness and discover their selves living in a male-dominated society and this is also applicable in the case of Amrita Pritam. Amrita Pritam exists beyond the rigidly stratified schemas of the world and owns a stature in the society of a strong and self-contained personality. Thus the 'self' of Amrita Pritam is discovered and revealed through the analysis of the significant instances of her life mentioned in her two autobiographies. For further research it would be really interesting to investigate Amrita Pritam's works applying the theory of trauma and memory.

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ELT or Literature: Dilemma of an English Teacher

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Abstract

This paper claims that there is an unstated divide in English departments in institutes of higher education in India between teaching of literature—fiction, non-fiction, poetry and criticism—and what is popularly known as "English Language Teaching" (ELT). This gulf adversely impacts the desired learning outcome, and produces students passionate about literature with an undernourished linguistic faculty or competent English speakers with an unchiselled critical ability. While at secondary level, much emphasis is laid upon language learning, it seems largely neglected at tertiary level. Some universities acknowledge the divide and have specific centres for the study of either literature or language teaching. However, most universities expect teachers to juggle between the Shakespearean tragic universe and the etiquettes of polite conversation. In many cases, the two-credit 'Compulsory English' course meant for students from multiple streams—science, arts, commerce—gets perfunctorily completed. Students get through this course by learning some basic grammar and vocabulary items which come handy in the written examination, hardly paying attention to their speaking skills. The paper studies these practical concerns in English departments of India and suggests some remedial measures both at policy and individual levels.

Keywords: *ELT, Teaching Literature, Interpretation, English Departments in India, and English Classroom.*

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Oedipus under the Balua Bridge

In my first year as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Mahatma Gandhi Central University (MGCU), Motihariin 2016, I offered a course titled 'Ancient Greek Tragedy' to the first semester students of B.A. (Hons) English programme. One of the recently established universities, and the second central university in Bihar, MGCU started its first academic session in October, 2016. MGCU drew students across the state of Bihar, especially from the district of East Champaran and the neighbouring regions in its pilot batch. There were 17 students in the B.A. (Hons) English programme, all hailing from Bihar. These were my first batch of students, and the text I introduced to them was *Oedipus, the King*. I taught them in a recently refurbished classroom in the temporary campus near the Baluaflyover.

As I moved ahead with the course, I buoyantly dealt with various concepts such as the mimetic theory of art, Aristotelian notion of tragedy, and delivered elaborate lectures on the prescribed plays. Halfway through the course, I was surprised to learn that half of my students did not understand a word I said. Many of them were dependent upon the summaries of the prescribed texts in Hindi through various YouTube channels and other online platforms. That was the only source of their knowledge. I realised this when I evaluated their assignments. Their assignments did not show any trace of the discussion we had in the classroom. A few of them were not even able to synthesize the portions they had blatantly copied with link sentences so that they could fall cohesively in their assignments. After some discussions with my students, I started adopting a different method; I started explaining some of the concepts in Hindi, as all my students were from Hindi speaking regions. While half of my students could somewhat comprehend the texts, the other lot—competent in English use—would find my classes unchallenging and uninteresting. These were the ones who had received education in English medium schools, and had pursued 'English' Honours after completing their intermediate education in Science stream. Hailing from the same state, the students in my wildly heterogeneous English classroom were so diverse in their linguistic competence that any effort of fruitful engagement with one section nearly alienated the other. Like Oedipus, the protagonist of the play I was teaching, I tried to ponder over this issue by asking questions. Perhaps, this paper is just one of my many attempts to move further towards *anagnorisis*. The questions often find myself asking are as follows:

a) How to deal with a heterogeneous classroom with varying degrees of competence in English?

b) Can I prepare a lecture that would hold the attention of all the students and be beneficial to all?

c) Would I not be holding back the geniuses by dwelling more on basic language skills?

d) Would I not be performing elitism by speaking only in English while I remain unintelligible to half of my students?

These questions sound more Quixotic than Oedipal. But as I would teach them a course on 'The Theatre of Absurd' later, I realised there are no stupid questions. If every effort is futile, so be it. When I interacted with a few of my colleagues in other universities in rural or suburban areas, I found they echoed my concerns. Thus, I devised one question that could make my subjective pondering somewhat universal in nature:

e) What is an English teacher supposed to teach in the class in an Indian higher educational institution?

Each institution differs from the other. Similarly, each teacher has a unique vision towards teaching. Still, can there be something that all English teachers in the tertiary level agree that they do in the class? Do they teach the texts or engage in English exercises? Are the prescribed texts means to an end, i.e., teaching English language, or it is the other way round?

The Fishy Affair of Interpretation

The question I raised was not a unique one. I found that Stanley Fish had asked a similar question albeit in a different context. Let us see how different his situation is from mine. In his book *Is there a text in the class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Fish questioned whether the English classrooms in the Anglophone higher educational institutes concentrate on the prescribed texts or engage in different interpretive traditions. Fish could afford to do so because the students in those classrooms would be familiar with the cultural background of the English texts and more importantly, they would be the native speakers of the language in which the text is composed. Fish would reflect upon his own teaching method and say, "what I had been doing in essays like "What It's Like to Read L' Allegro and II Penseroso" was not revealing what readers had always done but trying to persuade them to a set of community assumptions so that when they read they would do what I did" (Fish 15). For him, the act of literary criticism in the classroom, was either "a matter of demonstration" or "a matter (endlessly negotiated) of persuasion" (Fish 17). In both cases, he was engaged in a meaning-making process with students who would be partners in the act of interpretation. They would be members of a linguistic community which gave its tacit assent towards considering a piece of writing as literature. Fish was desperate not to commit what Wimsatt and Beardsley famously considered "intentional fallacy"—the act of finding the meaning of a text in the author's biographical details and socio-cultural settings—and "affective fallacy"— the act of superimposing the reader's own feelings on to the text.

The challenge that an Indian teacher faces in an Indian suburban classroom is more complex. Comprehension comes first, interpretation later. Imagine teaching "L' Allegro and II Penseroso" in Motihari under the Balua bridge. The students must grapple with the meaning of the text written in an archaic language, dealing with alien concepts, featuring characters with hard-to-pronounce names, mediated by an Indian teacher who also shares her own approximation of the text. In such a scenario, there is hardly any room for demonstration or persuasion. On certain occasions, especially a few weeks before the examination, it comes down to mere dictation. Students covetously seek possible list of questions as if knowing them would help them answer better.

Fish had a choice whether to reinstate or forgo the constituents of the older literary institutions such as "texts, authors, periods, genres, canons, standards, agreements, disputes, values, changes, and so on" (Fish 17). Abandoning these, what remains are "the words on the page." That reminds us of I. A. Richards, another English Professor, who once distributed anonymous poems to his students to seek 'original responses.' Richards would record these responses in his ground-breaking work 'Practical Criticism.' This would also not be possible in my classroom, as many of the English 'words on the page' would seem Greek and Latin to half of the students. If according to Harold Bloom, every reading is an act of misreading, misreading too is a privilege compared to utter incomprehensibility. Modern

poetry is difficult because of the juxtaposition of familiar words in unfamiliar places. For many students in suburban and rural classrooms in India, modern poetry would be simply meaningless, their absurdity no more profound. To develop their critical and original thinking on literary concerns, to enable them to interpret texts by donning the hand-me-downs from certain hermeneutical traditions (as Fish would have it) or to help them create their own meaning (as Richards would have it), it is of pivotal importance that all students be equipped with a decent linguistic competence in English first. Thus, I redesigned my question:

f) Should I teach English language or literature in my class?

Unable to pick any one option, I tried grabbing both horns of the dilemma. I struggled to divide my class hours. I tried to give them lessons in appropriate English use while ensuring the completion of the syllabus in time. How can I dwell on the Freudian analysis of a classical Greek tragedy and in the same breath state that 'Oedipus killed Laius' is a sentence in Past Simple? I was teaching two separate classes in one room in one period. This also creates a problem in evaluation of the written assignments and their mid-term and end-term papers. I found many students writing in flawless English. I would evaluate them on their presentation skills, use of appropriate diction, and critical thinking. The other lot would struggle to glue two words together. I would have to use a different yardstick for them. I would evaluate them purely on the basis of their language use taking note of their learning curve. Grading their answers meant putting a numerical value on different skills displayed in response to the same question. The gulf between the standard of linguistic competence, to my belief, owes a great deal to a gulf between two disciplines fiercely fighting for turf in the Department of English, one is Literature, the other English Language Teaching (ELT).

ELT vs English

Whether ELT is a sub-branch of 'English' or a separate but allied discipline is a contentious issue. The allied disciplines of English such as Comparative Literature, Translation Studies, Women Studies are listed as subjects for which there is a provision of a National Eligibility Test (NET) for lectureship, whereas ELT is not. The syllabus for NET for the subject 'English' includes ELT as a component. However, several central universities have specific schools/centres offering programmes of study in ELT. University of Hyderabad offers PhD in English Language Studies. School of English Language Education at The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad offers M.A., M.Phil and PhD in English Language Education. Aligarh Muslim University also offers M.A. and PhD in English Language Teaching. The schools offering courses in ELT encourage topics concerning the strategies to teach English. It can be said that ELT is situated at the intersection between 'Education' and 'Literature'. It produces teachers as well as teacher-trainers. As this course is not a core paper in B.A. (Hons) English course, or in M.A. in English, many who would later teach English at universities have absolutely no training in teaching English language. I have commented elsewhere on the want of adequate training in language for an English teacher through the crucible of NET:

> The short listing criteria for Assistant Professorships in English in higher education also ignore the candidate's speaking skills. Eligibility is based on a PhD degree or/and National Eligibility Test (NET) certificate (Draft UGC Regulations 5-6). For a PhD degree, one is required to defend the thesis in an oral

viva conducted much after the submission of the written dissertation. In many instances, the PhD viva becomes more of a congratulatory ceremony than an evaluative one. For qualifying the NET, through a cyber-test, one is not even required to demonstrate one's writing skills. A student, without any demonstration of speaking and writing skills, may be eligible to teach English by qualifying the NET. (Patra 81)

There is a subtle hierarchy operational in the English curriculum in which language teaching is deemed inferior to literature teaching. It is assumed that students who pursue the graduate or postgraduate programmes in English would be already familiar with English. Therefore, training them in language is seen as redundant. The gulf in the English department can be better seen through the way the courses are designed. The following table lists the courses prescribed for the B.A. (Hons) English in the model syllabus prepared by University Grants Commission.

Table 1: List of Courses on Literature and ELT is the Model B.A. (Hons) English Syllabus

Literature Courses	**English Language Teaching Courses**
Indian Literatures: 1) Indian Classical Literature 2) Indian Writing in English 3) Modern Indian Writing in English Translation 4) Literature of the Indian Diaspora	**Courses on Writing:** 1) Academic Writing and Composition 2) Research Methodology
Anglo-American Literatures: 5) British Poetry and Drama: 14th to 17th Centuries 6) British Poetry and Drama: 17th to 18th Centuries 7) British Literature: 18th Century 8) British Romantic Literature 9) British Literature 19th Century 10) British Literature: The Early 20th Century 11) British Literature: Post World War II 12) American Literature	**Ruminations on Language:** 3) Language and Linguistics 4) Language, Literature and Culture
European Literatures: 13) European Classical Literatures 14) Modern European Drama 15) Nineteenth Century European Realism	**Communications and Performance:** 5) Text and Performance 6) Media and Communication Skills 7) English/MIL Communication

Special Courses:	**Ability Enhancement Courses**
16) Popular Literature	8) English Language Teaching
17) Science Fiction and Detective Literature	9) Soft Skills
18) Travel Writing	10)Translation Studies
19) Autobiography	11) Creative Writing
20) Film Studies	12) Business Communication
21) Literature and Cinema	13) Technical Writing
New and Comparative Literatures:	
22) Postcolonial Literatures	
23) World Literatures	
24) Partition Literature	
Literature on Gender:	
25) Women's Writing	
26) Contemporary India: Women and Empowerment	
27) Gender and Human Rights	
Criticism and Theory	
28) Literary Theory	
29) Literary Criticism	

The courses in the left are orientated towards literary discipline while those in the right seem inclined towards developing the communication skills of the students. The model syllabus for B.A. (Hons) Programme mentions that there would be only one Ability Enhancement Compulsory Course: English/MIL Communication. The students can opt either to learn English or learn any modern Indian language through a two-credit course. At the same time, there is a provision for any two Ability Enhancement Elective Courses. These could be taken from the pool of courses listed in the above table in the right column with Serial no. 8 to 13. These courses are also of two-credits each. The core-papers and discipline specific elective papers are of 5 credits each. They consist solely of courses listed in the left column in the above table. Thus, apart from the three ability enhancement courses, the students would not have a hands-on training on language use, and have to fend for themselves when it comes to courses in the core section. The course objectives of core papers, understandably, do not aim at strengthening their linguistic competence.

The attempts to develop their original thinking towards literary texts in classrooms such as these would succeed only by a sustained effort towards building their linguistic competence. At the policy level, the syllabus of B.A. (Hons) English and M.A. English should involve more courses that are skill-based and aim at developing their verbal ability in English, especially in the first two semesters. ELT should be made a core paper

both in the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in English to ascertain that potential English teachers are familiar with the principles of English teaching. At those places where students at the tertiary level require special attention, training them in English should be listed as an objective in core papers. Remedial courses should be offered during their graduate or postgraduate level as a part of the curriculum to compensate for the lack in education up to the intermediate level. In the absence of a policy level intervention, the teachers can individually adopt language teaching as one of the implicit objectives of any course they are offering.

The English Teacher as an Endangered Species

Despite the learner-centric approach to teaching, an English teacher, according to me, cannot be merely a facilitator. Throughout the paper, I have tried to demonstrate how a teacher acts like a catalyst whose job it is to help students learn the language, thereby gain the strength to appreciate literature. However, this is only partially true. Every lecture on a literary topic becomes more than a utilitarian service solely for the benefit of students. Any class on any literary topic has the potential of germinating a discourse as potent as lectures of S.T. Coleridge or A.C. Bradley on Shakespeare. These lectures, accompanied by the passion of the teacher, are semi-theatrical performances. In the event of negotiating between the students' requirement of learning the language and enhancing their critical ability, is the English teacher disappearing into oblivion? Perhaps, we can respond to that question some other time.

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Battle of the Sexes: Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* as a Saga of Revenge and Retribution

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Abstract

The Life and Loves of a She-Devil by Fay Weldon is reminiscent of a gothic fantasy. Resistance to the oppressions of a self-seeking husband is the motivating force for Ruth, the protagonist to be defiant and vengeful. She symbolises the wounded sensibilities of miserable wives. This novel of blazingly hot revenge lays bare the absurdities of the modern beauty-obsessed culture. The heroine is able to turn her indignities into potent sources of power and strength. The monstrous wife is the focal point in the narrative, where winning the man does not contribute to the happy ending. The question of bodily violence is raised in this novel as a consequence of attempts to satisfy the patriarchal demands for femininity.

Keywords: *Simulacrum, Corporeal, Diabolic, Femininity, and Monstrosity.*

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"Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor Hell a fury like a woman scorned." (William Congreve, The Mourning Bride, 1697)

Hell has no fury like a woman scorned and that was the starting point of the dark tale of envy, revenge, sex and power – The *Life and Loves of a She-Devil* written in 1984 by Fay Weldon, one of Britain's most admired and translated writers. A number of women depicted by Fay Weldon are characterised by a spirit of defiance and motivated by a thirst for revenge. The rules prevailing in patriarchy, which endanger the freedom of women and the injustice meted out to them, contribute largely to the development of a spirit of confrontation in their character.

In *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, Weldon shifts the power struggle back to the domestic field. The novel has distinct overtones of a science fiction. As Olga Kenyon puts it, "this macabre moral parable about the revenge of a scorned woman has echoes of a Jacobean melodrama" (123). The plot revolves around Ruth Patchet and her resolve to revenge herself on her unfaithful husband, Bobbo, and his mistress, Mary Fisher, a successful novelist, who is petite and charming. Ruth transforms her clumsy, substantial figure by subjecting herself to painful surgery, into a simulacrum – a physical replica of the other woman and takes over her role, career and life. The novel has the potential of a gothic fantasy and as Patricia Waugh observes, "a feminist recapitulation of the Frankenstein story" (190).

Though not a separatist feminist by virtue of her personal politics, Weldon wants women to look askance at the masculine model and acquire a vision congenial to accommodate their own perspectives. Women have to wake up to the reality that they, without exception, are real human beings and nothing else, and the power to guard themselves, particularly their integrity, is vested only in their hands. They alone are entitled to mould their destiny. This simple agenda is at the heart of Weldon's feminism.

Weldon is the creator of a host of characters who revolt against the existing order. They defy men, whom they have occasions to associate themselves with. Among them are the sorceress and hysteric, too, who turns things topsy-turvy, wreaking havoc on the placid flow of everyday existence. Ruth Patchet, the She-Devil, spells out categorically what her professed purpose ought to be. She defies and scorns her husband, who is guilty of glaring infidelity. She is bent upon a course of hectic activity, which brings her money, power and victory over him. She asserts:

> I want revenge
>
> I want power
>
> I want money
>
> I want to be loved and not love in return
>
> (Weldon 43)

It is with this end in view that she channels her energy into a frightful course of action designed to transform herself. She seems to think that the real power arises out of being loved, not out of loving in turn. The metamorphosis that Ruth undergoes from a wronged housewife into a 'she-devil' commences exactly when she puts an end to loving her unsympathetic husband. She makes herself impervious to all obligations that her family demands. She says, "I cast off the chains that bound me down, of habit, custom and sexual aspiration: home, family, friends –all the objects of natural affections. Not until then could I be free, and could I begin" (Weldon 159).

Ruth is fully aware that it is impossible for her to change the prevailing culture. She knows she should change herself, if she is to gain acceptance into it. It is for this purpose that she puts herself

to a masochistic torture of diets, self-denial, agonizing surgery and technological bombardment of her own body. Ruth's realization that love promotes slavery and hate is a prelude to freedom and power, is worth analysing. Her significant words, "I sing a hymn to the death of love and the end of pain" (Weldon 160), clearly demonstrate her perception that love is a destructive emotion. In fact, this recognition is at the root of the various stages of Ruth's success in her mission. Her plight is really pathetic before such a realization dawns upon her. The Ruth who appears in the early part of the novel is in a state of self-pity and disappointment, especially when Bobbo forsakes her. This is how she reflects on love and hate: "I assume I love Bobbo because I am married to him. Good women love their husbands. But love compared to hate is a pallid emotion. Fidgety and troublesome and making for misery" (Weldon 14). After thus establishing the connection between love and misery, Ruth proceeds to her business of revenge without ever looking back. The wings of her freedom spread themselves to soar to great heights. She says, "I look inside myself. I find hate, yes: hate for Mary Fisher, hot, strong and sweet: but not a scrap of love, not the faintest, wriggling tendril. I have fallen out of love with Bobbo!" (Weldon 25). These words reveal that Ruth feels in herself the upsurge of a kind of energy, which strengthens her to take on Bobbo and avenge his unjust act. From now on, we find her in possession of a power to free herself from familial responsibilities and shirk her duties as wife and mother.

> I am a woman learning to be without her children. I am a snake shedding its skin… I twist and squirm with guilt and pain, even knowing that the quieter I stay the quicker. I will heal slip the old skin, and slither off renewed into the world. (Weldon 76-77)

By a conscious dismissal of all soft sentiments from her mind, Ruth makes herself a tough creature devoid of love. She finds that her human qualities are quite out of place in the scheme of things into which she has to fit herself. In order to carry out her ambitious designs, she gladly embraces the opportunity of being a different animal, a new species. When Bobbo, in sheer contempt, epitomises her ugliness in the epithet 'she-devil,' he is quite unaware of the fact that he is paving the way for her freedom and his ruin. This freedom is instrumental to a psychological transformation and she makes the rapturous remark, "This is exhilarating. If you are a 'she-devil,' the mind clears at once. The spirits rise. There is no shame, no guilt, no dreary striving to be good. There is only, in the end what you want… I am a she-devil!" (Weldon 43)

A deliberate alienation on her part from duties and responsibilities that bind her to the family and society at large is the starting point of the adventurous journey that Ruth undertakes. It also marks the beginning of her contract with the devil, as it were. To Ruth, freedom from love is liberation from cares. Her emancipation from social and familial obligations emboldens her to scoff at institutions like marriage, motherhood and community, which have only curtailed her freedom. The idea Weldon drives home in the novel is that the best way to achieve freedom is to remain unaffected by the temptation to love and be loved.

Ruth's self-imposed act of re-structuring herself into the image of a different person raises thoughts about what her new identity will be. In depriving herself of her old feelings and behaviour, she has recourse to a task, which is, by all means, arduous. This is because it is not easy to change identities without motivation and resolve. Ruth's words help us to understand the magnitude of the problem she has to face. "The

roots of self-reproach and good behaviour tangle deep in the living flesh; you can't ease them out gently; they have to be torn out, and they bring flesh with them"(Weldon 49).

The transformation that Ruth undergoes enables her to put an end to her being an inferior, not only in the family, but in the world outside. Ruth's success in changing her identity heralds a great personal victory. It marks a crucial transition from Ruth's miserable predicament as a woman of no self-respect, into the comfortable stature of an individual, who cares only for herself. Simultaneous with this act of creation is an amazing shift from good to evil. What has hitherto been on the verge of a justifiably good act takes a turn towards something malicious.

Pamela Katz calls the novel a 'Feminist Faust' (115), which as she points out, is a 'deeply black comedy about the forces of good and evil' (115). Evil is integral to the very theme of the novel. Transformation is the key to Ruth's revenge, and without it her plan for retribution could never have worked. It may be truly said that there is something in her act that smacks of a diabolic contract signed in blood. This female 'Faust' has a violent and virulent spirit that results in a staunch determination to translate her devilish designs into frightful acts.

Ruth lacks Bobbo's knowledge of accountancy, but she makes it possible for her to defraud him of every pound in his bank account, thus achieving a strong economic base for her mischievous operation. Side by side with her creation of herself, is her destruction of Bobbo. The power relations between the sexes are what Ruth manipulates. Weldon, on her part, manipulates the cultural myths that sustain such relations. She exploits the potential of the Frankenstein myth in order to parody the ideology of feminine monstrosity. The immense power of the body in which she herself is trapped fills her with anxiety. She feels reassured, on second thoughts, that women should never be 'quasi-person, quasi-human' (192) who should ever remain 'mere carriers of the human species' (192). This is why she makes up her mind to turn herself into 'the female monster of primal fantasy' (192) – the she-devil. But it is not without regret that she resorts to such a painful course of action. To quote her words:

> I want, I crave, I die to be part of that other erotic world, of choice and desire and lust. It isn't love that I want; it is nothing so simple. What I want is to take everything and return nothing. What I want is power over the hearts and pockets of men (24)

Nothing can stand in the way of her resolve to acquire power and Ruth is prepared to go to any extreme to achieve this goal. She destroys her huge substantial figure in order to convert herself into an ultra-feminine corporeal shape, which enables her to be of an assertive, sadistic and monstrous psyche. Here the process of creation is linked up with the Frankenstein myth at various points. At a crucial stage of the operation designed to reduce her size, when Ruth lies semiconscious under the impact of the drugs to which she is put, she feels:

> There was an earthquake, a nasty rumble, the crust of the earth yearning to split along the line of its weakness… Life support systems had to be switched over to the emergency generator… Ruth observed their pallor, their distraction. When she could speak she said, "you needn't have worried. An act of God won't kill me"(Weldon 232).

Ruth is a relentless revolutionary who defies not merely a social order or an uncaring husband, but God himself. In this respect she is of the 'devil's party.' This is strictly in conformity with Weldon's conviction that women must strengthen

themselves by virtue of their own capabilities. To quote her words, "She (Ruth) said she was taking up arms against God Himself. Lucifer had tried and failed, but he was male. She thought she might do better, being female" (82). If Ruth is of a combative spirit, furious against the entire scheme of things in the world, her wrath is perfectly justified. God's world has been bitterly unkind to her, and her endeavour to accomplish something different has to be viewed in this light. She finds it, impossible to justify the ways of God to women, particularly to herself. She firmly believes, "we are here in this world to improve upon His original idea. To create justice, truth and beauty, where He so obviously and lamentably failed" (Weldon 113). The question of bodily violence is raised in this novel as a consequence of attempts to satisfy the patriarchal demands for femininity. The uncouth female has an amazing transformation into an angelic beauty and the transformation necessitates violence. But the violence that Weldon depicts here is not confined to the husband or to the house, but to the woman's body, though the destruction of her husband is Ruth's ulterior motive.

It is quite evident that Fay Weldon's purpose in this novel is to emphasize the idea that the violence to which women subject their bodies, with a view to produce an accepted, ideal bodily self, is an indictable offence. She also stresses the need for sufficient potential on the part of women for more active, outwardly directed violence against those who insist on such ideal self. The violence that Ruth directs against herself, no doubt, is frightful and she is resourceful and fully confident of her mental strength. Yet, she is certain that it is the body that articulates a self. Weldon's novel makes us conversant with the kind of violence aimed at achieving female perfection by identifying female self with female body. Her final triumph and the perversity with which it is wrought are well brought out in the much quoted last line of the book, "A comic turn turned serious" (Weldon 240). As Pamela Katz has aptly put it, Ruth is a character that we can fundamentally claim as one of 'our' own. I think that this 'our' goes way beyond the small group of feminist women who have had Weldon claimed as one of their own. For me, she is the truest torchbearer for anyone who has ever felt not beautiful, intelligent, graceful or genteel enough to earn respect in our culture (115).

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Cartographic Strategies and Colonial Discourse: Mapping the Western Australian Fictional Space

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Abstract

Cartographic representation, the conceptualization and ordering of space had an important role in defining settler relations to the Australian land. Therefore in the settlement history of Australia. Colonial discourse employed numerous cartographic strategies to obliterate the profound meanings that the Australian land held for its original inhabitants, thereby making the occupation of the continent and the displacement of Aboriginal communities from their homelands, appear to be justified and legitimate enterprises. This paper is a study of the fictional space of Western Australia; it begins by looking at the ways in which writers of novels situated in colonial discourse participate in this discourse, by employing cartographic strategies to negotiate the colonial space and the experience of settling Western Australia. It then proceeds to consider the traumatic aftermath of the imposition of colonial mapping on the lives of Aboriginal people and concludes by affirming the crucial significance of renewing the bonds of these communities with their "nourishing terrains."

Keywords: *Cartographic Strategies; Colonial Discourse; and Western Australian Fiction.*

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Western Australia has produced some of the finest Australian writing of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A galaxy of gifted writers which includes some of the most distinguished figures in Australian literary history, such as Katherine Susannah Prichard, Randolph Stowe, Peter Cowan, Robert Drewe, Doris Pilkington, Sally Morgan, Dorothy Hewett, Tim Winton, and Kim Scott, have created through their writing, a vibrant textual space that is distinctively Western Australian. As Philip Mead points out, it is not surprising that Western Australia with its vast size, geographical and historical difference from Eastern Australia, as well as its Indian Ocean orientation, has been a leader in regional literary definition (Mead 556).

The entire Australian continent today reflects a tension between two different ways of knowing and using the land, derived from the ancient traditions of the Aboriginal communities who were its earliest inhabitants, and the Eurocentric perspectives brought by the white settlers, who forcibly occupied the continent after displacing the Aboriginals from their traditional lands, and established dominion over it. Literary texts that write the experience of the Western Australian region register the different ways in which the land has been perceived and managed by the various peoples who inhabited it. In both the Aboriginal narrative and the settler narrative that may be read from the Western Australian fictional space, the custodianship/ownership of the land has been the most contentious issue.

The cultural landscape and the map are perhaps the most significant constructs that represent human engagement with the land, signifying how land is viewed, used and controlled by the cultures which produce them. The map in particular, is a cultural construct that expresses in a codified form, a social group's interaction with the land and can therefore serve as an excellent indicator of the way that particular social group perceives and represents land. The map assumes a special significance for Australian culture - a sense of territory has always been strong among Australian Aboriginal cultures, and extremely important in a different sense for Australian settler culture, which used the map as a means of establishing control. This paper begins by looking at the ways in which writers of novels situated in colonial discourse have employed cartographic strategies to negotiate the colonial space and the experience of settling Western Australia. It then proceeds to consider the traumatic aftermath of the imposition of colonial mapping on the ancient continent.

Colonial Discourse and the Mapping of Australia

Cartographic representation,the conceptualization and ordering of space had an important role in the settlement history of Australia and were therefore crucial in defining settler relations to the land. Paul Carter in *The Road to Botany Bay: an Essay in Spatial History* views white invasion itself as "a form of spatial writing that erased the earlier meaning" (165) and the act of settling not as "a matter of marking out pre-existing boundaries, but one of establishing symbolic enclosures"(168). Carter shows how settlement practically marked itself out on the Australian land and how the cultural landscape of colonial Australia was created through stages of exploration, creation of boundaries, clearing and settlement. Colonial imperatives demanded that a monolithic sense of space which did not acknowledge the indigenous approaches to space and its organization, be imposed on the "newly discovered" land. Simon Ryan explains how this works out:

> The space of empire is universal, Euclidean and Cartesian, a measurable, mathematical web constructed and maintained by positivism…The imperial endeavour

> encourages the construction of space as a universal, measurable and divisible entity, for this is a self-legitimising view of the world. If it were admitted that different cultures produced different spaces, then negotiating these would be difficult, if not impossible. (4-5)

Ryan's remarks underline the importance of universal conceptions of space in establishing colonial control and the key role of maps in the imperial project as well as in settlement history. Ryan here demonstrates how colonial maps served to create a new view of the colonized world that refused to acknowledge the spatial culture of earlier inhabitants and often totally ignored their presence. This was a way of legitimizing the unlawful occupation and re-ordering of the colonised land, making it look as if it was ready for colonial encroachment. In his book *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction*, Graham Huggan's main argument is that maps have been used to serve the dominant discourse in most societies and that in Australia, cartographic strategies have been employed to support and legitimate colonialism and the conquest and erasure of Aboriginal communities.

The European discourse of the "new science" and geographical discovery had clear connections with colonial cartographic practice and clear implications for shaping the imperial project in Australia, and the settler discourse of the land. Graham Huggan links the geographical discovery of new lands to "an imperialist rhetoric that pronounced them ready for the picking" (8). The new science and geographical discovery, was often the prelude to colonization. The Royal Society of London, points out Ryan, embodied the connection between power and knowledge on which imperial expansion depended; "its agenda was expansion of empire" (32-37). These links between new scientific knowledge, new geographical discoveries, empire and the new ways of mapping that were imposed on the colonized lands need to be understood to fully grasp the ideological meanings of colonial mapping schemes and the cartographic strategies adopted in settler discourse to establish control over the Australian land.

Huggan further elaborates on how maps worked to aid imperial conquest and the exclusion of the Aboriginal people in Australia: "The trope of 'mapmaking' dovetailing with that of 'discovery' was duly called in to support an ideology of conquest. This ideology fostered the notion of a socially empty space that belied – or wished away – the existence of an indigenous population" (Huggan 75). Huggan also supports Chandra Mukherjee's view that "the meaning of land as property to be consumed and used by Europeans, was written into the language of maps…"(Huggan 8).

Colonial Mapping and the Western Australian Fictional Space

Such cartographic strategies help in forming an understanding of the major discursive practices that writers have employed to negotiate the experience of settling Australia and the colonial space that is represented in Australian novels situated in colonial discourse. In early twentieth century novels that write the settler experience of Western Australia, such as *The Boy in the Bush* by D. H. Lawrence and Mollie Skinner (1924), the mapping scheme reveals those cartographic strategies typically associated with colonial maps, which seek to re-inforce colonial control on a newly 'discovered' land.[i]

The map of Western Australia that emerges through the fictional discourse of *The Boy in the Bush,* a novel that tells the story of the early years of the settlement of Western Australia, is the of-

ficial colonial map. Jack Grant's journey from Fremantle to Wandoo is meticulously mapped. Places en route – Guildford, Darlington, and Mahogany Creek, have mostly have been renamed by the settlers, in fact they fossilize the memories of some of the greatest explorers and administrators in Western Australia's colonial history, such as Fremantle, Stirling, and Darling. These are typical gestures in colonial appropriation: as Huggan argues, "the colonial map is a symbol of territorial/ linguistic appropriation corresponding to the desire to (re)name and acquire place (69). Some other place names, such as Perth and York clearly echo the geographical antecedents of the colonizers. As Ryan points out, the naming of rivers, mountains and islands often provided opportunities for explorers to reward their supporters and financial sponsors (37).

> One of the most influential cartographic strategies in the construction of colonial discourse was the practice of representing Australia as a blank. Simon Ryan argues:
>
> …the cartographic practice of representing the unknown as a blank does not simply or innocently reflect gaps in European knowledge but actively erases (and legitimizes the erasure of) existing social and geo-cultural formation in preparation for the subsequent emplacement of a new order…the construction of Australia as tabula rasa joins with its production as antipode to produce the continent as an empty, inverted space desperately requiring rectification and occupation … for the indigenes whose presence is erased. … Its blankness is a representation of European ignorance but works semiotically to form the antipodal landmass as empty, unsettled and inviting European inscription … a semiotic *tabula rasa*. (104-105)

The discourse of Australia as *tabula rasa* is clearly formulated in D. H. Lawrence's novel *Kangaroo*: "The soft, blue, humanless sky of Australia, the pale, white, unwritten atmosphere of Australia. Tabula rasa. The world a new leaf. And on the new leaf, nothing. The white clarity of the Australian, fragile atmosphere. Without a mark, without a record." Here Lawrence seems to echo the explorers' discourse that viewed Australia as empty, lacking any cultural inscription, practically a blank. Simon Ryan cites Catherine Martin's *An Australian Girl*, as another literary text which views Australia as *tabula rasa* (125) - here, the "Aborigines and the signs of their existence are excluded from the construction of the land as text; thus, when this text is read, they are absent…" (126).

> The idea of Australia as blank is conjoined with the idea of Australia as antipode to create a discourse that legitimizes colonization. Ryan explains:
>
> …maps have played a significant role in the production of the southern continent as a place for projection of European fears and hopes. It is expected that there will be oddities and perversities in the fauna and flora, and that the inhabitants will be likewise perverse and of course uncivilized. … this notion of antipodality was one map-inspired trope used to explain the Australian inhabitants and to produce colonial enterprise as a natural and normalizing mission. (Ryan 10-11)

The cartographic discourse of Australia as the antipodes joins with that of Australia as periphery to create the idea of a country where everything is upside down, perverse and strange. Such an idea comes across in several passages in *The Boy in the Bush*: for instance: "What was the good of people at home writing, "We are having true November weather, very cold with fog and sleet,"

when you were grilling under a fierce sun and the rush of the intense antipodal summer" (95). The idea of Australia as periphery, as being on the far edges of the world is repeated in *The Boy in the Bush* as in this exclamation: "The uttermost ends of the earth! All so lost, and yet so familiar" (8). Simon Ryan explains how this aids to further justify colonial occupation: "The discourse of antipodeanism works to establish the indigene as perverse and strange like the rest of the continent ….the Aborigine is an insult to the natural ownership of resources by those who judge themselves best able to exploit them" (Ryan 112). All these discourses work together, to effectively erase the Aboriginal presence on the continent and ignore them completely.

Probably the most striking cartographic practice in *The Boy in the Bush* is the erasure of the Aboriginal population that the fictional discourse appears to endorse. In a novel whose fictional world spans a major area of Western Australia, it is surprising that the Aboriginal presence is hardly ever touched upon. Lawrence himself was probably ignorant of Aboriginal culture and way of life – however his silence about them is striking, for one who had such deep respect for the Pueblo communities of Taos, New Mexico. Mollie Skinner was writing a novel that celebrated – however quietly – the achievements of the early settlers in the State and it probably suited her fictional purpose to ignore the Aboriginal population altogether.[ii]

The towns and cities mapped by the novel are areas of white settlement and altogether avoid mention of the Aboriginal territories. Here the novel clearly endorses a mapping practice commonly employed by the early explorers, a practice that was aimed at promoting pastoralism at the expense of Aboriginal claims to the land.[iii] Here we see at work what Huggan refers to as the 'hidden rules' of cartography. The 'silences,' 'positional enhancements' and 'representational hierarchies' of maps, according to Huggan, indicate the ways in which, consciously or unconsciously, mapmakers betray social status, cultural preference, or political intent. 'Silences' refer to small but significant omissions of detail which belie the supposed impartiality of the map, linking it instead to myths of cultural superiority (10-11). Such strategies link cartographic discourse, as suggested by Huggan with the controlling interests of a dominant culture (138) – which is exactly what is seen to operate in the fictional discourse of *The Boy in the Bush.* The omission of Aboriginal territories and the inclusion of white settlements from the mapping scheme of this novel may appear innocent, but, is evidently participating in a settler discourse that silences Aboriginal claims to ownership of land. Another mapping strategy adopted in the novel is the distinction between places at the centre and those at the margin. Perth, the major city and white settlement is clearly at the centre of the official mapping scheme, while the wild 'North west' of the state is somewhere on the margins.

Aboriginal Communities in Western Australia and the Colonial Encounter:

The imperial project, with its various ideological agendas, displaced hundreds of Aboriginal people from their 'nourishing terrains' (to use Deborah Bird Rose's term), and inscribed new meanings on the land of the ancient continent, with total disregard for the values ascribed to it by the original inhabitants. In the words of Gary Clarke:

> The earth – sky – water – tree - spirit – human complex became fragmented, the perspective and meanings of the ocular centric agriculturalist inscribed on the land, effacing a vast and intricate web of cultural and spiritual meanings. Like the

> "outside view" of the picturesque painter, the maps of the cartographer which replaced indigenous meanings with "tracks and fences" are a form of ocular centrism with potent political, social and environmental consequences. (156)

Clarke's words rightly sum up the effects of the new ways of perceiving and conceptualizing that the settlers imposed on the Australian land, and how they practically obliterated age-old networks of relationships between specific territories, humans, plants and animals.

The region that now constitutes Western Australia, a state carved out by the colonial project in nineteenth century Australia, was mapped differently by the various Aboriginal peoples who originally inhabited it.[iv] Aboriginals see the creation of a country called Australia itself as a colonial construct and part of the colonial scheme. In an interview, the writer Mudrooroo says: "The British came here and they established something called Australia which is an artificial construct and they have by force imposed everything on us" (Mudrooroo 216).

Aboriginal mapping practices and the division of the Australian continent into localities, derive from the Dreaming. Deborah Bird Rose shows how Dreaming determined

> … the boundaries which transform the original undifferentiated mother earth into specific localities, defined by Dreaming presence, language, cultural practices, plant communities, ceremonies, and by the fact that there are people who belong there and take care. Dreaming travels are celebrated in song, dance, story, and ritual. Tracks and songs are the basis to Aboriginal maps and are often called 'boundaries.' To say that there are boundaries is to say that there are differences; the universe is not uniform. Unlike European maps on which boundaries are lines that divide, tracks connect points on the landscape, showing relationships between points. These are the 'boundaries' that unite. … One type of boundary is the demarcation of ecological zones. (Rose, *Dingo Makes us Human* 52–53)

Rose shows here how the traditional Aboriginal mapping scheme took cognizance of ecological, linguistic and cultural differences. By giving primacy to ecological factors in demarcating the land into zones and by viewing a zone as the integration of ecological, linguistic and cultural difference, this mapping scheme shows a bioregional awareness of the land, unlike the colonial map which was imposed on the Australian continent to signify political control and colonial imperatives.

While in the pre-colonial period, tribal boundaries were strictly observed with clear rules for inter- tribal relations, during the upheavals following colonial intervention, there was a lot of displacement from traditional lands and mixing between tribes. Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who have done extensive research on Aboriginal communities in Western Australia, demonstrate how in some areas, new portmanteau terms have emerged to include different tribes – for example, Nyungar to refer to all persons of Aboriginal descent who belong to the south-west of the state, or 'Jamidji' (Yamadji) for people of mixed origin who may or may not be of Western Desert background or Wonggai as a very general label for people of the southern section of the Western Desert. Some of the major dialects spoken in the region, as identified by Ronald and Catherine Berndt include Ngadi, Gugadja, Mandildjara, Gadudjara, Bidjandjadjara, and Bindubi, with

some dialectical language units spread across state boundaries (*Aborigines of the West* 7). Tribal and linguistic boundaries were not respected by the new orthogonal mapping scheme, and in the new colonial map, ancient tribal boundaries were totally obliterated.

The effects of forced colonial takeover were so devastating and traumatic that Deborah Bird Rose refers to the Aboriginal communities that were not totally wiped out, as the 'survivors of the great Australian holocaust known as colonization' (Rose *Dingo makes us Human* 2). As in the rest of Australia, in Western Australia also the traditional patterns of Aboriginal life were rudely shattered and its rhythms disrupted and damaged by colonial intervention. On the basis of anthropological investigations held in different parts of Western Australia since the 1930s, Ronald and Catherine Berndt point out the ways in which European invasion altered the traditional cultural patterns of Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. The establishment of settlements which grew into townships, pastoral properties and missions at strategic centres had a great impact on Aboriginal life. Mining, with its pattern of exploitation, had far-reaching ramifications among those Aborigines whose territories attracted miners. The impact of pearling fleets in the coastal towns of the North-West was devastating and on the pastoral stations, Aborigines were soon relegated to a subservient position. Movement away from their home territories brought people into close contact with other Aboriginal tribes whose languages and cultural patterns of belief and behaviour were different. Wyndham, Drysdale River, Kalumburu, Kununura, Mowanjum, Sunday Island, Beagle Bay, Lombadina, La Grange, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek were important pastoral stations of Western Australia where Aboriginal communities generally gathered after they were dispersed from their traditional lands (*Aborigines of the West* 4-7).

From this account given by the Berndts, it is clear that the map of the Western Australian region underwent major transformations as a result of the colonial encounter, by obliterating former boundaries, and creating new centres of social congregation and economic activity. In the new colonial economic scheme the Aboriginals were pushed to marginal positions, while the resources of territories that had earlier belonged to them were ruthlessly plundered. A new exploitative pattern replaced the earlier traditions of "caring for country." Aboriginals were displaced from their home territories, which led to loss of language and often disappearance of some languages and entire tribes. Thus began the story of the dispossession and marginalization of Aboriginals in Western Australia. The Lost Lands Report prepared by the Department of Indigenous Affairs sums up what happened in post-1829 Western Australia:

> The Crown's conception of a rightful relationship to land was in many ways incompatible with that of Aboriginal people, and before long the occupation of land by colonists was accompanied by violent conflict between blacks and whites. By the 1850s, disease, violence and exclusion from traditionally occupied lands had decimated the Aboriginal population in the south-west. In the north-west, the establishment of pearling, and the pastoral industry from the 1860s, was also accompanied by violent conflict and by the use of Aboriginal men as labourers and Aboriginal women as both labourers and prostitutes. (10)

This Report emphasizes the incompatibility of the two conceptions of ownership and occupation, and also how the same colonial legal system had a double edged effect – one for the white settlers, another for the Aboriginal peoples.

Ronald and Catherine Berndt emphasise the point that displacement and eviction from traditional lands did not sever the bonds of the Aboriginal communities with the land; on the contrary, the bonds seemed to be valued even more. They point out that many Aboriginals still occupied their traditional home territories, whether or not those territories were subsumed under pastoral leases or categorized as reserves. Many moved into various centres where there was socio-cultural inter-mixing with other groups. Even those who went to the settlements did not relinquish their emotional and hereditary ties with or claims to their home lands. (*Aborigines of the West* 5). The writer Ken Colbung says:

> My own land …was that of the Nyungars. In spite of our divorcement from it, and the paucity of our traditional Aboriginal heritage, our attachment to it has not decreased. In fact, because we have been deprived of it, that attachment has increased. While the Western Australian Land Act can provide for grants or leases of land for Aboriginal usage, other bills can invalidate this by allowing mining to take place on such land, with little thought that these activities can destroy areas we still hold sacred. (100)

The mindless takeover of the sacred sites of the Aboriginals has in fact been, for the Aboriginal peoples, one of the most painful aspects of the new colonial scheme of things. Sacred sites had been central to Aboriginal mapping – many of the contemporary land rights struggles have centred on regaining control over sacred sites. Modern Aboriginal writing has been preoccupied with the excruciatingly painful memories of such experiences and with Aboriginal resistance to such exploitation. The Western Australian writer Jack Davis comments on the impact of colonialism on the life of Aboriginals in the state:

> With the coming of the white man, the fabric which made up the delicate pattern of Aboriginal existence was soon destroyed. Dispersed and dispossessed, tribes dwindled and many of our people vanished from the face of a land which was no longer theirs. Driven by the natural human instinct to survive, groups merged and became part of the group which was largest in number. Where the white man had turned the soil whole tribes were completely obliterated and the dialects of various groups became as one. An example of this is the fourteen tribes which inhabited the south-west of Western Australia. Only one language now remains, a composite of the fourteen languages, and that is the Nyoongah tongue. ("Aboriginal Writing: a Personal View" 11)

Annihilation of tribes, displacement from traditional lands and the death of many tribal dialects were traumatic experiences that most Aboriginal peoples had to face in the wake of the colonial encounter.

Re-claiming the "Nourishing Terrains": the Way Forward

The loss of connectedness with traditional homelands and sacred sites is seen to be a major reason for the disoriented condition of many Aboriginal communities, as well as individuals within those communities, while it is clear that the loss of the connections with traditional ecological wisdom has totally deranged the natural life of the region and its delicate balances. Loss of traditional homelands has deprived Aboriginals of access to natural resources, while in the modern, globalised economy, they occupy marginal positions.

All Australian communities have to accept the fact that a re-connectedness with sacred sites, animals and plants – a renewal of the rich mythi-

cal associations with 'nourishing terrains,' as pointed out by Makarand Paranjape - is essential for the wellbeing of the Aboriginal peoples:

> … wellness is also restorable if we find a way of recuperating spiritual knowledge and practices ... How is it possible to restore or rejuvenate some of these practices in the present day? … Tacey has argued that the recovery of the sacred is imperative, both for aboriginal and white Australia: … In such a regeneration, landscape can make a crucial impact on the psyche (pp. 6-7) … According to him, resacralising is a social and political necessity (pp10-11): what is needed is nothing less than a 'New Dreaming' (p148-176). (Paranjape 16-17)

Such a 'resacralising' would profoundly impact upon the wellbeing of the Australian land as well as its people, both Aboriginal and white. Restoration of those bonds with land and country, severed by the colonial encounter, through restoration of rights over traditional homelands, is possibly the greatest priority for the few surviving Aboriginal communities in this ancient continent.

Notes

[i] According to Graham Huggan, the strategies brought into play by the map in order to further the ideological programmes of the cultures that produced them, include appropriation, enclosure and exclusion (xv). "Many of these strategies are obvious, but some are subliminal, reflecting the subtlety with which maps operate as forms of social knowledge or as agents of political expediency" (9). A good example of the operation of such strategies is given by the American ecocritic Lawrence Buell. The orthogonally sectioned mapping introduced in the American republic, says Buell was part of "a strategy for consolidating control over "unsettled" regions" (*Environmental Imagination* 269-270). The mapping scheme here represents, as Buell explains, Enlightenment rationalism and is an expression of all the values that came to be associated with the American nation; most importantly, it is a gesture towards controlling and regularizing the unsettled parts of the country. It becomes therefore a loaded signifier of the different ideologies and philosophical positions that provided the driving force for the establishment of the American republic. Similar strategies are seen to operate in colonial mapping schemes introduced in Australia.

[ii] Just as Lawrence's omission of the Aboriginal communities is enigmatic, so is Skinner's silence about their presence in the state. "Lawrence," observes Keith Sagar in this connection, "loved the dream-like, pristine bush, but couldn't stand the people (it seems Lawrence never saw, or showed any interest in the Aborigines" (*Life of D. H. Lawrence* 134). Sally Morgan's classic *My Place* specifically mentions Skinner's sympathetic attitude towards Aborigines and how she had been helpful to Morgan's own mother during difficult times: "Molly Skinner the author owned a house just behind the hotel and she said Mum could pay rent and stay with her if she wanted to. Molly was very sympathetic to Aboriginal people and treated them kindly. Mum moved in with her"(Morgan 343).

[iii] Ryan observes: "That the explorers and their financial supporters were interested in the extension of pastoral holdings through explored districts is well known .... the representations of land while still produced in the 'cause' of geography and natural history operate for the direct pecuniary interests of the expanding pastoralists and are of course prejudicial to the indigenous inhabitants who are entirely omit-

ted from the maps. As a result of this omission, the maps efface the Aboriginal cultures contacted by explorers and about which some knowledge is possessed, at the same time as they carefully include locations of white settlement. ….Exploration ethnography is rarely patient enough or sufficiently linguistically skilled to inquire about tribal boundaries – if, indeed, the explorers realize there is such a thing." (Ryan 124).

[iv] *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* (Eds.Sylvia Kleinert et al.) presents in its inside cover, a map of "Aboriginal Australia" with the names and regions as used by D. R. Horton in his book *The Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia* (1994). This map, according to the authors, attempts to "represent all the language or tribal or nation groups of the indigenous people of Australia."

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Hangwoman: An Orchestration of Themes - Locating Modernity in the Present

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Abstract

The present paper aims to explore and examine the heterogenous subjects and interwoven narratives, a significant trait started from the modern age, of the novel *Hangwoman*. It is a story of a woman's making of a 'Hangwoman.' The long battle women have fought to secure breathing space in a male-centred world. It resulted in women's successful ventures in man's domain smashing the shackles of patriarchy and male chauvinism. But still, a woman executioner is an unthinkable vision. The Hangwoman, Chetna traverses from a docile, pliant girl to a determined and unyielding lady. The circumstances lead her to become the first hangwoman of the country. She challenges masculine superiority and breaks the myth of female inferiority. Through engrossing and absorbing narrative the novel weaves together multiple subjects like various shades of love, violence against women – molestation, rape and murder; psychopathic killer, prostitution, the psychology of the executioners and the convicts, the wretchedness of people due to poverty; the trauma of handicapped, captivating history of Kolkata, hyperreality of social media. The axis of all these subjects is Chetna Gridha Mullick and her ordeals.

Keywords: *Traumatized and Distressed Psyche, Heterogenous Subjects, Interwoven Narratives, Hyper Reality of Social Media, Male Chauvinism, and Dispensing Justice.*

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Never again shall a single story be told as though it were the only one. – John Berger's G.

A classical epic-length novel, *Hang woman: Everyone Loves a Good Hanging* is a story of stories. Berger's axiomatic dictum asserts a poetics of the porous text that this novel seems to practice. In absorbing and engrossing narrative, the novel weaves together multiple subjects – love, violence against women – molestation, rape and murder; psychopathic killer, prostitution, the psychology of the executioners and the convicts, wretchedness of people due to poverty; the trauma of handicapped, captivating history of Kolkata, hyper reality of social media. The axis of all these subjects is Chetna Grddha Mullick and her ordeals in becoming the first hangwoman of free India – a "symbol of power and self-respect of Indian womanhood" (205). Diversified themes of the novel are crisscrossed with myth, imagination, realism and grim and gloomy tone. The framework of this captivating novel is imbued with bleakness, despair and death. The heterogenous subjects and character delineation has strong note of modernity: "Modernity in the West in the first half of the 20th century meant new formats for new thoughts—innovative ways of writing and thinking, new fields of inquiry, the infusion of women into historically male-dominated workforces, the emergence of new art forms" (britannica.com). The thinkers who supported modernity included Sir Francis Bacon who urged the inductive method and experimentation based on observation as against traditionalistic scholastic deduction, Descartes who proposed a method of inquiry based on rationality rather than theological authority, and empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume who insisted that our knowledge be derived from our actual sense-experience of the world (Cuddon, A Dictionary 442). The novelist presents the quotidian of the hangmen with modernity.

Hangwoman is written originally in Malayalam as *Aarachaar* by K.R. Meera and translated by J. Devika into English. Devika skilfully preserves the tone, temper and ethos in the translation. It received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award and Odakkuzhal Award in 2013, Vayalar Award in 2014, Sahitya Akademi Award in 2015, Muttathu Varkey Award in 2018. The first-person narrative gives the novel a significant depth and subtlety and a peep into the traumatized and distressed psyche of the heroine. Because of the immediacy and intimacy provided by first-person narrative, Chetna's fear, dilemma, moral conflict and her traversing from a docile, pliant girl to a determined and unyielding lady passing through many ordeals in becoming a hangwoman becomes more perceptible to us.

Set in Chitpur, Kolkata, the plot traces the lives of the Grddha Mullicks, a family of officially appointed hangmen, with a long lineage, beginning in the fourth century to the present day. They love to regale others with sensational stories connected with various methods and intricacies of hanging, life and plight of executioner and victims. These tales are passed to them from generation to generation. In Independent India, the death sentence is a rarity. With the decline in the number of cases, the Mullicks have now fallen on bad times and live in utter poverty. The Mullicks support themselves by selling the tea to the bereaved who come to cremate the body of their dear one to the crematorium at Nimtala Ghat by the Ganga. But Chetna's grandmother Bhuvaneswari Devi continues to hold on to perceptions of bygone glory (mirrored in a solitary gold coin leftover from a purse gifted by a raja of Gwalior).

The protagonist of the novel Chetna was an intelligent student, scoring distinction in her plus two. Due to financial constraints, she has to drop her study after plus two. Her father, a hangman,

Phanibhushan eighty-eight years old is a self-professed veteran of 451 hangings. Other members of her family are – her submissive mother bullied by her aggressive and womanizer husband and domineering mother-in-law; her crippled brother Ramu trapped in a living death (whose limbs were chopped in revenge by the father of the criminal who was hanged by Phanibhushan); the grandmother Thakuma one hundred and four years old, proud of her family "as old as this land of Bharat" (209), always eager to narrate enchanting stories of the lives of hangman since centuries and subjugated, tormented, seductive, revengeful women; uncle Kaku sixty-five years old, a coward, a failure, a weak and a sick man and aunt Kakima Kaku's wife who prostitutes herself to collect money for her husband's treatment and killed by Phaani for defaming the name of family; the two young daughters of Kaku, Rari and Champa five and ten years old respectively. The responsibility of this family falls on Chetna after Ramu, Kaku and Kaki's death and Phaani's imprisonment. She has to bear the responsibilities of the four females of her family. The tragedy and trauma failed to crush the strength and spirit of Chetna. She boldly faces the world humming Tagore's song "Jodi tor daak shune kevo ona ashe to be ekla chalo re" (432), 'If no one responds to your call, then go your own way alone.'

Chetna begins the career of a hangwoman as an assistant to her father, the main hangman. Phani's imprisonment forced her to carry the family profession alone. Thus she becomes the first woman executioner in Independent India. Chetna denies Phani's stern commandments not to undertake the execution of Jatindranath Banarjee alone, with the hope of getting released due to the need for a hangman. She bravely hangs the perpetrator of a heinous crime and the male chauvinism. She beaks the shackles of patriarchy and the myth of the weaker sex. Chetna executes Jatindranath Banerjee who was penalized for brutally raping and killing a thirteen-year-old girl, Mridula Chatterjee. Jatindranath's moral breaks with the rejection of the mercy petition and the announcement of his execution. Chetna gave him peaceful death by fulfilling his last wishes. She did not hesitate in performing professionally her job as an executioner. But the motherly instinct dominated Chetna's persona in fulfilling the last wishes of the convict. She allows Jatindrnath to embrace her tender girlish body to fulfil his sexual instinct. She becomes a perfect executioner by hanging this person only within twenty seconds. She challenges masculine superiority and breaks the myth of female inferiority.

The novel comprehensively narrates the subtlety and nuance of hanging and the entanglement of emotions, compulsions and the bitter reality of the profession of execution. An expert hangman can give smooth death to convict by his well-created perfect noose and exact time of its tightening, in which the Mullicks are experts. Chetna claims: "Even the infants born in our family could tie a perfect noose. It is the very first thing we Grddha Mullicks learn to do with our hands" (2). About herself, she says, "Before I was five, I could fashion a noose on my own (3). Chetna very often creates a "small but perfect" nooses at the ends of her frayed old dupatta.

The first realization of the power of her hand and the noose she can create came to Chetna when she taught her seducer, Maruti Prasad, a tough lesson. She got terrified and shocked when Maruti grabbed her breasts. Initially, she was unable to understand "when two hands slid under my armpits and spread themselves on my breasts" (9). She gathers all courage and puts the noose of her Duptta round his neck. He gasped for breath. He was about to die but released by her because she wanted to teach him a lesson not to kill him:

> Very slowly, I took the dupatta off my chest. He gawked greedily at my breasts. I tied a noose in the bat of an eyelid and, smiling at him, put it around his neck like a marriage garland. Before he could pull me closer, I had tightened the noose, passing the other end of the dupaata through the window bars and pulling it tight. His mouth gaped open. His eyes popped. His tongue protruded and paan juice flowed from it like blood. (9)

The novel traces the traumatic experiences of a hangman. He often suffers from guilt conscience for taking a life in the name of justice. Supporting the cause of a hangman, Chetna says: "The hangman's job can't be a mechanical, bureaucratic government assignment, I felt. No female-born human can pull this lever without waging a war against herself and winning it" (73). Carl Sandburg beautifully captures the psyche of a hangman in his poem "The Hangman at Home":

> What does the hangman think about
>
> When he goes home at night from work?
>
> When he sits down with his wife and
>
> Children for a cup of coffee.

Thakuma is very proud of the rich legacy that her family carries for centuries. She thinks that it is Grddha Mullicks' karma to kill and they do it 'for the sake of justice.' The proud Phani comments: "Our Lineage is as old as this land of Bharat...this courage, this strength, this sense of justice, all of it is in our blood..." (46). The death penalty is a barbaric practice. It is a debatable question whether a hangman does right or wrong by taking a life. Chetna argues in favour of hangman saying it is a job full of dignity and responsibility and a hangman is not a murderer rather a dispenser of justice: "The hangman does not murder, he only carries out justice. Without justice there would no king, no government, why... nothing at all on this earth" (209). In the Hangwoman's Diary, the reality show Chetna supports the idea that Hangman is to help the government in dispensing justice: "The hangman is not a hired killer. He is a responsible officer of the government. ... He takes away a person's life for the sake of the nation. He delivers justice...' (42). The heart wrenching experience that haunts the hangman for a life time is, when he covers the face of the convict. The eyes of the executioner and the convict meet for the last time, as he steps in to cover the latters face:

> For a hangman, the most difficult moment is that in which he steps up to cover the face of the condemned man. In that crucial moment, their eyes meet. The last memory that the condemned man gathers for the next world is of the hangman's face-an an expression of guilt, impenetrable boredom, or one that begs forgiveness. Sometimes the condemned man's tears spread on the black cloth. It thickens the texture of the black. (134)

The novel also throws light on the various style and ways of execution that grew with the passage of time and the logic behind this change. It is Mulliks who have devised the method of tying the hands of a convict at the back before execution. The loose hands were in practice. The dancing of dangling hands during execution makes the scene of hanging very pathetic. Mulliks changed it to make hanging a peaceful spectacle. But some eccentric hangman like Kala Graddha Mullick who wanted to make the execution an interesting and thrilling scene, they left the hands untied: "the hanged man's death dance would be truly entertainment only if his arms and legs were free" (210).

Millions of Indians even after so many years of Independence live in extreme poverty and suf-

fer from severe and multidimensional deprivation. The novel brings into light the wretched life of the poor caused by utter poverty, failure of crops due to drought, confiscation of land by the manipulative rich, unpaid debt, death by starvation and strange disease, murder. The poor farmer Jitendra Ghosh and his son Ramesh Ghosh become the prey of nature made and man-made calamities. Ghosh's crops fail due to harsh summer. The usurer grabbed his land on the pretext of false accounts and unpaid debt. His protest against this mishandling was answered with threats and beating. Ramesh in a fit of anger killed six members of the family, including an infant. He was hanged for the heinous crime. Justice was dispensed on the basis of evidence and not on what had lead to the heinous murder.

In India, a large section of society suffers from wretchedness, starvation, disease and strange death. From time-to-time the writers and the thinkers have raised awareness towards pathetic conditions of the poor due to poverty. In his *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul comments about the sordid conditions of the poor: "India is the poorest country in the world… I have seen Indian villages: the narrow, broken lanes with green slime in the gutters, the choke back-to-back mud houses, the jumble of filth and food and animals and people, the baby in the dust... I had seen starved children defecating at the roadside…I had seen the physique of the people of Andhra, which had suggested the possibility of an evolution downwards, wasted body to wasted body… (44-45). Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his *An Autobiography* about the wretchedness of the poor "naked, starving crushed and utterly miserable." He felt sorry "at the degradation and overwhelming poverty of India" (52).

The novel *Hangwoman* narrates the pathetic condition of the poor: "Starvation deaths abound in Amlasole. There, children die in pain; worms are eating their bodies and creatures crawling in and out" (147). The readers are filled with horror knowing about the strange disease that took the life of the poor children. Ratan, son of a poor farmer, suffered from a strange disease. His family came to Kolkatta from Midnapore after the failure of crops. The moth began to fly out of Ratan's penis, termites had begun to come out of his eyes and ants from his nose: "His skin was like fields bereft of moisture at the height of summer. His eyes overflowed with yellow termites, his ears with flies...white moth came out of his penis…" (146).

The politicians and the leaders do the lip service by talking highly about the issues of poverty, illiteracy, disease and how to alleviate the conditions of the poor. But nothing has been done seriously for the poor. The poor can get relief through utter misery and wretchedness by Death. This apathy of the leaders towards the poor enrages Jonathan Swift. Commenting on England's legal and economic exploitation of Ireland, in *A Modest Proposal*, he bitterly suggests that by butchering the children of the Irish poor and selling them as food to wealthy English landlords, the society will be relieved from the burden of the poor. Like Swift, Chetna in savage and offensive tone suggests in "Hangwoman's Diary," a Reality Show: "In a country where crores of people suffer in dire poverty... it is better to kill the poor through the death penalty than kill them slowly by abandoning them to starvation..." (148). Shocked by her cruel comment, Sanjeev questions her apathy towards the conditions of poor. Chetna responds

> Because I grew up in the midst of poverty. The people we see on strand Road by Nimtala Ghat are very poor. They have no one. They die on the roadside; their bodies are torn apart by street dogs... I believe they would be better off dying

> quickly and painlessly, in two minutes on the gallows, it is much better than being killed slowly in hunger and want. (148)

The son of a poor and sick man, Sanjeev, a Journalist shares his childhood traumatic experience. The hunger and temptation made him eat Biryani in a hotel but failed to pay the bill due to poverty. The angry manager of the hotel slapped him hard and hit him on the head for not paying the bill of forty rupees. The other customers enjoyed this spectacle and felt: "I ought to be severely punished if I were not to grow up into a seasoned thief." (149) But the punishment didn't end here, he was forced to work:

> They shoved me into kitchen pulled off my shirt and pants, and made me wash the dirty dishes...'I washed the dishes from eleven thirty in the morning. My legs ached. So did my back. My palms were wrinkled from being soaked in water and the skin on my fingertips began to break. All those were briyani dishes. Full of leftovers – bones people had sucked, half eaten eggs, long grains of rice mixed in crud and pickle and papad. (149)

The novel brings into light issues related to women – violence against women and young girls, their suppression and subjugation, the rape and brutal murder, their vulnerability and victimization, sexual abuses, prostitution and battering of wife. The women have to suffer various kinds of oppression in patriarchal society. Indu Prakash Singh writes:

> Whether it is child marriage, rape, dowry death, bride burning, child abuse, wife battering sexual assault or domestic violence, each form of oppression pins down her sordid tale from womb to her tomb that map and draw the contours of her decadent, capitalist, casteist, criminal patriarchal society. (*Indian Women* 24-25)

The novel satirically hints at the hypocrisy of men who wanted to have free sex with other women but expects utter fidelity from wives, through Phani's promiscuity. Phani shares with Sanjeev his liaison with four women. He has lost interest in his wife, who grew old after delivering and nurturing many children. The novelist also talks about the plight of sex workers who live in Sonagachi, Kolkata's the largest red-light area. Prostitution is the most extreme and crystallized form of all sexual exploitation, which in turn is the foundation of women's subordination and the discrimination against them. Prostitution is not merely a discrete social phenomenon where women sell sex for money but is instead paradigmatic of violence against women and conditions all violence against women along a continuum (Balos and Fellows 1999, 1236). Chetna describes the sex workers waiting for customers at Sonagachi:

> On both sides of the lanes too narrow for even a single vehicle to ply, there milled around women, fat and thin, fair and dark and wheatish, all made up with layers of rose powder and heavy kohl, clad in a tight blouse that revealed their breasts and midriff, with or without a bindi on their foreheads. They stood there waiting, hands-on-hips, chest wide open. (224)

She throws light further on their predicament:

> "...I walked past women with stony faces whom no one had yet bought. They waited with paint and sweat running down their face and neck, legs tiring, spirits flagging, and perhaps feeling the pangs of hunger (226).

Women have been suppressed, exploited and became prey of men's lust since centuries. The readers are shocked witnessing the rape, brutal

killing and chopping of little girl Amolika's corpse and marks of fifteen wounds on her little body: "Six-year-old Amolika's eyes had been gouged out. Her limbs had been hacked off. Her neck had been pierced with an iron rod… (276). The girl knows the murderer because he was a neighbour, an eighteen-year-old. "He had promised to teach her a song... but before she could sing along, he clamped his hand over her mouth and dragged her into the bushes" (276).

The author concurrently handles issues that afflict contemporary Indian television and print media, through the character of Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, a news reporter for CNC, who covers the story about Jatindranath's execution. Sanjeev is interested in selling News. He says to the viewer Jatindrnath is lucky to be hanged by a woman "Chetna Grddha Mullick prepares to take the job of the hangman.... With this Jatindrananth Banerjee gains the good fortune of securing passage to the other world through a noose fashioned by bangle-clad wrists for the very first time in history" (68). Sanjeev wants to use Ramu's wretchedness as sensational News for his channel when he was hospitalized. He has no concern and sympathy either for ailing Ramu or for shattered Chetna. He orders Chetna to remove the sheet off from Ramu's body to get a sensational picture of his deformed body: "I shook my head in the negative. Better not see it. 'Look madam, what is worth seeing and what's not. If I tell you to pull off the sheet, you better do it! He was relentless. you pull me out of my bed before daybreak and now I have to listen to a lecture? It felt as if he had slapped me. He pulled the sheet off himself" (248).

Sanjeev on CNC studio on the programme, "Hangwoman's Diary" invites Kokila, the wife of Jatindrnath to bring a sensation to his News Addressing the public, he says "Here are two women before us. One of them symbolizes all feminine power and has embarked on an important task. But how amazing that the worst wound to be inflicted by the performance of this task must be done by another woman! When Koikla and Chetna come face to face, the question we must ask is: Should Jatindranath Banerjee be killed or spared? (123). Sanjeev invites Protima di on Hangwoman's Diary along with Chetna to discuss: "the ethics of the death penalty continue all over the world" and views of two femles: "Chetna Gradhha Mullick who has been deputed to hang him, Protima Ghosh, mother of Rameshchandra Ghosh, the last convict who was hanged at the gallows..." (126)

Sanjeev abuses Chetna to subdue her spirit and gain and maintain power and control over her. He grabs all the opportunity to assault her physically by threatening her to rape. Sexual harassment controls women— it censors their mobility and freedom and affects their security and personhood. Rape is an utter selfish, cruel and brutal act of the male over the female. It is an act of dominance shown by the powerful male over the powerless female. In her path breaking book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* Susan Brownmiller writes, "rape is a crime not of lust, but violence and power. It can also be defined as Robbing of Honour" (47). The most blatant insults come from Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, the journalist who makes an agreement with her father which forces her to give a series of interviews regarding the execution. Right in their first meeting he grabs her and tell her with audacity that he wants to 'fuck her hard.' The sad and ironic predicament that she has to put up with is the fact that despite Mr. Mitra showing scant respect and affection for her, she gets into a complex relationship wherein love and lust get entangled with violence. All throughout the negotiations that she has regarding the execution and the interviews she gives for his channel, she is never given a breathing space to voice her opinion. On

top of all these, she is made a piece of entertainment in his show, being paid to perform as he commands. The hyper reality of digital world where images do not signify anything in particular and have just the surface reality has been brought out here. The grandeur of the text depends upon the deeper consciousness and accomplishment working behind the issues raised by the novelist.

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Reconfiguring Public Memory: A Critique of T.V. Eachara Varier's *Memories of a Father*

Emily Paul* and Dr. Rajesh V. Nair**

Abstract

The paper attempts to read T. V. Eachara Varier's memoir *Memories of a Father* (2004) to analyse how a memoir turns out to be a discourse of counter-memory that destabilizes and reconstructs the public/collective memory. Based on the famous (or rather infamous) Rajan case, Varier's memoir documents a father's heart-wrenching memories about his son. It narrates his ultimately unsuccessful efforts to find his son P. Rajan who was arrested by the police for his alleged involvement in the Naxalite movement and later succumbed to custodial torture. The text acts as a form of resistance against the state's oppression, particularly during the notorious emergency. The narrative poignantly chronicles the grave human rights violations committed by the state and its agencies. However, the memoir becomes a parallel or alternative history that exposes the other side of reality. Here, it is attempted to read Eachara Varier's memoir as a counter-text which deconstructs the official, public memory and the paper also investigates the various strategies adopted by the memoirist to relive the past and achieve his purpose.

Keywords: *Memoir, Memory, Resistance, Naxalism, and Counter-Memory.*

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Counter-narratives are stories that stand opposed to dominant and powerful master narratives. Counter-narratives often reveal the view from a marginalised position. They repair the damage caused to their identity and also allow the marginalised people to refuse the identity imposed on them. Naxal life writings derive its significance as they counter some of the master narratives regarding the movement. Naxalites are being considered as a terrorist group who attempts to dethrone the elected government through armed attacks. Since Naxal life writings present an alternative version to this official narrative, it falls under the category of counter-narratives.

Memory is a means by which people inscribe, retrieve, and hold on to their past. Memoir, a term derived from the French word denoting memory, is primarily based on memory. As a form of life writing, memoir allows individuals to pen down their lived experiences, tell the hitherto untold stories of their lives and negotiate with their past. In memoir writing, personal or private memory gets into a public domain, often challenging the 'sanctity' of widely accepted, popular narratives.

Closely related to and often confused with autobiography, a memoir usually differs chiefly in the degree of emphasis placed on specific events or occasions. In contrast, writers of autobiographies are concerned primarily with themselves as subject matter. Writers of memoirs are usually persons who have played roles in or have been close observers of historical events and whose primary purpose is to describe or interpret events. A memoir very often stems from the recollections and reminiscences of the author with whom the subject had affinity and familiarity (Couser 19). In the hands of a memoirist, a memoir becomes a powerful political tool and a form of resistance used to defy and reconstruct public memory. T.V. Eachara Varier's memoir *Memories of a Father* (2004) is a remarkable record of a hapless father's quest to find his missing son and also an attempt to immortalize his dead son's memory through his writing.

Naxalism in Kerala

The Naxalite movement in Kerala was inspired by the events that happened in the Naxalbari village of West Bengal in 1967. Naxalism had its moment in Kerala during the 1960s, which was a critical decade in the history of the communist party, both globally and nationally.

The Sino- Soviet split of 1964 after the death of Stalin was one of the key reasons for the Indian communist split, which happened in the same year. The Chinese were against some of the policies of the USSR, which Mao Zedong thought were not left enough. Soviet's policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the west was revisionist, to Mao, who believed in class war and dreamt of dealing the west militarily.

In India, the communist party looked to the USSR for inspiration, much to the displeasure of those who wanted armed revolution for the "annihilation of class enemy." It led to the split and the formation of CPI(M). Even after the formation of the new party, the revolutionaries in Kerala were not happy. During the Naxalbari uprising, a United Front government led by E.M.S. Namboodiripadu was in power in Kerala. "There was discontent among the cadre against the Marxist leadership that was ready to forsake communist ideologies for power" (Ajitha 13).

It was E.M.S. Namboodiripadu's refusal to publish pamphlets and tracts from communist China that invited the fury of revolutionaries like Kunnikkal Narayanan. The Naxalbari uprising was like a ray of hope for people like Narayanan. The socio-political conditions that existed at that time in the northern districts of Kerala were con-

ducive for a revolutionary movement to find its roots. A major portion of the population in these areas has consisted of weavers and beedi workers. With their meager income, they had to live impoverished life. Thalassery - Pulpalli police station attacks of November 1968 were the first among many attacks organized by the Naxalites. Attacks failed, and the leaders were arrested. The first phase of the Naxalite movement in Kerala ends with the death of A. Varghese in a fake encounter. The second spurt came in the months before Emergency when a Young Venu rallied around various groups to form a party. Being an anti-state discourse, Naxalism underwent severe state oppression during the Emergency. It was a time when the Naxal movement was at its peak. Police acted with vengeance upon the Naxalites, and many of its members were arrested and detained in police custody. "Numerous people were put behind bars and tortured as they were suspected to be sympathizers of the movement" (Ajitha 241).

Rajan Case

P. Rajan was a final year engineering student of the erstwhile regional engineering college, Calicut. He was a brilliant student, a merit scholarship holder, a singer, a stage and radio actor. Branded as a Naxalite, Rajan was taken into police custody from the college hostel in the early hours of 1 March 1976. The arrest was based on Rajan's alleged involvement in the Kayanna police station attack. On 28 February 1976, a group of people attacked Kayanna Police station and took away a gun. The police and authorities assumed that this was a Maoist- Naxalite action. Police arrested the suspects, tortured them, and detained them in police custody. Rajan was taken into custody without any evidence for his involvement in the attack. Varier writes: "There was never even an attempt to find out if he (Rajan) was a real culprit or not. They just took him, tortured him, and killed him" (24). He adds further to prove his son's innocence: "He is not capable of doing things like that. When extremists attacked the police station at Kayanna (near Calicut) he was participating in the youth festival at Farooke college. He was the Arts Club secretary at the engineering college where he studied" (3).

Varier's memoir can be read as a counter- memorial narrative that undermines the popular narrative, surrounding Rajan case. It is a voice of dissidence that exposes the brutal state oppression and serious human rights violations executed under the cover of Emergency. The memoir is a scathing attack on Emergency and the authorities who played a significant part in materializing a 'state of exception,' as Georgio Agamben puts it, in India. "The state of exception is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather, in so far as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law's threshold or limit concept" (4).

The memoir describes the rigorous torture underwent by the inmates of Kakkayam camp, a camp set up by the police to inquire about the attack of the Kayanna police station. Rajan was taken to this camp and later succumbed to custodial torture. Varier narrates the barbarian mode of inquiry at Kakkayam camp:

> …but the mode of inquiry used at Kakkayam never involved any modern or scientific methods for detecting crimes. Torture was the only method the police knew, and they used it freely…. They were beaten and then tied to a wooden bench with their hands and legs down. A heavy wooden roller would be rolled over their thighs. Many could not stand the pain and fell unconscious. (30)

As a counter-narrative, the memoir brings to the limelight the real face of powerful politicians and bureaucrats who denied justice to Rajan. The most inhuman part of things was that in Rajan's case, his parents were denied their right to get information about their son. Without knowing the fact that his son had already been dead, this unfortunate father continued his search, meeting officers after officers, giving petitions to everyone from the President of India to the lowest police officer. The truth that Rajan was tortured and killed finally got revealed as a result of an endless legal battle fought by an old man at the fag end of his life. He observes: "…they packed Rajan's body into a sack and took it away in a jeep. They burned it in the midst of some forest with sugar, to ensure that not even the bones would be left behind, so it was said" (68). The memoir has been written for global readers who are concerned about human rights. As Basil Fernando puts it in his foreword: "The global human rights community must hear this story…It should be read carefully by anyone concerned about the real meaning of human rights" (viii).

Public Vs. Private Memory

Private memory refers to a person's or an individual's recollections whereas Public or collective memory is the shared pool of knowledge and information in the memories of members of a given community. It can be shared, passed on, and constructed by small and large groups. Public memory is a socio-political construct, a version of the past, defined and negotiated through changing socio-political power circumstances and agendas. Pierre Nora noted that "the representations of collective memory are those that have been selected by those in power. Public memory is both a tool and an object of power" (181). State as an engineer of public memory constructs memory, and such memories are kept alive through certain practices like commemorations, erecting statues, memorials, etc. (Connerton 7). "Public memory is not neutral, but it has the tendency to be hegemonic and dominant obfuscating 'other' memories/ memorials which are radical and deviant. Counter memorial narratives are rare, but their presence in public places are usually erased" (Rajesh 892). *Memories of a Father* fits into the category of counter- memorial narratives.

The Emergency, came into effect on 25 June 1975, forms the background of Varier's memoir. Emergency was a dark episode in Indian history and had profound ramifications across the nation. The Emergency bestowed upon the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi the authority to rule by decree, allowing elections to be suspended and civil liberties to be curbed. Dissenters were imprisoned, and the press was censored. "There was censorship not only of the newspapers but also limits on freedom of expression among people, who were scared to meet and talk among themselves…" (Varier 37). The country witnessed severe human rights violations during the Emergency.

The Politics of Remembering

Memoirs immortalize the dead by exhuming memories of the dead from the grave of forgetfulness. Memoirist achieves this by remembering and recreating the past in his/her writings. The process of remembering is always selective with conscious and unconscious omissions. Unconscious omission is a result of poor memory or memory loss on the part of the narrator whereas conscious omission is a deliberate attempt to hide specific details that are in opposition with the agenda of the writer. Therefore, selection is an essential aspect in the documentation of memory, and it makes remembering a complex task. Here, memory is the key element used to revisit and relive the past.

The narrative of *Memories of a Father* progresses through the recollections of the narrator, Eachara

Varier. The memoir becomes a means to vent out his emotions, alleviate the pain of losing his only son, and overcome the trauma that he endured during his search. He writes:

> Only those who have gone through such misery understand the agony of parents who must drag themselves through life without getting information about a missing child. For me, it was like a pin being constantly inserted into my body, if I thought of my son while eating, I found it difficult to continue. When I slept, memories of him would surround me. My inner self was always writing, as if on a red–hot tin sheet. (56)

Here, writing serves a therapeutic purpose by curing the writer's traumatic self, haunted by the disturbing memories of his son.

Conclusion

Throughout the book, Varier vividly portrays the legal and social breakdown that led to the mass arrests and extrajudicial killings of the time, along with his personal tragedy. *Memories of a Father* is a record of a father's painful efforts to find his missing son. It is the story of a father's endless legal battle against the state and its machinery to get due justice. As Varier puts it: "I fought a lonely battle for my son. Though tired, I am still carrying on" (63). Varier's memoir serves many purposes; as a medium to explain his version of the story, defend himself against the allegations leveled against him by the leading newspapers of the time, tarnish his image, and to weaken him morally, as a form of resistance against the brutal state oppression and above all, the memoir is a counter-narrative that challenges the official narrative surrounding Rajan case. Varier asks a pertinent question to the society: "… I leave a question to the world: why are you making my innocent child stand in the rain even after his death?" (74). This question continues to haunt every single reader of this heart-rending narrative.

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