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From Caricature to Character: The Portrayal of Transpeople in Contemporary Malayalam Cinema

Bincy Nelson & Deepa L.C.

Introduction

Perspectives on gender and sexuality are greatly influenced by cinema, one of the most powerful mediums in contemporary culture. Movies have the power to solidify false preconceptions and prejudices regarding gender roles, leaving a powerful impression on spectators. Transgender characters in Indian films are often portrayed in an unfavourable light, either as objects of mockery or in dehumanising positions. Nonetheless, some films show the emotional complexity of transgender problems by handling them delicately. This article examines how Malayalam movies, despite their realistic depiction, often fail to depict the life of transgender people adequately. Though Malayalam cinema has made considerable progress with dramatic movies and the casting of transgender performers, it is still unable to completely convey the complex realities of transgender people.

The Portrayal of Transpeople in Contemporary Malayalam Cinema

Transgender characters in Indian films are often presented negatively, objectified, satirised, and cast in dehumanising positions like prostitutes or beggars. However, some films approach transgender matters delicately and make an effort to depict the emotional complexity of transgender life, which involves internal challenges like depression and loneliness as well as external concerns like social estrangement. A surge in popular media's exploration of queer themes in the 20th century gave birth to an increased number of films featuring transgender people and homosexuality.

Cinema's representation of transgender characters has significant implications. As Vito Russo notes in *The Celluloid Closet*, mainstream films about LGBTQ+ issues are often directed at the majority rather than the community itself. This portrayal shapes public opinion and understanding of transgender individuals (325). Unfortunately, as John Phillips observes, Western popular culture often demonizes deviations from normative gender and sexual standards.

The essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey offers a framework for comprehending how viewers respond to transgender characters. Mulvey’s interpretation, grounded in Freudian psychoanalysis, proposes that scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) and ego libido (identification) are the means by which viewers get pleasure (815). It might be difficult for viewers used to standard gender binary representations to relate to transgender characters. The fact that transgender bodies deviate from the established patterns of visual pleasure and identity exacerbates this challenge.

John Phillips, in *Transgender on Screen*, discusses how films with transgender characters often rely on deception and revelation to create narrative engagement. These plots either let audiences in on the deception or reveal it later, allowing for a “pleasure of discovery.” While this approach attempts to address the complexities of transgender representation, it can also reinforce problematic stereotypes.

Before the gay liberation movement, cross-dressing in films often reinforced heteronormative and essentialist views on gender. However, with the increased visibility of the gay rights movement, transgender characters began to gain more nuanced portrayals in the 1990s. Films like *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything*, *Julie Newmar*, *The Birdcage*, and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* challenged traditional notions of sex, gender, and sexuality, though they sometimes perpetuated heteronormative themes.

The way transgender characters are portrayed in Indian film, especially in Tamil cinema, is typically shallow and undeveloped. Rather than accurately portraying authentic transgender experiences, they are often reduced to small, humorous parts or represented via cross-dressing. Stereotypes and misunderstandings about transgender identities continue to exist because of this trivialisation of these identities.

The cinema has the capacity to significantly impact society’s perspectives. It is an effective medium for teaching and public education since it can blend visual and aural components. The representation of transgender characters in films has the power to either dispel negative stereotypes or foster understanding and empathy.

In the Malayalam film industry, known for its realistic portrayals, there have been some attempts to represent transgender individuals more sensitively. However, the industry still struggles to fully capture the complexities of transgender lives. Future analyses will need to

explore both stereotypical and nuanced representations to understand the impact of cinema on transgender perceptions and experiences.

Transgender characters are often cast as villains or reduced to comedic relief parts in films. Transgender persons are often used as comedic relief in Malayalam movies, making use of the comedy inherent in gender norms to entertain viewers. Comedy reality shows like “Comedy Stars,” gave trans people prominence but often used them for crude and cheap humour, helping the depiction of transgender persons as comedic relief gain hold in Kerala. Despite this, these shows also helped transgender activists in Kerala, like Sheethal Shyam and Surya Ishan, gain recognition.

While transgender people are not always portrayed positively or negatively in the media, there has been a movement in recent years towards more visibility and a variety of depictions. The portrayal of transgender individuals as the targets of jokes or main characters in horror films, however, continues to be a problem. This often frames transgender women as deceptive traps for straight men, reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

To make people laugh, cross-dressing characters are often portrayed in films and television series; these characters are usually males dressed as women. Popular programs such as “Comedy Stars” and “Bluff Masters” make use of this format to spread stereotypes about transgender persons as just people who cross dress and have no morality, existing only for laughs. Such characters also appear in films, with movies like *Rasathanthram*, *Suryan*, *Soothradharan*, and *Chanthupottu* showcasing cross-dressing characters for comedic effect.

An early example of this pattern can be seen in *Soothradharan* (2001), in which Salim Kumar’s transgender character reinforces negative perceptions about the hijra community while playing no major part in the story. The representation of Leela Krishnan as a guy who leads a hijra lifestyle for financial benefit unintentionally conveys the idea that hijras do so just for financial benefit. This inaccurate portrayal may cause viewers to believe that all transgender people have similar lives, which may promote harmful stereotypes.

Misconceptions regarding the transgender community are perpetuated by *Chanthupottu* (2005). Radhakrishnan, the main character, was reared as a female by his grandmother and exhibits feminine traits and cross-dressing, which causes confusion and derision from society. The movie *Chanthupottu* has had a tremendous influence on how the general public views transgender persons, despite some critics claiming that it is not a transgender film since it

finally shows Radha's desire to be a woman and his increasing adoption of male qualities. Despite not accurately portraying a transgender person, the figure Radha came to be used as a derogatory metaphor for transgender people. Radha undergoes a gender struggle as a result of his upbringing, which is made worse by social pressure to fit into stereotypical gender stereotypes. The way homosexuality is portrayed in the movie feeds negative prejudices about homosexuality and undermines the reality of same-sex desire. Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man*, which examines the social obstacles males experience while participating in traditionally feminine hobbies, has themes echoed by the effeminate dancer Radha. By highlighting the criticism males who transgress gender norms endure, these representations further marginalise transgender and effeminate people.

This pattern is maintained in films like *Suryan* (2007), in which Harisree Asokan plays an effeminate guy whose mannerisms are used for comedic effect. Scenes where he acts feminine, as when he bathes and applies turmeric powder, are only meant to make people laugh and perpetuate the idea that transgender people are just something to be laughed at.

Similar strategies are used in other films like *Rasathanthram*, *Vandanam*, and *Naranath Thampuran*, where cross-dressing is used for humorous effect. Mohanlal dons a woman's clothing in *Vandanam* (1989), while Jayaram plays the same in *Naranath Thampuran* (2001). These moments just serve to make viewers giggle and have no bearing on the storyline.

This pattern of using cross-dressing to elicit laughter is prevalent in Malayalam cinema. Movies like *Kilukkam Kilukilukkam*, *Pattabhishekam*, *Balettan*, *Thillana Thillana*, and *Ayal Kadhayezhuthukayanu* all feature cross-dressing characters, often played by well-known actors, to enhance the comedic impact. These scenes, rooted in gender stereotyping, capitalize on societal norms to generate humour, perpetuating the marginalization of transgender individuals.

Kasaba, *Rasathanthram*, and *Ammayane Sathyam* also feature cross-dressing characters. In *Rasathanthram*, Meera Jasmine's character, Kanmani, disguises herself as a man as part of the plot, similar to Annie's character in *Ammayane Sathyam*. These films use cross-dressing not only for comedy but as crucial plot elements.

While *Kireedam Illatha Rajakanmar* portrays Abi as an elderly Muslim woman, using the contrast between his acknowledged manhood and his feminine representation for humorous

effect, *Darling Darling* introduces a character named Prasitha who clothes and behaves like a man for comedic purposes.

Cross-dressing is a common plot device in films like *Kilukkam Kilukilukkam*, *Pattabhishekam*, *Balettan*, and *Ayal Kadhayezhuthukayanu*. In *Thillana Thillana*, the male lead assumes a female identity to get greater insight into his romantic interest. In *Kilukkam Kilukilukkam*, Jagathi Sreekumar, Innocent, and Kochin Hanifa portray cross-dressing characters, their visual appearances alone eliciting laughter.

Mayamohini is another significant film where Dileep plays a central role as a woman, and relies on his feminine appearance, gestures, and movements for comedic effect. This portrayal, while popular, does not contribute positively to the understanding of transgender identities.

The casting of well-known actors in cross-dressing roles amplifies the comedic impact, as audiences familiar with their masculine personas find humour in their feminine portrayals. This dynamic is evident in films like *Chanthupottu* and *Suryan*, where the juxtaposition of the actors' known masculinity with their feminine roles generates laughter.

Such films reinforce traditional gender roles, perpetuating stereotypes that men should not display feminine traits and vice versa. This societal attitude marginalizes transgender individuals, who deviate from these prescribed roles, making them targets for mockery. The negative portrayal of transgender characters in these films fosters a culture of gender stereotyping, where deviation from traditional gender norms is ridiculed.

These portrayals have a profound impact on public perception of transgender individuals. They reduce transgender characters to objects of ridicule, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and contributing to their marginalization. This treatment in popular media perpetuates the notion that transgender people are to be laughed at, further entrenching societal biases against them.

In the Malayalam film industry, the representation of transgender individuals started earlier but often failed to resonate with audiences due to perceptions of awkwardness and unrealism. Filmmakers have tried to bring transgender issues to the screen through dramatic representations, but these attempts were not always well-received by the masses. Dramatic films, which delve deeply into issues without relying on comedic relief or colourful performances, have attempted to portray the transgender experience more authentically. Notable examples

in this category are *Ardhanari* and *Aadum Raja Odum Rani*, which depict the darker aspects of transgender life.

Ardhanari, a Malayalam film directed by Dr. Santhosh, provides a vivid dramatic representation of transgender life. The film centres around Vinayan, played by Manoj K. Jayan, who faces numerous challenges as a transgender individual. From childhood, Vinayan exhibits signs of being transgender, such as wearing bangles and female attire. His parents initially dismiss these behaviours as jokes, but his elder brother and friends mock and harass him. Vinayan finds solace in his friend Balu, but their relationship suffers when Balu cannot accept Vinayan's identity. The villagers' reactions to Vinayan highlight the societal challenges faced by transgender individuals. Vinayan's father supports him, believing his effeminate behaviour will change with maturity—a common misconception about transgender characteristics. The turning point in Vinayan's life comes when his brother, a politician, arranges for a criminal to kill him due to his effeminate nature. Vinayan accidentally kills the criminal and flees the village, joining a Hijra community in Tamil Nadu. The film portrays the Hijra community's lifestyle, rituals, and challenges. Vinayan faces further difficulties, including an unsuccessful relationship and police discrimination. Eventually, he reunites with Balu, but their happiness is short-lived due to societal pressures. Vinayan's intense desire to be a woman is poignantly depicted, highlighting the emotional and psychological struggles of transgender individuals.

Odum Raja Aadum Rani recasts the normative male body, gender identity, and sexuality in a homosocial space. The central character, Thamburu, portrayed as an emotionally wounded individual, displays queerness throughout the film. The story begins with Venkiti, a door-to-door salesman, who meets Thamburu—a man with feminine features. Thamburu's femininity is evident in his behaviour and mannerisms, causing tension with Venkiti. Thamburu's relationship with Venkiti becomes strained due to his possessiveness. When Mala, a new character, enters their lives, Thamburu initially conflicts with her but eventually becomes friends. Thamburu's refusal to love a woman and his past marriage raises questions about his gender and sexual identity. The film explores themes of gender performance and societal expectations. The film addresses the idea of "curing" Thamburu's femininity by introducing Mala as a means to restore his masculinity. This concept is critiqued through the lens of Mary Douglas's theories on body and boundaries, which suggest that societal norms impose order by exaggerating differences between male and female. The film ultimately shows Thamburu joining a transgender

community, finding acceptance and happiness among people who understand and embrace his true self.

Both *Ardhanari* and *Odum Raja Aadum Rani* convey the message that transgender individuals can find happiness and acceptance within their community. These films depict the struggles and psychological trauma faced by transgender people, highlighting the negative attitudes and misconceptions prevalent in society. Common themes include the societal belief that transgender individuals can be “cured” and the challenges of homosexual relationships.

In *Ardhanari*, Vinayan’s father’s belief that his effeminate behaviour is curable reflects a widespread misconception. Similarly, in *Odum Raja Aadum Rani*, Venkiti attempts to “cure” Thamburu’s gender conflicts by introducing Mala, reinforcing the idea that gender variance is abnormal. These films critique societal ignorance about transgender conditions and emphasize the need for acceptance and understanding. These films highlight the importance of acceptance and understanding, showing that transgender individuals can find happiness when embraced by a supportive community. Through sensitive and empathetic storytelling, dramatic films can raise awareness and foster a deeper understanding of transgender issues in society.

Malayalam cinema has ventured into depicting the lives of transgender individuals, although this is fraught with challenges. Addressing socially marginalized groups realistically can be controversial and potentially lead to dramatic effects. Films like *Thira*, *Iratta Jeevitham*, and *Njan Marykkutty* attempt to portray transgender experiences with a degree of authenticity. However, many in the transgender community feel their true stories and experiences are rarely portrayed accurately. Instead, these portrayals often become dramatic or melodramatic, constrained by filmmakers’ need to make them palatable for audiences. Thus, these films represent ‘so-called’ realism rather than genuine realism.

Njan Marykkutty follows a transsexual man’s journey to realize his true gender identity in a society that stigmatizes gender transformation. The film aims to educate audiences on the issues faced by the transgender community and differentiate between transgender and transsexual identities. It highlights the emotional and physical trauma transgender individuals endure, both from society and governmental authorities. The story centres on Mathukutty, who transitions to Marykutty through surgery. Returning to her native place, Marykutty faces numerous challenges, including rejection by her family. Despite this, she finds support from a

parish priest, who helps her navigate this difficult phase. Determined to become a sub-inspector, Marykutty joins a coaching institute and works as a radio jockey for a church-run FM channel, earning local admiration. The film depicts her struggle to achieve her dreams and secure a respectable identity in society. However, Marykutty's circumstances are significantly better than those of many transgender individuals, particularly trans women, who often face sexual harassment and violence. Activist Sheethal Shyam, for instance, experienced severe harassment from childhood and struggled to explain her situation to the world. Unlike Marykutty, who is relatively protected and well-educated, many transgender people are forced to drop out of school and engage in sex work or begging for survival.

Marykutty's gender conflicts do not hinder her education or job prospects. She can afford gender reassignment surgery due to her reputable job. Her primary challenge is societal rejection of her cisgender male privileges, which angers her village. The film contrasts Marykutty's supportive environment with the harsh realities faced by many transgender individuals, whose families often do not support their education or transition. Marykutty's story, while inspirational, highlights a relatively privileged journey compared to the widespread struggles of the transgender community. Her success, supported by education, employment, and community support, contrasts with the experiences of many transgender individuals who lack these advantages.

Iratta Jeevitham, directed by Suresh Narayanan, uniquely portrays the life of a female-to-male trans man, Adruman, highlighting the invisibility and abuse faced by this group compared to male-to-female transgender individuals. The film is politically motivated, aiming to bring marginalized narratives to the forefront. The story depicts Amina, who leaves her village and returns years later as a man, addressing the dual marginalization of being a transgender person and belonging to an orthodox Muslim family. Unlike many transgender-themed films that end tragically, *Iratta Jeevitham* offers a hopeful conclusion, reflecting a shift in how transgender stories are told.

Although not primarily focused on transgender issues, *Thira* is a landmark in Malayalam cinema for its respectful portrayal of a transgender character. Basu, a transgender woman, plays a significant role as the protagonist's aide, breaking stereotypes often seen in Malayalam films. Portrayed by a real transgender actress, Savitha, Basu's character challenges societal misconceptions and underscores the importance of realistic transgender representation in film.

Directed by V.C. Abhilash, *Aalorukkam* explores the struggles of Pappu Pisharody, an Ottam thullal performer, in accepting his transgender son, Sajeevan, who transitions to Priyanka. The film delves into the emotional turmoil of parents confronting their children's gender identity. Pappu Pisharody's journey to find his son and his eventual realization that Sajeevan has become Priyanka is marked by resistance and silence. His struggle to accept Priyanka reflects broader societal challenges in embracing transgender individuals. The film also highlights Priyanka's contented life with her partner and child, contrasting with her father's initial rejection. Unlike many films that focus solely on societal rejection, *Aalorukkam* emphasizes the need for familial acceptance, portraying a realistic depiction of a transwoman's life and the impact of parental attitudes.

The representation of transgender individuals in Malayalam cinema is evolving, with films like *Njan Marykkutty*, *Iratta Jeevitham*, *Thira*, and *Aalorukkam* making significant strides in the right direction. These films offer varying degrees of realism, reflecting both the progress and the challenges in depicting transgender experiences authentically. Realistic representation is crucial for challenging stereotypes and fostering understanding. While significant progress has been made, there is a need for more nuanced and comprehensive portrayals that go beyond dramatic or melodramatic depictions. Only through such efforts can cinema truly reflect the diverse and complex lives of transgender individuals, promoting acceptance and equality in society.

Conclusion

Although the media is often seen as a mirror reflecting the society, it may sometimes misrepresent the truth. Even with its daring subjects and clever writing, Indian cinema usually steers clear of accurate portrayals of transgender people, who are still active members of society but are generally represented unfavourably. Filmmakers need to have a deeper understanding of the transgender community and the implications of how they are portrayed. In contrast to films like *Boys Don't Cry*, Malayalam cinema propagates negative preconceptions about transmen and mostly ignores them. While films like *Odum Raja Aadum Rani* and *Arthanari* give a fair representation, films like *Chanthupottu* and *Soothradharan* relegate transgender people to comedic relief. Transgender themes are only briefly touched upon in realistic films like *Njan Marykkutty* and *Aalorukam*. Overall, while some progress has been made, Malayalam cinema still has a long way to go in portraying transgender individuals

accurately and sensitively. Moving beyond stereotypes and embracing a nuanced approach can help change societal perceptions and promote greater acceptance.

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Food Offering - Puzhukku Nercha - : A Cultural Subtext of Ramapuram

Fed Mathew

The notions in connection with terms like folklore and folkloristics vary from author to author. To begin a paper one may have to present a working definition of folklore in the modern critical scenario. One of the common definitions almost acceptable to all is the one given by Alan Dundes of folk as:

The term 'folk' can refer to any group of people whatsoever, who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is - it could be a common occupation, language or religion: but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions, which it calls its own. In theory, a group consists of at least two persons but generally most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity. (*The Study of Folklore* 2)

This all inclusive definition of 'folk' provides with an important insight that 'folk' has a group identity and the group may be of any size 'as large as a nation or as small as a family'. This modern conception of 'folk' provides us with an important insight: folklore is not merely the 'lore' of the antiquarian belonging to a single, homogeneous group, it may include the items of the modern people too. In 1978, M. R. Dorson presents them as contemporary, keyed to the here and now, to the urban centers, to the issues and philosophies of the day. (*Folklore In the Modern World* 23)

When the definition is over, the classification of folklore may loom large as a complex reality where divergence rules the roost rather than convergence. Dr. J.J. Pallath, in his text book on Folklore (2017) provides a detail classification with four main sections as Oral Folk Culture, Folk Customs, Folk Performance and Folk Material Culture. These broad four main sections have nineteen subsections as found in classical folkloristics. The religious ritual of food offering-Puzhukku Nercha-comes under Folk Customs with five sub titles namely Festivals, Celebrations, Recreation and Games, Folk Medicine and Folk Religion. This ritual

of food offering is treated under folk customs especially under festivals and it is analysed taking into consideration its different phases through co-option and assimilation.

Description

Puzhukku Nercha is a food offering existed in Ramapuram Church for some time. It is a vow taken by the devotee to offer food (Puzhukku Nercha) during the next festival if his prayer is granted by the saint , St Augustine. Ramapuram is one of the old centres of Syrian Christians in Kottayam District . As far as the origin of the ritual is concerned, the exact description of its beginning is not available. It has been a major ritual during the festival at least for a century. The middle decades of twentieth century were the glorious period of this ritual.

Folktales

The detail description of the ritual as secondary material, is also negligibly limited. As we approach the resource persons, each one would give his version as folktales.

- a) One of the informants shared his experience thus:- the byword or rather the common nick name for Ramapuram people was *Puzhukku theeni*, later *Puzhukku*, for some time. Puzhukku literally means Tapioca. But in this instance it refers to the age old ritual of Puzhukku Nercha , which was in existence for a century in Ramapuram. It seems that this practice began somewhere in the past when colonization or new settlements were emerging. Ramapuram being a small town with limited population began to feel the need for fresh fertile grounds for the growing population. New settlements as Privathanam, Kadanad and Thudaganad came into existence as places of Shrines (small community with a shrine for prayer) under Ramapuram Church. As cultivation began in the thick forest converting the land into agricultural fields, the first challenge was from wild animals especially wild boar and porcupine. The farmers tried their level best to keep these animals away from their field. But most of the time their night vigil was not very successful. So they resorted to devotional remedies like offering/ Nercha/vow i.e. if our fields are kept unassailed by wild animals, we would offer Puzhukku nercha

for the saint. These people would bring their Neercha during the main feast of St Augustine , on 31st December and the first of January every year.

The Neercha is a combination of all roots namely, tapioca, yam, arum, local potato, varieties of yam as elephant, purple and other earlier varieties of roots. The preparation is done by peeling all these roots and cut them to small pieces. These pieces are boiled together with coconut along with chilly and other spices to add a pleasing flavour. When these roots are properly boiled, they are mixed together and thus Puzhukku is prepared.

There was some specialty in the packing of these Puzhukku packets . It was packed in areca nut barks which were available in plenty. The fresh bark of the areca nut was neatly peeled by removing the outer covering and the *neercha* was filled in the areca nut bark in a conical shape.

These packets were taken to church and offered in front of St Augustine's statue which was taken out for public devotion during festival times. When the number of Neercha packets increased , devotees would place them under the table of St Augustine's statue. The devotees shared these *neercha* packets with due devotion in the first phase of the ritual.

- b) As years passed this folklore also began to undergo changes. The spiritual side of the Neercha got so popular that devotees used to offer Neercha not only for the protection from wild animals but also for other needs like protection and cure from an epidemic or cure from a serious disease. One of the resource persons told that even for minor ailments also people began to offer Puzhukku Neercha. As the in the early decades of twentieth century, the feast of Ramapuram church was an important one in this region where thousands would be coming for the celebrations. Innumerable beggars would line up for begging. As years passed these beggars also were given these neercha packets. The proper order and arrangement of the first phase of Neercha gave way to a celebration atmosphere where the Neercha packets were given by the devotees to these long line consisting of devotees , beggars and jolly young men.

As the devotees began to share these packets with these people, sharing the Puzhukku from the conically shaped areca nut barks, the hands of the recipients and the hands of the person who shares the *neercha* were equally smeared of the Neercha. As he came to the end of the sharing, it would end with a minor push and pull in which the Puzhukku was smeared over the body of the people. So in this second phase, the spiritual aspect of the ritual gave way to the celebrating atmosphere where a game of non serious push and pull became the order.

- c) By the middle of twentieth century this ritual has taken the form of mischievous game where group of people would capture these packets when any devotee is seen with this packet; most of the devotees would throw the Neercha as quickly as possible to the rushing group so as to save themselves from being completely smeared of the Neercha. The young men would conduct it as a game where devotion gave way to non-serious mischief. The accidental smearing of Neercha in the earlier phase gave way to playful indulgence verging towards a sort of entertainment. The young women participated in the offering by bringing these packets and they were the main targets and thus the ritual accommodated a free space where all pent up feelings were relieved in resulting a sort of catharsis for the whole community.

Analysis

At the very outset of the analysis, one may have to be cautious of the difference inherent in performance study and that of other forms of folkloristics. Claus and Korom describe them in detail; “But the main contribution of performance theory is in the delineation of the scope of study. Most performance studies are on verbal traditions, but verbal traditions *in action*. They study an *event*: and all that is related to that event: the setting, the social context, the performer and the audience” (*Folkloristics and Indian folklore*, 159). These four elements undergo tremendous changes in the gradual evolution of this folk ritual.

When we analyse the ritual from theoretical background, the ritual provides fertile ground for new reading. Molly Kaushal quotes in her essay ‘From Mythic to Political Identities: Folk Festivals and cultural sub-texts.’: “It is neither the cognitive

nor the ideological content of the ritual that is important but rather differentiated participation in it.” (Folklore, Public Sphere and Civil Society. 186.) As in the case of cultural studies, the folkloristics seems to face a slight confusion over the emphasis one can place on text, context and textual analysis. In this analysis we place the importance on subtext which is the implicit meaning of a text or the underlying message that is not explicitly stated or shown.

Our consideration, therefore, goes to the construction of identity. Any ritual performance is closely related to the self identity of the community. “ Another important sub-text of public ritual performance is construction and presentation of a group’s identity to oneself and to outsiders.” (Ibid P. 187). The very idea of inclusion and exclusion according to hegemony also deserves our attention. The world view and social order, that is sought to be legitimized through them. This ritual also undergoes different elements of co-option and assimilation as seen in the following three phases, namely the spiritual, the popular and the secular.

As mentioned earlier the ritual undergoes three fold evolution. This food offering Puzhukku Nercha, under goes three distinct phases and in its first phase where spirituality was emphasised and it clearly underlies the agricultural background of the early Christians. The ritual has two myths; namely the vow that if Muthappan (St Augustine) keeps his crops safe and sound, he would propitiate the deity with this ritual. Another element that can be relevant here is the allusions we find in the Bible that the first produce may be sacrificed in the church as a token of gratitude and for future prosperity.

The second phase of the ritual was more popular and the number of participants also increased substantially. The myth connected with the saint and his powers became more deep rooted and people would take vow for anything that was humanly difficult. The ritual received a secular colour and anybody could take vow and offer this ritual. The third phase co-opted various elements of celebrations and entertainment. The spiritual aura gave way to worldly and physical encounters. Jolly young men let loose their imposed suppression through impulsive indulgences.

When this evolution is further analysed the subtext of cultural transformation from agriculture towards an urban culture becomes more visible. When a deeper

analysis is performed on the basis of Foucauldian analysis of discursive practises paving the way for further hegemonies, the subtext receives greater significance. The major symbol of Puzhukku- tapioca the staple food – gradually loses the symbolic value, it began to connote the stark reality of hunger and settlement. When the identity of Ramapuram as Puzhukku theeni / Puzhukku gradually loses its symbolic value and began to denote the hungry and the downtrodden. The elevated notions of agriculture gave way to the vainglorious the new rich. The shortened form of Puzhukku no more represents anything positive and it began to connote the negative/indecent. Thus new ideology and new hegemony displaced the symbolic tapioca to something that is diabolic.

Finally the ritual in its third phase was successfully discharging its social function of catharsis by providing free space to release the pent up feelings, and thus retain the overall balance of the community. When these safety values are unknowingly stopped the overall natural growth of an emerging culture got stranded. It has literally deprived the ritual and the feast of its social function and converted it to a nonentity which fails to discharge its due function.

As analysis comes to the conclusion the cultural subtext of this ritual is the identity of the community which varies according to ideologies and hegemonies.

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Conceptualizing Dalit and Gender Issues in India; A Literary and Cultural Mapping in the Movie *Masaan*

Merin Augustin

When history intentionally forgets B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of Indian constitution, does the literary and cultural imaginings actually resolve our real issues of caste and gender issues which are still prevalent in India? Caste based discrimination is a socio-political reality. History itself is a bias between conquest and exploitation which leads to an unharmonious human relationship. The images of 'other' created consciously during colonialism. It eradicates and erases the subaltern.

Lord Macaulay and his minutes are a mere representation of Guru Dronacharya of Mahabharata era. His intentions are not so likely to be innocent as it seems, to "form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern". This thereby creates a political tension between various strands of the society.

Masaan is a riveting movie which explores the dark reality and grim truth of caste and gender. This is a 2015 independent drama film in the debut directorial brilliance of Neeraj Ghaywan featuring Vicky Kaushal and Richa Chadda in lead roles. This movie is shot largely in a naturalistic mode and deals with the issues of an Indian orthodox casteist society. The film moves through the two narratives of Devi Pathak, a Brahmin girl and

Deepak, who is a poor Dom caste dalit. When Devi Pathak was ready to satisfy her bodily pleasures she became a culprit in front of the society. Deepak was a culprit by birth for some. The second narrative of this film tells the love relationship of Deepak and his higher caste girlfriend, Shaalu where their caste is a villain between them.

Even after these long years of Indian independence it is indeed a shame to our land that discrimination and segregation are still ruling the people over here.

When the differences in social strata blow like a tornado, there we find possibilities of mapping margins which shine like a morning star today and might be continued.

Overview

Film is a cultural reflection of the communities in which they are made. The film endeavoured the scope of its space in the cultural domains towards the end of the 19th

century. Each frame in a movie offers visual extravaganza which requires no words. Movies can be seen as the most modern weapon to communicate the issues of the society which are labelled to be problematic indeed to be silent. To some extent literary and cultural imaginings can address the real issues of caste and gender.

Though the stereotypes are still continuing, new voices have come across time over resistance subjugation. And *Masaan* is one such movie which brings a new visual experience through the direct portrayal of the Dom community, a particular dalit group who burn the dead bodies. They see the body as it is and help the soul to escape from earth by breaking their skulls. These men mediate between life and death and live in the physical terrains of hot crematorium grounds.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a Mahar Dalit known as the father of Indian constitution. He strongly advocated for abolishing the caste system. For him caste draws an unequal mode of organisation of social relation. With the invasion of colonial forces the caste system in India got worse and new religions formed through Western civilization. Ambekar is a staunch advocate of anti-oppression for dalits.

The binary relationship between the subaltern and ruling class is explored in the subaltern studies. The subaltern ended with the idea of post colonialism.

This society is a living representation of the subaltern history of India. The British sowed hatred in the hearts of the people. And they did this by receiving the 'divide and rule policy'. As a result small groups are involved and disturb the political stability of the country. Even after they returned they tried to control 'affairs' from distant lands.

Are we still blind enough to believe in Macaulay? Does English education need to be imparted to Indian natives was the only motive behind him? If so, why can't this English education terminate the grotesque subalternity from India?

Language gives a unified identity to the people. But still it is not a reality. India is a culturally specific geographical arena marked by discrimination rather than similarities. The roots of commercialization of education were implanted by Macaulay. The paradox lies in the fact that he neglected other Indian languages in education in the Indian subcontinent. He saw it as a least culturally specific phenomenon. Such is the false identity created by Englishmen. They make us believe in the misconception of the 'burden of English responsibility'.

Content

Film is a cultural space for shaping identities. Politically important issues need to be discussed in films rather than ordinary concepts of love, friendship and family. Though its scope is vast, the stereotypes are dominating in the cultural space of films. Indian films always gained popularity across the world in presenting new themes and concepts which are radically discussable. But at times it also tastes the bitter reality of marginalisation.

The films are consciously side kicking the subaltern groups of the society. Unfortunately, we all belong to a society where P. K. Rosy, the first ever actress in Malayalam film is subjugated and tormented by double marginalization of being a woman and dalit.

“Cinema is an escapist, aspirational, larger-than-life world. In that sense, it is too Brahminical in its ethos to give good space to caste narratives” says Neeraj Ghaywan. He is a national award winning director of *Masaan*. This film is a motion picture of ‘Fly away Solo’, a screenplay written by him.

Readdressing Dalit issues

The term “Dalit” (or “Untouchable”) refers to a person belonging to the lower caste of society. They denied their political identity and self respect. They are nearby victims by those who play power politics within the religious and cultural courtyards of Indian houses. Representation of dalits is equally problematic and confusing.

Because the mainstream imposes power on them and they are burdened to bear the images and ideologies like whites represent blacks.

Masaan (Crematorium; also known as Fly away Solo) is a Indo- French crop production produced by Drishyam films Macassar productions, Phantom Films, Sikhya Entertainment, Arte France Cinema. The film opens with the difference between life and death quoted by Brij Narayan Chakbast, British Indian Urdu poet. He defines life as a delicate arrangement of five elements and death as a disarray of these elements.

Life in Varanasi is portrayed as an eternal trap. An imaginary trap created by old people on modern ideologies. According to them, the misery of modern time is technology. Today mobile phones are equally a villain and mentor is mostly used by the younger generation. In this movie the young generation is always under the surveillance of adult people or police which is like white surveillance on blacks.

This movie, through different scenarios, explains the history of Ghats. Earlier the border of mother Ganges was a vast forest. Cremation rituals began in this river. The kings settled at the Ganges at first, then came priests. The gut is now under dispute between Maharashtrians and Gujaratis.

The family of Deepak suffers from poverty and they meet their daily life with money they got from cremation. Deepak is given an opportunity to study from his caste but for others it is their fate to suffer the torment of the scorching pyre. At one time even his father insisted him to escape out of these grounds.

The soul rings in the hands of Shaalu can be seen as an irony. No Hindu soul can escape the body without the untouchable's labour that alone provides the route for soul's salvation. The ring in the hands of Shaalu is very tight which was gifted by her uncle during her childhood days. She is a chatterbox and the youngest one in the family. Shaalu and her family on their way to pilgrimage met with a ghastly bus accident. This turns the story upside down in the second narrative of the film. Deepak unknowingly gets to cremate his lover's body. He was broken and cried for days. His optimistic plan of life was destroyed in its half way.

Silencing the Voiceless

It is the general tendency of the power holders to keep their subaltern mum. It is the very nature of whites who impose their power on blacks. They are afraid that someday the blacks might turn against them if they give them language. The male protagonist of the story Deepak Kumar Chaudhary was a brilliant student studying at Seth Kinaram Agarwal polytechnic college. His professor is taking classes on centrifugal force. Even if he has a doubt, he is unable to raise the question. The majority of the class silenced him.

Feeling of Inferiority

As a subaltern, Deepak has to face many challenges of the society. He is answerable to everyone's questions. Even in his friendship circle he is mapped with his caste. He is ready to reveal his love to Shaalu but not to reveal his identity. He fears that this creates a tension between them. Deepak always feels low by birth when he is travelling with his girlfriend who belongs to a higher caste. To curb her curiosity he shouts at her that he lives in the Harichandran Ghat. That night, he reveals the complete truth about his identity and his family who are untouchables bound to burn bodies and light pyres on them.

Re-addressing Gender Issues

In literary studies, “gender refers to how individuals define themselves and how they are evaluated by others”. It is the basis of gender. Sex is biologically determined while gender is socially constructed. One is not born as a male or female but the society makes him a male or female. In films, the camera decides to look at what its viewers desire. It can thus be defined as a male gaze. Mishra takes the pictures of undressed Devi who is covered in a bed sheet to hide her shame. But is brutally enjoying his heinous action and the camera is completely employing male gaze. Here Devi becomes an object. Objectifying women’s bodies is a debatable issue which needs to be discussed politically.

The misogyny and an even power dynamic is a ghastly narrative in patriarchal society. The women in this movie succumbed to the sentiments of their father and other men around them. This film is set in the backgrounds of Varanasi. The tussle between existing traditions and new creates tension between the young generation and old generation. Devi Pathak is the female protagonist of the story who lives on her own. The father Vidyadhar Pathak emotionally tortures his daughter in all its aspects. He is giving importance to his honor rather than her heart feelings. Inspector Mishra is masking his evil identity as he is there to protect their honour.

The issue was that Devi’s boyfriend Piyush Agarwal booked a room in a hotel to have sex. In the midst of the moment they are raided by the police accused of sex trafficking. Society marks women as bad if they tend to live in their own way. The women here are not a machine to say ‘yes’ to the actions of men. Devi is educated but she is dismissed from her job because of this case. We see that everyone blames her for this deed. And she boldly answers their question that they both are equally involved in having sex. She is not ready to accept her defeat and the story moves around her struggle to live.

The police can be seen as the power dynamic of the society. Their standpoint is that love between a boy and a female is a crime and if they are arrested with evidence, it needs to be celebrated in society and media. The orthodoxy created by society will surely tear them into pieces. Because of that Piyush committed suicide by the intermediation of the police official Inspector Mishra. He is a dear-departed soul without fulfilling his desires and dreams on earth. But he claims that Devi is the one who is responsible for his death. Mishra intimidated her father that he has his daughter’s sex scandal on his phone and bribes from her father’s

small earning. She was devastated by the death of Piyush. She tries to contact his parents but she is unanswerable to their questions. The memories of him haunted her.

A Shamshan Ghat is a platform designed for cremating bodies. Women are not allowed to enter the crematorium grounds. Women in hindu religion are portrayed as a living goddess with a delicate heart with motherly features to sacrifice their pleasure for family and children. Talking to dumb women with delicate heart is not allowed to visit these grounds. Devi Pathak was informed by a vendor that women are not allowed to enter there. Traditionally it is believed that girls are mentally weak and will not be able to handle the dark sides of death.

Deepak's girlfriend Shaalu also experiences restrictions and barriers in her desires and ambitions. She is passionate about poetry itself implies she is from a higher caste. Even if she agrees to continue the love relationship, she is sure that her family will not approve of their relationship.

The directorial brilliance lives in the climax of *Masaan*. Two people tormented by different social situations accidentally come to dispose of their luggage of pain in the Triveni Sangam. It is a confluence of three rivers and is considered as a sacred place to flush away one's sins. They came from different backgrounds but went together leaving an endless number of questions regarding their future journey. The symbolism of holy river Ganges brings us the light of hope.

It is the destiny of the subjugated to live according to the ways of the society. Society is in chains. It is this society which creates segregation and dispute between gender and communities. Before the invasion of Victorian morality, equal power of rights was enjoyed both by men and women. The colonial forces created confusion between people. It is the general nature of human beings to subdue the freedom and power of those that enjoy these less. The differentiation in sharing power structure separates people in terms of caste, creed, colour, gender, sex etc. Negotiations of voiceless communities are not born today or yesterday but begin from where history creates bias among people. The strong monuments of sovereignty and secularism seem to be inflexible but it tends to be flexible for certain classes of the society.

The portrayal of *Masaan* is naturalistic in having common interests of life like mainstream to dream and desire and to love and separate. It is a right of the individual to express his identity. *Masaan* is a story of Dalits, it grounds and features the very traits of mainstream cinema which make us attached to the pain of caste confined people of Varanasi.

A Psychological Perspective of *Alice in Wonderland*

Nada Rajan

Alice in Wonderland is a 2010 American computer-animated and live action fantasy film directed by Tim Burton, written by Linda Woolverton, and released by Walt Disney Pictures. The film is inspired by English author Lewis Carroll's 1865 fantasy novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its 1871 sequel *Through the Looking-Glass*. The characters in Wonderland represent an array of archetypes even as they reflect a Freudian classification between the id, ego, and superego. Alice reveals her psyche to herself and achieves personal integrity and wholeness by determining who in fact she really is.

At the film's opening, 19-year-old Alice, perched on the brink between adolescence and adulthood, finds herself unexpectedly required to make a fundamental decision about her life. Whether she will accept the social norms and expectations by accepting the marriage offer of a wealthy lord, or else determine her own destiny is the discussed theme. In order to resolve this problem, Alice, like all the great heroes of literature past and present, must undertake a quest, which on the surface appears to be the quest for the Vorpal blade required to slay the Jabberwocky, but upon further inspection is a mission to reveal Alice's own identity and what's more, an attempt to recover what the Mad Hatter describes as her lost "muchness".

The realization and integration of the self is a phenomenon which every human being faces in their life. Just as Alice is listening to the proposal of Lord Hamish amid an assembled crowd of expectant onlookers (representing social pressure), she spots the white rabbit, clad in a waist coat and baring a pocket watch. Intrigued, she quickly leaves Hamish on bended knee to pursue the rabbit down the rabbit hole, whereupon she enters the world of the unconscious mind. She falls down the rabbit hole exactly as in Carroll's work. Oddly, she knows on some level, probably from experience, that Wonderland is just a dream and that ultimately, in Wonderland, she is in control of her own destiny and those of the colorful characters that populate this dreamscape.

Alice is presented as a lucid dreamer, in as much as she knows that she's dreaming. Nevertheless, she finds herself unable to wake up. Clearly, Alice has a message for herself- and the message is urgent. Hence the white rabbit carrying the pocket watch. One wants to hold and protect the rabbit, yet it's always just out of reach and must be pursued. Maddeningly, this object can never be attained unless it gives itself up to the pursuer of its own free will. The

white rabbit, like the Cheshire cat and the Blue Caterpillar, are Jungian animal archetypes, each representing an aspect of Alice's own psyche: the rabbit, desire; the cat, mystery and trickery; and the caterpillar wisdom and the power of transformation. Alice's pursuit of the white rabbit represents desire of an object that begs to be possessed and in order to possess it; she is willing to go to all kinds of trouble, including falling down a rabbit hole to catch up with this adorable object.

Burton's vision of the journey down the rabbit hole is similar to both Carroll's and Walt Disney's. As Alice falls, she encounters all kinds of objects floating in space and lands unceremoniously with a thud. Upon landing, Alice finds herself in a room full of doors, all of which are locked. At this juncture, Alice is her natural size and is too small to reach the key far above her on a glass table top. In order to pursue the rabbit- or just to get out of the predicament in which she finds herself, she must unlock a door. This room full of locked doors represents the mind, the secrets of which may be unlocked if one only has the presence of mind to locate the key.

Finding the key is easy, it's in plain sight on the glass table; reaching the key, however, is more complicated. Alice must go through a series of growing and shrinking to finally procure the key and fit it into the appropriate lock and finally arrive at the right size to fit through the door. Alice's constant size changing resultant from eating cakes and drinking brews labeled "eat me" or "drink me" may refer to a woman's never feeling that she is the right size and thus undergoing a long series of growing and shrinking throughout her life. Being the "right size" has everything to do with unlocking the secrets of life- one can be neither too fat or thin, tall or small. And yet this is clearly Alice's own determination, though she is unaware of it.

As Alice undergoes the ordeal of procuring the key, growing to the proper size to seize upon it etc. she is being watched by the mouse and another companion, who wonder aloud if this is indeed THE Alice and if it is, why can't she remember what is required to get the key. Throughout Wonderland, there is much doubt about Alice's being THE Alice. Alice's inability to remember that she's been to Wonderland before represents the fact that her own mind is always a fresh mystery to her- an unknown object of both delight and horror. When Alice does finally enter Wonderland, she is not recognized by the inhabitants, who are anxious to know whether or not she is THE Alice. We later learn that it has been foretold in the Oraculum that Alice is the one who will free the inhabitants from the reign of the red queen by slaying the Jabberwocky.

The Oraculum is an ever-changing document, but the most important day is Frabjous day in which Alice slays the Jabberwocky; that malicious dragon controlled by the menacing Queen of Hearts, who tyrannizes the inhabitants of Wonderland. The Queen of Hearts represents the superego in Alice's psyche. She is the force which controls the more spontaneous and joyful aspects of her personality. This superego, however, is deformed and cruel. Her head is unnaturally large, and she demands that her courtiers likewise deform themselves to draw attention away from her own physical irregularity. Moreover, she abuses her servants and often dispatches them by beheading, (an interesting method of execution, which no doubt represents the removal of one's faculties of reason).

The Red Queen's power, however, is but a house of cards. Her minions are quite literally, a deck of cards and hers is a losing game. She cannot be happy because her world is loveless. Since she is so focused on control and power, she has missed out on the entire point of living. Her consort Stayne, the knave of Hearts, tolerates her only because of his fetish for "largeness", which, when he meets Alice who by this time is about 8 feet tall, is more to his liking than the queen. Stayne is attracted by power, and he instinctively knows that Alice is powerful as well as being very tall. For a short time Red Queen muses that it might be better to be loved than feared, as her sister is, but upon encountering a small rebellion, she reverts to her theory that it is better to be feared than loved, a grossly mistaken notion that will result in her banishment from the Underland.

It is ironic to call her the Queen of Hearts, as it is the red queen's sister, the white queen who is truly the queen of hearts and souls. Hers is a complex game represented by a chess board. Her minions are chess pieces, a game not of luck, but of skill and learning. Her life is rich because she has the love of all who know her. The white queen represents the mother or possibly the goddess archetype in Jung's schema and the ego in Freud's. She is the intermediary between the Superego and the ID. Unlike the Hatter, she is not insane or a slave to the passions; rather she is kind and has compassion for all, including her power thirsty sister, who seeks to destroy her. Her purpose is to avoid an all-out war between her sister (superego) and the other inhabitants of Wonderland (the unconscious) attempting as best she can to integrate the two camps. When this becomes impossible, she requires a champion (Alice) to represent her, as she has taken vows never to harm a living thing. White Queen's color, in contrast to her sister, is white, a color denoting light and purity.

Early on, Alice is escorted by Tweedledee and Tweedledum to see Absolem, the blue, houka smoking caterpillar to determine whether or not she is THE Alice. He unceremoniously declares that she is not. Alice emphatically agrees stating that she could never, in a million years, slay anything, let alone a vicious monster such as the Jabberwocky. Oddly, the Oraculum itself depicts Alice and her friends in front of the Oraculum pondering the coming battle between Alice and the Jabberwocky. Even in the face of prophesy, Alice refuses to believe that she is anything more than what she appears to be; a powerless and crazy girl. Absolem, as we might infer from his name, represents a priestly or even godly archetype- that mysterious and otherworldly personality who has access to the author of all things- i.e. Alice herself.

When he meets Alice, he asks her who she is, and she makes it clear that she doesn't really know. "I'm Alice, but I don't think I'm THE Alice," she stammers. In fact Absolem is right. Alice hasn't yet achieved her potential because she doesn't know who she is and at this point she is not THE Alice. To understand her true nature, Alice, like Absolem, will have to transform herself into another kind of being. In the end of the film, we see that Absolem has transformed himself into a butterfly, as is the nature of caterpillars, while Alice has transformed herself into a knight in shining armor come to redeem all of Wonderland by slaying the evil Jabberwocky, which is her true nature. Both Absolem and Alice have died and been reborn and transformed.

Although Alice is the author of Wonderland- she doesn't know her true nature and hasn't realized her true power until she is faced with the notion that if she doesn't slay the Jabberwocky, her beloved friends (actually- her own mind) will fall prey to it. Alice has been foretold by the Oraculum (a symbol for any prophetic sacred text) that she is the chosen champion destined to slay the Jabberwocky, and on the other hand, Alice herself is the author of the Oraculum, because, as she states more than once in the film, this is her dream and she will determine her own destiny, whether or not it has been foretold that she is the one to slay the Jabberwocky.

When Alice finally meets the Mad Hatter, he does recognize her, saying- "It's Alice, I'd recognize him anywhere, though he is different, and seems to have lost much of his muchness." It's significant that Mad Hatter attributes a male gender to Alice, who is obviously female. This may be because Alice's gender has less to do with her essence than she thinks. Also, when Alice does eventually don the armor and the Vorpole blade befitting a knight, she is transformed into a hero archetype, typically male even as she retains her femininity. One of Jung's most

interesting archetypes is the Hermaphrodite, a union of opposites and an archetype that represents integration of the psyche. When Alice does don the armor and the blade and slays the Jabberwocky, she has transcended her femininity and has become a hermaphrodite a perfect balance between male and female, indicating total integration of the disparate elements of her conscious and unconscious mind.

The Mad Hatter is the ID in Freud's schema. He's mad. He knows what he wants and he loves life and does so madly, without regard for social conventions and expectations. His mind and body are really unfettered by the demands and expectations of the superego (Red Queen) until he is literally bound by chains to serve her, which at one point in the story, he literally is. Mad Hatter is so utterly tyrannized by the Red Queen, who has wrought much destruction in Wonderland that he can't help but seem a little joyless during these hard times. In Alice, he recognizes the redeemer, though, as he puts it, "you have lost much of your "muchness". Still- Alice is Alice (from the Greek, meaning "truth"), and she will slay the Jabberwocky. The hatter has utter faith in her and will do whatever is necessary to help her fulfill her destiny to undertake the quest that she has yet to understand that she must undertake. Thus, he hides her in his teapot and fashions a gown befitting a queen when she is shrunk down to size.

Alice is only motivated to fulfill her destiny as a champion when she is met with adversity. Her first encounter is with the vicious Bandersnatch, who pursues Alice and her friends with ferocity. The Bandersnatch- along with the other ferocious animals of Wonderland represent Alice's shadow self. Alice, however, realizing that she is the one who is really in control here, stands her ground and refuses to move in the face of the gigantic, snarling beast, telling herself that this is her dream, and nobody here can really hurt her in the confines of her own mind.

The Bandersnatch does stop before annihilating Alice - and the door mouse removes one of his eyes with his sword. The blinded Bandersnatch then swipes at Alice, leaving a festering wound on her arm. Alice's own creation has wounded, perhaps mortally, its own author- much in the way that God's people have historically wounded and offended God. As we shall see, in order to recover from the wound, Alice's task will be to face her shadow self and make peace with him. When she finally does this, by offering him back his stolen eye, the Bandersnatch kisses her wound and it immediately stops festering. Making peace with Bandersnatch also allows Alice access to the heart shaped key chain around the beast's neck that opens the coffer housing the Vorpall blade, the only instrument capable of destroying the

Jabberwocky. Not only does Alice make peace with her shadow self, she recruits him to her cause and he becomes a valuable ally in her quest to redeem Wonderland from the evil queen. Alice's fearlessness in the face of her shadow is what ultimately gives her the strength to fulfil her destiny as Wonderland's redeemer and upon vanquishing the Jabberwocky (representing the tyrannical power of the superego), it becomes clear who Alice is- a tremendously commanding, determined person who will decide her own destiny, both in Wonderland and the real world. When she emerges anew from the rabbit hole, a symbolic rebirth as a new and transformed individual, she has the strength and presence of mind to inform the expectant crowd of onlookers that she will not be marrying Lord Hamish as expected, and even required, but that she *will* find something useful to do with her life, nevertheless. She then does an odd dance (one performed by the Mad Hatter upon the defeat of the Jabberwocky) called a "futterwacken". (Earlier, Mad Hatter informs the inhabitants of Wonderland that on the day that "Frabjous day" the Jabberwocky is vanquished, "I shall Futterwacken...vigorously.") And Alice also Futterwackens most vigorously in outright defiance of super-egotistical expectations and demands laid upon her by family and friends. She is now the master of both of her worlds and ready to fashion her own adventures.

Alice's experiences in Wonderland functioning as an allegory for the developing ego, or, in other words, for growing up. Through her experiences in Wonderland, Alice gradually gains empowering insight and self-understanding in order to embrace her own identity. Alice may not have entered the rabbit hole if it was not for the fall. This is often the case with people who are called to journey into the unconscious. It's as if there often must be a "fall" of one kind or another as the gateway to the unconscious. It will require courage to follow the unconscious, but this archetypal fall is one that should ideally be embraced after one "dusts oneself off" as a result of the fall.

In close to the final scene of *Alice in Wonderland*, and with the help of her friends, Alice takes up the sword and fights the dragon. Just prior to this final test, however, Alice again meets the blue caterpillar where he is in the process of turning into a cocoon. Alice sees this and says, "You are going to die." The caterpillar replies, "No I'm going to be transformed." It is clear that Alice is projecting onto the caterpillar. When she sees the caterpillar's change of appearance, she immediately fears her own death. Additionally, we witness the Jungian concept of synchronicity when we view Alice's interaction with the caterpillar. Her inner psychological process is reflected back to her by this meaningful encounter with the caterpillar

at the perfect time. Just around the corner, Alice has her most heroic task yet, and her own chance of transformation. It is not at all surprising, however, that Alice worries that she may die instead. She has a mighty dragon to slay.

To the astonishment, or not, of the others, she defeats the mighty and ferocious dragon and the good queen regains her crown. For Alice, the unexpected has occurred. She has found a source of power that she did not know she possessed and she used this power for the greater good. Order is restored to the land. The good queen rules again. Alice proves to herself and to the other inhabitants of Wonderland, that she is in fact, the right Alice... she became herself. Next is the really interesting and fitting conclusion to the story. Alice clearly learns from her adventure and ordeals. She knows now that she must leave Wonderland. Alice says, "There are questions I have to answer. Things I have to do." She has found a new sense of purpose.

Alice decides to return "home." She climbs out of the rabbit hole and returns to the scene of the altar from the beginning of the story. Her groom is still waiting there. In front of everyone, Alice says quite simply and boldly, "I will not marry you. You are not the right man for me."

The final scene places Alice on a ship where she has been accepted as an apprentice in a grand business venture, and a blue butterfly lands briefly on her shoulder. She recognizes it as her friend, the transformed blue caterpillar. Alice's transformation has been validated; it seems.

In this wonderful story and movie, Alice brings home an increase in consciousness. An increased consciousness is one of the significant gifts of her journey through Wonderland and the unconscious. The "unruly Alice" will have a new awareness for her upcoming journey through life. Alice answered the call and followed the white rabbit into the unknown. She will exit Wonderland as a changed woman; a woman who has cast aside societal expectations, not as a rote act of rebelliousness, but because she was called to something greater. She was both called to and embraced a path leading to wholeness and a meaning that cannot be found by simply trying to fit into others' expectations.

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Alienation and Estrangement: Embracing Masculinity through Reassertion of 'the self' in *Kumbalangi Nights*

Neethu Baby

The relationship between masculinity, identity and gender as social structure has changed somewhat during the various phases of development with the sociology of masculinity. Early influences tended to draw heavily on notions of gender role and its 'strains' or 'discrepancies' for men. (Pleck 81)

Men's lives are storied in a sociocultural context in which powerful myths about masculinity inform the 'gender folklore' of families. Men who rigidly accept these myths will be uncomfortable with the implication that they need help, or may have 'emotional problems'. A set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man can be termed as masculinity. The plural 'masculinities' is also used in recognition of the ways of being a man and cultural representations of/about men which are determined historically and culturally. In the literature masculinities are defined from various theoretical perspectives. Natural Sciences define masculinities as controlled by physiological factors such as hormones or chromosomes. Nathaniel Goldberg identifies the 'neuro-endocrine system' (the interaction of the nervous system with the hormone system) as the biological basis of masculinities. Such essentialism is also characteristic of populist 'celebratory' writing about masculinity, in which men are urged to reinvigorate their 'natural' masculinity. Robert Bly sees masculinity as being damaged by the conditions of modern society, and remedy in men-only retreats and bonding rituals. In contrast, from the more critical, academic perspective of the social sciences, masculinities are understood as a form of power relation, both among men themselves and between men and women. Essentialism views masculinities as arising from the social contexts in which men live, from their positions in the various institutions and organisations of their society and/or in the context of the socially available discourses about gender. Masculinities and femininities can be understood, therefore, as the effects of these interpretations and definitions: on bodies, on personalities and on a society's culture and institutions.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw massive transformations of gender relations. This was for many reasons—economic, political, sexual, and spatial. Gender, gender ideology, and ideologies around gender became more explicit. While the words 'feminine' and 'masculine' were in use in the sixteenth century, 'femininity' and 'masculinity' did not acquire widespread

recognition as significant categories for describing identifiably gendered people until the nineteenth century. A central feature of this was the establishment of a series of ideologies around the notion of 'separate spheres' for women and men: 'the central belief...of a male breadwinner gaining a livelihood through work and maintaining his female [and child] dependants within the home.... In this view, husband and wife were the archetype, but father and child, brother and sister, uncle and niece, master and servant reproduced the relationship of clientage and dependency' (Davidoff 64)

These divisions and differences are matters of ideology. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall write, with respect to the English middle class of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'Public was not really public and private was not really private despite the potent imagery of "separate spheres". Both were ideological constructs with specific meaning which must be understood as products of a particular historical time' (33).

These shifts to the ideologies of separate spheres are usually dated around the first fifty, sixty, seventy years of industrialization from the 1780s. Connections might be made between specific cultural, literary, and ideological representations of gender and sexuality, and changing patterns of industrialization, employment, geographical mobility, and domestic organization; in short, a correspondence between the gendered and the institutional separation of the public and private spheres. Masculinities occupy a higher ranking than femininity in the 'gender hierarchy' characteristic of modern Western societies. At the top of the gender hierarchy is 'hegemonic masculinity', the culturally dominant ideal of masculinity centered on authority, physical toughness and strength, heterosexuality and paid work. This is an ideal of masculinity that few actual men live up to, but from which most gain advantage and the next level is 'complicit masculinity'. Below this in the hierarchy are 'subordinated masculinities', the most important of which is homosexual masculinity. More generally, this form of masculinity includes a range of masculine behaviour which does not fully match up to the macho ideals of hegemonic masculinity. At the bottom of the gender hierarchy are femininities. (Although these may take a variety of forms, for example emphasised or compliant femininity and 'resistant' femininity, femininity is always subordinated to masculinity.) In his 1977 publication, *Verbal Art as Performance*, anthropologist Richard Bauman defines performance as a term that conveys 'a dual sense of artistic action ... and artistic event' with the event comprising 'performer, art form, audience, and setting'.

In Cinema the male protagonist is expected to perform a masculine role in front of his audience. Any lesser performance would make him stand out as a clown, transgender or invalid. Malayalam Cinema since its genesis revolves around the faculty of storytelling. The stories were invariably on the lives of Heroes who, through their adventurous lives could attain glory. The lonely warrior struggling to protect and provide for the family gave way to the Angry Young Man in the 70s and the 80s saw men sacrificing their lives in a disillusioned society. The embittered youth gave way to the ultra-masculine feudal lords- the 'Madambis' (feudal lords) and 'Valyettans' (big brothers). The New Wave cinema of the 21st Century focused more on lives of the marginalized-the Others and their stories. These stories were new and fresh bringing audience back to Cinema Halls which were at the verge of shut downs.

Beauvoir's central thesis in *The Second Sex* (1949) is that: throughout history "woman" has been constructed as man's Other, denied the right to her own subjectivity and to responsibility for her own actions. Women themselves internalize this objectified vision, thus living in a constant state of "in authenticity" or "bad faith". The fact that women often enact the roles patriarchy has prescribed for them does not prove that patriarchal analysis is right. Beauvoir's uncompromising refusal of any notion of a female nature or essence is succinctly summed up in her famous statement "One is not born a woman; one becomes one." Throughout most of the twentieth century, the ideology of the family wage and the definition of the father's role as that of "family breadwinner" meant that for most men the amount of time they were able to spend in the home with their children was restricted to a couple of hours in the evenings and time together on weekends. This necessarily limited their chances of playing an active part in their children's upbringing. Joseph Pleck quotes a "breadwinner" father interviewed in a 1950s community study, lamenting his own lack of involvement with his family: "I'm a rotten Dad. If our children amount to anything it's their mother who'll get the credit. I'm so busy I don't see much of them and I don't know how to chum up with them when I do" (Pleck, 89). With "homemaker" mothers thus taking on primary responsibility for child rearing and fathers routinely absent from everyday activities in the home, Mirra Komarovsky was the first of many to observe that men often risked becoming marginal figures in their children's lives. In contrast to this, however, children typically had far greater daily exposure to adult females and the activities they engaged in, whether this was via their mother or another woman-since throughout the twentieth century it continued to be the case that most alternative caregivers

and the majority of elementary school teachers were female. In other words, one of the important consequences of these twentieth century work/family patterns was to restrict the opportunities that children had to interact with their father and model his behavior directly, in the way that the gender socialization theories stipulated. Instead, children of both sexes were for all intents and purposes raised and socialized primarily by their mothers in an everyday world populated predominantly by women. The medicalisation of biography—a narrative reconstruction of identity incorporating a ready-made technical vocabulary of stressors, flashbacks, traumas and hyper-vigilance—provides an interpretative frame for addressing the disjuncture between lived experience and conventionally idealised images of manhood.

Kumbalangi Nights (2019) directed by debutant Madhu C Narayanan is a detailed description of the attempts of two brothers Saji n Bobby to get integrated into the mainstream society. Kumbalangi is an isolated island known for its rural setting. *Kumbalangi Nights* is about desolation, fragmentation and separation of four brothers whose lives attain fulfillment with the entry of maternal love which brings order to their otherwise chaotic life.

When ‘men’, who are not meant to cry or show vulnerability, and may well, have had difficulty with intimacy of any kind, really do find themselves ‘in crises, communities we construct are the support networks we create. Relations between public and private worlds have long been a central concern within feminism, and are also, arguably, pivotal to the intrinsically personal politics of ‘mental health’. At times of crisis, innermost private worlds come into collision with the all too often uncomprehending faces of the public domain, and when the person in crisis is a man, a distinct set of issues and difficulties arise which have seldom been addressed without recourse to a modernist paradigm of medicalising knowledge. The term ‘in crisis’ is used rather than ‘madness’ or ‘distress’, as it created a non-medicalising space within which experiences could be located on a continuum, while still sufficiently evoking an arena where key issues such as risk and fears of ‘dangerousness’ arise. It also enables to avoid the discomfort many people feel with other people’s use of language, and to flag up the tension between discussions about ‘mental health’ crises and discourses claiming that masculinity, or men in general, are in a state of crisis. Over recent decades a considerable feminist literature has debated the impact of patriarchal culture and psychiatry on women. Issues particular to women in the ‘mental health’ system, such as concerns about violence and harassment, have recently been approaching the politics of complexity, written into policy, but remain far from resolved on the ground. Despite cautioning against an essentialist identification of insanity as

feminine, some feminist commentators may have inadvertently encouraged a belief that women are intrinsically psychologically vulnerable and that madness is a 'female malady' (Showalter, 1987).

Kumbalangi Nights (2019) is the story of brothers Saji (Soubin Shahir), Bobby (Shane Nigam), Bony (Sreenath Bhasi) and Frankie (Mathew Thomas). It is the story of outcasts who find their worth and place in life through love. Football-crazy Frankie (Mathew Thomas) is ashamed to invite his school friends to his home, set on a fishing hamlet, where his brothers Soubin and Shane are constantly at odds with each other. Mathew considers his home to be in squalor, calling it the worst house in the locality. The hamlet is used as a dumping ground for stray dogs and cats, serving as a metaphor for their place in society. Saji (Soubin) and Bobby (Shane Nigam) are both loafers, who live in their own worlds and are unwilling to earn an honest penny. Bobby (Shane Nigam) is a happy-go-lucky man who loves his music (his portable speaker travels with him). His opening frames show him playing 'Happy' on his portable speaker as he serves himself rice and fish, their staple food. Shane is averse to working and his friend advises Babymol, who needs Shane to engage tourists at her homestay, that the proposition must be put forward as a favour as opposed to 'work'. Anna Ben, the bold and ambitious, is delightful as Babymol, a strong-willed woman attempts to chart her own course of flow in both love and in life. The blossoming love affair between Babymol and Bobby change everything for the family. The obstacle to Babymol and Bobby's love life comes in the form of Shammi (Fahadh Faasil), her brother-in-law who stays with her family. Fahadh's unique take on Shammi, guilts us into laughing at his toxic masculinity while also making us conscious of the uneasiness in every scene he pervades. One fine example is a kitchen scene where Fahadh hangs by the door and questions his wife, played by Grace Anthony, and Babymol on what they were talking about. Despite repeatedly being told it was something personal, Fahadh continues to question them, all with a smile on his face. When Soubin approaches Shammi, who has established himself as the patriarch, to discuss Babymol's marriage to Bobby, Fahadh reminds Soubin of his family's place in the lower strata of society and that Bobby does not have a job or a house. One poignant moment is when Soubin cries his heart out to a psychologist following a personal tragedy. It is the women in *Kumbalangi Nights* that offer hope and purpose to the lives of these men. Bobby (Shane) in particular is constantly found questioning his worth, but it is Babymol's persistent love that serves as his anchor in what could have otherwise been a turbulent life.

Guillermo Maldonado, the American Evangelical pastor, says “Loneliness is not lack of company but loneliness is lack of purpose”. This is absolutely true for Saji and Bobby, two idle fellows messing up their lives. Fourteen minutes into the movie the song ‘Cherathukal torum, nin tee ormayayi’ (every lamp brings in your memories/the warm kisses we never received) played at the background of an image of a mother rocking her kid to sleep clearly depicts the personal tragedy in the lives of the four brothers-the absence of a mother. Saji, the eldest brother is an utterly broken loner who yearns for maternal care. His father Napoleon married a second time and Leelamma was then the mother of Boney whose father died. The couple later begot two sons Bobby and Frankie. The brothers were forever been insulted by society who branded them as ‘fatherless or born of many’. (01.21.30) Saji reveals to the psychiatrist the reason for the conflicts in their notorious brotherhood-it is their inability to perform their masculinities in the society.

Their frustration and shame for being mocked at culminates into hatred and violence. Another important character is Shammi (Fahad Fasil) who enters the hamlet after his marriage with Simi. (Grace Antony) Forever conscious of the fact that he is an outsider the schizophrenic Shammi appears to be a decent gentleman living under the rules of patriarchy.

Shammi calls himself “The Complete Man” referring to the tagline of Raymonds Clothing. Shammi hides his violence under a smile which is cynical and silly. Simy’s uncle refers to his migrated settlement comparing Shammi to him as he has also settled in his wife’s native place while she is working abroad. Shammi offended by the remark points to the difference between them. Shammi says “We are not birds of same feather. I earn for my family and take care of them while you depend on your wife.” (30.04)

Saji, Boney and Bobby seek solace in love. Saji takes care of Murugan’s wife Sathi and child after Murugan’s accidental death while trying to rescue Saji from his suicide attempt. The mother and child entering the dilapidated house brings love, peace and order into the lives of the brothers who lived like stray dogs in the alienated island of Kumbalangi.

The brothers ,had always missed their mother ,who gave up family life and went to serve with a Christian missionary group. Saji embarks on a chivalrous mission of protecting Murugan’s family; Boney seeks solace in music and later in Nyla his girl friend, Bobby and Babymol love each other and Frankie is the happy to have his brothers back.

No one can be masculine through and through without constantly, and in the end rather obviously, doing violence to many of the most basic human attributes; the capacity for sensitivity to oneself and others, the expression of fear, the admission of weakness, the wisdom of co-operation, the satisfaction of servicing, the pleasures of passivity, the need to be needed—all quint-essentially ‘feminine’. (Segal 93)

By taking part in self-conscious and critically reflective practice that challenges dominant discourses and constructs alternatives and by adopting non-patriarchal speaking positions, men can begin to reconstitute the sense of who they are and who they might, both individually and collectively, become. (Pease 99)

Masculinity and femininity were at crises as they failed to meet the demands of the traditional society. Power was vested at the hands of the privileged- the upper class white men who never permitted digressions in the unwritten rules passed on to generations as heredity. These failed subjects appear in ‘millennial cinema’ as protagonists resorting to violence. The violence is not justified with the presentation of these atypical characters as sympathy deserving underdogs but the violence becomes power at the hands of the majority which they get as a price for their relentless struggles in day to day life.

The four brothers of Kumbalangi gets assimilated into a society which kept them distanced and marooned with its rules and customs These Heroes are common men, less sophisticated, embittered due to lack of privileges and psychotic as they cannot perform their demanding gender roles. Particularly masculinity is at crisis and men often suffer from traumas. The rejuvenation of these men takes place when they come into terms with reality.

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Recognising the Distant: A Diasporic Reading of Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* and Jean Kwok's *The Girl in Translation*

Akhila Simon

“The Greek noun diaspora derives from the verb ‘diasperien’, a compound of ‘dia’ (over or through) and ‘speirein’ (to scatter or sow). In all of its various uses, diaspora has something to do with scattering and dispersal” (Kenny 3). The ancient Greeks had used the term Diasperien to point out the colonization, to change their empire, but in the modern times the word Diaspora is used to describe a community of people who live outside the shared country of origin or ancestry, but maintains active connections with it. The language and culture get transformed when they come in contact with other people.

Indians have a long history of migration to many parts of the world. During the British rule in India many Indians had made short trips to England and European countries. When India got her Independence Indians had migrated to European countries mostly for the purpose of higher education. Many Indians migrated to the English speaking countries with the hope of getting high standard of living. India has come to the terms of new culture, with its own social framework. This new life is not easy for any immigrant. Their motherland comes in opposition with the new environment which will result in the feeling of insecurity and desolateness. The key feature that distinguishes diaspora from Indian migrants is their consciousness of their roots and origins. Even though they were apart, they kept contact with their homeland.

Diasporic community includes both emigrants and their descendants. While some people lose their attachment to their ancestral homeland, others maintain a strong connection to a place which their ancestors may have left generations ago. Many Americans come from mixed culture and heritage and therefore they can claim membership in multiple diaspora communities. In *Global Diasporas*, Robin Cohen defines it as, “A dispersal and scattering of people from an original homeland” (Cohen 17).

Diaspora is not a new phenomenon just as exile or expatriate. It is increasing in a phenomenal scale globally. The reason for this is the increasing interaction between local and the distant due to the communication technologies, consented migration of people from their native place especially from the third world countries to others for a better and standard way of living. Diasporas cultural and ethnic origins lie in a land other than where they currently reside and their economic, social and political affiliations cross borders of nations.

One of the important aspects of human life is a sense of belonging. One's own home is the place which offers such a sense of belonging. The diaspora community with their multiple homes face the crisis of an in-between existence. They are constantly in search of their roots. The diaspora or immigrants all over the world enjoy their temporary or permanent stay as well as suffer in their host countries. The migration of the Indians to the USA increased after the promulgation of immigration act in 1965.

In the age of globalisation, the issues of diaspora continuously enrich the diasporic literatures of the twenty first century. Globalisation influences largely the Diasporic movement in the world. Diaspora also has helped in the growth of literature. The trauma of an immigrant is reflected in the works of diasporic writers. Diasporic study helps us to gather information about the cultural outlook between the different traditions. It provides us more vivid information about different customs and traditions. There will be cultural conflicts and question of identity when they have to leave their cultural values and practice the new ones. Therefore, their acceptance has the feeling of distraction, lost and nostalgia. Most Indians managed to handle the problems of two or more identities. But the next generation is confused by the difficulties and desires and they become influenced by the culture which they are born and adapt themselves into it. They are also influenced by the past of their parents and grandparents.

Diasporic literature is a vast concept and an umbrella term that includes all those literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. At different levels it unfolds the experiences of dislocation and unsettlement. Diasporic literature has its root in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and banishment. A diasporic text can be investigated in the terms of location, dislocation and relocation.

The diasporic writers turn to their homeland for a variety of reasons. Diasporic writings help us in many ways and is a powerful network connecting the nation. It also helps to rediscover the commonality and inclusiveness of India. The diasporic writings have also helped in creating a new impression around global India and have also developed in building a novel image of India abroad. Uma Parameswaran defined diaspora as

First is one of nostalgia for the homeland mingled with fear in a strange land. The second is a phrase in which one is busy adjusting to the new environment that there is the shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves ethno cultural issues. The

fourth is when they have ‘arrived’ and start participating in the world of politics and national issues. (Parameswaran 165)

Diasporic elements are the characterized elements found in diasporic writings. The social settings are the catalyst in the production of emotional feelings. Social settings, in general refer to the immediate physical and social environment in which people live and interact. Social settings are dependent upon the people who form the culture. Thus, social settings have an important role in the life of immigrants.

Migration has showed greater sense of adjustment, adaptability and accessibility. The American diaspora refers to the population of United States citizens who relocate, temporarily, or permanently to foreign countries. There are a variety of reasons for which Americans might emigrate from the country. While some emigrate from the country for economic reasons. With the ongoing problems with the American economy, and increase in economic opportunities are increasingly driving migration abroad. This is shown in the works of Imbolo Mbue and Jean Kwok.

Imbolo Mbue is a novelist and short story writer based in New York City. The works of Mbue are drawn from her own experiences as an immigrant pursuing the American dream. *Behold the Dreamers* is a remarkable debut by her. Mbue is a wonderful writer with no false notes, no narrative shortcuts and certainly no happy endings. The novel gives out the details about the experiences of two New York families during the 2008 financial crisis; an immigrant family from Cameroon, the Jonga family, and their wealthy employers, the Edward family. In Mbue’s novel the immigrant family are discomforted with the transition to a new place and they find themselves changing in response which was called as a fresh take on the immigrant experience.

Jean Kwok is the award-winning, New York Times and international bestselling Chinese author of the novel *Girl in Translation*. It is an unforgettable classic novel of an American immigrant. It is a moving tale of hardship and triumph, heartbreak and love and the things that get lost in translation. The story details about the first decade of the lives of Kimberley Chang and her mother after they migrate from Hong Kong to New York City. The novel is told from Kim’s perspective. Each chapter of the novel corresponds roughly to a year of her life, beginning in the early elementary school and ending shortly before Kim goes to college. Kim struggles as she attempts to balance between her double life. As she grows up, she feels the weight of

her family. She also has to choose between the obligations to her family and her desires for herself. Through Kimberly's story the author Jean Kwok, who is also an immigrant from Hong Kong as a young girl, brings to the page of the lives of the countless immigrants who are caught between the pressure to succeed in America, their duty to their family and their own personal desires. Jean introduces a fresh, exciting Chinese American voice, in which an immigrant girl is forced to choose between two worlds and two futures.

The dissertation titled "Recognising the Distant: A Diasporic Reading of Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* and Jean Kwok's *The Girl in Translation*" is mainly purposed to search the depiction of diaspora through the works of Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* and Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*. This paper will explore the problems faced by the diasporic immigrants and also discuss the themes of alienation, displacement and immigration. Thus, it analyses how the social settings mould the life of an immigrant which eventually leads to change in environment.

A Diasporic Reading of Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*

Diasporic Literature deals with alienation, displacement, nostalgia, existential crisis, rootlessness and quest for identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experiences that comes out of the immigrant settlement. Diaspora writing has a peculiar quality of loss and nostalgia. It reflects the predicament of immigrant and their difficulties in adapting to a new culture. Quest for identity is a part of Indian diaspora. As far as Indian people are concerned, they have been migrating to the other parts of the world for better opportunities even though the migrant has to show a greater sense of adjustment, adaptability and accessibility.

Behold the Dreamers takes place between 2006 and 2008 and chronicles the eve and the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, when the subprime mortgage bubble finally burst. Imbolo Mbue immigrated to the United States from her native Cameroon in the late-1990s in pursuit of a better education. *Behold the Dreamers* earned Mbue a seven-figure advance and was an instant hit. It is one of numerous recent works that has attempted to grapple with the moral meanings of the 2008 financial crisis. Mbue's work also stands alongside numerous novels that deals with the experiences of the Africans in the West, particularly in the United States.

Set in New York, the book traces the varied impacts of the 2008 recession in the United States on the lives of two couples: the Jongas and the Edwardses. Jende Jonga is a Cameroonian immigrant in the US on a temporary visa pending his asylum case; Neni Jonga is a community-college student on a student visa. Clark Edwards is an executive at Lehman Brothers which is one of the firm whose bankruptcy played a major role in the recession and Cindy Edwards is a nutritionist with a rags to riches background.

In 2008, Clark Edwards hires Jende to be a chauffeur. The job offer comes as a welcome change in the Jongas' luck, which has been hard since they emigrated from rural Limbe, in Cameroon, to a shoddy apartment in Harlem. As Jende drives the Edwards family about the city, he learns that money has not made them happy. Clark seems stressed about some problems with the books and leveraging of debt at Lehman Brothers; further, he occasionally engages in encounters with sex workers. Cindy has imposter syndrome because she grew up poor and was conceived out of rape. Vince Edwards, a law student at Columbia, rejects his parents as too materialistic but nonetheless takes their money. Mighty, a child, is shuffled back and forth between school and activities by domestic help because his family is so busy.

The lives of these two families begin to intersect. Clark is increasingly absent and stressed because he feels a sense of foreboding about the reliance of Lehman Brothers on shoddy bookkeeping and investments in subprime real estate products. Cindy, already insecure because she feels she is not good enough for her husband, turns to alcohol and Vicodin to soothe her worries over her marriage and absent husband. Vince, on the cusp of graduating from law school, rejects his pathway into the wealthy elite by deciding to go to a retreat out West and later to India, to find himself. Mighty grows increasingly unhappy as he overhears more and more acrimonious arguments between his parents.

Jende's life is complicated because of his pending immigration case, overseen by a marginally-competent lawyer named Bubakar, who makes constant requests for more fees. Jende's request for asylum is rejected and he knows he will be deported sooner or later. Neni discovers that she is pregnant. She receives a welcome respite from the gruelling cycle of classes, all-night study sessions, and homemaking when she accompanies Cindy and Mighty to the Hamptons, to serve as live-in help. While at the Hamptons, Neni discovers that Cindy is an addict and that the woman is deeply unhappy.

Matters come to a head for both families. Vince devastates his parents by telling them he will be going to India. Lehman Brothers declares bankruptcy. Jende loses his asylum case when the judge rejects his fabricated story of persecution at home; he prepares himself for return to Cameroon. A newspaper story about a madam with Wall Street clients confirms Cindy's suspicions that Clark is cheating on her, and Cindy forces Clark to fire Jende, who has covered for his boss.

Meanwhile, Neni, who was unable to work during the end stages of her pregnancy, and having quit her job at Jende's request, discovers that no financial aid is available if she wants to return to school and that pharmacy school is prohibitively expensive. Desperate to salvage her dreams and find the lawyer's fees for Jende, Neni blackmails Cindy for \$10,000 to keep silent about Cindy's addiction. Her plan to secure her future fails, however: Jende is tired of struggling, and agrees to return to Cameroon voluntarily. Jende beats Neni one night after she blows up over his high-handed decisions.

Cindy dies after a binge of drinking and drugs. Clark becomes a lobbyist for the credit union industry. The Jongas, using the blackmail money as a nest egg, return to Cameroon, where Jende plans to be an entrepreneur and live comfortably in Limbe, where such money is enough for affluence. Neni stands by Jende, despite her own love for America and sadness that her children may miss out on the opportunities in America. Thus, the novel ends.

When these characters are placed under diaspora, they gain different labels. These characters become a victim of diaspora.

Delineating the history of diaspora, Robin Cohen distinguishes among the victims of diasporas as an experience mainly shared by Jews, Africans and Armenians and other more positive forms of diasporic settlements which can be seen as galvanizing new creative energy outside the natal homeland while he remarks that the current usage of the term favours the meaning of a 'victim diaspora', he points out in the modern era many forms of trade or business diasporas exist. Therefore, diaspora as enforced dispersal was never the only facet of the term's meaning. (Fludernik 291)

The major theme that is portrayed in this novel is the Sustainability of the American Dream. This novel takes a critical look at the American Dream, that is, the idea that anyone who is willing to work hard can become prosperous in the United States. For Jende and Jonga it means earning a good living and eventually moving into a comfortable home. For his

wife, Neni, it means fulfilling her dream of becoming a pharmacist. Clark's dreams become quest for integrity. Imbolo Mbue illustrates how the ambitious concept of the American Dream, which is often rooted in materialism. He also explains that the major barrier standing in the way for the fulfilment of their dream is the race and class. Thus, the American Dream is only sustainable when it is rooted in non materialistic values.

Another theme that Mbue put forward is the Modern Immigrant Experience. Jende learns how difficult is to become an American citizen. Throughout the novel Jende's journey through the American system of immigration helps him to realize that there seems to be no viable pathway to citizenship for someone else with his background, in spite of America's promise to welcome everyone to its shores.

Mbue also had used the Statue of Christopher Columbus and the doublers as symbols in her novel. The statue which stands in Columbus Circle in Manhattan, symbolizes the Jonga family's search for a land of prosperity. The usage of this symbol can be seen in some of the chapters. The Statue of Christopher Columbus are quoted in the lines, "In his first days in America, it was here he came every night to take in the city. It was here he often sat to call her when he got so lonely and homesick that the only balm that worked was the sound of her voice. During those calls, he would ask her how Liomi was doing" (Mbue 157).

The doublers are parallel figures to Wall Street stockbrokers and investment bankers, signifying the possibility of corruption and exploitation. Doublers are street criminals in Cameroon, far removed from the elite, privileged world that the Wall Streets inhabit, both are linked by their immoral willingness to exploit people's dreams to enrich themselves. Mbue portrays the symbol of doublers in chapter 15.

Mbue concludes her novel by saying that "one can never trust any Government-I don't trust the American government and I definitely don't trust the Cameroon government" (Mbue 611).

Mbue's prose is mostly straightforward and plain but her characters are complex, with opposing motivations, which provides the story with depth and quiet power. Thus, Mbue clearly conveys the themes of experiences of the immigrant when they are in a foreign land and also portrays the way in which they conquer their American Dream through her novel *Behold the Dreamers*.

A Diasporic reading of Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation*

Jean Kwok's early life mirrors that of Kim in *Girl in Translation*. When Jean Kwok was five years old, she immigrated with her family to Brooklyn, New York, from Hong Kong. The novel brings to the page of the lives of countless immigrants who are caught between the pressure to succeed in America, their duty to the family, and their own personal desires, exposing a world that we rarely hear about. Introducing a fresh exciting Chinese American voice, *Girl in Translation* is an inspiring debut about a young immigrant in America who is a smart girl trying to balance her schoolwork and factory labour, custom and desire. A girl who is forced at a young age to take responsibility for her family's future and her struggle between two worlds and two cultures is depicted in the novel by Kwok.

Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* details the first decade of the lives of Kimberley Chang and her mother after they emigrate from Hong Kong to New York City in the 1980s. The novel is told from Kim's perspective. Each chapter corresponds roughly to a year of her life, beginning in early elementary school and ending shortly before Kim goes to college. Kim struggles as she attempts to balance her double life as a brilliant student during the day and tireless factory worker at night. As she grows up, she feels the weight of her family's dependence on her to make a better life for them, and must choose between her obligations to her family and her desires for herself.

The novel begins as Kim and her mother arrive in New York City with the help of Aunt Paula and Uncle Bob, Ma's sister and brother-in-law. They move into a rundown apartment in a largely-abandoned neighbourhood in Brooklyn, the surplus of structures there set to be demolished at any time. Kim starts public elementary school and Ma goes to work in the Chinatown clothing factory owned by Aunt Paula and Uncle Bob. Kim joins her there to work afterschool. They both work six days a week for measly wages. They face pests, filth, harsh weather, and extreme poverty during their first ten years in the country.

Kim's transition into the American school system has many bumps along the way. Although a gifted student in math and science, she struggles to catch up with her peers in subjects that rely on knowledge of the English language. She deals with bullies and alienation because of her status as an immigrant living in extreme poverty. In addition, she must continue to balance her efforts in school with her job working with Ma at the factory.

Just before middle school, Kim's efforts in school are rewarded when her principal encourages her to set her sights on a prestigious private school. To her surprise, Kim is accepted into Harrison Prep on a full scholarship. Once there, she dedicates herself to her studies in the hopes of getting into a top university, becoming a doctor, and building a better life for herself and Ma. During high school, she falls in love with Matt, a fellow Chinese immigrant her own age, who also works at the factory. By the time she realizes she has feelings for him, though, Matt has started seeing another girl.

Around this time, Kim learns, much to her excitement, that she's been accepted to Yale. Matt's mother passes away shortly after, and he turns to Kim for comfort. The two of them have sex and Kim becomes pregnant. Matt urges her to keep the baby, forego Yale, and start a simple life with him in Chinatown. Though she believes it might make her happy, she knows she's worked too hard to give up her dream. She decides to break up with Matt, but can't go through with the abortion she's scheduled.

The novel ends twelve years after the break-up. Kim is a heart surgeon and lives in a grand house with Ma, along with her and Matt's son, Jason. When she recognizes one of her patients' fathers as an old acquaintance of Matt's, she asks him to pass her business card to him. Matt shows up at the hospital where Kim works and the two of them talk about how they both regret their decision to break up. Kim takes him back to his apartment on her motorcycle and gets a glimpse of his life with his wife, Vivian. Despite her regret, Kim realizes that she made the best decision for herself, Ma, Matt, and her child.

In the epilogue Kim is a paediatric cardiac surgeon. She recounts seeing Matt's daughter in the bridal shop window. She asks to pass her card to Matt when she identifies that one of her patient's father was an old friend of Matt. Matt shows up the hospital a week later. She and Matt cried as he admits that he knew that she had an abortion. She gives a ride to him to get back home. She sees Vivian with him who is pregnant. Kim rides back home in tears. When she gets home the reader learns that her twelve-year old son Jason is the spitting image of Matt.

Kim thinks about her decision of having Jason in her life and decides not to tell Matt about her decision. Kim now lives in a big house and she was able to buy a piano for Ma. Kim recognizes that in keeping Jason a secret she is depriving him of his father. But she thinks that she couldn't have made any other decision. Thus, the novel ends. The novel portrays the

struggle that the immigrant faces, when he is asked to live and choose between the two worlds and futures. Salman Rushdie says that “sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools” (Rushdie 143).

There are many symbols used in this novel to depict the condition of an immigrant in America. One among the symbols used are The Liberty of Goddess. The Liberty of Goddess symbolizes Kim’s hope that, regardless of the obstacles and issues she and Ma had faced when the New York still holds opportunities for success. The next symbol used is the skirts. The skirts are used to represent the way that the way of inhumane factory system fundamentally wrapped in Kim’s outlook.

The main theme discussed in this novel is about the immigrant experience. As *Girl in Translation* follows Kim and Ma’s journey, it gives special attention to the ways in which both of them especially Kim handles their way of status as Chinese immigrant. In the case of Kim being an immigrant entails rejecting many of the conventions surrounding how to be a proper female and Chinese in order to be successful at school. According to Ma it was about the difficulty and foreignness of life in U.S. For both the women the experience of being an immigrant is one that is isolating. It makes her feel alone in case of Kim both her Chinese life at home and her American life at school. According to Kim and Ma being in United States means learning a new language. In that way Kim faces the difficulties and complexities of being an immigrant.

Another major theme that Jean Kwok shares is about the poverty and shame. In the novel Kim and Ma were able to immigrate to the United States with the help of the Ma’s older sister Aunt Paula. As in the novel we can see that Kim is trying to hide her financial situation from her friends, classmates, and teachers.

Through this novel Jean Kwok is trying to convey the struggles that the young girl had to face in her life as an immigrant. The themes of alienation, displacement and conquering her American dream is clearly depicted in her novel *The Girl in Translation*.

Conclusion

Due to globalization, there emerged an endemic and alien culture. The consequence of globalization and its after effects are clearly affected in the various genres of literature. Among them, the literature of migration is characterised by these influences. It is focused on the mixing of the national myths and legends, culture, tradition, norms and values with the aliens. Diaspora

is all about the creation of new identities, spaces for growth, resolution of conflicts and a new culture.

In most of the multi-ethnic societies the several groups in the ethnic order way in wealth, power and status. The emigration of India to other countries has a long history. People of India have migrated to different countries for various reasons in various periods of history and settled in alien islands. Experiences range from trauma to felicitations, from nostalgia to amnesia.

Diaspora is the site for cultural dichotomies. The diasporic space has a unique nature. The characters show both positively and negatively their diasporic adventure. This negotiation between these two spaces can keep positively in the lives of the immigrants. Looking through the prism of Diasporic studies, the characters transformation in life can be identified as the direct result of factors like problematic existence, racial discrimination, nostalgia, cultural clash, identity crisis, otherness, passive or active resistance against the hostility and how would they adapt with the struggles they confront. It is the difference in social settings among different groups that establish the contrast between the natives and the immigrants and makes it more evident.

The role of ethnicity in the makeup of the American cultural identity and the need for or resistance to revision of the canon of American culture has resulted in the multicultural critique. Multiculturalism has become an inescapable reality today in the United States. The United States is inherently diverse despite the domination of one or more groups over others. Multiculturalism teaches them that where the person may go or wander, he will always go back to his roots in search of his identity. Under Diaspora the problems of identity crisis, racism, and a detailed understanding about the victim can be observed.

Diaspora is a term which evokes multi-disciplinary interest. Literature however, is an enriching resource of information of the Indian diaspora. It serves the other window of the life world. The literature on Indian diaspora is largely enriched by the contribution of diasporic Indians in various capacities and few Indians who are interested in the diaspora. The literary contributions of the Indian diasporic are a manifestation of their search- search through memories, search for home, search for roots.

During the colonial period migration was a history of misery, deprivation and sorrow. The third wave of migration from the nineteenth century was mainly to the industrialized,

migrated territories of the republic of India. The Indian diaspora is a generic term to describe the people who migrated territories of the republic of India.

The novel *Behold the dreamers* by Mbue tries to explain her new understanding that the American dream is not accessible to everyone. Mbue gives out the struggle that the characters have faced in the novel. The novel *Girl in translation* by Jean Kwok also portrays about the immigrant experiences. She introduces a fresh, vibrant Chinese voice, in which an immigrant girl is forced to choose between two futures and worlds. The character in the novel finds it difficult to adapt to a new environment. Second and third section gives a detailed analysis about the two novels. The themes of alienation, displacement, poverty is also described. In overall the project gives a detailed analysis of the ways in which the immigrant struggles when they are out of their roots. They have to face a number of problems and find it difficult to adapt with the new culture. Both these novels convey the struggles that the characters have faced as being an immigrant.

To conclude, Diaspora not only led to the crossing of boundaries. It denotes the journey across less visible boundaries of time, space, traditional values and languages. The diasporic subjects relocate into a new landscape and creates something afresh. They cannot simply abandon their old lifestyles. They are gradually shifted to the host land and also there is an interplay between the good and bad that should be acknowledged in the diasporic space.

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Women on the Move: A Study of *Kanalvazhiyile Nakshatrangal*

Reshmi R. L.

Terry Tempest Williams, an American writer, educator, conservationist, and activist in *When Women Were Birds: Fifty-Four Variations on Voice* explores the question of what it means to have a voice. A week before Williams's mother dies, she tells Williams that she has left her all of her journals but that she does not want to look at them until after she was gone. When Williams examined the journals after her mother's death, she was shocked to see that all three shelves of journals have been left blank, as waiting to be filled. Williams initiates a discussion of voice by recalling that her mother's voice was the first one she ever heard. The author decides to write her own story in the journals which her mother left for her. In fifty-four short chapters, Williams recounts memories of her mother, and explores the concept of absence and presence of voice of women in the world. "Once upon a time, when women were birds, there was the simple understanding that to sing at dawn and to sing at dusk was to heal the world through joy. The birds still remember what we have forgotten, that the world is meant to be celebrated"(5). It is really important that as narrators and as women who are telling their stories can change the universe through women's stories which may be most personal, but finally, is the most universal. Revealing the spirit of a woman is actually opening the door to the spirits of other women, so it becomes a mirror. For every woman there is a need to have a voice in the private and public sphere which helps in self-discovery and growth.

In this context a memoir titled *Kanalvazhiyile Nakshatrangal* published by Kudumbasree, a community organization of Neighborhood Groups of women in Kerala gains importance in the field of life writing. This memoir brings forward the events of the past and re-enact them by giving it form in writing. *Kanalvazhiyile Nakshatrangal* is a collection of success stories of ordinary women which was written by Asha S. Panicker, the Editorial Assistant of Kudumbasree State Mission. The book contains the success stories of fourteen ordinary women in which some of the stories have been published in Kudumbasree magazine earlier. Sharing experiences is an important tool for women to voice their feelings and thoughts of identity, sexuality, marriage, love, family and life. Kudumbasree has been recognized as an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas of Kerala: bringing women together from all spheres of life to fight for their rights and for empowerment. *Kanalvazhiyile Nakshatrangal* was written as a way to pass down a personal legacy, rather

than as a literary work of art or historical document and a record of events by a person having intimate knowledge of the fourteen women. It is frequently difficult for women to portray these personal experiences through conventional literary and writing techniques. Often the memoirs attempt to please two of the human desires: to be known, and to know others. A growing number of women started sharing their experiences about how they felt about gender relations and the plight of women in general.

Each story in *Kanalvazhiyile Nakshathrangal* portrays strong female characters. The first success story in the collection is the story of Girija. After the death of her father who was running a driving school, Girija's family became completely destitute. When hunger and poverty became challenges in her life she had to go to work at the age of 10. Most of her rights as an individual were denied when she was staying in a relative's home. Yet she stayed there and completed her schooling. She got married with the hope that she would get a better life through marriage. But after marriage, situation got worsened as her husband gets a little income which cannot meet the needs of the family. When life was completely at a standstill she found a new way through Kudumbasree. In 2004 she joined in Kudumbasree and came to know about the micro finance offered by Kudumbasree which has proven to be an effective and popular measure in the ongoing struggle against poverty and women empowerment. Originally started as micro finance-led financial security model, Kudumbasree soon became a comprehensive model of local economic development and participatory mechanism for women empowerment. With the help of Kudumbasree she started 'Sruthy Catering Service'. As Terry Tempest Williams says, "There are two important days in a woman's life: the day she is born and the day she finds out why"(23). Though at first it started as a small enterprise by giving tea, coffee and snacks to all the small events, later it turned out to be a big business. During her cooking days she also learnt to drive and she loaded the food in the van and delivered it to different places. "Our unit is getting a lot of orders. Now there is only the problem of not having time. I have experienced the problem of not having a home in the past. When I was young I craved food a lot. By God's grace I don't have any problem now. I feel I'm so lucky"(8). Girija's unit was one of the Cafe Kudumbasree units that participated in the India International Trade Fair organised in Delhi in 2014. "I was able to build my own house. Bought an Omni van and a scooter also bike for my husband and bullet for my son. We have recently bought an i10 car. No debt yet. Not only me, but my friends also live happily"(10). Girija observed. Recognizing her true identity in terms of her professional success other than

her role as wife and mother makes this a successful female story. The overall empowerment of women is closely linked to economic empowerment.

Sonu is a social worker. Sonu tells a story of a mother of an adult autistic daughter. The father abandoned his daughter and his wife when he found out that the child was born with autism. As there was no one to look after the daughter when she went to work, the mother tied the daughter's hands to the window and locked the house from outside. One day as she was left for work, someone was harassing the daughter through the window. This incident affected Sonu deeply. It was the time when Buds rehabilitation centres were started under the leadership of Kudumbasree for mentally challenged people above 18 years of age. When Block Resource Centre was started at Thalachira the mother started going to work again after leaving her daughter at B.R.C. It was because of Sonu's proactive intervention that helped the mother live happily now. Despite the hardships, she has completed double PG-P.G. in Malayalam and P.G. in English. At the age of 23 Sonu became the chairperson of Community Development Society and she worked in that position for 6 consecutive years. Sonu's concern is collective rather than individual, as she is the woman possessed of a strong commitment to rationality and to moral responsibility for herself and others.

Quite often gender roles deny women the right to define their own individuality. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ammu works in 'Paradise Pickles and Preserves' where she cannot have ownership or partnership with her brother Chacko.

Though Ammu did as much work in the family as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter had no claim to property[...]

"Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society", Ammu said.

Chacko said, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine"(57)

As the theorist Rowbotham cites, a woman cannot experience herself as an entirely unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined as a woman, that is, as a member of a group whose identity has been defined by the dominant male culture. (qtd. in Friedman 38). Gender norms and gender roles describe how people of a particular gender and age are expected to behave in a given social context. But after going through the stories of women in *Kanalvazhiyile Nakshathrangal* it can be inferred that they have been come out of

such gender stereotypes. We can see a progress in many important dimensions, such as increased participation in the economic and social spectra. Such progress gives the world a hope that the society today is less tolerant of inequality and injustice than past generation. Development is not possible without gender equality, therefore a country's development plans should always include tackling gender inequality.

Kalamani, a woman who proved that well-digging and breaking rocks are not the jobs exclusively reserved for men but it can also be done by women, is an 'Ayalkoottam' member at Kaliyakavu Panchayat in Malappuram. Kalamani now leads a happy and satisfied life. Before that she had a different life, a life of suffering. Kalamani, the daughter of Parangodan and Elsy who were engaged in setting up tents in the fields of the country side and run circus. Her father taught her tight rope walking and jumping through hoops. Though her studies were interrupted several times, she completed her fifth standard. At the age of fourteen she got married and she was taken to Karnataka by her husband. It was actually a trap and her family was quite unaware of that. He was married before and had two children. However she could send a letter to a friend and her family reached there to save her. As soon as they reached, her husband had left the village and he was not seen after that day. At that time she was only fifteen years old. But that girl did not give up. She started going to work in the fields. After that she married a man named Viswanathan and started going with him to dig wells and break rocks. When she was asked how she got the courage to go down such a deep well and break the rock, she replied: "Miseries and sufferings- husband is not well, parents getting older, what else I can do?"(21-22). Now Kalamani is an active member of Rangasree Community theatre. As she loves dancing and singing, she gets many opportunities to showcase her talent. She has won the best actress award in the drama competition held in Tirur and the bravery award of Kudumbasree-Snehitha. Thus Kalamani becomes a true inspiration and role model for many women.

Ramla's story is a story about finding the courage to pursue the dreams of a woman. "The woman on stage is acting well, natural dialogue delivery'. People who watched the play asked back and forth. 'Who's that? Who's this Pathumma?' One of the people watching the drama said, 'Isn't that our Ramlath'" (44). Today Ramla's life is easier than it has ever been. But it was not the condition before. At the age of fourteen she got married. But the life after marriage was not a smooth ride. When Kudumbasree started self-employment schemes for women, five of them took a loan to start a tailoring unit. Later she was elected as a ward

member, a member of Community Development Society , and Chairperson of Area Development Society . She was also working as a Resource Person in Kudumbasree Balasabha and Akshaya schemes. She says: “Whatever be the character, I will perform well”(48).

The story of a social entrepreneur, Lisy Martin from Ettumanoor in Kottayam depicts the challenges many women face in the society. Her story reminds the readers the great social entrepreneur Arunachalam Muruganantham, a school drop out from a small village in Tamilnadu, invented a machine to manufacture sanitary napkins. Lisy has made considerable progress by making sanitary napkins. She had the courage to come out to start a business of her own. The napkin making process was really a complex one. Though she failed and was rejected several times she was not ready to quit and stop. Just like Williams in *When Women were Birds* records:”My voice is born repeatedly in the fields of uncertainty.”(85) When Lisy approached Kudumbasree for a loan she was asked to submit a detailed project report. She decided to learn about the sanitary napkin manufacturing process. She had done a lot of research and travelled a lot. Her aim was for sanitary napkins to be manufactured using modern machines and best raw materials. After getting the information regarding the wooden pulp used in napkins and the company in Mumbai from which it is sourced she started the manufacturing process. Finally the product named ‘Fiyona’ was launched. With Kudumbasree’s help, her product now faces no problem of marketing. 70000 to 1 lakh napkins are supplied every month in Kottayam and Ernakulam offices of Kerala Medical Service Corporation. Seena, Manju, Mini and Jayasree who had been with Lisy in times of crisis are still with her. So this success story of Lisy becomes theirs too. It is true that entrepreneurship increases woman’s self esteem and confidence, thus leading to greater control over their lives in social and economic spheres. Women are considered to be better suited to handle money and to make sure that the income through their entrepreneurial efforts make them self sufficient. They believe that positive thinking supported by affirmations will achieve success in anything, and therefore, as one begins focusing attention and consciousness on the positive, on the half-filled glass of water, reality starts shifting and materialising the positive intentions and aspects of life. This story does not give any image of the submissive woman and it discards the representative value given by the majority to the oppressed female voice.

Betty Friedan, an American writer, activist and feminist in her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, has discussed a kind of frustration that almost every woman in the society suffers. She terms the condition as “a problem of identity” (16) experienced by many women, who

are unable to develop a sense of self-worth and purpose in their lives. Friedan defines women's unhappiness as "the problem that has no name" (13). Friedan refers to the happy housewife heroine whose only ambitions are marriage, and motherhood. Friedan calls this homemaker an ideal of femininity, "the feminine mystique" (17). But here the successful women of Kerala rejected the 'feminine mystique' and pursue a meaningful life outside as well as inside the home. The success stories of the common ordinary women of Kerala do not end here. Kudumbasree makes drastic changes in the socio-economic life of women in Kerala. It has enhanced entrepreneurship and leadership and the capacity of women to work and earn better. The status of women has thus substantially improved. Kudumbasree always reminds us of the importance of celebrating women's achievements and progress towards gender equality. *Kanalvazhiyile Nakshathrangal* presents some strong women who emerge as free women and they grow up by believing that a woman can do anything. They are not living up to the ideas of what a woman should do with her life. Their life experiences enable them to get through life by themselves, as independent beings, meaning that they can have their own independence, and have their own free will to do what they please.

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Rising from the Ashes: Everyday Lives of Dalit Women in Bama's *Sangati* and *Karukku*

Manju R.

Everyday life, “is the most self evident, yet the most puzzling of ideas” (Felski, 1). It is filled with moments both mundane and extraordinary and it is punctuated by a myriad of incidents, ranging from trivial to transformative. Our daily experiences and incidents shape our memories, emotions and the ongoing narrative of our lives. Sociologist Henri Lefebvre explored the theory of “everyday life”, emphasizing how routine activities and mundane experiences contribute to the social fabric. According to Anita Vaidyanathan, the concept of empowerment or resilience refers to the “women’s ability to negotiate, strategize, manipulate and rebel against events, situations and persons in their everyday lives in the family and in the workplace” (96). The women characters in the works of Bama are portrayed as powerful and strong characters and are not cowed down by their personal crisis.

Bama is the pen name of Tamil Dalit writer Faustina Mary Fatima Rani. She was born at Puthupatty village in Virudunagar district in southern Tamil Nadu. Bama began to be noted as a writer with the publication of *Karukku*, an autobiographical novel. Written in Tamil and published in the year 1992, *Karukku* has won worldwide honour after Lakshmi Holmstrom’s translation of the novel into English in the year 2000. The English translation has enabled *Karukku* to cross linguistic and regional boundaries and reach the global readers. The book is about Bama’s inner quest for self-discovery and it can also be considered as a community’s history or rather as a cultural biography of a community. Bama’s *Sangati* was published in Tamil in 1994 and it was translated to English by Lakshmi Holmstrom in 2005 under the title *Sangati: Events*. It is at once a narration of the author’s individual struggle and personal life and at the same time it elevates itself to become the autobiography of a community.

In the Preface to *Sangati*, Bama proclaims that her aim of writing the novel was to project the liveliness and resilience of Dalit women; their ability to “bounce like a ball that has been hit—and not to curl up and collapse because of the blow” (Preface vii). “Sangati” means news, events or happenings. The book does not have a plot in the normal sense; it is in the form of interconnected anecdotes. The novel consists of powerful stories narrated by memorable protagonists. It is in the voices of many women speaking to and addressing one another as they share the incidents of their daily lives. These individual stories, anecdotes and

memories of personal experience are narrated in the first person, and then counterpointed by the generalizing comments of the grandmother and mother figures, and later still, by the author-narrator's reflections. The narrator is in the earlier chapters at least, a young girl of about twelve, and in the last three or four chapters, a young woman. The novel deals with several generations of women: the older women belonging to the narrator's grandmother Vellaiyamma Kizhavi's generation downward the narrator's own, and the generation coming after her as she grows up. Thus, it becomes an autobiography of a community. The conversations between the generations point to changing perspectives and aspirations as well as to gains and losses over the years.

The hardships faced by Dalit women in their daily life make them strong and courageous. As a result, they can face acute pains and they are not soft or chicken hearted. The novel is full of instances when women single-handedly faced difficult situations and emerged victorious. The author narrates the story of Kaatturassa's mother. While cutting grass in the woods, she went into labour pains and bereft of any help, delivered the child there itself: "She cut off the umbilical cord with the sickle she had taken with her to cut the grass, dug a hole and buried the placenta and then, walked home, carrying her baby and her bundle of grass" (S 6). Since the baby boy was born in the forest, he was named Kaatturassa which means, the king of the forest. Bama opines that "our women have an abundant will to survive, however hard they might have to struggle for their last breath. Knowingly or unknowingly, we find ways of coping in the best way we can" (S 68).

A significant aspect of patriarchy operative in Dalits is revealed through unequal division of work between Dalit men and women. The Dalit women had to work very hard throughout the day. From the moment they wake up, the women set to work both in their homes and in the fields. At home, they are pestered by their husbands and in the fields, there is back breaking work besides the harassment of the landlord. Although both men and women came home after a day's work in the fields, the men went off straight away to the bazaar or the toddy shop to while their time. When women returned home in the evening, there was no time even to draw breath. They washed vessels, cleaned the house, collected water, gathered firewood, went to the shops to buy rice and other provisions, boiled some rice, made food, fed husband and children; before they could eat what was left over and go to bed. They couldn't go to bed in peace and sleep until dawn. Night after night, they had to give in to their husband's pleasure: "Even if a woman's body is wracked in pain, the husband is bothered

only with his own satisfaction” (S 59). The unequal division of labour is conspicuous in all spheres of life. It is even visible in the works related with marriage. During the preparation for marriage, while men “usually sat on benches outside and chatted or they might stroll off together to the shops, the women remain busy the entire time, cooking the rice and other things and doing everything else” (S 85). Rita Felski in her essay, “The Invention of Everyday Life” has rightly commented that home is “a highly gendered space” in which “women have often been seen as the personification of home” (15).

Though Dalit women work very hard and though they have to endure gender exploitation in terms of the wages they receive for the job, they are proud of one fact: they are financially independent than the high caste women. As Bama remarks: “Our women work hard and earn their own money; and have a few coins in their hands. They don’t hold out their palms to their husbands for every little expense” (S 66). The author opines that instead of waiting for a saviour to solve their problems, the Dalits themselves should uphold their own rights: “It is we who must uphold our rights. We must stand up for ourselves and declare that we too are human beings like everyone else. If we believe that someone else is going to come and uplift us, then we are doomed to remain where we are, forever” (S 66).

The obscene language used by Dalit women while quarreling can be seen as a strategy to cope with tension in their domestic life. According to Bama, the women have neither pleasure nor fulfilment in their own sexual lives; they derive a sort of bitter comfort by using these terms of abuse which are actually names of their body parts. They give vent to their suppressed emotions by shouting and fighting: “If we are to live at all, we have to shout and shriek to keep ourselves sane” (S 68). Raakkamma and Kaaliyamma retaliate against domestic violence and abuse. Raakkamma uses abusive language and makes her husband feel ashamed when he comes to beat her: “Disgusting man . . . instead of drinking toddy every day, why don’t you drink your son’s urine? Why don’t you drink your monthly blood? And she lifted up her sari in front of the entire crowd gathered there” (S 61). It is because of the insolent behavior that she is able to escape from his brutal thrashing. As she remarks “If I hadn’t shamed him like this, he would surely have split my skull in two, the horrible man” (S 62). The women subvert the prevailing system through humour, shrewish conduct and abusive speech. Kaliyamma drives away her violent husband by taking recourse to verbal obscenities, abusive speech and exaggerated protestations. She matches every act of physical violence and shocks her tormentor into passivity. She tries to make him realize the hard labour she puts in at home and outside: “I

too went and worked all day in the fields in the baking heat; I too came home half-dead. But after that, just to make you a decent meal, I've even had to go to the shops. Can't you realize that I'm only an ordinary woman?" (S 63-64).

Their courage is also reflected in the defiance that they show to upper caste landlords. Sammuga Kizhavi, an elderly lady boldly stood against the upper class landlord. She insisted that she should be dropped back home in the landlord's vehicle from the voting booth. She openly threatened to defame the party's reputation and succeeded in having her way: "You made sure of my vote, and now you're going to leave me stranded here, are you? Give me a ride home . . . otherwise I'll speak to all the people in our street and none of the women will vote for your party" (S 101). On one occasion, she violated the caste code by taking a bath using the water from the landlord's well. When the landlord caught her red-handed, she told him that the water in the well was salty and she spat out a mouthful of water into the well. On another occasion, when Sammuga Kizhavi saw the landlord beating a child for having touched his drinking water, she deliberately went and pissed inside his pot.

Bama's call to revolt against the oppressive fate of women has relevance beyond Dalit women and takes cognizance of women everywhere irrespective of their caste and colour: "We must be strong. We must show by our resolute lives that we believe ardently in our independence. I told myself that we must never allow our minds to be worn out, damaged and broken in the belief that this is our fate. Just as we work hard, so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive" (S 59). According to the author, it is high time Dalit women started thinking independently and taking bold decisions: "We must start thinking for ourselves, taking decisions and daring to act. Don't we sharpen and renew a rusted sickle? Just like that, we must sharpen our minds and learn to live with respect" (S, 63). The writer herself confesses in the acknowledgement to the novel that *Sangati* "grew out of the hope that the Dalit women who read it will rise up with fervour and walk towards victory as they begin their struggle as pioneers of a new society" (ix).

This abundant will to survive is one of the hallmarks of Dalit women, who manage to plough through a life full of adversities, which in itself is a victory of human soul. A significant character who merits discussion is Vellaiyamma, Bama's grandmother. She was deserted by her husband, Goyindan within four years of her marriage. When all her hopes of her husband's return bore no results, she discarded all the outward symbols of matrimony to meet the survival needs of her children. When there was a terrible famine, she took off her *tali* and sold it. She

told herself that she had become “a corpse without a husband and struggled single-handedly to take care of her two children” (S 5). Despite the hard labour Dalit women have to indulge in throughout their lives, they do not forsake their enthusiasm to live. The writer finds much in their lives to emulate and considers it intriguing that “in spite of all their suffering and pain, one cannot be delighted by their sparking words, their firm tread and their bubbling laughter” (S 75). Their zest life is conveyed through their songs which bespeak of the vigour of a lived life. Lakshmi Holmstrom opines in her introduction to the novel that “from birth to death, there are special songs and dances. And it is only the women who perform them: “Roraattu” (lullaby) to “oppari” (dirge), it is only the women who will sing them” (xx). The songs sung by them are occasioned by apparently simple incidents in their life and express uncomplicated yet intense emotions in a simple diction.

Bama admires and adores the women of her community and places them at the highest pedestal owing to their skill of multi-tasking: “How many jobs they are able to do simultaneously, spinning about like tops! Even machines can’t do as much” (S 78). Here, the writer does not applaud the traditional Tamil ideals of fear, shyness, simplicity and modesty, but rather, courage, fearlessness, independence and self-esteem. The author posits her intentions in her acknowledgement to *Sangati*:

My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but about their lively and rebellious culture; their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide; about the self-confidence and self-respect that enables them to leap over their adversities by laughing at and ridiculing them; about their passion to live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment; about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories. (ix)

In *Karukku*, Bama opines that gender socialization is one of the main reasons for the degradation suffered by the Dalits. Even the little babies are told and instructed again and again of their enslavement and degradation that they have come to believe that they are degraded untouchables, lacking honour and self-worth. They have reached a stage where they themselves, voluntarily, hold themselves apart. She exhorts the Dalits who are asleep to open their eyes and fight against injustice:

We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate.
We must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all these institutions that use caste

to bully us into submission, and demonstrate that among human beings, there are none who are high or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and just society, where all are equal. (K 28)

Bama says that Paraya community was a community “that was born to work” (K 55). All the women worked hard to make a living. Her grandmother worked as a labourer to a Naicker family, but, she was also a *kothaal*- she hired labourers for them, brought them to work regularly, supervised them and made sure they received their wages. Except for Sundays, she went to work every single day. She would rise before cock-crow at two or three in the morning, draw water, see to the household chores, walk a long distance to Naicker’s house, work till sunset and then come home in the dark and cook a little gruel for herself. The author’s mother used to go to the forest to collect firewood. On one occasion, she brought a bundle of firewood, leaned it against the wall and then began vomiting vast gobs of blood. Bama comments: “But it was only by toiling like this, without taking any account of their bodies as human flesh and blood, that people of my community could even survive” (K 52).

Even though these women worked hard and suffered bodily pain, they were always happy and cheerful. They laughed, chatted with each other and sang songs. The writer applauds the spirit of cheer and joy shown by women even in adverse conditions. As they planted paddy seedlings or weeded the fields or harvested the gram, they worked to the rhythm of their songs. They sang to their babies as they rocked them in their cradles. They sang to the young girls as they came of age. They sang teasing songs to the prospective bride and groom on the occasion of their marriage. During festivals, women sang in the church and performed *kummi* dance. They also sang dirges to their dead. Bama admits that the resilience of Dalit women has been a source of inspiration to her: “Many Dalit women, for whom toil is their life-breath, who led vigorous lives in spite of all their weariness and anxieties, have been a great inspiration as well as a constant help to me” (K 139).

After centuries of silent suffering and humiliation, the writer is happy that Dalits are becoming more and more aware of their rights and responsibilities. In *Karukku*, Bama opines that the Dalits have realized that they had been made slaves in the name of God. They have learnt that the nuns and priests of the Church have never respected them as human beings, but bent the religion to their benefit. The resurgence, willpower and renewed vigour of Dalits to live a respectable life is voiced by Bama: “They have become aware that they too were

created in the likeness of God. There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated; and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect and with a love towards all humankind” (K 109). Bama admits that her stay in the convent as a nun for seven years had weakened her both mentally and physically. She says that at the time when she entered the convent, she was like the “strong core of a teak tree. Both in mind and in body, I was strong and steadfast as that. But, when I came out, I had lost all my strength. I was as feeble as a *murunga* tree that blows over in the wind” (K 121). In the convent, though she had a number of elitist attributes such as status, money and a comfortable life, she felt like a fish out of water because she was alienated from ordinary people. After renouncing the life of a nun, Bama realizes that it is hard to make a living. Her indomitable strength and willpower is evident in the following words: “I am truly happy to live with a whole and honest mind. I feel certain contentment in leading an ordinary life among ordinary people. I can breathe once again, independently and at ease, like a fish that has at last returned to the water, after having been flung outside and suffered distress” (K 121). She comforts herself with the thought that “rather than live with a fraudulent smile, it is better to lead a life weeping real tears” (K 122).

Despite the innumerable odds and severe opposition and repression, Dalit women are trying to create a viable space in all spheres of life. As the eminent critic Tapan Basu opines, “Women writers are beginning to construct an identity out of the recognition that women need to discover and must fight for, a sense of unified selfhood, a rational, coherent and effective identity” (123). Dalit women’s voices in Indian literature are very significant as they break not only the silence of centuries but also invent new literary techniques by violating the traditional syntax, imagery and symbols. The spirit of optimism and the strength to rise like a phoenix from the ashes and face life with renewed vigour is evident when Bama says:

Each day brings new wounds, but also new understanding, new lessons that experience teaches, sufficient mental strength to rise up even from the edge of defeat. I have seen the brutal, frenzied and ugly face of society and I have been enraged by it. But at the same time, I have danced with joy because of the sweetness and simplicity of a life that is in touch with nature. Even though I have walked hand in hand with anxieties, I have also recognized a strength and zest within myself, flowing like a forest stream, and this has refreshed me. (K 138)

Thus, Bama vividly portrays the everyday life of Dalit women in her novels, shedding light on their experiences with caste discrimination, poverty and patriarchal norms. She captures their spirit for survival, indomitable will power and their zest for life. The picture of Dalit woman that emerge from her works is that of a courageous woman with resilient, questioning spirit, a fighter and a survivor determined to follow her dreams, even at a cost. Her works have become a weapon of resistance to reimburse the deep delved agony, violence and humiliation endured by Dalit women during these centuries. The women characters in the works of Bama are not cowed down by the adversities that they face in their lives. Despite the hardships they face, the Dalit women characters in the works of Bama are lively, energetic, cheerful and optimistic in their outlook. They face obstacles with a smile on their faces and they possess tremendous courage, will power and spirit for survival.

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Socio-economic Background and Communicative Competence in the Context of ESL Learning

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Introduction

Communicative competence is the “general ability to use language accurately, appropriately and flexibly” (Yule, 2016). It involves grammatical competence or the ability to use words and structures accurately, sociolinguistic competence or the ability to use appropriate language in a particular social context, and strategic competence or the ability to organize a message effectively and to compensate via strategies in order to overcome potential communication problems in interaction (2016). It is generally observed that children who grow up in a social situation in which more than one language is used can acquire an L2 easily as in the case of L1 acquisition and they acquire near-native competence in it. However, in an ESL situation, learners are seldom exposed to the L2 as they are in L1 acquisition. Nevertheless, a few learners are seen to acquire remarkable competence in using English as L2, even in similar learning conditions.

Socioeconomic Background and Communicative Competence

The socioeconomic background of the learner exerts a considerable influence on the development of communicative competence in L2, but the subject has received scant attention. Clare Burstall et al. in their study of British primary school children learning French, detected a linear relation between the pupil's social class and his attitude towards learning French and his level of achievement in French. The correlation became even more evident when the students reached the secondary school. High scores in French achievement tests and positive attitudes to learning French characterized the students from high socio-economic strata whereas lower levels of proficiency and more ethnocentric attitudes were consistently associated with lower social status (5-6). It is often found that children with parents in higher-status occupations tend to receive more parental support in their new learning experience.

Another aspect that is in favour of the learners from well-off families is that unlike their less fortunate fellow learners who begin their formal study of the L2 from a level of absolute ignorance, they might have had some experience of the L2 at home where English might be used along with the MT in casual conversation, and from their exposure to English songs, films, TV programmes, other social media etc.

The variables selected to assess the socioeconomic background of students in this study include their place of residence, and also the occupation and educational qualification of their parents, which are assumed to be important determinants of the ESL competence achieved by learners. A survey-cum-analysis method was adopted for the study. The informants consisted of a group of second year undergraduate students. Oral and written proficiency tests were used to assess their communicative competence. Data regarding their socioeconomic milieu was collected using questionnaires and personal interviews. The tools for analysing the collected data included descriptive analysis and also statistical analysis using chi-square test.

Analysis of data supports the assumption that the socioeconomic background of the learners is a variable that directly influences the level of ESL communicative competence achieved by them. Data relating to the socioeconomic background of students was analysed in the following manner.

Place of Residence

Students' questionnaire yielded data regarding the place of residence. 75% of the high achievers have an urban background whereas only 50% of the low achievers have such a background.

Association between Place of Residence and ESL Competence

Chi-square test of significance was applied to substantiate the influence of place of residence on proficiency; data and results are presented in the table

Table 1

Data and Result of χ^2 Test for the Association between Learners' Place of Residence and English Language Competence

H₀: Place of residence does not affect proficiency

Place of residence	Proficiency			Calculated χ^2 $\sum \left[\frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \right]$	Tabled χ^2 (df 1 & $p < 0.01$)
	High (O)	Low (O)	Total		
Urban	39 (32.26)	28 (34.74)	67	6.806**	6.635
Rural	13 (19.74)	28 (21.26)	41		
Total	52	56	108		

(O) represents Observed frequency

Values in brackets indicate (E) Expected frequency

** indicates significance at 0.01 level

INFERENCE: Since calculated chi-square is greater than table value we reject the hypothesis that the place of residence does not affect proficiency. This means that place of residence is a variable factor that affects ESL competence. The scope and possibilities of the variable may be studied to the advantage of the low achievers,

Occupation of Parents

Responses relating to the occupation of parents, reveal a wide range of jobs.

i. Occupation of Father

A majority of students have their fathers employed in middle level positions in banks and Government departments/bodies—48.08% among high achievers and 35.71% among low achievers. It is noteworthy that whereas fathers of 19.64% of low achievers are in the lowest levels of skilled/unskilled labourers such as tailors, blacksmiths, weavers and coolies, the father of no high achiever belongs to these strata. So also, it is notable that only one of the low achievers has her father in a top-level job. Thus, it is obvious that high achievers are mostly from the upper strata and low achievers from the lower layers of society. Fig. 1 presents the diagrammatic representation of the data and analysis.

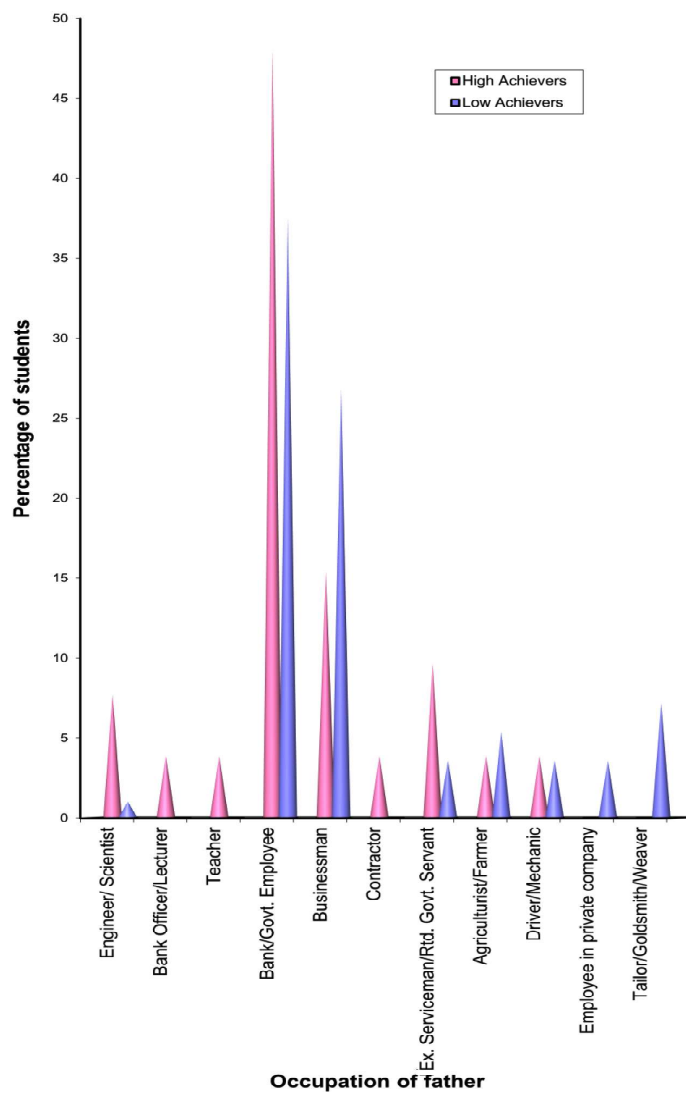


Fig. 1. Diagram Showing Occupation of Father of High and Low Achievers

Association between Occupation of Father and ESL Competence

The result of chi-square test confirms the influence of father's occupation on proficiency, as shown in table 2.

Table 2

Data and Result of χ^2 Test for the Relation between Occupation of Father and ESL Competence

H_0 : Occupation of father does not affect proficiency

Occupation of father	Proficiency			Calculated χ^2 $\sum \left[\frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \right]$	Tabled χ^2 (df 2 & $p < 0.01$)
	High (O)	Low (O)	Total		
Professionals	6 (3.37)	1 (3.63)	7	12.658**	9.210
Teachers / Govt. staff / Contractors/ Businessmen	42 (38.04)	37 (40.96)	79		
Farmers / skilled & unskilled labourers	4 (10.59)	18 (11.41)	22		
Total	52	56	108		

(O) represents Observed frequency

Values in brackets indicate (E) Expected frequency

*** indicates significance at 0.01 level*

INFERENCE: Calculated chi-square value > table value at 0.01 level of significance. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis that occupation of father does not influence ESL competence. That is, fathers' occupation is a factor that has a telling effect on the L2 competence achieved by students.

ii. Occupation of Mother

Mothers are mostly housewives, as stated by 65.38% of high achievers and 82.14% of low achievers. Fig. 2 clarifies the conclusion by graphical representation.

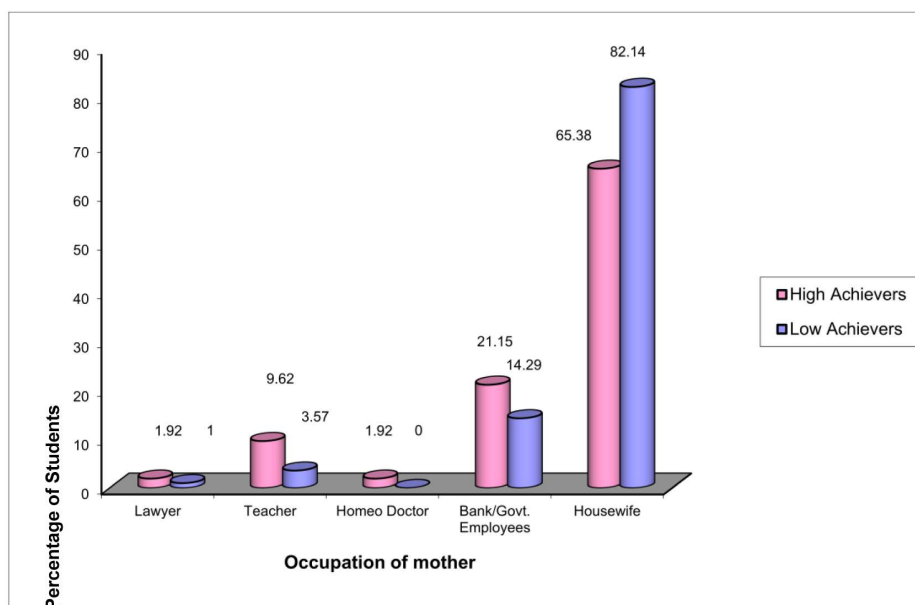


Fig. 2. Diagram Showing Occupation of Mother

Association between Occupation of Mother and ESL Competence

Chi-square test was applied to find out whether there is significant association between mother's occupation and learner's proficiency. The details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Data and Result of χ^2 Test for the Relation between Occupation of Mother and ESL Competence

H_0 : Occupation of mother does not affect proficiency.

Occupation of mother	Proficiency			Calculated χ^2 $\sum \left[\frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \right]$	Tabled χ^2 (df 2 & $p < 0.05$)
	High (O)	Low (O)	Total		
Professionals	1 (0.96)	1 (1.04)	2	4.119 (not significant)	5.991
Govt. / Bank employees, Teachers etc.	17 (12.52)	9 (13.48)	26		
Housewives	34 (38.52)	46 (41.48)	80		
Total	52	56	108		

(O) represents Observed frequency

Values in brackets indicate (E) Expected frequency

INFERENCE: Since calculated chi-square value < table value at 0.05 level of significance, we accept the null hypothesis that occupation of mother does not influence learner's language proficiency. Mother's occupation is not a variable that contributes to language learning and hence does not reflect on student's achievement.

3. Level of Education of Parents

The data regarding the educational qualification of parents shows that the language proficiency of students is directly proportional to the level of education of their parents. The qualification of both the parents of the majority of high achievers is degree—30.77% of fathers and 36.54% of mothers are graduates. But SSLC/ITI is the parental qualification of the majority of low achievers—35.71% of fathers and 60.71% of mothers. Moreover, it is to be noted that none of the low achievers except one has her parents educated beyond the undergraduate level. Thus, it is obvious that parent's level of education has a crucial influence on the proficiency attained by their children.

i. Educational Qualification of Father

The descriptive analysis shows that father's qualification is closely linked with the level of proficiency attained by learners. Fig. 3 presents the data and analysis diagrammatically.

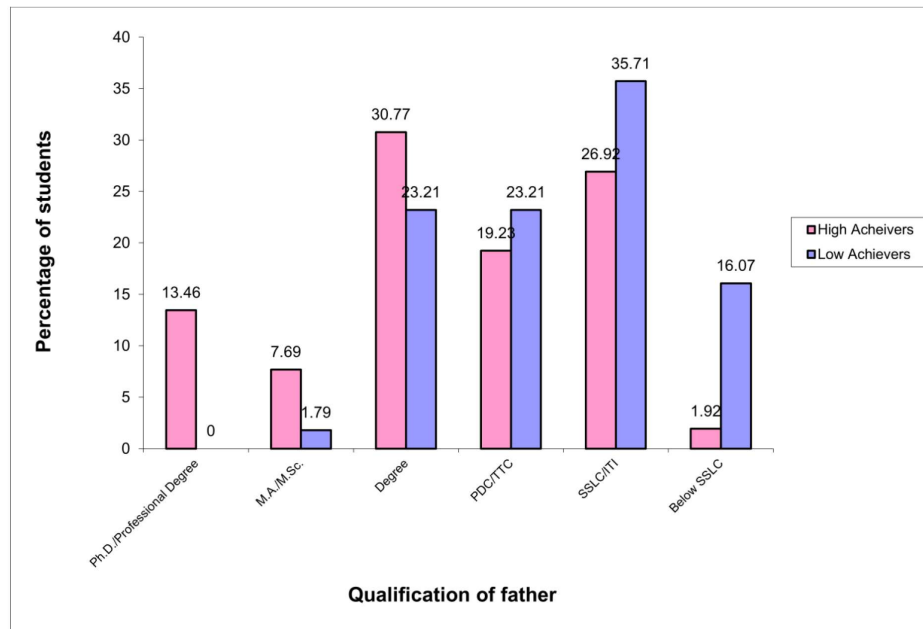


Fig. 3. Histogram of Educational Qualification of Father

Association between Qualification of Father and ESL Competence

Chi-square analysis was applied to verify the relationship. The data and result of the analysis are given in Table 4.

Table 4

Data and Result of χ^2 Test for the Relation between Qualification of Father and ESL Competence

H_0 : Qualification of father does not affect proficiency.

Qualification of father	Proficiency			Calculated χ^2 $\sum \left[\frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \right]$	Tabled χ^2 (df 3 & $p < 0.01$)
	High (O)	Low (O)	Total		
PG and above	11 (5.78)	1 (6.22)	12	16.017**	11.345
Degree / Diploma	16 (13.96)	13 (15.04)	29		
SSLC / Pre-degree	24 (27.44)	33 (29.56)	57		
Below SSLC	1 (4.81)	9 (5.19)	10		
Total	52	56	108		

(O) represents Observed frequency

Values in brackets indicate (E) Expected frequency

*** indicates significance at 0.01 level*

INFERENCE: Since calculated chi-square value > table value at 0.01 level of significance, null hypothesis that father's qualification does not affect proficiency is rejected. Father's educational level is a variable that exerts a strong influence on a child's proficiency. The high achievers do benefit from the superior educational qualification of their fathers which may be because of their fathers' support and favourable milieu at home which encourage achievement in English.

ii. Educational Qualification of Mother

The influence of mother's level of education on learner's proficiency is strong, as revealed by the descriptive analysis given above. Fig. 4 presents the diagrammatic representation of the analysis.

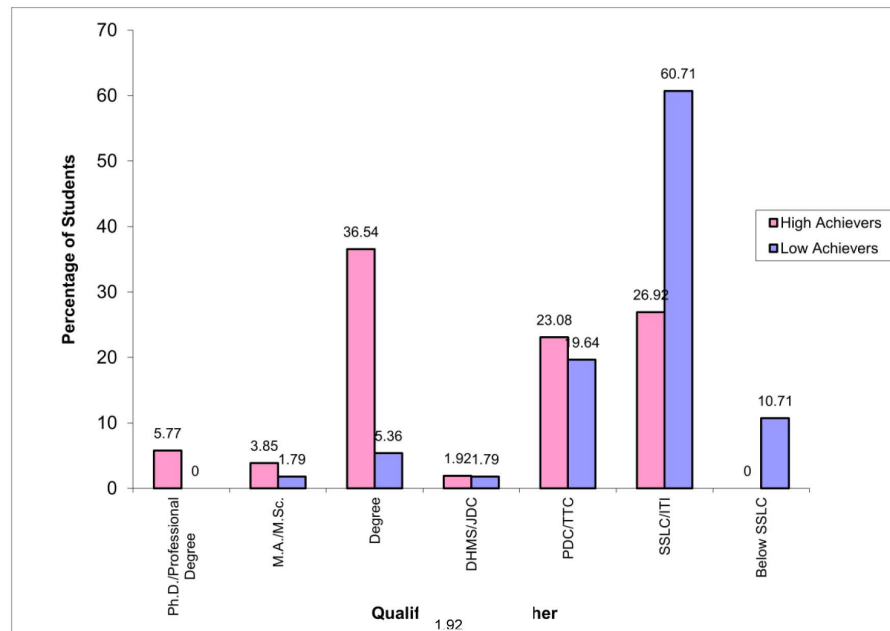


Fig. 4. Histogram of Educational Qualification of Mother

Association between Qualification of Mother and ESL Competence

The details of chi-square test of independence applied to confirm the influence of mother's level of education on student's proficiency are given in Table 5.

Table 5

Data and Result of χ^2 Test for the Relation between Qualification of Mother and ESL Competence

H_0 : Qualification of mother does not affect proficiency.

Qualification of mother	Proficiency			Calculated χ^2 $\sum \left[\frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \right]$	Tabled χ^2 (df 3 & $p < 0.01$)
	High (O)	Low (O)	Total		
PG and above	5 (2.89)	1 (3.11)	6	21.859**	11.345
Degree / Diploma	20 (11.56)	4 (12.44)	24		
SSLC / Pre-degree	26 (34.19)	45 (36.81)	71		
Below SSLC	1 (3.37)	6 (3.63)	7		
Total	52	56	108		

(O) represents Observed frequency

Values in brackets indicate (E) Expected frequency

** indicates significance at 0.01 level

INFERENCE: Calculated chi-square value > table value at 0.01 level of significance. Therefore we reject the null hypothesis that qualification of mother does not affect proficiency. Educational level of *mother* is more vital in promoting language proficiency than that of *father*, as revealed by the greater discrepancy between the calculated and table values of chi-square in the case of mother's qualification. This is perhaps because the job of helping children in their studies at home is mostly done by mothers and high levels of education definitely contribute to the academic performance of children. Besides, mothers usually establish a more intimate bond with children than fathers do, and give them moral and emotional support whenever their spirits sink. Thus mothers play a vital role in shaping the character and future of their children. High achievers undeniably benefit from the assistance of their well-educated mothers.

Another point to be noted is that while the occupation of the mother does not affect the learner's proficiency, the qualification of the mother is a significant variable. The majority of students – both high and low achievers – have housewives as mothers. But whereas low achievers do not have any advantage of the situation, high achievers profit from their mothers being housewives by virtue of their higher education and leisure. The discrepancy in the results

of the chi-square tests may also point to the fact that employed mothers, though educated, lack the leisure to give any academic assistance to their children.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that a high socioeconomic level is a positive social variable that facilitates the communicative competence achieved by the learners in English. That is, the socioeconomic variables such as the place of residence, educational qualification and occupation of parents, are significant affective factors in ESL learning. A high socioeconomic level translates to better L2 learning facilities whereas a low socioeconomic background hinders the attainment of an optimum level of ESL competence. It acts positively for the high achievers while having a negative effect on the low achievers and vice versa, exerting a causative influence on the levels of competence achieved. However, it is a rigid variable, not yielding to any manipulation, but the insights from the study can take the L2 teacher a long way to identify the negative variables and adopt remedial measures to overcome them. For instance, even in the ESL classroom where the primary sources of input are mostly limited to teachers, textbooks and other resources, the quantity of meaningful interaction in English is minimum. Therefore, the teacher can make the maximum use of mutable variables such as methods and materials of teaching, to ensure maximum benefit to the maximum number of learners. The volume of conventional type of teaching material may be reduced and supplemented with activity-oriented learning tasks; English teachers, right from the pre-primary level of instruction should be given training in student-centred methods of teaching to ensure maximum classroom interaction in L2. Thus, the disparity in ESL competence caused by the negative immutable variables can be minimized substantially.

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