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Leaves of Healing in Nature and Art: Eco-psychological Themes in O. Henry's "The Last Leaf"

Lijiyamol Thankachan

Ecopsychology is a field that explores the connection between human well-being and the natural world, suggesting that a deeper bond with nature can aid in healing both psychological and physical ailments. It recognizes the interplay between ecological health and mental health, emphasizing that reconnecting with the environment can restore balance in mind, body, and spirit.

O. Henry's "The Last Leaf" is a timeless short story that beautifully intertwines themes of hope, resilience, and the profound connection between humanity and the natural world. At its heart lies Johnsy, a young artist grappling with illness and despair, whose fragile spirit becomes inextricably entwined with the fate of an ivy vine. As the leaves fall one by one, they mirror her dwindling will to live, transforming the humble vine into a poignant symbol of her inner turmoil. Beyond its narrative of sacrifice and renewal, the story offers fertile ground for an ecopsychological reading, unveiling the intricate interplay between human emotions, the natural world, and art.

The ivy vine serves as a hauntingly evocative metaphor for the fragility of life and the capricious nature of hope.

There was only a bare, dreary yard to be seen, and the blank side of the brick house twenty feet away. An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall. The cold breath of autumn had stricken its leaves from the vine until its skeleton branches clung, almost bare, to the crumbling bricks. (Henry 251).

To Johnsy, the vine's falling leaves signify her own descent into oblivion. She declares with a despairing certainty, "When the last one falls, I must go too," (Henry 251) binding her existence to the vine's fate. This visceral connection underscores nature's role as both a reflection and a catalyst of her mental state. The doctor observes, "Your little lady has made up her mind that she's not going to get well," (Henry 251) emphasizing the delicate thread between her psyche and the world beyond her window.

Ecopsychology, which delves into the profound relationship between human well-being and the natural environment, finds its embodiment here. The ivy vine becomes a visual proxy for Johnsy's waning vitality, its slow denudation echoing her fading spirit. The natural world, in

its stark beauty and relentless cycles, is shown to hold an unparalleled sway over the human mind, weaving a tapestry of interdependence between the outer environment and the inner self.

The persistence of the “last leaf” becomes a luminous beacon of hope in Johnsy’s darkened world. When the storm fails to dislodge the solitary leaf clinging to the vine, it kindles a spark of curiosity and rekindles her will to endure. Her transformation is encapsulated in her realization: “It is a sin to want to die. The last leaf has shown me how wicked I was” (Henry 255). The steadfast leaf becomes a symbol of endurance, infusing her with a newfound desire to live.

Ecopsychology posits that observing resilience in nature can ignite a similar resilience within the human soul. The unyielding “last leaf,” though a product of human artistry, draws its power from its resemblance to the natural world. It awakens in Johnsy a profound sense of connection to life, illustrating how deeply the human psyche is nurtured by even the faintest echoes of nature’s enduring spirit.

In Behrman’s painted leaf, art emerges as an exalted tribute to the resilience of nature. His act of recreating the ivy leaf, so lifelike in its detail, becomes a testament to art’s capacity to mimic and magnify the natural world’s power. Though artificial, the painted leaf is imbued with the spirit of the vine, bridging the gap between the transient beauty of nature and the enduring hope it inspires. “Someday I will paint a masterpiece,” (Henry 253) Behrman had once vowed, and in his final act of selfless creation, he fulfills this promise. His painted leaf transcends mere imitation; it becomes a masterpiece not of aesthetic grandeur, but of emotional and spiritual profundity. Through his art, he captures the invincible essence of nature, crafting an anchor of hope that saves Johnsy’s life.

This interplay between art and nature illuminates the ecopsychological idea that creativity inspired by the natural world can restore balance to the human mind. The painted leaf, though a work of human hands, carries the weight of the natural resilience it emulates, offering Johnsy a lifeline in her darkest hour.

Behrman’s sacrifice underscores the ecopsychological principle of interdependence, where the well-being of individuals is interwoven with the natural world and the actions of others. Braving the storm, he paints the leaf at great personal cost, imbuing it with a vitality that

defies the forces of nature. His gesture embodies the interconnectedness of life, where acts of altruism ripple outward, creating profound impacts on others.

Johnsy's recovery is not solely her triumph; it is a testament to Behrman's devotion and the symbolic power of the natural world, even when mediated through art. His final act underscores the notion that healing is a collective endeavor, shaped by the interrelation of human effort, creativity, and the environment.

In its rich symbolism and evocative narrative, *The Last Leaf* explores the profound psychological interplay between humanity, nature, and art. The ivy vine, with its waning and enduring leaves, reflects Johnsy's emotional journey from despair to hope. Behrman's painted leaf exemplifies the transcendent power of human creativity when it seeks to emulate and honour the natural world.

Viewed through the lens of ecopsychology, the story reveals the therapeutic power of nature, whether real or artfully rendered, to restore balance to the human spirit. The narrative reminds us that the cycles of nature, mirrored in the delicate dance of leaves on the vine, possess the power to heal and inspire. In Behrman's ultimate sacrifice and Johnsy's rekindled hope, *The Last Leaf* becomes a profound meditation on the symbiotic relationship between humanity, art, and the natural world.

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A Scrutiny of Weber's Analysis of Authority in Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*

Shilpa Mathew

The term “authority” can be generally defined as an administrative unit of government, or it can mean the power or right to give orders or make decisions, or it can refer to the person who exercises (administrative) control over others. According to Ian Buchanan, authority is described in political theory and sociology as “the legitimacy (or not) of the use of power” (33). The term is constantly associated with power, as the individuals representing authority wield power with their position in the government and the governed are considered to be the powerless sections of a society. But even then, the law-abiding citizens perceive the objectives and demands of an authority figure as reasonable, beneficial and true, and usually respect them.

The thought of the “analysis of authority” was developed by the German sociologist Maximilian Karl Emil Weber, who was primarily concerned with the matter of how authority is attained. He is acclaimed for conceptualizing how people and institutions come to have authority, and how they maintain it. Max Weber in *Economy and Society*, a work that was published posthumously in Germany in 1922, defines authority as:

legitimate forms of domination, that is, forms of domination which followers or subordinates consider to be legitimate. Legitimate does not necessarily imply any sense of rationality, right or natural justice. Rather, domination is legitimate when the subordinate accepts, obeys, and considers domination to be desirable, or at least bearable and not worth challenging. It is not so much the actions of the dominant that create this form of subversion and acceptance, but rather the “willingness” of those who subordinate, to believe in the legitimacy of the claims of the dominant. (55)

When the governed sections (the subjects or citizens) of a state are willing to yield and conform to the commands of the dominant entity, authority becomes legitimate. Their trust in the governing body and respect for the system which represents the authority, pave way for a mutual understanding between the ruler and the ruled and a harmonious order prevails in the society founded on peace and welfare. But when this legitimate authority turns oppressive, there occurs violence and voices of dissent are heard against the agents of authority.

Weber identified three kinds of authority: (i) rational-legal - government depends for its authority on the fact that laws have the appearance of necessity (e.g., it is rational to ban murder and so on); (ii) traditional authority – authority derives from long established customs, laws and practices, the sense that things have always been thus and should remain thus; (iii) charismatic authority – the authority an individual claims or derives from a higher power, such as destiny or God. (Buchanan 33)

The one thing which is common in all the three authorities is “legitimacy.” “A legitimate authority is justified by both the ruler and the ruled. Each type of authority is legitimate since it involves both explicit and implicit consent of the governed” (Giddens 270). The governed has sanctioned the power of the authority because they believe the authority functions for the welfare of the benefactors of that system.

Orhan Pamuk, a Turkish novelist and Nobel prize winner, in his daring novel, *Snow*, published in 2004, delineates the fundamental predicament of modern Turkey and recounts the struggle of a European intellectual (a poet) and social elite, Ka (the protagonist of the novel) to comprehend and make peace with the catastrophes occurring in the country, as an important issue raised in *Snow* is the clash between the ideologies of the West and the East. Weber’s three types of authority can be analysed in *Snow* as the political unrest in Kars (the eastern Turkish city), accentuates the skirmish between different forms of authority uprising in Kars to overthrow each other. The conflict among the secular government, the group of headscarf girls and the religious fundamentalist group demonstrates the political mayhem and the tug of war held by these groups, for gaining supremacy in Kars. It is better to examine in detail the three types of authority, before the application of Weber’s analysis of authority, is done in Pamuk’s novel.

The rational-legal authority plays a pivotal role in the functioning of a human society. The governing body embodies a prominent structure in the evolution of a society and serves as a legitimate source of authority or power. The laws implemented by the system are assumed or believed to be executed for the welfare of the citizens of a state. The authority resides in the bureau and not the individual. Thus, the leadership style of the rational-legal authority is similar to that of bureaucratic officials.

“According to Weber, power made legitimate by laws, written rules and regulations is termed rational-legal authority. In this type of authority, power is vested in a particular rationale,

system or ideology and not necessarily in the person who implements the specifics of that doctrine. A nation that follows a constitution applies this type of authority” (Grabb 128). So, generally, the functioning of this type of authority is analogous to that of the working of a government of a nation.

Legal authority can be defined as a bureaucratic authority, where power is legitimized by legally enacted rules and regulations such as governments. This form of authority is the one that is grounded and clearly defines laws with explicit procedures that define the obligations and rights. This is largely respected due to the competence and legitimacy that laws and procedures bestow upon the people in the authoritative position. Authoritarians can exercise power only within the legally defined boundaries. (Giddens 282)

Authority can also ascend from other factors like tradition and individual traits. The traditional authority is the conventional, orthodox, deep-rooted system which prevails in most of the communities and nations. This system can be of different natures – religious, patriarchal, spatial and so on. Their advocates or followers are resolute and unwilling to change their values, no matter what happens, as this type of authority has been conforming to known principles or accepted standards, since a long haul. The leadership style can be inspired from a notable personality.

“In the traditional authority, a ruler typically has no real force to carry out his will or maintain his position but depends primarily on a group’s respect. Traditional authority can be intertwined with race, class, and gender. In most societies, for instance, men are more likely to be privileged than women and thus are more likely to hold roles of authority” (Hadden 158). Unlike the rational-legal authority, the traditional authority is not sanctioned by any constitution or does not abide by any written law, but solely functions for safeguarding the longstanding beliefs and customs, and the group’s inclination to perform duties rests principally on the members’ respect for their beliefs in the long-term traditions and customs.

Hence, traditional authority can be well-defined as the power legitimized by “respect and only respect” for age-old cultural practices. “It comes from unwritten rules that are maintained over time. Leaders in traditional authority are people who depend on a tradition. This leader is a dominant personality and the existing order in the society entrusts that person the mandate to rule. Traditional leadership is reflective of everyday conduct and routine” (Hadden 159). The group expresses its reverence towards traditional authority because it has

always been that way and they would like to observe it so, unaltered, and preserve the customs, without allowing an outside agency to distort the customs for executing its selfish agendas.

The charismatic authority is generally religious in nature. This power is claimed by an individual (a religious leader) or a sect who convinces the religious followers to undertake the reign of that community by force or persuasion, with the slogan of establishing a new order. The source of power lies on a leader's personal qualities (his appearance, charisma and potential). The representative of authority can be virtuous or vicious and subsequently, can transform the world into a better place or can degrade it into a place of terror. The leadership style is ascribed to that of a self-motivated disposition. The followers accept the power of charismatic authority because they are enthralled by the chief's ideals.

Charismatic leaders are seen as people who are inspired by God or by lofty unsocial principles. Charismatic leaders usually emerge in times of crisis and offer innovative or radical solutions. They may even offer a vision of a new world order. Thus, charismatic authority can be defined as the power legitimized by exceptional, unusual and extraordinary personal abilities which inspire devotion and obedience. Weber identified this extraordinary attribute as "charisma", whereas Robert Bierstedt, an American sociologist called it "leadership" and not an authority at all. The leader designs an army of true devotees to obtain perpetual support from the people. It has no rules or traditions to guide or monitor conduct; as it is based on the unique characteristics of an individual. (Ritzer 130)

The charismatic authority is in a way, worshipped by the followers and they eventually call themselves "his disciples", as if the agent of this authority is sent by God. The devotees perceive the able leader as their saviour. This authority wins the hearts of many with his character and is in constant conflict with the rational-legal authority, as the nature and working of this authority is chiefly decided by the individual alone, unlike the former, which is collective in nature.

At the very beginning of the novel, the readers are informed of the natural catastrophe- the heavy snowfall (blizzard) which has cut off Kars from the rest of the country (Turkey) and concurrently of the political catastrophe- the violent conflict which has broken out between the secularists, the group of headscarf girls and the religious fundamentalists.

Weber's notion of rational-legal authority is epitomized in *Snow* by the secular government, which is legitimate in nature and functions like a bureaucratic authority. The agents

performing the role of this legal authority in the novel are the government (Ankara) ruling Kars, Prof. Nuri Yilmaz (the local Director of Education), Sunay Zaim, the army and the Secret Police of Turkey- the MIT.

While Ka and Ipek (Ka's beloved) are at a café together, they witness the murder of the Director of Education, who was responsible for enforcing the government's rule that headscarves not be worn in University classrooms. "It was only when Ka saw the director shudder violently and fall from his chair that he realised the man had been shot in the chest" (36). It is assumed that the religious fundamentalists led by Blue, are responsible for the murder. This brutal act signifies the disturbed climate of Kars indicating the vehement combat between the government and the religious fundamentalists, the latter being assumed to win the forthcoming local elections because of the Islamists' religious fervour and promise of divine authority (charismatic authority) which captivates the poor unemployed civilians and the desperate souls of Kars.

The presumed secular government is actually blamed for the suicide epidemic that has defamed Kars, as it was on the insistence of the governing bodies that young girls were deprived of their right to wear headscarves in the University classrooms. This infiltration by the government into their lives, their personal choices and decisions, disheartened the girls. They were even forced by their parents to obey the law put forward by the legitimate system, which made them fall into depression, as the law was against their will. Eventually, some girls who could not yield, committed suicide out of unhappiness. "What shocked and frightened Ka was the manner in which these girls had killed themselves: abruptly, without ritual or warning, in the midst of their everyday routines." (13)

The revolutionary theatre group controlled by Sunay, stages a play in Kars, which becomes a front for a military coup and an army takeover of Kars to prevent an Islamist victory in the elections. Sunay announces: "Do not fear. The reactionaries who want to turn back time, those vile beasts with their cobwebbed minds, will never be allowed to crawl out of their hole. Those who seek to meddle with the Republic, with freedom, with enlightenment will see their hands crushed" (158). Thus, this forgotten theatre personality openly denounces Islamists and their regressive ideas for Turkey. Sunay can also be regarded as an accomplice of the powerful government in overthrowing the rivals.

The MIT agents conveniently take advantage of Ka by playing with his emotions: “This Ipek Harum with whom you hope to return to Frankfurt. . . she was, once upon a time, Blue’s mistress” (364). They make him reveal the secret hideout of Blue. The army deports Ka from Kars for his own safety, and their commands are lawful and expected to be followed by the people. Ka in his letter for Ipek writes: “The road to Erzurum has reopened, and they are forcing me to leave on the first train” (395). Thus, Ka leaves the decaying backwater (Kars) forever.

The traditional authority is symbolized in *Snow* by the group of headscarf girls led by Kadife. It is formed as a protest against the secular government’s decision to ban the wearing of headscarves by girls in the University classrooms. The legitimacy of traditional authority exists because “it has been accepted for a long time and by longstanding custom. People adhere to traditional authority because they are invested in the past and feel obligated to perpetuate it” (Hadden 158).

In the novel, Kadife and the group of headscarf girls respect and follow their religious traditions and practices, and strongly believe that they are obliged to follow their beliefs, as these norms have been considered accepted for a long period of time by the devotees. The pious customs have been imprinted in these girls’ minds from their childhood and so, the performance of this religious duty and habit is indispensable for them and has become part and parcel of their existence. Kadife, an activist of religious rights, acts as a representative of the traditional authority, by hoping that, the government repeals its provocative order of prohibiting girls from wearing headscarves. The government’s instruction has questioned the very meaning of their existence and so they are dogged to fight back even though, this female group, a minority in Kars, can be considered trivial by the patriarchal ruling body.

The charismatic authority is exemplified in *Snow* by the religious fundamentalist group mounting in Kars, regulated by Blue, the prominent Islamist. The secularists perceive the fundamentalists to be an unwanted growing weed engulfing the rich soil of Kars. The fundamentalists desire to overpower the government which has decreed a controversial order endangering the spirit of Islam. This wrong decision taken by the secular body becomes the means for manipulating the minds of Kadife and the followers, and thereby, the fundamentalists wish to reinstate their interests, under the pretence of being the common man’s saviour.

Kadife falls for Blue's ideals and charisma: "His eyes were deep blue- almost midnight blue- a colour you never saw in a Turk. He was brown-haired and beardless, much younger than Ka had expected; he had an aquiline nose and breathtakingly pale skin. He was also extraordinarily handsome, his gracefulness born of self-confidence" (74). Kadife even helps him at the cost of removing her headscarf which was dear to her. This act by Kadife proves Blue's influence over her, and she is revealed to the readers as Blue's mistress. "The appeal of a charismatic leader can be extraordinary, and can inspire followers to make unusual sacrifices or to persevere in the midst of great hardship and persecution. The charisma of the leader is enough and adequate to inspire their followers and make their authority seem legitimate," (Ritzer 130)

The fundamentalists were alleged to be terrorists by the secular government and so the group were often in hiding and hunted down and killed by the rational-legal authority. Necip defends Blue's actions by saying: "'Political Islamist' is just a name that Westerners and secularists give to us Muslims who are ready to fight for our religion" (69). Blue is captured by the MIT (with the aid of Ka) and killed. Blue's murder is avenged by his disciples, who killed Ka, even when he was in a foreign land and Ka's book of poetry is stolen by the assailants. Thus, the fundamentalists' deeds substantiate that they were under the sway of their charismatic leader even after his death, and performed Ka's murder as a ritual, a way of attesting their commitment and love towards their late master.

Max Weber's distinction of authority as rational-legal authority, traditional authority and charismatic authority have been examined methodically in Orhan Pamuk's novel *Snow* by analysing the three forms of authority in action in Kars, the secular group, the group of headscarf girls and the religious fundamentalist group.

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Cultural Intermediaries: *A Song of Ice and Fire* to *Game of Thrones*

Dr. Manu C. Skaria

Delayed recognition and acceptance are by no means uncommon in any field of knowledge; these are more common when it comes to art and literature. While Leonardo DiCaprio gained acceptance as an actor from a very young age, an Academy Award eluded him until 2016. *The Shawshank Redemption*, one movie that finds a place in almost every list of classic or “must watch” movies of all time, received a mild reaction from the box office before going on to become a cult classic later on in history. George R.R. Martin’s (hereafter referred to as GRRM) epic fantasy novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* presents a case not so different. Conceived in 1991 and published in 1996, neither the book nor its sequels attracted many readers on a global scale for a considerable period of time. The current paper is an exploration into the role of cultural intermediaries in the current universal visibility of GRRM and his books in mainstream media.

It is unrealistic to get the exact sales figure of a book that was published in 1996. Making an assessment of the same over two decades in a quickly shrinking world is even more difficult. Hence, an estimate of the visibility factor is attempted based on abstract scenarios by pitching GRRM against other popular writers. To begin with, the series falls into the genre of epic fantasy and two book series that have stolen the show in the 2000s were *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien and the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. The massive success and critical acclaim received by the movie versions of *The Lord of the Rings* must have acted as a boost for filmmakers to try something on similar lines (à la the *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* Series). While movies like *300* did well in the box-office as well as claimed positive critical reception, the film version of Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* series failed to create an impact (in spite of a director like James Cameron being at its helm and a fantastic star cast). However, one does not find GRRM being considered on par with these during this period.

The second factor taken into consideration is the treatment of these texts in academia. The elitist academic tradition has often looked down upon popular fiction, and the efforts from various cultural studies departments across the globe to promote the study of popular culture has often been met with a lukewarm response from the traditionalists. Even in 2019, most of the well-established departments in India offer courses on fantasy, science fiction, campus novels and similar genres as open/elective courses rather than as a core part of the curriculum.

Within this limitation, preliminary research shows that GRRM and his works are still beyond the limits of academia in a majority of the institutions. While some of the television episodes are included in syllabi as part of popular culture courses or are used as introductions to Medieval Age, the books hardly get any attention. For example, the course offered by Eric Weiskott at Boston College; the course introduction begins as follows: “Before House Stark and House Lannister came the House of York and the House of Lancaster.” For a course titled “Game of Thrones: Medieval English Political Poetry,” this sentence is the only reference that can be found to the show in the entire course introduction. A detailed look at the syllabus indicates that the show is utilised in the bare minimum.

It is in this context that the study explores how and why GRRM and his books gained unprecedented popularity after the show began airing on HBO in 2011. In doing so, the role of fan communities as ‘cultural intermediaries’ can be postulated to have gained unparalleled relevance as ‘tastemakers’ in the 21st century entertainment market.

Cultural intermediaries, a term which gained popularity after the publication of *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) by French critic and theoretician Pierre Bourdieu (he used ‘new cultural intermediaries’), refers to a set of workers who are “the producers of cultural programmes on television or radio or the critics of ‘quality’ newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers.” (Bourdieu 315) They operate as a link between the producers and consumers with the primary duty of adding symbolic value to a product. Bourdieu believed that these people played a crucial role in the rooting of consumer capitalism and promoting pleasure principles. With their defined positions in the cultural institutions, they imparted remarkable influence on defining and shaping the consumerist tastes and dispositions.

However, the pre-defined roles of cultural intermediaries as “self-interested entrepreneurs seeking to maximize economic value” (Perry et al. 724) cannot be taken for granted in an age that has moved light years ahead of Bourdieu’s times in terms of technology. One of the issues with Bourdieu’s definition is the reduction of cultural intermediaries into mere commentators or critics within the realm of limited occupations. With the advancement of the media and technology, the boundaries between cultural production, mediation and consumption have increasingly been blurred.

Bourdieu stressed on “control over the mass media” (325) as one of the critical aspects which enabled the cultural intermediaries to channelize the shaping of consumer tastes. However, at the point of publication of *Distinction*, the word mass media was often limited to films, TV shows, radio programs etc., which were always unidirectional: producer to cultural intermediaries to the consumers. The feedback on the cultural commodities on sale was—as limited as they were—often to travel back in the same direction, that is, through the cultural intermediaries and was subjected to high levels of regulations and censoring. This was happening because the cultural intermediaries were using media for the promotion of the commodities while they were also, in turn, vital contributors to the corporatization of the very same media which were dependent on audience ratings, circulation, market growth and so forth. (Maguire and Matthews 407). The most recent versions of mass media, which has attained a more inclusive nature with the advent of social media, broke this unilateral flow of commodities.

With the horizon of mass media expanding to unprecedented lengths, it is impossible to define the role of the intermediaries based on economic or commercial motives alone. In this context, Nick Piper’s observation that cultural mediation “in its broadest sense, . . . describes the process of moving “cultural” information around” (248) is relevant. In other words, cultural intermediaries are the set of people whose primary purpose is to circulate cultural information. Here, the focus falls on how the information is transferred around and how it defines/redefines and shapes/reshapes the taste of the consumers and thereby creating new cultural dimensions and statements, rather than on the motives of the intermediaries. This approach helps us eliminate the notion that cultural intermediaries are ‘workers’ who posit themselves between producers and consumers; it offers one the freedom to look at anybody who is involved with the circulation of information as a cultural intermediary.

The growing popularity of *Game of Thrones*, not just as a show to be watched and enjoyed but as something that has ensured audience participation through fan-made trailers/teasers, fan theories on the development of the plot, trolls and memes, serves as a prime example of this blurring of boundaries and the emergence of cultural intermediaries in its newest form. Symbolic production, the crucial component of commodification, takes an altogether different dimension in this case. While the conventional cultural intermediaries such as advertising, marketing etc. fulfil their regular role in shaping the value of the show, it is the consumers who unconsciously assume the role of passive intermediaries as well as producers

of secondary or tertiary knowledge about the product that makes a difference in the current context.

These consumers, often labelled as ‘fans’ or ‘fan communities’ at large, started getting the academic attention only in the 1990s. As noted by Fiske, fandom was often associated with the cultural tastes of the disempowered people who were subordinated by the socio-economic system that determines the status of an individual in the society(30). The object of enthusiasm that interests the fans -TV shows, movie stars, rock bands, anything that falls under the domain of *mass* or *popular* culture- were belittled by the advocates of *high* or *real* culture. The institutionalised image of fans as people who follow and celebrate lowkey artforms portrayed the concept of fandom as the most superfluous aspect of popular culture. The turn of the tide with cultural studies centres across the world deconstructing the *high* culture across the globe, fandom started getting recognition as a legitimate cultural expression in the 1990s and the years that followed.

The fan communities are capable of creating a culture as affluent and elaborate as done by traditional *high* cultures. Fan viewing is characterised by a conscious choice of a particular program which is religiously watched every week, and often re-watched multiple times in part and full from various online sources. The involvement of the fans gets more prominent as they absorb the text and then translate it into a cultural activity. At the bare minimum, this involvement begins as a conversation about the viewed episode with other followers of the show which then extends to groups at different levels who share the same tastes and opinions. They form communities online and offline, organise and co-ordinate conventions and these activities becomes a platform for expressing their artistic creations: creating caricatures, designing various costumes, writing and sharing poems and stories about the show and the people who follow it and so on.

While these traits hold true for almost every other show that is aired on a mass basis across the globe and is prominently visible in the case of comic books and superheroes (think of various *Comicon* conventions held across the globe with panel discussions lead by celebrities), *Game of Thrones* has assumed new levels in the whole process of mediation. The interpretive position of a fan is not altogether new; Henry Jenkins has advocated for the need to understand fan interpretations as an institutionalised activity rather than a personal one(210). However, what distinguishes the fandom of *Game of Thrones* from the rest are their vibrant

nature which does not limit the interpretation of the text to an already aired episode but the creativity they bring through their fan theories about the upcoming episodes and seasons.

To give a specific example from the show, the prophecy related to *Azor Ahai* has been a hot topic of debate among the fans for a considerable amount of time. Interestingly, the show has never mentioned the name *Azor Ahai* as such in any of the episodes aired till then. There are, however, references to a ‘promised prince’, ‘chosen one’ etc., that have started popping up with the entrance of Melisandre (The Red Woman). She is a Priestess of the god *R’hllor* and plays a significant role in the development of the plot. She believed that Stannis Baratheon was the chosen one and did several things to put him on the throne which included offering Stannis’ daughter to the god *R’hllor*; but he fails and is killed by Brienne of Tarth. The question on the details of the prophecy leads us to the book *A Clash of the Kings* (the second book in the series) where Melisandre’s original quote begins as “Azor Ahai, beloved of R’hllor! The Warrior of Light, the Son of Fire! Come forth, your sword awaits you! Come forth and take it into your hand!” (Martin CH. 10), whereas in the show, her dialogue is limited to “Stannis Baratheon, Warrior of Light, your sword awaits you.” (Benioff and Weiss).

A further exploration into the details of the prophecy tells us that *Azor Ahai* was a legendary hero chosen by the god *R’hllor* to fight the darkness that laid over the world. He wielded a sword known as the “Lightbringer” which he thrust into a monster, and the monster burst into flames. The history of the sword as explained to Ser Davos by Salladhor Saan reveals that the first two attempts of *Azor Ahai* to forge the “Lightbringer” failed. The third attempt is explained thus:

A hundred days and a hundred nights he labored on the third blade, and as it glowed white-hot in the sacred fires, he summoned his wife. ‘Nissa Nissa’ he said to her, for that was her name, ‘bare your breast, and know that I love you best of all that is in this world.’ She did this thing, why I cannot say, and Azor Ahai thrust the smoking sword through her living heart. It is said that her cry of anguish and ecstasy left a crack across the face of the moon, but her blood and her soul and her strength and her courage all went into the steel. (Martin CH.10)

It is this history of the sword that the fans had worked on, especially after the revival of Jon Snow by Melisandre (if not before) after he was betrayed and killed by the Crows at the Wall. A number of fan theories have been in circulation ever since and many surprising names feature in the list of contenders for the role of Azor Ahai: Daenerys Targaryen, Jon Snow,

Tyion Lannister, Jamie Lannister, Cersei Lannister, Beric Dondarrion, Hot Pie, Jorah Mormont, Davos Seaworth, Arya Stark, Gendry, Samwell Tarley, and Brienne of Tarth (Harris). There are so many such opinions that have grabbed the attention of the audience over the last few years.

It is not just the number or the name of the minor characters that make these theories engaging but how they are mutually contradictory. An example is the case of Daenerys Targaryen; Nate Jones argues strongly for her case by pointing out that she fulfils all the criteria mentioned in the prophecy. She was present both in the *book* (emphasis original) and the show when a red comet appeared in the sky after the birth of the dragon. The adjectives given to her—Stormborn and Mother of Dragons—substantiates that she is born among smoke and salt; that also conform to the third condition of waking a dragon out of stone. If the dragons could be counted as weapons, then she euthanizing Khal Drogo and stepping into the funeral pyre could account for sacrificing a loved one to create a powerful weapon. She is a direct descendant of Aerys II, and now that the Night King has one of her dragons, she is connected to both Ice and Fire. (Jones)

The next contender in the list, Jon Snow, is given almost the same chances by Nate Jones but many people beg to differ from his opinion. With the end of the seventh season revealing the true parentage of Jon (again, people had predicted him being a Targaryen much before that), most of the questions on how he qualifies to be Azor Ahai seems to have been settled, except for one—whom did he kill to forge a weapon? While Jones cites the case of the death of Ygritte, he also points out Jon only watched her die and did not kill her himself. A Redditor named Saravian tries to join all the dots available from the *books* (emphasis original) as well as the show to assert that Jon Snow will plunge ‘The Longclaw’ through the heart of Daenerys in the final season to forge a new weapon to kill the Night King (Qtd in. Volvoikar). Given that Nissa Nissa had wilfully shown her chest to Azor Ahai to create Lightbringer, and since Jon and Daenerys are people known for their compassion and benevolence towards their followers, the theory received positive responses from the viewers.

This is one of the many instances where people had relied on the book to create their own theories. One has to keep in mind that the book series is not yet complete finished and many theories get circulated still. It does not matter if any of these theories were discarded by the audience, they had served the purpose of mediation. Each text gains prominence when it is re-read and rewritten. The accusation made by Chinua Achebe on F.R. Leavis for praising

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* may be taken as an example to show how this scenario works. The elite status of Leavis should not be a hindrance in making the comparison because, as Fiske has pointed out, it is high time we stop considering "proletarian culture and the proletariat as an undistinguished homogeneity." (32).

These theories and associated discourses act as a quick source of information. A page dedicated exclusively for the theories on Wiki of Thrones website indicates the increasing relevance of these discourses. The widening popularity of such discourses and counter-discourses in the form of fan-theories shows the existence of a hierarchical structure among the fandom. In a digital world where the number of followers for a YouTube channel or a webpage or blog can create revenue, there are elites within the fan community who can influence and control the taste of the audience. Evidently, fan theories have contributed significantly to the increased popularity of GRRM on a global scale.

The transition of the mass audience into cultural intermediaries holds high potential and edges out the traditional workers in terms of the impact on other audience. While they assume the role of a girl or boy next door, enjoying the show as much as anyone else, these are tech-savvy individuals adept in the possibilities of social media. These are *micro-influencers* who utilise the online world as a repository of taste. To narrow down their cultural capital, more often than not, it is their creativity bundled with proficiency in using social media. It is observed that many of these bloggers, Instagrammers, and users of other social media platforms are not aware of the language, norms and decorum to be followed while dealing with consumers. Their modus operandi is simple: be straightforward and follow no specific patterns. Hence, their impact on the consumers deserves more academic attention since it is not the result of systematic work but one that happened in spite of it.

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Dalit Literature in India and the Politics of Representation in *Coming Out as Dalit* and *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoir*

Tojy Dominic & Arunraj Joseph

Introduction

Dalit literature, emerging as a powerful form of expression, occupies a critical space in the Indian literary landscape. Rooted in the lived experiences of the marginalized, it seeks to articulate the voices silenced by centuries of systemic caste-based oppression. Dalit writing is not merely a genre; it is a political and cultural movement that challenges entrenched structures of caste, patriarchy, and social inequality. As Arjun Dangle, a prominent Dalit writer and editor, asserts, “Dalit literature is not simply literature. It is associated with a movement to bring about change. It is literature that speaks of human freedom.”

Historically, Dalit literature finds its origins in the anti-caste movements led by social reformers like Jyotirao Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Phule's works, such as *Gulamgiri* (Slavery), laid the foundation for caste critique by exposing the exploitation of lower-caste communities by Brahminical structures. Ambedkar's speeches and writings, including *Annihilation of Caste*, further inspired generations of Dalit writers to reclaim their narratives and envision a just society. While early Dalit expressions were primarily oral and folkloric, modern Dalit literature began to take shape in the 20th century, particularly with the rise of the Dalit Panther Movement in the 1970s. This movement provided the impetus for Dalits to assert their identity, demanding social justice and equality, with literature serving as its primary medium.

The politics of representation is central to Dalit writing. Dalit literature emerges as a counter-narrative to dominant caste discourses, challenging the erasure or stereotyping of Dalit lives in mainstream Indian literature. The representation of Dalit identity is not monolithic but encompasses the multiplicity of experiences shaped by intersections of gender, region, and class. For instance, the works of women writers like Bama (*Karukku*) and Urmila Pawar (*The Weave of My Life*) shed light on the specific oppression faced by Dalit women, who are often doubly marginalized by caste and patriarchy. As Pawar poignantly states, “To be born a woman is a terrible thing; to be born a Dalit woman is a tragedy.”

The Early Foundations: Phule's Contributions

Jyotirao Phule (1827–1890), one of the pioneers of the anti-caste movement, was instrumental in shaping early Dalit discourse. His seminal work, *Gulamgiri* (Slavery), published in 1873, is considered a cornerstone of Dalit literature. Written in Marathi, *Gulamgiri* exposed the exploitative structures of the caste system, drawing parallels between caste oppression in India and slavery in America. Phule's writings highlighted the dehumanizing practices faced by the Shudras and Dalits, advocating for education and social reform as tools for liberation. Phule's works also underscored the role of Brahminical hegemony in perpetuating inequality. His critiques of religious texts and myths served to dismantle the ideological basis of caste discrimination. Phule famously stated, "The Brahmins have cunningly framed false Shastras and falsely interpreted religion for their own benefit," a sentiment that resonated with subsequent Dalit writers. His efforts to educate women and lower-caste communities through the establishment of schools laid the groundwork for empowering marginalized voices.

Ambedkar's Influence on Dalit Literature

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), often regarded as the architect of modern Dalit thought, played a pivotal role in inspiring the Dalit literary movement. His works, including *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), remain foundational texts for Dalit literature and activism. Ambedkar's incisive critiques of caste-based inequalities and his call for social justice resonated deeply with marginalized communities. Ambedkar emphasized the importance of education and self-respect, advocating for the assertion of Dalit identity through intellectual and cultural means. He also encouraged Dalits to reclaim their history and resist oppressive narratives. His declaration, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved," reflects his intersectional approach, which has influenced Dalit literature addressing gender and caste oppression.

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956, along with millions of Dalits, marked a significant moment in Dalit history, inspiring a literary movement that explored themes of liberation, spirituality, and equality. Writers like Namdeo Dhasal, who co-founded the Dalit Panther Movement in the 1970s, drew upon Ambedkar's ideology to create works that combined poetic expression with radical political thought.

Voices in the Modern Dalit Movements

The Dalit Panther Movement, emerging in Maharashtra during the 1970s, was a crucial moment for Dalit literature. Writers such as Namdeo Dhasal (*Golpitha*, 1972) and Baburao Bagul (*When I Hid My Caste*, 1963) used literature as a means of protest, critiquing caste oppression, poverty, and social injustice. The Panthers were inspired by the Black Panther Movement in the United States, adopting a militant stance against caste discrimination and advocating for equality. In subsequent decades, the movement's legacy continued in the works of modern Dalit writers. Regional voices, such as Tamil writer Bama (*Karukku*) and Telugu poet Gogu Shyamala, addressed the specific struggles of Dalit women, intertwining personal and collective narratives. Bama's *Karukku* (1992) remains a seminal text, articulating the double marginalization of Dalit women within caste and patriarchy. She wrote, "How long can we continue to exist as a people who are broken?" echoing the collective despair and resilience of Dalit communities.

As a form of resistance and assertion, Dalit literature remains a testament to the enduring fight against caste oppression, embodying the voices of resilience and hope. This paper tries to probe into the politics of representation and the question of identity as represented in ***Coming Out as Dalit* (2019) by Yashica Dutt** and ***The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoir* (2008) by Urmila Pawar**, the two notable works published in the modern era of Dalit writing.

The Politics of Representation in Dalit Writing

The politics of representation in Dalit writing is deeply intertwined with the struggle for reclaiming agency and articulating marginalized voices. Representation in Dalit writing serves as a form of resistance, empowerment, and identity assertion. It is not just about telling stories; it is about reclaiming ownership of narratives that were historically silenced or appropriated. As Arjun Dangle states, "Dalit literature has a purpose—it fights for the oppressed and the exploited. It is not simply a cry of despair; it is a call to revolt." This revolt is rooted in the need to assert Dalit perspectives and resist the misrepresentation or appropriation of their realities by dominant caste writers. Sharan Kumar Limbale, in his critical work *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, argues that Dalit literature must be grounded in the lived experiences of Dalits, reflecting their struggles, hopes, and realities. He writes, "Dalit literature is born out of

pain, sorrow, poverty, and the inequality that Dalits have been facing for ages.” This focus on authenticity is a key aspect of the politics of representation in Dalit writing.

Despite its transformative power, Dalit literature often struggles for recognition in mainstream publishing and literary circles. The selective acknowledgment of Dalit voices and the commodification of their narratives by market-driven forces remain pressing concerns. Dalit writers strive to ensure that their stories are not diluted or co-opted for savarna audiences. Hence the politics of representation in Dalit writing is a fight for authenticity, agency, and justice. It challenges dominant caste narratives, critiques appropriation, and advocates for inclusive and intersectional representations of Dalit identity. As Namdeo Dhasal wrote in his powerful poem *Hunger*, “We must shatter these walls of stone, of shame, of silence.” Dalit writing continues to break these walls, asserting the humanity and dignity of a community long denied its voice.

1. *Coming Out as Dalit* (2019) by Yashica Dutt

Yashica Dutt’s memoir is a poignant exploration of caste in urban India, focusing on her personal journey of “passing” as upper-caste to avoid discrimination. The act of “coming out” as Dalit becomes a political statement against the invisibilization of caste in metropolitan spaces, which often claim to be post-caste but remain deeply stratified. Dutt writes, “For years, I thought of myself as a fraud because I had abandoned my identity. But it was not me who was fraudulent—it was this system that made me feel my existence was a crime” (23).

This statement underscores the emotional and psychological toll of systemic casteism, which forces Dalits to hide their identity for survival. By reclaiming her identity, Dutt asserts the importance of authentic representation and challenges the savarna-dominated narratives that perpetuate caste denial in urban spaces. Dutt also critiques the idea of meritocracy, which ignores the structural disadvantages faced by Dalits. She writes, “Merit, as we understand it, is not a measure of hard work alone but of privilege that has been passed down for generations” (89).

This critique aligns with the politics of representation, as it exposes how dominant caste groups continue to monopolize opportunities while dismissing affirmative action policies as favouritism. Dutt’s narrative explores the intersection of caste and modernity, emphasizing that caste discrimination persists in elite institutions and professional spaces. She observes, “Caste

is everywhere—in the foods we eat, the clothes we wear, the festivals we celebrate-but it is rarely acknowledged in boardrooms and classrooms” (102).

By spotlighting this hypocrisy, Dutt argues that authentic Dalit representation is crucial for dismantling the brahminical hegemonic practices in the social structure.

***The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*(2008)by Urmila Pawar**

Urmila Pawar's memoir is a deeply personal yet collective account of her experiences as a Dalit woman in rural Maharashtra and urban Bombay. Pawar weaves together themes of caste, gender, and community, highlighting how Dalit women face unique forms of oppression.

Urmila Pawar speaks about the double marginalisation of Dalit women in the text. She vividly explores the concept of double marginalization, capturing the unique struggles of Dalit women who are oppressed both as Dalits and as women. Pawar highlights how caste and gender intersect to create a layered and compounded form of discrimination, leaving Dalit women in a particularly vulnerable position. This dual burden is evident in her personal experiences, as well as in her observations of the broader social realities faced by Dalit women in rural and urban contexts.

Pawar writes, “To be born a woman is a terrible thing; to be born a Dalit woman is a tragedy” (14), emphasizing how Dalit women are doubly disadvantaged—first by the patriarchal structures within their own communities, and second by the systemic caste discrimination imposed by dominant castes. She critiques the gendered expectations placed upon Dalit women, often expected to bear the brunt of both physical labor and domestic responsibilities while enduring exploitation and violence from savarna oppressors.

Through her memoir, Pawar also critiques the patriarchy within Dalit communities, which often marginalizes Dalit women's voices even within movements that claim to fight for equality. She reflects on her experiences of being silenced and sidelined in male-dominated Dalit spaces, writing, “Even in our fight for justice, it is the men who take the stage, while we are relegated to the background” (87).

At the same time, Pawar reclaims Dalit women's resilience and agency, portraying them not just as victims but as active participants in their own liberation. She recounts the stories of women in her family and community, their struggles for education, financial independence, and dignity in the face of adversity. Her writing challenges the notion of Dalit

women as passive recipients of oppression, highlighting instead their strength and capacity to fight back.

By documenting these intersecting oppressions, Pawar brings to light the need for Dalit representation that includes the voices of women, making her work a significant contribution to both Dalit and feminist discourse. Her memoir becomes a powerful act of resistance, reclaiming the space for Dalit women's narratives and demanding acknowledgment of their unique struggles and contributions to the broader fight for justice. Pawar critiques not only the dominant caste structures but also the patriarchy within Dalit communities, asserting that representation must include the voices of Dalit women. In her narrative, Pawar reclaims Dalit history by documenting the struggles of her community. She writes, "We are not merely victims; we are survivors who have fought and are still fighting to claim our rightful place in society" (67).

This act of reclaiming history is central to the politics of representation, as it challenges dominant narratives that portray Dalits as passive recipients of oppression. Pawar also critiques the pervasive nature of caste discrimination. She recounts, "Even as I moved into the city, the stigma of caste followed me like a shadow. No matter how much I educated myself, the taint remained" (102).

Her experiences underscore the inescapable nature of caste and the importance of Dalit representation in exposing this systemic injustice.

Both *Coming Out as Dalit* by Yashica Dutt and *The Weave of My Life* by Urmila Pawar underscore the importance of Dalits telling their own stories, reclaiming narratives that have historically been erased, distorted, or appropriated by dominant caste voices. Dutt's memoir confronts the invisibilization of caste in urban, elite spaces, where her decision to "pass" as upper-caste highlights the systemic erasure of Dalit identities. Pawar, on the other hand, offers a rural and gendered lens, documenting the intersection of caste and patriarchy in her experiences as a Dalit woman. Together, these works emphasize the diversity within Dalit experiences, showcasing how identity is shaped by factors like geography, gender, and class. Both authors critique savarna hegemony that perpetuates caste oppression while simultaneously denying its existence. Dutt challenges the meritocracy myth and exposes caste discrimination in modern institutions, while Pawar critiques the enduring stigma of caste that persists even in urban spaces, following her like a "shadow." Writing for both authors becomes an act of

empowerment, enabling them to challenge the systemic invisibility of Dalit lives, reclaim their dignity, and resist oppressive structures. Their works emphasize that representation is not just visibility but a transformative tool to dismantle systemic inequalities and assert agency.

Conclusion

Both *The Weave of My Life* by Urmila Pawar and *Coming Out as Dalit* by Yashica Dutt illuminate the complex and multifaceted realities of Dalit identity through the lens of personal experience. These works reclaim the authentic voices of Dalits, highlighting the importance of self-representation in countering erasure and misrepresentation by dominant caste narratives. Pawar's exploration of the double marginalization faced by Dalit women reveals the intersectionality of caste and gender, while Dutt critiques the denial of caste in urban, elite spaces, exposing the myth of meritocracy. Both authors confront the savarna hegemony that perpetuates caste oppression and challenge the systemic structures that deny Dalits their dignity and opportunities. Through their writing, they assert the need for representation not just as visibility but as a tool for empowerment and social change. Their works remain a testament to the transformative power of Dalit literature, which demands justice, equality, and the dismantling of entrenched caste hierarchies.

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Sacred Transgressions: Negotiating the Subversive Narratives of Gender and Caste in Mutiyettu

Dr. Jilu Ani John

Each folk community has a distinctive and specific awareness about the universe, life on earth, and humanity's place in it. This awareness is their world view, which becomes manifest in the folklore of the people. Most folk arts originate from magic rituals that worship the personified forces of nature. The magical power ascribed to religious ceremonies and rituals developed into sound aesthetic philosophy manifest in exquisite and esoteric art forms and performances.

The folklore of Kerala is a diverse and rich tapestry of legends, myths, rituals, and practices that capture the cultural and social heritage of the land. Kerala folklore is an ensemble of folk plays that have simple and popular thematic content and mode of presentation that form a part and critique of communal life. The ritualistic folk plays are essentially rituals to appease the deities and they blend harmoniously into the folk culture.

Kerala ritual theatre embodies a rich tapestry of performative traditions, deeply entrenched in the cultural and religious practices of the region. This distinctive theatrical genre is characterized by its intricate fusion of mythological narratives, folk idioms, and classical aesthetics. Situated at the intersection of the sacred and profane, Kerala ritual theatre serves as a conduit for communicating the divine and the human, facilitating a symbiotic relationship between the community and the cosmos. The performative rituals, often staged within the precincts of temples, are imbued with a deep sense of religiosity, invoke divine presence, facilitate communal bonding, and serve as a platform for social commentary, underscoring the sacred significance of these events. These ritual theatres reenact popular mythological narratives intended to appease the deities and interwoven with the negotiation of human experience and social commentaries. A diverse array of folk plays come within the purview of Kerala Ritual theatre: Mutiyettu, Kudiattam, Theyyam, Kakkari Natakam, and Therukoothu, each with its distinctive theme, style and costume, cultural resonance, and the common end of driving out all evils through the ritual.

The socio-political dynamics of Kerala's ritual theatre tradition offer a fascinating lens to examine the intricate relationships between power, culture, and identity in the state.

Explorations of the complex intersections of mythology, performance, and community, offer valuable insights into how ritual theatre mirrors, defines, and challenges the dominant socio-political narratives in Kerala. The narratives of these rituals employ satire, irony, and social commentary as potent tools for social critique and change. How these performances frequently question prevailing narratives and societal systems, makes Kerala ritual theatre a venue of subversion and resistance. This paper attempts to interrogate how Mutiyettu, a ritual of mimicry and possession performance conforms to and confronts the hegemonic gender and caste narratives of the land.

The ritual theatre form Mutiyettu is a predominant one among the performative styles of worship in Kerala. It is a striking blend of possession performance and the structural features of classical Sanskrit drama and shares some common features of Kathakali and Kudiattam. This multimedia event includes elaborate rituals, art, music, and dance and the performance lasts from the afternoon to the dawn of the following day. Only men of the Marar and Kuruppu caste, who have purified themselves with strict fasts and acts of penance can enact the goddess and the accompanying rituals. Performed generally in northern Travancore and some parts of Ernakulam district, Mutiyettu is a high-class temple art rooted in ritualistic folk tradition. This ritual theatre rooted in the goddess cult, enacts the popular story of Darikavadham by the goddess Kali, known popularly in Kerala as Bhagavathi, that brings back peace and order to the world. As such the ritual is part of the Bhagavathi or Bhadrakali cult prevailing in Kerala. Mutiyettu is performed against the backdrop of Bhagavathi kavu which acts as an open theatre, between February and May, after the harvesting season.

Mutiyettu performance which begins after midnight is preceded by a series of rituals that begin early that afternoon. These include the powder drawings of Bhagavathi in her fierce form (*Kalamezhuthu*), invoking the spirit of the goddess to the kalam (*kalampattu*), waving bigwicks dipped in oil over the kalam (*thiriyuzhichil*), the removal of the kalam by the artist and the distribution of the mass of coloured powder to devotees as prasada. All these rituals, accompanied by songs and the beating of drums lead to the spectacle of the Mutiyettu drama proper. There are seven invariable scenes in this folk play: Narada's complaints to Lord Siva about Darika, the *purappadu* (exposition) of Darika, the entrance of Kali and the actor's possession performance, the comic scene involving Kali and Koimbat Nair that provides ample scope for improvisation and audience interaction, entrance of Kooli, the grotesque female character and the final scene involving the decapitation of Darika marked by the removal

of the muti or headgear and the triumph of Kali. This will be followed by the blessing of children.

Kali is the goddess of empowerment, or shakti (power). She is referred to as the goddess of creation, destruction, time, change, and power. Her earliest appearance is that of a destroyer, principally of evil forces. Devi Bhagavatam, a Sanskrit work that belongs to ancient Hindu literature reveres Shakti as the primordial creator of the universe and the Brahman (ultimate truth and reality). Tantric Philosophical Traditions recognize feminine divine power as a fundamental cosmic principle. Kali is revered as a kind mother goddess in many Shakta Hindu Cosmologies and Shakta Tantric beliefs. Kali worship and rituals have been practiced throughout India since ancient times. Bhagavathi or Kali is one of the most popular deities of Kerala whose sites of worship, *kavuis* found in almost every village of the state.

Bhagavathi who dominates both the landscape and consciousness of the people of Kerala reveals herself in the artistic complexity and beauty of Mutiyettu. The ambivalent Goddess combines both positive and negative aspects. Being born of Shiva she shares the power of *samhara*. The colour palette of the performance is strikingly red and black and represents cosmic energy. Muti, the elaborate headgear from which the drama derives its name represents divine consciousness. The rage of the goddess is destructive and devotees enact rituals to subside her anger and invoke her blessings. However, Bhagavath's fury is the righteous, protective anger of a mother and is always directed against evil. Her strength, power, and even cruelty are channelled to serve her children.

The ritual Mutiyettu also promises the cure for outbreaks of postulant fevers such as small pox and chicken pox. In Hindu Mythology the goddess is often associated with seeds of grain and seeds of smallpox. Kali is revered as a goddess of fertility and seeds of grain symbolize abundance, prosperity, and new life and the sustenance and nourishment that she provides to the devotees. The destructive seeds of the disease represent the fierce and violent dimensions of her persona. Paradoxically the seeds of the disease symbolize the protective spirit of the goddess that wards off all diseases and harm from the devotees.

According to Carol Christ, goddess symbolism is the affirmation of four factors- female power, female body, female will, and women's bonds and heritage (320). The goddess icons legitimize female power as beneficent, independent, strong, and creative. Thus, the wrathful goddess Kali becomes a fascinating icon for modern feminists. She combines within herself

the power and Mutiyettu, the goddess-oriented ritual becomes an eloquent manifestation of the profound divinity and mystery associated with womanhood.

Sarah Cadwell remarks that scholars have often mentioned the identification of political power with warrior goddesses as a characteristic feature of matrilineal societies. Kerala also had a matrilineal system where property and social relationships are historically passed down through the female line and the Kali cult's emphasis on feminine power resonates strongly.

Kali's mythology, packed with elements of female agency, autonomy, and fierce resistance against patriarchal oppression, serves as a potent symbol of feminist liberation. Thus, traditional patriarchal systems are subverted by the Kali cult's veneration of the divine feminine, flipping the established gender order. Women can temporarily overcome the limitations of patriarchal society by expressing agency and claiming their power in this liminal space created by ceremonial inversion.

However, it is curious to note that the Kali cult in matrilineal Kerala society contains a paradoxical feminist relevance, alternating between empowering and constraining narratives. This dichotomy calls forth a nuanced analysis of the region's specific social dynamics and its convergence with the cult. The stories of Kali assert female agency. However, the postures of male submission to female power occur only in the world of fantasy and ritual. While powerful goddesses rage, the social empowerment of real women remains elusive to a great extent. Only men are allowed to enact the role of the goddess. It is quite strange that menstruation and birth-giving, the biological essence of their identity disqualifies them from embodying the divine feminine.

The Mutiyettu drama presents one more female character Kooli, a grotesque caricature like female. The entrance of Kooli is the comic highlight of the play. Her entry towards the middle of the performance alleviates the intensity of Kali's possession scene. Kooli, shown in an advanced state of pregnancy pleases the audience with her antics. Kooli is teased by the audience and in turn retorts by shouting back. She catches some of the spectators and pretends to breastfeed them inviting uproarious laughter from the audience. With a face asymmetrically painted in black and white and a skirt made of leaves and feathers and tangled hair she represents the rustic dimension of the ritual. Kooli is the name of a tribal goddess who is supposed to be an indigenous precursor to Kali and possesses many of Kali's traits. She also serves as an oblique presentation of Vetalam, the head of the ghosts who is sent by Lord

Siva to assist Kali in the war.

Kooli's performance has a deeper significance, apart from offering a sort of comic relief. She presents herself as an alter ego of Kali, grotesquely imitating the actions of the goddess. Kali's solemn, sacred, and silent actions are paralleled and contrasted by the foolish, funny, and loud performance of Kooli. She enters, hooting wildly, "*makkale*" and seats herself on Kali's stool, feigns to be possessed, and enacts a series of "inverted purifications." It is quite curious to note that her antics centre around self-cleaning and the performance of everyday domestic chores. The Kooli character may be a reinforcement of the emphasis the Kerala community places on personal cleanliness.

It appears that Kooli's acts highlight the facets of motherhood that lie hidden within Kali's character. Oral variants of the myth state that the sight of the male infants at Kailasam's threshold calms Kali's wrath. Her rage is transformed into kindness as she cradles and feeds them. Throughout the Kooli scene, the breastfeeding sequence is repeated multiple times, further solidifying Kali's status as a mother goddess. In certain performances, Kooli pretends to be possessed while holding the muti on her head. Kooli mimics, shadows, and teases Kali. She also illuminates the hidden depths of the goddesses' celestial personality.

Kooli, who is a low-caste female, is a marginalised woman. Nevertheless, she clearly enjoys her body and sexuality, with frequent references to sex in the double entendres of her repartee. Despite being ridiculed and marginalised, she voices real feminine anger, provoked by male abuse. She talks about the maltreatment at the hands of Darika and Danavendra and informs Kali that her pregnancy is the result of the dual rape by them. This information infuriates Kali again, leading to the consummation of the war and the beheading of Darika.

Kooli's protests thus represent truly feminist concerns. In the folk culture, a ritual performance is more than just a kind of entertainment. Purification or renewal of the entire community is the intended outcome. The temple, or *bhagavatikavu*, is the area that served as the focal point of the folk drama. Mutiyettu is an unabashedly interactive ritual drama wherein the entire audience participates. The ritual creates a liminal space where traditional social restrictions are symbolically dismantled. The stage itself is a fluid concept with the artists revelling around the temple, pulling the spectators in as the enactment progresses. This makes it accessible to people of all communities, both high and low castes alike, blurring the hierarchical boundaries of the caste system. The participation of different castes and communities in Mutiyettu

demonstrates the inclusive and communal nature of the ritual. The folk play turns out to be an occasion for a temporary subversion of the caste hierarchies of a land that is notoriously adamant about maintaining caste barriers. Mutiyettu is a communal project in which every caste has a distinct role to play. The Thandan caste contributes the arecanut fronds needed for the masks and headdresses, while the Parayan caste supplies the bamboo artifacts and leather hides for the drums. While the Kuruvan clan maintains the rural torches blazing, the Ganakan community paints the masks. The Maran caste prepares the torches and supplies them with oil, while the Veluthedan caste cleans the garments used to make the deity's garment.

These subversive elements make Mutiyettu more than a performance—it's a complex social commentary challenging entrenched power structures through mythological representation and ritualistic practice. The ritual tradition of Mutiyettu offers a nuanced paradigm of caste and gender transgression. Through violent and ferocious characterization, the performance's principal deity, Bhadrakali, forcefully opposes patriarchal religious and feminine tropes by embodying an aggressive, uncontained feminine power. Caste disruption and gendered subversion go hand in hand because the ritual space momentarily suspends established hierarchies, enabling performers from underrepresented groups to have a hand in the ritual. This subversive potential is further enhanced by Kooli's character, who reveals social paradoxes through humorous criticism. Most importantly, the performance establishes a liminal area in which normative power systems are ceremoniously overthrown, providing a brief sense of social freedom for both the audience and the performers. Mutiyettu's combined subversion of caste and gender hierarchies makes it a special kind of ceremonial resistance.

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From Silence to Violence: A Psychoanalytic Study of Alienation and Defense in *Varathan* and *Straw Dogs*

Kiran Jose

A film, often referred to as a movie, motion picture, or moving picture, is a form of visual art that simulates experiences and conveys ideas, stories, perceptions, emotions, beauty, or atmosphere through moving images. A compelling film entertains, educates, and inspires viewers in various ways. It stimulates reflection, fosters empathy, and encourages us to assist others and make positive contributions to society.

Many films narrate stories that inspire us to greet each day with hope and optimism. They motivate us to overcome personal challenges and positively influence the lives of those around us. Furthermore, movies raise awareness about a wide array of issues. For instance, films focused on education underscore its significance and offer insights to stakeholders on enhancing educational systems. Clearly, movies wield a considerable influence on the world today.

Varathan is a 2018 Indian Malayalam-language action thriller film directed by Amal Neerad starring Fahad Faasil and Aishwarya Lekshmi. It is "... an adaptation of Sam Pekinpah's 1971 film *Straw Dogs*." (Hooli) The movie follows Abin and Priya, a married couple who move from Dubai to Priya's ancestral estate in rural Kerala after personal setbacks. Their hopes for peace are shattered as they face increasing hostility, moral policing, and predatory behaviour from the local villagers, who view them as outsiders. As the harassment escalates, culminating in a violent home invasion, Abin is forced to defend his family and home. The film is a tense survival thriller exploring themes of alienation, gendered violence, and resilience, and is noted for its stylish direction and atmospheric storytelling.

Straw Dogs, directed by Sam Pekinpah, is a controversial psychological thriller starring Dustin Hoffman and Susan George. The film follows David Sumner, a mild-mannered American mathematician, and his English wife, Amy, who move to rural Cornwall seeking peace but instead face escalating hostility from local men, including Amy's former lover. As tensions rise, the couple endures harassment, culminating in a brutal home invasion and a notorious, highly debated rape scene. The film explores the breakdown of civility, the unleashing of primal violence, and the psychological effects of oppression and masculinity, ultimately forcing David to confront his own capacity for violence in order to protect his home.

When analysing the films *Varathan* and *Straw Dogs* side by side, it becomes evident how individuals react violently when pushed beyond their limits. This violence often serves as a way to channel suppressed aggression in defense of themselves, their families, and their homes. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a useful framework for understanding such violent outbursts. It can help explain how the pacifist psyches of Abin and David transform into violence and what triggers this change.

Psychoanalytic theory encompasses the organization of personality and the dynamics of personality development that inform psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology. Originally articulated by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th century, psychoanalytic theory has undergone numerous refinements since then. It reached its full prominence during the last third of the 20th century, coinciding with critical discourse surrounding psychological treatments that emerged after the 1960s.

Freud shifted his focus from the analysis of the brain and physiological studies to the exploration of the mind and its associated psychological attributes. His work emphasized the recognition of childhood events that could influence adult mental functioning. As stated by Tyson, "His examination of the genetic and then the developmental aspects gave the psychoanalytic theory its characteristics." (Tyson 19) Freud developed a therapeutic method for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements within the patient's mind. This approach aims to bring repressed fears and conflicts into consciousness, utilizing techniques such as dream interpretation and free association.

Sigmund Freud maintained that the personality consists of three different elements: the id, the ego, and the superego. "The id is the aspect of personality that is driven by internal and basic drives and needs." (Moccia) These are typically instinctual, such as hunger, thirst, and the drive for sex, or libido. The id is also the unconscious and stems from our instinctive abilities. "The id thus acts in accordance with the pleasure principle" (Boag) in that it avoids pain and seeks pleasure. Due to the instinctual quality of the id, it is impulsive and often unaware of the implications of its actions.

"The ego is driven by the reality principle. The ego works to balance the id and superego, by trying to achieve the id's drive in the most realistic ways." (Lapsley 6). It seeks to rationalize the id's instinct and please the drives that benefit the individual in the long term. It helps

separate what is real, and realistic of our drives as well as being realistic about the standards that the superego sets for the individual (Bargh JA, Morsella E) .

“The superego is driven by the morality principle. It acts in connection with the morality of higher thought and action” (Boag). Instead of instinctively acting like the id, the superego works to act in socially acceptable ways. It employs morality, judging our sense of wrong and right and using guilt to encourage socially acceptable behaviour. Furthermore, the Superego comes from the people around us. They affect what we believe in and how we view things, so this can be different depending on how you were raised and the culture you were around. The Superego is also responsible for finding the happy medium between the Id and Ego. “The Id can sometimes be overly dominant when it comes to satisfying the human urges. The Ego can be very unrealistic in terms of how we view ourselves.” (Robins 80)

“Defence mechanisms are psychological strategies that are unconsciously used to protect a person from anxiety arising from unacceptable thoughts or feelings” (Utah Psych). According to Freudian theory, defence mechanisms involve a distortion of reality in some way so that we are better able to cope with a situation. Denial is a defence mechanism proposed by Anna Freud, which involves ignoring the reality of a situation to avoid anxiety. If a situation is just too much to handle, the person may respond by refusing to perceive it or by denying that it exists.

Repression is an unconscious defence mechanism employed by the ego to keep disturbing or threatening thoughts from becoming conscious. Repression, which Anna Freud also called “motivated forgetting is just that: not being able to recall a threatening situation, person, or event.” (Dalton 40). Thoughts that are often repressed are those that would result in feelings of guilt from the superego.

Amal Neerad’s *Varathan* and Sam Pekinpah’s *Straw Dogs* delve into themes of masculinity, identity crises, and societal violence, depicting outsiders who confront hostile communities. By using a psychoanalytic lens, both films examine the male psyche, gendered power dynamics, and the symbolic defence of ‘home’ as a space for psychological transformation.

Varathan follows the story of a couple, Abin and Priya, who move from Dubai to Priya’s ancestral estate in Kerala. This tranquil atmosphere provides much-needed relief for Abin, who has experienced personal setbacks in his career. At the beginning of the film, Abin is portrayed as a calm, gentle, and non-confrontational person who abhors violence. This

aspect of his character is evident when he questions Priya for killing a cockroach that scared him (*Varathan* 28:50).

Their peaceful lives take a turn when the antagonists – Jithin, Josy, and Johnny – begin to intrude upon them. The Malayalam word “varathan” means “outsider,” and the local villagers perceive Abin and Priya as outsiders, often treating them unfriendly. Priya becomes a victim of the antagonists’ voyeuristic gaze, which results in her losing her peace of mind. The antagonists’ intrusion generates tensions in Abin and Priya’s relationship, leading to frequent arguments.

Abin’s non-confrontational nature causes him to hesitate in standing up against the antagonists. Instead, he often tries to pacify tense situations, which frustrates Priya, as she feels unsupported. Notable instances that highlight Priya’s vulnerability include when she suspects someone has stolen her innerwear (*Varathan* 55:34), when the antagonists disrupt her peace with lewd songs (*Varathan* 1:07:55), and when she discovers a mobile phone in her bathroom (*Varathan* 1:12:10). In these moments, Abin fails to comfort and validate her feelings.

Emboldened by Abin’s pacifist attitude, the antagonists continue to harass the couple and even assault Priya while Abin is away on a business trip. Following this incident, she is hospitalized and feels unsafe living with Abin, as he has downplayed the harassment they have endured. She expresses that if her father were alive, none of this would have happened (*Varathan* 1:34:15). Her words deeply shatter Abin.

The hostility and harassment from the locals escalate, culminating in a violent home invasion. During this confrontation, Abin is forced to defend his home and family. After a fierce clash with the antagonists and their henchmen, Abin successfully protects his wife and also helps a mother and son who had sought refuge from the antagonists. As the film concludes, we see Abin sitting alongside a smiling Priya, and he crushes a cockroach that comes near him. This act, along with a warning sign that reads, “Trespassers will be shot” (*Varathan* 2:05:37) that he places on their gate, symbolizes the shift in Abin’s psyche.

Straw Dogs centres on David Sumner, a mild-mannered American mathematician, and his wife Amy, who move to a remote farmhouse in Cornwall seeking peace. However, they quickly encounter hostility from Amy’s ex-boyfriend, Charlie Venner, and his friends, who resent David as an outsider. As David hires local workers, tensions in his marriage arise; Amy criticizes his condescension and cowardice for leaving a charged academic environment in the U.S. His withdrawal into his work causes issues, leading to Amy’s increasingly provocative

behaviour toward the locals, particularly Venner (*Straw Dogs* 17:25). David struggles for acceptance among the residents, including conversations with the local vicar and magistrate.

When David discovers their cat dead in their bedroom, Amy suspects the workmen, Cawsey and Scutt, are responsible. She urges David to confront them, but he is too intimidated (*Straw Dogs* 44:53). The men invite him hunting, abandoning him on the moor with the promise of driving birds toward him (*Straw Dogs* 54:19). While David is away, Venner pressures Amy sexually, and, after some hesitation, she submits. Scutt later enters, holds Venner at gunpoint, and rapes Amy while Venner reluctantly assists (*Straw Dogs* 1:05:17). David returns home unaware of the assault.

After firing the workmen for their slow progress, the Sumners attend a church social, where Amy becomes distraught upon seeing her rapists. An encounter between Janice and Henry ends tragically when her brother finds them, leading to Henry accidentally suffocating Janice. The Sumners leave early and, while driving through fog, accidentally hit Henry. They take him home and call the pub to report the incident, alerting the locals who seek vengeance.

As the drunken mob, including Hedden, Scutt, Venner, and Riddaway, pounds on their door, David refuses to surrender Henry, declaring, “I will not allow violence against this house.” (*Straw Dogs* 1:32:03) Scott arrives to help but is mistakenly shot by Hedden during a struggle. With the situation escalating, David sets traps and weapons to defend against the attackers, inadvertently injuring Hedden, knocking Riddaway unconscious, and killing Cawsey in the chaos.

When Venner threatens David, Amy’s screams distract them, and Scutt attempts to assault her again. Venner shoots Scutt before David disarms him and kills him in the ensuing fight. After witnessing the violence, David mutters, “Jesus, I got ‘em all.” (*Straw Dogs* 1:51:52) A recovering Riddaway attacks, but Amy shoots him. The film ends with David driving Henry back to the village. When Henry tells him he doesn’t know the way home, David replies that he doesn’t know it either, but still keeps driving on.

Amal Neerad’s *Varathan* and Sam Pekinpah’s *Straw Dogs* delve into themes of masculinity, identity crises, and societal violence by portraying outsiders who confront hostile communities. Analysing these films through a psychoanalytic lens reveals how they interrogate the male psyche, explore gendered power dynamics, and depict the symbolic defense of “home” as a site of psychological transformation.

The exploration of masculinity in both *Straw Dogs* and *Varathan* unveils complex themes surrounding castration anxiety, identity crises, and the emergence of violence. In *Straw Dogs*, David embodies a fragile masculine identity that begins with his passive and intellectually detached demeanour. The aggression of the Cornish locals, particularly highlighted by the traumatic event of Amy's rape, triggers his castration anxiety, symbolizing a deep sense of emasculation. In response to this perceived threat, David's violent defense of his home marks a significant transformation into hypermasculinity, serving as a Freudian "rebirth" that attempts to resolve his identity crisis through primal violence. This transformation even shocks his wife, as is evident in her turning away from him with a shocked expression after David defeats all the assailants who tried to attack their home. Similarly, in *Varathan*, Abin, a modern urban man, struggles against the patriarchal norms of the village that clash with his non-confrontational nature. The harassment of his wife Priya and the invasion of their home challenge his masculine authority. His eventual violent retaliation mirrors David's journey but is nuanced by cultural context. Abin's violence becomes a means to reclaim agency against a collective patriarchal oppressor rather than merely responding to individual rivals.

The films also examine the male gaze and sexual objectification, particularly through the experiences of Amy and Priya. In *Straw Dogs*, Amy's rape scene is framed voyeuristically, resonating with Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. As one critic explains about Mulvey's theory, "what counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance" (Sampson). This framing results in a profound internalization of objectification for Amy, as she grapples with her trauma and subsequent guilt, oscillating between victimhood and complicity in her own sexualization. Conversely, in *Varathan*, Priya's body serves as an object of fetishization for the villagers, evidenced by stolen undergarments and invasive stares, reducing her to a mere spectacle. Barbara Fredrickson's objectification theory aptly describes her mental distress stemming from this constant surveillance, further exacerbating her isolation. However, Priya's climactic act of shooting a harasser disrupts the narrative of passive victimhood, allowing her a brief moment of agency before ultimately succumbing to Abin's violent masculinity.

Both films represent the home as a Freudian *unheimlich*, a space that is both safe and violated. In *Straw Dogs*, the farmhouse becomes a symbolic womb, and David's violent

defense serves to expel invaders – those abject threats – to assert control over his domain. Similarly, the ancestral house in *Varathan* is invaded by villagers, forcing Abin to confront the abject elements of blood and violence in his quest to protect his family. The siege scenes in both films utilize bloodshed as a symbolic rejection of societal norms, allowing the protagonists to embrace a primal identity that starkly contrasts with their everyday lives.

Furthermore, the identity crises faced by both David and Abin are intricately tied to the symbolic order. David's regression is framed by Erik Erikson's theory of identity crisis, marking his retreat to Cornwall as a pre-adult regression. His violent rebirth aligns with Lacan's concept of the symbolic order, where he transitions from a passive intellectual to a patriarchal enforcer, albeit tragically. On the other hand, Abin's identity as an urban outsider destabilizes his position within the hypermasculine norms of rural Kerala. His acts of violence are a means to reassert his place within a patriarchal framework, reflecting a Lacanian integration into the symbolic order through culturally sanctioned masculinity.

Lastly, the films present a nuanced critique of feminist subversion versus reinforcement. While *Straw Dogs* critiques toxic masculinity, it simultaneously perpetuates misogynistic tropes, notably through the eroticized suffering of Amy. David's portrayal as a "hero" through his violence ultimately reinforces patriarchal dominance. In contrast, *Varathan* subtly challenges traditional gender norms through Priya's resilience and her moment of agency, yet her ultimate submission to Abin's violent masculinity echoes the unresolved tension found in *Straw Dogs*, underscoring the cyclical nature of patriarchal power in both narratives.

Both films utilize psychoanalytic frameworks to critically explore the theme of masculinity in crisis, yet the cultural contexts that inform their narratives profoundly influence their respective resolutions. In *Straw Dogs*, violence emerges as a hallmark of individualistic triumph, emblematic of a Western ethos that esteems personal autonomy above all else. This portrayal not only reinforces traditional notions of masculinity but also raises crucial questions about the moral implications of such violence in the service of self-assertion.

Conversely, *Varathan* presents a more nuanced critique of collective patriarchy, grappling with its pervasive influence while acknowledging its inescapability within the societal fabric. This film challenges the notion of masculinity as an absolute construct, instead illuminating the complexities and vulnerabilities inherent to male identity in a patriarchal society.

Employing the theoretical frameworks posited by Freud, Lacan, and Mulvey, both narratives offer valuable insights into the ongoing struggle to reconcile issues of identity, agency, and societal expectations. Freud's psychoanalytic theory elucidates the internal conflicts surrounding male identities, while Lacan's ideas on the mirror stage and the formation of the self reflect the societal constructs that shape masculine behaviour. Mulvey's contributions further enrich the discourse by examining the dynamics of the gaze and its implications for both male and female agency. Collectively, these theoretical lenses enable a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between individual agency and structural forces that define contemporary masculinity, ultimately revealing the complexities of identity formation in an increasingly multifaceted world.

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Gender Representation and Feminist Critique of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*: A Laura Mulveyian Perspective

Paul Jacob

Introduction

Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), introduced the concept of the "male gaze" to film theory, arguing that mainstream cinema is structured around a masculine viewer's scopophilic pleasure. This theoretical framework has been widely applied to analyse how films represent women as passive objects of desire for the male spectator. While Mulvey's theory primarily focuses on the objectification of female characters, it can also be applied to examine how male bodies are presented within a patriarchal framework.

In this context, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* presents a unique case study for applying Mulvey's theory. The film's graphic depiction of Christ's suffering and crucifixion raises questions about the representation of the male body and its relationship to the male gaze. By examining the film's visual style, narrative structure, and reception, the study attempts to explore how *The Passion of the Christ* engages with and potentially subverts traditional notions of masculinity and spectatorship.

Mulvey's theory of the male gaze is grounded in psychoanalytic concepts of scopophilia and narcissism. She argues that mainstream cinema positions the spectator as a voyeuristic male subject who derives pleasure from looking at female characters as objects of desire. This is achieved through various cinematic techniques, such as framing, camera movement, and editing, which emphasise the female body and its erotic appeal. According to Mulvey, this reinforces patriarchal power structures by objectifying women and reducing them to their physical attributes.

While *The Passion of the Christ* does not explicitly focus on female characters, it can still be analysed through the perspective of the male gaze. The film's central figure, Jesus Christ, is presented as a hypermasculine figure whose body is subjected to extreme violence and suffering. The camera lingers on his wounds, emphasizing the physicality of his pain and sacrifice. This graphic depiction of male suffering can be seen as a form of objectification, as it caters to the spectator's voyeuristic tendencies and potentially elicits a sadistic pleasure.

However, *The Passion of the Christ* also complicates traditional notions of the male gaze. By depicting Christ's suffering in such graphic detail, the film forces the spectator to confront the vulnerability and fragility of the male body. This challenges the conventional association of masculinity with power and invulnerability. Moreover, the film's religious context invites a different kind of spectatorship, one based on empathy and identification with Christ's suffering rather than simply objectification.

The reception of *The Passion of the Christ* further complicates its relationship to the male gaze. The film sparked controversy due to its graphic violence and perceived anti-Semitic undertones. Some critics accused the film of exploiting Christ's suffering for sensationalist purposes, while others praised its spiritual power and emotional impact. The film's polarizing reception highlights the complex and often contradictory ways in which the male body can be represented and interpreted in contemporary cinema.

While the film's graphic depiction of Christ's suffering can be seen as a form of objectification, it also challenges traditional notions of masculinity and spectatorship. By examining the film's visual style, narrative structure, and reception, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the male body is represented and interpreted in contemporary cinema. (Mulvey 6-18)

The film positions female characters as objects of scopophilic pleasure and emotional manipulation for the male viewer, perpetuating traditional gender roles and stereotypes. While the film may offer a moving portrayal of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, its treatment of women remains problematic from a feminist perspective. The film's adherence to patriarchal narratives and its objectification of female characters contribute to the ongoing marginalization of women in religious and historical cinema.

Mary Magdalene

The film portrays Mary Magdalene as a repentant sinner who finds solace in Jesus' teachings. However, her character is primarily defined by her past transgressions and her unwavering devotion to Jesus. Her portrayal aligns with the traditional trope of the "fallen woman," whose redemption is contingent upon her adherence to religious doctrine and subservience to male authority (Brown, 2007). The film fails to explore Mary Magdalene's agency or her potential contribution to Jesus' ministry beyond her role as a devoted follower.

Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema often objectifies women, positioning them as passive objects of desire for the male viewer (Mulvey 6). In the film, Mary Magdalene is frequently framed in close-ups, highlighting her physical beauty and emotional vulnerability. This emphasis on her visual appeal aligns with Mulvey's observation that female characters are often reduced to their physical attributes in order to satisfy the male gaze.

Moreover, Mary Magdalene's emotional displays, such as her tears and expressions of devotion to Jesus, are presented as spectacles for the male viewer's consumption. This aligns with Mulvey's argument that female characters are often reduced to their emotional displays, further objectifying them and reinforcing their passive role within the narrative (Mulvey 11). The film's focus on Mary Magdalene's emotional connection to Jesus, while potentially meaningful from a religious perspective, also serves to position her as an object of emotional manipulation for the male viewer.

The film's portrayal of Mary Magdalene as a repentant sinner further reinforces her objectification. Her past transgressions are visually alluded to through flashbacks and suggestive imagery, inviting the male viewer to gaze upon her with a mixture of fascination and judgement. This aligns with Mulvey's observation that female characters are often associated with sin and temptation, further objectifying them and reducing them to their sexualized pasts (Mulvey 14).

The camera often lingers on Mary Magdalene's body, particularly her face and hair, emphasizing her physical beauty and vulnerability. This visual emphasis on her physical attributes serves to objectify her and cater to the male gaze, as Mulvey argues that women in cinema are often reduced to their visual appeal for the pleasure of the male viewer.

Furthermore, Mary Magdalene's relationship with Jesus is portrayed as one of unwavering devotion and subservience. This reinforces the traditional power dynamic between men and women, where women are expected to be submissive and deferential to male authority. While the film may intend to portray Mary Magdalene's devotion as a positive attribute, it also reinforces the notion of female passivity and dependence on male figures. The film portrays Mary Magdalene as solely defined by her relationship to Jesus, lacking any independent agency or desires outside of her devotion to him.

In addition to Mulvey's theory, other feminist scholars have also critiqued the film's portrayal of Mary Magdalene. For instance, Brown and Parker argue that the film reinforces the traditional trope of the "fallen woman," whose redemption is contingent upon her adherence

to religious doctrine and subservience to male authority. They suggest that the film fails to explore Mary Magdalene's agency or her potential contribution to Jesus' ministry beyond her role as a devoted follower.

The film objectifies Mary Magdalene, emphasizes her emotional displays, associates her with sin and temptation, and reinforces traditional gender roles. While the film may offer a moving portrayal of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, its treatment of Mary Magdalene remains problematic from a feminist perspective due to its perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and its failure to grant her agency or complexity.

Mary, the mother of Jesus,

Mary is portrayed as a grieving mother who witnesses her son's suffering with unwavering faith. While the film emphasizes her maternal love and compassion, it also reinforces the image of the passive and silent woman, whose primary role is to endure pain and offer emotional support (Ehrman, 55). Mary's character is devoid of agency, and her voice remains unheard amidst the male-dominated narrative. While the film does not overtly sexualize Mary, it nevertheless positions her as a passive object for the male gaze through its visual and narrative choices.

Visual Representation

Visually, the film frequently frames Mary in poses of suffering and sorrow, emphasizing her vulnerability and helplessness. Her anguished face and tear-stained cheeks are presented in lingering close-ups, inviting the viewer to gaze upon her pain and sorrow. This visual emphasis on Mary's suffering aligns with Mulvey's concept of scopophilia, the pleasure derived from looking at others as objects. By focusing on Mary's physical and emotional pain, the film invites the viewer to derive a voyeuristic pleasure from her suffering, thus objectifying her.

Moreover, the film often portrays Mary in dimly lit settings or with a halo-like glow around her head, creating an ethereal and otherworldly image. While this visual depiction may be intended to convey Mary's holiness and purity, it also reinforces her status as an idealized and unattainable figure, further distancing her from the realm of human agency and subjectivity.

Narrative Representation

In terms of narrative, Mary's role in the film is primarily defined by her relationship to Jesus. She is the grieving mother, the silent witness to her son's suffering. This portrayal reinforces

the traditional trope of the “*mater dolorosa*,” the sorrowing mother whose identity is inextricably linked to her son’s suffering (Schüssler Fiorenza, 112). This limited and passive role further reinforces Mary’s position as an object within the narrative, rather than an agent with her own desires and motivations.

The film’s focus on Mary’s emotional pain and suffering can be interpreted as a form of emotional manipulation for the male viewer. Her tears and anguish are meant to evoke sympathy and pity, positioning the male viewer as the active subject who feels for the passive, suffering object (Mulvey, 486). This dynamic reinforces traditional gender roles, where women are seen as emotional beings in need of male protection and comfort. Mary’s emotional responses are exaggerated and melodramatic, further reinforcing the stereotype of women as overly emotional and irrational beings.

The film’s portrayal of Mary’s relationship with Jesus also reinforces traditional gender roles. Mary is depicted as completely devoted to her son, her entire identity revolving around her role as his mother. She is shown as submissive and obedient to his will, even in the face of immense suffering. This portrayal reinforces the patriarchal notion that women should be self-sacrificing and prioritize the needs of men over their own.

The film’s visual and narrative choices position Mary as a passive object of pity and emotional manipulation, reinforcing traditional gender roles and denying her agency and complexity. While the film may offer a moving portrayal of Mary’s grief, it ultimately fails to present her as a fully realized individual with her own thoughts and desires.

The film’s objectification of Mary can be seen as a reflection of broader societal attitudes towards women. By depicting Mary as a passive and suffering figure, the film reinforces the notion that women are inherently weaker and less capable than men. This portrayal can be harmful as it perpetuates gender stereotypes and limits women’s potential for agency and autonomy.

Claudia Procula

Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate, emerges as a more complex character in the film. She expresses empathy towards Jesus and attempts to intervene on his behalf, demonstrating a degree of agency absent in other female characters (Pauwels, 65). However, her efforts are ultimately futile, and her voice is silenced by her husband’s authority. Claudia’s

portrayal highlights the limitations of women's power within a patriarchal system, where their opinions and actions are often dismissed or ignored.

Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze can be applied to the portrayal of Claudia Procula in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* in several ways. Although Claudia exhibits some agency and defiance, the film ultimately positions her as an object of the male gaze and reinforces traditional gender roles.

Visual Representation

Visually, Claudia is often presented as an object of aesthetic contemplation. The film emphasizes her physical beauty, often framing her in close-ups that highlight her facial features, luxurious clothing, and elegant demeanour. These close-ups serve to objectify Claudia, reducing her to her physical attributes and presenting her as a visual spectacle for the male viewer. This aligns with Mulvey's argument that the male gaze in cinema often fragments the female body, focusing on specific body parts for the pleasure of the male spectator (Mulvey 11).

Moreover, the film uses lighting and colour to enhance Claudia's visual appeal. She is often bathed in soft, warm light, creating an ethereal and idealized image. This visual aesthetic further reinforces Claudia's status as an object of desire, catering to the male gaze's preference for idealized and passive female figures.

The film's emphasis on Claudia's visual appeal is also evident in its costume choices. She is often adorned in elaborate dresses and jewellery, symbolizing her wealth and status as the wife of Pontius Pilate. These visual markers of femininity and opulence serve to further objectify Claudia, aligning her with traditional representations of women as decorative objects.

Narrative Representation

While Claudia exhibits some agency in the film, her character ultimately reinforces traditional gender roles and power dynamics. Her attempts to intervene on Jesus' behalf are repeatedly thwarted by her husband's authority. This portrayal highlights the limited power and agency of women within patriarchal structures.

Furthermore, Claudia's pleas for mercy are often framed in emotional terms, emphasizing her feminine sensitivity and compassion. While this may seem like a positive portrayal of female empathy, it also reinforces the stereotype of women as overly emotional and irrational

beings. This portrayal aligns with Mulvey's argument that the male gaze often associates women with emotionality, positioning them as passive objects in need of male guidance and control.

The film's portrayal of Claudia's relationship with Pontius Pilate further reinforces traditional gender roles. She is depicted as the dutiful wife, concerned for her husband's well-being and reputation. Her attempts to influence his decision are framed as gentle persuasion rather than assertive action. This portrayal reinforces the patriarchal notion that women should be supportive and submissive to their husbands, even when their moral convictions conflict with their husband's actions.

While Claudia Procula initially appears to challenge traditional gender roles through her attempts to intervene on Jesus' behalf, the film ultimately positions her as an object of the male gaze and reinforces patriarchal power structures. Her physical beauty is emphasized, her emotional distress is exploited for the viewer's consumption, and her agency is ultimately undermined by her husband's authority.

This portrayal of Claudia, like that of Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, contributes to the film's overall reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. While the film may offer a compelling narrative about Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, its treatment of women remains problematic from a feminist perspective. The film's adherence to patriarchal narratives and its objectification of female characters perpetuate harmful stereotypes and limit the representation of women's agency and complexity.

Conclusion

Laura Mulvey's seminal theory of the male gaze, while groundbreaking in feminist film theory, reveals its limitations when applied to a film as complex as Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. While the film undoubtedly contains elements that align with Mulvey's framework, such as the objectification of Mary Magdalene's suffering body for the viewer's scopophilic pleasure (Mulvey, 486), reducing the film to a mere manifestation of the male gaze would be an oversimplification.

The Passion of the Christ challenges the traditional subject-object dichotomy inherent in Mulvey's theory. The film's central figure, Jesus Christ, despite being the object of the gaze, simultaneously subverts it. His suffering body, while undeniably a spectacle, also serves as a site of resistance against the dominant power structures (Shaw 245). The film thus invites a reading beyond the simple dynamics of the male gaze, necessitating a more nuanced approach.

Moreover, the film's religious context adds another layer of complexity. The gaze in *The Passion of the Christ* is not solely a sexualised male gaze; it's also a religious gaze imbued with theological implications (Kwok 56). The spectators are not just passive voyeurs but are implicated in the act of witnessing, a concept central to Christian theology. This spiritual dimension of the gaze complicates a straightforward application of Mulvey's theory.

Therefore, while *The Passion of the Christ* can be analysed through the viewpoint of the male gaze, it's crucial to acknowledge the film's complexities that challenge and extend the boundaries of Mulvey's theory. A more comprehensive analysis would require incorporating theological perspectives and considering the film's unique subversion of traditional cinematic tropes. Such an approach would not only enrich our understanding of *The Passion of the Christ* but also contribute to the ongoing dialogue between feminist film theory and religious studies.

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Gods, Heroes, and the Alpha Male: Mythic Archetypes in Ranjith's Films

Jerin Jose

Myths are much more than mere narratives as they encompass the culture, nature, fears and aspirations of the people of a particular area. At the superficial level myths are simple narratives, which bring forth an aspect of experience that is inextricably linked to the life of a particular community. At a deeper level, these narratives have a profound socio-spiritual significance drawn from the value and belief systems bequeathed to a specific community through generations of local wisdom. Such narratives play a crucial part in identity formation, psychological makeup and the collective psyche of the community as a whole. Ancient myths deal primarily with the activities of one or more divine beings-gods, goddesses and other superhuman beings and their relationships with one another, with humans and other earth creatures and with the cosmos.

Generally, myths are universal and individualistic at the same time. As myths derive their sustenance from the cultural norms and rites of the source tradition, they form a didactic device with wide application. Yet, simultaneously myths touch upon areas capable of divergent interpretations dependent on individualistic realms of experience. In addition, myths carry minimal elaborations that foreground the core of the narrative. In short, myths voice the age-old worldly wisdom encapsulated in tradition.

Theories abound on the myth and none are conclusive by any measure. In the Introduction to *Philosophy and Mythology*, F. W. J. Schelling highlights the complex origin of myths:

Mythological representations have been neither invented nor freely accepted. The products of a process independent of thought and will, they were, for the consciousness which underwent them, of an irrefutable and incontestable reality. Peoples and individuals are only the instruments of this process, which goes beyond their horizon and which they serve without understanding.

For Levi-Strauss, "myth is a structured system of signifiers, whose internal networks of relationships are used to 'map' the structure of other sets of relationships; the 'content' is infinitely variable and relatively unimportant" (*Anthropology and Myth*). Eliade is of the view that myths are often stories of origins, how the world and everything in it came to be in *il/o tempore* (in that time). He considers religious myths as sacred histories. Freud suggests that myths are public dreams, which like private realms, emerge from the unconscious mind. Jung

agrees when he holds that myths often reveal the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Campbell also adopts a similar viewpoint. According to Campbell, myths orient people to the metaphysical dimension, explain the origins and nature of the cosmos, validate social issues, and, on the psychological plane, address themselves to the innermost depths of the psyche.

Though myth eludes definition and seems distant, they still surround, embrace, imbue and colour human consciousness. For this very reason, mythology signifies different things to different investigators. Historians pursuing myth find garbled pre-history and the migration of tribes while anthropologists uncover family tangles and tribal imperatives. Psychologists look for archetypes and mental screens or malfunctions. Sifting through the myths themselves, sorting them out, relating and re-telling them for our times, we can demonstrate the fact that what surrounds human consciousness can also reappear in the depths of a person's mind.

The power of imagination mediates between the collapse of universal truths and the logic of order and predictability. The appropriate moral response occurs not at the level of theory and reason, but through images and myths. For Indians or particularly the Hindus, these new perspectives facilitate re-evaluation of the standards based on pragmatic, realistic and humane considerations. Traditional Hindu religion has accommodated a profusion of values throughout its history. The variety of moral systems providing resources for the contemporary Hinduism testifies to this ability. This pluralism of thought depended on a uniformity of action that unified the Indian community. Contemporary religious liberalism threatens this consensus and harmony. Modern morality appears bankrupt from its lack of ability to articulate a comprehensive justification for observing traditional rituals and practices. Objective truths of the previous generation are unmasked by today's commentators and interpreters. They explain, evaluate and criticize the laws and absolute truths handed down through generations. Thus, a modern writer becomes a commentator and cultural teacher who induces "diversity of life" through "articulation of a plurality of ways to be human" (Bauman). Taking life as a basic text, this new genre of writers shape life by generating several alternative meanings.

Joseph Strelka from the New York State University, Albany, in his paper *Mythe/Myth* says, "Many literary works serve as excellent examples of the revitalization of myth. No less worthy of note, it is often myth that gives power and vitality to some of the greatest works of literature." Some of the greatest literary writers of Postcolonial Indian English prose and fiction have made use of Indian myths and legends in their works. Girish Karnad in *Yayati*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandala*, *Fire and Rain* and Raja Rao in *The Serpent and the Rope*

are just a few examples of writers who have brought out the emotional, metaphorical, historical and symbolical appeal of myths.

Several popular and best-selling books today include lesser known stories in Hindu mythology that are re-told in an innovative ways. There seems to be a surge in books, movies and art that analyse episodes and epics in Hindu mythology, re-reading and deriving unexplored meanings from a contemporary perspective. Myths, as Nietzsche suggested, worked as cultural foundations that saves the society from fragmentation. It built cultural bonds that brought people together to justify life as desirable in spite of its dark moments. Hindu mythology appeared as a literary device in the works of Indian writers including Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Raja Rao and R K Narayan (to name a few). Allusions to Hindu mythology in novels such as *Anandmath*, *Kanthapura* acted as powerful devices for expressing the personal and political aspirations and dilemmas of the writers.

Epics in Hindu mythology are reinterpreted in a way that makes them less godly and more human. The protagonists possess all human emotions including the weaker ones. Their struggles and battles may not always be seen driven by higher purposes. The narratives of the myths have changed as universal journeys of characters are retold from individual's point of view. These bring out the human side of the Gods and have made it possible for readers to relate to them in newer ways. The characters are critiqued, scrutinized, storyplots are questioned and connected with contemporary ideologies and issues.

A number of Indian writers and diasporic writers of Indian origin have written prose and fiction that has generated a lot of interest and been very popular with the Indian readers of today, especially young adults. In such literature, an entirely new genre of writings about Indian mythology and legends has set the book market on fire. Writers like Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, Devdutt Pattanaik etc have gained a lot of fame because of their books and works involving Indian myths. With the continued reinforcement of Hindu iconography across mediums it is possible to argue that myth, as Roland Barthes uses it in *Mythologies*, functions as a synonym of ideology. Ideology refers to the body of beliefs and representations that sustain and legitimize current power relationships. Ideologies promote the values and interests of dominant groups within society.

While questioning, challenging, negating and reversing the original, popular reconstruction of myths has also become a means of controlling, ordering and giving significance to the

immense anarchy that characterizes contemporary history. As far as they remain at the realm of mere reflections, contemporary mythology will cease to do justice to the potential of myths to create alternatives that conflict with power establishments and resonate with the ambivalent Other.

Almost all Indian writers have taken recourse to the rich store of myths to assert their distinctive perspective on life. Interestingly, Indian writers have an obsessive tendency to reflect in the works, their love to Lord Shiva. Shiva is one of the great gods of Hinduism and perhaps more than any other attests to the complexity of the religious culture of South Asia. The name Shiva is not yet in use in the Rig Veda, but an ambiguous deity called Rudra appears, who shares many traits with the god who is later more commonly referred to as Shiva, “The Auspicious One.” In fact, Shiva is known and referred to by many different names, each reflecting different sides of his character, such as Ācāra, Āmbhu, Bhava, and Pāupati. In classical Hindu mythology, Rudra is represented as one of the three aspects of the Hindu trinity (Trimurti): Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Rudra the destroyer. This indicates that Rudra’s ambiguous character remained, but from a Saiva religious perspective, Shiva is the Great Lord (Mahāvara) who encompasses this trinity and simultaneously transcends it. Lord Shiva, as a character, is regarded as the encapsulation of what one may call manliness. The mythological embodiment of alpha male concept is convulsed in Shiva.

Alike Literature, Indian films are of no exception in this rapport. Ranjith, a celebrated director and screen play writ in Malayalam also has this obsession for the character of Shiva. Ranjith has written films in every conceivable genre, created intriguing women and men on screen and scripted powerful stories that have stood the test of time. Yet today, he is labelled the creator of the ultimate alpha male heroes (Neelakandan, Induchoodan, Madhavan Kutty, Sreehari, Jagannathan), characters that are glorified and eulogised for their machismo and misogyny. The alpha male heroes Ranjith created are now often being criticised for their glorification of misogyny. However, what seems interesting in this study is his choice to name these characters with synonyms of Lord Shiva. It is never too surprising that a writer like Ranjith who is inextricably rooted in Kerala society might have grown up with these idols in his heart, which may as well have reflected in his writings.

Devasuram released in 1993; the film and its characters remain live in the hearts of audience. The hero of the film ‘Mangalassery Neelakandan’ bears the name of Lord Shiva. ‘Neelakandan’ which means the man with blue neck is a synonym of Shiva. Neelakandan

has been the manliest character of all time in the Malayalam cinema. When the writer made a second part for the film in 2001, *Ravanaprabhu*, Ranjith was brilliant enough to name Neelakandan's son as 'Karthikeyan', name of Lord Subhramanya who is the son of Lord Shiva. *Aaram Thampuran* released in 1997 had its hero named 'Jagnadhan' which means Protector of the universe, Lord Shiva. *Usthad*, another film penned by Renjith saw yet another machismo character 'Parameswaran' (meaning Lord Shiva) as the protagonist. These were the few films of the decade which set the cult of Malayalees aesthetic sensibilities regarding manliness and heroic characters. It cannot be ignored as coincidental, that the choice of names of these hero characters turned out to be of Shiva's. Ranjith would have found it difficult to find other suitable Malayalam names that would sufficiently sound manly enough.

Ranjith's association with myth is not limited just to the realms of protagonist's names. He attempts in re-telling (often subverting) the popular myths too. Unlike most other Malayalam films of ninties or twenty hundreds Ranjith's heroes subverts the usual pattern of heroes victory over the villain with the murder of villain. When most other films of the period ends with hero murdering the anti villain, Ranjith offered a peaceful life to his caharcters. Most of his films ended happily, giving the anti hero a chance for redemption. The climax of *Devasuram* gives a new life to 'Mundakkal Shekharan' with the mercy of 'Neelakandan' who 'takes his hand instead of head. In *Usthad* the villain Usaf Sha is left warned by Parameswaran as Jaganathan in *Aaram Thampuran* does leave Kulapulli Appan unmurdered. Though these reversed climaxes were unusual in Malayalam movies, the audience continued to cling to these climaxes. The sequel to *Devasuram*, *Ravanaprabhu* was the history of Karthikeyan's requital in spite of Neelakandan's death. Even after Neelakandan is being murdered by 'Mundakkal Rajendran', 'Karthikeyan' decides to leave Mundakkal Shekharan.

The attempts of de-mythification do lies in the very name of the film *Ravanaprabhu*. The movie tells the story of Ravana, the demon King, who steals Janaki (the heroine). The title and the plot alludes to the Ramayana story of Ravana kidnapping Sita, to the forest. But unlike the myth, in the movie Ravana (Karthikeyan) wins Janaki. After *Ravanaprabhu*, Ranjith did *Nandanam* with a fictitious Guruvayurappan. Lord Krishna is the most popular and favourites of the deities. Krishna is also seen as easily accessible and approachable, especially by female devotes. In the film *Nandanam* Lord Krishna appears disguised as a neighbourhood boy before the protagonist Balamani, who is a young house maid and an

ardent devotee of 'Krishna'. The truth is not revealed until climax when Balamani along with the audience realizes the neighbor character to be Krishna.

By using the mythical characters or their names for the characters, the writer succeeds in reinforcing the nature of his characters. Those characters became the most popular male characters in Malayalam film which are still celebrated. The use of myth and mythical characters were not just a passive tool, but an effective means by which the characters were built up on. The exceptional reception of these characters could not have attained with a lesser powerful names that would easily communicate to the audience about the character's nature. All these direct and indirect references to myth in Ranjith's films have done its share in establishing and structuring the narrative. Ranjith is one of the many other writers and artists who have found the scope of myths in asserting the meaning in their art. Thus it is evident that myths converse better to its receptors, especially when it comes to a medium like cinema.

Myths and legends may no longer be associated with religious rituals and beliefs but "myths" of heroic characters that mediate the troubling paradoxes of life and emerge triumphant, will always compel us and cast their spells on us (Magoulick: What is Myth). Hence the fascination for interesting literature on Indian myths and legends shall continue.

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Contours of Resistance: Reading Arundhati Roy's Non-fiction through Subaltern Consciousness

Dr. Neethu Mary Tomy

Arundhati Roy became an international literary sensation with her Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) which brought global attention to postcolonial Indian literature through its lyrical exploration of caste, forbidden love and family tragedy in Kerala. After a twenty-year hiatus from fiction, she published *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in 2017, an ambitious novel weaving together stories of marginalized lives to create a panoramic portrait of contemporary India's struggles with identity, violence and belonging. Roy also devotes her creative energy to writing brilliant, well-crafted and elaborately argued essays on momentous matters of public interest. The entire range of her writings is characterized by a passionate plea for social change. In her non-fictional writings, Roy assumes the role of a spokes persona to support the cause of the Dalit and the deserted.

Gramsci, the Marxist thinker and theorist of Italy, adopted the term 'subaltern' to refer to those groups in the society who are "subject to the activity of the ruling class" (55). In the post-colonial scenario, the Gramscian term subaltern gets wider perspective as it refers to the third world countries and the marginalized groups in the society. Subalternity becomes an overriding concept in literature when the marginalized section of the society has no voice of its own. Arundhati Roy's fictional and non-fictional writings address the needs of the subalterns. She becomes the post- colonial voice of the marginalized and oppressed sections of the society.

Roy's essays express her strong feelings against the injustices and inhumanities perpetrated by powers and people who parade as saviours of the weaker section of the society. Roy dwells on how the power centered relationships result in the sub-ordination of a group of people or even a nation by another. She identifies the theme of her essays as

The relationship between the power and powerlessness and the endless circular conflict they're engaged in. My writing is not really about nations and histories, it's about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the Physics of power... the accumulation of vast unfettered power by a state or a country, a corporation or an institution – or even an individual, a spouse, friend or sibling – regardless of ideology, results in excesses ["Come September" 65].

Roy elucidates this theme with the help of the contemporary world scenario where the poorer nations are marginalized and manipulated by the powerful ones according to their will. An important target of Roy's intense scrutiny as an opponent of neo-imperialism is the policies of America or rather the 'Empire' as she calls it. She uses the metaphor of a megalomaniac dictator to describe the Empire.

Powerful, pitiless and armed to the teeth. He's a kind of king the world has never known before. His realm is a row capital, his conquests emerging markets, his prayers profits, his borders limitless, his weapons nuclear. He has a television see only what he wants you to see and read only what he wants you to read ["Power Politics" 148].

How the Empire exploits the other subaltern nations is a dominating concern in most of her works. Roy exposes the politics behind the decisions and actions of Empire in the guise of welfare and development. She expounds on the hypocritical aspects of power as practiced by the Empire. "His minions arrive in third world countries masquerading as missionaries come to redeem the wretched. They have a completely different dossier in their briefcases" ["Power Politics" 51]. Roy stands as a champion for the cause of the weaker nations.

Roy talks about the phenomenon of power – domination and marginalization not only in the international arena but also in the domestic sphere. Her essay "The Greater Common Good" is in itself a study of the subaltern group. In the essay she discusses how the subalterns are excluded from sharing the benefits of progress and development which is mainly meant for the upper-class members of the society.

Roy wrote "The Greater Common Good" in support of the displaced tribal people who suffer from the constitution of the Sardar Sarovar dam on the banks of the Narmada valley. The people had no other alternative except to leave their land for an unknown destination in the name of development. At the outset of "The Greater Common Good" Roy describes the deplorable condition of the tribal people. "I could see their fields and the forests behind them. Scuttling across the landscape like motorized peanuts." (43) Roy brings to focus the serious situation into which they are led.

The millions of displaced people in India are nothing but the refugees of an unacknowledged war. And we like the citizens of White America and French Canada and Hitler's Germany are condoning it by looking away. Why? Because we're told

that it is being done for the sake of Greater Common Good. That it's being done in the name of progress, in the name of national interest. Therefore, gladly unquestioningly, almost gratefully, we believe what were told. We believe that it benefits us to believe. (58)

"The Greater Common Good" also shows the tyranny and injustice, insult and abuse of the wealthy caste people to the outcaste and the have-nots. The author mentions an event of the village Jalud, in the Nimad plains of Madhya Pradesh where the courage of the shameful caste divisions can be felt. The sufferings of the Dalits of this area remind us of the author's booker prize winner book, *The God of Small Things* in which Velutha, a Dalit of the village has to suffer a lot by society and administration. He was so mercilessly tortured by the dishonest and cruel police that he breathed his last in the police custody. The author very beautifully presents a heart touching picture of Velutha.

Velutha appeared on the scummy, slippery floor a mangled genie involved by a modern lamp. He was noticed his soil mundu had come, undone. Blood spilled from his skull like a secret. His face was swollen and his head looked like a pumpkin, too large and heavy for the slender stem it grew from pumpkin with a monstrous upside down smile. Police boots stepped back from the rim of a pool of urine spreading from him, the bright, bare electric bulb reflected in it (78).

Roy is not blindly opposing the developmental strategies undertaken by the government. Her resistance is based on the systematic study of the socio-economic and ecological problems resulting from it.

The fact that big dams do more harm than good is no longer just conjecture. Big dams are obsolete.... They're a guaranteed way of taking a farmer's wisdom away from him. They're a brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich. Their reservoirs displace huge populations of people, leaving them homeless and destitute. Ecologically, they're the dog house. They lay the earth to waste. They cause floods, water-logging, salinity, they spread disease. There is mounting evidence that links Big Dams to earth quakes. ["The Greater Common Good" 56]

Through her essay, Roy is aiming at a reorientation of the developmental strategy. She proposes to incorporate the philosophy of social justice in the development discourse. This

can integrate the hitherto neglected, under privileged, deprived and marginalized groups into the main stream of the society.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons after the Second World War remains perhaps the most serious threat to the very existence of mankind on earth. Oblivious to the moral and historical implications of this, the so-called super powers, and later even those countries that do not even have the means to provide the basic needs to their people, continue to create and preserve these weapons of mass destruction as a matter of prestige, parading it in the name of self-defense. Roy writes:

It is such supreme folly to believe that nuclear weapons are deadly only if they're used. The fact that they exist at all, their very presence in our lives, will wreak more havoc than we can begin to fathom. Nuclear weapons pervade our thinking control our behaviors. Administer our societies. Inform our dreams. They bury themselves like meat hooks deep in the base of our brains. They are purveyors of madness. They are the ultimate colonizer ["The End of Imagination" 19].

Roy's essay "Democracy who's she when she's at Home?" explores the theme of violence resulting from religious fanaticism and communal hatred. In the past two decades, India has witnessed ever rising religious intolerance and caste conflicts, anti-Sikh riots (1984), demolition of Babri Masjid (1992) communal riots in Godhra (2002), to list a few. In recent years, religion and caste have become trump cards for politicians to swell their vote banks. It is against this background that she wrote her essay. It begins with a pathetic rendering of the pleas of the victims of Godhra outrage. She relates the incident not from the point of view of an outsider, but rather subjectively.

Last night a friend from Baroda called weeping. It took her fifteen minutes to tell me what the matter was. a friend of hers had been caught by a mob. Only that her stomach had been ripped open and stuffed with burning rags. Only that after she died, someone carved 'OM' on her forehead. ["Democracy" 21]

Roy asks a very relevant question which acts as an eye opener to every reader. "Precisely which Hindu scripture preaches this? ... which particular verse in the Quran required that they be roasted alive?" (21). Roy propagates through her writing that violence is no solution to the widening gulf between communities. The ultimate solution comes in people coming together to understand one another, and learn the spirit of tolerance.

The underlying theme of subalternity is reflected in the ‘art’ and ‘activism’ of Roy. She is an artist cum activist of the contemporary period. Through her essays covering a number of themes including US imperialism, war on terrorism, dispossession and communal violence in India and Hindu nationalism, Roy emerges as a writer for the victims of modernity. She punctures the balloon of snobbery, hypocrisy, vain political ideologies and social taboos that are held close to the heart of the modern society. She becomes a fervent warrior against the injustice in her country and abroad and her prose rings with courage, conviction and rage against tyranny and empire. The subalterns try their best to communicate their problems to the authorities but no positive change takes place in their favour. The authorities are not ready to listen to them and this results in the eternal suffering of their lot. While remaining acutely aware of her position as an Indian English writer with global visibility, Roy speaks for the cause of the marginalized and transforms literature into a site where subaltern experiences become central rather than peripheral to understanding contemporary India and post-colonial modernity.

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Educational Renaissance in Kerala: A Holistic Approach to Revamping Education for Moral and Intellectual Growth Amidst Global Migration Trends

Dr. Alvin Joseph

Introduction

Kerala's reputation as a hub of intellectual excellence stems from its deep-rooted educational traditions. This state, known for advancements in healthcare, information technology, and various service sectors, owes its success to an unwavering focus on education. Historically, ancient systems such as the "Kalari" and "Salas" emphasized holistic development, blending moral and physical growth. This ethos laid the groundwork for Kerala's educational renaissance during the 19th century, driven by Christian missionaries, socio-religious organizations, and visionaries like Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara. However, as Kerala's educational system evolved, it prioritized intellectual skill enhancement at the expense of moral and psychological development, leading to significant societal challenges. This paper explores the concept of a second educational renaissance that addresses these gaps, proposing a holistic framework to foster well-rounded individuals capable of navigating global challenges while retaining Kerala's intellectual legacy.

Kerala is often considered to be an intelligent community. This state is known for its expertise in various areas like health care, information technology and other service sectors. In fact, it is a matter beyond doubt that Keralities generally possess a high level of professional competence as they have proved it in various capacities both within and outside the country. Keralities are often noted for their presence all over the world in almost all levels and capacities. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on an official visit to Kerala told the fictional story of the astronaut who found a tea shop in the moon run by a Malayalee. The Prime Minister was in fact pointing to the fact that Malayalee is a ubiquitous presence all over the world.

Now the pertinent question arises, what is the secret behind the skill and efficiency of Kerala people? If we make a study about the matter, one will have the conclusion that the reason behind this phenomenon is the supreme importance that the Kerala society gives to education. Right from the ancient times the primary education systems like 'Kalari' and also the higher education systems like 'Salas' of arts and culture (the older form of modern Universities) underscored the primacy of education in our society from ancient times. The

holistic approach to human development which gave equal importance to moral and physical aspects of man was the hallmark of our ancient system of education.

The influence of Christian missionaries and especially the role played by the Church in the field of education in Kerala had been awesome. Educational visionaries like the Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the Catholic Church leader, who ordered in that for every church in Kerala, there should be one school called the “Pallikoodam”. This move by the Catholic Church can be seen as a part of the great educational Renaissance that happened in Kerala in the 19th century, giving education to not only the privileged section of the society but also to the under privileged and the down trodden. The move by other agencies like Muslim Educational Society, Nair Service Society, Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and other similar agencies also gave impetus to this movement. This movement can be hailed as the first modern educational Renaissance in Kerala.

The result of the movement in education was tremendous. This development had huge impact on Kerala. Being a small and saturated state, the resourceful and sophisticated manpower began the flow from Kerala to all parts of the world including the Gulf and the western countries. This resulted in the economic prosperity of the state and money began to flow from such countries to the state. Thus, Kerala society realized the power of education and the value of intellectual capital. Thus, more and more educational institutions were set up in all levels especially in the higher education and professional areas resulting in more sophisticated manpower.

But as Kerala society progressed in such a manner the emphasis of the educational system shifted more towards the intellectual aspects and the process of skill enhancement giving less importance to the moral aspects of human development. What used to be intrinsic/essential to education, i.e. the moral formation of the individual, was later thought of as something complementary. As a result, a new generation sprang up whom besides being intelligent, are morally and psychologically incompetent. The rising tension in our society, the numerous crimes, stressful life, sexual violence, disintegration in family and marriage, encroachment toward nature, abuse of natural resources and increasing alcoholism are a testimony to this fact. Many statistical evidences have it that Kerala, despite being a state with high literacy, education and health care, is a state where highest number of suicides are reported and also a state where the number of people diagnosed with psychiatric disorders are on a rise. How can we change this situation? Christine Lagarde, the former head of IMF says that “Education is the foundation

upon which any change is built” and hence this points to need in the revamping of our educational system where we should give due emphasis to the moral aspect of the human person with a holistic approach. For that there should be another educational Renaissance in the Kerala society giving emphasis to value oriented human development. Education must not just be a passport to economic freedom but should be something which makes him/her a better person. Following are the suggestions towards the nature of this new educational Renaissance

- 1) Educational institutions must provide students with teachers who act as mentors and can be good model to them by giving a true sense of direction in life.
- 2) Students must be given the right training to become mature enough to make critical choices in life and to make wise decisions.
- 3) The libraries of schools must be well stocked not only with intellectually stimulating books but also morally and spiritually enlightening ones. Students must be exposed to narratives on great personalities, philosophies and religions.
- 4) It is mandatory, now - a – days, for each educational institution to have a trained counselor for students with personal problems.
- 5) Spiritual practices like Yoga and meditation will help students to relieve stress.

In this way we can remold our educational system by giving due emphasis to spiritual and moral aspects of the human personality with proper intellectual growth.

Implications for Addressing Student Migration The massive migration of students from Kerala to foreign countries is driven by the perception of better educational opportunities and career prospects abroad. By revamping the local education system to focus on holistic development, Kerala can retain its intellectual talent and reduce the brain drain. A value-oriented education system will not only prepare students for global challenges but also instil a sense of cultural and ethical responsibility, making them ambassadors of Kerala’s rich educational legacy.

Conclusion

Kerala’s first educational renaissance transformed the state into a beacon of intellectual and economic progress. However, the neglect of moral and psychological dimensions has created societal imbalances that must be addressed. A new educational renaissance, rooted in

holistic human development, is essential to foster ethically grounded, intellectually capable individuals. By integrating mentorship, critical decision-making, enriched libraries, counselling, and spiritual practices, Kerala can revitalize its education system. This transformation will not only curb the migration of students to foreign countries but also reinforce Kerala's reputation as a leader in education and human development.

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Culturing and Caramelizing Man Readings: A Microscoping through *Kali and Ambily*

Amrutha Francis

Gender, Binary, Sex, Biology, Construct, Performance - Cliché words, find its application and representation quite differently in books and box offices. Most of us are aware of the 'gender coin' (gender binary) and the cultivated side-lines of the same coin. The explosions occurred in the gender coin paved way to 'gender triangles' (LGBTQIA). Now these three angles got separated themselves to welcome the other aspects of those cliché words and to reconstruct into some other shapes. These constructs are not even accepted by the contemporary scenario into its full-fledged form and it's still confusing and provoking all around the world. The basic assumption of society on the concept of the gender mainly focuses on the binary Man/Woman. The rest is always termed as 'others', 'the third gender', 'Sexual minorities' etc. The binary is always consisting of central and periphery, centralized/marginalized, dominant/oppressed or suppressed. The so called oppressed, marginalized, or the periphery never accepts this new born category with them. Actually, they, the periphery is fighting to change this distinction between the binary.

We,

The zero signs –

That seems to be that

That looks different from that;

This as that,

That different from that,

That, different from this,

Neither this nor that,

But, that which is this and

This, that is that... (Kunnisery 23)

The one who has no identity... no entity... emptiness... Not as a hero not as a heroine but just a zero. This is what Vijayakumar Kunnisery says in his poetry collection called *Alingam* about the ones who has no certainty regarding their gender and sex. The pain of being in both socially constructed illusions of gender and neither getting a chance in either one. They come under the group which is not the main stream categories of men and women. But they possess both the qualities of men and women. 'God has created human beings as man and woman with distinctive qualities'. This paper goes through the mixture of these two 'distinctive qualities' with a 'special reference'.

But here, this paper is mapping the margins in the mainstream and the emergence of margins towards the mainstream by comparing two visual texts namely *Kali* and *Ambily*. The idea of gender, sex, patriarchy, and heteronormative society everything has deep rooted in the word 'family'. The etymological reference of the word 'family' brings out that, the word was used for calling the servants of the household. This is derived from Latin word 'familia', 'famulus' which mean servant, slave etc. In the book *Origin of the Family*, Frederick Engels describes about the relationship between members, about kinship, brothers, sisters and more. So, from there itself the bias is activated. Master – Slave dichotomy is still working in our binary, the 'gender coin'. Following this dominance, one group is always supposed to be oppressed. When a third party comes, both the dominant and oppressed never accept them. The existence of the third party is still in question whether they are beyond binary or within it. At least the periphery should be inclusive of them. But this never takes place and those beyond the binaries experience a fluid state of existence and general contentment.

From the early beginning itself gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity; depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex, sex based social structures or gender identity. By 1970s feminist theory embraced the concept of a distinction between biological sex and social construct of gender. Hausman argued that gender is really an 'epistemology' for knowing and understanding the operation of culture in defining identities, in which one's perceptions and experiences of the world are attributed to a socially constructed narrative that is based on one's belonging to one gender category or the other. As Stryker stated:

Bodies are rendered meaningful only through some culturally and historically specific mode of grasping them physically that transforms the flesh into a useful artifact, [...]

Gendering is the initial step in this transformation, inseparable from the process of

forming an identity by means of which we are fitted to a system of exchange in a heterosexual economy. (249 – 250)

Keeping Butler's notion of Performative Gender, this paper tries to investigate the exotic realms of appearances. Even though the primary reference focuses on *Ambily* and *Kali*, this paper has taken *Charlie* and *Narasimham* for a back support. Within one or two dimensions, this paper can't capsule those primary 'reel canvases' (film). Those scripts formed questions in transgressing gender. The public brain is so orthodox in its understanding. Even if one tries to alter the so called 'settings', his/her efforts would go in vain. Transgender is a crystal example for the above mentioned. The forefront is still a dream place for them. The attributes of masculinity are still conventional factors which make a hero and if its degree decreases a bit then he will be named an effeminate or unnatural creature. 'Innocence' has no place in men's dictionary.

Ambily in *Ambily* outstands this conventional notion of an ideal hero. This 'reel canvas' of 2019 directed by John Paul George showcases a man of purity, man of love, man of sincerity, man of innocence, man of tolerance who tries to erase the margins unknowingly thus to create the gender fluidity. Throughout the movie, the central character *Ambily*, is struggling to place his steps on a solid platform. Shifting back to *Kali*, 2016 movie by Sameer Thahir, with the typical hero character by the rage attitude is another example of manliness. The social atmosphere of Kerala teaches all her girl children to learn how to cook, how to manage a house, how to behave – including to sit patiently while their partners are angry. So, the hidden fact in this is that, it is understood that all men are so rage figures and women should be submissive to their attitudes. But in this movie, there are elements of hero's rude attitude even towards his fellow beings, especially men. The shift from *Kali* to *Ambily* records the strategy change happened within the four-year period of time.

The iron body of film world is its actors. All minor and major actors work together for the success of a movie. But for every actor there is a challenge to secure their space in the mass movie culture and sustain that space for a period of time. To an extent stardom could help out cinemas to run through theatres. But the contemporary scenario is mocking at the stardom and they started valuing pulse of the movie. This paved the way for the actors to come up with entertaining, morally good movies. An actor has to travel much to reach the platform of a star actor, superstar, and mega star.

The word hero will definitely match with Ambily, because he never tells anyone about his quality but his deeds make others understand and love him. And the box office collection of *Ambily* is surprising that it encouraged family audiences than the youth. The director has arrowed a question that in which segment or under which title *Ambily* can be attached. The social construction of gender and the societal responses to those who are born into the socially distinctive nature of male and female are a puzzle of a joke now. The whole movie, *Ambily* embraces the epithets of gender discriminations and 'exploitations' (exploitation of his innocence). *Ambily*, being a mainstream member, and among the mainstream he belongs to the most powerful, most authoritative group even then his behaviour and attitude which is just a backdrop of his disease, put him into the darkness of acceptance.

In *Kali* the central character Siddharth admits his tragic flaw and he is ready to come out of it. He couldn't do it in the right manner, the inner consciousness that he is a man and there is no need to step back from the decision he has taken ruled him over. The initial shots of his college life and the students' encounter, after all his beloved Anjali questions him that do you think it is great to wrestle with gang leaders in the college but he answers that it is better to knock against them than to receive blows. That itself shows his power of manliness. There are situations where the heroine asks him not to protect her by scolding others and by using abusive language. This is also an attribute where men enjoy a freedom to use any language even if it is abusive in public, it's a kind of licence and society crafted them so. He is more reactive person than a responsive one. *Ambili* is a man of love, he is reactive and responsive which are lovely and it never hurts others. The typical boy of Kattappana to the stump remover, the milk seller he gave a good beat without making any noise he just opened up the tap of the milk can and the same cycle was stolen by *Ambili* for cycling with Bobby.

In *Kali* the house owner's grandchild advises him to be kind and he is not even ready to accept a boy's naughtiness. From Siddharth's childhood onwards he is shown as an intolerant person and his reaction towards the person who knocked at his nose is an example for the above mentioned concept. He has become a gang leader during his college days only because of his rage character. His anger, rude and fastidious behaviour, temerity, everything has got created new attribute of manliness through the movie *Kali*. At the same time central character Siddharth is loving and lovable, compassionate, supportive and caring. But every smooth rhythm of his life is being disturbed by his chutzpah nature. The extreme roots of manliness can be seen in this movie. The title of the movie named *Kali* means Fury and it is absolutely

associated with a man's emotion. The head of the movie shows slicing meat and a cat eagerly waiting for the 'dead body' of a fish. The sounds of the knife, meat slicing voices create the mood and atmosphere of the movie which satisfies the title. Being the member of a mainstream group man is not ready to accept his faults. Such a situation darkens Siddharth's figure in *Kali*. Sometimes he is not willing to accept the negatives of his side. He argues with his wife that she finds fault with him always, towards the end of the film there is an argument with husband and wife and she leaves the home without him and the malignant hero assumes that he has nothing bad if she leaves him alone and he will manage his life alone. But this intention got changed or rather his wife changed it with her magical teachings, the concluding statements by Siddharth are remarkable that he barely needs his wife.

Kali is a movie that deals with the issue of one's character or attitude, and Ambili exhibits a different gender performance, solely due to a pure biological reason that will never disrupt his life at all. The start of the movie *Ambili* is with children playing with mist and the sun is just shedding his rays only to warm up the fellows playing there. That first shot itself cradles a cool environment among the audience. Taking the history of Malayalam movies till now, most of the title names carried a male chauvinist approach. Or else the titles could directly indicate the hero of the movie. But *Ambili* is a cavil. Here the title of the movie indicated its hero by creating some confusions regarding the name, because all will associate the name with female characters than with male characters. The conventional strategy of naming characters by poets and writers still has a hold in our contemporary scenario. A bit is womanizing in that name even though his parents called him without considering all these things and they just called out of passion and love towards him. The contradictory title maps out the manliness in question and by doing so the writer and director John Paul George has cracked out the antiquated cliché of naming.

There is a sensational talk by MLA in *Ambily* that initiates some other view points of the manliness, that 'Bobby kuttan is a Boy'. Just cycling alone to a distant place is no more fresher in today's world and this is not a new attribute of being a man. Ambily assures the audience at one point of time that he is not inactive, but just thought of leaving it aside. Ambil's childlike nature and the 'innocent boldness' underline that, he is incapable of everything and can be fooled by others at any cost. Bobby attacks him by saying just to prove that he is a man first, and then come to home for his sister. The next response of Ambily towards his beloved Teena is so lovely and touching "did you convey our matter in your home I hope so

he came here to see me”. And all these sentences are enough to prove that he has a slight IQ imbalance but that wouldn’t control him back when his soul mate went to Himachal Pradesh.

As usual all lovers he has taken up a ladder at night and went to his beloved Teena’s home just to inform her about his dream of their marriage. We get a sadden Ambily when he was not selected for the tour to pick his beloved Teena even though he has called and paid the taxi. He clearly covered the tears from his Teena. Teena clarifies the doubts of friends regarding her endless and selfless love towards Ambily only by saying that he had no mental issues when he was young but she never specifies what happened to him in his further life. Friends’ advice that love is not life and it is not the medicine for everything, she corrects them by saying he has proven everything and she is quite sure that public is making him a laughing stock and her presence as a wife would enrich the value of family and he would be treated as a normal person by others.

The way Ambily takes bath, the way he walks, and his unmimicked dance, self-congratulating talks- all are today’s iconic style for youth. And this can be termed as a ‘moony mannerism’ (Translation of the word Ambily with a female touch, mannerism of Ambily). This moony mannerism challenged the star valued moon walks and ideological dances. The songs in this movie narrate these kaleidoscopic views. Where as in *Kali* the hero Siddharth is willing to dance with his wife in their private moments. For a few seconds he dances with a happy mind losing all luxuries of manliness, but it was not in front of his wife. When his wife understood that he was dancing and at that moment itself he stopped dancing and didn’t admit to his wife about his happy steps. The other side Ambili initiated a group dance and encouraged all his friends to enjoy with him in a public space without any delicacy. This is a new kind of leadership and an activism. Mirroring of Ambily is an exercise to exchange the mindscapes of mass intellect. This paper tries to analyses the ‘other’ed representations signalled in *Ambily*.

Capsuling and comparing manliness got one more angle. The 2000 release movie *Narasimham* by Shaji Kailas portrayed a heroine who is smart to win the love of a notorious man and hate of her own family members for the same reason. But she was very submissive to her lover and his needs. She accepted the conditions of her lover Indhuchudan who wants her to simply blow when he is drunk, and to satisfy his sexual needs in the winter/ rainy season. But Malayalam movie maze is uplifting her female characters. *22 Female Kottayam* and *Charlie* require a special mention here. A woman who is ready to proclaim her virginity, and

to revolt medically against the mischiefs by her lover and a woman goes free of mind to search her dreams out with a different gender performance respectively.

Considering the heroines of *Kali* and *Ambily* the so-called manliness is taking roots in them. Anjali in *Kali* tries to make over her husband's wrong attitude whole heartedly. She admits the fact that her husband cannot control his temper but she also conveys him that no one else in this world would accept him as he is. And it will scratch the glamour of her husband which she wants to avoid. She knows that if she leaves him there is no one to love him. She is the reason for his transformation. Coming back to *Ambily*, Teena is his world; his day begins with Teena, ends with Teena. Ambily is a doll for everyone who has money to share without a balance sheet. He is a subaltern. And it's Teena who takes up the charge to control him and loves him without any barriers. She stands with him. More than her life she works for his identity in this world. She loves Ambily as he is. Teena's shrewd decision is a challenge on this society. Being a periphery member, she pushes a mainstream member to the margin less world. In essence, as Butler reminds us, gender eludes the binaries of truth and falsity, authenticity and imitation, revealing itself as a construct whose very credibility can be rendered radically unstable.

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The Politics of Erasure in “Enjoy! Enjaami” by Arivu

Cibyna Thomas

The anti-caste movement has long powered the Dalit movement in southern India, with artists using their crafts to amplify its cause. Yet, their voices are consistently at risk of erasure, often losing their intended impact over time. Works like Poykayil Appachan’s “No Alphabet in Sight” and Saahodaran Ayyappan’s “Maveli Nadu Vaneedum Kalam” have led struggles against caste hierarchy. But taking “Maveli Nadu Vaneedum Kalam” as an example, we must ask how much of its context and significance is still recognized. One might assume caste discrimination is a relic best analysed by academics, but the ongoing fight against it shows otherwise. Dalit literature and music—key in challenging this injustice—feature figures like Jyotirao Phule, Savitribhai Phule, and Mukta Salve. Despite their influence, these voices face neglect in mainstream history and risk fading from popular culture. In today’s mainstream culture new faces are assuming popularity. But their presence in the popular culture looks short lived.

In the anti-caste movement in music and poetry in the twenty-first century, the one that has captured the hearts of the popular sensibility is Arivu with his “Enjoy! Enjaami.” This song can be taken as a typical example of erasure of the artist as his craft progresses to achieving international fame. This might seem paradoxical as one might wonder how a writer/ artist can lose value even though the craft retains its significance. Michel Foucault has spoken about it as ‘how’ certain voices are systematically removed from the mainstream culture by agents of power. The music album, which was released on 21 March 2021, was performed by Arivu and Dhee. The album title, translated as “Enjoy! My Dear,” is an exhortation by the writer-singer Arivu to treat human beings and nature as one and the same. The song is debunking the myth of “ownership” by explaining that everything in the universe is connected and exists in a symbiotic relationship. The central voice in the song is Valyammal, Arivu’s grandmother.

Arivu has dedicated this song to his grandmother, who had come from Sri Lanka to settle in Tamil Nadu. The song follows a storytelling trajectory. Arivu brings his grandmother as a speaker in the song and asks her to narrate the history of the land:

My Grandma’s shrink bag

With betel and nuts

The hands that carry them

Play the Parai drum

Grandma Grandma

What Magic did you do?

Valyammal's Grandson

Tell me the Story? (YouTube English Subtitle)

Valyammal explains to Arivu how civilisation came to be, and her narrative openly makes jibe at the humanist ideals that placed man as the centre of the universe- "Our forefathers have sung through their life/ The lakes and ponds belong/ To the dogs, foxes and Cats too." His grandmother explains to him that the farmer who has toiled in the land has nurtured the beautiful garden in which we are living now. This is a direct indictment against the have/ have-not dichotomy existing in society- Arivu voices the uselessness and idiocy underlying thought patterns that are discriminatory in nature.

Arivu is not alone in his vociferous protest against caste discrimination. He is part of the "Casteless Collective" that was formed in 2017. The name of the movement comes from the Tamil phrase "Jaathi Illadha Tamizhargal" which was coined by C. Iyothee Das, who wanted people in Tamil Nadu to see themselves without caste. Another artist from this collective Isivaani had received special mention from the BBC for her work, and her work resembles the artistic expressions of Arivu. Her works constitute part of the 'gaana' tradition in music, which can be traced back to the 17th century. In gaana music, the singers sang about the death of slaves in Northern Madras. They explain through their music that death can be the only form of liberation for them. In this tradition, she has written numerous songs- In her "Ambedkar Song" she reiterates the lines "Olikkanam/ Jathiye Olikkanam" meaning we should do away with caste. Among her literary oeuvre, another popular song is "Beef Song" which she wrote in protest against the lynching of Dalits in the name of beef-ban controversy. *The Hindustan Times* in an article titled "Isaivani: The pathbreaking woman gaana singer now on a BBC Top 100 list" says the following about her-

Isaivani is a distinctive gaana singer... [which] can be considered an achievement by itself. Isaivani has successfully broken an age-old tradition, which has led other young female gaana singers to come forward and express themselves.... (Ghosh Madhusree)

Isivani has brought her work to international attention, but Arivu's experience shows how erasure persists even at the global stage in a digitally literate society. When "Enjoy! Enjaami" reached worldwide audiences via DJ Snake, promotional material featured only DJ Snake and Dhee, omitting Arivu entirely: "To promote the track, they put up a billboard in New York's Times Square bearing only the images of DJ Snake and Dhee" (Gurbaxani, Amit). This exclusion reflects how the very narratives and creators at the movement's core can be side-lined. The rerelease of the song also failed to convey the emotion Arivu infused in the poetry, underlining how music's original meaning risks being lost across translations and commercial adaptations.

A similar erasure threatens Isivani, yet it takes another form: media attention to the harassment she endured risks overshadowing her artistic contributions, while targeted attempts to discredit her persist. Such erasure can marginalize advocates not only because of their activism but also through consumer-driven priorities that favour commercially viable figures over authentic voices. The question of erasure can be solved only if the artist assumes equal significance to the craft. This is of utmost significance in issue-driven activism that is led by a proper cause. The side-lining of the artist can be detrimental to the cause.

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