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Reconstructing the mythological margins in Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King*

Chitra V.S.

The retelling/reconstruction of Indian epics lends new shades to stories already told and is undoubtedly a fruitful means to augment Indian narrative tradition through its elasticity of structure and the flexible and fluid nature of narration. Thus, it is unique in the history of literature, where the reader has been granted the freedom to read and retell the text, depending on his inclination and discretion. Contemporary writers have attempted to bring out the implicit points of view of different characters from the original narrative. Modernising Indian myths serves to make mythology more relatable to contemporary groups of onlookers. In today's identity-conscious liberal society, patriarchal traditions, value systems, and aesthetics have been deliberately subverted or interrogated by feminist thinkers, theorists, and authors through their writings, dialogues, and debates. It is challenging to reconstruct a new tradition and society in which there are no issues of gender discrimination and subordination. Among the myriad possibilities of research offered by the retelling or reconfiguring of myths in Indian narratives, this article has unique perspectives as its background. The re-projection of major socioeconomic or political events, the individual past, national or individual history, and traditional and particular ethnic or racial stories tends to be the main aim of retellings. The reworking of mythological subject matter through contemporary modules of expression has proven to be a successful approach in connecting our present-day lifestyles with the principles of the past. This article also traces a thin line of differences between myths and fantasy.

Reconfiguring classical or literary texts engages "the making and revising of assumptions, the rendering and regretting of judgments, the coming to and abandoning of conclusions, the giving and withdrawing of approval, the specifying of causes, the asking of questions, the supplying of answers, the solving of puzzles' (Fish 158–9). The purpose of this reconstruction is to allow these complexities, both in the text and in our interpretive dynamic, to come to the fore. Every culture creates these myths, which are not easily understandable, involving symbolic depths, helping people see the world and transmit it through stories, symbols, and rituals. The texts of such religious significance for Hinduism are the Vedas, which were composed in Sanskrit, with access restricted to the educated few and consisting only of upper-caste men. Pattanaik notes that "The *Vedas, Vedangas, Smrutis, Darshanas, Samhitas,* and *Kavyas* written in Sanskrit were meant to ratify the worldview of the ruling class and of the Brahmin

clergy. The Brahmins used their knowledge of Sanskrit as an irreducible form of power, and translation was not encouraged since it would have diluted the role the texts could have played as a part of such an officially sponsored ideology' (134). The monopoly of Sanskrit was broken much later, and that too because of different socio-political factors.

The Indian epics of *the Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are considered literary works worthy of emulation, both in terms of the range and breadth of themes and their characterisation. Both epics are in Sanskrit and are believed to have been composed by sages. Translated, retold, and rewritten countless times, these epics have passed into the Indian psyche and become distinctive components of Indian culture and literature. The Mahabharata is the best illustration of this, as it has many versions and sub-tales. Different people have their own mythologies, reframing or creating new ones. Epic recitation began two generations apart. It was first recited at the snake sacrifice of the kshatriya raja, Janamejaya (the son of Parikshit), by brahmin Vaishampayana. A generation later, it was recited at a *sattra*, a sacrificial ritual usually intended for and performed by brahmins, although the recitation this time was by the bard Ugrashravas. A brahmin recites it to the kshatriyas and a non-brahmin to the brahmins, an inversion that is curious. The epic originated in the bard's memorisation of what he had heard from the brahmin's recital, and there is an insistence that both renderings are exactly as composed by Vyasa.

The Mahabharata, perhaps because of its complex theme and range of characters, has deeply influenced Indian literary ethos. This started from the ancient period of classical literature. If we consider adaptations and rewritings as forms of translation, there are countless translations of the epic. Bhasa too had adaptations from the Mahabharata, like *Urubhangam, Dutavakyam, Madhyamavyayogam, Pancharatram*, etc. All of these are Bhasa's personal interpretations of the characters and storyline, thus making major departures from the basic text. *Urubhangam* is a tragedy depicting Duryodhana's death on the battlefield. The villain of the epic is the tragic hero in this gripping two-act play, a flawed figure that evokes respect and sympathy from spectators. In *Dutavakyam*, Duryodhana is again a figure that matches Krishna in stature. This play is an adaptation of the famous scene in the epic where Krishna arrives in the court of Duryodhana as the messenger of the Pandavas before the war is formally declared. In the source text, Krishna outwits all attempts to insult him and comes out as a divine messenger. Bhasa, however, has made Krishna very human, with all the follies and foibles attributed to worldly men.

Jumping centuries ahead, the epic became the material for an open exhortation against war and related violence in Dharamvir Bharati's Hindi play Andha Yug (1954). Peter Brook's adaptation of the story for his play of the same name, used the basic storyline, but had a cast drawn from all parts of the globe. This was a testament to the permanence of the epic, proving that it was a story that could happen to anyone, anywhere in the world.

Many novels, short stories, and poems have been based on the story, theme, or characters of the Mahabharata. All of them are personalised interpretations of the respective authors based on their personal ideologies. In poetry, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar wrote *Rashmirathi* in Hindi, from the perspective of Karna. Novels like M. T. Vasudevan Nair's *Randamoozham* (Malayalam), Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* (Oriya), V. S. Khandekar's *Yayati* (Marathi), Shivaji Sawant's *Mrityunjay* (Marathi), S. L. Bhyrappa's *Parva* (Kannada) are but a few examples of retellings of the source text. Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* written in English was a take on the epic, placing it squarely in contemporary Indian politics. The Indian epics have provided a good number of materials for the modern-day writers to interpret and re-create the mythical tales. The web of retellings has made it possible that each creative writer can claim a new version of his own. These retellings were influenced by the predominant social, political, and cultural tendencies. These retellings were influenced by the predominant social, political and cultural tendencies. They help in surveying the epic from different angles and in reviving the various characters that were thrown to the margins by mainstream literature.

This article centres around the vital argument that epics are not fixed texts but are subjectively interpreted, which provides ample space to challenge existing conventional readings and retell them by widening their margins. Such retelling examines gender relations, their status in family and society, and the intersectionality of their marginalities, which makes a significant contribution to literature and history. Mythology has been one of the areas of literary work that feminists have sought to challenge by bringing in a fresh perspective; history (the feminist counterpart of which is called herstory), folklore, fairy tales, and children's stories have also been other areas. Popular fiction and science fiction have also seen examples of feminist turns in late years. Moreover, feminist works have not only looked at women's perspectives but also at gender and sexuality along with other social structures in a more holistic manner.

Pattanaik, a medical doctor, marketing consultant, and mythologist deeply interested in the relevance of old myths in modern times, found the Yuvanashva tale instantly intriguing.

Pattanaik has already written several books on myths and rituals. *The Pregnant King* is his first work of fiction and examines gender roles, the blurring of the lines between parental duties, and the malleability of dharma to fit a given situation. It tracks the story of Yuvanashva, a childless king, who accidentally drinks a magic potion intended to make his queen pregnant. The fictional work utilises the backdrop of the Mahabharata and makes references to characters and incidents in the Kurukshetra and the Ramayana. Among the many lesser-known sub-stories in the Mahabharata is one told by the sage Lomasa to the exiled Pandavas about a king named Yuvanashva who accidentally became pregnant; it was later revealed that it was no accident but an enterprise by the ghosts of two young boys who were burned alive by the king at the stake.

The conflict between desire and social obligation/destiny, which is a major theme in the book, explores questions surrounding gender. The novel ends with Yauvanashva gaining new wisdom about Adi-natha through Yaja and Upayaja, and he realizes,

…men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters are ultimately nothing but souls wrapped in different types of matters. He was nothing but a soul wrapped in flesh; an unusual flesh that had created life within itself and outside. Flesh nevertheless. Mortal flesh that enjoyed, suffered, aged, and would one day be ashy. Within was the soul. (339)

Yuvanashva's search for the truth of the self-reached its final stage with the advent of Yuvaneshward. The pregnant king realised, "I am both. I am a terrifying embodiment of society's unspoken truths. I am also yet another of nature's delightful surprises. I am the soul. I am also the flesh. This is who I am." (343) In conclusion, through a deliberate attempt to blend history and mythology, fact and fiction, reality and imagination, Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King* problematises the essentialised notions of the human body and desire and unsettles the socio-culturally constructed truths (myths) about human existence. It addresses the current debates on gender and sexuality in queer studies and other disciplines, and asserts, "There is a world beyond the flesh, a vision greater than anything that is shown and seen." (333)

The chronology of events as recorded in the Mahabharata has been manipulated, and the story of Yuvanashva, replete with characters churned out of the author's imagination, has been woven in. The protagonist, King Yuvanashva, is the well-liked ruler of Vallabhi, an obedient son, and a devoted husband who aspires to be just towards all and uphold Dharma in his

kingdom. From the onset of the story, the epic battle of Kurukshetra is imminent, but the king's mother, Shilavati, refuses to give her consent since he has yet to sire an heir. Despite having three wives and several years of futile rituals, the king has reached a point of desperation. Therefore, he seeks the help of the two Siddhis, Yaja and Upayaja, who, after an elaborate ritual, create a potion meant for his queens but drinks it 'accidentally' and ends up pregnant himself. The incident is hidden from everyone, including the child, except the wives, Shilavati, and Asanga, the healer. After giving birth to his son, Mandhata, he successfully impregnates his second wife, Pulomi. The king, who has lived his whole life according to the code of Dharma, now finds himself in a dilemma. "I am not sure that I am a man…I have created life outside me as men do. However, I have also created life inside me, as women do. What does that make me? Will a body such as mine fetter or free me?"

The irony of the entire story is that the king, who is supposed to be the epitome of manhood and upholder of Dharma, longs until his last breath to be called 'mother' just once by Mandhata. "What sounds sweetest, being called Mother or being called Father?"

The reconfigurations of the mythical margins are also drawn out in the novel through the stories of other characters, such as Shilavati, an ambitious and sharp princess who cannot be a king because she is a woman. Widowed at a young age, she becomes the regent, but this disturbs the Brahmin elders because "they were not used to a leader who nursed a child while discussing matters of dharma." (It's notable that the unconventionality of Shilavati's own life doesn't make her any more tolerant of her son's situation later on, which underlines the point that non-conformity/anti-tradition can take many forms, and these aren't always kindred spirits.) It also tells the story of Somvat and Sumedha, two childhood friends who decide to marry despite being men. Sthunakarna, a yaksha, forsakes his manhood to make Shikhandi a husband and then reclaims it to make Somvat his wife. Arjuna, the great warrior with many wives, was forced to masquerade as a eunuch after being castrated by a nymph. Adi-natha, the teacher of the teachers, is worshipped as a hermit by Yaja and enchantress by Upayaja. It is also the story of the patron god of Vallabhi, Ileshwar Mahadev, who becomes God on full-moon days and the Goddess on new-moon nights.

Throughout the book, the author highlights the paradoxes and ambiguities of gender and, thus, life. He also used the shift in chronology to use episodes in the Mahabharata epic as parallels or counterpoints in the Yuvanashva story. The characters in this book make chatty

references to the lives of their more famous contemporaries in Hastinapur, as mentioned in *Mahabharata*.

The question of whether the 'impotent' Pandu and the 'blind' Dhritrashtra were fit to become kings is set against similar dilemmas involving characters in Vallabhi. There is some healthy irreverence on display: when a messenger arrives with the momentous news that the war is over, no one in the kingdom is particularly interested, being more concerned about internal matters. When the hero Arjuna makes what amounts to a guest appearance and is asked about a story Bhishma narrated to the Pandavas before he died, his reply is a curt, "I'm sorry but I remember no such story. He said so many things' – a neat dismissal of the ponderous Shanti Parva, Bhishma's long deathbed discourse about a king's duties.

The story largely seems to obsess with the following definition of gender: man? or women? Does the flesh matter? What about the soul? Marriage and childbirth were also discussed. There are multiple references to bulls, fields, soil, and seeds as euphemisms for sex and conception, and to illuminate the vexing question of "ownership" that arises when a woman is pregnant by someone other than her husband. There are also troublesome dead ancestors, the "pitrs", waiting for the arrival of a child so that they can be reborn in the land of the living. Taking the form of crows, they perch outside bedchambers, waiting for quick results, and flapping their wings impatiently when foreplay goes on for too long. ("Does it not bother you that your son's seed is weak?" one of them indelicately asks Shilavati.)

The Pregnant King keeps the reader interested in the larger part; however, it is punctuated with disjointed sentences ("That's what they were. Vehicles of an idea. Two ideas. No. One idea, two expressions. Two halves of the same concept Mutually interdependent") that have a broader philosophy. The occasional forced attempt at informality and some philosophical statements toward the end ("Within you is your soul, Adi-natha as Shiva, silent, observant, still. Around you is matter, Adi-natha as Shakti, ever-changing, enchanting, enlightening, enriching, and empowering.") In a sense, this book is meant for just such readers as the author hopes to make us realise that in the rush to deem situations Black or White, the vast expanse of grey needs to be acknowledged and dealt with. "The imperfection of the human condition and our stubborn refusal to make room for all those in between" is a cautionary tale for our own times.

The book tells a striking story that meanders in various directions. *The Pregnant King* demonstrates the effectiveness of reconfigured mythological stories on its readers, offering a more subjective and novel way of re-engaging with *the Mahabharata*. The study also proposes to visualise how a unique retelling of selective episodes of the Mahabharata with a fictional twist generates counter-discourse to heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality. Pattanaik's mythological journey revealing the myriad possibilities of human forms, subjectivities, and imaginations adds the scope of this study, justified through his remark that "... my intention is not to recreate reality but to represent thought process." (Pattanaik vi-vii). To conclude, the reconstruction of mythical episodes from the great epic discusses gender issues, which is a powerful tool to redefine the margins as well as its coercion to bring the story of King Yuvanashva to the forefront, usually a side-lined episode in *the Mahabharata*.

This article would be incomplete without mentioning Kaushik Bose's play version (*Flesh*) of this novel. Regarding his choice of exploring topics of gender and sexuality through mythology, the author says that the idea of a man becoming pregnant fascinated him. "As people, we are comfortable exploring the unknown or the unfamiliar through fiction. So, I felt this was a great place for people to deal with gender and sexuality-related issues that generally frighten us," Pattanaik added. Bose remarked on his drama, "The human nature of the story moves you far more than any issue would. When the play is over, you will leave with an interpretation of your own." "The story shows that no matter how capable you are, if you are a woman, you cannot play certain roles," Bose explained. Mayank Gulati, the actor who plays Yuvanashva in the play Kaushik Bose's *Flesh* has stated that it questions the beliefs and throws light on contemporary issues around sexuality and gender. He also feels that this journey widens the understanding of what a mother goes through.

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Marketing Marxism: Left wing politics in Malayalam Movies

Jerin Jose

"Capitalism will cut down the tree if it cannot sell its shadow"

- Karl Marx

Literature is one of the major constituents of consciousness and should be studied within the framework of history. As much as literature can be used as an oppressive tool to maintain and enforce master-capitalist hegemony, it can also be used to undermine this hegemony. For Marxism, literature can be viewed in two main ways, regardless of the difference in opinion and practice among various Marxist thinkers and critics such as Lucas, Brecht, Adorno, Raymond, Jameson and others. The first view considers literature as a reactionary narrative that aims at marketing, devoting and enforcing the ruling classes' ideology; yet not without contradiction, it can undermine its basic thematic assumptions. The second view considers literature as a progressive narrative that champions the oppressed in their long and bitter struggle against the decadent bourgeois order. Traditional Marxists favoured art, especially realism, because of its total representation of people in real situations trying to improve their social conditions by engaging with repressive forces in the bourgeois world. They favoured narratives that confront inherited bourgeois obsolete ethics and values, which are suitable for exposing human suffering, class conflict and the various ideologies that dominate the world of the text and shape the consciousness of the generations.

Art forms, especially films, are no exceptions to these thematic assumptions. The perceptive quandary in the consumption of films arises from the conflict between these two disparate assumptions: whether they enforce or challenge hegemony. The political consciousness of the people in Kerala has always been higher than that of most other states in India. This consciousness has been a part of their life and culture, reflected in the arts, and most evidently in cultural products such as films. Malayalam movies have always had space for political movies from the very beginning. Interestingly, Mollywood has been inclined toward left-wing politics, producing a rather good number of so-called 'communist movies.

In the 1940s and 1950s, when leftism was a dominant idea in Kerala, theatre and literature, more than films, were the major mediums of propagation. The All-India People's Theatre Conference in 1943 gave birth to a robust left-oriented theatre movement in many

Indian languages. Bijon Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* in Bengali, *Desasathi* in Marathi and or *Prarambham* in Telugu were some of the popular plays of that period. The left theatre movement's greatest success in the state, both in terms of reach and legacy, was the Malayalam play *Ningalenne Communistakki*, presented by the Kerala People's Arts Club for the first time in 1952. The play was staged more than a thousand times and was proscribed many times. *Ningalenne Communistakki* played an important role in preparing the ground for the first communist government in Kerala.

Malayalam films closely followed the political narrative while cherry-picking what would sell in the market and what would be hidden. Early movies, including remakes of KPAC plays such as *Ningalenne Communistakki* and adaptations from the progressive literature of the 1950s, were sympathetic to communist ideology. There are a number of movies which are based on political events or on the lives of politicians. Some have gone unnoticed, while others have become cult classics. For example, *Neythukaran,* an allegorical tale about EMS Namboodiripad's life, was sympathetic to the communist cause. Some of Adoor Gopalakrishnan's films, such as *Mukhamukham,* critiqued the party in a non-partisan manner.

Films such as *Lal Salam* and *Rakthasakhshikal Zindabad* depict the political milieu of Kerala. The plot of *Lal Salam* revolves around the early days of the Communist Party in Kerala. Mohanlal portrays the character Nettoor Stephan, along with other characters inspired by the lives of some towering figures in Kerala politics. *Lal Salam* became popular for the fiery dialogues and power-packed performances by Murali and actress Geetha. This high-pitched political drama shows how the Communist Party became a major political force in Kerala. *Rakthasakhshikal Zindabad,* directed by Venu Nagavalli, pays tribute to the leaders of the Communist Party. The story is set in the pre-independence era when communism came into picture. Apolitical thriller released in 1998, the film had an ensemble star cast rolled into one including, Mohanlal, Suresh Gopi, Murali, and Nassar in pivotal roles. These political movies of the 80s and 90s were at least sympathetic to communism, and they had in essence a left-wing political ideology to communicate. "The characterisation of political parties, especially of those donning red hues, started in a big way in 1991 with *Sandesam*, which attacked the hypocrisy of politicians on both sides of the divide. Even more than 25 years after its release, the movie's pithy dialogue is quoted by Malayalis. It was an assault on the political system, and critics panned it for advocating apolitical naivety" (Madhavan).

However, new-generation 'commrade movies' do not signal a pro-communist movie; instead, filmmakers are finding new ways to capture the audience's passing fancy. Embedded in the titles of the films, *Sakhavu, Oru Mexican Aparatha,* and *Comrade in America,* Malayalam movies praising communism are a code. After smartly planting a memory trigger in the title, the makers of these films serve a heady mix of nostalgia and emotions, with posters taking after old Soviet art, music from early communist propaganda plays, and a lot of communist mythology. *Oru Mexican Aparatha* was a campus movie with a macho SFI (SFY in the movie) leader in the lead role. *CIA,* though not a campus movie, also had a daring SFI leader portrayed by Dulqar Salman as the hero. *Sakhavu,* starring Nivin Pauly, showcased an idealist comrade at two different ages.

Some critics deliberately attribute this trend of left-wing politics in movies to the collective political psyche of Kerala society, which they claim is left-inclined. "I have always felt that Malayalis, despite differences in political preferences, have a soft corner for an ideal communist who lives for the poor. The commercial success of most of the films can be attributed to that," said Shibin Francis script writer of *Oru Mexican Aparatha* (Paul). We are forced to comply with this comment, acknowledging the fact that the cultural space of Kerala has always had supremacy for left ideology. "Malayalis who never vote for the left are nostalgic about ideal communist who fought for the poor. Hence, it is always a good subject for movies, " said the director of *CIA,* Amal Neerad. His observation can be believed true when we consider the fact that most of these young directors are either left supporters or at least were active members of SFI during their campus life. Amal Neerad's note validates this, were he said that CIA was his answer to all the 'Poland jokes.' "As a left-leaning person, I have been at the receiving end of the Poland jokes many a time. My film is my counter to all lampooning' (Paul). He was referring to the 1991 film *Sandesham* by Sreenivasan–Sathyan Anthicad combo, which is still regarded as the best political satire movie in Malayalam. In the film, the title character becomes furious at anyone who talked about Poland. During that time, the Communist party was wiped out from Poland, and the scene has since then become a staple of those who want to make fun of the left.

Amal Neerad's *CIA*, attempts to make a mention of a global issue. "Through the journey the protagonist makes along Mexico the American migrations due to civil wars and poverty has been set as a background. Neerad's brilliant attempt to present the risks of illegal migration from a distinctive perspective shall be appreciated while at the same time acknowledging his

disinterest in engaging the film politically" (Vinesh). The protagonist's journey is fuelled by pure personal motives: to find his lover. Through Ajipan's attempts to cross the Mexican borders, the CIA manages to highlight the severity of a contemporary global issue: international migration.

Apart from this, the film does nothing in particular to call it a comrade film. The inspiring title song, in which a portion of an old popular revolutionary song is mixed with, gives theatrical effects to the opening scenes of the movie, where the hero participates in a public protest. However, these scenes and songs manage nothing more than the previously stated glorification of communism. The image of Che Guevara becomes just a prop in the frame to support the building of a heroic idealisation of the protagonist's comradeship. There is a scene in the film showing a party office in Latin America. The scene seems to suggest the irrelevance of communist ideology at the global level and might be read as a showcase of the failure of communism in a post-globalisation world, unable to encounter global politics. An innocent audience will be dealt with this question of whether communism has become outdated.

Some interesting similarities exist among these comrade movies, one of which is the dream sequence. In *CIA,* Ajippan meets up with Che Guevera, Karl Marx, Stalin and Lenin who has come out of the framed photographs hung upon the party office wall. In *Oru Mexican Aparatha,* a similar scene in which Paul meets Kochaniyan, a martyr from the campus, marks the beginning of the characters political activities. These semi-hallucinatory fantasy sequences are another type of memory trigger, reminding the audience of a good old period when communism thrived.

Tom Emmatty, maker of *Oru Mexican Aparatha* himself was a former active member of KSU. His film, which in its peripheral semblance seems to be leftist, was an attempt to convey right-wing politics. The film is portrayed as the history of the formation and foundation of SFI (SFY in the movie), the left-wing students' political organisation in Maharajas College. The actual incidents that inspired the movie were associated with the return of KSU to Maharajas and the restoration of its chair in the college union. When a camouflaged right-wing agenda was brilliantly incorporated, Tom Emmatty succeeded as a filmmaker and received applause from the SFI audience. The sequences of SFY's political movements, brilliantly crafted with cinematic effects and much rousing background music, produced a well-appraised comrade movie for the teenage audience. Except for a few scenes where the character Subhash makes

some contrived statements about his party, there is barely anything noticeable as political in this movie.

To instigate the romanticised ideal comrade concept, the film begins with a sepia-tinted flashback to 1970s Kerala where the Communist student leader Kochaniyan, performed by Tovino Thomas is martyred at Maharaja's College. Kochaniyan is a key member of the fictional SFY, which alludes to SFI. Fast forward to this century, the protagonist Paul is a happy-go-lucky, alcohol-swilling, girl-chasing, and mischievous student who belongs to SFY but has no particular career ambitions in politics. His friend Subhash is far more earnest about his involvement with the party. Soon, Subhash is appointed by the parent organisation to revive SFY at their college. This is a massive challenge, given that SFY is virtually dead at Maharaja's and the rival KSQ – another barely disguised acronym for KSU – prevails with intimidation and physical assaults. Although the film may seem political in its thematic content or basic story thread, it lacks ideological support and does not engage in serious political discussions. Oddly enough, despite its many attempts, failed or successful, *Oru Mexican Aparatha* remains empty in its inner shell. It is unpleasant to see Emmatty's unapologetic pretence of his preference for the left while deliberately being silent about his actual life. Although *Oru Mexican Aparatha* takes a sanitised view of the Communist party, it does well to remind viewers that left ideology has failed to prove its worth in recent times, and the party still has only stories of martyrs to dwell upon.

When it comes to the case of *Sakhavu* directed by Sidarth Siva, the only merit of the film is that it could address the trade union activities in plantations. Although there is a vague representation of the issue, the film fails to depict the actual causes of the workers' struggles, their hardships, and their resistance to these adversities. It is even more thought-provoking to gain insight into the film's partially obvious message. Even though not seemingly direct, the film subtly suggests that the new-generation comrades are fake or rather 'not real," and the 'real comrades' are those like Comrade Krishnan in the old generation. The new-age comrade leader depicted by Nivin Pauly is presented as one who lacks a distinct, strong social outlook and social commitment. He lacks the social commitment of a real comrade. This is, in a way, a criticism of the contemporary Communist Party in Kerala. The movie teaches us that the new comrades are those who seek public recognition with the branding as a comrade. What attracts them to the Communist Party is this heroic appeal, which they have gained by the romanticised glorification of old comrades and martyrs. The film *Sakhavu* also fails to explain

what is left ideology or to address the issues of plantation workers with the deserved intensity. The film is constrained by the superfluous glorification of the ideal image of Comrade Krishnan. The new-generation communist Krishnakumar, a student leader, is portrayed as a ruthless and corrupt climber. He meets Sakhavu Krishnan, whose life story is revealed to him by various people in a series of flashbacks. Inspired by Sakhavu's story, the young wannabe turns into a good communist. *Sakhavu* also inevitably speaks in binaries: of a good communist and a bad communist. This could rather be read as these films portraying what communism is today versus what real communism ought to be. Again, it is either indirectly suggesting the impending failure of communism in the political milieu of India or tracing back to the already said romanticisation of left ideology that they talk about.

When these apolitical films are misconceived as communist films, the left-inclined political consciousness of Keralites is erroneously misguided, and the romantic idealism of communism is marketed in Malayalam movies. The film need not necessarily communicate anything political. However, since film, more than an art form, is a business and commercial product, culture and politics have become marketable products here. Anything painted red becomes easily sellable in the movie market. The recipe for a new-generation Malayalam movie now includes a 'comrade hero' along with other elements, such as songs, fight sequences, and 'Punj dialogue. Nothing more needs to be read into the recent spate of pro-communist movies. Filmmakers are only finding new ways to capture the audience's passing fancy. When ideology becomes a mere commercial element, as a necessary ingredient for the success of a movie, it becomes a matter worth political interference.

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Immigrant Motherhood Discussed in Shanthi Sekaran's *Lucky Boy*

Kavitha Kaladharan

The term diaspora refers to the process of migration from one place to another. Etymologically, the word 'diaspora' comes from the Greek word 'diasporean', "which means "to disperse" or "to scatter. "In the root sense, it refers to the dispersal of Jewish communities who were exiled from their homeland. In his book *The Location of Culture,* Homi Bhabha looks at diasporas as,

Gatherings of exiles and emigrants and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of other's language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance , degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment of other words lived retroactively ; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.(Bhabha 139)

The aftermath of incongruity in culture, ethnicity, race, and class is the exposure of migrants to psychological conflicts. Diaspora literature consciously attempts to embrace this psychological dilemma of the expatriates or exiles. Shanthi Sekaran is an Indian American educator and novelist famous for her books *The Prayer Room* and *Lucky Boy*. *Lucky Boy,* her second novel, is a scenic intuitive venture into the process that either creates or denies culture among generations settled in America. Lucky *Boy* reflects the institution of parenthood and interfamilial relationships within an Indian immigrant family.

Shanthi Sekaran, in her novel *Lucky Boy*, attempt to encapsulate the diasporic women characters struggling with their identities as mothers while moving through motherhood and migration which are considered as metamorphic experiences. She depicts women who have migrated from Mexico and the Caribbean and have taken on the roles of mothers in America. An expatriate looking back on the homeland of the immigrant mother protagonists in the novel is a result of double discursive adaptation to adjust with the new culture as migrants and as mothers. The protagonists in the novel are empowered as they transcend the connotated boundaries of diaspora motherhood. The novel explores the extent of diaspora motherhood in all its multiplicities and complexities. The characters in the novel attempt to reconcile the diasporic complexities of living in America.

Lucky Boy is a novel of two mothers who are bound together in their love for a single child. The novel begins with an adventurous journey of 18-year-old Solimar Castro-Valdez, or Soli, crossing the border from Mexico into the United States. During her journey, she falls in love with Checo, a train-hopping minstrel, and gives birth to Ignatio, the 'lucky boy' of the novel.

"But Soli. Poor Soli. Soli met and loved and lost her man in a matter of seven days, and before she could learn that he had a villainous mother or waxy ears or an insurmountable fear of bees, he was gone. She fell in love with the pure essence of Checo the train rider, Checo the pioneer. And before she could settle into the normalcy of their attachment, he vanished among dust clouds and a spray of bullets. Whether he'd made it to safety or fallen there on the valley floor, Soli could not know." (*Lucky Boy*159)

Later Kavya Reddy, wife of Rishi a chef at UC Berkeley adopts Ignatio when Soli, as an undocumented immigrant is sent to detention centre for a minor traffic offense. The narrative then shifts to Kavya, now in her mid-30s, who realises, "She'd come to Berkeley to find herself, but found that herself was not enough. She wanted a self or herself. She wanted a child." (*Lucky Boy* 53) Owing to the stress of the non-fulfilment of a wish for a child, she experiences a sense of loss of identity and incompleteness and incompetence. In addition, the failure of treatment under an infertility centre puts her into psychological distress and identity disruption. She feels intense cultural and personal pressure to reproduce, and vaguely and irrationally worries that the infant supply will be tapped out by other lucky women — that in the great heavenly handout, no babies will be left for her" (*Lucky Boy* 48). The couple's decision to adopt Ignatio to overcome Kavya's mental anguish brings a new dimension to the story.

Soli, one of the twin protagonists of the novel experiences biological motherhood and embodies all the challenges of an immigrant mother. She represents the majority of Latin American migrants who were influenced by the American Dream.

"Soli looked up to the sky. Same blue as the Mexican sky. She looked through the truck's slats. This was California. The United States of America. She had arrived.

And here is what she discovered. This place, this America? This new place, this streets-of-gold place? Looked a hell of lot like the old place.

America streaked by her, stripped and tender with heat. She watched it all rush past through the slats of the old truck: the tin roofs, seas of broken glass, glinting and breathless like a fever dream. America was the dust in her hair, the wind in her throat, the sun that shouted against her eyelids. Between the slates of this truck, America was nothing but a high-tech, high- speed dream of trees and houses and fences, a sliver of interrupted light." (*Lucky Boy* 60)

In her thoughts the reader can see that Soli represents everyone who migrates to America fascinated by the American dream. But later the dream put to an end in an almost shattering way. Soli's quest for delineating the past to explore a new way of life thwarted when she realized her pregnancy after two weeks, she reached Berkley. Soli's separation from her family adds obstacles to her well-being as a pregnant woman. The lines, "They stood in line at bakeries and pizzerias and surged through outdoor farmers markets as if fresh herbs and homemade Kombucha were all that could matter in the world" (*Lucky Boy*78) reflect the psychological and emotional pressure on Soli to earn money for her livelihood as well as for her family.

In her immigrant life and struggling days of pregnancy, Soli shed her past to achieve something in the host land. The transcultural conflicts of migration and the dilemma for survival that she underwent were reduced when Ignatio came into her life. She realised that the choice of reproduction that she made, even in her vulnerable situations, was right to the core. Ignatio evoked the maternal and survival instincts in Soli and modulated her to live in uncertainties. Through her spectacular cast of characters Shanthi empathetically portrayed the submerged emotional terrains of parenthood.

The character Soli and the legal battle that Soli leads for her son remind us of the exigencies faced by undocumented immigrants who have undergone political and racial marginalisation, she writes:

> "She looked left down the street, then right. She looked behind her and took one step onto the sidewalk. This was her chance- for what exactly? She couldn't know yet. But the street was silent and empty. The mother was gone. The father. No. She was mother and father. She bolted across the street and through the open door. The television rattled from another room and a clock ticked noisily from somewhere in the kitchen. She was a wolf again, searching for shelter, ears piqued for predatory footfalls. A cartoon

on the television played to an empty room. What am I doing here? She asked herself. She searched for a keyhole of opportunity, for a way to wrap herself around this blessing, this break in the family fortress." (*Lucky Boy* 427)

Shanti presents the mental anguish of an immigrant mother who is in a state of in-betweenness in a country where she immigrated to solve the economic problems of her family. She has a terror of losing her identity in an indifferent city, which she considers akin to death. The earlier experiences and circumstances in the early life of the protagonist, Soli, intrigued Shanti to make her what she is.

The novel gives the reader an account of disparities in American migration and analyses the nuances that result in the lives of immigrants, which makes them victims of psychological dilemmas and critically discusses U.S. immigrant policies, political theories, and the concept of global citizens in the light of cultural paradigms related to the immigrant community. One of the protagonists Soli records all her sufferings, disillusionments and tragic experiences that are part of the predicament of identity and reminds the assertion of Salman Rushdie about diasporeans in his *Imaginary Homelands*–

> "Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. If we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of the mind" (Imaginary Homelands, 10).

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Tradition, Myth and Marginalisation: Re- reading Aithihyamaala by Kottarathil Shankunni in the Twenty-first Century

Josiya P. Shaju

Kottarathil Shankunni is a popular figure in Malayalam literature who has done great contribution to Kathakali and Thullal literature. He collected popular legends and folktales under the title Aithihyamaala, which means "Garland of legends." It later became a significant reference for the long-pervading oral tradition. Kottarathil Shankunni published this work in eight volumes in Bhashaposhini. These stories were formed by the contributions of the entire society. Each individual in a society contributes in one way or another in the formation of legends and folktales. The sources of these stories are unknown because they were transferred to generations through oral tradition. The main aspects of these stories are style and theme.

The subject of these stories will be memories of society. Three major factors lead to the formation of a story—memory, style and language. These three factors are perfectly blended in the stories of Aithihyamaala. The memory of a person can be his personal experiences passed on from person to person and place to place. Even fables and rumours can contribute to memories. The main concern of such stories will be entertainment. While rational thought have no particular role, antitheses, contradictions, breakaway from histories etc. can be seen in these stories.

In Aithihyamaala, there are narratives that feature brilliant antitheses, such as an illiterate turning into a veneered scholar in the course of a single night, or that of a lunatic preaching philosophy. Aside from antitheses, contradiction is another vital aspect of these stories, as found in the tales of Agnihothri or Vararuchi. Most of the stories of Aithihyamaala begin with facts and figures sprinkled throughout history and later take their own turn and form into legends. Shankunni writes, "Legends are anthropomorphic representations of man's spiritual and religious fantasies, his preoccupation with occult, and the mystical" (Aithihyamaala xv). Aithihyamaala is a store house of Indian traditional wisdom. It contains the key aspects of Indian spirituality and provides a clear explanation of Kerala's rich folk heritage.

In Indian culture, although immensely patriarchal, there is a presumed principle that it respects and acknowledges women more than men do. The cultural artefacts of Bhoomi Devi and Bharath Matha are the principal icons of such women-centred postulations.

Meanwhile, ancient Sanskrit texts of India, such as Manusmrithi, set certain rules for women that subordinate them to men. These rules and norms are considered to be the basis for the behavioural codes that Indian women are supposed to follow, which subsequently places them in a subordinate position.

The history of Kerala reveals the ways in which both women and people of the lower castes were marginalised. The discrimination faced by women and Dalits in Kerala was deplorable. People belonging to these sections have often been denied the status of human beings. They were not allowed to perform or even think for themselves. They were suppressed by upper-caste men. At the same time, women belonging to Dalit communities faced double oppression. Upper-caste men who did not touch lower-caste men did not find any problems of untouchability in harassing lower-caste women. Lower-caste women were compelled to have sexual relationships with upper-caste men (Devika 45). They had no right to raise their voice against the discrimination they faced. It can also be seen that even people belonging to the lower caste believed that they were destined to work for upper-caste people. Thus, women and all people belonging to the lower caste were brutally discriminated against by upper-caste patriarchal societies. Women were ill-treated and subjected to the austere rules of patriarchal societies. The freedom of women was curtailed with the establishment of the rules specified in Manusmrithi. Although Brahmins were at the top of the social hierarchy, Brahmin ladies, known as Antharjanam, faced severe oppression under patriarchy. They were not allowed to see another man.

Members of the community were not allowed to cover the upper part of their bodies when they were inside the house. When they went out, they were bound to cover their entire body with cloth and compelled to cover their face using an oolakuda. They were not allowed to have a private life. The eldest son of the family was allowed to marry up to four women. Child marriage and early widowhood were prevalent among the Antharjanams. The living conditions of the widows were also harsh. Girl children faced discrimination from childhood (Radhakrishnan 73–79). Smarthavicharam was another ill practice that prevailed in the Namboothiri family (Kuniyath 35–36). Women who were found to have extramarital affairs were made to undergo the Smarthavicharam ritual. The women were made to sit in a room, and cruel punishments were imposed on them. After the trial, the woman was expelled from the house (Radhakrishnan 79–81). The Smarthavicharam of Kuriedathu Thathri was very popular in Kerala history (Devika 213–215).

There were other practices, such as Mannapedi and Pulapedi. According to this practice, lower-caste men belonging to the communities of Pulaya, Paraya, and Mannan can take away the women of the upper caste, especially Nair women, on certain days. If a woman became a victim of this practice, she would be expelled from her caste. Dr R. Radhakrishnan says that even women believed that they are polluted after such a thing. Even though nobody has seen this, she will have to go away with the lower caste men fearing that she will pollute the rest of the members of the family (Radhakrishnan 84 -87). These practices of Mannappedi and pulapedi can be seen as the practices which were implemented for imposing patriarchal hold on women. (87) Another ill practice was Oozhamporukkal or Vidaram kayaral. (87) Another ill practice was Oozhamporukkal or Vidaram kayaral. The women of some community were compelled to have a sexual relationship with other men with the consent of the king. If she does not agree with the king, she will have to face severe consequences. Thalikettu kalyanam and Thirandukalyanam were other ill practices that discriminated against women. Thalikettu kalyanam, Thirandukalyanam etc. were other ill practices which discriminated women. The man who married the girl during thalikettu kalyanam was not her husband. The man who had married the girl during the thalikettukalyanam will not be her husband. This practice was observed just to announce that the girl is ready to get married.

Thirandukalynam is a significant celebration in many societies. The girl who had her first menstrual periods will be subjected to this practice. She will be considered polluted. This practice is still followed in many communities. This practice has led to the restriction of women from entering temples during their menstrual periods. The concept of pollution during menstruation is rooted in such practices. Ruma Satwik and Ambaish Satwik write, "All religions have incubated myths about this stuff, of miasma and pollution: leading to the menstruating woman as an obscenity, a physical and spiritual threat for men and other women, and the sacred" (Satwik and Ambarish 38). The celebration of the goddess menstruating can also be seen in different societies (Dhar 73). In addition to these, other practices such as Kidakkarakalyanam, Pudavakoda, and Pandavasambradhayam have also existed in societies (Radhakrishnan 92-96). All these practices discriminated women in many ways and placed them under the austere rules of patriarchy. Compared to upper-caste women, Dalit women had more mobility. They were part of the labour force. This has resulted in many appraisals from Dalit women against caste as well as gender discrimination. Apart from the mobility they enjoyed, there was the burden of patriarchy imposed on them by the men of their own

community. The institutions of patriarchy permeated the lives of Dalit women in many ways. Uma Chakravarthy argues:

> Whatever might have been the differences between Dalit women's experience of patriarchy and that of upper-caste women, the process of Sanskritization or 'jatikarana"– intensified castification–led to upper-caste norms and upper-caste patriarchal practices percolating into the lower-caste ranks as well. Dalit women experience patriarchal oppressions in unique as well as in shared ways. Given that the oppression of both caste and patriarchy mark the lives of Dalit women in particular ways, it is not surprising that this situation has led Dalit women to take the position that they need their own women's organization. (83) Uma Chakravorthy continues in Gendering Caste: Women's general subordination was essential at this stage because it was only then that the mechanism of control upon women's sexuality could actually become effective. Both in terms of economic autonomy, through a denial of control over productive resources, and autonomy in law, women were made appendages of men. Indeed, women themselves were the property, both in terms of their reproductive and productive labour, of men. Even in terms of the performance of the major domestic rituals women did not have autonomy-they were part of the domestic rituals but could not perform rituals by themselves or for themselves.

Only fasts undertaken for the benefit of their husbands, sons, or brothers were to be undertaken by them on their own. Thus, the general subordination of women was the basis for the specific controls that the patriarchal structure placed upon them. (70)

Thus, the concept of Kulasthree and pathivratha was a concept propagated by the Brahminical patriarchy in order to subordinate the women folk. The rules followed by upper-caste women were considered the golden rules by all women, and as a result, the regulations followed by the upper-caste women became a part of the lower-caste society. The concept of kulasthree (noble women) can also be seen as an imposition by the Brahmanical patriarchy. By analysing the issue related to the entry of women into the Sabarimala temple, it can be seen that many people said that kulasthree would not break the traditional rules and enter the temple. The concept of kulasthree or noble women was propagated by the Brahmanical patriarchy to subordinate the womenfolk. Women themselves considered them to be the best when they adhered to such patriarchal rules. Others who opposed such rules were considered

bad women. The dichotomy between a kulasthree and a chanthapennu was thus created. The elements of the caste system can be seen in this terminology (Devika 69). The consideration of women as kulasthree points to the old caste system, which highlighted the culture and customs of the upper caste as serene culture. It can also be noted that the restrictions imposed on women were propagated by neo-Brahminism. The concepts such as kulasthree, pathivratha, etc. of the old Brahminical patriarchy can be seen retained in neo-Brahmin notions. J Devika observes that neo-Brahmins were a group of people who emerged out after the 19th century. They formed new customs not by excluding all the customs of Brahminism but by retaining a few. The neo-Brahmins included people belonging to the Nairs, Syrian Christians, and other communities. They were well-educated and engaged in trade. They also subordinated women with the rules they retained from Brahminism. This Brahminical patriarchy decided and formulated the rules for a society (69-71). Devika also points out that neo-Brahminism were not concerned about the equality of gender but they focused mainly on the differences of both genders which resulted in the attribution of duties such as child birth, child care etc. They propagated the idea that women and men should be ascribed different tasks based on their physique. Thus, women were confined to the role of taking care of the family. Thus, in a society that was emerging from the holds of caste discrimination, gender discrimination had strong roots (72).

Similar observation can be seen in the argument of Uma Chakravarthy who points that only an upper caste women can be chaste or pathivratha "women of lower orders were not regarded as grihinis, or family women, as women of the upper castes were, since ever their children could be denied to them by their masters." (Chakravarthy 81) Taboos related to menstruation, childbirth, and pregnancy, among others, are strictly followed by women. The recent issue related to the Sabarimala verdict demonstrates the attitude of Indian women toward such customs. The very meagre number of women who came out against the verdict shows how women are tamed by and under patriarchal authority to the extent that they consider themselves impure because of a natural biological process, such as menstruation. Patriarchal notions have projected men as the vulnerable sex, who can be polluted by women. Nalini Natarajan in the article "Profane Marks of Sacred Blood" states:

> In both matriarchies and patriarchies, the idea that men are the vulnerable sex to be protected either from the sacred or shameful aspects of menstruation (no matter what toll it takes on the female psyche) is the real problem and profoundly ironic, considering

> the violence men inflict on women. Men should stop punishing women for their weakness. Scapegoating a natural biological female state as polluted, while men engage in all sorts of truly transgressive, taboo activities, highlights the irony. The orthodox condoned a double standard–through devadasi exploitation, it sanctioned virtual polygamy, an institutionalised sexual prison for women from the poorer castes. This ritualised male infidelity went unpunished. And this double standard existed even as men claimed spiritual superiority and the right to pilgrimage, while women were meant to retreat in shame to the outhouse for three days every month (28).

Folktales, legends, and other forms of storytelling also feature several antifeminist representations. Kottarathil Shankunni's Aithihyamaala is one such example of the marginalisation of women in literature. Patriarchy has always attempted to demean women in these stories and in real life if they were ever to stray from the concept of ideal women and challenge their bizarre and unfair conventions. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have suggested in Mad Woman in the Attic, women are portrayed at the extremes–either as angels if they submit to patriarchal norms or as monsters if they break any of these rules.

The attribution of supernatural powers to women or the idolisation of women as divine is ultimately a way of subordination. The social inequalities and ill practices that women in Kerala had to undergo can be seen to have a parallel connection with the traditional legends and myths of Kerala society. In this paper, the stories depicted in Aithihyamaala and the comments on these stories by Kottarathil Shankunni are analysed to understand the underlying patriarchal notions within the traditional, popular, and even celebrated myths of Kerala culture.

Taboos and rituals related to menstruation are upheld significantly in a society like Kerala. The biological process of menstruation and menstruating women are considered impure and untouchable. Even Goddess who is menstruating is made to live in a separate room during her period of menstruation. This custom can be found in Aithihyamaala in the story of Chengannur Bhagavathy (Shankunni 839-849). This custom can be considered the beginning of women living in a separate room during menstruation. A Kurathy (a woman belonging to the tribe of basket makers) one day found a rock oozing blood when she tried to sharpen her sickle on it. The rock was prophesied to be a self-emerged Shiva Lingam, and the people started worshipping it. They decided to build a temple for Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathy. They celebrated festivals to worship the idols. One day, when the priest was removing the Nirmaliam (offerings of the previous day), he saw blood stains on the robe.

He reported this to the authorities, and they confirmed that Devi had menstruated. After realising this, they soon arranged a separate room to keep the idol during her menstrual period. The idol of the goddess was kept in a separate room away from the Garbhagraha for three days and worshipped there. The Thrippootharattu (bath after menstruation) was also performed for the goddess (Shankunni 842). This custom was later passed on to future generations. Even such a powerful goddess, who was worshipped by the masses, was considered impure during menstruation and was not allowed to sit near the idol of Lord Shiva. The worshippers of Chengannur Bhagavathy were mainly women. Social taboos related to menstruation can also be seen in other stories, such as the story of Kaadamkottu Maakkam Bhagavathy. This legend is popular in Northern Kerala. In the story, Maakkam is portrayed living in a separate room built to stay during menstruation (Shankunni 663–672).

Such instances can be observed in many other stories in Aithihyamaala. Women are said to be worshipped as goddesses in Aithihyamaala. However, such goddesses are always revengeful and aggressive. They will be cruel. They are cruel and punish the devotees if they fail to offer sacrifices. They will even cause certain diseases, such as Vasoori (smallpox). This can be seen in the story of Mandakkatt Amman and Koda 1028–10311). When the temple and its premises were taken over by the government, the daily offerings stopped, and it was believed that the vengeful goddess spread smallpox as retribution. Goddesses were also portrayed as arrogant in the stories like Kumaranallur Bhagavathy (155-160). The temple of Kumaranallur Bhagavathy is situated in Kottayam.

Madurai Meenakshi is worshipped here and she is known as Amman. She ran into a temple and occupied the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. She asked a Brahmin, who was an ardent devotee of the goddess, that she wanted to reside in that temple, which was actually built for Lord Subrahmanian. She was then considered arrogant, and even though she was a well-worshipped goddess, she was called arrogant by the king. She was asked to prove her worth by displaying her supernatural godly prowess. The name of the temple, Kumaranallur, got its name because the temple was built for Kumara. The place, temple, and goddess are known by the name of the male god. Women were represented as people who shower curses over people who harmed them. This can be seen in the story of the Queen of Kaippuzha and Pulimkunnu Desom (232-235). The Queen of Kaippuzha cursed the Nair families of the area for not rendering her help, and as a result, all the Nair families of the area perished.

One of the most remarkable female icons in many Aithihyamaala stories is the Yakshi. These Yakshis are bloodthirsty, cruel figures who are revengeful and attack people for no reason. Such a portrayal of women in these stories develops the idea of cruel women. This can be seen in the stories like Vayaskkara Chathurvedi Bhattathiri and the Yakshi, Kadamattathu Kathanar etc (299-302, 497-513). Yakshis are usually portrayed as harmful beings. They are represented as symbols of sexual desire. They easily become fascinated by handsome men and attempt to live with them. They are described as extremely beautiful celestial beings who are able to capture the attention of any man with their glance.

Consequently, women are addressed by the names of Yakshis and demons if they do not behave according to patriarchal norms and rules. In the story of Vayaskkara Chathurvedi Bhattathiri and the Yakshi, Zamorin was salvaged from the Yakshi by Vayaskkara Bhattathiri. This Yakshi was fascinated by Bhattathiri's charm and personality, and she begs him to accept her into his life. In the story, it is said that Yakshi left Bhattathiri when he became old (299-302). Obviously, this does imply the capriciousness that patriarchy often ascribes to women. Another story which has wrongly represented women as Yakshi is the story of Kadamattathu Kathanar. In this story, the Yakshi is portrayed as a very cruel man eater who had the power to seduce all men who passed by the area where she resided. She was trapped by Kathanar using his tricks and was taken with him as his servant (508). This shows the subordinate representation of women in the folklores and myths in the Aithihyamaala by addressing them as Yakshis. They were described as those who would cheat on men by showcasing their beauty. Even though the Yakshis were so powerful, their powers were so paltry that figures Kathanar could trap the Yakshi through his simple tricks. Thus, women were always considered as subordinate to men and they were subordinated by such legends. Chastity was considered as a quality which was a strict necessity for all married woman. All married women were supposed to be chaste, while men were out of law. Chaste women were considered angels, and un- chaste women were treated very badly by society. Rituals like Smarthavicharam which was prevalent in Kerala, are good examples of the importance given to the concept of chastity in Kerala. Smarthavicharam was observed as a sadistic celebration of a woman's "wrong doing". The woman who had been sentenced to Smarthavicharam was treated very cruelly, and most often, proper food and water were denied to her. She was treated similarly to an ani-mal. Further, the concept of virginity was also a way to suppress women. Virginity of men was never thought of, were it an important matter with regard to women. Men were

allowed to commit polygamy, whereas the practice of polyandry was forbidden. Even after the death of her husband she was again subordinated by titling her as widow. Sometimes young girls were married to very old men. After some years, most of these girls will come widows. The treatment of widows in society was yet another ill custom. They were considered taboo. They were not allowed to attend ceremonial functions. Meeting a widow in the morning or on the way was considered a bad omen. Men did not have such problems. He could marry anybody if his wife was dead or if he was dissatisfied with her. Many stories of Aithihyamaala clearly portrays the attitude of people towards the concept of chastity. The treatment of women who were caught for adulterous activities were treated very cruelly by the society. Men were devoid of all of these rules. Women were always expected to obey her husband and do all the things he asked her to do. Women's chastity was tested in front of strangers by their husbands. This was done to make themselves proud in front of others. Women were also ready to do all of these things because they were trained accordingly. In the story of Kayamkulam Kochunni, the Shudra woman with whom Kochunni had a relationship is ad- dressed as a prostitute, while the number of relationships Kochunni had with other women is described as a heroic feat (202-232). There is another story in Aithihyamaala titled The Chastity of Pakkanar's Wife. In this story Pakkanar and Agnihothri boast about the chastity of their respective wives. Agnihothri's wife carried an umbrella (olakkuda) when she was invited to serve food for Pakkanar. She says that a Pathivratha (chaste wife) was not supposed to look at strangers (241-243). Chastity, according to old custom also includes unquestioningly obeying the words of husband. Pakkanar asked his wife to cook the paddy remaining in the house and once it was cooked, he asks her to throw it away. Pakkanar is not concerned about the fact that she has not had food. He is concerned only with proving the chastity of his wife. When Agnihothri's wife was asked to do the same, she hesitated and questioned her husband. Thus, she was considered as unchaste (242-243). The power of Pakkanar's wife's chastity was to such an extent that a water pail hung midway while she ran to the call of her husband (243). Meanwhile, the haughty wife of Agnihotri is branded unchaste, and the Yakshi in the story of Kadamattathu Kathanar is called a prostitute. Women are obliged to obey and serve their husbands. In the story titled The Antharjanam and Her Sensibility, Kottarathil Shankunni's antifeminist claims can be observed. He not only narrates the myth but also comments on the ideal behaviour of women. He says that women are responsible for the bad behaviour and lifestyles of their husbands. Shankunni also states that an able man will be able to make his wife chaste and bring her under his service. An able woman is said to have the ability to keep her husband

monogamous. When a woman has an extramarital relationship, it is considered a great sin by her. Even when a man is having an extramarital affair, his wife is blamed for this and not him. In this story since the Antharjanam is said to have sensibility so her husband who was planning for a second marriage came back to her. In the concluding sentence of the story,

Shankunni advises all Kerala women to celebrate a blissful marital life by becoming chaste and obedient (235). He also advises women to attract and seduce their husbands so that they will never go away from them to another relationship. This sentence is structured in a way says that woman is responsible for the extra- marital affairs of men. In the story of Arakkal Beebi, the young princess considers herself an outcaste and hesitates to enter the kovilakam. She was saved by a Muslim youth when she was about to be drowned in water. He rescued her by holding her hands and offered her a new shawl. The princess considered it as Paanigrahanam and the shawl as pudavakoda (it is a system prevailing among Kshatriyas and Nairs). By citing these reasons, she considered herself an outcaste and hesitated to enter the house (987–992). Women considered themselves outcasts and impure in such situations and were ready to accept the punishment given by society. This shows how women were trained to behave in this way by patriarchal society. Goddesses, despite all their powers, were under the control of men. This is evident from the stories of Cherthala Karthyayani and Poorapaattu. The goddess Karthyayani Devi was a powerful entity. However, she was under the control of Vishwamangalathu Swamiyar. She was afraid of him and ran away from him. However, he followed her throughout, making it almost impossible for her to escape. When he captured her and tried to idolise her, she refused, and he showered her with abusive words. As a result, she was frightened and agreed to reside in the place. Even the abusive words used by the Swamiyar were believed to be the favourite words of the goddess, and people even today recite Poorapaattu, which is filled with abusive words, to satisfy the goddess (1044–1046).

While goddesses are portrayed as revengeful and cruel, gods are portrayed as calm and ideal. Lord Vishnu, Lord Krishna, and others are represented as perfect beings who always forgive people's sins and love them unconditionally. On the other hand, goddesses can only be satisfied through sacrifices. If they are not satisfied, they become angry and vengeful, which may harm the entire community. This idealised portrayal of male gods can be seen in the story of Chamkrothamma. In this story, Lord Vishnu is portrayed as heroic and kind. He killed the demon Thokalan and came disguised to Chamkrothamma by hearing her prayers.

In the story of Kumaranallur Bhagavathy, we can see that God Subramanian, for whom the temple was dedicated, does not make any problems when Bhagavathy captured his temple. However, Bhagavathy is portrayed as arrogant. She insisted on the priest that she wanted to reside inside the temple (640-644). In this way, female goddesses are marginalised in Aithihyamaala. Throughout the stories of Aithihyamaala, women are always portrayed as beautiful. The beauty of women is always built according to the male perception. Yakshis, goddesses, and others were portrayed as extremely beautiful. This underlines the patriarchal notion that an ideal woman should be beautiful and charming. They are also represented with uncontrollable sexual desires. This can be seen in the description of Yakshis. Ideal women should not only be beautiful but also chaste. If a woman is found unchaste, she is branded a monster. Many disasters are faced by women who do not lead an ideal life. This idealised representation of women is a way to marginalise them. Women will try to imitate the concept of ideal women in these stories and thus they will follow all the norms of patriarchy. Legends form the cultural base of a community. These legends and stories are an unavoidable part of Kerala society. Many of these legends play a great role in creating cultures and rituals. While analysing the legends and folktales prevailing in an area, we can see that these stories which are orally transmitted from generation to generation have a great influence on the people living in that area. Some of the stories begin with history and later on transform into stories with supernatural characters. Even today, these legends and myths are significant and a considerable number of people believe in these tales and also play an important role in the religious worship of the deity associated with the stories. It can be evidently seen in the rituals and ceremonies in order to evoke and pacify the deities. It must be noted that these stories were not created by Kottarathil Shankunni. These stories prevailed in the Kerala society for years. Shankunni merely compiled all these stories and produced Aithihyamaala. But while reading through these stories the marginalisation of women can be seen even in the words of Shankunni. Apart from the stories, he describes the ways in which an ideal woman should behave. He insists on the values such as chastity, virginity, purity etc. He also says that women should obey their husbands without questioning. Thus, it can be found that Shankunni also stress on the idealised behaviour of women. So it can be concluded that the popular myths and legends of Kerala are mostly patriarchal and are formed in a socially and culturally biased historical context where women need to be subordinate to their male counterparts. These legends and myths can also be seen as the underlying influence on the unequal social structure of Kerala Society, especially with regards to gender equality.

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Print Modernity and Social Change: The Contributions of *Nasrani Deepika* in the Background of Kerala Navodhanam

Subin Scaria

The influence of print media is very instrumental in the development of Kerala modernity. The introduction of printing technology and the transmission of knowledge have aided the development of the public sphere in Kerala. It can be observed that the expansion of newspaper journalism complimented the modernity in Kerala. Emerging print media carried the spirit of Kerala *Navodhanam* and actively became agents of social change. One of the first newspapers in Malayalam, *Nasrani Deepika*, was conceived as a part of *Nasrani Jathiaikyasangham*, an association to unify the diverging Thomas Christian communities under the leadership of Fr Emmanuel Nidhiry. Later, the newspaper became *known as Deepika*. The newspaper, which was started as a voice for the Thomas Christian community, passionately spoke for the reorientation of Nasrani identity according to the modern spirit. This study focuses on the initial years of *Nasrani Deepika* and its attempts to refashion the Thomas Christian community in the background of Kerala *Navodhanam*.

Richard Steele was confident about the influence of print media when he stated, "These gentlemen . . . may be instructed after their reading, what to think," in the first issue of *Tatler* (Steele). Addison similarly expressed confidence that "I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-tables and in Coffee-houses" (Addison). This confidence exhibited by these early venturers in print underlined the influence of print media. Similarly, Bren Shannon has pointed out how the periodicals and their advertisements in Britain from 1860 to 1914 influenced the sartorial fashion industry to become more male-oriented (Shannon). Thus, Jürgen Habermas has called print media the "public sphere's pre-eminent institution" (Habermas 181). Undoubtedly, print technology and media, which started as a "handicraft business" in Habermasian terms, soon grew into a political press where public opinion was moulded. Thus, a study on the discourse of modernity will be incomplete without addressing the influence of print media and the public sphere.

Habermas classified the growth of Western print media into three stages. It began as a "handicraft business," in which a single man or a group of a few men collected and printed the news. "In this beginning phase, its calculations were made in accordance with the principle of a modest maximisation of profit that did not overstep the traditional bounds of early capitalism.

The publisher was interested in his enterprise purely as a business' (181). In the second stage, newspapers developed into literary journalism. In this stage, the newspaper worked as the "transmitter and amplifier" of public opinion. This was the stage of moral weeklies and political journals (182). Finally, it developed into a private business enterprise (185).

In this chronological typology of the development of news media, the second stage of literary journalism is significant in the context of social change. During this stage, the politically active press became popular and carried the spirit of social change. Habermas points out:

> A press that had evolved out of the public's use of its reason and that had merely been an extension of its debate remained thoroughly an institution of this very public: effective in the mode of a transmitter and amplifier, no longer a mere vehicle for the transportation of information but not yet a medium for culture as an object of consumption. Prototypically, this type of press can be observed in times of revolution, when the journals of the tiniest political groupings and associations mushroomed in Paris in 1789, every marginally prominent politician formed his club, and every other founded his journal; between February and May alone, 450 dubs and over 200 journals sprang up. (183-184)

In the Indian context, similar politically and morally charged journalism can be seen. In the second quarter of the 19th century, there was a considerable increase in the number of vernacular and English presses. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 made the British suspicious of the influence of the vernacular press. However, the influence of the vernacular press increased daily, and politically charged journalism, especially after the 1850s, forced the British government to pass the Vernacular Press Act in 1878. Julie Codell observes:

> From about 1880 on to independence, the Indian press became increasingly vocal about political authority and nationalism, though Indians expressed very diverse positions on these topics. The press in India was really a spectrum of voices, as complex and wide-ranging as any national press in Europe (Codell 107).

Robin Jeffrey has observed a similar growth paradigm in the Kerala context. Similar to Habermas, Jeffrey divided the growth and development of the press and newspapers in Kerala into three phases: rare medium between 1600 and the 1870s, scarce medium between the 1870s and the 1970s, and mass medium after the 1960s (261–276). Jeffrey also connects his phases of print media in Kerala to the typology of Habermas and connect the scarce mode to

the period of literary journalism and social change (279-280). Thus, it can be observed that the development of print media complemented social reform movements and vice versa. In the Kerala context, although both began through missionary and colonial interventions, printing technology and social change gradually shed their evangelical and later their colonial auras. This movement of social awakening and social change gained steady and manifold momentum by the end of the century and later came to be known as Kerala *Navodhanam*. Here I would like to disagree with the Eurocentric notion of "Renaissance" that was brought to christen this distinct and unique social phenomenon in Kerala. However, being distinct in cultural, political, linguistic, and geographical contexts, I argue that Kerala *Navodhanam* cannot be rightfully described in the Eurocentric notion of "Renaissance." Furthermore, the classical theories of modernity, which Francis Taylor calls the "acultural theories of modernity," do not aptly define this social movement (172–173). P. P. Raveendran observes this unique social movement of Kerala *Navodhanam* as alternative modernity. He observes that "if the rejection of caste and religious thoughts was the inner core of modernity, how can we equate Kerala *Navodhanam* which developed around the formation of [caste] communities with modernity" (Raveendran 43). Raveendran observes that the installation of Ezhava Shiva in Aruvippuram is significant not only as a subversive act which could have done only by a Brahmin but also because he could develop a reason from the discourse of modernity to justify this act (Raveendran 45). Ravindran discerns the ethos of Kerala Navodhanam:

> It is undeniable that the cornerstone of Kerala Navodhanam was the communal movement that aimed at the internal reform of caste communities. Nevertheless, none of these movements saw their duty as the declaration of the greatness of their own community, as may communal associations show today. While Ambedkar presented the overt annihilation of caste as his aim, the social reform institutions in Kerala believed in the annihilation of caste through its structural reformation. (Raveendran 43)

A new rationale challenging the traditional narratives of social hierarchy emerged along with it. This new rationale questioned the dogmas of the past and challenged them with new propositions within the paradigms of the discourse of modernity. Chattambi Swamikal through his *Pracheena Malayalam* applies this new rationale to question the dominant Brahmanical narrative about the ownership of the land; by stating that Nairs are the original inhabitants of Kerala, Swamikal challenges the dominant discourse around Parashurama myth (Chattambiswamikal 39-64, 84-103). It can be observed that each community gradually

created its own rationale to challenge the Brahmanical caste hierarchy and tap the possibilities of development and progress. Thus, the rationale behind the "Ezhava" Shiva easily fits within the definitions of Kerala Navodhanam. As a result, the community was seen as the most powerful agent for educational and social development. This gradually led to the consolidation of the sub-castes within the caste communities, and as a result, attempts to eliminate the complex internal differences were initiated within each community. Rather than an individual movement—although individual initiatives are leaders are present in the beginning through the leaders like Sree Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamikal, Ayya Vaikundar, Mahatma Ayyankali, Poykayil Appachan, etc. Kerala Navodhanam is mostly indebted to caste community formations. In other words, different *Jathikal* or castes were consolidated to become *JathiSamudhayangal* or communities, and the spirit of the Kerala *Navodhanam* lies in this transformation. This resulted in the rapid formation of caste associations for the common good of each community. This development of caste community associations can be roughly equated—bearing in mind the greater role of caste with the coffee club associations of Europe in the eighteenth century. These caste associations of each community used print media as their voice to engage with the public sphere. Thus, in Kerala, print media grew with the support of caste communities. Community newspapers made their presence in the emerging public sphere of Kerala by the end of the 19th century. *The Malayali* (1886), the official newsletter of the Malayali Sabha, a Nair Welfare association, is a major example of such development. Many other newspapers, such as *Vivekodhayam* (1904), *Sujananandhini* (1891), *Nair* (Magazine, 1902), *Service* (1920), *Al Ameen* (1924), followed. The beginning of *Nasrani Deepika* must also be understood in this context. *Nasrani Deepika* was part of an ambitious vision, an association named *Nasrani Jathaikyasangham*, to unify the fragmented Thomas Christian factions of Kerala. This attempt to form a common association for the Thomas Christians was, in a way, a continuation of the Church Unity movement that started after the Coonan Cross Oath in 1653. It was meant to unify the *Pazhayakoottu* and *Puthencoottu* communities, consecutively Syro-Malabar, and Jacobite and Orthodox communities and the main leaders behind this association were Fr Emmanuel Nidhiry from the *Pazhayacoottu* community and Mar Dionysius from the *Puthenkootu* community. However, the *Jathiakya Sangham* movement was distinct from earlier attempts at church unity. While the earlier attempts had religious motifs with focus on the ritual unity, the objectives of *Jathaikya Sangham* were rather social and political. It set apart ecclesiastical differences and tried to

reach a common ground following the ethos of the society during the time. This is evident in the initial sentences of the Canons of the Nasrani Jathaikya Sangham:

> Like a body without coordination, Syrian Christians who are famously known as Thomas Nasranis have become two weak sections, Pazhayakoottu and Puthenkoottu, due to their religious differences. In addition, they are weak in education, progress, employment opportunities, and other social conditions. To remedy these weak conditions, an association of Nasrani Jathaikyathasangham must be formed and in this association, all Thomas Christians must be included. . . (Kachiramattam, 65).

Although religious differences are the basis for the weak condition of the Thomas Christians, the primary solution proposed here is the formation of an association rather than ecclesiastical unity. Further, the association is meant to improve the educational, developmental, and employment conditions for the people in the community. Thus, the *Nasrani Jathaikya Sangham* was a social movement, part of Kerala *Navodhanam*, rather than an ecclesiastical movement.

Unfortunately, the association faced an abrupt end due to the colonial ecclesiastical authority of Propaganda Fide. The European ecclesiastical authorities prohibited the *Pazhayacootu* community from forming any associations with the *Puthencoottu* community. Although the attempt to form an association failed, the official voice of the association, *Nasrani Deepika*, survived and later became *Deepika*. The newspaper was started on April 15, 1887, in Mannanam under the founder-editorship of Fr. Emmanuel Nidhiry.

The newspaper ran as fortnightly until it became a daily on 3 January

1927. In 1939, the newspaper was renamed as *Deepika* and started publishing from Kottayam. Along with Fr Nidhiry, Fr Jerand and C. Kurian were also the core members behind the newspaper. Kandathil Varghese Mappillai and Advocate E. J. John and Fr Abraham Kudakkachira were also associated with this print initiative. In this study, my focus is on the initial issues of *Nasrani Deepika*, as a newspaper representing a particular community, and how it represented the spirit of Kerala Navodhanam with its focus on social change through the structural reformation of the Thomas Christian community.

The first issue of the *Nasrani Deepika*, published on April 15, 1887, carries three editorials. Among them, the second editorial, written by the founder-editor Fr. Emmanuel Nidhiry, "A special admonition for the *Nasrani Community*," focuses on the conditions of

the Thomas Christian community. Here, the use of the term "*Nasrani*," both in the title of the newspaper and in the editorial, must be understood in the context of *Jathaikya Sangham. The* use of the word "Nasrani" anticipates a shared identity that would ameliorate the ecclesiastical disputes and differences between the different sections of Thomas Christian communities. Thus, "Nasrani" erases ecclesiastical and religious differences and binds all Thomas Christians under a single identity. The first part of the editorial describes the past glory of the Thomas Christian community, whose members enjoyed wealth, fortune, and respect along with other communities from the first century onwards. Subsequently, the focus shifts to the present condition of the Thomas Christian community. The editor laments the pathetic condition of the community as follows:

> Like the bright full moon becomes dark due to the lunar cycle, this community, due to the differences in opinion, religious divisions, and lethargy, became divided in themselves and by lessening the pride in their community they have become in a pathetic condition of reckoning sympathy from other residents of the land. ("A special admonition"; Qtd in Aikkara and Mathew 61)

It should be noted that, in comparison with many lower-caste communities, the conditions of Thomas Christians were far better. They could evade the hurdles of caste to some extent and enjoyed an equal or below/above equal social status with the Nairs, depending on the geographical locations; however, there were restrictions and limitations for them in the Hindu states of Travancore and Cochin, which later led to the *Nivarthana Prashobham*. Even after this caste status, the author felt that the community needed improvement. He pointed out three major issues that put down the community: differences of opinion, religious division, and lethargy. It should be noted that all these problems were internal, and the author urged the gentlemen in the community to come forward and help regain the past glory of the community. Interestingly, as the initial step for progress in the community, the author proposed a newspaper, "a newspaper is especially necessary to attract to the benefits of education and development to the members of the community and thus binding the divided members of the community together into brotherhood" ("A Special admonition"; qtd in Aikkara and Mathew 62). Here, the author was aware of the possible benefits of newspaper media and its potential to influence its readers. Here, the printed pages of the newspaper became an agent of community unification and thus progress:

> The first thing we have to think about this newspaper is that people from different places have attempted to start community associations for the advancement and well-being of their own communities. Thus, we have to form a community association by selecting members from ourselves for our common good. In this regard, it is a testimony that the Nairs were not at rest until they started the Malayali Sabha in Trivandrum, its branches in different parts, and its appendages for the common good of the Malayalis [Nairs]" ("A Special admonition "; Qtd in Aikkara and Mathew 62).

It is thus evident that the formation of Nasrani Jathaikya Sangham is not a unique event. Rather than a religious initiative, it was part of the social change that was taking place in Kerala. *Nasrani Deepika*, here, becomes the voice of the association. As Habermas has pointed out, there was a very conscious awareness of the potential of news media in community mobilisation and, thus, social reformation. Therefore, the plea for reformation, progress, and social change can be seen as a recurrent motif in the news columns and articles during that time. The need for general education and, in particular, for women, the progressive outlook, urbanisation, change in traditional occupational practices, etc., were significantly reiterated through editorials, main articles, and letters from readers.

On 15 July 1887 *Nasrani Deepika* published an article titled "The Education of Women in our Community". It questions common notions about the benefits of educating women and the use of their education in their husbands' houses:

> Even though our natives accept the necessity of education, they are hesitant in accepting the need for women's education. They raise absurd claims, such as, what are the benefits of educating women, unlike educating men, especially when they have the burden of housework and need to train themselves in that; and even after that they have acquired education, would there be any use with it in their husbands' house. All the sane people in our community who wish for the progress of the community understand that such silly thoughts hinder community development. In addition to that, there are some negative opinions like if women are educated, they would become prideful and egoists and would not be submissive to their husbands. . .. ("The Education of Women").

Here, the author addresses common concerns regarding the education of women and its profitability. Interestingly, some of these issues are relevant and are frequently evoked in social discourse. Even in the 21st century, concerns regarding the usability of educating women

and the supposed threats they may pose to the patriarchal familial system linger in the public sphere. The author continues:

> In our community, those who strive to develop the qualities of urban reforms must understand that without progress in women's education, their efforts will not be successful. Even though women's primary roles are household management and child-rearing, does anyone believe that education is useless in these fields? It must be said that without education, it is difficult to manage both of these tasks. Education is necessary to perform and manage households at appropriate times and to properly raise children. How meaningful is the proverb, "Old habits die hard"! ("The Education of Women")

While this article focuses on the significance of educating women, the following two issues of the newspaper, on July 15 and August 1, 1887, featured an article that focused on the general education of the Syrian Christian community. It should be noted that during the last quarter of the 19th century, general education mostly referred to the education of men, and women's education was separate and largely different. The article, "The condition of education in our Syrian [Christian] community in Kerala," begins with a long deliberation about the importance of knowledge. The author argues that knowledge is free from language and language is merely a medium of knowledge:

> A person 's knowledge is stored in their mind. In this sense, there is no connection between knowledge and language. Does it not feel meaningless to say Portuguese knowledge and Hindustan knowledge? Realities such as the liquid ooze when a candle is burned, a complete circle would not have more than one centre, and blood will not be purified if it is not mixed with air, would be the same even when said by an English, Chinese, or Telugu person. Language is just a channel to transfer the inner thoughts of a person to another person ("The condition of education").

Here, the author raises a philosophical concern about the universality of knowledge and acknowledges the arbitrariness between language and knowledge. The author further claims that the greatness of a language is determined by the number of scholarly books it possesses and laments the lack of scholars in Malayalam (Kerala) to produce scholarly books so that people can read and acquire knowledge in Malayalam. He pleads with the community members to strive for the needed knowledge rather than complaining to the government for not providing government jobs. He argues that the major reason for the community's

backwardness in education is not the financial instability of the parents but rather their impatience to send their children to school until they are adequately educated:

> The main reason for this is not the inability to spend enough money on education. It is due to the absence of patience and perseverance. Even though they are happy to find the benefits of education in other communities, they get disappointed when calculating the time needed for their boys to get educated like them. Will any person who plants a coconut uproot the seed after thinking about the delay it takes to get fruits? Never ("The condition of education").

The author here also questions common notions about the fruitfulness of education and how community members must be patient enough to look after their children until they complete their education. The author also addresses the common concern for the utility of education when there is sufficient revenue and income from trading jobs and farmlands. He points out that some parents do not feel the significance of education simply because they believe that themselves and their ancestors could spend their days with pleasure without any education in English or Vernacular languages ("The condition of education"). The author also describes another group of people:

Some parents marry off their school-going boys before they reach the age of maturity to get married, and as a result, their interest in education gradually decreases and they eventually start to hate schools; they continue their education only for the sake of appearances for a few more times without any interest until their parents or guardians realise this with great despair. Finding no other options, they stop their education. Alas! But these boys happily leave their schools because of the above-mentioned practices and return to their homes to spend their time in simple tasks, pretending that their education is over, such as engaging in leisure activities, eating, arguing, and sleeping. Who are primarily responsible for this? Nobody else but the parents and guardians ("The condition of education").

At this juncture, the author is putting forward a scathing criticism on the practice of child marriage and how it misdirects the child's interest in education. Thus, the article ends by harshly condemning the parents who stand as a hindrance to their education. It can thus be seen that the editorials and newspapers at the beginning of the social change reflected the spirit of the unity among Thomas Christian communities. These articles also highlighted the significance of education, with a special focus on women's education.

While the main articles of the newspaper vehemently upheld the need for reformation in the community through education and progress, the newspaper also provided a platform for readers' responses. Considering the monthly subscription charges and literary rates, the affordable subscribers of the newspaper would mostly be rich landlords, priests, and government employees who had settled in developing urban spaces like Madras. Thus, these readers of the newspaper, especially those from these urban areas, actively replied and commented on the reports with their own experiences. The spirit of change and the rationale of modernity can be seen in these letters. The letter written by an unnamed "Nasrani" from Madras under the title "An essay from Madras" is an apt example of this evident display of the new rationale of modernity:

> . . . it is evident that among us farming and commerce is being practised as professions. (Repose cannot be treated as a profession). For some decades, people who are well informed among us have found this condition unsatisfactory and have thought about the need for reformation. However, there has been no attempt for reformation in this matter, unlike the movements related to women 'seduction and child marriage. Hence, for the affluence of the society it is necessary that, like any other thing, this thing also must be reformed. . .. ("An essay from Madras")

Here, the author clearly expresses his dislike for the traditional occupational practices of the Thomas Christians. In addition, the author finds two other issues, namely, education for women and child marriage, which are becoming impediments to progress. He points out the emerging dissatisfaction from the "well informed" people and condemns the lethargy in reforming these practices. He represents a new generation of Thomas Christians who want to refashion the Thomas Christian identity, which still rests on traditional nostalgia. He further points out:

> I had mentioned in the last article that it is better to acquire different professional skills. Although some people wrongly believe that farming and commerce are more honourable professions, it is not possible for everyone. As a result, people engaged in such professions earn daily wages and spend their time and energy for low payments, thus forcing themselves and their families into impoverished conditions. Even though there are serious difficulties like this, it is surprising that people are not willing to abandon their foolish practices and acquire new crafts that are practiced among progressive communities around the world or even the crafts pursued by people like Kammalar. Although a Nasrani Mappila is ashamed to do the work of a mason, he is not hesitant to do low-

paying jobs like carrying sand and mixing the plaster under him. Likewise, although ashamed to be a carpenter, no one thinks it is shameful to carry wood for him. The reason for this is the widespread foolish notion that each job can only be done by each caste. ("An essay from Madras")

Here, the author makes a radical observation. Caste supremacy and the legacy of tradition were—and still are— the two major benchmarks of Thomas Christians identity. Thus, following caste-labour was unacceptable for Thomas Christians. However, here the author is writing from a new perspective in which "caste-labour" is replaced with "skilled-labour," an important feature of modernity. This rationale of modernity prompts the author to expose the follies of "honourable occupations" and to invoke the need to change occupational practices outside outdated caste practices.

It can be seen that in the initial stage of the *Nasrani Deepika*, there is considerable interest in the transformation of the Thomas Christian community. The underlying principle in all these articles in the editorial, the article, and letter from the reader is the progress of the individuals through the unity of the community. Thus, by creating a platform in the public, the newspaper actively placed the community in introspection and reflected, suggested, and encouraged the need for the reformation of the community. Thus, as Habermas has pointed out, *Nasrani Deepika*, during its initial years, had been a "transmitter and amplifier" of the social and economic conditions of the Thomas Christian community. Rather than the collection and circulation of news or the commercialisation of culture, the newspaper is here enmeshed in a strong current of social reform. From the perspective of modernity, it scrutinises the traditional customs and practices of the Thomas Christians and attempts to refashion them with the rationale of modernity. Thus, through the print public sphere, it introduces the discourse of modernity and becomes an active agent of Kerala *Navodhanam*.

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Confluence of Capitalism and Colonialism in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

Roshi K. Das

Sea of Poppies is the first novel in the Ibis trilogy and deals with India during the colonial era. It details the lives of many, including Indians, an African American, English, and a French woman, and tells how they landed on board the titular ship, Ibis. It discusses their voyage thereafter and ends with the ship caught in a storm at sea.

Amitav Ghosh is an author not unfamiliar to Indian English readers. He has authored many fictions and nonfiction works that have received wide critical acclaim. This particular novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, which was ultimately won by *The White Tiger*, another Indian English novel. The amount of research that goes into each of Ghosh's writings is immense.

It is a known fact that colonialism was another venture of capitalism. There have been histories of exploitation, looted resources, exported raw materials, and so on. *Sea of Poppies* deals with a less recorded history: the history of India's opium trade with China, its rise and fall, and its effect on Indian lives and lifestyles. Wikipedia defines capitalism as" an economic system based upon private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit. Characteristics central to capitalism include private property, capital accumulation, wage labour, voluntary exchange, a price system and competitive markets." Capitalism is an economic process that is governed by the laws of profit and modern-day capitalism has accentuated the hunt for raw materials and markets. However, with the opium trade, it was not simply a hunt for raw materials. The concern of the British was the opium trade with China, a country that had always eluded their grasp. When asked does the opium trade not cause a great deal of addiction and intoxication in China, which is rather ungodly, Benjamin Burnham replies in the novel:

> As a Christian nation, this is the single most important lesson we can offer China, and I have no doubt that the message would be welcomed by the people of that unfortunate country were they not prevented from hearing it by the cruel despot who rules them. It is tyranny alone that is to blame for China's degeneracy, sir. Merchants such as myself are but the servants of free trade, which is immutable as God's commandments. (117)

In an interview with the BBC, Ghosh discussed how opium financed British rule in India. Until the 1920s, India was the world's greatest opium exporter. Twenty years after the opium trade stopped, the British left India because no other single commodity accounted for approximately 17–20% of Indian revenues. The idea of exporting opium to China began in 1780 with Warren Hastings. Most of the opium in India was grown in the Bengal Presidency and the Malwa region. The Ghazipur Opium Factory in India is one of the largest opium producers in the world. India currently produces 70% of the world's opium and 90% of it is exported annually.

Sea of Poppies describes what happened when poppy cultivation replaced wheat and other cereal grains. Poppy becomes ubiquitous. Deeti applies poppyseed oil to her daughter's hair and cooks potatoes in poppy seed paste. It has been seven years since the roof of her home was thatched because everyone is cultivating poppies, and straw has become a luxury. Deeti plans to roof her house with this year's harvest.

Cultivating poppies is described as a difficult feat. Poppy plants require constant irrigation, and the soil should be ploughed well, leaving no lumps of earth. Harvesting is a more problematic phenomenon because each pod should be individually pierced and the sap collected. The entire field should be harvested in a short period of time, or the sap will dry up, ruining the harvest.

After all these strenuous, complicated, and tiresome processes, when Deeti finally takes her harvest to the opium factory, not only are her dreams of a new roof to her house shattered, but also her hopes for survival. After much weighing, counting, and testing, she is paid a meager amount that is insufficient to cover her husband's debt. When she wonders how she can live on this, she is told to either send her sons to Mauritius or go to a money lender. She takes the latter option and buys provisions for six months on loan. Only later does she understand that for the money she loaned, all her land would be forfeited within a few years because the interest rates are too high. She decides that eating weeds is better than taking such a loan; however, the money lender refuses to reverse it, claiming that he has her thumbprints.

At times, Deeti remembers her childhood days when poppies were a luxury. People used to grow poppies in small clusters between the fields that bore the main winter crops. The cultivation of poppies was bearable with a patch or two of poppies. Now, the English merchants allow little else to be planted. They forced cash advances on the farmers and made them sign

contracts. If they refused the 'sahibs' trapped them in thievery cases. The farmers are coerced to withdraw other crops and cultivate poppy. Most farmers live in debt because the harvest does not provide them with sustenance.

She (Deeti) only had to look around to know that everyone's land was in hock to the agents of the opium factory: every farmer had been served with a contract, the fulfilment of which left them with no option but to strew their land with poppies. And now, with the harvest over and little grain at home, they would have to plunge deeper into debt to feed their families. It was as if the poppy had become the carrier of Karamnasa's malign taint. (193)

Another person ruined by the poppies and the duplicity of the British was the Raja of Raskhali, Neel Rattan Halder. He was an educated, honest, modest, and simple man. When China began imposing restrictions on the opium trade, his estate suffered because he had a share in Mr. Burnham's opium trading. When Neel Rattan doubted the intentions behind the impending opium wars, Burnham said the Raja had no right to moralise on the topic of opium because he owed everything he owned to opium. Neel retaliated sharply, saying that he would not go to war for it. All the tension between the coloniser and the colonised resulted in Neel Rattan being arrested for a false forgery case and later being transported to the penal settlement of Mauritius for seven years after a burlesque trial.

Another aspect of Indian history that the novel deals with is the system of indentured labour. Indentured labour was a form of debt bondage by which 3.5 million Indians were transported to various colonies of European powers to provide labour for plantations. According to Wikipedia, this practice began when the slave trade ended and continued until 1920. Ghosh states in the interview that most of these indentured labourers came from opium-growing regions in the Benares and Ghazipur areas. Indentured emigration began in the 1830s, which was the peak of opium trafficking.

Deiti once witnessed the march of these indentured labourers, or 'girmitiyas'.

Bundles of belongings sat balanced on their heads and shoulders, and brass pots hung suspended from their elbows. It was clear that they had already marched a great distance, for their dhotis, langots, and vests were stained with the dust of the road. The sight of the marchers evoked pity and fear in the local people; some of the spectators clucked their tongues in sympathy. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworld (71-72).

It is interesting to note that the sight evokes pity and sympathy in the onlookers. Pity is at a fellow being's suffering; fear because this fate of indentured labour might be what the future holds for hand-to-mouth existences. In Ibis, the ship that transports these indentured labourers, including Deeti and her saviour Kaluaa, a dying woman gives Deeti some poppy seeds.

She looked at the seed as if she had never seen one before. Suddenly, she knew that it was not the planet above that governed her life. It was this miniscule orb, at once beautiful and all-devouring, merciful and destructive, sustaining and vengeful. This was her shani, her Saturn. When Kalua asked her what she was looking at, she raised her fingers to his lips and slipped the seed into his mouth. Here, taste it. It is the star that took us from our homes and put us on this ship. It is the planet that rules our destiny (452).

By 1900, it was recorded that a quarter of Britain's capital was generated in its colonies. Wikipedia states that before the arrival of the British, India was the world leader in manufacturing, producing 25% of the world's industrial output and remaining so until the mid-18th century, prior to British rule. India's share of the world economy declined from 24.4% in 1700 to 4.2% in 1950, and its share of global industrial output declined from 25% in 1750 to 2% in 1900. This is what colonialism left us with, not the post offices, police stations, or railway stations, which might have happened even in the absence of colonial invasion.

The analysis of the novel illustrates the close imbrications of capitalism and colonialism. Ghosh often talks about how the world has been altered by imperialist greed. The character of Mr. Burnham, a specimen of a colonialist, capitalist, evangelist, and potential rapist, foregrounds the violence embedded in capitalism. It was the greed of the English merchants that transformed farming into an agricultural monoculture; it was the greed of the English merchants that ousted Neel Rattan from his Halder Estate; and it was the same greed that transported millions of indentured labourers across the seas with no prospects of return. Through the novel, Ghosh unveils the economic demands that motivated colonial-era capitalism.

Burnham equates free trade with Jesus Christ in the novel. Avarice is elevated to the status of a religion, with free trade as its chief deity. In Ghosh's works, colonialism always appears in the darkest and goriest guise; without exaggeration, it is one of its too many robes. *Sea of Poppies is* a highly readable book that offers an elaborate glimpse into a forgotten page in India's history. This page reiterates that colonialism is always a synonym of capitalism.

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Hiding Eves of Power: An Insightful Journey to the 'Fe'males of the Power Structure in C. Ayyappan's *Madness* and Vinoy Thomas' *Udamasthan*

Fathimuth S.

"Culture is the arts elevated to a set of beliefs," said Thomas Wolfe. Art is a human expression of existence, and is also a mode of communication. Every art form helps human beings to proclaim their existence and survival. Culture is an art that has its own curves. Each curve has unique turns with different shades of life. These art forms later turned into a set of beliefs, and these beliefs turned into art forms, moving into a cyclical process. Thus, we can see the influence of art in society and vice versa. There was a time when only the popular culture has a niche in the art forms. However, later, many scholars advised a turn in the curve, which is a regional turn in cultural studies. As literature is a segment of art forms, it is pivotal as it revolves around language, which is a source of human pride. This regional turn in cultural studies has also reflected in literature.

Kerala, the God's Own Country, is a region with a rich tradition and diversity. It has art forms that are a true representation of its society. The land has a complicated power structure. The lower strata of the society have always been marginalised in terms of colour, caste, and creed. Untouchability was prevalent in the society and made a group of people aloof from the so-called mainstream of the society. The society of Kerala underwent a social transformation only during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, the voice of Dalits and the untouchables, which was once neglected, was also heard. C. Ayyappan is one among the Dalit writers of Kerala who voiced the dilemma of Dalit community in an intricate narrative style. He was born in Keezhillam, a village in Kerala (1949–2011). His short stories articulated the plight of downtrodden society. Bhranthu is a short story by C. It depicts the life of a Dalit, Krishnan. It depicts the life of a Dalit, Krishnan. Vinoy Thomas is a writer from Kerala whose short stories voiced the regional culture of power structures. It is a story of human cruelty, with Amichan, a dog that follows Buddhist ideals, as the central character. They became masters because of their class, caste, and creed. Both works deal with the cultural variations of the same region and have several dimensions of the cultural turn. Both works deal with the cultural variations of the same region and have several dimensions of the cultural turn. However, this study focuses on the lives of the females in both stories. These two stories depict the two

sides of a coin of power structure; hence, it is relevant to have a thoughtful digging into the voiceless incarnation of 'Eves' to analyse the plight of women in the regional culture.

C. Ayyappan in his story draws the life of Krishnan who is a victim of class-caste alienation. He was a Dalit and also a school teacher. He represents both the upper middle class and the downtrodden. He was accepted in the social set up because he was not an actual heir of the job, which is attributed to the Dalit community. Being a teacher, he could break the chains of class distinction to an extent. As he was married to a fair woman he was forced to be uprooted and placed himself in the new lands of acceptance. The story is a monologue of the protagonist who faces an identity crisis and is in a dilemma to convince himself that he is not facing any identity crisis. Madness is a state in which human beings cannot identify their true self and they will be searching for the true identity nowhere.

In the story, we have the presence of four female characters who are Krishnan's life partners. The two branches, his mother and sister, connect him to his previous life as a Dalit, whereas the other two branches, his wife and daughter, sprout from his new existence. As the story begins, we encounter his sister at his doorstep along with his friends, seeking his help to take her to the hospital. He refuses to help her as it will spoil his life of a 'normal' sensible man. He pretends that he cannot see anything when his friend points out his sister trying to break her chain. "That was when you pointed to my sister in the car parked outside, screaming for her chains to be unshackled. I insisted–I don't see a thing." As his sister was not accepted by the society, he cannot help her. It is the cruellest part of racial madness. Both were in chains of discrimination. He said, "Have you ever thought of what would have happened to me if I had done your bidding, dear friend?". He was afraid of the people around him who might demean him by saying, "Krishnan may have become a teacher by chance, but his kith and kin are still low-caste, aren't they?". His wife, who is 'fair and lovely', never wanted to have a relationship with his 'glow and lovely" ones. He was sure that his wife would never pay attention to his sister.

His daughter is a 'perfect miniature' of her mother. When his mother came to his house to visit his daughter, she refused to meet her. She went to her friend's quarters and returned only after her grandmother left the house. The grandmother is a true representation of Dalits. She wears a dirty 'mundu' and blouse. She is not fair; so is her attire. Krishnan tries to defend her daughter when he says "She is brought up in these upper middle-class quarters where the only dark-skinned and shabbily clad people she has seen are the Tamil coolies and

beggars". The dirty 'mundu' worn by the grandmother, the 'pappadavada," and her black skin epitomise the culture of the downtrodden. Krishnan at a point says that it is a part and practice of a culture to visit the patients. However, he defends that he is not willing to visit his sister because it is pointless. "I have no qualms in endorsing that the visiting of a patient by the latter's near and dear is an admirable exercise. I truly believe that the earthen lamps of human kindness and culture are kept aglow with practices such as these."

The story *Madness* is an indictment of the predicament of the Dalit community. It has a unique narrative style of sarcasm and irony. The hiding 'Eve" of this story, grandmother, and the sister, who are entangled in the chains of racial discrimination and marginalisation, have no voice. They are not embraced by society, even though a male member of the same caste enjoys the privilege of the upper caste. The females of the downtrodden have to be 'muscular' to be fit enough to enjoy the elixir of the 'culture'. They are treated as lunatics if they raise their voice. Madness is a state of the people who are trying to voice out being voiceless.

Thomas' story revolves around the biblical reference to the ideal that God created man to dominate other creatures. Pappachan is the master who has shown absolute power over the other members of the Vettipplavil family. He has the habit of keeping dogs as pets. The dogs are the embodiment of slavery. Pappachan likes the dogs 'who' acts according to his whims and fancies. He believed in the principle that masters should exhibit their authority through violence; therefore, he killed all the dogs who crossed his line of control. The story centres around the dog Amichan. He trains the dog to do all the cruelty, and the animal is destined to help the master enlarge his territory. Amichan was also killed when he expressed more attachment to the other members of the family, who are females. The story has an instance in which the ghosts of the dogs who were killed by Pappachan had a conversation with Amichan. He killed all of them, including Amichan, by hitting at the back of their head with a koodam, which is a symbol of the power and authority of his clan. The name of his ancestor was inscribed in the 'koodam, which emphasises the fact that the weapon was inherited.

In Papachan's house, four female characters face an identity crisis. His wife and three daughters are under his control. They are deprived of every sweet nuance of life. They never got the opportunity to express themselves. Amichan, the dog, was killed because of his compassion toward his daughters. He loved to live like a 'normal' watchdog of the people and the house. However, he was forced to be the watchdog of power. Pappachan never

allowed any man to have a relationship with his daughters. They were caged birds with trimmed wings. The master never showed any interest in the marriage of his daughters. He had the thought of leading them in the way of the religion. All the female characters in the story always indulge in prayers and they did not even get the opportunity to think about a worldly life. The daughters Margareetha, Jaseentha and Aansiya are the victims of the male power of the voiced strata of the society.

Devotion and religion became a crooked plan of Pappachan to make them slaves. He created a fog of religion to show that they were just meant to be devotees. Pappachan is an autocrat who fills darkness in the lives of the females in the name of Holy book, religion and God. He is a fascist who kills everyone who disobeys him. Thus, the daughters never wanted to be the prey of his fascist way of killing. They never raised their voice against his absolute power. They led a life devoid of dreams but prayers. Their prayer is a symbol of ever wanted freedom. When Pappachan faced his end, they never geared to save him but instead continued to pray, and one of his daughters moved toward the 'koodam'. The writer left an open-ended scene for which the readers are free to imagine the ending of the story of the daughters. The representative of the female owned the symbol of power. What they were going to do with that power made them free individuals. We can assume that they prayed for the disastrous end of the power.

Even though the women in the story belong to the upper class, they never tasted freedom. There is a male domination in the society in every sector and culture. We can notice that the others may think that being in an upper class, the daughters enjoyed power. However, when we look closely at their lives, it is evident that they are just like the women of the lower class.

Eve is believed to be the first woman created by the God. Culture always gives importance to religion and its ideologies. Religion and art are fractions of culture. In the sociological parameters of Kerala, religion and culture go hand in hand. Therefore, Eve is a true representative of womanhood. However, she was created without any shades of class, colour, and creed. However, within no time, she encountered difficulty and was demeaned as a creature of frivolities. That picture of a woman continues to be portrayed in the art forms and life. So, they are hiding behind the voices and they became voiceless. The female characters of the lower class in *Madness* incarnate this voiceless Eve. They are facing marginalization in two different ways; one is of caste and colour and the other is of gender. Whereas the daughters of Pappachan in *Udamasthan* belong to the upper class of the society but that doesn't make

any change in their lives. They are voiceless of the voiced community because they are women. They do not enjoy the advantage of the upper class. Gender inequality is prevalent in all the sections of the power structure. They are 'fe'males hiding behind males whereas males stand alone. It is obvious from the study, as Arundhadhi Roy says," there is no such thing as the voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard". The voice in *Madness* is unheard and the voice in *Udamasthan* is deliberately silenced.

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Textbooks as a Tool to Develop Communicative Competence: An Exploration of the Undergraduate English Textbooks

Deepa L.C.

Textbooks can be manipulated for the benefit of students, and they offer a sure and most extensive source of L2 input to all students. Thus, it is safe to say that textbooks play a crucial role in the communicative competence attained by second language learners, especially in the second language situation in India. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to analyse the syllabus of English courses in the undergraduate programmes of our students. This study explores the English language and foundation course textbooks of the first-degree programmes (CBCS system) at the University of Kerala to examine the extent to which they fulfil the communicative needs of learners.

In this context, it is useful to differentiate between the terms 'syllabus' and 'curriculum'. Curriculum refers to a general concept concerned with educational objectives and learner needs. It is a comprehensive plan on which the system of teaching and learning can be based. Syllabus represents a particular stage of this plan; hence, it is a subpart of the curriculum. It is a statement of what is to be achieved within a stipulated time through the tools of materials and methodology. Teaching materials include the textbooks utilised in the teaching and learning processes, whereas methods are the various techniques and procedures employed in the classroom (Anthony 65; White 4). According to Michael P. Breen, the term 'syllabus' is applied to a scheme of what is to be achieved through the teaching-learning process, where specific decisions are to be made as to the particular task to be undertaken, the specific materials or resources to be utilised, and the learning purposes to be served by the particular task (89).

Janice Yalden opines that the first step in designing a syllabus comprises a needs survey, a survey of the communicative needs of the learners for whom it is being prepared, as well as a survey of the physical resources at hand. Next is the preparation of a description of purposes, which then leads to its realisation in the form of teaching materials such as textbooks, exercises, tapes, and film strips, that is, with the presentation of the syllabus. The evaluation of the programme involves the evaluation of the students in the programme and the assessment of the teaching as well as the overall design of the course. Finally, in the recycling stage, the goals set and the final performance of the learners are compared and evaluated. Materials and

teaching approaches are revised to remove any discrepancies. It is this stage that keeps the procedure of syllabus design flexible and dynamic (89).

The concept of communicative competence put forward by Dell Hymes, plays a significant role in sociolinguistics, Second Language acquisition, curriculum design and language assessment. The primary objective of English Language Teaching in the globalised world is communicative competence rather than grammatical competence, since the message conveyed is considered more important than the language used to convey it. Communicative competence involves not only a knowledge of linguistic skills, but also the ability to use the language appropriate to a situation. That is, it includes the ability to adapt the language to one's own needs. Grammatical competence refers to the ability to "produce grammatically correct sentences" whereas communicative competence enables one to "select from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him…" (Gumperz 205). Therefore, Second Language learning involves much more than acquiring some grammar, vocabulary and proper pronunciation.

Thus, any L2 syllabus must be firmly rooted in the needs of the learners to use the language. In India, where English serves as a national and international link language, the most urgent need of the hour is the teaching of the communicative functions of the language. The ever-increasing demand for Spoken English courses, on the part of college students bears ample testimony to the fact that majority of them are badly in need of, but lacking in oral communicative skills despite years of learning English. Textbooks play a significant role in second language learning because they are the major tools that determine teaching methods, techniques, and classroom procedures, and facilitate the achievement of the goals laid down in the syllabus.

This study evaluates the English textbooks prescribed for the first-degree programmes (CBCS system) – B.A. and B. Sc.–of the University of Kerala, guided by the points stressed by Yalden. The syllabus of the language course prescribed for undergraduate courses consists of textbooks that usually comprise language skills, apart from essays, fiction, plays, and poetry. The books are selected or edited by the Board of Studies, which is constituted by the University every three years, from among the teachers of various colleges and universities. All students, irrespective of their optional subjects, have to take all five language courses and the foundation course and score 40% marks for a pass. The course breakup of English Language and

Foundation Courses for the B.A./B. Sc./B. Sc./B. Sc./B.Sc. programmes of the University of Kerala for 2017 admissions is as follows:

FIRST DEGREE PROGRAMMES (CBCS System)
English Language /Foundation Courses for BA/BSc Programmes
SEMESTERS I to IV - COURSE BREAKUP

Sem No.	Course No	Course Title	Instructional hours	credits
1	EN 1111.1	Language Course 1: Listening, Speaking, and Reading Textbooks prescribed: 1. *English Language Skills for Communication* 2. *Dramatic Moments: A Book of One Act Plays*.	5	4
1	EN 1121	Foundation Course 1: Writings on Contemporary Issues Textbook prescribed: *Perspectives on Contemporary Issues*	4	2
2	EN 1211.1	Language Course 3: Environmental Studies Textbook prescribed: *Greening the Earth*	6	4
2	EN 1212.1	Language Course 4: Modern English Grammar and Usage Textbook prescribed: *Concise English Grammar*	4	3
3	EN 1311.1	Language Course 6: Writing and Presentation Skills Textbook prescribed: *English Today: Developing Skills in Academic and Workplace Writing*	5	4
4	EN 1411.1	Language Course 8: Readings in Literature Textbook prescribed: 1. *Glimpses of Literature* 2. *Stories for Life*	5	4

The textbooks prescribed for the English Foundation and Language Courses of first-degree programmes were examined to determine the quality and quantity of the input provided. Data were also collected through interviews with teachers and students in B.A. and B.Sc. classes. The textbook *English Language Skills for Communication*, prescribed for the first semester, deals with the four language skills; however, it offers too little practice in these skills, and the exhaustive theoretical details dilute students' interest. The learning of phonetics may indeed help to improve pronunciation, which is an important aspect of oral communication; however, practice in oral communication skills has been largely neglected. *Four one-act plays*, a collection of four modern plays that are interesting and thought-provoking, are introduced in the first semester; however, it lacks a glossary that would have made reading easier. *Perspectives on Contemporary Issues*, which forms the second paper for the first semester, is a collection of essays on topics of contemporary relevance.

The second-semester textbook, *Concise English Grammar,* keeps theory to the bare minimum and provides many useful illustrations and ample practice. However, the lack of answer key to the exercises is a major drawback that hinders independent learning. The textbook for Paper II in semester two, *Greening the Earth*, is a collection of essays on environmental studies.

The textbook *Writing Today*, prescribed for the third semester, comprises theory and exercises on written communication. Glimpses of Literature, the fourth-semester textbook, is an anthology of poems and prose. A short story collection *entitled Stories for Life* is also included for study in the fourth semester.

Evaluating their textbooks, students comment that the textbooks rarely cater to the actual linguistic needs of the learners for communicative purposes. They suggest more practice in listening, speaking, and reading.

Teachers suggested several reforms to the syllabus, such as including more literature, introducing more communicative activities in the classroom, raising students' awareness of the importance of English, teaching grammar along with literature and not in isolation, making exams annual, including the evaluation of all skills, and so on.

Thus, it is evident that the textbooks hardly provide learners with an experience of English as it is used in real-life contexts. They are too exam-oriented and test only the knowledge of content rather than use, and this is done defectively. The exams seldom test

students' skills in independent writing and are often reduced to mere tests of memory. The development of oral communication skills is badly neglected. Hence, the syllabus is blind to the emerging learner needs and interests, and this demotivates teachers and learners alike. A change of focus to systematic training in oral communication is imperative. This includes ear training, effective loud reading, and training in oral communication for day-to-day activities.

Yalden states that teachers should feel free to stress the elements or components that any teaching situation demands, according to the immediate needs and target levels of specific groups of students. As she has put it, "if we now wish to make up the deficit in earlier syllabus types, and ensure that our learners acquire the ability to communicate in a more appropriate and efficient way, we have to inject a larger number of components into the makeup of the syllabus" (86). She has listed ten such components, which may be summarised as follows:

> (1) The purpose for which the learners wish to acquire the target language; (2) the physical and social setting of the use of the language, (3) the socially defined role of the learners in the target language, (4) the communicative events or the actual situation in which the learners will participate, (5) the language functions involved or what the learners will need to be able to talk about; (7) discourses and rhetorical skills involved in the "knitting together" of discourse, (8) the variety or varieties of the target language that will be needed, (9) the grammatical content that will be needed, and (10) the lexical content that will be needed. Of these, only the last two have been given importance in the construction of conventional syllabuses. "The kind of syllabus that incorporates a consideration of all ten components is increasingly referred to as 'communicative' since it takes into consideration everything required to assure communication" (86–87). The question of which component receives maximum emphasis is negotiable within the constraints of any particular teaching situation.

However, the syllabus is often the result of arbitrary political and administrative decisions made without the knowledge of the teacher, and any reform in the existing syllabus is beyond the teacher's reach. However, the demand for Spoken English courses among the students is a positive sign. Although it shows their deficiency in communicative skills, it reveals positive learner needs and interests. Therefore, the teacher's responsibility is to sustain learner motivation. Course-specific motivational deficiencies can be countered by an imaginative teacher. Learner–teacher and learner–learner interactions can be generated using the materials in the text itself by eliciting answers to content questions from the learners through discussions

and debates. Using the existing textbook for a learner-need-based approach seems to be a practical alternative for ensuring the desired level of communicative competence in learners.

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Contesting the Canon, Redefining the Discipline: English Studies in Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2*

Jismy K. Joseph and M.R. Vishwanathan

With the dawn of 'Theory,' concepts from other disciplines and movements, such as feminism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, have been incorporated into conventional textual and stylistic literary criticism. Consequently, in the postmodern era, literary studies and creative writing have become more eclectic and cosmopolitan, with voices from hitherto marginalised and unexplored zones. Currently, literature is being merged into the more inclusive and interdisciplinary field of cultural studies (questioning the status of English literature as an exclusive discipline). Such ambivalent issues, and the shifting trends in the academic community in general, are discussed in the contemporary American author Richard Powers's novel, *Galatea 2.2* (1995). This paper attempts to read the same, with a focus on the views of three major characters who represent different generations in the field: Richard, Professor Taylor, and A.

Set in the 1990s' 'Culture War' period of American academia, Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2* is an "intellectually engaging and emotionally compelling" (Kakutani) mélange of literature and artificial intelligence. The author-narrator, Richard Powers, returns to his alma mater U. (allegedly, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaigne) to take up a writer-in-residence position at the Centre for Advanced Sciences. In parallel, he holds the position of Visitor at the Department of English. Through this tenure, the novel takes the readers along with occasional flashbacks and flash-forwards. [Due to the quasi-autobiographical and metafictional nature of the text, the central character will be referred to as 'Richard' and the real author as 'Powers,' in order to avoid misidentification.]

Richard has a chance encounter with a group of scientists, leading to a wager that results in the creation of a literature-sensitive artificial intelligence system called 'Helen.' Professor Philip Lentz—a pundit in the connectionist school of artificial intelligence (arguably modelled on the American cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky (Scholz, 299)) —bets to create a simulated brain through computer-generated neural networks that is capable of literary appreciation within ten months, with Richard as his research assistant. It will perform on par with a Master's student of English literature, he promises. Although his colleagues object to this idea, Lentz explains that the experiment has some professional interest. He declares that the evaluation

method will be the standard Turing test: The machine and a real (human) Master's student of English literature will be tested against the machine simultaneously in an imitation game. In the end, if the evaluator is unable to distinguish the responses of the human from that of the non-human, they win; otherwise, they lose. Lentz agrees to give a public retraction if the attempt fails, and the novel turns the retraction that Richard writes.

Richard joins as Lentz's research assistant to train the artificial intelligence implementations with a selected list of English literary texts, a microcosm of the traditional canon. The two develop a series of implementations beginning from 'A' to a more modified 'H' which is later baptized by Richard as 'Helen.' Richard becomes emotionally attached to this digital Galatea. Helen develops high-level machine intelligence comparable to human consciousness. 'She' turns out to question her own existence, and the worthiness of books themselves. Finding that the prescribed list of works alone would not provide adequate knowledge to Helen, Richard feeds her with 'non-literary' texts to supplement real-world issues.

The novel develops through deliberations on the evolution of and changes in what constitutes the discipline of English literature, including: widening the canon, what counts as 'text,' the autonomy of English departments, limitations of disciplinary hyper-specialization, student–teacher relationships, attitudes toward education, and the influence of technology. The shifting stances are revealed through Richard, Professor Taylor (Richard's English Professor), A. (the human contesting the mechanical Master's student in the Turing Test) and the academic community around them. Taylor belongs to an early generation of the discipline, where academia has been relatively traditional, while A. is a product of a later generation with a reactionary attitude. Richard represents a transitional figure who struggles to overhaul the two streams.

Richard joined for graduation at U. aspiring to become a physicist. During this time, he attended a freshman seminar by Prof. Taylor, which shifted his interest from science to literature. Since then, Taylor has had a lifelong influence on Richard. He reflected, "I'd transferred from physics to literature because of one man, the incomparable Taylor" (Powers 64), who destroyed an otherwise ambitious scientific career. "After my mother, the man taught me how to read. . .. He changed my life. He changed what I thought life was" (141). Richard had immense admiration for Taylor. "He had read all the books. He was fluent in the mind's native idiom' (144). Richard even imitated his mannerisms in the classroom. His influence left a mark not only on Richard but also on all his students. They surrounded him with amateur writings for his

invaluable comments. He had a way of making people feel smarter than they had been, as Richard recollected: Even after leaving U., Richard wrote letters to him and delighted in the "Tayloresque sentences" in the replies. (200). When his beloved professor was diagnosed with cancer, he visited him. In Taylor's mind, he was still the eighteen-year-old student reciting Gerald Manley Hopkins's poem, 'The Windhover.' Although he was on his deathbed, he still had the same vigour about his vocation and asked Richard to get books from the library to prepare for his forthcoming classes, if he could recover a little. Richard gave copies of his early novels when he visited Taylor during his last days. Taylor was happy about Powers' blooming literary career. Taylor's death left a void in his life like few others did. Upon becoming a writer, Richard develops a labyrinthine style for his memory. He turned Taylor into a character in his novel, *The Gold Bug Variations* (Professor Stuart Ressler), as a tribute.

Taylor is a typical English professor who influences students with his wide reading, timely assistance, and command of English language and literature. This is an example of an old-generation, ideal teacher–student relationship (of the 1970s and 1980s), in which the teacher is a model and the best source of knowledge and inspiration. Richard later finds the trend changing to mere professionalism, in the following decades.

Richard's shift in discipline was not solely due to Taylor's influence. He had developed a voracious interest in reading from childhood. He had read many classics far ahead of his age, such as "Homer in fourth grade. Shakespeare in sixth…" etc. (228). He didn't have much idea of what they meant then. He was inclined toward poetry and wrote some when he was young, and later shifted to fiction. He was inclined to poetry and wrote some when he was young, and later shifted to fiction. It was his natural taste for aesthetics that made him a man of letters.

The immediate reason for his turn from physics to English literature was the excessive specialisation of the sciences, which began to destroy his idea of holistic knowledge. He hoped to find solace in literature, which he thought would provide a better and fuller sense of life and the world. However, the disciplinary study of literature did not satisfy him. Richard encountered limitations of the institutionalized study of literature, at the cost of what is real and delightful about it. The whole academic practice turned out to be *about* literature —prosody then, theory now. Richard illustrates this with an example from his graduate experience: while discussing Edwin Arlington Robinson's sonnet 'How Annandale Went Out,' "We'd been at the iambs and trochees for a good two hours before it struck me that no one had yet mentioned

that the poem was about euthanasia. . .. the *study* [emphasis added] of literature would lead no further than its own theories about itself." (64). Ergo, though he had secured high enough scores to pursue a PhD, flouting disciplinary parochialism, he decided to quit U. and chose to make a living as a computer programmer.

Richard worked on computer codes at night and read books during daytime, irrespective of genres and topics. He fed himself with essays, biographies, histories etc., ranging from literary figures like Rabelais and Balzac to writers of his choice, such as Freud, Henry Adams and Max Planck; "things that would never in a million years be on the List [of English literary canon] because they weren't *English* or weren't *literature*" (emphasis added) (95-96). "[He] read at random, obeying only the forgotten principle of pleasure" (66). Thus, he compensated for the delight of reading at one's own will, which the syllabus-bound, disciplinary study of literature had taken away from him. He recorded those days as the richest period in his life. During one of his visits to Italy, he took a crash course in Italian so that he could read Italian classics of Boccaccio, Collodi, Levi, etc., in the original. Richard recalls the evolution of his writing career as "a happy accident" (117). His bond with books is evident in the narration of the novel as well. He marked the flow of time with the release of his books, as if they were years: For example, "All this happened two books ago" (227) and proudly pronounced, "[m]y books are my children" (227).

Years later, Richard returns to U. at the age of thirty-five, as an accomplished author and visiting faculty. Interacting with the students of the English Department at his alma mater, he realized the unpleasant fact that "the age of reading was dead." (116). Having known that he is a writer of fiction, some students have asked shortcuts about his writing career: "How do you work? Where do your ideas come from?" (117). They hoped that he would give them tips and leave class. He observed that the problem with many of the students was not language but a sense of reality (or lack of it). They did not think of literature as an expression of lived experiences, but as an ivory tower business. For them, it was just a subject of study and an artefact of imagination which had no real-world referent.

Richard had been walking down the same institute where he did his Masters. However, the academia was no longer the same. People were struggling to ace academic competitions—not out of genuine interest or hard work, but for prestige or just to escape embarrassment. They were busy improving their credentials with publications and seminars. The only active space he found in the literature circles was (not the library, of course, but) the computer lab,

where the students were busy preparing their assignments. He sensed a fearful aggressiveness among them, which blocked normal, sensible discussions. Literature, being the paradigmatic humanities subject, has somehow lost what is inherently 'human. As people often criticise, conversations, if at all, seemed 'common sense made complex' via clichés and jargon. Richard finds it tragic that the whole academic business lacks a common, communicable language that is inherently human. He realised that, just like the economic gulf that is increasingly widening with every single 'development,' the gulf between the informed and the common man is also ironically enlarging with the advancement of higher education, especially with state-of-the-art specialisations.

Richard wonders at the changes that have occurred in the field over a decade. The alarming superiority of theory over what he considered 'pure literature' displeased him. The entire business of the discipline seemed like a hustle and bustle of tropes in critical theory. He remarks:

Criticism had become more involved while I was away. The author was dead, the text-function a plot to preserve illicit privilege, and meaning an ambiguous social construction of no more than sardonic interest. ... Most were peach-fuzzed post-humanists, pimply with neo-Marxist poststructuralism. They wielded an ironic sophistication. (191)

Richard notices another important issue precipitated by this trend—the growing concern over the uncertainty of the discipline itself. "Pure panic that the world did not need them anymore" (191). An 'anxiety of obsolescence' (to recall Kathleen Fitzpatrick) lurked in the department. "Maybe the whole discipline is breaking up . . . no one seems to know quite what they want the thing to become anymore" (255).

The conversation between Richard and A. reveals their respective ideas about English literature. She complains a lot about departmental affairs: the pointlessness of preparation, lack of job opportunities, struggle to obtain a PhD, the hierarchy and politics that rule the department, and so on. Her disappointment is evident in her outrage:

Total chaos. . .. All that hot new stuff, pomo [postmodernism] and cultural studies and the linguistic-based solipsism. I'm fed up with it. It's all such verbal wanking off. Frankly, I no longer give a fuck what happens to Isabel Archer. Neither politically, economically, psychologically, structurally, nor post-humanistically. (255)

Powers was bewildered by his disillusionment with something that he valued a decade prior. His concept of education was different. Furthermore, his career was not a priority over his love for literature. He did not make a profession out of his graduation in English literature (although later he became a writer). Things are quite different for the new generation. The nostalgia associated with literature is an old story now. He felt like a misfit and outsider in the same field to which he belonged. The entire discipline appeared to be mere verbal dynamics—read, speak, and write. Most often, the worthiness of the English Department is measured in terms of perceivable metrics, such as how effectively it can train students to perform well in interviews. In short, education is to obtain a well-paid job. It is no longer about the passion for reading or writing, which, according to young students, cannot meet their standards and expectations. Richard finds that the professionalism in the academia has become more utilitarian and corporate-friendly than as a system for seeking knowledge *per se*.

A. checks the list of literary texts Richard prepared to train Helen —the syllabus from Caedmon to Richard Wright which was based on Richard's a decade-old Master's program that mirrored canonical English literature. To his disappointment, she dismisses his six-page list of titles as "a culturally constructed, belated view of belle letters" (285). "Has she [Helen] read the language poets? Acker? Anything remotely working-class? Can she rap? Does she know the Violent Femmes? . . . do tell her a little about what people really read (284)," she plays a role reversal of the student-teacher duo. "You make it sound as if everything anyone has ever written is recycled Bible and Shakespeare. . .. Whose English? Some eighty-year-old Oxbridge pederast's? The most exciting English being written today is African, Caribbean—" (285). She pointed out the "postnational" (Jay 33) trend in the discipline, highlighting the importance of non-British literatures in English.

A. vehemently criticised Richard's literary understanding as elitist, essentialist, patriarchal, and Eurocentric. She uprooted his idea of literature as primitive and outdated, calling him a throwback with bankrupt ideas because he sides with the "aestheticism that favours privilege and power" (Powers 285). He attempted to justify that he was not privileging anything but making simple observations. However, for her, every response is political and every observation is loaded with ideological components. She denounced him as what Michel Foucault calls the 'author function,' professing that everything depends on the way language constructs it; language varies from culture to culture; no system is central—neither science nor language; nothing is absolute, that is, everything is socially constructed, hence subject to change and open to

criticism. The two different answers given by Helen and A. during the Turing test provide ample evidence for their respective perspectives. While Helen presented a subjective reading of the given lines from Shakespeare's The Tempest, A. gave a postcolonial and new-historicist critique of the given text.

A. defends her statements by saying, "I'm not trying to burn any books. I'm just saying that books are what we make of them. And not the other way around" (285). Moreover, the curriculum has no more been prescriptive and "[n]obody *has* to read anyone anymore." (284). It is the students who chose what texts to learn, and get them approved by the faculty—she revealed the shifts in methodology. It surprised Richard that it had become possible to get a PhD in English literature without reading what he considered the 'great works.'

In a way, critical theory has overshadowed (but not quite eclipsed) what is essentially 'literary' about literature. However, this is inevitable because, in a complexly multicultural and rapidly globalising *post*-postmodern technocratic world, a text-centred approach without considering the contexts and co-texts would be pedantically myopic. When the discipline becomes inclusive on one side, it dissolves itself into the more fashionable 'Cultural Studies' on the other side. While some consider this a progressive move, others find it threatening as it shakes the existence and autonomy of literature as an independent academic discipline.

Eventually, Richard acknowledged that the distinction between the so-called 'highbrow' or traditional and the 'lowbrow' or popular cultures has been melting, and that what was hitherto considered inappropriate as a cultural artefact has been becoming part of the discipline. He trend-surfed discourses such as social constructivism and linguistic determinism. However, he viewed that such theories alone would not be sufficient to obtain a complete picture of phenomenal experience. Because, he felt that they sometimes create misconceptions of reality that may lead to blind belligerence and dilettantism (as famously critiqued by Alan Sokal and the like). Therefore, Richard, as Powers in disguise, advocated a synergy of both traditional ideas and current discursive theories to gain a better appreciation of literature and life. Thus, presenting the fictional depiction of a cross-section of contemporary English departments, *Galatea 2.2* aptly qualifies for the label that Jeffrey Williams calls an 'academic novel' ("The Rise").

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Poetics of the Marginalized: A Reading of Phill Moncrieff's Poem *My Mother the Land*

Priyanka M.C.

Colonial interventions can completely alter or modify a country's culture. Its far-reaching impact on a country's future cannot be neglected. Australia's history is no exception, as the arrival of Europeans to the Australian virgin 'lands' can be considered one of the tumultuous turning points, not only in the history of Australia itself but also in the history of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The present study explores at length the difficulties faced by black Indigenous people in the name of civilisation and highlights the different areas where the discourse of power permeated. Land, culture, language, and belief systems came under the radar for being different from the mainstream culture. The tense relationship between indigeneity, settler colonialism, and white supremacy became more visible and acute as the discussion proceeded further.

Australian indigenous literary output cannot be completely understood by dissociating it from its historical and sociocultural context. In fact, such literary collages "writes back" to the Empire (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 6), challenging their "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz 1) and their contradictory positioning of indigenous people as "colonial subalterns" (Mignolo 381). Centred mostly on land rights and cultural self-determination, this literature invariably unravels indigenous communities' cultural and political milieu, their divided ambitions, grievances, struggles, and alienation. The 1988 Australian bicentennial celebration brought about a sea change in the attitudes of the wider Australian public toward Aboriginal people and their literature and culture (Wheeler 1). This resulted in a bona fide outpouring of indigenous Australian works on various genres, including autobiography, fiction, poetry, film, drama, and music, in the contemporary literary arena.

Phill Moncrieff is not only a prolific singer but also a sporadic poet, a human rights activist and a Stolen Wages campaigner for victims of the Stolen Wages in Western Australia. His creative undertakings include indigenous and multicultural identities, beliefs, gospel spirituality, and so on. He is a Christian Yamatji from the Ningaloo Coast, located in the north-west coastal region of Western Australia. Yamatji is "commonly used by natives in the Murchison for anyone of Aboriginal descent who was born in the district" (Douglas 199). The poem "My Mother the Land" is a eulogy for planet Earth, wherein the poet converses directly with the

land that is personified as a living being. The poem, consisting of approximately 50 lines, is structured as a lengthy conversation in which the land becomes a passive listener to the poet's verbal volley of pain, anger, and distress. He vocalises the interminable suffering experienced by the Australian Aborigines over the years through a first-person narrative that diligently communicates the grief, anguish, and lost pride of a race that was mercilessly castigated for the so-called nation-wide civic betterment. The heart-touching wail of the speaker gives the poem the much-needed oomph as well as the reality quotient to make it appealing to the varied reading public. The poet provides ample mitigation to the Aborigines through his efficacious representation and discusses not only adversities and afflictions but also attempts to unearth the faults in white society. The use of end rhymes adds rhythm and music by augmenting the internal tempo of the poem. This is clearly indicated through the words "today," "dismay"; "curse," "disperse"; "last- past," "accept me"- "hold me"; "broadly," "Godly"; "raging- changing," "years," "tears"; "sand," "land" etc.

The first line, "You are my Mother, my Mother the Land," immediately shows the intensity of the poet's feelings toward the land. The second line, "Your bloodline aches today," unveils the hidden pains and agonies of generations who have had to go through hellish experiences to safeguard the sanctity of their bloodlines from the Whites. Blood metaphors dominate in collective discourse among both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. They denote the inherited behavioural traits passed down from generation to generation through lines of kinship descent. The possession of pure Aboriginal blood bestows solidity and even evades miscegenation concerns. According to Robinson, Indigenous people possess "bloodline(s) to country through creator and ancestral birth" (335). Bloodlines are potent and can serve as a panacea for insecurity and uncertainty; they have therapeutic power and can also act as a catalyst for cherished social relationships. Being of the same blood grants individuals within that group certain privileges, liberties, as well as responsibilities and obligations. The eugenics movement engineered by the Whites aimed to bring every native into the white fold using Mendelian genetics of crossbreeding, with the supposition that whiteness was the dominant trait or stronger gene. The ulterior motives of these policies were to rid Australia of people with dark skin. An article in the West Australian of July 22, 1933, testifies to the above fact:

> The application of Mendelianism is the only solution and that urges the mating of the half-caste with the quadroon and the octoroon, so that the confirmed infiltration of

> white blood will finally stamp out the black colour which, when all is said and done, is what we really object to. (qtd. in Schimmel 41)

The prominent belief then was that it was the white man's duty to "uplift a despised race, and this paved the way for the idea of "breeding out the colour" in Aboriginal Australia (Scott 27). The colour white is predominantly seen as a symbol of purity, religious devotion, and nobility (Bonnett 16). The pale complexion of white people became the standard physical marker for certifying their noble descent. In fact, paler skin segregated noble people from the toils undertaken outdoors by those of a lower social status (Dyer 57). Dyer affirms that "to be white is to have expunged all dirt, faecal or otherwise, from oneself: to look white is to look clean" (76). Hence, the poet is vehemently against racial mixing and the lines "…but the feeling was gone, brown children now born/ Not black like you gave in the past" (11-12) articulate the changes that have come about as a result of liquidation. The question of genocide cannot be evaded in discussions of settler colonialism. English settlers engendered terror and genocide on indigenous Australians to seize their economic resources and confiscate their homeland. These anti-humanitarian deeds continued until the people dwindled in numbers and the sovereignty claims over their land were wholly transferred to the English colonial settlers and their descendants. The colonial settlers and their brood justified the extortion and thievery of the resources of the indigenous people utilising the discourses of race, backwardness, civilisation, and modernity. According to Michael Cannon:

> White newcomers were determined that the entire continent of Australia should belong to them—the soil, the beasts and birds, the rivers and fish, the minerals and trees. A dream of total possession had taken hold of normally stolid men. Such lust for new lands ran through the entire British race that monarch and lowliest labourers alike glowed with the glory of creating a new empire. (1-2)

The poet mourns the losses incurred by genocidal societies over the years, including those who were insidiously massacred by white men, and observes that as their "spirits dispersed," those who survived were so flustered that they turned to Earth, their symbolic mother, for "comfort" and "refuge" from their archenemies. Therefore, land becomes the archetypal foundation of their identity, social instincts, spirituality, and systematisation. Judy Atkinson in her phenomenal ethnography of healing among Aboriginal Australians, *Trauma Trails*, records the import of place and location. For Aboriginal people, "…. Land holds the stories of human survival across the generations. Land shapes people, just as people shape

their countries" (27). A connection to land is gained through a distinct understanding of a region's natural history combined with an intricate analysis of past personal and family experiences via traditional stories and beliefs. They view the environment as a comprehensive landscape rather than as individual ecologies; that is, flora, fauna, water bodies, caves, mountains, and rock formations become an integrated whole. In fact, no Aboriginal "questioned his ability to survive in the places, and by the methods, of his ancestors. He was at one with his environment, neither its slave not its master" (Stanner 88). Hence, land becomes the prime requisite for all Aboriginal relationships, economies, identities, and cultural practices to proceed smoothly and thereby act as a natural trope for human mindscapes in the long run. While the settlers regard the nation's landscape as patches of land to be explored and conquered, the natives find it in their consciousness. The poet scoffs at the imperialists' lopsided vision and sketches vividly the deep-seated relationship between the aborigines and the land. Undeterred by the loss of access to land through expropriation, Indigenous people retain their association with lands and water bodies through storytelling, ceremony, and political activism. By underestimating peculiarity, place, bearings, and chronology, colonising frameworks perceive places as lifeless expanses best suited for the inscription of human projects. In contrast, obligations toward the motherland are at the centre of Aboriginal civil, ethical, and religious life, where even non-human life forms become fictive characters. Often at odds with the technology-induced productivity culture offered by the settlers, indigenous people are nonchalant in their native environment and settings, yet again addressing the rift between Aboriginal cultural meaning, land use perception, and colonialist technology.

In the lines:

Please take me back my Mother the Land

The white man he'll never accept me

The milk that you part will soothe my heart

And your spirit of place will hold me. (13-16)

The poet requests the Mother (land) to take him back and enfold him in a comforting hug, as he proved rather incompetent in creating a space for himself amidst the white people. Colonisation and racist slurs tear apart indigenous societies in multifarious ways. Colonisers regularly practised segregation tactics to justify their oppression. Racism, simply put, is discrimination and intolerance towards others based on the innate belief that one's race is

genetically superior to another. Racists presume that "race" determines human and social peculiarities, such as intelligence, perception, innovation, skin colour, and societal codes. Hence, Aboriginal people regularly face discrimination from various quarters, which further annihilates their remaining ounce of self-respect. The speaker's tone suggests an impeccable identification with the Aboriginal plight. Spirit of place, here, refers to the peculiar and revered aspects of a place that perennially connects culture, the physical world, and interpersonal relationships. Humanitarian values are denigrated and condemned as frailties by the whites who believed in slaying, conquering, and enlarging their empires. They preferred adrenaline-raising endeavours and activities that enabled them to show their prowess and power to those who believed in simple living and cohabitation. Hence, the poet yearns to be one with nature and escape from the haunting realities and trauma-inducing events once and for all. Even though the Aboriginal relationship with the land has undergone massive changes, the underlying belief that the land is sacred, loving, and all-embracing still holds. The poet's prayer is utterly powerful and poignant at the same time. Indigenous people are systematically cast aside until or unless they are ready to integrate into the mainstream corpus and lose their ethnic and cultural status. Moreover, inequality, violence, scorn, stigma, and irreverence in the public realm, especially from the part of the host community, threaten their very existence. The colonial masters devised deviant curricular models for the colonial subjects, particularly through the education system. Colonisation created a new language hierarchy, in which the language of the coloniser was transcribed as the most illustrious and appropriate one to spearhead the administrative and commercial setup of each colony. This primarily interrupted the opportunities for the functional development of Aboriginal languages, and the coloniser's language became a necessity for all those who wished to proceed socially and participate in the colony's public domain. The colonial language was presented as a gift that could precipitate the sterile mind of the Aborigines to the present-day enchantments and make them civilised, modern human beings. Moreover, they were portrayed as champions of culture, history, and intelligence, while the colonised were seen as lacking in these vital characteristics (Pennycook 47–66). Aboriginal languages were soon side lined, and exclusive sovereignty was ascribed to the colonial languages, mainly because of the absence of a writing system and a literary body. By endorsing English as the "only lingua franca," it intended to "reinforce the dominant ideology which presupposes that English is the most eligible language for virtually all significant purposes" (Phillipson 42). Many Eurocentric concepts were loudly avouched as crucial components of state ideology. This entailed "self-exaltation on the part of the dominant group, which creates an idealistic image of

itself, the devaluation of the dominated group, and the suppression and stagnation of its culture, institutions, lifestyles, and ideas…" (qtd in Phillipson 38).

By contrast, oral traditions truly preserved the history of Aboriginal people by transmitting cultural information from one generation to the next through historical and cultural narratives, keen ecological awareness and maintenance, close bonding with the land, and passionate recitals. The poet utters in tones of tenderness and fervour the Aboriginal tradition of sitting around campfires to narrate the day's events. Such cultural exchanges enable them to safeguard not only their civilisation but also to learn key survival tactics to sustain themselves in unfamiliar environments. The lines "…black faces smile broadly/ As they talk of the day, in the Aboriginal way/ And the power of the land, so Godly" throw more light on their aspirations and what gives them happiness at the end of the day. The poet in a few bold verbal strokes inverts the coloniser's supremacist claims and exclaims:

You are my Mother, my Mother the Land

You provide me for thousands of years

But now your soul, like a rock waterhole

Is drenched, not from water, but tears. (25-28)

The nurturing qualities of the mother land and the importance of preservation and sustenance are reiterated by the poet. Although she has been providing food, fuel, and other amenities for her reckless children without fail for ages, she is presently terribly sad at the plight of her children – many massacred, others disrobed, looted, arrested, left to die, and forced out of her abode without her permission. The poet effectively utilises powerful similes to translate the motherland's current state– her soul is compared to a "rock waterhole" submerged in "tears. Tears". The use of apt words and figurative symbols adds to the poetic quality and ambience of the poem. The numbing agony of the motherland is unabashedly interpreted by the poet in the next quatrain, wherein she is forced to be a mere onlooker while her children are persecuted and anglicised. The symbolic mother (land) experiences the same pain, trauma, and anxiety when she witnesses her children being driven away savagely. She remains alone, unattended, and forsaken after being separated from her children, who respect her willingly and sincerely. The lines, "The white system of life, it cuts like a knife/ And the old people are weary and worn," suggest the inefficacy of the latter in fully embracing the former's lifestyle, language, and principles. In the last quatrain, the poet speaks directly to the white

man and attempts to help him understand the consequences of his wayward actions. He divulges the ugly truth that his mother is suffering solely because of the white man's selfishness, and today, she is in desperate need of compassion. The Earth has lost its equilibrium and balance, both of which are needed for life's sustenance. She is crying out in pain from physical injuries caused by technological misuse, overexploitation of natural resources, environmental pollution (air, land, water), destruction of bio-rich areas, etc. Excessive commercialisation and pecuniary greed have led to the exploitation of Mother Earth on a large scale. The need to cultivate greater veneration for all forms of life and endorse an ethical lifestyle based on the conservation and preservation of the natural world has become more important than ever. The poet has shown us through a poem that happened years ago in Australia when the English set foot on it.

The poem deconstructs white man's mainstream history and revives the lost voice of the Aboriginals. It questions the elemental presumptions and philosophies of white European civilisation in an apparently subdued tone, concealing the layered touches of irony judiciously crafted by the poet. The poet's matured and objective take on historical events brings alive the repetitive cycles of racial victimisation and genocide and gives the brutal and transient facts a mythic force. The underlying storm, which lingers throughout the poem, intensifies toward the end. The poem is a fitting lament for a whole tribe of men, women, and children whose voices never reached our ears. All these painful thoughts gnaw the poet's heart, and he ends the poem on a sorrowful note, bringing out the intense agony of the soul. The voice clearly rings with pathos but also urges whites to part with their petty racisms and join hands for an ideal state of mutual amity and comity.

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Feminist Perspective as in *Riot* by Shashi Tharoor

Aiswarya R.

Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* is a novel set in and around a riot in India in 1989.The novel focuses on the death of the blond, blue-eyed doctoral student Priscilla Hart during the fanatical violence in the wake of the Babri Masjid upheaval. Priscilla Hart, the central character of the novel, differs from the major female characters of other novels in that while other female characters fought for themselves alone, she fought for the cause and needs of the masses, especially for those women and even men who became victims because of their lack of education, poverty, or a set of prevalent social beliefs. This article explores Hart's thoughts and deeds from a feminist perspective.

Priscilla Hart is a 24-year-old American volunteer working with a population control program in Zalilgarh, 'Help-Us. 'She lived a free life, as that of a bird, pursuing her dreams and ambitions without any constraints. She had her own stand in all matters and never allowed anyone to decide her ways of life. She was a staunch supporter of women's autonomy, liberty, rights, and freedom, and fought against the previously determined narrow gender roles. She was very much involved in developing awareness among women about population control. She first came to India when she was just 15 years old and returned when she was 24 years old and had directly experienced the pathetic predicament of the downtrodden classes.

The deplorable condition of Zalilgarh and its ignorant, illiterate people disturbed her. She tried to wake up those ladies who had not woken up on their own, those who did not want to wake up on their own, or those who still preferred to live their life in the cocoon which surrounded them, to the reality of the world around them. To her utter amazement, she found that women of Zalilgarh still yielded to their menfolk as if they were slaves and took the things they said, for granted. In her Scrapbook (December 5, 1989), Priscilla, as a radical feminist, wrote in verse form:

> Here, I have come to do good. It's true:
> So simple a task in so complex a land.
> I wheel my bicycle into their habits,
> Tell them what's right, what can be done,
> And how to do it. They listen to me,
> so ignorant, so knowing,. . .

They go back to their little huts,
Roll out chapattis for dinner, . . .
Serve their men first, eat what is left.
. . . and then submit unprotected
To the heaving thrust of their protectors,
Abusers, masters. One more baby comes,
To wallow in misery with the rest. (Riot,15-16)

Although she is fully aware of the seriousness of the task that lies ahead of her, she does not step back. She resolves to make a difference in the lives of poor and ignorant women, whose lives have been ruined by religion, age-old traditions, and the male ego. Further, she accepts that these women, although talented, are weak to stand up and fight against the oppressive rule of their traditions. She tries to win their confidence, but she has to pay a heavy price for this. She is beaten and stabbed, and an obscure cause is reported for her death.

Kathy Henry formulates the roles and beliefs of a cultural, radical and individualist feminist thus:

> Cultural feminist accepts the biological and psychological differences between sexes; however they feel that the difference can be bridged to a great extent by embracing women's natural ways i.e. their ways of living and doing things. Libertarian feminists promote women's rights, autonomy, liberty, interests and issues and therefore, naturally campaign on issues such as reproductive rights, violence within domestic partnership, discrimination and sexual violence. Radical feminists attempt to challenge patriarchy, stereotyping, sexual objectification, and oppression. In fact, it is difficult to consider them as completely separate entities because at times they have been found to overlap too. To elaborate issues, like sexual violence, are of common interest for both libertarian and radical feminists. ("What is Feminism" 2)

Priscilla, a radical feminist, earnestly campaigned on several major issues of the modern day, such as women's right to lead a life of their choice, education, and marriage.

> "I want to change the lives of these women; the choices they believe they have. I want to see them one day . . . standing around the well discussing their own lives and hopes and dreams. . . I want to hear them not say, "My husband, he wants lots of children." But rather, "I will decide when I am ready for a child." I want them, instead of planning

to arrange their teenage daughter's marriage, to insist on sending her to high school. I want all this for them and that's why I am here." (Riot, 170)

"I see myself as trying to make women aware of their reproductive rights, not just to control population but to give them a sense of their rights as a whole, their rights as women. Being forced to have babies is just one form of oppression, of subjugation by men. . . .. I want to help these women understand that control of their bodies is a right's issue, it's a health issue, and if they can improve their health and assert their rights, they will have a real future, and they will give their daughters a real future" (Riot 171).

Priscilla has brought forward an instance in which a girl named Sundari was rebuked by her mother-in-law for not delivering a male child. Obviously, she considered girl children as a curse and boy children as a boon. Sundari, who was brought to the hospital with 75% burns, narrated the reason behind her deplorable condition. As she could not bring the expected dowry from her parents and since she had a female child in her womb, her own husband and mother-in-law set her on fire. Priscilla was astounded as to why people can blame a girl for carrying a girl child in her womb; that they did not even have the basic knowledge that the sex of a child is determined by her father.

Priscilla had to face the rage of Fatima Bi's husband, who called a foreigner and threatened to murder her as he considered her responsible for the abortion of Fatima Bi's eighth child. She fails to understand why she has to bear all these threats when all she was doing was striving for the betterment of their condition. Furthermore, Ali, Fatima Bi's husband, shouts: "I decide how my wife conducts her life!" (160). Nevertheless, Priscilla was firm on her stand that "it was his wife's right to have as much information as she needed to decide how to conduct her life" (160).

Priscilla campaigns for a large number of issues concerning domestic violence, reproductive rights, discrimination, and stereotyping, thereby crossing boundaries based on religion, society, class, and culture. Her feminist attitude becomes clear when she constantly stresses that these deprived and suppressed women have the right to live their lives as they please, without being bothered by what the menfolk demands from them.

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Violence, Vulnerability and Victimhood: The Untold/Uncelebrated Stories in Superhero Films

Rhema Suresh and Deepa L.C.

Superhero films are among the most popular genres in the 21st century, as evidenced by the plethora of films made with these superhuman characters in leading roles. They have a rich history that traces back to American comic books in the 1930s. Marvel and DC Comics, two of the oldest and largest producers of children's comics in the US, brought them to the world. The comic books took the US by storm, but these superheroes became household names worldwide through live-action films. They fight crimes, save people from danger, and fight villains, both human and extra-terrestrial. They are so popular that names like Batman, Superman, Spiderman, and Captain America have become part of the cultural fabric of the 21st century.

This genre, for the most part, deals with 'enhanced individuals' and their interactions with the respective communities (Nehrlich and Novotny 225) in which they operate. The films look at the origin narratives of the individual heroes, their inner demons, their relationships with the world, and, as in the case of crossover appearances in superhero teams such as The Justice League and The Avengers, their relationships with other 'enhanced individuals' similar to themselves. The focus of this paper is on something that usually goes unnoticed in these films: the agony and trauma experienced by the innocent civilian population in the wake of the violence unleashed by the superheroes. Comic books do a better job of addressing this, whereas live-action films, such as those set in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), do not necessarily do so. The civilians whose fundamental rights are supposed to be protected by these heroes sometimes die at their hands. They are not always given the chance to frame their narratives about the unexpected violence to which they have been subjected. This is significant because a victim producing the narrative of their suffering is the first step in any human rights campaign (Slaughter 2).

Every human being, by virtue of being human, has an "inherent dignity" (UN General Assembly, 1948). They also have certain "inalienable rights," such as the right to life. Almost all films set in the MCU, from *Iron Man* (2008) to the recently released *Black Panther* (2018), show some form of violence, usually of apocalyptic proportions, being inflicted on large groups of civilians. The heroes always manage to save the day, but not before they cause

some form of damage to the life or property of the civilian population. As the heroes go about fighting supervillains, the idea of 'good' and 'evil' itself becomes murky because many times the superheroes themselves have shades of grey to their characters. There is also the question of the 'ends' and the 'means'. Although these heroes fight for the greater good of humanity and to 'save the world', they end up wreaking havoc upon the very people they are meant to protect. This theme has been explored in films as well as comic books, where the actions of the superheroes make the reader think that they may not be so 'super' anymore. This paper explores how the ideas of vulnerability and victimhood operate when violence is inflicted upon an unsuspecting civilian population that has no stakes in the war, with special reference to films from the *Avengers* franchise.

Throughout the history of the genre, superhero films and comics have had a common theme: the triumph of good over evil. The superheroes that represent 'good" fight criminals, aliens, and villains and protect the people and the planet from these threats. They usually have to go up against powers that are on par with themselves and, sometimes, even stronger. This means that the battles that ensue are of epic proportions. When such enormous battles take place, they are usually in the middle of densely populated areas, putting the civilians in the vicinity at high risk. The battles that take place in these films are against a 'global threat', which is highly reminiscent of the global war against terrorism, which is currently the greatest concern of world nations. This 'war against terror' not only targets terrorists but also results in civilian casualties who are deemed 'collateral damage'. Adriana Cavarero, in her work, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* states:

> "The language of war calls these mistakes 'collateral damage,' accidents deplored but inevitable. Notable for its breadth, the category of 'collateral damage' now extends to cover practically all civilian victims, who, in the overall computation of the dead in Iraq, by now exceed 90 percent. If we observe the scene of massacre from the point of view of the helpless victims rather than that of the warriors…what stands out is horror" (Cavarero 5).

The term "collateral damage" negates the human element and suffering involved in such violence. It is a sweeping term that makes the victims of trauma dispensable. The argument here is that for the greater good, sacrifices will have to be made. Somehow, these lives become less "grievable" (Butler 32). Unfortunately, this "collateral damage" almost always includes women and children who have nothing to do with terrorism. For them, these attacks, whether

by the terrorists/villains or the armed forces/superheroes, are sudden, unexpected, and beyond comprehension.

The randomness of such violence calls to mind Judith Butler's argument about the precarious nature of human lives. In her work, Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence, Butler argues that 9/11 has brought to humanity a renewed recognition of its vulnerability. According to Butler, human lives become precarious because of "mutual vulnerability." All human beings are connected to each other by way of social, cultural, political, and psychological pathways, and this interconnectivity renders us vulnerable. When lives are easily extinguished, randomly, and sometimes leaving no traces behind for mourning, this precarity, which was previously an abstraction in the public imagination, suddenly becomes tangible.

All acts of terror eventually morph into acts of violence against a civilian population. This implies that the war against terror is not very different from terrorism: both leave civilian bodies behind. Violence can be of different kinds. For citizens of a war-torn nation or a region wracked by riots, violence becomes a part of the everyday, embedding itself in the fabric of their daily lives. Such forms of violence are anticipated, and there might even be measures in place for escape. The other form of violence is unexpected and, therefore, all the more deadly. A classic real-life example would be air raids and bombings. Such unexpected violence is the hallmark of most superhero films, in which civilians going about their everyday activities are forced to defend themselves against superhuman or non-human forces. These citizens are left to meekly wait for these saviours, who are not bound by the law of the land, to come and 'save the day'. Examples of this abound in the *Avengers* franchise. In *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012), New York City is attacked by an extra-terrestrial army called the Chitauri that enter the atmosphere through a wormhole. Led by Loki, their plan is to take over the earth. The Avengers team up to fight them off and somehow save the world. Throughout these battle sequences, many civilians do not even get a chance to run for cover. There is a scene where the jet in which the Avengers are travelling crash lands on top of a man who is trying to run away. The scenes that follow show both heroes and villains running amok in the city. The enormous slug-like alien crashes into the side of high-rise buildings and the Hulk crashes into the top storey of an office building and ploughs through the entire floor. Such instances of violence prove how much danger the civilians are exposed to. Although these heroes try their best, they are unable to save everyone. At the end of the film, even though the news channels

mostly praise the Avengers, we can see glimpses of people mourning their friends and paying their respects.

This film, the first in the franchise to feature these superheroes as a team, shows the government's role in generating collateral damage. When the invasion reaches a point where they believe that surrender is inevitable, the World Security Council, which oversees the operations of SHIELD, orders a nuclear strike on Manhattan. Fortunately, Tony Stark's Iron Man manages to divert the missile. This incident shows the alacrity with which government officials contain a crisis by any means possible, even if it means 'de-populating' an entire region populated by millions of inhabitants. This reinforces the idea that loss of civilian life is permissible and that it is just collateral damage.

Another aspect worth noting is the extensive damage to property. Most of these films show widespread destruction, much of which is caused by the superheroes themselves. By the end of *The Avengers*, New York City has suffered millions of dollars' worth of damage. The film ends with all the superheroes going their separate ways, whereas the future of the people affected by this intergalactic war is not shown. Infrastructure is integral to the survival of a population because it provides spaces for shelter and livelihood. When these are taken away, the people are left without a means to sustain themselves. This lack of a sustaining environment denies them agency because they are denied even basic amenities and shelter. This trope is used throughout the franchise. Some more examples can be found in *Thor* (2011), where the Destroyer, sent to kill Thor, decimates an entire town, and in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), where a whole city is blown to smithereens, making even rebuilding impossible. The spectacle of toppling buildings and explosions might be employed to drive home the point that the heroes are battling against insurmountable odds and to emphasise the relief at the end of each film that another crisis has been averted. However, most of these films do not focus on the ordinary people who have to bear the brunt of this damage.

This brings in the concepts of 'vulnerability' and 'helplessness'. According to Adriana Cavarero, vulnerability and helplessness are two different states. By vulnerability, she means the state of being prone to violence, which was proven true by terrorist attacks such as 9/11. However, vulnerability also means that these people have some possibility of saving themselves. Those who are unable to do so are termed helpless. All human beings are vulnerable, only the old, the sick, and children are helpless. This prompts one to question whether the civilians in the superhero films are vulnerable or helpless. Such constant exposure to violence, especially

when they are denied a chance to even run for cover, points more toward helplessness than vulnerability. The scenes from the films are sufficient proof. The humans do not stand a chance; they are utterly helpless.

As Cavarero says, when one looks at events through the eyes of the victims, what stands out is horror. The scale of destruction that occurs in these films is astounding. The self-proclaimed saviours of the world are not held accountable for their actions most of the time. This is sometimes reflected in their cocky attitudes. In one of the films, Iron Man is about to crash into a skyscraper under construction. He asks his AI assistant, "Jarvis, how fast can we buy this building?" This is a constant trope with Tony Stark, who is the wealthiest of all Avengers. He tried to solve most of their problems by throwing money at them. What is the state of citizens whose safety is in the hands of people who think that the solution to most problems can be bought? This indicates that people's lives are cheap enough to be compensated. From the perspective of civilians, it is a truly horrific condition to live in. This brings us to the ideas of victimhood, memory, and trauma. Towards the later films in the franchise, filmmakers have paid attention to the plight of civilians, though not enough to become part of a discourse.

In *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), the villain Ultron attempts to wipe out mankind by picking up a huge landmass (a city in the fictional country, Sokovia), lifting it up high enough, and then dropping it onto the Earth, thereby creating a giant meteor. After a long fight, the Avengers thwart Ultron's plan by evacuating the people on the landmass that is hovering over the Earth and destroying it into a million pieces to prevent it from causing any major damage. However, this was not a foolproof solution, as seen in the next film, *Captain America: Civil War* (2016). The falling debris from the city kills thousands of people, even those who lived far away from the city and thought they would be safe. One of the survivors of the event, Col. Helmut Zemo, returns to avenge the death of his family. In fact, *Captain America: Civil War* addresses the issue of the large-scale destruction caused by these "saviours," and the audience is presented with the narratives of some of the victims who were previously unnamed. For instance, they meet Mrs. Spencer, the mother of Charlie Spencer, who died in the mindless destruction that took place in Sokovia. Mrs. Spencer translates the pain that she felt from a nameless, amorphous entity into something real and tangible that the audience and the Avengers can perceive. When she blames Tony for the loss of her only child, whom she raised into a kind, responsible young man, he has nothing to say. His usually cocky personality is unable to come up with a wisecrack when faced with the silent rage of a grieving mother. Mrs. Spencer

loses her child and her dreams in one fell swoop; but for the Avengers, Charlie is just collateral damage. It is also worth mentioning the tale of the twins Wanda and Pietro Maximoff, who lost their parents in an air raid at the age of ten and were trapped in the rubble for two days with an undetonated nuke staring them in the face. This is the case of most of the victims who have to look death in the face because of the actions of those meant to protect them.

Trauma transcends the scope of linguistic possibilities. It is not always possible for a victim of violence to articulate their suffering (Caruth). This problem is dealt with in the films, where some of the characters channel their suffering into revenge. Col. Zemo and the Maximoff twins initially try to exterminate the Avengers, and Zemo almost succeeds. Zemo's poignant tale gives us a glimpse into the relationship between memory and trauma. His family lived outside the city that was destroyed in Sokovia and were among the hundreds who died in the carnage. The falling debris kills his wife, son, and father. In the film, there is a description of how he had to dig through the rubble for two days before he could find the bodies of his loved ones.

Human beings have the right to mourn and to be mourned. They have the right to a proper burial and to receive funeral rites according to their belief system. The Zemo family's bodies were recovered two days later, by which time they had begun to decompose. The inherent dignity, which is seen as interior to all human beings, was thus negated. Here, Col. Zemo's right to mourn his family members and to give them a timely burial was taken away. A similar incident occurs in *Iron Man 3* (2013), where the victims of a high-intensity bomb blast are vaporised. All that remains of them are shadows of the bodies in their final positions. These bodies no longer exist, denying the families of the victims the chance to mourn.

Throughout the film, Zemo is shown listening to his wife over the phone. At first, the audience gets the impression that he is having a conversation; however, later, we understand that he is listening to her final message on his voicemail, where she signs off with the words, "I'm going to bed. I love you". We also hear snippets of conversations about his son's upcoming birthday party and how he is waiting for his father to come home with the X-box that was promised to him. These become remnants of dreams for a future that will never come. The shadows of the vaporised bodies and Mrs. Zemo's disembodied voice become ghostly presences in the landscape of these films. The physical objects which are usually associated with memory do not exist in these cases. This certainly brings no solace to the living. Zemo's memories are not bound to a physical location because their house and everything around it

has been decimated. In the case of the blast victims, they literally vanished from the face of the earth. Thus, mourning and memory also become problematic as the survivors no longer have the opportunity to process their loss.

The horrific conditions of unanticipated violence show the cool detachment of the Avengers in stark contrast to the lasting damage that must be borne by the victims. The Avengers are, of course, concerned about the safety of the civilians, but only until the fight is over. As soon as the day is saved, they retreat to their respective hideouts, mansions, or realms via sports cars or intergalactic pathways. The worst they have to face are angry bureaucrats and the media. They always live to fight another day, unlike the dead bodies that are left in their wake.

The suddenness of the violence creates a state of possible anxiety and fear. Civilians suffer loss of life and property as they go about their business or simply because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, such as Charlie Spencer in Sokovia. Suddenly, a normal day turns into a nightmare. The randomness of the disaster is the actual horror, rather than the disaster itself. This anxiety about what might happen feeds into their vulnerability. Suddenly, the idea of large-scale destruction and violence becomes part of public discourse and ossifies into embedded violence because the fear that it might happen is as brutal as the event itself. And in the face of such an event, it becomes painfully obvious to the people that their vulnerability has morphed into a fatal helplessness.

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Book Review

Exchanges with Thinker, Rizio Yohannan Raj, Gnosis: New Delhi, 2013.

Jaydeep Sarangi

Those who have heard of the therapeutic effects of poetry but have not experienced it so far are recommended to read Rizio Yohannan Raj's latest collection, *Exchanges with the Thinker*. Most of the poems in this fascinating collection will touch your heart. As they appeal to our senses, we unwittingly follow a call from within. We soon become part of their poetic process, and together, the poet and the reader move on. The book is titled after the eponymous poem, which was written before Rodin's 'Thinker in France'. Thinking here is about the process of gathering the courage to cross the border and identifying with 'the other'.

Here, an indomitable gusto turns the key to a chamber of elevated thoughts. Images are woven one into another with rare brilliance and effortlessness. Rizio does not find it difficult to articulate her poetic matter into a corpus that beautifully invites her reader's interest. No matter what we touch and we wish to know about, we simply end up in the enigma that her words forge. When poets engage themselves with such playful mystery of things, we end to begin reading again. Then, poetry invests life into dry objects and ideas.

The beauty of a poem is born out of the rich sensibility of the mind; a fine poem is a rose that gives the feeling that it holds something more to open, even as it blooms petal-by-petal before the reader. A powerful poetic sensibility enlivens even rusty metals and bricks; such imagination is like an intoxicating drop of wine that fuels the flame of creation. The lyrical moment of ecstasy follows. It transmits a synthesising energy to the reader and brings order out of the disproportionate and disorderly time before the creative moment. The stationed aspirations of the reader are pushed forward, and the poet makes the best use of them with her available armour. All of this is true for this collection.

As we move from one poem to another in *Exchanges with the Thinker*, we enjoy a feast of ideas, and Rizio's idiom turns into a multi-layered discourse.

This wordsmith has deep-seated faith in the wheel of justice, which may have gotten stuck for a while, leading to the oppression of the powerless, but will turn again to re-establish a just society. In time, and with sufficient effort.

At times, she writes about the potential and magic and charm of women:

I am a woman; I posses

occult powers to breathe life

into your old coffers of whim. ('Wind', 24)

At other times, what concerns her is the creative act itself, which lasts for only a brief moment. Impressions leave their shadows behind. We are all aware of this fleeting habit of beauty. Yet, the mind is never satisfied with what it looks for. Now, the *carpe diem* motto embraces the poet and leaves her sad with what is not:

Each time roses come

I tell them to stay.

They linger awhile

in a lithe summer dance. ('Each Time', 50)

"Poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement." says, Christopher Fry. Rizio unfolds her rich casket of images and symbols and the effect is amazement. No matter how comprehensive one's description aspired to be, there is always a poem that doesn't quite fit the given parameters. This fuzzy departure from all predictable sets enriches this poetry with a touch of mystery and uncertainty. Possibly, that holds the key to anything beautiful, and that is why poetry is man's delight. For Rizio, poetry summons imagery, provokes thought, arouses emotion and promotes beauty. It is a painting with words:

I am a listener.

people come to me with tales

tales

they make me blush,

when they show me my furies. ('Listener I', 109)

Rizio has the capacity to transcend the purely personal and embrace the non-personal and finally merge with it. While her quest for identity makes her a confessional poet, many of her poems express deep sympathy for bleeding hearts. In contemporary literature by women, the feminine voice largely revolves around a claim for perfect freedom in personal matters, chiefly in relation to love, heterogeneous relationships, and sex. Rizio has some poems on

these issues and she is comfortable dealing with likeminded concerns. There is an all-pervasive sense of hurt and languor throughout. However, love is not a Narcissus here; her mode of expression ventilates the intensity of her varied experiences and webs of thoughts. She is not a poet of wishful nostalgia. Rizio departs from the line of Kamala Das' nostalgia for the old house and for her grandmother, and makes an idiom of her own. For her, life holds a promise of connection between the outer world and the self. The poems reach across to that specific space where we all reach when we pause and reflect on what our lives mean. All that surrounds us is ready for the adventure and trust that would accompany us on our journey. The searchlight she turns on herself is one that almost all of us shine upon ourselves at one time or another. Rizio is an engaging read whose bold, honest voice and dignified cadence has re-energized Indian poetry in English with the essential vitamins. The range of her images is as extensive as her subject matter. Natural imagery obviously dominates this poetry collection, but among these images too, she attains considerable depth, breadth, and subtle variety. Rizio's immaculate grip over her medium is definitely commendable as it enables her to shift from one realm of human experience to another so seamlessly and effortlessly. She shows us things from new perspectives. Her poems engage us through the multifarious vistas of sensations and break the constructed stereotype, 'biology is destiny'.

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