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Unmasking the Power of Humour: A Critical Examination of Gender Norms through Khushwant Singh's Jokes

Annu K. Jose & K. Balakrishnan

Gender studies as a field of critical study is keen on the issues related to gender differences and the associated themes of oppression. However, the role played by humour in maintaining the gender hierarchy has not been unearthed to the full extent. Humour and the related areas of knowledge like comics, jokes and cartoons were taken as innocent modes of entertainment, devoid of any hidden agenda. Are jokes so innocent? There are underlying concepts behind every bit of laughter that jokes create; they may be some age-old practice, a superstition, a custom or a social construct. In connection with issues of gender, there is a large corpus of practices and beliefs that rule the scene.

The Indian genre of humour is rich with Birbal stories, Tenali Raman stories, Sardarji jokes and so on. Khushwant Singh is a prominent figure in the field of Sardarji jokes and on-the-face humour. He directed his humour towards all sections of society, irrespective of their position, economic status, ethnicity or gender. Being a multifaceted personality, he has tried his hands at everything that came his way. So his humour has a wide range, and he has got something for everyone. Though famous for his novel *Train to Pakistan*, he has a large number of joke books to his credit. The jokes he has published in the author's columns in *The Hindustan Times* and *The Tribune* were compiled and printed as joke books.

Michael Billig in his prominent text *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*, etches out a connection between the role of humour and social order concerning gender roles. He gives special attention towards the element of ridicule, which he claims is significant in enforcing the social order. Humour is enjoyed by people beyond any difference, be it in age, knowledge, gender or nationality. Through the aspect of placing one superior over another while delivering a joke, laughter is evoked at the expense of the weakness or inferiority of another person.

When we analyse jokes seriously in the light of their role in maintaining social order, we can see a hitherto neglected face of humour. Some of the selected jokes from Khushwant Singh's *Joke Book VI* can be analysed critically to understand how they define gender roles or assume certain gender identities. This will help us to know in detail about humour related to gender issues and understand how gender is constructed through humour. Teasing, harassment

and ridicule were known as tools for maintaining and preserving hierarchical power structures. In the field of humour also we come across the same tools being employed to maintain a hegemonic structure about gender. Even when it comes to the readers or the audience, these jokes act as a warning that they too can be butts of jokes if they in any way deviate from the existing system. They are in danger of being grouped with those put on ridicule if they are found not enjoying these jokes.

In her essay "The Role of Humour in the Social Construction of Gender," Marlene Mackie asserts that "humour plays a significant part in the social construction of gender". She is concerned about the conservative role of humour in maintaining patriarchal hegemony. Humour preserves socially constructed beliefs about the various gender roles and identities. Humour acts like an ideological apparatus in reinforcing gender identities. According to Mackie, since humour generally affirms societal standards, its key function is the ideological buttress of the patriarchal status quo.

To ridicule means "to mock, to show the absurdity of, to make fun of, belittle, taunt or tease" (Smith 77). More specifically, it signifies "the act of making fun of some aspect of another [which] involves a combination of humour and degradation and encompasses a range of activities like teasing, sarcasm, and ritualised insults" (Wooten 188-189). The systemic thoughts on ridicule first emerge in the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* and *The Treatise on Human Nature*. As a philosopher whose ideas on humour demarcate the classical and modern theories of humour, Hobbes "puts ridicule at the psychological core of humour" (Billig 50). He famously defines laughter as "nothing less but sudden Glory arising from a sudden conception of some Eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the Infirmity of others, or with our own formerly" (Hobbes, Treatise 65-66; Leviathan 38). Hobbes' debates about laughter and humour develop what is now recognised as the superiority theory of humour, according to which "when something evokes laughter, it is by revealing someone's inferiority to the person laughing" (Morreall 7).

Ridicule's corrective function becomes the subject of book-length research in Michael Billig's *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (2005). As a prominent work in the emergent field of critical humour studies, Billig's book furthers previous claims about the punitive aspects of ridicule regarding social norms. Billig contends that through a mechanism which involves embarrassment, humour, in the form of ridicule, occupies a universal role in maintaining the social order. "Without the possibility of laughter," he asserts, "serious

social life could not be sustained" (200). Billig connects the social corrective aspect of humour to social norms and the maintenance of social order in general.

In *Laughter and Ridicule*, Billig stages an argument for what he regards as the largely overlooked, yet central, the role of ridicule—as a "form" or "aspect" of humour (22, 196, 200)—in social life. This vital role, he contends, has been "textually repressed" in prevalent popular and academic psychological studies of humour. Such studies, Billig shows, manifest what he deems and thoroughly critiques as "ideological positivism," i.e., an ideologically motivated system of demarcating humour into desired positives and ignored negatives throughout social sciences (10- 11). Billig contextualises and critically re-reads the three most famous humour theories of superiority, incongruity and relief (or release) alongside Bergson and Freud, highlighting these writers' treatment of ridicule. Billig's major concern is the relation between humour and serious life, and "why humour is to be found universally in all cultures" (5). Emphasizing research that reveals the unnaturalness and rhetoricalness of laughter and humour, and especially building upon the humour and sociological theories of Bergson, Freud, and Goffman, Billig proposes that humour, in the form of ridicule, plays a universal function in maintaining the social order. He explains the disciplinarity function of ridicule as follows: The (fear/prospect of the) ridicule typically resulting from embarrassing social situations—by making (or threatening to make) us the object of others' laughter—acts as a control strategy that causes our conformity to societal norms (201-202).

Following Billig, we can assume the universal role of ridicule—as a form or aspect of humour—in maintaining social order, we can expect that in a society certain ridicule-based mainstream gender humour is directed toward sustaining its gender order as a significant example of a social order loaded with norms and values. In other words, we can expect certain order-maintaining mainstream gender humour to be formed around gender meanings in that society. The mechanism of such ridiculing of gender humour concerning gender norms—following Billig's main argument —may be outlined as follows. Femininity and masculinity are inherently relational, in that they find meaning in contrast to each other.

The panoptic aspect and the extent of policing hidden behind humour can be understood from the joke titled 'Instant Pregnancy' narrated by Khushwant Singh.

Banto boarded a crowded bus. Finding it difficult to bear the jolts, she requested a passenger to give up his seat to her because she was pregnant. The gentleman stood up and offered his seat to her. Standing by her side, he carefully examined her anatomy and felt cheated. He asked, '*Bahenji*, when did you become pregnant?'. 'Only this morning,' replied Banto (88).

Here we get elements of gender policing, where there is a conscious search for normative gender expressions on an individual who is found to be deviating from the expected appearance or behaviour. How is it possible to address a person as a ' gentleman' when he is described as keenly observing the anatomy of a lady in front of him? There are doubts regarding the structure of a society that places such audacity on men to encounter women in public about the veracity of their pregnancy. Keeping the element of humour at bay this joke has serious gender connotations that are to be brought out and discussed.

There is serious confusion regarding the power of decision-making in a marital bond, where often the superiority is attributed to the male counterpart. However, in the joke titled 'Two or Three', there is a humorous conclusion to the situation where the man's attempt to be the final word is overturned by the wife's clever retort.

> Banta and his newly married bride Banto were visiting friends when the topic of children came up.
>
> The bride said she wanted three children, while the young husband said two would be enough for him.
>
> They discussed this discrepancy for a few minutes until Banta thought he'd put an end to things by boldly saying, 'After our second child, I will just have a vasectomy.'
>
> Without a moment's hesitation, the bride retorted, ' Well, I hope you will love the third one as if it is your own' (126).

The man's comment about undertaking vasectomy does not end the issue as his patriarchal mind believed. The girl has got her options, though the social norms conserved by the element of ridicule do not keep it acceptable or appropriate.

Jokes often play in positively and negatively reinforcing gender roles. Certain jokes tend to address the audience and warn them to refrain from some sort of action to escape being butts of laughter, as in 'Obedient Daddy'.

A father of five came home with a toy, summoned his children and asked which one of them should be given the present.

'Who is the most obedient, never talks back to mother and does everything he or she is told?' he enquired.

There was a silence, and then a chorus of voices: 'You play with it, Daddy!' (127).

Such gender humour not only sustains gender norms but also tends to internalise such norms in social agents. The people who enjoy these jokes would police and restrain their behaviour. They are exposed to some social pressure and are hence likely to monitor and restrain their gender behaviour in fear of similar castigation.

Mainstream gender humour feeds on hegemonic gender norms. There are certain roles associated with gender identities. Some chores are assigned to women, while others for men. 'Dowry Girl' presents this situation.

Girl's father: 'My daughter sings so well that you will forget to listen to tape recorders and stereos after you hear her. She dances so superbly that once you see her dancing, you will stop watching TV and the VCR. And she washes clothes better than any washing machine.'

Boy's father: ' But I have already accepted your daughter's hand for my son. So why are you telling me all this?'

Girl's father: 'So that you do not ask for these items as part of her dowry' (129).

This joke achieves gender disciplining by securing laughter in support of the humour's stated or implied gender ideology. Here, the rhetorical side of humour becomes particularly foregrounded. The laughing audience's response approves the gendered stance embedded in the humour-as-rhetoric and simultaneously fulfils its norm-reinforcing aspect.

This type of gender humour, in its claim to approving laughter, apparently appeals to fear of ridicule by exerting the social pressure to laugh. Mainstream gender humour taps into hegemonic gender norms, and consequently enjoys the potential or actual support of prevalent gender norm circles. This could also mean the probable rhetorical success of such humour in eliciting laughter (of approval) from the majority of its audience. Billig's emphasis on our fearing "the prospect of ridicule and embarrassment" (202,) is pertinent here. It is no surprise

if, particularly in the presence of others, we may laugh or smile at humour we find unfunny or supportive of ideas incompatible with our worldviews. As McCann, Plummer and Minichiello note, while commenting on the policing capacity of humour in male-male relationships, "[t]o be part of the peer group, to get the joke, to be accepted, are all powerful motivators. Like the panopticon, humour has an ongoing self-policing aspect: men continue to partake in its controlling mechanism to remain in humour's embrace" (515). One's laughing at gender humour despite their desire to oppose it can therefore ensure that no one questions their silence. However, the laughter, whether they like it or not, simultaneously reveals one's—even if reluctant or enforced—conformance to the gender norms stated or implied in the humour.

This approving laughter by the audience could be motivated in one or a combination of three ways related to fear of ridicule. We may fear that others might think that we lack a sense of humour, an accusation which could mean that we "lack a vital human quality" (Billig 11). On the other hand, not laughing at a joke could suggest that the receiver is simply not getting the joke in the first place. Therefore, a person's laughing at mainstream gender humour despite their liking it could imply that they intend to show (off) their success in passing what we can call a public or interpersonal test in gender basics. Finally, expressing dislike upon hearing a joke could signal the beginning of an argument.

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When Man Embraces the Machine: Post-humanist Echoes in *Android Kunjappan Version 5.25*

Aswathy Mani

Post-humanism is a complex and evolving intellectual movement that challenges traditional conceptions of what it means to be human. At its core, post-humanism questions the boundaries and limitations we have historically ascribed to human existence and explores the transformative impact of emerging thoughts on our understanding of humanity. It posits a future in which the human condition is no longer defined solely by our biological and cognitive attributes but is profoundly influenced by our relationship with technology, artificial intelligence, and the interconnected world.

This abstract concept blurs the lines between human and non-human, organic and synthetic, offering a radical re-imagining of our place in the ever-evolving tapestry of existence. In this exploration of post-humanism, we delve into the philosophical, ethical, and cultural dimensions of this paradigm shift that challenges our very notions of identity, agency, and the future of our species.

Cybernetic art, sci-fi literature, films and TV shows, electronic music, social media, online communities, transhumanist identity, virtual reality games, smart clothing etc. are examples which demonstrate how post-humanism has permeated various aspects of culture, challenging our understanding of the human experience in a technologically driven world. It encourages us to question the boundaries of what it means to be human and how culture adapts to these evolving notions.

In this era with rapid technological advancements and growing fascination with artificial intelligence and robotics, the 2019 Malayalam film *Android Kunjappan Version 5.25* emerges as a thought-provoking narrative that delves into the depths of post-humanism. The movie explores the profound post-humanist echoes present within the film, examining how it challenges conventional notions of humanity, raises ethical dilemmas and offers poignant commentary on the ever-evolving relationship between technology and society.

The Malayalam science-fiction comedy- drama movie *Android Kunjappan Version 5.25* was directed by Ratheesh Radhakrishnan Poduval and was produced by Santhosh T Kuruvila. The national award-winning actor Suraj Venjaramood, Soubin Shahir, Kendy Zirdo,

and Saiju Kurup played the lead roles in the film. The film can be described as a futuristic film that prepared the audience to think. The film was released in 2019 and earned several awards.

The plot intricately weaves a tale of human-robot interaction. The film's premise revolves around an aging man, Bhaskara Poduval, who, due to his son's absence, seeks the companionship of a humanoid robot, Kunjappan Version 5.25. The story of the old man and his son (Subramanian also known as Chupan) who is a mechanical engineer, living in Payyanur takes a twist when the son leaves his father to the care of home maids to join his new job in Russia. This takes the story forward resulting in the son's return and introduction of the Android machine which gradually becomes the old man's perfect caretaker.

Initially, Kunjappan is introduced as a mere household assistant, but as the story unfolds, the android's character transforms into a vessel for exploring profound post-humanist themes.

The focal objective of this paper is to discuss the dilemmas of the post-human world when technology and life hold hands. Post-humanist perspective challenges traditional boundaries between humans and technology, emphasizing the blurring of these distinctions. It raises questions about what it means to be human in an increasingly technologically driven world. Android Kunjappan's portrayal exemplifies these post-humanist ideals as it straddles the line between machine and human, sparking contemplation about the nature of humanity. The humanoid itself shows how a human and a machine co-exist.

Within the narrative, Android Kunjappan is not just a machine; he becomes a character who defies easy classification. His evolving relationship with Bhaskara Poduval highlights how technology can disrupt and reshape human emotions. The android's desires, quirks, and the affection he receives from Bhaskara challenge the conventional definition of human relationships.

The introduction of Android in the village shows the naïve, but curious minds of commoners about technological gadgets. The machine becomes the talk of the village, it is given an identity, and the boundary between man and machine is seen blurred here. The villagers talk to it, take care of it and even visit it as a guest.

The ignorance of the commoners is evident through various scenes like one in the temple when they support the priest in stopping Android from entering the temple saying it is a foreigner and not a Hindu. The old man replies by saying it is made by his son, so it is a Hindu. At once, the machine switches on its screen and puts up the pictures of Hindu Gods and starts chanting

Sanskrit verses. Such scenes make viewers reflect and rethink the established notions in society.

With the arrival of the Android, Poduval learns new technological aspects like reading the newspaper online, video calls, online bill payments, etc. There is yet another scene in the film which pictures the old man taking the Android to the tailor to get clothes stitched for it. Another heart-touching scene occurs when Bhaskara Poduval wipes off the raindrops on the head of the Android endearingly.

The following conversation between Poduval and his nephew Prasanan brings out the innocence of the old man who cannot comprehend technology and advancements in society.

Prasanan: Hi Uncle! Where did you go?

Bhaskara Poduval: To the Astrologer.

Prasanan: Why?

Bhaskara Poduval: Got his horoscope checked. Got a sanctified amulet for him... to ward off the evil eye. Let's go.

Prasanan: Is everything else...alright? (Android Kunjappan, 2019, 1:26:13-1:26:37)

The film pictures a conflict between Science and the psyche of individuals. It skilfully raises ethical questions about the use of artificial intelligence and robotics in caregiving and companionship. It invites viewers to ponder the implications of forming deep emotional bonds with machines and the ethical responsibilities that come with it. These dilemmas mirror real-world concerns as technology increasingly becomes integrated into our lives.

The blurring of human-robot boundaries is evident in the evolving dynamics between characters. Symbolism and metaphors further accentuate this theme, making viewers contemplate the consequences of such technological advancements. The futuristic technology depicted in the film is not just science fiction; it offers a glimpse into a possible future.

The following conversation quoted between the robot and Bhaskara Poduval brings out the attempt of the makers of the film to bring out the difference between a human and a machine. Android: One can erase me. My memory could be deleted (*Android Kunjappan*, 2019, 1:27:42-1:27:43).

The film's portrayal of robotics and AI prompts us to consider how these advancements could impact our own society. It serves as a cautionary tale while also showcasing the potential benefits of such technology.

This is indeed answered in the film when Pothuval leaves home with the android machine when he came to know that his son is going to take the Android away from him. The father fails to understand that the Android is only a human-made machine that is programmed to perform in a particular way. Later, he views his own son being attacked by the robot following a system failure.

Towards the end there is a scene in the film where the old man hallucinate his son's head in a helmet as the android and calls it affectionately 'Kunjappaa' like how all the villagers addressed the robot. The film addressed this threat that technology holds for the old and naive. It gives a critical analysis of scientific advancements and at the same time raises concerns over certain aspects when machines completely take over human action. The film thus ends on a sceptical note, leaving the audience to reason and figure out a possible solution to such technological interventions in society.

Android Kunjappan Version 5.25 is a cinematic masterpiece that embodies the spirit of post-humanism. Through its portrayal of Android and the intricate narrative, it challenges conventional boundaries between humans and technology. The film's exploration of ethical dilemmas and its insightful commentary on the impact of technology on society invite viewers to reflect on the profound questions posed by post-humanism.

As our world becomes increasingly intertwined with technology, *Android Kunjappan Version 5.25* serves as a powerful reminder of the complex relationship between humans and machines. It calls for a nuanced understanding of the post-humanist perspective, encouraging us to embrace the possibilities of the future while being vigilant about the ethical and moral implications of our technological choices. The film is thus, a testament to the enduring relevance of post-humanist discourse in our ever-evolving world.

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Cultural Marginalization and Resistance of Dalit Christians in *Karikkottakari*

Bibiya Joseph

The structural abuse through the caste system pushed the Dalits to the lower end of the social hierarchy. It removed them from the upper caste history, which often gets the authentic status. The arrival of missionaries as a part of the colonial agenda brought significant changes to Kerala's social, political and cultural situation. Their quest for higher social status urged them to choose a religion that guaranteed a better and equal social position. However, they could not access the complete inclusion, resulting in an identity crisis of not being there and here. The aim of this paper is to study the cultural marginalisation and quest for identity of Dalit Christians, more specifically Pulaya Christians, in the novel *Karikkottakkari* written by Vinoy Thomas. This paper also attempts to discuss how Christianity became an oppositional force against the caste system, offering a space for resistance while being an oppressing power. It also looks into the people's resistance against the caste hierarchies through their everyday lives.

Dalit community was restricted to the marginalised spaces of society, and conversion offered them not spiritual but material comfort. They were looking for their metaphorical Canan, a space where they could hope for upward mobility, unlike the position they had. They identified with a 'suffering' and 'outcast' God, born as human and participated in their pain. Christianity rendered comfort and justified their humiliations and sacrifices by promising a different afterlife. Spirituality, for them, gave a hope of social restructuring. Though Christianity provided an individual sense of upliftment, it could not decipher the code of casteism that bound the society. It functioned as an oppositional force while, at the same time, the ghost of caste permeated through the religion that promised 'one God for all'.

The Malabar migration, a significant historical process in Kerala, began in the early decades of the twentieth century and lasted till the 1980s. There was an influx of migrants from the State of Travancore to Malabar, which was part of the Madras Presidency. Malabar district comprised the present-day districts of Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Malappuram, and parts of Palakkad. Karikkottakkari is a town in the Kannur district of Kerala where several migrant Dalit Christians live. Vinoy Thomas sets his novel in Karikkottakkari in the background of the Malabar Migration. The word *kari* carries different meanings, a significant

one being black, indicating the colour and race of the people. The second *kari,* according to Thomas, means farmland. *Shabdatharavali* also defines it as a piece of land left uncultivated for a long time. Thomas interprets the first *kari* as a representation of ancient life and the subsequent one as denoting farming (*Pachakkullavar* 3). The name of the place itself signifies the place as a black fort with rocky, uncultivated land. Thomas describes the land as made of black laterite rocks that are barren and difficult to live.

In the novel *Karikkottakkari*, we see an entire village of people removed and marginalised culturally, constructing a space for themselves. At a time when the flow of migrants from Travancore was waning, and the entire process of Malabar Migration was reaching a halt, Father Nicholas walked in hoping for a place that overflowed with honey and milk for a group of people who did not even have access to fundamental rights let alone food to satiate their hunger. He purchased the land and brought the Pulayas to Karikkottakkari, an abandoned and unwanted area of rocky and barren land that never passed as prosperous in the eyes of the other upper-caste Christians. He took in only people ready to baptise and call Christ their God. They evolved into a community with a distinct culture, less sophisticated and not at all elite, but something that reminds them of their history and roots. The people inhabiting Karikkottakkari were not economically marginalised; each family was given three acres of land. However, even after acquiring the agency in terms of financial aspect, they could never overcome the cultural marginalisation they faced. According to Gopal Guru, Dalit symbols are taken away and hidden in relatively insignificant spaces in society. Karikkottakkari is such a space but offers voice and agency to a group of people otherwise swept away from the mainstream. They form a culture different from the dominant upper-caste Christians. Christianity attempted to give them agency in society and left them in a liminal space. They are at a point of transition, at the threshold of a new religion and culture, unacquainted. As Victor Turner says, liminality is an interstructural position if we consider our society a "structure of positions" (93). It is the paradoxical location of being in between or betwixt but not belonging anywhere in particular. The disciplining force of this chaotic space is Father Nicholas and his influence on people who considered him the "Saint of Exodus" (*Karikkottakkari* 68).

The place Karikkottakkari is a subaltern counterpublic, which according to Nancy Fraser, are discursive areas "that develop in parallel to the official public spheres and where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs". She coined the term from

Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'subaltern' and 'Rita Felski's idea of counterpublic. Habermas put forth the concept of the "public sphere' which is the "space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction" (Fraser 110). It is a site for producing and discussing matters concerning the citizens.

At another level, it designed a specific kind of discursive interaction. Here, the public sphere connoted an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters. The discussion was to be open and accessible to all; merely private interests were inadmissible, inequalities of status were to be bracketed, and discussants were to be deliberate as peers. (Fraser 113)

However, this concept is far from ideal as it does not acknowledge the exclusions in the social structure. The inequalities are not eliminated, which stops the marginalised section from becoming equal social beings. Moreover, other competing counterpublics addressed and represented the class and gender realities. At this point, the subaltern counterpublic gets its significance as a multiplicity of public spheres is preferable to a single public sphere. The subaltern counterpublics "emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics; they help expand discursive space" (Fraser 124). These subaltern counterpublics find prominence in stratified societies where exclusions occur in multiple ways.

The place Malom, inhabited by upper-caste Christians and where Iranimos was born, looked down on the people of Karikkottakkari. To the inhabitants of Karikkottakkari and the outcastes like Iranimos, this is a place away from the dominant community where they can exist without concern about their caste position. It was a space away from the one shared by the dominant castes. "No one came in the name of power. The land of black people. No insult in the name of caste. No mockery in the name of colour" (Thomas 71).

Professor T M Yesudasan, in his essay "Towards a Prologue of Dalit Studies", writes about reclaiming the Dalit sense of self and retrieving their lost pride and honour to understand the current problems and attain a more humane future. Pulaya Christians in Karikkottakkari struggle to return to their roots and amalgamate their distinct yet shared religious identities. When Bindhu says to Iranimos, "Do you know Ittuchettayi, every human being in Karikkottakkari wishes to be a Pulaya again", she becomes the voice of every Pulaya Christian in Karikkottakkari. She does not want to be labelled as a new Christian as she hopes to live in her Pulaya identity.

The people of Karikkottakkari experience and embrace their identity in distinct ways. Chanchan Valliyachan is a proud Pulayan who threw away the scapular that Nicholas gave him as he realised that Christianity was slowly finding its place among his race and people. He was disappointed that his people gave up the rituals and traditions of their ancestors. Seban, Bindhu and Iranimos want to reclaim their Pulaya self and constantly search for their erased identity for different reasons. Seban wanted to secure a government job while Iranimos searched for an answer for his paternity and caste origin. Seban's father, Kunjettan, wants to live and die in his Christian identity. Kunjettan hopes to die beneath the cross of Karikkottakkri because it is the only place that accepts him as a human being. Most people in Karikkottakkari stay in their Christian identity and follow the religion and its rituals for Father Nicholas. Their loyalty does not lie with the religion but with the man who provided them material comforts, social acceptability and spiritual guidance. When Seban's mother, Theyyamma, learns how he became a Pulayan again, she worries Father Nicholas might let them out of the religion.

When Iranimos started teaching history in the college, which was started by Father Nicholas in Karikkottakkari, he asked them to detail their history and the life lived by their forefathers. The students came up with stories every day that were never recorded or talked about earlier. The attempt here is to reclaim their identity and history and encourage them to return to the Dalit consciousness. The elders of Karikkottakkari, like Kunjettan, regard their life in Christianity as safe because they feel protected from the evils of caste experiences they lived through while in Travancore. However, the later generations in Karikkottakkari realise that the outside world is still unsympathetic and cruel to them, and their only possession is their caste identity. They live a double life and go through an identity crisis throughout their life.

This is a fort, a fort made out of temptations by Christianity. We feel that our lives are safe when we live like the elders here. But there is no escape from here. I could have proudly said I am a Pulaya if I had not been converted. I am tired of this double life I am living. I want to escape (Thomas 84).

Being pushed to the fringes forces one to resist oppression and find a way to exist and survive in society. Pulaya Christians in Karikkottakkari do not organise any protests or participate in revolutionary activities to question the caste consciousness among the upper caste Christians. However, the subtle, intentional and unintentional struggles they go through every day in a repressive setting count as an act of resistance. The attempt to reclaim their Pulaya identity and refusal to live an enslaved life is a form of resistance. Chanchan Valliyachan

is a prophet of everyday resistance, questioning and criticising the religion and the people who left their traditions. Pulayas, also called Cheramars, were the first rulers of Kerala. Chanchan Vallyachan recounts that 'Keralam' originated from the word 'Cheralam'. They were the first rulers of the place. He says a person will not be enslaved if he is brave enough to resist those in power. James C Scott distinguishes between two types of resistance as follows:

> Real resistance, it is argued, is (a) organised, systematic, and cooperative, (b) principled or selfless, (c) has revolutionary consequences, and/or (d) embodies ideas or intentions that negate the basis of domination itself. Token, incidental, or epiphenomenal activities, by contrast, are (a) unorganised, unsystematic, and individual, (b) opportunistic and self-indulgent, (c) have no revolutionary consequences, and/or (d) imply, in their intention or meaning, an accommodation with the system of domination. (Scott 292)

Resistance is an everyday activity, and Scott maintains that by focusing on visible historical 'events' such as organised rebellions or collective action, subtle, yet powerful forms of 'everyday resistance' are often overlooked. It involves informal and, at times, invisible acts of noncompliance, subversion and resistance of the subjugated people against different forms of domination and expression. Every cultural activity of the people of Karikkottakkari becomes an act of resistance in this sense. Even after the appeals and teachings of Father Nicholas, they still indulged in black magic and other rituals that Christianity considers as sin. The existence of a place like Karikkottakkari for Pulaya Christians itself exhibits the caste consciousness of the upper caste Christians. Anything that questions the dominant and the powerful is a counter-narrative. Karikkottakkari and the people inhabiting there are, in a way, countering the Christian narrative of the community being caste inclusive.

Iranimos had been called a 'Karikkottakkarikkaran' since the day he was baptised, alluding to his dark colour, curly hair and full lips. His first encounter with the people of Karikkottakkari was during a tug-of-war competition held at Devamatha Church ground. Their physical appearance, strength, and the song they sang stuck with him, and he felt a sense of belonging to the people. The song, which he names *pannippattu*, or the pig song, becomes integral in his act of resistance to the family members who fake and take pride in their 'upper caste' origin. Iranimos singing the pig song at the twenty-eighth Adhikarathil family meeting exhibits how the literature of resistance becomes the voice of the marginalised and the oppressed. His visits to the place, even after being told not to, can be considered a method of resistance against the caste consciousness of the Adhikarathil family. Being called a 'Pulayan'

by his grandfather was an acknowledgement of identity for him, which led him to walk out of his family, leaving all the privileges to search for his roots.

Barbara Harlow asserts that resistance is an act, or a set of acts, that rids people of their oppressors and resistance literature functions as the voice of the 'other', the silenced, which tries to destroy the hierarchies of power and bring the focus to the people exiled to the lower levels of the social structure. It awakens the people from his/her life of silence and servitude and also the social consciousness of its people towards the inequality and exploitation meted out by the oppressors. Karikkottakkari has a rich culture with its own songs, rituals, and festivals. Their songs align with their lived experience in their native land and their life in Karikkottakkari. They sing about strong, fierce pigs that terrify even an elephant, wolf or snake, which refers to their own lives. These songs are not sophisticated and disciplined like that of the upper-caste Christians.

The people of Karikkottakkari live a life of resistance against the systemic oppression of the caste system, from which they desperately tried to escape and failed. Their rationale behind the conversion was not to remove their Dalit identity but an attempt to obtain social, cultural and economic betterment. The Dalit Christian life depicted in *Karikkottakkari* depends entirely on returning to their Dalit consciousness. Though first-generation migrants are comfortable with the safety provided by the new religion that adopted, modified, and disciplined them, the later generations hope and strive to reclaim the past. Though Christianity lies outside the caste system, it enables the practice within itself to create a hostile environment for the already marginalised people. Thomas's novel criticises this approach and calls attention to the marginalisation faced by the Dalit Christian community in the religion.

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Breaking Boundaries: Belligerent Grasp of Cultural Hegemony and Women's Agency in *The God of Small Things* and *Shuggie Bain*

Devika Dileep

Culture encompasses the shared beliefs, ethics, ethnicities, and norms that shape the identity of a society. However, within the intricate tapestry of cultures worldwide, there often exists a pervasive force known as the 'cultural hegemony' a concept developed by Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. It refers to the dominant influence and control exerted by one culture's ideologies and concocted standards over others, often to the detriment of alternative cultural perspectives. Cultural principles, like gender hegemony, profoundly impact societal structures and individual lives, shaping gender performativity and temporality.

Literature is an unfiltered medium that unveils the world's realities many writers find it as a candid medium to unfold reality, truth and knowledge revisited. Comparative literature rigorously analyses diverse works, highlighting shared themes and distinct nuances in cultures, languages, and eras. It offers insight into how literature shapes our views of the world, human nature, customs, performance, and societal issues across diverse backgrounds. Gendered narratives within literature expose entrenched power dynamics, stereotypes, and norms that suppress gender minorities under the guise of native traditions.

Adopting a multidimensional approach, this thesis delves into inspecting the universality of hegemonic norms through a comprehensive study by probing two gendered narratives: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain* (2020). These narratives transport readers to the real world by providing unfiltered insights into the lives of marginalized women and showing how literature reflects and challenges societal norms.

The 1998 Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, vividly portrays the rich culture of Kerala, a state in south-western India in the post-colonial scenario. The novel highlights a small rural village called Ayemanam located on the banks of Kerala's iconic backwaters named Vembanattu Lake and a family which values culture and norms. The semi-autobiographical novel weaves Kerala's rich culture, featuring Malayalam phrases, traditions, cuisine, and caste-based discrimination, into its narrative, shedding light on the oppressed or untold stories of women. Similarly, the novel *Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stuart is also a 2020 Booker Prize winner. It is also a semi-autobiographical novel that tells

the story of an alcoholic mother named Agnes Bain whose alcoholism is the result of societal suppression and degradation induced on her children particularly her effeminate son Shuggie. They are victims of societal norms that discriminate against people based on their sexuality and class. This text portrays the exploitative grip on women and marginalized genders within the context of a working-class community. Taking this into account the *The God of Small Things* and *Shuggie Bain* would expose the conditions of Women in both the Western and Southern worlds.

In the post-World War II era, significant cultural, hegemonic and systemic disparities persisted between Western and Eastern nations. While people in oriental countries often admired Western ideals, Western imperial dogma frequently underestimated colonial nations and never looked beyond their material wealth this starkly contrasting standpoint shows the apparent existence of hegemony within cultures. Through the lens of literature, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* illustrates Cultural hegemony in Kerala focusing on an Anglophile family and their social principles that relegate people based on colonial legacies and caste systems. Likewise, Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain* portrays Glasgowian society in Scotland, marked by the rise of neoliberalism and individualism but plagued by economic and class discrimination. Despite this, the enduring oppression and demotion faced by female characters persisted within their respective cultural contexts.

The God of Small Things is a non-linear narrative featuring dizygotic twins Estha and Rahel as the central figures. They are the offspring of Ammu, a character who eludes easy classification in traditional Kerala. She neither conforms to traditional gender roles of the society nor does she exclusively embody modern empowerment principles but she tries to challenge it. Ammu is a multi-dimensional character who wrestles with her sense of powerlessness while navigating the intricate landscape of womanhood in her society. Her silent struggles and attitude defy the 'love laws' of the time, escalating the trauma, and its repercussions extend to profoundly impact her children.

Douglas in this semi-autobiographical novel *Shuggie Bain kept its* authenticity by infusing native Glasgowian dialects and standards. Here cultural rubrics of the working-class society which disdained women and their dreams are well depicted together with its traumatic side effects on children. This sprouts an assumption that female characters despite their cultural context go through a similar kind of oppression and mental anguish due to the existence of societal power structure.

Ammu Ipe from Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Agnes Bain protagonist of Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain,* exhibit distinct physical appearances that reflect their unique cultural and contextual backgrounds. Ammu, hailing from India, is described with traditional South Asian features such as dusky skin, expressive dark eyes, and long, jet-black hair. Her appearance encapsulates the cultural diversity and rich tapestry of her homeland. On the other hand, Agnes Bain, living in 1980s Glasgow, Scotland, bears the physical marks of her environment - pallid skin due to the gloomy Scottish climate and the toll of poverty on her health. Agnes is an alcoholic: "She was drinking to forget herself because she didn't know how else to keep out the pain and the loneliness" (Stuart 324). These differences in appearance visually symbolize the contrast between their cultural backgrounds, highlighting how physicality conveys the diversity and context of their stories. However, a common thread between them is their shared tolerance in a hegemonic world.

Born and raised in an orthodox Syrian Catholic household, Ammu witnessed various social injustices that she and her other female family members had to endure during their generations. When her mother and aunt saw it as a normalized way of living, Ammu approached it with keen awareness and a critical perspective. Nevertheless, she remained exploited. Arundhati Roy intricately woven the first strand of the garland of torments and challenges faced by Ammu in her lifetime by unveiling an incident of police brutality.

He stared at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam police didn't take statements from the 'Veshyas' or their illegitimate children. Ammu said she would see about that. Inspector Thomas Mathew came around his desk and approached Ammu with his baton. 'If I were you,' he said, 'I'd go home quietly'. Then he tapped her breast with the baton. Gently. *Tap, Tap.* As though he was choosing mangoes from the basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered (Roy 8).

This assault by a policeman who derogatorily called her a "Veshya," a term for prostitutes in Malayalam. Ammu was dehumanized and objectified, treated as a commodity rather than a person by a law enforcement officer. This disturbing incident highlighted the pervasive gender-based injustice women faced, even from those tasked with upholding justice.

Similarly, Agnes Bain was also slut shamed several times. Her alcoholism and intoxicity made her vulnerable and predatory men reified her as a sex toy and abused her. As she often

used to spend time in bars and other public places while befuddled, she was preyed on multiple times. The pages of the novel unfurl a tragic tale of Glasgow, where the shadows of sexual abuse cast a haunting pall over the lives of women. Among them, countless young souls met a harrowing fate, enduring brutal assaults that culminated in their untimely demise. Their lifeless bodies, cruelly discarded in black plastic bags near the forlorn drainage, stand as solemn witnesses to a heart-wrenching narrative. This grim reality exposes a world where harassment, manipulation, and the profound devaluation of women's lives weigh heavily on the collective conscience, painting a tragic portrait of society's darkest corners which blame women for their fate: "There had been all kinds of lurid stories splashed in black and red across the front of the evening papers, with photo-booth pictures of young women who had been raped and murdered in the shadows of the city. The paper said they were prostitutes and published biased stories about the drug they had to feed" (Stuart 58).

In matters of education and women's autonomy, society often emphasized male dominance and expected women to cater to the self-serving desires of misogynistic or patriarchal figures. Ammu's desire to live life on her terms is constantly thwarted by the rigid social hierarchy and expectations of her family and community. As a result, she is often compelled to conciliate her dreams and desires to conform to societal customs. Ammu's father Pappachi Ipe set an example for the oppressing men of the time. Pappachi's refusal to provide Ammu with an education is indicative of his deeply ingrained patriarchal mind set, a decision rooted in the prevailing gender norms of the society in which he lives.

Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework. Since her father does not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposal comes Ammu's way (Roy 38).

Agnes Bain's dream in life was to live a posh life with a loving husband and kids. She longed for admiration but was reduced to an objectified sexual treat to satisfy the thirst of predatory men. She was a victim of harassment from many men even from her husband Shug and Father Wullie. Agnes's alcoholism distanced her from the men in her life, especially Shug, who abused her physically. "Her hand reached to her head, feeling for where her hair had started to tear……. she could feel the blood of her scalp on her fingers" (Stuart 35). His

treatment towards Agnes changed after marriage. Her boyfriend Eugene came to her life as a hope but he also became a reason to drag her into alcoholism once again.

Ammu's life is marred by both personal experiences of domestic violence and witnessing it within her family. Pappachi Ipe, Patriarch of Ayemanam house, Ammu's Father, exhibits ingrained male chauvinism. He had a proclivity for domestic violence and suspicion towards women, particularly aiming at his wife and daughter. His jealousy and insecurity are further evident when he ends Mammachi's violin lessons after he overhears the music teacher complimenting her. This reaction is driven by his fear of Mammachi's growing independence and talents, which challenge his dominance and control over her. Toxic Pappachi's brutality is shown through his action of his wife beating with the Brass Vase causing her injuries. Since wife beating is a custom in their culture none of the women reacted. "Ammu said that human beings were creatures of habit, and it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to. You only had to look around you, Ammu said, to see that beatings with 'brass vase' were the least of them" (Roy 50). "The Kathakali men took off their make-up and went home to beat their wives. Even Kunthi, the soft one with breast" (Roy 236).

For women, marriage and motherhood are often seen as substantial responsibilities, yet they can also result in a lifetime of suffering that deprives them of their aspirations. Complex family dynamics are a common thread in both novels, broken marriages are at the heart of familial dysfunction, affecting not only spouses but also their offspring. Among the marginalized people Estha, Rahel, Shuggie and his siblings are indirectly involved. These children endure a traumatic childhood, social ineptness and stigma through their parents' influence. The brawls of Agnes and Ammu against such circumstances, affect those innocent lives and sabotage their future with trauma.

In the case of Agnes Bain, a Western woman who likes luxury and admiration, her over-expectations make her fall into utter despondency. Agnes chose to marry a philandering cab driver 'Shug', which led to dysfunction and instability. Shug Bain's constant absence and emotional negligence of Agnes and their children exemplify the traditional gender roles that often portray women as disempowered and marginalized. This perpetuates a power imbalance when Shug leaves Agnes isolated in Pithead away from her parents. His visits are solely for his gratification, and he disregards his paternal duties. Agnes's longing for a stable relationship is consistently thwarted, highlighting the emotional abuse inherent in a society that restricts women's agency and reinforces male dominance. "Shug started coming in during his night

shifts and using her in this way. He waited until the small hours when the children would be in bed, then he whistled nonchalantly up the hallway in the freshly pressed dress. As she undressed him, she could tell his underwear was clean and boil-washed by another woman" (Stuart 106).

In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu decided to marry Baba to escape her oppressive family, seeking freedom in Calcutta. However, their marriage deteriorated due to Baba's alcoholism, abuse, and his ultimate betrayal when he forced her to sleep with his boss to secure his job. They divorced, but Ammu endured societal backlash, highlighting the unfair blame placed on women in failed marriages in their society: "When his bout of violence began to include the children, and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her Parents in Ayemanam. To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams" (Roy 42).

Ammu's illicit affair with the 'untouchable' Paravan Velutha defies societal norms and the 'Love Law',leading to her separation from her twins and her family's desertion of her. The family prioritizes their reputation over human life, exemplifying the entrenched caste-based discrimination. Similarly, in *Shuggie Bain*, Agnes's parents disapproved of her relationship with Shug, not only because he mistreated her but also due to his Protestant faith which was against the so-called "Love Law" set by Catholics. Their strong religious convictions lead them to associate his behaviour with his religious background. This blind religious faith made them mistakenly believe that punishing Agnes would cleanse her from perceived sins instead of providing the support she needs to overcome her challenges: "Wullie closed the living room door quietly. He drew his heavy granary belt from his wool trousers, the meadow side union logo was debossed into the leather, and the sheer weight of it dragged on the carpet. Aye, mibbe it's for the best" (Stuart 75).

In *The God of Small Things,* Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are the central figures who reinforce the sexist beliefs and stereotypes of society. They are practitioners of internalized misogyny wherein women themselves subjugate women. Mammachi, Ammu's mother tolerates her husband's oppressive behaviour and reinforces traditional gender roles that uphold a patriarchal system. She even arranges a secret entrance to Chacko's room to carry out his illegitimate affairs, justifying that men have needs but disdains when Ammu does the same. She blamed Margret Kochamma for her failed marriage with Chacko. She used to mention her as the daughter of a shopkeeper, showing aversion towards her familial background and

modern looks. Likewise, Baby Kochamma envies Ammu's attempts to embrace independence and autonomy. This envy leads her to conspire against Ammu's relationship with Velutha, ultimately contributing to the tragic consequences. Baby Kochamma's unfathomable resentment of Ammu's nonconformity to traditional gender roles drives her to undermine Ammu's happiness, ultimately betraying her by reporting her affair with Velutha to the police. This attitude reflects the internalized misogyny and adherence to restrictive societal norms. Her manipulative behaviour showcases her willingness to sacrifice Ammu's happiness to protect her interests' moreover societal ones.

Ammu and Agnes both embraced an unpleasant death drenched lonely and loathed. In *The God of Small Things,* Ammu dies in grim without gratifying her desperate attempts to reunite with her children, Estha and Rahel, who have been separated from terrible conditions. She bares all the blame. She died alone in a lodge when she was only 31. "Not old, not young, but a viable die-able age" (Roy 3). Agnes's battle with alcoholism eroded her consciousness, leaving her yearning for happiness. Even Shuggie, her only source of solace, recognized that death was the only escape from a world that had taken its toll on her: "Her breath hissed away slowly; it just faded, like it was walking away and leaving her. Her face changed then, the worry fell away and at last she looked at peace, softly" (Stuart 411). Agnes passed away the day after her birthday, choking on her vomit while slumped in her chair. Her death is a poignant depiction of the devastating impact of addiction and the overwhelming despair that consumed her life. An after-effects of the torture the hegemonic society induced on to her dreams.

The plight of Ammu and Agnes is the mere representation of the world's reality and cultural approach to women, highlighting the struggle for gender equality. They shed light on the enduring challenges that women confront, irrespective of their geographical location or period, underscoring the need for continued efforts to address and rectify gender-related discrimination worldwide.

In the sweeping canvas of literature, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Douglas Stuart's *Shuggie Bain* stand as luminous beacons of storytelling. Each offers a hauntingly realistic glimpse into the turbulent terrain of the cultural Hegemony. These semi-autobiographical works resonate deeply as they unearth the relentless grip of patriarchy and social domination that persisted across geographical boundaries, transcending the so-called divisions between the imperialist Western world and the colonial landscapes of southern India. These novels bear witness to a stark truth: in these diverse settings and cultural milieus, the

torments endured by women remained a harrowing constant. Women, irrespective of their location or societal backdrop, were the primary sufferers, and their children too often became victims of these kinds of marginalization.

Within the pages of *The God of Small Things,* Arundathi Roy placed Rahel as her reflection, she expressed herself through Rahel's senses. Like she intentionally acknowledges her mother Mary Roy who taught her to say 'Excuse me' before interpreting, Rahel also gets a lesson like this from Ammu, shading the similarity. She penned the traditional Kerala and showed the stained lives of suppressed women like Ammu in the hegemonic society. In Shuggie *Bain*, Douglas Stuart was living through Shuggie by portraying the crisis of being effeminate and having an alcoholic mother. Despite being born as a boy and because of his effeminate nature society blamed and abused Shuggie, showing the dogma of cultural beliefs. The realism was taken from his own life. We encounter the relentless impact of political conflicts, echoes of domestic violence, the stifling weight of subjugation on women, and the inescapable chains of forceful dependence through his lines. Hence these stories are highly inspired by the real-life experiences of the authors.

Arundhati Roy and Douglas Stuart hail from distinct regions, genders, and cultures, yet their narratives resonate with the shared experiences of women, emphasizing the universality of women's oppression and the cross-cultural dominance of patriarchy. Themes of emptiness and shattered dreams underscore the profound nature of this struggle, illustrating how women and their children bore the weight of cultural hegemony's oppression across diverse landscapes.

This study only shows a small fragment of certainty through the life of Ammu and Agnes but the reality and the truth are much worse and boundless. *The God of Small Things* and *Shuggie Bain* compel us to recognize that the torment of women and marginalized genders was an international and intergenerational phenomenon. They stand as a testament to the universal nature of gender-based oppression, a sombre reminder that even in places where Western ideals were celebrated, women remained trapped by cultural hegemony's oppressive grasp.

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Marginalisation and Culture: A View from the Perspective of Mental Disorders

Chaithanya Antony

Culture is a social phenomenon. Every single society in the globe has its own unique set of cultural values that are distinct from one another. Social behaviour is an important aspect of culture. This implies that a person's behaviour determines the cultural values preserved by his or her culture. Social exclusion, also known as marginalisation, happens when particular groups of individuals are prohibited from participating in specific aspects of society. It is common for society to marginalize individuals based on their ethnicity, caste, or lifestyle. The public is aware of these difficulties because these marginalisation patterns have been explored and discussed in various media contexts. But what about 'crazy' people? 75% of the general public believes that those who suffer from mental illness are violent and eccentric. Some disorders, including obsessive-compulsive disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, acute stress disorder, somatic symptom disorder, Tourette syndrome, tic disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, etc., have been misidentified as psychiatric illnesses. The public misunderstands and stigmatises them as eccentric people because of their odd behaviour, which is caused by intensified worry, fear, or trauma. Actually, after a certain period, they return to normal. For such patients, this view has major repercussions in the form of increased prejudice and a feeling of exclusion from society. A medical speciality called psychiatry deals with a variety of issues involving mood, conduct, cognition, and perception. When a person is emotionally unstable, there is nothing wrong with evaluating the mind once in a while. Everyone occasionally needs a break. A person is not necessarily crazy just because he/she sees a psychiatrist. The majority of educated and well-off people nevertheless ignore these realities and choose to mistreat psychologically agitated persons. This article focuses on the marginalisation of people who experience stigma as a result of having certain mental conditions.

A psychological disorder is *an ongoing dysfunctional pattern of thought, emotion, and behaviour in people that causes significant distress, and that is considered anomalous in the culture or society in which they live* (Butcher et al.). There is a possibility that these conditions will last a lifetime or are temporary. People with psychological issues can function better with the use of talk therapy, self-care techniques, and medication. Most of the time, these patients would be unable to manage themselves without outside assistance, and they

would be rejected or marginalised by society. People from disadvantaged ethnic groups, lower socioeconomic classes, and poorer socioeconomic backgrounds are particularly affected by stigmatisation.

More than half of those who suffer from mental illness do not get treatment for their problems. People frequently put off or postpone getting therapy because they worry about being treated unfairly or constantly worry about losing their jobs and means of support. Whether it is subtle or overt, stigma, prejudice, and discrimination against those who suffer from mental illness can be harmful. Fear or a lack of understanding are two common causes of stigma. The media's inaccurate or deceptive portrayals of mental illness have a role in both of those issues. Works of literature and movies influence the majority of people and they structure their thoughts based on what they take to be reality. The primary goal of novelists or movie producers is to build up the maximum audience and financial success. The choice of psychiatric themes by authors and producers is based on their intrigue and potential for exhilarating diversion. The actual depiction of mental illness is not something they are interested in; instead, they diverge for more exciting and fascinating topics. Even mild personality disorders are portrayed as being unnaturally nasty and haughty. People with these issues are portrayed as messy and odd, unable to think or speak clearly, and possessing a killing instinct. Therefore, it spreads a stigma towards mental illness since readers and viewers take it as fact. We cannot hold the public responsible for their actions because they will be more concerned with their own safety than with the welfare of the mentally ill. While some people may recognise the medical or hereditary nature of a mental health issue and the necessity for treatment, a review of studies on stigma reveals that the general public still has a negative perception of those with mental illness (Thornicroft et al). Population surveys have provided strong evidence that the majority of the general public still holds unfavourable stereotypes about schizophrenia and other severe mental illnesses, such as the notion that those with the condition will be violent and that those with depression won't be able to make wise decisions (Angermeyer and Dietrich 178).

Stigma is used as an "umbrella term" to describe a variety of practices, such as discrimination, social exclusion, and stereotyping, that are connected to a stigmatised social position, such as a mental illness diagnosis (Link and Phelan 363). It is common practice to use lingo or labels to marginalise individuals or groups of individuals. Many often, the behaviours we exhibit in our "normal" daily lives are the same as those that are connected with the disease. For example, in people suffering from obsessive-

compulsive disorder (OCD), compulsive actions are mistaken for abnormal behaviours. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a unitary nosological entity rather than a psychiatric disorder, according to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) of the American Psychiatric Association (1994) and The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) of the World Health Organisation (1992).

There are some more categories for OCD like contamination OCD, harm OCD, religious OCD, sensorimotor OCD etc. When OCD is aroused, some unfavourable, obsessive ideas emerge in the mind, causing anxiety and fear. As a result, people will have overwhelming anxiety which will cause rapid breathing, intense perspiration and breathing difficulty. Soon, they begin engaging in compulsive behaviour to get rid of that specific bad idea because they think those irrational thoughts might injure or harm their family. Compulsions are habitual behaviours or beliefs used by a person to oppose, neutralise, or make their obsessions disappear (IOCDF). Research indicates that short-term anxiety reduction usually follows the performance of rituals, which negatively reinforces these behaviours leading to their proliferation (Rachman and Hodgson 188).

People with 'harm OCD' usually get disturbed as soon as they see sharp objects like knives, screwdrivers or even a pen. When OCD trigger in them they start to believe that they have used the sharp objects to kill or injure someone else. They will wander local areas enquiring about the attack although they know the truth deep inside their mind. They will occasionally go to the police station to ask questions about the crime and then admit to committing it. When the general public becomes aware of this odd activity, they assume that these people are mad and stigmatise them. Some parents, whether they are mothers or fathers, won't even touch their infants for fear of dropping them. These odd acts mislead family members and the general public (Gillette).

There are many different kinds of love, such as love for one's partner or children, love for one's friends and family, sensual love, and love for oneself. The fixation on a loved one or a stranger as if he or she is an object or possession can result from obsessive love disorder. Numerous factors, including mental health conditions and delusional disorders, may contribute to this. People with such kind of an obsession exhibit an interest in visiting their loved ones at odd hours. They will not consider the time or occasion to make this visit. They may even stalk them. When security or police catch them, they fail to explain the proper reason for the visit and this may lead to suspicion. They may even be taken into police custody.

The public would undoubtedly mistake abnormal habits like conscious deep breathing, uncontrollable swallowing without food or water, an uncontrollable urge to look into other people's eyes, repeatedly staring at the side of an OCD person's nose, etc. as quirks.

Nobody cares to know the reason behind such behaviours. Actually, their sensory concentration will really become trapped in their brain, and compulsion will be required to resolve the issue (Keuler). People with hair-pulling disorder may pull their hair out, whenever anxiety hits them. When someone sees a patient with a hair-pulling disorder, they will undoubtedly think that person is crazy and never realise the fact that they're doing this to get rid of their nervousness.

A persistent difficulty in getting rid of or parting with goods because you feel the desire to save them is known as a hoarding disorder. When you consider getting rid of the objects, you could feel distress. Regardless of their true value, we progressively accumulate or keep a lot of things. Undoubtedly, when someone observes these practices, they assume that the person is insane. There are some abnormalities involved in every phobia, panic attack, somatic symptom disorder, acute stress disorder, etc. Symptoms often range in severity but can last a lifetime.

People may develop mental illness as a result of childhood abuse, social isolation, bereavement-related trauma, brain traumas, malfunctions of the brain's neurotransmitters, long-term stress, and other factors. Some disorders are serious but the personality disorders that we discussed here are not harmful to people around them or to the sufferers themselves. Always remember that people with straightforward personality disorders are manageable compared to those with complex mental health issues. They are not to be blamed for having a mental disorder. We must be compassionate towards them. Stigmatisation or marginalisation could only make things worse for them. The basis of almost all disorders is escalated anxiety and fear resulting in heart palpitations, rapid breathing, nausea, profound sweating, screaming etc. People are not always crazy just because they consult a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is someone who has received training in treating mental health issues. People in this fast-paced environment frequently experience anxiety problems, and we can never tell who will go bonkers. Please do not overlook a crazy person the next time you see them on the street. Refer the person to the appropriate resources so that they can access the health care services available.

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The Border-crossing Transgression in Rushdie's *Fury*

Dimple Dubey

Sociologists argue that modernity itself can be regarded as a journey in which border-crossing transgressions occur frequently, implying the individual's journey through it via a series of transformations of the self. Zygmant Bauman in his book *Liquid Modernity*, accounts for modern times in terms of its association with space, not the space within borders, but crossing borders. Indeed, time and speed are essential characteristics of modernity, and they continue to be translated into spatial images of transgression:

> Once the distance passed in a unit of time came to be dependent on technology, on artificial means of transportation, all extant, inherited limits to the speed of movement could be in principle transgressed. Only the sky was now the limit, and modernity was one continuous, unstoppable and fast accelerating effort to reach it.… Being modern means being perpetually ahead of oneself, in a state of constant transgression (in Nietzsche's terms); it also means having an identity which can exist only as an unfulfilled project. (Bauman 28-29)

With respect to the novel *Fury* (2001) by Salman Rushdie, Pico Iyer in his book *The Global Soul Jet Lag, Shopping Malls and the Search for Home* (2000), recalls Rushdie's writerly biography as an exemplary trajectory of "the Global Soul" (32). Rushdie has insisted on recurrent patterns of migrations and travelling, exile and border crossing as experiences which have shaped and defined human culture and civilization. Though the novel has a setting that is global but the global is now an anomalous and indivisible space without frontiers that helps them re-shape, transform or metamorphose by the quest. In *Fury*, the problems of deracination and belonging undergo revaluations of a significance that entails nothing less than what Dirk Wieman witnesses in "Back to Back Stories: Salman Rushdie, Transnationalism and Fury" as:

> …a reversal of the 'classical' Rushdiean value system. The utopia in *Fury,* is not the interstitial transcultural domain of the universalized migrant who heroically transcends the constraints of fixed cultural boundaries, but precisely the overcoming of such fluid identity positions in an equally heroic act of reclaiming biographical continuity, including the embracing of one's own origins even if they prove traumatic. (141)

The preference thus shifts from the borne-across, metamorphosed man, emplaced in a discriminatory, performative and in an *in-between* status quo, to the stature of an author whose own life-story is an *a priori*, in which he emerges as a cast-off entity, as the self-centered subject of antiquated humanism.

In Fury, Rushdie attempts to subvert the prevalent notion of globalization through a framework of merging and an exemplification of 'happy hybridity', signifying a demurring articulation of difference. Wieman argues that: "[i]t is only in Fury that Rushdie comes fully up to the possibility that hybridity might be a strategy of […] imperial power […] and hence the hallmark not of an interstitial and transgressive, but an accommodationist and scripted subjectivity" (156). In *Fury* displacement seems to reach its final form and the realm of excess is the United States of America. Rushdie pictures New York, a pioneering city, at the onset of the millennium with its metropoles congested with an intricate life-system of pseudo-humans whose life and language are regulated by that of computer-technology and digitalization. It is a city full of noise with "garbage trucks like giant cockroaches" (42), and streets stalked with deafening clamors, where one is "never out of the earshot of a siren, an alarm, a large vehicle's reverse-gear bleeps, the beat of some unbearable music" (42). Explicitly it is a multi-dimensional and multilateral universe constructed by continuous "plundering[s] and jumbling[s] of the storehouse of yesterday's empire" (43), a town whose "magic, hybrid heart" (86) masks its ingrained apprehensions and ravings. The depiction of New York in *Fury* is of an American dream that hideously went wrong, a kind of nightmarish depiction of 'the land of promise'.

America and its devouring practices expend, swallow up or cannibalize the strangers visiting it. "America's omnivorous appetite, her tremendous devouring urges" (69). It provides Malik Solanka, a perfect platform for the reinvention of himself, who has wandered to the 'promised land' with the skillful desire to destroy, to veil his roots, to erase his virtual reality of his "back-story" (50), to castaway his "useless baggage of blood and tribe", to reinvent himself on "the land of self-creation" (79). This reinitiates the much-desired program of "automorphosis" (55), or the reprogramming of the self. Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), has proclaimed of USA as having "generated a powerful fable of itself as a land of immigrants" (173). America, and specifically New York, is the place where "everybody who needed … found … home away from home among other wanderers who needed exactly the same thing: a haven in which to spread their wings" (*Fury* 157). Malik was tempted by the prospect of "becoming American while staying

somehow diasporic," (Appadurai 170), in the attempt of "unselfing of the self" or the longing "[n]ot to be, but to un-be" (*Fury* 79). He is spellbound by the pomposity of the American Dream and the potentiality of being "Ellis Islanded," (*Fury* 51), and enraptured along the way by one of the practices of a new cultural condition—the internet:

> Give me a name, America… Bathe me in amnesia and clothe me in your powerful unknowing…No longer a historian but a man without histories let me be. I'll rip my lying mother tongue out of my throat and speak your broken English instead. Scan me, digitize me, beam me up. If the past is the sick old Earth, then, America, be my flying saucer. Fly me to the rim of space. The moon's not far enough (51).

In *Fury,* the early passages recall a willing subject of the foreigner and the migrant Professor Solanka, to the imperial city and its stirrings in the form of an eager surrender of peripheral to the metropolitan. In New York everyone is a foreigner and there are no anti-foreign suspicions about deracination. Wiemann puts forth his viewpoint here that:

> …transgression occurs not in the shape of hybridity but in the act of reclaiming an intact, continuous and unabridged 'back story', however abject. In the postmodern, transgression therefore lies in a rejection of imposed nomadism, in an embrace of fixities, and a flight from freedom (144).

Rushdie's New York appears different from his other situational city portrayals, yet it is quite the same in fictionalizing the experience of migration or the telling and listening to stories as a way of constructing reality. Stories are the capital assets of the migrants:

> This was what we brought with us on our journey across oceans, beyond frontiers, through life; our little storehouse of anecdote and what-happened – next, our private once-upon-a-time (50-1).

Fury is a novel of here-and-now, where the 'now' is the first summer of the third millennium and the 'here' is New York, a city of immigration and rabble, of races fused and confused, of intermingled peoples and inter-wined narratives. Rushdie's protagonist, Professor Malik Solanka, is a former academician who has come to New York to find complete anonymity, after becoming a media star in the UK on having created a sensational doll called Little Brain. His impulsive rage begins with his disappointment when his doll, Little Brain, is out of his control, and is being dallied by the organizers of the press conference, people from the television world and magazine editors. Watching the doll borne of his own conception, his "purest

endeavor" turning into a monster of garish figure, "most profoundly abhorred" makes him to decide the extermination of the doll (98). Since he himself was reluctant, he remorselessly asks his wife, Eleanor, to destroy all the dolls. Eleanor however upsets him with a deception and the exasperation leads Solanka with the gesture of standing atop his sleeping wife and his son, Asmaan, holding a knife, in a drunken state. The realization strikes him that "he needed to put an ocean…between himself and what he had almost done" (39), and this sets him off to New York. Like an anonymous man of the crowd, Solanka identifies New York as a place in which he can disappear without running the risk of being found out. His contriteness has driven him to flee to America: "to which he had come to erase himself. To be free of attachment and so also of anger, fear and pain" (44). He silently prays, "[e]at me, America, and give me peace" (44); for "[f]light would save others from him, and him from himself" (80). He yearns to "unwrite" the story of his past, to unself his self, to construct himself into a new man, by losing into the anonymity of the alternate world (79).

But America could not render him peace and solace: "The city [Manhattan] was teaching him a lesson. He had crossed the ocean to separate his life from life. He had come in search of silence and found instead a loudness greater than the one he left behind. The noise was inside him now" (47). Solanka had falsely interpreted America as a hearth where he could rewrite his history, considering "...a greater deity was all around him: America, in the highest hour of its hybrid, omnivorous power. America, to which he had come to erase himself. To be free of attachment and so also of anger, fear, and pain" (44). But Solanka was overburdened with his past and he struggled to evade it with overfilled fury. He did not leave behind "his ghosts" but did bring them along (42). Despite having a horrific memory of the "guilty secret" of his past (130), Malik Solanka, a man with "unpredictable temper" (193), rejoices in the emotional relish, firstly to Mila Milosevic, daughter of a Serbian poet, a young entrepreneur of computerization, who recommends Solanka, to re-launch his annihilated digital doll, Little Brain, and secondly to Neela Mahendra, a political exponent, and a specialist in "documentary programming for television" (124).

Rushdie concurs to multitudinous causes, sources, and effects of fury. In the novel, Malik Solanka notices that most New Yorkers are full of fury, and this is compounded by fear of others' fury: "America, because of its omnipotence, is full of fear, it fears the fury of the world and renames it envy" (114). The divide between the classes has become a moral question for Americans:

America insulted the rest of the planet, thought Malik Solanka in his old-fashioned way, by treating such bounty with the shoulder – shrugging casualness of the in-equitably wealthy. But New York in this time of plenty had become the object and goal of the world's concupiscence and lust, and the "insult" only made the rest of the planet more desirous than ever (6).

Fury traces a society in the grip of an extreme form of alienation induced by conspicuous dissipation, where reality itself risks being objectified. This is "the age of simulacra and counterfeits, in which you can find any pleasure known to woman or man rendered synthetic, made safe from disease and guilt-a lo-cal, to-fi, brilliantly false version of the awkward world of real blood and guts. Phony experience that feels so good that you actually prefer it to the real thing" (232).

A proximate reading of the novel reveals Rushdie's articulation of an irresolute negotiation by a migrant towards a neocolonial order. In Rushdie's novels transformations, translocations, translations are mostly of the migrant 'other,' who is never seen as uncanny and with an unconventional difference that construes as one of the facades of multiplicity. Solanka seems to be desirous and disgusted at once with the glimmering spectacle of the American prosperity, and therefore ambiguously affixes a critical perception of New York to himself. Solanka embodies the locational ambivalence of a migrant, as he has travelled and settled in three continents. He arrived in America to release himself from the appalling fury in the absurd hope to be able to "begin to construct a new man" (80). He had survived a distressed childhood in India, he matured within the racially isolating surroundings in England, and had attempted to flee from both for a vacuous, self-absorbing living in the new country, the USA. Solanka is not out to build another digital ogre but to re-structure himself – an enterprise which requires a radical severing of all biographical ties. New York as the apex of American culture appears to be the ideal environment for such an attempt at "automorphosis, the transformation of the self" (55). Rushdie here tries to explore America's feasibility, to function as an apex of departure by constructing a utopia for displaced beings.

Fury features numerous fabricated intertextualities and allusions of displacement: metaphorical illustrations for an unnamed, mysterious island in the Indian Ocean (most probably Fiji), named as Lilliput-Blefuscu, where assassins disguise in "fancy-dress Disney costumes" (130). Yet the novel's fundamental fairy-tale stature resides in utopianism when we come to know that Solanka undergoes the disorienting separation from the East. After being abandoned

by his father, and the subsequent remarriage of his mother, Solanka had migrated to England to pursue his education, worked as an academician and remarried. In pursuit of a refuge from his personal predicament, he further relocates himself in New York. No wonder it was true as America is associated with success all over the world. In India, "…great pride was taken in the achievements of U.S. – based Indians in music, publishing ... Silicon Valley and Hollywood ... British journalist has work in U.S.A.! Incredible!" (224).

In other words, Solanka reflects that, "American success has become the only real validation of one's worth" (224). The prerequisite was to "find a gateway" to the city's "magic, invisible, hybrid heart" (87). New York's amicability allures Solanka, and he contemplates in partaking this quest by leaving England, but gradually notices "the erosion of what once overwhelmed" (185), and strives to re-invent himself by obliterating his past. He gratifies in the reflection that "nothing less than the unselfing of the self would do…After that he could perhaps begin to construct a new man" (80). Consequently, he tries to transcend "his own life's ugly reality" (169), by creating an imaginary yet reconciled enclave, in which his frets and predilections could be supplanted by a sense of accomplishment and repossession. He drafts a conceit, foremost virtually and then via Internet. He designs the civilization of the Rijk: "The world of 'Puppet – Kings'" (170). It facilitates the acquisition of his visionary realm that had sprung from his zeal for constructing houses for his figurines. Solanka's creations in America stem out through the science fiction readings he undertook during his youth. The novels of Stanislaw Lem, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Fredrick Pohl, and Philip K. Dick enthrall his imagination the most. He finds their treatises and genres "fantastic" (147), with "its parables and allegories, but also its flights of pure invention, its loopy, spiraling conceits-a ceaselessly metamorphosing alternative world in which he felt instinctively at home" (147).

The myth of these tales is valued mainly by the Web, by Mila Milosevic, the computer wizard who acquaints Solanka with the new technology. Solanka realizes that the technological advancements might not only bring a creative addition to his endeavors but also ensure a lasting opportunity for further evolution and progression. He estimates, "Just the creative potential, which can be done with an idea now. The best sites are inexhaustible, people come back and back, it's like a world you're giving them to belong to" (177).

Solanka thus uses a virtual actuality to move to a different space which is same as any other configuration of displacement. But to comprehend can a virtual realm be inhabited as a true home? Malik Solanka seeks redemption from fury by dissipating into the machine and

finally taking refuge in an "alternative home planet" attainable in cyberspace (140). Malik constructs a science-fiction fantasy located in the decaying Rijk civilization on the planet Galileo-1, creating a narrative snapping between the utopian and the dystopian. Solanka perceives this surreal realm as a reassuring alternative to actuality. Mila too makes an assertion: "This new world is my life .... It's where I feel most alive. There, inside the electricity" (179). Even Solanka cannot help plunging into this "multidimensional world" (187), and actuates himself inhabiting "a world he greatly preferred to the one outside his window, and thus came to understand what Mila Milo had meant when she said that this was where she felt most alive" (188).

Nonetheless the abundance, fame and benefit brought upon by this cybernetic venture failed to provide a space of indubitable connect and contact, resulting in a gap of belonging of the real and the imagined: "In the electronic world, Solanka and the web spyders worked closely together for hours a day. Outside it, they were strangers. This was apparently, how it had to be" (215). Solanka learns the harsh reality of no longer considering America to be a fairy, mythic land and acknowledging that it is not the land of manifestation of his dreams, but "a land with excess of [people's] dashed and thwarted hopes" (184). This sense of dejection is expressed more acutely and accurately when he calls America "a land where the right to dream was the national ideological cornerstone" (184), and describes its wretched condition where "people were waking up ... and realizing that their lives didn't belong to them. Their bodies didn't belong to them, and nobody else's bodies belonged to anyone, either. They no longer saw a reason not to shoot" (184). This sense of unbelonging to the real or imagined world creates a further discontent and rancor in Solanka and he escapes again. He decides to migrate back to England with the urge to disconnect himself from the world, and spend his time "trying to hear Neela's silenced Voice" (258). Neela Mahendra and Mila Milosevic, predominant female characters in the text share Solanka's migrant and cosmopolitan identity. They emerge as a locus of psychological relief for Solanka as they enforce an immediate recognition and disclosure of an 'outsider' in America.

As the novel concludes we witness Solanka again at his departure point, Heath, his hometown in England, which marks Solanka's return to his life after his failed voyage to America. The homecoming can be inferred as a route to the exploration of one's eminence and identity, recovering his familial ties, wrapping up the trails of abandonment in childhood that invoked his exilic existence. Having voyaged and dwelled in three continents, Solanka

embodies the locational ambivalence of migration. An in-depth observation of this novel exhibits Rushdie's attempt to articulate a postcolonial migrant's flux, who is in a vital pursuit of an 'imaginary homeland' regardless of his de-territorialized emplacement.

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Space and Identity Issues in Mythology as Retold in the Novel *Asura*

Hildegard Anne Maria & Edberg D. Cheeran

In all the versions of *The Ramayana*, Ravana is defeated by the Devas. He is killed by Rama in an atrocious battle. If Rama stands as aexcellent example of the honest ruler, Ravana is depicted as the epitome of evil. In the northern states of India, there is a festival called Dussehra during which effigies of Ravana are burnt. This ritual indicates the conquest of good over evil. The word 'Ramayana' means the voyage of Rama. But Anand Neelakantan diverts from the regularly compacted path and tries to tell the story of Ravana's journey. His novel also presents the themes of hunger, poverty, caste, race and colour. Anand Neelakantan's *Asura* opens with Ravana dying on the battlefield, felled by Rama's arrows. His life flashes before his eyes, which reveals the secret history of the 'other', the 'vanquished' as the author would prefer, from *The Ramayana*. The antagonist of the original version hogs the attention in this newer version. The positive side of Ravana gets more focus in the novel. He is a devotee of Shiva, a great scholar, a brilliant musician and astrologer.

The present paper opens up the prospect of various readings from a postmodern perspective, where both Rama and Ravana are portrayed as representatives of two dissimilar clans or two contradictory centers. In Ramayana, Rama occupied the centre, marginalizing Ravana as the 'other'. But in the novel, the centre of the margin has been thrashed in order to replace it with a humanistic insight. In Ramayana, one can trace the birth and rearing of Rama in such a detail that nobody gets worried to count on the legacy of Ravana. Here the author, clearly states the heritage of the Asura clan. Ravana, being the son of the great sage Vishrva and the Daitya princess Kaikesi, spent his childhood in poverty. Ravana, according to the novelist, is not a demon but a king who was adamant upon employing a casteless society thus ousting the money minded Brahmanical system of knowledge maintenance. As it is shown in the cover blurb of the book, this is the story of Ravana, the deceitful demon king in Ramayana who abducted the wife of Rama, the allegedly divine embodiment of Vishnu.

> For thousands of years, I have been vilified and my death is celebrated year after year in every corner of India. Why? Was it because I challenged the Gods for the sake of my daughter? Was it because I freed a race from the yoke of caste-based Deva rule? You have heard the victor's tale, the Ramayana. Now hear the Ravanayana, for I am Ravana, the Asura, and my story is the tale of the defeated (Neelakantan 1).

Many other instances like cultural obligation of devas over asuras are also some instances of intolerance. Love for fairer skin, depicting black skin people as asurasetc are some faces of these discrimination. *Asura: Tale of The Vanquished, The Story of Ravana* and His People, as its title implies is a unique piece of narrative which illustrates the plot of *The Ramayana* from the viewpoint of Ravana and Bhadra; one an Asura Emperor and the other a menial, demoralized Asura who helped Ravana to mount the throne of Lanka. The novel is a probable narrative of the sanctified myth. *The Ramayana*, which offers reason for Ravana's conduct and provides justification from his and his people's points of view. *The Ramayana*, a story that has countless multidimensional possibilities, has now narrowed down to a single outlook and is subverted here. Sita becomes Ravana's daughter here, who is the actual cause of his men's total destruction. Siva, Vishnu and Brahma are no more Gods but mass leaders who achieved a kind of Godhood. The Devas and the Asuras cause diverse societal changes when they over run and assault the others' kingdom. Asura is the tale about the rise and the fall of the Asura kingdom under the rule of Ravana. The novel highlights the humaneness of the asuras against the verisimilitude of divinity experienced by devas under the pretext of social good. Bhadra, in the narrative, serves a polyphonic intention: the judge of actions of king Ravana in the outside world; and secondly, the conscious of Ravana, the thoughts Ravana could assemble and nurture had he been an ordinary human. The character of Bhadra is most pathetic as he has been deprived of all the rights except being a puppet in the hands of the authority. He is double marginalized- first for the fact that he is a black asura and secondly, he is substandard and a low creature compared to the royal class (king). Neelakantan has shaped Bhadra as a representation of the common man. Bhadra's voice is the voice of the silenced and suppressed majority. Bhadra has been portrayed to illustrate interest to this fact. The role of Bhadra, then, assumes critical implication as the personalized expression of the man that Ravana is shown to be. Bhadra anchors the story. His character gives it a third perspective. Bhadra is the bridge between the ancient world of *The Ramayana* and today. He is the window that allows us to watch at that indistinct era through modern eyes.

The respect for women, the defining eminence of a cultured society, distinguishes Rama from Ravana and the narrative of Asura expostulates that it is Ravana, who in spite of being the demon, lives up to this iconic principle of civilized societies. While in *The Ramayana*, the 'maryadapurushotam' Rama abandons his wife even after she proves her chastity, Ravana, does not, even once, try to hurt Sita, there is an instance in the novel where Mandodhari is

attacked by deva soliders and was molested in front of Ravana even then Ravana accepts her but when rumors were spread on Sita, Rama abandons her, who was securely looked after by Trijata in the Ashoka Vatika. Moreover, in *Asura*, Ravana's entire war with Rama works on the one principle: the treatment of women by the Devas. He does not want his daughter to face what befalls her in vanvasa, as she belongs to a enhanced culture, that of the Asuras. He just wants to save his daughter. Ravana's character, in Asura emerges in severe contrast to the character of Rama. Given the alternative voices, it was implied that this difference would emerge, but this difference, rather than overturning the conventional notions, constructs Ravana as humane rather than divine. This humaneness of Ravana makes the narrative take cognizance of the restrictions and drawbacks in his character and his dream kingdom. Ravana lives with his own sets of qualities and limitations.

The novel *Asura*, turns out in every sense an attempt to reconstruct the past as well as the epic giving voice to the muffled making it pleasing for every reader. The writer has tried to challenge the prevailing ideology of the time and has initiated a new tradition of looking into the tales from 'the other' side. The muted characters have been provided a voice. The novel offers the reader to go through the mind set of diverse characters particularly the silenced one in the Ramayana. Ravana till date continues to be depicted as an perpetually brutal villain until a brave attempt by Anand Neeelkantan's work renders a powerful voice to Ravana. Thus, a novel attempt of bringing alive an ever-hated pessimistic character like Ravana does venture to enlighten that in order to progress as a culture, one needs to look beyond the issues of religion and caste and only. In The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Jean Francois Lyotard defines the postmodern condition by its "incredulity towards meta narratives" (Lyotard 13). Postmodernism critiques, interrogates and problematizes grand narratives as it regards grand narratives as deceptive, which are nonetheless backed by those in power of controlling, dissipating and propagating knowledge to erase "difference, opposition and plurality" (Barry 83). In place of meta narratives, postmodernism advocates for a "series of mini narratives, which are provisional, contingent, temporary and relative" (Barry 83). Thus, Postmodernism 'deconstructs' (to use Derrida's term) ideas of history, absolute truth and up held the postmodern view of the same as perspective based. Through his novel *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, the writer, Neelakantan has tried to break the grand narratives of the prevailing ideological mythology and has brought into fore the small narratives of the silenced characters. In the novel, the author has tried to defy the sacred myth of Ramayana and has provided an another

reading of it by bringing into limelight the point of view of the much celebrated villain of Hindu mythology, Ravana. By bringing into focus the single narrative of Ravana and by creating him the anti-hero of his novel; the author has dared enough to subvert the unifier hegemonic discourse (Brahmanism). The objective of the author is to upheld the narrative from the other side and provide justice to the marginalized class by making their voice heard which has been deprived of since ages.

In the novel, the writer has tried to humanize the protagonist, unlike *The Ramayana*. This is in disparity to the divinity of Rama and the visible reluctance and rejection of the perfection that comes with that divinity. Ravana says, "…I was always a creature of passion. I had lived as Ravana and I would die as Ravana. I did not intend to become Rama, the perfect man and God. There was no dearth of gods in my country. It only lacked men" (Neelakanton 354). His follies and imperfections become starker in contrast to the character of Rama in Ramayana & Ramcharitmanas. Rama is the God incarnate, the divine human of Tretayuga in human history, a period when all was celebrated and perfect. This is highly unlike Ravana, who followed the dictates of his own principles and did what he felt right. In the mainstream narrative, while Rama made, apparently, no mistake, Ravana, in his Ravanayana, has his share of idiocies and mistakes that he does not try to equivocate.

The narrative foregrounds a very significant aspect of the narrative techniques used by 'the self' and 'the other.' Ravana, aware of his imperfections, still is decisive and determined to pursue his actions to the end even in the face of imminent defeat and destruction. Ravana's character, then, as told autobiographically, is far from being a beauteous picture of his life that is replete with perfections and idealizations. He defines himself as flawed but with determined courage to stand for his actions and what he considers just. He grows from a very humble and degraded childhood, albeit belonging to the royalty, under the authority of Kuber, the brother of Ravana and the king of the Asuras. Commencing his journey from a thatched hut on top a mountain, he grows to be the ruler of the vast Asura kingdom over a major length and breadth of India and Sri Lanka. However, through his journey, he admits to having made some rash decisions and mistakes but rather than escaping them, he stands to face the consequences. Moreover, given his conscience, he is also sorry for not being able to do much for the common Asuras like Bhadra who expected a golden period under his kingship.

The parenthood and apparent transition of fatherhood is also portrayed in the novel. He was forced to leave Sita forcefully in the woods due to the curse that she would bring

death to Asuras. But he forever laments about her fate. He wishes to see her as soon as possible.

> What would she be doing now? Who did she look like? Perhaps like her mother?' Something snapped in me when I thought of my long-lost love. Was the empire worth losing her? Perhaps it was. Mandodari was an ideal partner. Vedavathi had been too spirited to be a wife or a queen. I longed to see the face of my daughter more than anything else. I had not read the reports from the field for some time but I vaguely remembered reading about the marriage arrangements being made for her. These northern people had a strange custom. The father of the prospective bride would announce a contest among eligible suitors. I found it boorish. Was a bride a prize to be won in a contest? I had even heard of Deva men selling their wives as slaves, mortgaging them, or using them as wagers. It was terrible but what could one expect from a semi-civilized, nomadic tribe? Women were treated by the Deva men as nothing more than commodities. Perhaps I was prejudiced as I belonged to an entirely different culture. But I had always believed a society could be called civilized only when it treated its woman and downtrodden people, well. Caste was rigid. The condition of people belonging to the lower rungs was beyond imagination. By such standards, the people of the dusty, northern plains were almost sub-human. Of course, the Asuras had problems of their own. The Asura men loved material things. Asura woman were violent and almost unethical, but then, our girls were brought up almost exactly like our boys. There were social distinctions like the caste system among the Asuras too, but it was not based on birth or skin colour (Neelakantan 203).

Though he was happy to see her, he wasn't able to digest the idea of Deva culture. He was totally worried by the idea of Swayamvara, as according to him where literally a women is considered as a product and is out looked by beauty and the physical charm:

> I noticed that the princes and kings assessed her like they had come to a cattle market and have found their prize cow. I burned with anger. What sort of custom was this? An innocent young girl in her prime exposed to the lustful eyes of old men who could win her in a contest? What about her feelings, her loves, her dreams and wishes? Any ruffian who has enough strength to lift that stupid bow could marry her. She would know none of the joy of courting her husband, there would be no whispered words of love, no pangs of separation and the sweet wait to see her lover on a moonlit night.

> Maricha held me firm. Initially I had resented my arranged marriage to Mandodari and cursed my interfering mother many times. But we had known each other and spoken many times. This was uncultured (Neelakantan 205).

Ravana, was forever devoted to his family. He wasn't partial about the 'ways of world'. He was ready to accept her son-in-law and daughter. He was rather protective about her and her life. Anand Neelakanton puts the famous kidnap of Sita as the affective action of a distressed father.

> While we were flying north, Maricha tried to dissuade me again. I ignored him. "You could kill Rama and his brother and bring Sita back after telling her the truth about her birth." he said. But I did not want to kill Rama. My daughter was devoted to him and I did not want to cause her any sorrow. I only planned to keep Sita in Lanka till Rama's voluntary exile was over. She could then join him when he assumed the Kingship of his petty kingdom. Secretly, I hoped that once I had brought her to Lanka and she had seen her father's dazzling home, she would convince her husband to stay with us (Neelakantan 212).

Yet another point, the twenty first century retelling of the myth advances the anti-feministic nature of the earlier myth. Ravana, even when his wife was violated during the war, accepted his wife. But the prototypical figure Rama, when the subjects spread rumors against his innocent wife. He abandons her even after the deadly ritual Agni Pareeksha. This instance actually gives Ravana a better position and better value than Rama. Neelakantan depicts Rama as a husband in a patriarchal society who does not have even have the agency to have a say in the matters involving to his wife. Thus the novel with its politics of enclosure and disrupt tells a new story which is a not a postmillennial myth in the conventional sense, but a mixture of postmillennial perspectives. The final section of the novel deals with the death of Ravana. The author creates a contrast between the lives of Rama and Ravana. Bhadra, the commentator says:

> Rama had sacrificed the two people who he loved the most, for the sake of his dharma. He became more and more depressed and withdrawn and finally found eternal solace in the dark waters of the Sarayu. […] He led an unhappy life and sacrificed everything– his wife, his brother and his conscience, for that dharma. […] Ravana was a man who lived life on his own terms, doing what he thought was right and caring nothing for what

was written by holy men; a man who lived life fully and died a warrior's death. Like their lives, believes, values and definitions of dharma, the manner of their deaths were also conflicting. However, the final truth remains that both were actors in a grand farce and it is only the small detail of who won, that decided the hero and the villain, in their epic life stories (Neelakantan 493–94).

Thus, Rama and Ravana are two social products to state the supremacy of the patriarchal society. When the writer unpacks the ancient product the need to restructure the same is being hunted upon. The novel Asura, turns out in every sense an attempt to recreate the past as well as the epic giving voice to the muted making it appealing for every reader.

In the entire narrative of Asura, it is the human that occupies the central position. Through this Neelakantan explicitly questions the status of Ramayana in the foundational epic of Hindu and Indian mythology and folklore. Neelakantan is not only raising an alternative voice of the vanquished but also questioning the significance of The Ramayana as one of the Foundational Narratives of India. Jonathan Culler opines that Foundational Narratives are those whose stories are independent of the narrative in which they are put. Asura's narrative has totally altered the story, and hence Ramayana probably cannot be iconized as a Foundational narrative. His narrative counters and challenges all that is conventional and traditionally accepted. Consequently, what is believed to be a foundational narrative loses the base.

The novel is a harsh accusation on the traditionally respected sacrosanct. His voices construct a narrative that refuses to toe the line of mainstream literature. Myths, shows the narrative of Asura, have for long, dominated our life as the 'Absolute Past', but it is only one-half of the story, told by the 'self' to force or hegemonies the 'other'. This imperial 'Other', the 'self' deliberately, by virtue of being the wielder of power, subdued alternative voices, but, in spite of being suppressed, the latter stayed and when space was offered, caught fire. In the present study, the Asuras are considered as the other and inferior by the Devas. Also even the Asura authorities view the common Asuras as the other and the untouchables. Devas consider the culture and beliefs of Asuras as inferior and Devas even make Asuras believe that they are inferior. Vanara race, one of the mixed races among Asuras are being looked down as inferior even by the common Asuras, is just one instance of 'Othering' being done.

The myth of Ravana and the Asura caste told in the viewpoint of the marginal reveals the justifications, dilemmas, trauma and helplessness of Ravana, the learned, pious, musician,

the loving but shy husband, the loving brother cheated by his brother Vibhishana, led to death by the deeds of immoral sister Shoorpanakha, humiliated by Anarnya, the King of Ayodhya, who told Ravana in an arrogant manner on the verge of failure: "Hey untouchable, if your mother is castles so too are you"…. "I will not surrender to a Sudhra"... "I will not demean myself by fighting a Sudhra" (Anand 333). Ravana combated this shame with his sword roaring "Then die at the hands of Sudhra" (Neelakantan 340).

The death of Ravana also has significance in the narrative. While the traditional texts, like Ramayana and Ramcharitmanas, project it as desired by Ravana, through the hands of Rama for the attainment of Moksha; in Asura Ravana, in spite of all that transpired, says:

> I wanted to start again. I wanted to make the same mistakes, love the same people, fight the same enemies, befriend the same friends, marry the same wives and sire the same sons. I wanted to live the same life again. I didn't want the seat Rama has reserved for me in his heaven. I only wanted my beautiful earth (Neelakantan 13-14).

Thus his voice acquires the strength of the subaltern, who was repeatedly humiliated, silenced, threatened, butchered and made slaves. If he failed in his mission in safeguarding Lanka and its culture from the barbarian Devas and treacherous Asuras like Vibhishana, who wanted to impose caste hierarchy, he is not fully responsible for the rot of Asura dynasty. One reason was that their probabilities to succeed in the midst of treacherous group are grim. Secondly, the Asuras' view on good and evil is ambiguous and their confidence in themselves as well as their belief diminished by constant struggles and failures as Bhadra rightly remarked: "We were sure that Mahadev Shiva would not allow evil to triumph. However, in the deepest corner of my mind, I knew we were lesser children of Gods, and even a compassionate and all powerful God like Shiva would look at the colour of our skin and flinch. Perhaps we had been born with the wrong skin colour" (Neelakantan 475).

Asura, *The Tale of the Vanquished* depicts the oppressed and suppressed voices of the ancient past. The olden trends of those suppressed voices are still prevailing. The instances of northern suppression over southern India can be sort out in this line. The novel throws light on hidden aspects of past as well as present. Thus, these models of reworking make us re-consider some of the fiery questions of Vedic India and also offer a positive reconstruction through its perpetually 'silenced' dark characters.

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Love beyond the Norm: Subversion of Anthropocentric view of Human Emotions in James Cameron's *Avatar Series*

Isabella Xavier & Reeba Thomas

This paper analyzes the concept of anthropocentric subversion through the characters Jake and Neytiri, who are not only united by their goal to care for and protect the clan but also brought together by their love and spiritual relationship with nature. Jake Sully, the movie's hero, assumes his scientist brother's role in the Avatar program, assigned to fulfill the project's needs. However, upon meeting Neytiri and learning about their world, he stands up for the Na'vi people and what he believes is right. Both *Avatar* and *Avatar: The Way of Water* movies highlight humans' insatiable greed and destruction for personal gain on one hand, and the existential crises faced by other living beings on the other.

Love is a set of emotions and behaviors characterized by intimacy, passion and commitment. It involves care, closeness, protectiveness, attraction, affection and trust. When it comes to love, some people would say it is the most important human emotion. Love is most likely influenced by both biology and culture. Although hormones and biology are important, the way we express and experience love is also influenced by our personal conception of love. In the context of this discussion, love takes on a unique form, portraying a relationship between a human and a non-human creature. Eywa chooses Jake for the Omaticaya, extending her blessing to his union with Neytiri.

Traditional romantic heroes and heroines, although imperfect, typically exhibit superior character, abilities, and physical beauty as leaders of the forces of good. Jake and Neytiri, echoing the symbolic characterization prevalent in romance narratives, grapple with a more sophisticated inner struggle. Jake's conflict between ties to his fellow Earthmen and the desire to regain the use of his human legs contrasts with his newfound bonds to Neytiri, the Na'Vi people, and the culture and tribe he has joined. "Avatar" urges viewers to reconnect with Mother Earth and abandon destructive exploitation of the environment. Neytiri, akin to her ancient literary counterparts, possesses grace, beauty, and intelligence. While devoted to Jake, her parents, and her people, she also exhibits courage and combat prowess, rescuing Jake and showcasing a symbiotic relationship with Pandora's spiritual world. Similar to the heroines of old, Neytiri assumes the role of the tribe's next shaman. Jake, as Neytiri's male counterpart, is handsome in both human and Na'Vi form. He is intelligent, inquisitive, adaptable,

and a powerful warrior and leader. The intricate dynamics between Jake and Neytiri contribute to the overarching theme of love and connection in the narrative.

Quaritch's enticing offer of restoring Jake's human legs temporarily leads him to spy on the Na'Vi, betraying the trust of both Avatar program leader Grace and his adopted indigenous community. This nearly results in the destruction of the planet and the native civilization. About halfway through the movie, following a three-month apprenticeship with the Omatikaya clan to understand their ways, Jake confesses in a voiceover that he now sees everything "backwards," can barely recall his old life, and declares, "I don't know who I am."

As the film progresses, the wounded hero navigates his identity crisis, breaking free from divided loyalties and healing himself. Key romance themes of love, identity, and freedom take center stage. In Avatar's climax, Jake leads the Na'Vi to victory over the Earthmen, embracing his Na'Vi identity and affirming his love for Neytiri and their people. This final scene starkly contrasts the thriving Pandora with the defeated Earth, emphasizing the film's overarching juxtaposition between the two worlds.

Avatar: The Way of Water beautifully illustrates the themes of love for both family and nature. In contrast to the anthropocentric theory, which imposes the idea that nature should conform to human needs, establishing humans as authorities over nature, the film conveys a powerful message: it is not nature that should adapt, but rather, we need to adapt to nature. This profound idea is skillfully portrayed through the characters, particularly when Jake and his family are forced to relocate from the Omatikaya to Pandora's eastern sea, home to the Metkayina clan.

In *Avatar* Series James Cameron skillfully merges timeless romantic conventions with a contemporary ecological consciousness, crafting an eco-romance that champions current ecocentrism. This perspective defines human identity by its relationship with the physical environment and nonhuman life forms, highlighting the intricate, web-like interconnections between them. Such a viewpoint is increasingly prevalent in both current news narratives and various artistic media forms. The Na'Vi represent the forces of good in the movie. These blue, graceful, ten-feet-tall monumental humanoids are an idealized version of certain Native American tribes, such as the Sioux plainsmen or indigenous populations linked to the Amazon rainforest, who live close to the land and demonstrate reverential respect for the natural world in general and all living things in particular. Cameron's Na'Vi tribesmen live in harmony with their

spectacularly beautiful landscape, residing communally in a gigantic Home tree, where they sleep aloft in hammocks fashioned of enormous leaf-like pods secure in a dendritic space of interconnection that mimics both a neural and arborescent network that unifies the group in body and spirit. In opposition to the cold, dehumanized villains Quaritch and Selfridge, Cameron places wise, caring leaders of the Na'Vi Omatikaya clan, the chief Eytukan and his shaman wife Mo'at, the spiritual leader of the tribe, who selflessly protect their people and culture. When war finally does break out, the moral, seemingly pre-lapsarian Na'Vi find themselves embroiled in a David – and Goliath struggle that casts natural wisdom, bows, and arrows, and flying mountain banshees—the quasi equine ikran- against sophisticated space vessels, powerful automatic weapons, and nearly impervious, monstrous robots.

Ecocentrism holds relevance by advocating for the well-being of all living things, not just specific creatures. Despite being ingrained in human nature to control other living beings, it's essential to recognize that nature itself has a right to existence. When we express the need to protect and conserve nature for the benefit of human life, it often stems from a human-centric perspective. This mindset, though labeled as ecocentrism, can be considered a masked version of it. The true significance of ecocentrism lies in the belief that nature should be protected and preserved for its intrinsic value, not solely for human interests. Ecology or nature is not a mere object to be modified according to our needs. Just as humans have the right to live, all living things have the right to their own existence.

In the novel *Valli* by Sheela Tomy, writer Sarah Joseph critically examines ecocentrism, stating that "Every blade of grass has its rightful soil. A vision of life that seriously thinks about the right of a blade of grass... and thus about the equal rights of men. This heartache for all living beings and those who are building the concrete jungles of development by razing hills, mountains, forests and fields is incomprehensible." It is evident that every living thing has its own rights on Earth. Expanding on Sarah Joseph's observation, throughout the novel *Valli*, author Sheela Tomy also advocates for the true essence of ecocentrism and criticizes humanity's greed in attempting to conquer the entire ecosystem.

In relation to the environment, post-humanism can be defined by a number of characteristics. First, post-humanism exposes anthropocentrism as an attempt to ignore behavior in which humans focus on themselves at the expense of all other species. Second, Posthumanism critiques exclusive moral focus on human inequalities in relation to environmental protection, emphasizing that inequality between species should remain within the scope of ethical

consideration. Third, it reveals anthropocentrism as an inadequate basis for environmental action as it criticizes anthropocentrism as ethically wrong as well as pragmatically ineffective.

Anthropocentrism literally means human-centered, but in its most relevant philosophical form it is the ethical belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value. In contradistinction, all other beings hold value only in their ability to serve humans, or in their instrumental value. From an anthropocentric position, humans possess direct moral standing because they are ends in and of themselves; other things (individual living beings, systems) are means to human ends.

Cameroon's *Avatar* series portrays the subversion of anthropocentric worldview. Anthropocentrism, which gives emphasis on the superiority of Homo sapiens over other species, is challenged through the love of Jake Sully to Neytiri and their love towards nature. He embraces his avatar form and decides to accept it for the rest of his life. Jake's character here presents his submission to the non-human form, which is a contrast to the theory. Also, he chooses to fight for the good in order to protect the clan 'Omtikaya' and to preserve Pandora. In the greed for acquiring unobtanium, the team of RDA never cares about the life of a clan and the biodiversity. Nature is neutral, it never categorizes among any species nor does it discriminate. The idea of superior and inferior comes from the humans' mind which creates such discrimination between living species and creates imbalance in whole biodiversity. The unbalanced relationship with nature and humans destructive behavior towards nature is endangering earth and humans own health. Nature is the foundation. And humans should model the value of nature. Dave Foreman argues, "Human beings are not dominant, Earth is not for Homo sapiens alone, human life is but one life on the planet and has no right to take exclusive possession" (446). This is exemplified by the characters in the Avatar series, providing a model to perceive nature as a community of coexisting beings. No living thing is superior to others; instead, they are equal creatures that need to coexist for one another. An exception among other human beings, Jake stood for nature out of love. Love has the power to transform an individual, fostering selflessness and acceptance of everyone.

Through the analysis of Jake's character, the dominance of non-humans over human beings becomes apparent. The struggle is for their existence, to safeguard their group and preserve nature in its natural state. The concept of nature as a co-living being originates from the human emotion of love. Love is the force that transforms Jake, enabling him to stand by his principles in all situations and transcending boundaries and limitations.

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(Re)scripting History, Fiction and Cultural Identity: Analysis of *The Golden Legend*

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Nadeem Aslam is one such an author whose writing style has been inspired by great writers like Vasko Popa, Czslaw Milosz, John Berger, Michael Ondaatje and Bruno Schulz. Aslam regards literature as "public act", and a "powerful instrument against injustice"(Jaggi). *The Golden Legend* (2017) written by Nadeem Aslam portrays a tale of sectarian violence, cruelty and religious intolerance anticipating a peaceful time and space. He dovetails the history of Pakistan, cultural conflicts, immigrant experience whereby fictionalizing history in his novels. He weaves his narratives in a conscious manner so as to move in parallel with the psyche of the characters in his novels. Aslam's narratives encompass a profusion of metaphors, exotic images, abstract ideas, and symbolic elements. Omniscient narration is repeatedly interrupted by flashbacks and historical references.The novel *The Golden Legend* uses architecture as a medium to narrate a violent landscape that parallels the lives of the characters. It is interesting to categorize this novel as an example for narrative automation where story in fragments are narrated using the literary spaces that are created within. It is set in a fictional city of Zamana, which is located somewhere on the Grand Trunk Road in northern Pakistan. His female characters are unique in their perception and representation.

Zamana becomes the backdrop for a peaceful, symbolic place that encapsulates cultural memory of tolerant times in the history of Pakistan quite contrary to the bloodshed, violent, and intolerant Pakistan in 1970s. Like the female leads in his other works Nargis, in *The Golden Legend* relentlessly fights the ingrained polarization of cultural identity that the society demands. The paper attempts to analyse how the narrative is configured in order to fictionalize history, the role of space and its overt representation of cultural identity.

Nargis, an architect who lives with her husband Massud (also an architect) in Zamana—a fictional city whose name (time) connects to the novel's theme. They flee to an island where they find safety in a mosque that Nargis had built.The fictional city of Zamana, forms the narrative setting, in a part of the Grand Trunk Road that links Bangladesh to Afghanistan. The novel opens with the death of an architect Massud, who leaves behind his wife and associate Nargis. They have a spectacular collection of exquisite buildings and fought for culture in a hostile environment. Living in the mixed neighbourhood of Badami Bagh across from Zamana's

18th century mosque, Massud and Nargis were no strangers to violence. Massud and Nargis had built a mosque on this deserted island on the outskirts of Zamana. Through architecture their intention was to resolve the rift between different branches of Islam. The initial and original plan was that a Hindu temple and a church would be constructed beside it. Massud is accidentally shot during the inauguration of a new library they have designed in Zamana. Nargis is the guardian to Helen, the daughter of Lilly and Grace, her Christian servants. Helen is targeted by Islamic extremists who see her journalism as heretical and believe that Christians should be driven from Pakistan ("*The Golden Legend*: Review").

The two women make attempts to get back to normalcy, but Helen's father Lily's growing love for a Muslim widow, the daughter of the local cleric, is about to destroy the fragile peace in Badami Bagh. When this gets exposed, Lily gets accused and he has to flee for his life. Helen and Nargis become targets and they are also forced to flee. Meanwhile Helen has fallen in love with Imran, a Kashmiri terrorist-in-training who has escaped from his camp after understanding about the brutal acts which he has to soon indulge in. And Imran becomes a self-appointed protector of these women.

Religious intolerance was indeed a very serious issue during the independence of Pakistan and its formation as a country or probably a nation should be contextualised in order to relate to the instances mention in the narrative of the story. R. S. Tanner has observed in *Violence and Religion: Cross-Cultural Opinions and Consequences*, that the independence of Pakistan led to a massive migration by some religious communities and various regions that were dominated by Muslim communities began to merge with Pakistan, while the regions occupied by non-Muslim communities remained part of the Indian State. Although most Sikh and Hindu communities migrated to India, and also Indian Muslims, especially from eastern Punjab, sought homes in Pakistan, Christians in Punjab did not move massively across new borders. Christians in Pakistan experienced oppression, especially since Islam was declared as the state religion of Pakistan in 1956. Political leadership and military regimes used Islam to legitimize rules that can harm Christianity and other minority religions. The emergence of Islamic nationalism had an impact on the exclusion of religious minorities from political, citizenship, and economic processes, as well as marginalizing them and leading to the possibility of conflict and counter-nationalism. According to various surveys, Pakistan had the highest number of Christians persecuted in the world in November 2017 (Tanner). During twelve months (2015 to 2016), 76 Christians were killed in Pakistan. Christians in Pakistan suffer from institutionalized

discrimination. Many Christians experienced poverty and some even became victims of forced labour.

Aslam remarks in an interview that he fictionalizes history in the novel, "Once upon a time there was a country called Pakistan, dreamt up by secular intellectuals as a refuge for Muslims. According to its creation myth, Pakistan was also meant to be a democratic homeland for minorities. But in reality, Hindus and Sikhs were driven out; now Christians are the victims of terrorism or persecution in the form of blasphemy laws." The various episodes of violence in the story reflect on the politics of Pakistan as a sectarian state taking into account its problematic relationship with the world. The work offers accounts of the historical delineations of Islamic militancy inside Pakistan and the CIA's drone campaigns in mountain terrains. It is through Imran's perspective and narration that Aslam implies the insurgency in Kashmir. Imran who has escaped from a militant training camp on the outskirts of Zamana is a fictional representation of the ousted Kashmiri. With Imran's assistance Nargis and Helen flee Zamana and take refuge in an island that was formed, "when the soil caught in the hoof of a winged horse-like creature was dislodged and fell to earth, landing in the river." Imran recalls the space as there lies in this beautiful but abandoned mosque an "Islamic Paradise garden" of almonds, walnuts, peach, apricot, mulberry, apple amidst this thick foliage.

Imran, Nargis, and Helen find shelter in an island, which is a perfect symbol of liberty, a pure free place. They live in that mosque built by the Massud and Nargis in the context of a holy thought of bringing all types of religions together, within the same place. That mosque is usually considered the symbol of peace for all the sects and religiously oriented groups towards one platform to bring peace in Pakistan. The basic thought of Massud behind the building this mosque was to ensure that all the four sects of Islam will gather here to perform a common prayer. As an embodiment of unification which was absent in the real scenario. This mosque reflects an imaginary school of thought of nationalism that was not included in the real world in which both Nargis and Massud lived; the real world was still war at the survival of non-muslims.

The harmonious co-existence of diverse cultures is a sign of healthy society. Such a society is characterized by co-operation, tolerance, forbearance and understanding of each cultural group. And a nation that accommodates different cultures should encompass heterogeneity accepting distinctiveness and uniqueness of each culture. Tolerance is what comes to the forefront in the expression and acceptance of cultural differences. Aslam is

Pakistani-born and British educated; his own experience of living between two cultures finds expression in the narrative of the story. In the novel, Aslam explores the disjuncture between Western and Muslim societies as well as the height of communal hatred and violence unleashed upon innocents on the basis of religious intolerance. Nargis and Massud lived in a cultural heterotopic world that is an amalgam of their worlds and interests. Nargis was born a Christian and her real name was Margaret, the name she had been given at birth in the city of Lyallpur. Perhaps her life itself was a dangerous lie. Imran introduces him as "Moscow" which is his nickname and he is from Kashmir. There is an explicit remark by the narrator, where Aslam intersperses tradition, culture and history. "Traditions and histories had always mingled, and nothing in the East or the West was ever pure. Dante Alighieri had in all probability read accounts of Prophet Muhammad's miraculous journey to Paradise and Hell before he wrote *The Divine Comedy* (26)." There was another book written by Massud's father and its title was *That they Might Know Each Other*, works inspired by a verse in the Koran. It meditates on "how pilgrimage, wars, trades, and curiosity had led to contact between cultures. Tracing the umbilical connections between places" (42).

The chapters in the novel are titled as "The Orchard", "The Secular World", "Moscow", "The Island", "The Avoided Mirror", "The Desire Path" reminiscing different worlds within the fictional world of Zamana. Very interestingly all these different places fall into the narrative in such a way that they refer to the corresponding fictional spaces that are created. Narrative of the novel plays a significant role as far as the creation of literary spaces is concerned. Architecture and the production of heterotopic world in Zamana take place as a part of narrative automation. There are many instances in the novel that highlight the creation of literary space within the text. "According to a nineteenth century Urdu poet, all life of Zamana could be found in the city's four crowds – the one at the Mughal Fort; the one at the Gate of Hesitation that led to the medieval pleasure district; the crowd at the Friday Mosque; and the crowd at the mausoleum of the saint Charagar (19)." Foucault has observed thus, in *Of Other Spaces*, "space has a past and is inexorably related to how time is experienced." The nature of heterotopias (other spaces) indicate something about the culture they exist in both by virtue of their characteristics and by virtue of their distinctiveness. The fictional city Zamana is a heterotopia, that is a form of imaginary transcendence which might change over time and even disappear.

Aslam has indeed declared that "The most beautiful modern building in Pakistan was said by many to be a mosque designed by Nargis and Massud…they lived surrounded by objects from which they might draw inspiration (4). He describes its structure spending much time on the description on how minarets are shaped and in sunlight the sparkle that the building embodies. Here the concept of narrative automation could be adopted. Narrative automation applies to the world of fiction and the literary space created within the text. As Mark. J. P.Wolf states in his book *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*, "Automation is another way that an author's ideas are embedded in an imaginary world; the algorithm is the guiding hand that regulates the experiences of the world's visitors and controls its inhabitants according to its author's design" (201). Narrative automation does not, however, limit the reader's individualistic imaginative capabilities, nor does it constrain the literary space built within the text. Rather, narrative automation supplements the readers' imagination with additional features and characteristics that help them define it better. Another instance for this is the context where Nargis refers to the book written by Massud's Father, which is titled as *That They Might Know Each Other,* where there are twenty one sections or books in the volume. Each book comprises a narrative that talks about 'Earth', 'Water', 'Stars', 'Animals', 'Birds', 'Memory' and so on. In a challenging tone each of these sections brief a narrative that is coupled with history, cultural identity that in turn is a fictitious reality but triggers imagination and spatial associations in a reader. Nargis later finds a mutilated book of Massud and the cover of the book depicts "the Speaking Tree, which bore human and animal fruit, and grew on a mythical island named Waq Waq. Alexander the Great was standing before it, straining to listen to the heads peeping through the leaves, the faces of leopards, foxes, deer, rams, donkeys" (93).

Zamana becomes the world within the world, where religion and religious forces rule the nation quite contrary to the world that has been imagined by Nargis and Massud, indeed a secular land that enjoys plurality of cultural expression. Massud had always dreamed of attaining such a space and being a part of a world that very much humane quite contrary to the brutal past and present. Zamana is a city where the rule of law is a distant memory and social order has vanished. The chaotic everyday urban life in Pakistan is embedded in the violence mentioned in the narrative where the central characters become refugees in their own city. The book within the book, 987-page masterpiece "That They Might Know Each Other" written by Massud's father, turns out to be a representation of a mental space that juxtaposes disparate

ideas, thoughts, and historical events with far-fetched people and places. The incomplete nature of the book and laborious need to mend the book and that makes it the "golden legend" as mentioned in the title of the book.

The island where Iman, Nargis, and Helen reach is a symbol of liberty, purity, serenity and freedom. And they start living in the four partitioned mosque that was built by Massud and Nargis epitomizing the concept of religious secularism. And the mosque symbolises peace both within the physical as well as the mental space. The characters appear to break free from the shackles of Zamana towards the end of the story. They enjoy freedom from religious and ideological constraints, normative cultural identity and representation. They rely and emphasise nothing but humane values for a peaceful co-existence. Aslam has re-scripted the history of the land by using the backdrop of history, architecture and space as means of reflecting on life and existence of man amidst a chaotic time surpassing the religious intolerance that has inflicted pain, grief and terror in people.

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Custos in Viridi: Swamp Thing as a Superhuman Biota

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"All good things are wild and free." (Thoreau 657)

Nature is an important and integral part of mankind. Every living thing in the world has a close relationship to nature. The misuse of nature by man is being out of control and if nature reacts against humans, it can lead to some disastrous consequences. In the web series *Swamp Thing*, nature needs a person who is in close connection to nature and for that role, it chooses Alec Holland.

Nature has both positive and negative approaches, if humans protect nature, it nourishes the humans and at the same time if we harm it, it reacts in a precarious manner. Nature selects a virtuous character for its survival and the person Alec Holland transforms into a Green monster and acquires all the extraordinary powers to protect the swamp and to protect himself from dangerous situations. He has great control over all the trees, plants and the whole nature obeys his words and treats him like the ruler of their swamp world.

Swamp Thing is an American super hero horror web series which was released in3rd May 2019. This big budget web series was produced by DC universe and directed by Gary Dauberman with Mark Verheiden. Swamp Thing was one of the characters in DC Comics which was produced by DC universe and distributed by the famous Hollywood producers Warner Bros. The main character in the web series is a super hero named Swamp Thing. Swamp Thing is a monster that fought against the cruelty done by humans to nature.

The individual whom the nature selects for the role of a guardian is an ordinary man who has a great affection towards the eco system. The ordinary man is Alec Holland and his transformation into the Swamp Thing has prevailed virtuous deeds to the environment. Alec Holland and Swamp Thing were persons with different physical structures but with same mental conflicts. Alec Holland is a handsome charming youngster and Swamp Thing is a swamp monster with reddish brutal eyes and terrible body. Physically Alec Holland and Swamp thing are entirely different, but their internal conflicts and their feelings are the same. Alec Holland dies in an explosion and his memories survive inside the swamp thing. He becomes a monster after his death, but the swamp thing thinks that he is Alec Holland.

Alec Holland's consciousness and memories are imbibed by the Swamp Thing, with monstrous appearance and frightening physicality. The accident which happens in the swamp has changed the life of Alec Holland. Alec Holland died and it was the rebirth of Alec Holland as Swamp Thing. Alec Holland was not aware of the reason behind the attack when Alec's body has transformed as the Swamp Thing. He couldn't realize what was happening inside him. He cannot understand the changes that are occurring to him. He'transfigured as a green monster with lot of super powers. But he cannot accept the change that is happening to him at that night. He started attacking himself physically out of sheer frustration and anger, but mentally he seems to be Alec Holland. He realized that he cannot go back to his earlier life. Alec Holland is a man who stands for truth and also it is reflected in the character of swamp thing. Here Alec Holland and Swamp Thing stands for goodness and morality, both have same emotions. Alec always tried to connect with the swamp, its growth, and its magical power and hence the Swamp Thing beholds all those powers.

Swamp Thing is the avatar of the Green, in here, green is the protector of nature and human, but there is something out there, that is, the darkness of the nature, the darkness which came out from the pain of the nature. That darkness hunts the human for what they did to this nature. Here, the Green Swamp Thing is trying to protect humans from that darkness through his super powers. This makes him a superhero. *Swamp Thing* began as the story of Alec Holland, a young botanist, but after the events in swamp he turned into a green creature from the swamp.

Another leading Green Man scholar, William Anderson, bestows upon the Green Man the alias of "archetype of our oneness with the earth,"(Anderson 21) as taken from the title of his seminal work. Anderson's view of this "oneness" illustrates one of the more popular roles hoisted upon the shoulders of the Green Man. The Green Man is often assigned the duty of uniting the spheres of nature and civilization that is to serve as an intermediary and mediator between the two. The Green Man is first and foremost a representative of nature; nature that has suffered much at the hands of civilization, and is thus often inclined to become an aggressive nature, a defender of natural spaces.

Swamp Thing's stature is strongly connected to the Green Man tradition. Leaves, because of their yearly death and re-emergence, denote fertility, growth and renewal. Green leaves are symbolic of life renewed. Many of the figures associated with the Green Man tradition are representative of rebirth, including Dionysus, Robinhood, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

and at times even Jesus Christ. Swamp Thing as a sacrificial Christ-figure, not only reaffirm the attribute of rebirth often associated with the Green Man but suggest a further capacity for Swamp Thing to become a symbol for the relationship between humanity and the environment. It is nature, the Swamp Thing/Green Man that bears the burden of modern society's industrialization and ecologically devastating actions.

The green superheroes always come to rival with the negative characters. Alike all the superhero characters like Batman, Superman and others, whose function is to bring justice to the world, very often the urban world; the green superhero Swamp Thing tries to protect the binding force between nature and humans. It brings its elemental existence to the service of the nature and of men in nature. Either the nightmarish or poetic scenes in *Swamp Thing* transport the spectators into the depths of their inner world, in which they can see their relationship with the natural world.

Swamp Thing's superhuman strength level is directly tied to his connection to the Earth. With the additional power supplied to him by the Green, his ultimate strength level is nearly incalculable, dependent entirely on the Green's health. Swamp Thing has the ability to commune with plant life and to control its growth and form and this peculiar capability is referred to as Chlorokinesis. Swamp Thing also has a complete mastery over all forms of plant life and can command vegetative matter to do his bidding.

Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle dealt with virtues in terms of character traits of the soul. They held that virtues are conducive to personal and social happiness, while lack of virtue leads to suffering and downfall. The world's religions universally encourage people to cultivate virtues, and attribute their source to ultimate reality. Plato likewise rooted virtue in a higher reality, the Forms. Every culture on earth is grounded in teachings and practices that cultivate personal virtue in order to promote social and moral responsibility, so that people may be able to live peacefully on earth and beyond. In this series, there is a conflict between good and bad, dark and light, virtue and vice. Both these binary aspects are shown evidently in the *Swamp Thing*.

The web series *Swamp Thing* conveys the necessity to protect the nature in a fictional manner and expresses the situation that, if nature wants to take revenge it has the ability to 'fight back.' Swamp Thing is thus endowed with a proper "pantheistic consciousness" that urges it to fight against the threats of growing industrialization and uncontrolled urban expansion.

As Swamp Thing develops the awareness of its ability to enter a state of communication with the environment, it becomes a sort of green superhero, the incarnation of the primeval force of the elements, ready to rebel against man's violent invasion of natural spaces. Swamp Thing is another fantastic creature meant to awaken people's ecological sensitivity.

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Mushrooming Ecological Consciousness in Mollywood: An Analysis of New Wave Malayalam Movies

Shani K. Meeran

Movies of different genres have become very significant cultural products in the recent decades. They hold an unparalleled footing in the culture industry. As the adage goes, a picture is worth thousand words. Hence, film as a medium plays massive role in highlighting various regional as well as matters of universal significance. According to David Ingram, ecocritics have properly addressed the representation of ecological issues in films and attempted environmentalist critique of the political economy of the audio-visual media in the recent decades. Films have now become an important arena for the cultural debates in ecocriticism. According to ecocritics, the images of nature constructed within human cultures bespeak the challenges that need to be addressed. As Stacy Alaimo writes, "representations have material consequences" and "shape contemporary responses to environmentalism" (Alaimo 279). Thus, films can serve as a pedagogical tool to ecological reflection.

The various movie industries have played notable role in highlighting ecological issues in unique ways. The geography of a place has key role in shaping the lives and culture of its people. Hence, the reflections on ecology in films across cultures provide unique and diverse cinematic experiences. The current paper focusses on a bunch of creative reflections on ecology in Mollywood with the onset of New Wave in the industry. The paper is an analysis of select New Wave Malayalam movies through ecocritical lens.

As the term suggests, 'New Wave in Mollywood' refers to the new developments happening in the industry since 2010. It was fueled by erosion of the so-called 'superstar system'. The rise of urban centered and middle-class themes, multiple story lines and the introduction of new actors are part of the wave. The New Wave has brought radical and revolutionary changes in the industry. In the 26th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), the veteran Malayalam filmmaker Kamal had a positive take on the New Wave happening in movies all over India particularly in Mollywood. While talking at the "Symposium of Malayalam Filmmakers" at IFFK, he opined that massive changes are taking place in Indian cinema with the onset of New Wave and it is happening in Mollywood through directors like Lijo Jose Pellissery (Filmyhoods 2022).

With the outbreak of global pandemic, ecological crisis has become a hot topic again. Hence, we can hear the echoes of ecological crises from the prestigious venue of COP26 in Glasgow to the regional films made across cultures. There is a burgeoning interest among the New Wave filmmakers to present nature in its varied dimensions. The current paper focusses on the efforts put forth by the New Wave Malayalam filmmakers in garnering ecological consciousness and reflecting on ecological crises. The movies selected for the study are *Ee.Ma. Yau* (2018), *Jallikattu* (2019) and *Churuli* (2021) directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery, *Kala* directed by Rohith V. S. and *Aavasavyuham* (2022) by Krishand. Apart from being a setting, nature acquires various levels of meaning in all the chosen movies. The films make use of veracious elements of nature as aesthetic and symbolic markers. The nature becomes a trope for cultural references, creating echoes. Nature and its diverse elements become characters themselves in certain instances. The selected films are analyzed regarding the theories of ecocriticism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, cultural ecology, and social ecology.

Ee. Ma. Yau (2018), *Jallikattu* (2019) and *Churuli* (2021) are remarkable movies directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery, who is regarded as one of the most prolific and indigenous voices of Indian cinema. In an interview given to the *Readers' Digest* in January 2021, Pellissery admits that his movies *Ee. Ma. Yau, Jallikattu* and *Churuli* constitute a trilogy.

Ee. Ma. Yau (2018) is a dark satire. It revolves around the events following the death of Vavachan, an aged man from the Latin Catholic community in Chellanam, a coastal village with significant fishermen population in Ernakulam district of Kerala. It won Pellissery, Best Director Award at the 48th Kerala State Film Awards. As the movie opens, we see Vavachan returning home after a long journey. He talks with his son Eeshi about the grand funeral he had arranged for his father. Vavachan asks his son for a splendid funeral for himself that the coastal village had not witnessed before, to which Eeshi agrees. Vavachan dies soon from heart failure, but very unlikely events follow in the aftermath of his death. In the chaos that follows, the church vicar Fr. Zacharia demands an autopsy as a prerequisite for burying the corpse in the churchyard. An emotionally frenzied Eeshi, who wanted to give a grand funeral for his father, gets into an argument with the vicar about the funeral which ends in Eeshi assaulting the vicar. An infuriated vicar hesitates to bury the dead in the churchyard. Though efforts were made to reconcile with the vicar, they turn out to be futile. A heartbroken Eeshi must finally give a simple, natural, and unceremonious funeral for his father, all by himself in the home courtyard with the whole nature becoming a part of it.

The ecological significance of the movie is noticeable from the very setting of the movie in a coastal village named Chellanam with fishermen population. The whole story takes place against the backdrop of the sea. Problematizing death and the notion of funeral, the movie offers deep insights into the relationship between humans and the forces of nature. At the beginning of the movie, there is a conversation about the depletion of fish wealth leading to poor catch as a result of dried-up sea. The movie comments on how the changing times have taken its toll on sea and the coastal life. The movie clearly portrays the life and culture of people living in a coastal village in Kerala. Hence it becomes an instance of Cultural Ecology. In the book titled *Literature as Cultural Ecology,* it is stated that,

> Aesthetic forms of communication represent a special potential as a sustainable cultural practice because of their "heightened sensibility" for the connectivity and complexity of the natural as well as the cultural worlds. In their "expanded mode" of nondiscursive knowledge, they can tap into deeper, unconscious realms of mind and life, activating them as alternative forms of dealing with the contemporary ecological crisis within longer-term perspectives of evolution and survival beyond short-term economic interests. What is especially important is the emphasis on the active, participatory role of the recipient in the creative processes of art (Zapf 20).

Vavachan is a renowned mason who had built the church altar in a single piece of wood. But the church authority is planning to replace the grapevine of altar with modern art. It is a symbolic gesture of the changing times and its effect on the fisher folk. Apart from being a backdrop, the nature and its elements become characters themselves in the movie. They are very much a part of the funerals taking place in the movie. In addition to Vavachan's death, the movie also portrays a gravedigger's and a dog's death inviting comparisons between them. The changes in tone of the movie and the moods of characters get reflected in the nature. The morning following Vavachan's death is a cloudy one accompanied by thunder and incessant rain. Once the rain begins, the gravedigger of Vavachan is shown as fallen dead in the grave. As the preparations for Vavachan's funeral gets underway, rain becomes more intense. The arrival of Vavachan's illegitimate wife and her relatives at the scene worsens the situation. Eeshi strongly opposes and refuses to share his father. At the height of the heated arguments, the Pandal under which the body was placed collapses due to intense rain. The incessant rain may be symbolic of the nature's fury over the thoughtless and selfish deeds of men.

The significance of the nature is most evident in the final burial scene of Vavachan (Pellissery, 2018, 1: 44: 31). In the aftermath of vicar's refusal for a ceremonial burial, a helpless Eeshi prepares for a simple, natural funeral. It is contrasted with the ceremonial funeral of the gravedigger that takes place simultaneously. At the scene of gravedigger's funeral, just after placing the coffin in the grave, the sexton asks to fill sand quickly to prevent water from entering the coffin due to heavy downpour. Here, a separation between the human body and the earth is intended. At the same time, Eeshi drenches himself and digs a grave in the courtyard for his father. The roaring sea in the backdrop reflects his conflicting emotions. As Eeshi digs the grave, the others shout at him calling him mad and ask someone to stop him. But Eeshi threatens anyone who tries to stop him. He even locks the women of his household inside and asks every other to leave his compound. He did not want anyone to join in his father's final rites except himself and the nature. It rains heavily throughout the funeral as if the whole nature joins Eeshi in his bereavement. Finally, Eeshi buries his father while all others stand helplessly outside the compound. He places a wooden cross instead of a silver one after the burial. Here Eeshi emerges as a warrior of nature giving his father the best natural funeral ever with the whole blessings of nature in the form of shower. The sound of thunder replaces band that often accompanies a Christian funeral. Eeshi has given his father the most ceremonial return to nature. The leaves waving in the wind and the water dripping from them serves the role of bishop blessing the dead Vavachan. As the movie nears its end, a dead dog is seen lying unattended on the seashore. The final scene takes a supernatural turn when a group of men as if from the other world, clad in white comes in a boat to receive the dead Vavachan, the gravedigger and the dog along with the good and bad angels. Thus, the movie establishes the equality of all the species in the world heralding the notion of 'Deep Ecology' propounded by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss. Deep Ecology clamors for a shift from human-centered anthropocentrism to ecocentrism in which every living thing is seen as having inherent value regardless of its utility. Hence, humans are part of nature rather than superior or apart from it and must protect all life on earth as they would protect their family or self. The movie *Ee. Ma. Yau* establishes death as a great leveler and equalizer. Irrespective of rich or poor, human, or animal, everything must return to nature. The movie thus presents an unmistakable ecological vision.

Jallikkattu (2019) is another remarkable film directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery based on a short story "Maoist" by S. Hareesh. The movie was India's official entry for the 93rd

Academy Awards. It is a darkly symbolic tale which portrays the breakdown of a civilized society after a buffalo runs amok. The director clearly portrays men returning to the behavior of their cave dwelling ancestors in the aftermath of a buffalo escaping a butcher named Kalan Varkey. Though the plot appears to be quite simple, the director presents a great ecological vision etching out the monstrosities within men. Through the captivating visuals, the film blurs the fine line between animals and humans. It problematizes the relationship between gender and ecology.

Vanquishing the escaped buffalo becomes a matter of masculine pride, awakening the primal instincts of every man in the village. The film juxtaposes its two key elements i.e., humanity and nature, two forces set against each other before delving into the plot. In the movie, the domination of men over nature is paralleled with the patriarchal domination over women. It contrasts the brutal killing of buffalo with a scene of domestic violence where a husband shouts at his wife for repeatedly making the same breakfast (Pellissery 6:59). There are repeated shots of knives cutting through flesh implying the wounds made on nature. Donna Haraway has argued that the notion of a viable existence should be broadened to encompass life forms beyond humans. She suggests that in addressing the ethical and political dilemmas related to animals that can be killed, we must adopt a mindset of reimagining, engaging in speculation anew, and maintaining an open perspective. It is crucial to acknowledge that the ways animals live and die hold significance for them just as they do for humans (93). Haraway's non-anthropocentric viewpoint reaches its peak in the concept of the "Chthulucene," which represents a continuous, non-figurative temporality that defies precise definition and necessitates various interpretations. This challenges the problematic notion of the Anthropocene (Haraway 2015).

The film clearly portrays an impatient pack of glutinous people lusting over their next meal with meat. All characters including the village priest are shown as whining over meat. The non-vegan culture of people is established very well in the movie. After the buffalo runs helter-skelter, it unravels the animosities, violence and selfish interests seething beneath the villagers, with every stride that it makes. Even a seemingly sweet old man, who implores the people chasing the buffalo not to trample over the vegetation and to leave the creature alone, turns foul mouthed and bloodthirsty as the buffalo begins to destroy his own crops. In fact, every villager disregards the inherent value of nature and is seen only for its utility. The attitude of the characters in the movie negates the tenets of deep ecology.

The patriarchal exploitation of feminine gender parallels the exploitation of nature in the movie giving it ecofeminist dimensions. The movie portrays two daunting instances of subjugation of women. One is that of a policeman's quarrel with his wife where he assaults and shouts at her in rude tones. He places his wife on par with the buffalo and wishes both to be dead. Another instance of sexual violence is when Sophie, the butcher's sister is attacked by Antony, the butcher's assistant like a predator hungry for meat. Though she resists vehemently, her subsequent calm conversation with him shows the normalization of sexual violence in society whereby women condition themselves to face the male bestiality. The scene becomes more vibrant with the arrival of Kuttachan, a local bandit who was banished from the village in part due to plotting of Antony when both men craved for Sophie. A fierce fight ensues between Kuttachan and Antony bordering on sexual rivalry. The buffalo becomes a device for them to prove their sexual domination. In a remarkable scene, Kuttachan tells his helper in the chase that, the tastiest flesh on earth is that of humans which throws light on his vengeance against Antony and his lust over Sophie (48:30). It also echoes the cannibalistic tendencies still prevalent in the so called 'civilized' people. The man's desire to dominate nature is like his desire for domination over women.

The setting of the movie in a village in the mountains is also ecologically significant. Many of the villagers are outlaws who have migrated from other places. An old man character in the movie relates the history of the place. According to him, the place was dense forest in the past with abundant wild animals. But eventually the human encroachment led to the depletion of forest cover and wild animals. Though the humans inhabit the place, it still belongs to the animals. He comments that though the men chasing the buffalo run on two limbs, they in fact are all animals (01: 01: 11). In the movie, the animal's escape is always aided by the elements of nature, like darkness and rain, before it is finally subdued. The buffalo emerges as a warrior of nature against its domination. As the chase nears its end, the distinction between humans and animals are blurred beyond recognition. The beastliness within human beings reaches its pinnacle in the final pyramid scene in which people pile up like a pyramid over the buffalo and Antony, lusting for flesh (01: 28: 26). The whole civilization that men claim to have achieved breaks down in this scene. The end shot of prehistoric cave where primitive men fight each other after hunt conveys the idea that the years of evolution have not taken humans forward from the basics. It justifies the words of Harari that the deep sensory and emotional structure of humans have not changed much since the stone age (2016, p.80).

Churuli (translated as Labyrinth) is a 2021 mysterious film directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery based on the short story "Kaligaminarile Kuttavalikal" by Vinoy Thomas. Being, part of a trilogy, the movie shares similarities with its predecessor *Jallikattu. Churuli* is equally ecologically significant with its setting in the heart of a forest. It centers around two undercover cops, Antony and Shajivan who comes to the forest village of Churuli in search of an evasive wanted convict named Mayiladumparambil Joy. In the events that follow, reality and fantasy merges to give a thought-provoking tale of humans caught in the labyrinth of life with nature playing a decisive role. The movie begins with folk tale of a Hindu priest travelling through forest to capture an evil spirit named Perumadan, who is notorious for misleading people travelling through the beautiful forest. He comes across a ball on his way which turns out to be a rolled-up pangolin. Mistaking it for a ball, the priest takes it with him. But to his surprise, the pangolin starts speaking and directing the priest through various paths inside the forest. He traverses the paths guided by the pangolin, but gets lost in the woods. According to the myth, the priest is still wandering in the forest as he failed to realize that the pangolin was Perumadan in disguise. As the priest wanders through the forest, laughter of a woman is heard in the background which hints at the gender dimensions in the movie regarding ecology. Antony and Shajivan reaches Churuli under the pretext of working for a man named Thankan. As they reach the entrance to the village, they meet a jeep driver who promises to take them to the village with the fellow passengers seeming friendly at first. But the events take a startling turn once they cross a wooden bridge which marks their entry from the outside world to the forest village. The villagers turn out to be very rude and uncivilized. Since Thankan has been away from the village, the cops start working in a toddy shop which is the liveliest spot in the village. During their stay at the place, they realize that all the villagers are outlaws who choose the forest as a haven. The cops, especially Shajivan come across mysterious experiences. Though they manage to find the convict, they are inescapably stuck in the village as if caught within a labyrinth.

The movie contains significant reflections on ecology and gender. It opens with a picturesque aerial view of the forest and that of a bus journeying towards Churuli. The eeriness of the bus horn is contrasted with the sounds in nature. Here the bus becomes the symbol of human encroachment on nature. Later, as the cops travel to the village in a jeep, they have a talk on the fecundity of soil and how colonialism led to deforestation. They opined that the human encroachment would not have happened if the British had not reached there. Hence

the movie espouses the philosophical theory of social ecology associated with Murray Bookchin. The social crisis we are grappling with is closely connected to a crisis born from humanity's relationship with the planet. Our existing society is confronted not just by the erosion of its values and institutions but also by the deterioration of the natural environment. It is important to note that this issue is not exclusive to our era; it has been a recurring challenge throughout history. In his book *The Ecology of Freedom*, Murray Bookchin states that, "The damage inflicted on the environment by contemporary society encompasses the entire earth" (19).

It is noticeable that the cops have come under the guise of taking pits for planting rubber tree which is essentially a cash crop. It hints at the depletion of forest cover for monetary purpose. The movie presents an old woman waving axe at Shajivan for coming to take pits for rubber which can be seen as a symbolic gesture of Mother Earth reacting to her intruders. One of the allegations against the wanted convict is that of poaching wild animals. The movie presents a bunch of people who finds ecstasy in hunting and women. In the words of Antony, masculinity is measured by game meat and tamed woman which echoes man's desire to dominate nature as well as woman. In another significant scene, Shajivan comments that all forests are alike, which resemble a coiled snake and is not to be trampled on (Pellissery, 2021,1: 12: 36). It is a significant observation on the need for protecting nature. Like *Jallikkattu*, the movie presents the theme of primal instincts prevalent in man despite the centuries of civilization.

Kala (translated as *Weed*) directed by Rohit V.S is another noteworthy Malayalam movie with ecological undertones. Like the movies discussed earlier, *Kala*, though centers around a simple plot, problematizes issues like masculinity, atavism, exploitation of nature and animal rights. It also stresses the notion of "weed" and its varied dimensions. The whole movie chronicles happenings of a day, in an environment comprising forest and a house. The lead character Shaji is an egoist and narcissist. He lives under the shadow of his father, the patriarch of the house. The entire story happens when Shaji's father and his wife along with his son are away for a while. In their absence, a Tamil boy played by Sumesh Moor comes to their compound under the pretext of a laborer to harvest areca nut. The real intention of the boy was to take revenge against Shaji for mercilessly killing his pet dog, by paying him back in the same coin. What ensues is a gala of violence in which Shaji and the boy fight each other, which ends in the boy emerging as the winner, thus quelling his opponent's ego.

The ecological significance of the movie is evident from its opening with an aerial view of wilderness and a house amid it. The title track of the movie "Vanyam" deals with wilderness within man which unfurls in the movie. The movie captures elements of nature vividly along with the characters. Even the insects of nature become active participants in the action. According to one of the lower caste labourers in their estate, the whole land of their landlord belonged to the natives like him. Outsiders like Shaji's father have conquered their land clearing forests making way for cash crops like pepper. They have colonized the land and the people accentuating the exploitation of nature. The boy who comes to revenge Shaji also belongs to lower caste, living in close harmony with nature. Shaji has once killed his country breed dog in frustration born out of failing to get game meat. Being a lower caste boy, Shaji did not value the boy or the dog considering both as mere weeds. The common people are often looked upon as trashy weeds. According to American author Michael Pollan, "Weed is not a category of nature but a human construct, a defect of our perception" (Pollan, 1989). Shaji never thought that the boy would avenge him. But the boy emerges as invincible and subdues Shaji at the end thus weeding out the ego in him. The cruelty toward animals is a theme rarely explored in Mollywood. Shaji's offer to replace the country dog he killed with a rich foreign breed is unacceptable to the boy. Thus, the boy emerges as a warrior for nature and people living in harmony with it. In contrast, Shaji's character is a manifestation of toxic masculinity and the primal instincts still prevalent in man. The movie ends with a remarkable scene of the boy ascending hill with Shaji's foreign breed dog as the sun rises, thus heralding the birth of a new dawn where the inherent value of all the living beings of universe is acknowledged (V.S, 2021, 02: 04: 51). As the boy leads the foreign breed dog to nature, its equality with the country breed dog is established.

Subtitled *The Arbit Documentation of an Amphibian Hunt*, *Aavasavyuham* is a satirical sci-fi film directed by Krishand with great ecological significance. The film resembling a mockumentary has bagged Kerala State Film Awards for Best Film and Best Screenplay in 2021. It gives a startling picture of the ecological exploitation happening in the context of Kerala in a satirical way. The movie opens with a Prologue titled "Aamukham." It sets the tone of the movie with the display of stuffed species and account of various researchers about the massive extinction of amphibians pertaining to human interventions. Divided into Four Chapters, a man named Joy with unknown whereabouts is at the center of the storyline. Joy has an unusual bond with nature and he lives in close communion with it. The issues like

destruction of mangrove forests and the disappearance of species like onam dragonflies are introduced in the Prologue itself. The insects of nature are closely captured to establish their equality with humans on earth. Accounts from various researchers in nature are interspersed throughout the narratives in four chapters.

The Chapter One is set in Azhikkode, 2017 and chronicles the life of Lissy Raghavan, a shrimp worker. It highlights over-exploitation of sea wealth and the greed of fish merchants who not even spare small fishes for making profit. At the center of the plot is Joy from an unknown place, whose presence in the area increase the harvest of fish by Lissy's father as the fishes flock to his whistles. But strangely, Joy himself abstain from eating fish though he smells of dried fish. Lissy is wooed by her boss at the work place and is compelled by her mother to get engaged to him though he is a criminal. The boss' wish is thwarted when Lissy refuses his proposal outright and falls for Joy making love with him in the lap of nature which enrages the boss. In a duel that ensues between Joy and the boss, Joy kills him and is fatally wounded. The Chapter ends with the disappearance of Joy from the area leaving behind the fish merchant's brother whining for revenge.

Set in Puthuvype, 2018, Chapter Two revolves around the life of Suseelan Vaava, a fisherman. The chapter begins with Vaava revealing the story behind his father's death due to snake bite. According to him, it was a place devoid of venomous snakes in the past. But as mud from other places were transported to the area for construction purposes, the eggs of snakes came along with it, thus disturbing the ecosystem of the area. Vaava had been to some fraudulent money chain businesses in the name of green entrepreneurship, but failed to make quick bucks. It was when he was almost broken that, Joy gets washed ashore in an unconscious state one day. Vaava shifts him to hospital where the doctor in charge detects worms from nature in Joy's body which was sent to further labs for inspection. But they could not make out much of the situation as the worms underwent morphosis in the lab later. Thus, mystery surrounding Joy is further deepened. The transformation in Joy's body begins in this chapter. Like in the previous episode, the arrival of Joy increases the fortune of Vaava as he begins to reap abundant fish wealth. Hence Joy is regarded as a lucky charm though he has looming doubts over the real identity of Joy. The exploitation of sea wealth and the commodification of natural resources are highlighted here too. Joy, being a warrior of nature is termed a Maoist and arrested along with a local environmentalist for planting trees as well as partying in nature.

The second chapter ends in a fight between Murali, brother of the dead fish merchant in Chapter One during which Joy is shot and is believed to be dead.

Chapter Three set in Puthuvype, 2022 begins with Madhusmitha, a Kudumbasree worker relating the events following the appearance of a strange creature in her house four years back. In between the narrative, incidents like the disappearance of humpback dolphins with the coming of Vallarpadam terminal and their return during the corona lockdown are highlighted. Madhusmitha is portrayed as a victim of nature's fury as her son died during the cyclone Ockhi. The creature found in her house is identified as Joy by Murali, Vaava and some of his other acquaintances. But Joy has undergone significant morphosis and appears more like an animal. Speculations and hot debates ensue in television channels regarding the identity of the found creature. Towards the end, Murali appears with his allies on the scene and shot Joy dead. Thus, Joy becomes a martyr of nature. The annihilation of Joy is symbolic of the irrevocable damages inflicted on nature. The third part of the movie draw parallels between pandemic and human estrangement from nature. In the "Introduction" to the book *Pandemic, Ecology and Theology,* it is stated that,

> The strange stillness of the pan-demic has provided a moment for pan-reflection, and an opportunity to re- orientate the status quo. For many, there is a collective sense that this is more than an issue to manage our way out of. Rather, it is indicative of our broken relationship with the natural world of which we should be a part, and perhaps our alienation from a deeper sense of meaning, one not centred exclusively upon human needs and wants (1).

Chapter Four entitled "Upasamharam" set in Paris, 2023 serves as an epilogue. The chapter shows how Joy finally becomes a mere exhibit along with other extinct species at the National Museum of Natural History which hints at the impending apocalypse. According to Lawrence Buell, "Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary imagination has at its disposal" (285). With startling revelation of the ongoing exploitation of nature and its resources, the movie serves as reminder for the need to conserve nature and rekindle the lost connection with it. It is indeed a warning about the extinction of human beings itself if they fail to protect nature in the future.

The analysis of select 'New Wave' movies in Mollywood reveal that ecology is no more an underexplored domain in the industry. All the movies discussed have much ecological

significance with nature acquiring various levels of meaning. The trend can be seen continuing in the New Wave movies made in the covid and post-covid era like *Aarkkariyam*, *Jaan e Mann*, *Minnal Murali* (all 2021), *Malayankunju*, *Palthu Janwar* (all 2022), *2018: Everyone Is A Hero* (2023) and so on. With the advent of online screening platforms, the fame of Malayalam movies has travelled far and wide garnering universal appeal. Malayalam movies have come a long way with the emergence of 'New Wave' movement. The exploitation of nature parallels that of women in almost all the chosen movies. Various ecological crises are problematized in the movies. The elements of cultural ecology and social ecology are also evident in the movies.

Hence, the role played by 'New Wave' Malayalam movies in discussing and debating ecology and its myriad dimensions is far from negligible.

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Dismantling Norms: Exploring the Latent in Kapur's *A Married Woman*

Vidhya Viswanathan

Literary discourses, especially of the contemporary period, challenge the conventional notions of gender dynamics that propose codes of conduct for different genders. This is evident in most narratives irrespective of the divergent socio-political and cultural contexts in which it is written. Challenging the existing norm gains momentum as people recognise the need to deconstruct aspects that limit their potential in the day-to-day activities of life. Most of the contemporary texts by women writers explore and expose the predicament of women as wives and mothers, to reveal the stifling realities of their existence in a patriarchal society. The institutions of marriage as promoted by the conventional streams of thought do not seem to empower women to ventilate their aspirations and experienced realities of adhering to conditioned forms of existence.

One of the present-day writers from India, Manju Kapur, through her narratives, embarks to throw light on the aspects of women that are often silenced in accordance with the cultural, social, and political power structure that imposes silence on the expression of individuality among women. Through her works, she attempts to depict and bring into the realms of critical discussions the consequences of adhering to conventional social norms. Through diverse contexts, Kapur showcases the dilemma and ambivalence experienced by women characters who struggle to fit in and venture out of the framework designed for women in a patriarchal society. Her first novel, *Difficult Daughters* (1998) was awarded the Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1999. Other popular works include *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008), *Custody* (2011) and *Brothers* (2016). This paper attempts to analyse and discuss in detail the fictional narrative, *A Married Woman* that exposes the limitations of the institution of marriage and wifehood through the character of Astha who gets torn between the expectations of society and her inclinations to lead a life of her choice. Within the purview of this text, this paper also attempts to explore the latent feminist ideology dexterously underlined by Kapur to dismantle the existing norms to liberate women from social constraints that often threaten their aspirations.

A Married Woman narrates the life episodes of the protagonist Astha as she advances from adolescence to a woman to accept the roles administered by Indian society under the institution of womanhood. Astha is introduced as the only child of a working middle-class

parents – her mother is employed as a teacher and her father is a bureaucrat. Right through her childhood days, she is trained in a conventional manner by her parents reminding her of her vulnerability as a female: "Astha was brought up properly, as befits a woman, with large supplements of fear. One slip might find her alone, vulnerable, and unprotected. The infinite ways in which she could be harmed were not specified, but Astha absorbed them through her skin, and ever after was drawn to the safe and secure" (1). The instructions given by her parents and other elders reflect the conditioning of the female mind that is prevalent in today's society and it operates to promote "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (23) as Kate Millett observes in *Sexual Politics*.

The novel is set against the backdrop of the socio-political unrest instigated by the Babri Masjid issue which resonates with the internal conflict of Astha on struggling to fit into a system of patriarchy that does not provide space for independent thoughts and its executions. As per the conventional system, Astha gets married to Hemant, the "foreign-retuned son of one of the bureaucrats who lived in large houses bordering Lodhi colony" (33). His education, job and his family's financial security make him the most eligible man for Astha. According to the aspirations of her family, she marries Hemant and basks in the warmth of love that blossoms their relationship in the early years of marriage:

> Back in Delhi, Astha submerged herself in the role of daughter-in-law and wife. Time spent in the kitchen experimenting with new dishes was time spent in the service of love and marriage. Hemant's clothes she treated with reverence, sliding each shirt in his drawers a quarter centimetre out from the one above so they were easily visible, darning all tiny holes in his socks, arranging his pants on cloth-wrapped hangers so there would be no crease. (43)

Initially, as a wife and later as a mother, she appears to be happy but soon she is caught in the matrix of discontentment and disappointments that exist in the conventional pattern of life that is laid down to women by the male-dominated society. At this point, she encounters the existential dilemma that the feminist critique Betty Friedan refers to in *The Feminine Mystique* as "the problem that has no name" (n.p). The inconsiderate attitude of her parents, in-laws, and Hemant towards her skills of painting and her professional engagement as a teacher compels her to seek consolation from others who are more understanding of her potential outside the role of a wife and mother. Though she attempts to fit into the system to be

accepted by everyone, she fails as is revealed through the words of Kapur who describes her as:

> Astha was now virtually a single mother. Beleaguered by job, small children, and house, she sometimes toyed with the idea of resigning from school, but between her marriage and the birth of her children, she too had changed from being a woman who only wanted love, to a woman who valued independence. Besides there was the pleasure of interacting with minds instead of needs. (72)

Desperate to make others understand her struggles to meet the requirements expected of her as a homemaker, she tries to express her dilemma through poems. Hemant who reads these works, however, fails to decipher any sense and so she laments: "I want to bang my head against the wall because you never understand anything" (81). Disappointed with his non-compassionate approach towards her, she stops writing and turns her attention to drawing and painting which too are discouraged by Hemant. Asha expresses Hemant's insensitivity towards her and deduces that he is unshakeable in his decisions:

> What kind of a fool had she been to expect Hemant to understand? She had a good life, but it was good because nothing was questioned. This boat could not be rocked. She could paint that on a canvas and put it upon the wall, and stare at it day and night, so that its message burnt its way through her brain into her heart. This boat cannot be rocked. (99)

It is after this realisation that she feels attracted to Aijaz Akthar Khan who was the leader of the Theatre Group that performed plays to instil religious and cultural tolerance among the people. He comes to her school to conduct a drama workshop and Astha being the staff coordinator of the programme interacts with him. He praises her skills of writing and painting and in consequence, she gets drawn towards his compassionate nature. However, reminding herself that she is a wife and mother, she tries to forget his advances though she admits that she admired him: ". . . he looked at her, he wanted her opinion even when it wasn't necessary, he smiled when there was no occasion. Perhaps she shouldn't think of him so much, but soon it would be over, where was the harm, it made her happy and that in itself was worth something" (113). She suppresses this state of her mind and drifts along with the chores of her life. However, the news of his death along with the members of his theatre group who were burned live in a van by anti-socials perturbs her and she participates in the protest

rally that was organised against this brutal act of violence. She also becomes a member of the Sampradayaka Mukti Manch, a forum that was established to commemorate the activities of the Street Theatre Group.

Astha's participation in this forum brings about a tremendous change in her personal life as she gets associated with this organisation that is public and dynamic in its pursuits. As part of its manifestations, the core members of the group request Astha to offer a painting to be sold in the art exhibition conducted by the Manch to collect money to carry out the public awareness programmes that were initiated by the Street Theatre Group. Astha presents a painting and it gets sold for ten thousand rupees in the exhibition and she offers the money to the working of the Manch. Moreover, she also participates in the rallies and other programmes conducted by this organisation, thus widening her circle of contacts outside the limits of her family and other friends. Hemant questions her involvement in these public programmes and he expresses his contempt towards all its ventures that are made to develop religious and political sensitivity among people. Unlike earlier, Astha does not submit to his demands and expresses her need to work as a part of this programme.

Kapur from this point on elaborates on the transition that takes place in the character of Astha from a compromising and docile lady to an assertive woman who dares to express her individuality and sexuality in a culture that assumes women to be asexual on becoming mothers. This becomes evident when she decides to join the members of the Manch to go to Ayodhya to create awareness against religious fanaticism. As expected Hemant, her mother and in-laws express their defiance in her decision and her mother-in-law reminds her of her role as a woman, "It is not a woman's place to think of these things" (187). These cynical approaches from everyone force her to reflect on her life:

> Her mind refused to rest, roaming restlessly among the things that made up her life, her home, children, husband, painting, and the Sampradayaka Mukti Manch. Was this too much for a woman to handle . . . her children were well taken care of, she had trustworthy servants, she had someone who cooked better than she, she had left her teaching. And yet she was chained (190).

Determined to liberate herself from these constraints she decides to go to Ayodhya and this trip, more than all the other activities she has engaged with the Manch, presents and leads to certain perspectives that change the course of her life. In Ayodhya she meets Pipeelika,

Aijaz's widow and an intimate bond evolves between them that trespasses the boundaries set by patriarchy for women. Even after returning to Delhi, both of them continue their relationship and Astha leaves home frequently to meet Pipeelika. Hemant on observing her interest towards Pip, scorns her and Kapur presents his attitude towards them as: "Still, Hemant caught a whiff of this new interest in his wife's life and was free with his disapproval. Since Pipee was a woman, this disapproval was tinged with contempt, and the assurance of no real threat, indeed had Pipee been a man, Astha would have found it impossible to stray so far down the road of intimacy, or be so comfortable on it" (218).

This relationship with Pip simultaneously excites and depresses Astha as she gets torn between the expectations of a married woman and her inclination towards another relationship that is more satisfying and compassionate. When Pip asks her about her life as a wife, she confesses that it does not appease her individuality and confesses: "She was a wife too, but not much of her was required there. A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth were the necessary prerequisites of Hemant's wife" (231). Pip discloses that prior to becoming Aijaz's wife, she had relationships with other women and enquires about Astha's life. Though this question perplexes her, Astha's account of her reality expresses the dominant thoughts that occupy the minds of women in general in the Indian cultural context: "What could Astha say? She was living, the way people like her lived, where was the question of more lovers, or love for that matter?" (222). This reveals her disappointment with Hemant and it also indicates that their relationship has lost its warmth as Astha refers to it as nothing more than a "marital function" (224). Though Astha feels strange in her physical intimacy with Pip, she gradually begins to admire and appreciate this novel experience: "Afterwards Astha felt strange, making love to a woman took getting used to. And it also felt strange, making love to a friend instead of an adversary" (231). Exploring this expression of sexuality and sexual preferences by women over the heterosexual paradigm, Anu Aneja in the article, "Anticipating the Mother's Dream: Maternal Subjectivity in Psychoanalysis, Literature and Cinema" states: "Women's search for pleasures beyond the heterosexually defined relationships of adulthood becomes possible only through a hazardous escape from the patriarchal paradigm which sets women up as rivals for the phallus" (62).

Kapur's bold attempt at depicting a gratifying lesbian relationship seems to critique the existing norm of the heterosexual prototype that is considered the best in a patriarchal society. On observing Astha's distractions Hemant attempts to bring her back into his fold by expressing

his concern for her. But Astha, unlike in the earlier times refuses to yield and recollects the number of times he had neglected her: "What about the times he had not been there, and the reasons had always been such that her own claims seemed selfish. Now sexually involved with another, she realised how many facets in the relationship between her husband and herself reflected power rather than love. Hemant had managed to ignore her because ultimately, he filled his own landscape" (233).

Though Kapur presents Astha as a bold woman who dares to explore her individuality amidst the disapproval from family and friends, the inner turmoil of this woman elucidates the contradictory pulls at the emotional and psychological levels. Pip who looks forward to a full-time relationship with Astha encourages her to leave Hemant and join her with the kids. However, Astha fails to consider this concept of an alternate style of existence and parenting and hence, refuses this offer though she is unhappy in her married life. Her conventional upbringing that has framed her concept of an ideal family compels her to continue with her unhappy status by suppressing her aspirations of life and love outside the marital bond. At this moment she pretends happiness and says, "Everything is all right the way it is" (235) as she does not want to disrupt the existing family structure which includes the life of her children as well. This indicates the general attitude of women to silently suppress their different orientations and submit themselves to a system that is non-compassionate towards women. However, a dream that she shares with Pip reflects her desire to hold onto her life with Pip and her family at the same time, though it is practically impossible in reality:

> I have a fantasy, listen my love . . .
>
> I have a room, small but private, where my family pass before my eyes. It is very light, before me is a wall which divides the house, but I can see my children, that satisfies me, though to them I am invisible, that satisfies me too.
>
> This room will be our room, you with me, living in harmony. Our lives are separate, different things call to us, different demands are made on us, but always that solid base beneath us, like two flies caught in a sticky pool they cannot leave (241).

Pip who is independent and without commitments rightly objects to this pretentious existence and urges Astha to live with her. She presents alternate possibilities that are available to lead a better life: "There are other places in the world if you would only consider them. Instead, you allow yourself to be shut up by that man, who neither knows nor appreciates

you, and for what? I do not understand" (242). Though Astha considers this possibility she is unable to execute it and her dilemma indicates the traumatic experiences endured by women who are forced to continue in relationships that are toxic. As Prabhat K. Singh states in the first chapter of the book *The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium* Astha is caught in the "matrix of pains and passions of the housewives of middle-class Indian families" (7). This seems to be the consequence of certain conventional ideologies that are drilled into the minds of women through their growing-up years that compel them to follow instructions without challenging them. The inability to pursue self-oriented goals while satisfying the needs of others seems to be the reason for many women to submit to all adversities they encounter in relationships.

As the narrative climaxes, Kapur states the general attitude of women to remain silent and submissive by pretending to be happy in relationships that disempower them. Astha despite the negligence she has encountered from Hemant, decides to return to her life as his wife as any alternative method of existence would not be accepted by society. Her concern for her children and her desire to not create any disturbance in their social identity also compel her to succumb to the role of an ideal wife and mother as proposed by patriarchy. Astha's final decision to return to this patriarchal unit seems to underscore the ways in which this family structure is constituted at the cost of women as illustrated by Singh in her work, *Only So Far And No Further: Radical Feminism and Women's Writing:*

> Family is constituted as the essential moral centre of society of which woman is the silent, unpaid domestic guardian. Woman's social identity is obliterated, and the home acquires an elusive power and appeal, security, and comfort. Assumed risk and terror in the process of breaking through the walls of home help to maintain the harmony of this patriarchal unit (53).

Astha and Pip are non-conformist women characters who expose and explore the physical, emotional and psychological aspects associated with women in society. They present the state of women who are caught in the matrix of various social institutions that suffocate them to submission. Kuhu Chanana in the article titled, "Plurality of Lesbian Existence in Modern Indian Writers: Manju Kapur, Rajkamal Chaudhary and Geetanjali Shree" underlines the fact that in real life women are "left with no choice but to resort to pseudo-blissful heteronormative structure" (202). He comments on the notion of security that is expected by women in a heteronormative relationship as "Woman's false sense of being safe only in the

company of man (who is assigned a stereotypical role of a protector) is the result of continuous feeding of fear psychosis since childhood which in adults results in the perennial sense of insecurity in the company of female partners (203). Similarly, Mithu C. Bannerji in her article titled, "Lesbian Passion Forged in a Land of Turmoil" refers to this work as a site of "female revolt" (n.p) against the ideologies that are imposed on women through social, religious, and cultural practices. Kapur in this work has daringly presented women characters like Astha and Pip in the backdrop of the socio-cultural and political context of India where these types of deviant portrayals are often criticised by people who hold onto traditional concepts. Kapur skillfully draws a parallel between the unrest in the minds of women who struggle to liberate themselves from the clutches of patriarchy and the socio-political unrest instigated by the Ram Janma Bhoomi and Babri-Masjid issue in Ayodhya.

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