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Embodying Space: The Web of Ritual, Performance and Body in Kodungallur Bharani Festival

—Nimisha K. Jayan

Abstract: Kodungallur Bharani (a religious festival) is annually celebrated in Kodungallur Sreekurumba Bhagavathy Temple, Kodungallur located on the Malabar Coast of Kerala, India. The Bharani festival is noted for the 'aberrant' behaviours, animated features, and theatricality of devotees enjoying an indispensable position in the varied cultural scenario of Kerala. The temple evidently emerges as a lived space during this offbeat gathering and this paper is an attempt to analyse how the performing bodies with all their dimensions construct and occupy this space. It explores the web of space, performance, the city, ritual, and the body, understanding how the premises of the temple create a 'lived space' and offers a liminal experience for its participants during Bharani. In contemporary discourse, there has been a considerable shift in the view of space; visual perception is stressed as fragmentary and unreal. To have a holistic view, it is necessary to practice 'rhythmanalysis' bringing the whole body into focus. In this paper, a detailed study is conducted on the performativities in the city, premises of the temple, bodies of performers, and the pilgrimage paths or routes in the Kodungallur Bharani Festival. Clearly, a pilgrim's actual experience of space is markedly different from the geographical dimensions, and an attempt is also made to trace the cartography of this human geography.

Keywords: Lived space, Visual pleasure, Performativity, Liminality, Rhythmanalysis.

Bharani is a haven of aesthetes as it is primarily a festival of colour, drama, and extravagance. Accentuating this fact, we see hundreds of photographers and media persons; professionals, and amateurs, finding their way through the bustling crowd to transfer and record these exotic visions. Martin Jay hails vision as "the master sense of the modern

era" (15) as human experience is becoming increasingly visualised. With the emergence of visual culture, 'picture theory' was developed by W. J. T Mitchell that adopts a pictorial, rather than textual, view of the world (10). In Mitchell's view, picture theory stems from "the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that 'visual experience' or 'visual literacy' might not be fully explicable in the model of textuality" (Mirzoeff, *How* 16). This notion places vision on an equal pedestal of speech against the western notion of the superiority of spoken word and proclaims vision as a diverse discourse that must be studied using new tools of reference.

2 To begin with, military and police power has proven time and again to be necessary but not sufficient to create and maintain an empire. Rather, empires must employ a multitude of strategies to expand and survive, one of the most important of which is state-sanctioned public spectacles, ceremonies, and rituals (Coben 2). Thus, spectacles have deeper functions to play than circulating frivolities, and rather than being accidental outgrowths they are meticulously devised by the society to meet its ends. Bharani is a visual festival enticing eyes and minds. The very beginning of the festival is marked by the raising of flags. These flags are colourful, with intermittent patterns of bright colours, figures symbolising demons, thus bringing the impression of a battlefield. Prayer flags are an important aspect of Tibetan culture. Prayer flags act as a reminder of Buddha's preachings—promoting peace, harmony, and joy. It originated before the advent of Buddhism in Tibet, evolving through the integration of

Buddhist practices from India with the pre-Buddhist Bon Shamanism. The most followed pattern of these flags is the *lung-ta* horizontal line of symbols, *mantras* printed on to five different coloured clothes- blue, white, red, green, and yellow. These colours represent the five elements- sky, clouds, fire, water (wood), and earth. There are also vertical flags called *darchen*, made of coloured or white cloth (Barker 15). Probably, the prayer flags hung in Kodungallur temple is remnant of Buddhist establishments in Kodungallur. Another ritual of colour is *Kozhikallu Moodal*. The red colour is the prominent colour of the festival; red representing blood, violence, and sacrifice. Heaps of red-coloured clothes are placed on the *kozhikallu*, creating an impression of a pool of blood. Red is the colour of the attire of the participants, most of the faces are covered with blood enhancing the mood of the ambiance.

Hinduism is replete with such a visual representation of gods and goddesses. Sthaneshwar Timalsina suggests that constructing and worshipping images in Hinduism rests on cultivating a cognitive faculty of skilful imagination or visualisation. Without imagination, the idols become mere material objects. There is considerable evidence to argue that image worship is a practice that originated in Buddhism (50). With the emergence of *Smarta* and *Tantric* Hinduism, image worship became a central part of Hindu worship (Timalsina 51). He notes that in India, the most important terms used to denote image is *murti, bimba, vigraha, akriti, and pratima. Murti* not only describes an image but also identifies the process of providing immanence to the transcendent; in its imagination, image and their relation to the transcendent are interconnected. *Bimba* corresponds to the English term ‘image’ and refers to the reflection or the mirror image of the absolute (Timalsina 54). They are manifest in multifarious forms reflecting the identity of the

worshipper. Thus, the image is variable according to the person worshipping the goddess. Notably, other major religions of India as Islam and Christianity employ minimalist usage of images in worship. In Islam, visible representation of the almighty or any breathing entity is inappropriate as this religion is against any kind of idol worship. Thus, we garner the power of images in representing the visualised. In Hinduism, gods and goddesses are represented either as anthropomorphic figures or an abstract matter symbolising the presence of divine power. Diana L. Eck identities two types of images in Hindu worship; iconic and aniconic. The iconic image is 'representational' whereas aniconic images are 'symbolic forms' (42). The Vedic ritual tradition of Aryans was aniconic as there is no evidence of images or permanent temples or sanctuaries (Eck 43). Iconic images appeared only later. The tradition of sculptural representations of the gods served both "theological and narrative functions." These images were 'visual theologies,' which are to be 'read' by the devotees. The combination and juxtaposition of gestures and emblems express the ambiguities, the tensions, and paradoxes of the deity worship. Goddess Kali simultaneously wears a gory garland of skulls and gestures her procreation. This image world of India can be aptly called "visible thought" (Eck 51). The disfigured body of the deity is believed to severe the devotees' identification with the body culminating in the destruction of one's ego. They are also visual scriptures or visual narratives as many myths are embedded in the image.

Noticeably, the *tantric* mode of worship used explicit *yoni* and *linga* images, but later with Aryan cultural invasion and blight of British imperialism, and the consequent ascending morale of the society, these figures were smoothened or

carved out to fit into the acceptable realm. One pliable reason to frequent places of worship is that, while we gaze at these representations, we need to be gazed or be visible to the divine power. Thus, images are alive in the form of worship. In such worship, seeing a deity requires a recalling of memory associated with the myths of the respective deities. The active gaze (visualising) bridges the binaries of subject and object, and this singular awareness is the ultimate meaning, encompassing both the act of visualisation and its object, an image. Thus, in Hindu image-worship, external objects and human imagination collaborate in creating realities. Creating an image in the mental space, derived from external input becomes central to visualisation (Timalsina 57). This image may be relative, nonetheless, it limit itself to the existing practices and concepts. In this practice, even *mantras* or hymns produce images in the minds of the listener. This is evident in Bharani songs, where the listeners attend to a detailed description of the goddess's body from head to toe, which absolutely culminates in the worshipper's mental construction of the image of the goddess. For the believer, the deity images are real, as they visualise them as such. The visible aspect of a god need not be a permanent idol but can be an image as represented in a transient form as *kalam* ("floral paintings with powder"). Gilles Tarabout notes that ritual articulates different registries of the god's visuality and iconic representation (10). The visual interaction of devotees with divine images in temples is the main component of Hindu worship. Thus, vision is an important act in worship, *darshan*, the auspicious vision warding off of *drishti*, the evil vision (5).

Cultures of viewing have a close relationship with cultures of reading and thinking. Art, spectacle, and performance are important aspects of viewing (Lovatt 10). Foucault's

panopticon offered a new perspective to vision, linking it to power. The gaze connotes an active subject versus a passive object. There is a 'male gaze' that reduces women to mere bodies to be consumed and an 'imperial gaze.' Foucault through his studies probes the questions as "How does the dominant look at the subaltern?" and "What happens when these looks are returned?" (Kaplan xviii). "Like everything in culture, looking relations are determined by history, tradition, power hierarchies, politics, economics... Looking is power as Foucault has shown" (Kaplan 4). In Kerala, where untouchability was practiced, the stigmatised groups were to flee away from the upper caste gaze; the mere seeing was pollution. However, in Bharani, obviously the look is returned. The 'polluting' bodies are moved into the centre of the action, polluting the heretofore sacred spaces. The dominant view them with suspicion, disgust, and hatred and though the feeling is mutual, the festival offers the subaltern groups a space for the expression of these feelings. Feminist critics argue that the nature of representation is altered by the gender of performance and spectators, as well as by their sexual preference. Both gender and sexuality bring the dynamic of desire to play, informing the narrative's structure, the production's- 'look,' and the relationship between spectator and spectacle (Dolan 57). Bodies of participants corresponding to all sexes are adorned rendering them effeminate, negating the sexual gaze.

In Bharani, the gaze act as an instrument of power, the festival takes place under strict surveillance; the presence of policemen in large numbers in the festival ground validates this argument. Theatrical performances and spectacles in pre-modern societies have profound implications for the understanding of any society,

particularly in terms of the integration of communities and the establishment and maintenance of asymmetrical power relations, which are intricately intertwined with each other (Coben 22).

Organic use of Space in Bharani Festival

Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift begin their book *Thinking Space* by positing that "Space is the everywhere of modern thought" (1). In the fifteenth century, space was related to only visual experience; the body had but little importance in its conception. A proliferation of the concept of space has occurred, we often hear of literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, etc. As the most basic dimensions of human life, time and space serve as obvious, almost trivial, contexts of human life. On the other hand, time and space are also compositional in their being resources and factors for human action (Kellerman 1). This view catalogued space as separate from human existence, only serving a backdrop against which human behaviour is played out.

The contemporary theory of space, in turn, views space as a 'lived experience.' Michel de Certeau feels that our society is characterised by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown, and transmuting communication into a visual journey. It is a sort of epic of the eye and the impulse to read (xxi). He sees practices as spatialising places. In short, space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers (De Certeau 117). Thus, he is sceptical of knowledge that 'map' cities from a 'god's-eye view,' and is more concerned with 'stories' as epistemologies of actually getting by in cities; and, in spatial terms, he saw walking as a form of practical

narration. This may derive from the personal or social memories. The city for De Certeau is as much about dreams as things, and about doings not just knowings. The planner's approach while building a city does not always consider the everyday realities of living in a city. It is only through living in the 'everyday spaces' that one can comprehend the 'real text.' The text is real for the users of the space, as it is written by the users themselves, through their "narrative footsteps" (122). Thus, the bodies through their actions are creating their own stories.

Experience of a performer can never be the same as the observer, an 'otherness' is always present in it. Erving Goffman terms the insider's and outsider's views as 'emic' and 'etic' views respectively (*Presentation* 75). Bharani abounds in possession rituals and the experience of trance felt by its performers is not to be fully understood by the observer. But one can certainly be what Lefebvre calls as a 'rhythmanalyst' and hear the echoes of memories, hopes, desires, and pangs while listening to the rhythms of the space of Kodungallur during Bharani festival. For this, the observers have to maintain a critical distance; they have to merge in its rhythm and come out of it at the right time to analyse it. Space is marked by the activities going on in it. It requires a 'quality' firstly through its physical elements, secondly through the ritualised actions being played in it, and thirdly, through the way the active body responds to space (Tiwari 313). Seemingly, bodies act under the guidelines provided by memory and tradition. Space too is layered with meanings, it becomes a system of significations, "a palimpsest" (Tiwari 16). To understand the real significance of space, one has to uncover the deeper layers of space, to plunge into its past. A practical way of achieving this is through deconstructing the rituals

performed in these spaces. Rituals mirror the evolution of human beings, their culture, knowledge, and praxis. By probing into how rituals came into being, how they have changed, how they have transformed the participants and the onlookers we get to grasp the mankind's relationship to the spaces and reveal the elements behind the production of such spaces.

As a matter of fact, these rituals define them and lend them identity. They reconstruct the absolute, 'lived' space from within the sacred and the abstract realm of Kodungallur. Particularly, the oracles mark their presence in space; they construct a strange halo around them firstly by their appearance itself. Their red clothes, blood-stained face, swords and demeanour, itself becomes a performance. A theatrical space emerges with an oracle as a performer and people moving around him as an audience. Their bodies are inserted in space, shape, and re-construct it. The presence of oracles amidst the abstract space takes the audience to the realm of imaginary space; the body is the tool or agency to make their presence felt. The emotional response their body creates among the spectators is varied; they evoke the feelings of fear, reverence, power, and divinity. They are the representation of the Goddess on the earth, living amongst the profane space. They transform the profane space into sacred through their materiality and are also instrumental in making the spectators realise their presence in space.

Reena Tiwari in her study of *aghora* in Varanasi finds that *aghori* in the meditative posture and state is able to locate his own centre. This involves his meditative movement in the vertical direction along the central axis of his body. He identifies this axis with the central summit of the Meru Peak (Hindu's *axis mundi* of the universe). A space, conical in volume, is generated (Tiwari 62). Thus, the newly constructed absolute, lived space becomes an extension of

the oracle's body. Bharani festival produces a subaltern space; though the temple actually belongs to the high-caste, for some days it becomes 'defiled' for the elite, as they imagine the pilgrims to be polluting the goddess, *theendal* (pollution) being the essence of the festival. Thus, the irony that can be perceived here is that even while becoming a sacred space for the participants, it becomes a 'profane', 'inferior' space to the inhabitants of Kodungallur; this sacred/profane grading existing in the mental space of the observer with no bearing in the physical space. For the time being, Kodungallur temple and its premises become 'periphery' of the city. "The peripheral body finds its place in the periphery of the city that holds a peripheral ritual" (Tiwari 62).

10 The visual technology has considerably changed the festival in recent years. It has been revealed that many layers of space emerge during the festival and each of them ultimately aids the participants in attaining a liminal experience. Through their performance, the body, and space merges to provide a transformation. Space becomes 'lived space' were the divinity, humanity, and material world intersect and play. The natives of Kodungallur as well as people who come to watch the festival constitute the 'accidental audience' in contrast to the 'integral audience' of the performance. They come to watch Bharani, mostly out of curiosity and seeking entertainment. They may not be completely aware of the ritual procedures associated with the festival, but feels content with the fragmentary information they derive. As Bharani comprises of varied performers and practices, the performances are not uniform. Each group has different talents to put forward and thus the experience a spectator gains from the festival is varied and unique. Each performance varies in its passion

and intensity; one part may be severely religious whereas in other part, entertainment dominates. Viewed as a whole, Bharani is a spontaneous and versatile festival, each part bustling with different activities, and is constantly in motion; it is amoebic, elongating and spreading out but with the centre always fixed at the temple.

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Ritualistic Transcendence from 'Structure' to 'Communitas': A Reading of Poothan-Thira as a Performance

— S. Suthara

Abstract: The paper attempts to decode the ritual art form of Poothan-Thira indigenous to Kerala, using the tools of Performance Studies. Theories pertaining to spatiality and the proceedings of rituals, such as 'communitas' and 'liminality' proposed by Victor Turner are applied to interpret Poothan-Thira as an agent of societal transformation. The study closely examines various elements of the ritual art that trigger this social change from hierarchy into equity and harmony. The methodology of cultural studies, theatre and performing arts is employed so as to explore and identify the 'many spaces' in Poothan-Thira that facilitate cyclical transformation in the society. The paper also examines the myriad ways through which ritual arts cause a cathartic experience in ritual entities—artists, audience, and society at a macrocosmic level. Various stages in the ritualistic enactment of Poothan-Thira starting with its underlying myth to the aftermath of its performance, are demarcated to trace the three stages of ritual occurrence proposed by Turner—separation, liminality, and aggregation, respectively.

Keywords: Myths and legends, Liminality, Communitas, Poothan-Thira, Ritual and its spaces.

The mutually related and dependent interplay of ritual and space, wherein rituals generate 'many spaces' and spaces in-turn provide a milieu for ritualistic enactments, is an area of vivid possibilities in the study of art forms. The concept of 'space' has taken a huge turn in the recent past, and theories of spatiality with the motive to define areas that mark the boundaries of an art have been developed widely. T. D. Krishnamachari formulates one of the objectives of his thesis titled *Spaces, Rituals and the Communication Practices of Nagarathars* as to throw light on "…how spaces

contextualise the rituals" (1). This intention affirms the basis idea that rituals require spaces for their effective performance and conduct. This space could be physical and psychological in nature: physical space that defines the material zone for the conduct of an art form and the latter that helps in exaltation and transcendence of both the artist and the audience.

Kerala has got a rich cultural heritage which is thoroughly a result of the Arya-Dravida miscellany and the complex socio-economic system prevalent in this society from time immemorial. Most of the ritual arts here is but a result of idolatry and thereby encapsulate religion and its norms in it. Ritual art forms such as *Theyyam*, *Thira*, *Mudiyettu*, *Padayani*, *Kolamthullal*, *Pulluvan Paattu*, *Thottam Paattu*, *Kalamezhuthu* and *Theeyattu* form the very vibrant base for Kerala's ritual legacy. They mould a close relationship with individuals of a social system, thereby establishing their indispensable connection with one another. This idea of the "ritual view of communication" means the interconnectedness between ritualistic practice and individuals through shared believes and customs (Krishnamachari 30). Poothan-Thira, being a ritual art form of Kerala could be seen as a practice encoded in a myth that connects Keralites with their ancient past and religious belief system. The concept of ritualistic communication basically formulated by James Carey could be applied effectively to the art form of Poothan-Thira—the root of which is ingrained within the notions of sharing and association. An understanding of this interaction between the art and the human world is pivotal to trace the areas in which this cultural transaction occurs.

Communitas and Liminality: Turner's Understanding of Ritualistic Spaces

Art forms of a region are highly connected to the social and cultural life of that place and form the psychological base for the particular area. The major attempt of this paper is to trace these 'many spaces' in the ritual art form of Poothan-Thira with the help of two concepts proposed by Victor Turner regarding rituals and spaces—communitas and liminality. Turner theorises rituals in his work *The Ritual Process* (1969) with these two concepts that are closely associated with social life and ritualistic practices (Daniel). He proposes two mutually opposing social conditions necessary for harmony in a society, namely, communitas and structure. The hierarchically divided, structured, and fragmented mode of society wherein everything exists on the basis of difference and inequality is termed as structure. Contrary to this, communitas is a mode of social existence based on egalitarianism and community living which he identifies basically as an aftermath of any ritual practice. In Turner's words, it is the "…communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (96). Turner suggests a need to maintain an equilibrium between these two modes of living; where structure needs to be converted into a communitas with the onset of any ritual practice, which needs to retaliate to the original state of structure as in a cyclical manner.

Turner, using the theoretical base formulated by Arnold van Gennep, postulates a three phase process associated with the initiation of rituals. The first stage of "separation" as the name suggests involves a total detachment and suspension from everyday life by the ritual participants as a result of a ritualistic event. This is followed by the "marge" [margin] phase which is also called the liminal phase where the

identity and existence of the ritual subjects are ambiguous. Turner uses the term ‘liminality' to this stage which is more of a state of trance engulfed in the ritualistic enactments. This is a pivotal point of transition in any ritual practice where all the dimensions of space, time, and identity of the people involved are dissolved. Participants emulate and assimilate themselves with the rituals so as to question the very existence of a structured way of living. However, there is a need to return back to the structure—with an ethical and cleaner identity—which is completed with the process of “agregation” [aggregation or reintegration] (Kimball vii). The concept is that, once individuals enter into a ritual, they become new beings by shedding their original identities. These liminal entities follow equality principles in terms of their social ranks and living, thereby constituting the communitas. Rituals lead to communitas which brings about a state of liberation in the society from the normative structures and rigid ideological system. This also creates a sense of unification in the society where differences are blurred in order to maintain an equal status. Such a liberation is pivotal in moulding a culturally rich environment in the society which eases societal life. Communitas by coexisting with the structure, transforms the inflexible social system into a more lucid one. The theory framed by Turner could be applied to any forms of rituals regardless of time and space, as these rituals effectively create a ritual space of their own. Poothan-Thira, in this case, works in many spaces so as to effectively transform the society to that of a communitas.

Liminal Phase in Poothan-Thira: Myth as a Spatial Catalyst of Initiation

It is important to identify various agents, means, and spaces through which Poothan-Thira enter into a liminal phase; a major factor being its adamant ritualistic foundation. Apart from being a vivid art form with typical traits and specificities, Poothan-Thira has a rich ritual base. The mythical aspect of the art—which is embedded in the collective unconscious of the people in a society for generations—carries this ritual into various layers of the society and therefore becomes a 'space' of its own. The space that this myth fills is psychological in nature discarding all the physical dimensions. The art form with its roots ingrained in the myth of the slaughter of *Dharika* by goddess *Kali*, fulfills the universal myth of the destruction of evil by the good. The frightful imagery of goddess *Kali* along with her *Bhoothaganas* after the slaughter of *Dharika* appears as a recurring mythical picture in ritual art forms of *Theyyam, Mudiyettu, Kaliyoottu,* and *Padayani* as well. The belief is that the deity enters into the body of the artist while the ritual is being performed, which fosters the liminal phase. Performed as a part of *velavaravu* [festive arrival] in festivals like *pooram*, *vela,* and *thalappoli* following the *makarakoythu* [harvest], Poothan-Thira is an art form shaped from the agricultural heritage and myths related to it. The question of who among Poothan and Thira is more important is still debatable; Thira being symbolic of goddess *Kali* herself and Poothan being her companion.

Poothan-Thira is believed to have been performed even before the formation of Arya-Dravida culture and is said that the communal right to perform the ritual art form was handed over to *Vannan* or *Mannan* community by *Murthyadi* community during the age when four hundred

and forty two idols were believed to have lived (Unnikrishnan). There exists a belief in certain regions that Poothan-Thira is performed in commemoration of the peaceful appearance of *Amma* [mother goddess] or *Devatha* after her incarnation motive to slaughter *Dharika*. The belief is that, *Shiva* sent his *Bhoothaganas*—who later became Poothan—to accompany *Kali* in her mission to save people from the evils of *Dharika.* There is yet another variant myth prevalent in relation with the art form of Poothan-Thira. It says that *Bhadrakali* once paid a huge amount of gold to a *Thattan* [goldsmith] for him to erect a *thazhikakkudam* [dome] for a temple and appointed a *Pootham* to safeguard the work. However, the *Pootham* was cheated upon by the goldsmith who made a dome of bronze instead of gold. The dome made of gold-plated bronze revealed the reality within months, which *Kali* showed to *Pootham. Pootham* bit his tongue in anguish at the very thought of the treachery happened to him which interestingly is symbolised through the tongue-bitten face mask in *Poothankali*. All these legends stored in the minds of the people belonging to a society form the psychological base which reinforces the ritual. The belief system thereby becomes a ‘space' that constructs a liminal phase in which identity of the ritual participants would be suspended temporarily. Poothan-Thira effortlessly uses its myth as a veil to cover the realities of the society so as to transform it into a ‘marge'.

Thira is a form of ritualistic dance performed with a *thirakoppu* held in the head of the performer. The belief of *Kali* returning behind the back of *Vethalam* after the episode with *Dharika* is associated with this performance. The face of *Vethalam* could be seen carved in the *thirakoppu,* above which the figure of goddess *Kali* would

be ingrained. The myth associated with Poothan-Thira is rendered differently in some regions, which says that it is *Kali* who send Poothan and Thira to the world to ensure the absence of fret and fear after the erasure of *Dharika.* These age old legends associated with Poothan-Thira has effectively been inculcated into the overall collective unconscious over the years and could be seen as a catalyst that triggers the transition from structure to communitas during the ritual enactment.

Communitas and Religious Equity: Poothan-Thira being an Agent

The right to perform the ritual is usually passed on hereditarily by the communities of *Vannan* or *Mannan* whose ancestral jobs include traditional medicine, washing, or witch-craft and magic. The ritual is known for being performed by *Avarnas* or people belonging to lower caste. They follow rigid rituals before performing the art form with *Karimkali* as their clan goddess. Apart from the performance, other communities of the society also get a major participation in the ritualistic practice—the *Aashari* community being the ones who prepare wooden face masks for Poothan. This accounts for the communal harmony that art forms like Poothan and Thira facilitate in the society, which in turn foster the liminal phase in the case of this ritual. The ritual is performed in a belief for the overall well-being of the society regardless of any caste and class hierarchies and thereby carries a message of universal brotherhood and unity. Poothan-Thira arrives at every homes in the festive village despite any caste barriers. It assures a constructive socialisation in the society as people belonging to various strata join hands for the smooth conduct of the festival. The vigorous trade and sales in the temple grounds during the festival also widens the horizon

of possible religious assimilation, where people forget their divided ways of living. This swap of the society caused by a ritual in action is what Turner calls a communitas.

The basic belief in the ritualistic enactment that Thira is the incarnation of goddess herself elevates individuals into a ritual space of spirituality and divinity. This enables a temporary suspension from all the normal activities of daily life. Additional to this, Poothan-Thira exhibits a merging effect within the caste ladder of the society—being welcomed and idolised wholeheartedly by all religious groups. Festivals like *pooram* and *vela* cause a fissure in the structure of the society which gets accelerated with ritualistic practices like this. The ritual associated with fertility cult is welcomed by the villagers with *nirapara* [filled vessel of gains] and *nilavilakku* [lighted lantern], facilitating the first step of separation of ritual entities from everyday life, as Turner remarks. By this initiation, people collectively enter into communitas where mundane realities get blurred and a new way of communal living is ushered in as a part of a ritual.

The performance of Poothan-Thira completes the process of liminality by transcending the society through its spectacular aspects. They announce the onset of the festival season seeking blessings from *Kavu* [temple] and showering blessings all across the village with grains and flowers. They dance with intense and elaborate steps, with Thira extending its tough postures like *soochikkirutham* and *vadivaalveeshal.* The sight of Thira picking up money placed in the floor by audience with eyelashes or tongue transfers the audience into a state of temporary trance engulfed in ritualistic ambience. Poothan could be seen enquiring from house to house '*Thattan evide? Thattan evide',* meaning

where the goldsmith is. In some tales, it is *Dharika* whom Poothan searches for, symbolic of the quest to eliminate evils from the society. All these gestures and minute performance aspects effectively mask the reality principles for the artist as well as for the audience, transferring them into another world. This world driven by rituals is the liberal phase of the society in opposition to the existing structure, as Turner suggests—the communitas.

Back to the 'Structure': Ritualistic Completion in Poothan-Thira

Apart from being a source of pleasure and ritualistic tradition, performances like that of Poothan and Thira remarkably simplify the already complex structures in a society by causing a change in its mundane realities. The idea of normal human [the artist] transcending into a goddess elevates the human mind and sanctifies it to make it crystal clear. This is a characteristic trait of a symbolic rebirth, which could be read in parallel to the third phase of aggregation in the progression of the ritual. According to the theory, participants would be altered as an aftermath of the ritual. They could then be reintegrated into society with a purified identity and proper knowledge of their real roles for the overall societal good. Since the art form has its base in fertility based rituals and harvest, it imparts the age-old wisdom of the inseparability of nature and human life. This ensures the return of human beings to their very roots, having spread the message of the need to adhere to the soil. Poothan-Thira enforces this with the use of natural elements during various phases of the rituals—in makeup and in the forging of accessories. The universal concern favouring an eco-friendly life is addressed here and the participants after the ritual are supposed to be more conscious towards their surroundings. This indicates the

culmination of the liminal phase and marks the return to the initial stage of structure, completing the sequence of events pointed out by Turner. An eco-feminist reading of the fertility ritual in Poothan-Thira also suggests that soil and women need to be treated well for the society to sustain in prosperity. The return or aggregation phase of Poothan-Thira in particular is supposed to transform individuals into environmental conscious citizens who favour gender equity.

The artists who perform Poothan-Thira believe that they are cult figures with the vigour and vitality of the god which elevates them to a didactic realm. When this essentially personal psychological condition expands to the audience in the society, the art form attains a universal appeal. It cleanse the minds of ritual entities through spiritual means—the aftermath of which is the formation of a totally refined identity. The myths associated with Poothan-Thira would be amalgamated in the collective unconscious of the society, which becomes a prototype by itself. These images or image clusters get transferred from one generation to another, which affirms a possible return to a communitas mode after reentering the structure. This prototype that has been formed guarantees a cyclical swap between communitas and structure in a society, which Turner regards as pivotal for an effortless and untroubled life. Poothan-Thira—just like any other performances—offer a momentary escape from personal dilemma by promoting social communication and purgation of these emotions through artistic means. This could also be understood as a productive transformation that the ritual leads to.

The eloquent accompaniment of sound, rhythm, colours, and appearance help Poothan-Thira in blurring the pains and shackles of ordinary material life. The aim here is to

transform both the artist performing as well as the audience witnessing into a better self, enabling the holistic process of catharsis in the most effective way. Turner's theory primarily focusses on this part of a ritualistic activity wherein the society is reintegrated into its old form by detaching from the ritual. According to his idea, individuals after coming out of the liminal phase would be more responsible and improvised in nature of their dealings in the society. The entire process repeats as in an eternal loop—the land after the departure of the ritual, waiting for its arrival next year. This longing is but the result of the emotional upheaval that Poothan-Thira gifts with a temporary forgetfulness of monotonous daily routines. The art form therefore succeeds in its aim of letting people introspect and delve deep into their own selves so as to change it with the aid of the art form itself. The conversion from the state of structure to communitas and vice versa is achieved only through the union of the emotional and psychological spaces of the performer and the audience.

However, it is to be noted that Turner's theory expects a societal transformation as a result of a ritualistic practice. He focusses on the need for individuals to change and adapt for the well-being of the society, an idea which by itself is problematic. It is possible to extend discussions in this area through a critical lens of Turner's theory which anticipates cleansing of human mind and refinement of society through a ritual process. Another possible area of research includes problematising the gender relations working in the performance of this ritual—women being marginalised from the mainstream performance as in many other rituals. Though individual studies on rituals and myths related to Poothan-Thira has occurred, areas such as the language used in such rituals could be parallelly read in relation to the caste system of Kerala society. In an age where regional

artistic and literary trends are often neglected, studies pertaining to one's indigenous locality are of great relevance. Significant in areas of cultural studies, ritual arts, and folklore, the paper was a close examination of a ritualistic practice of Kerala origin. By applying the theoretical framework on performance studies formulated by Victor Turner, the multifaceted processes involved in a ritual practice are identified. The sequential order of these events is structured so as to discover how a ritual art form like Poothan-Thira initiates various phases in the course of its action.

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The Bhakti Movement and Kerala: Rethinking the Presence and Impacts in Literature

—Arunima S.

Abstract: This paper explores the presence of Bhakti movement in Kerala by examining its influence and impact on the society with a primal focus on its devotional literature during the 14th and 15th centuries. There had been several forms of devotional literature in India even before the advent of Bhakti movement. However, those were mostly concerned with moral instructions on the religious ways of living and rituals to be followed, rooted in the Vedic Hindu tradition. Bhakti as a movement separated itself from the already existing devotional cult, as it gave importance to reformations within the society through a spiritual outlook. Originating in the southernmost region of the Indian subcontinent, it gained popularity through the teachings of Alvar (Vaishnavite) and Nayanar (Shaivite) poets of Tamizhakam. The movement spread across the western and northern parts of India vigorously, preaching against polytheism and sectarianism. However, Kerala was introduced to Bhakti much later despite being a southern region. There had been evident changes in the Bhakti literature in Malayalam as compared to the course of the movement throughout the rest of India. Apart from an inclination towards the vernacular followed by the formulation of modern Malayalam, the literature labelled as 'Bhakti' can be seen as more rooted in the religiosity of the time rather than in its spirit of reform. Keeping this as the point of departure, this paper questions the presence of the reformist movement of Bhakti in Kerala through analysis of the works of Thunchath Ezhuthachan and Poonthanam.

Keywords: Bhakti movement, Malayalam literature, Devotion, Spirit of reform, Anti-caste consciousness.

Introduction

Religious in nature, the Bhakti movement is characterised by its spirit of reformation through devotional practices, in order to achieve salvation. The origin of the movement in India can be traced back to late 12th century. It has its roots in the southern parts of India, where it was propagated by the Alvar (Vaishnavite) and Nayanar (Shaivite) poet- saints through their songs of worship. Later by the fifteenth century, the movement had already spread across the northern region along with Hinduism that led to the gradual decline of Buddhism and Jainism. As P. Govinda Pillai notes, "the Bhakti movement had begun in the deep south of India and from there it spread to Karnataka with increased vigour. Later, it traversed to the western, northern and eastern parts of India before heading south again to reach Andhra". However, it is evident that the movement had assumed very different characteristics as it reached Kerala compared to its disposition in other regions. In the light of nature of the movement and impacts it had in other parts of the country, this paper proposes that the devotional movement Kerala had witnessed during the Bhakti period is but a continuation of the Vedic sentiments with a revived Sanskrit tradition. Thereby it examines and rethinks the chapter of Bhakti in the history and literature of Kerala, through an analysis of the significant works of the period- *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu* by Ezhuthachan and *Jnanappana* by Poonthanam Namboodiri.

The etymological roots of the term 'Bhakti' go back to the Sanskrit term 'bhaj' which means 'to worship'. However, it is significant to understand that it has multiple layers of meaning ranging from devotion to a deep engagement encompassing both the emotional and the intellectual aspects of human senses. The faction of Bhakti that existed

prior to its development as a movement in India was mostly based on the spiritual and ritualistic way of living advocated by Hinduism through its Vedas and Upanishads. Shvetash vatara Upanishad has one of the earliest mentions of the idea to refer to a love for God. Other texts like that of Bhagavat Gita also mentions the importance of having Bhakti by introducing bhakti marga (the path of faith/devotion) as one of three ways to spiritual freedom and release (Minor and Neil 3). These texts along with Puranas and Itihasas had fostered a devotional cult with an ultimate objective of salvation or moksha within Hinduism. Similar practices and approaches were popular in religions like that of Buddhism and Jainism as well.

However, when Bhakti emerged as a movement in the post-Vedic period, it underwent significant changes. The Vedic tradition with an upper hand for Sanskrit language was overturned with the use of regional and local languages. The Vaishnava Alwars, Shaiva Nayanars and those who belong to the Shakti (goddess) cult of Tamilakam popularised the movement during the 6th century C.E. with poetry in their regional tongue. Gradually it spread to Karnataka and later to the north and east parts of India. This movement is said to have its advent in Kerala much later despite being one of the Dravidian languages. It is interesting that there are notable differences in Kerala Bhakti from the popular tendencies of Bhakti movement found in other parts of India.

Kerala and its Literary Tradition of Devotion

The earliest literary accounts found in Kerala – *Ramacharitham* and *Thirunizhalmala* are written in Old Malayalam, which had a considerable influence of Tamil

Language. Later, by the advent of Sanskrit in Malayalam, a new form of literature flourished among the Brahmin society, known as Manipravalam literature. Works like *Unniyachi Charitham*, *Unnichiruthevi Charitham*, *Leelathilakam* etc. popularised this form of literature which commonly had themes satisfying the leisurely lives of upper castes. There was also a parallel development of Pattu literature which was a combination of Tamil and Malayalam languages.

However, the upper castes' affinity towards Sanskrit and Manipravala themes of eroticism had a significant role further in establishing Manipravala as the face of Malayalam literature. Some of the most celebrated works of the period like *Vaisika Tantram*, *Unnichiruthevi Charitham*, *Unniyathi Charitham* etc. depict lives of the elites involved with the courtesans.

It was during this period Malayalam is said to have introduced into the Bhakti waves that were significantly impactful in other parts of the country. The Alwar- Nayanar distinction was not very popular in Kerala as it was in other Dravidian regions. The devotion towards Rama and Krishna- the avatars of Vishnu- however was widespread throughout the state especially with the establishment of temples. According to P.P. Narayanan Namboothiri, "Temples became the centres of the Bhakti cult. Nambudiri Brahmins of Kerala, who presided over the social and religious life of the people of Kerala for several centuries up to the 20th century, raised the status of temples to ä high pedestal." Poonthanam Namboodiri and Ezhuthachan who are known as the pioneers of Bhakti literature in Malayalam, were evident devotees of Krishna and Rama.

Pillai notes that the "Bhakti poetry was seeking to save society from the depths of moral decadence to which it had sunk", referring to the predominance of erotic themes in Manipravalam literature. The earliest evidence of this break-away from Manipravalam and its themes of carnal pleasure could be found in the writings of Niranam poets and Cherusseri's *Krishnagadha*. It is significant however, that the term 'Bhakti' can only be used in relation to these works for their roots in devotion and worship. The movement of Bhakti had yet not set foot in Kerala which was firmly established in its spirit of reformation and anti-caste consciousness.

Pioneers of Bhakti movement like Basavanna from Karnataka, Tukaram and Namdev from Maharashtra, Guru Nanak, Tulsi Das, Kabir, etc. had made significant contributions through their poetry voicing against the prevalence of caste system and preaching its futility in front of God. Many of them advocated monism. A break away from idol worship advocating Nirguna bhakti can be seen in most of these works. One of the best such instances can be found in Kabir's poems. According to him:

> There, where millions of Krishnas stand with hands folded, where millions of Vishnus bow their heads, where millions of Brahmas are reading the Vedas, where millions of Shivas are lost in contemplation, where millions of Indras dwell in the sky, where the demi-gods and the munis are unnumbered, where millions of Saraswatis, goddess of music play the vina, there is my Lord selfrevealed, and the scent of sandal and flowers dwells in those deeps. (Kabir 15)

Moreover, poet saints like Andal, Mira Bai, Akka Mahadevi etc. who were ardent devotees of Krishna and Shiva broke

away from the assumptions on gender and worship. In their devotion, they freed themselves from the conventional ways of devotion and celebrated their god as their lover. These Bhakti poets also popularised the vernacular languages through their hymns, bhajans and Dohe and was impactful in all strata of the society.

The devotional literature of Kerala during the period of Bhakti movement is focused more on the advocacies on righteousness and praises of Rama or Krishna. The aforementioned themes and contents were not new as they were also seen in the Vedic tradition. Bhagavad Gita, epics and puranas, etc. contained the moral teachings on the rightful ways of living in order to attain salvation. Therefore, these arguments are not sufficient to differentiate and label the tendencies of Malayalam literature during the period as Bhakti. The elements of anti-caste reforms and preachings on equality are hardly seen in Malayalam devotional literature. Malayalam devotional literature was based on the Saguna form of bhakti and promoted idol worship. The importance of temples and ritualistic ways of life during the period give cues on the Brahminised Kerala societies. According to P.P. Narayanan Namboodiri, “Old temples were reconstructed and several new temples were established for the various deities of the Brahmanic pantheon. Dravidian deities were brahmanised”. Such changes in the Kerala society can only be understood as a revival of Vedic tradition rather than as a reformation. These were reflected on the literature as well. The only visible commonality Malayalam devotional literature had with the Bhakti waves in other parts of the country was the shift in the use of language. Malayalam which was heavily influenced by Tamil and later by Sanskrit was redesigned by Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan through his

composition of *Adhyathma Ramayanam* in the folk metre of *Kilippattu*.

Ezhuthachan, Poonthanam and the Bhakti influence

By the *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu* authored by Thunjath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, Malayalam broke away from the Vattezhuthu script by diffusing Sanskrit into the common tongue. The text was written in the 16th century. As he was born as a Sudra, Ezhuthachchan in his work, humbly apologises for his 'impertinence' in writing about the sacred scriptures and *Purana*s (Pillai, 241). He writes:

> Why am I embarrassed to pray the goddess of words
> To reside in my tongue just as for Valmiki
> Kindly forgive all my impertinence,
> For the authority of the Veda-shastras that I am not
> (my trans., Ezhuthachan 11)

Evidently, these lines reflect upon the casteist society that prevailed in Kerala. However, a tone of retaliation or a call for revival in the Brahmanical society is absent in his words. This can be quite clear as he addresses his own identity as he states his objective in writing the *Kilippattu Ramayana*:

> A mere servant, a devotee am I
> Born from the feet of Brahma
> Hereby tells the ever-told story of Sri Rama
> For those without wit and wise (my trans., Ezhuthachan 11)

Here, the poet expresses his idea of telling Ramayana in a language known to commoners whom he addresses as those without wits. It is evident that he considers himself as a 'lowborn' Sudra who was born from the feet of Brahma. The mention of caste here neither questions nor

problematises the inequality within the system but is rather used by the poet to posit himself as an 'inferior'. To consider this as a reformatory movement or an intentional attempt in reviving the society would be erroneous. However, it should also not be ignored that the work marked a shift from the celebration of elitist language towards vernacular one known for all.

The Brahmanical society of Kerala however hailed Ezhuthachan as the Father of Modern Malayalam. M. Dasan argues that the reasons for this could be the inevitable part he played in Sanskritising Malayalam Language and its tradition, and his works had completely ignored the polyphony generated by a caste-ridden society and the regional topography. The devotional element in Ezhuthachan's *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu* is highlighted with his portrayal of Rama as a God, different from Valmiki's portrayal of Rama as the great king of Ayodhya. One cannot argue that this work stays afar from the devotional path in Malayalam literature set by Cherusseri or Kannassa poets except for its style of narration and unparalleled use of language. As P. Govinda Pillai notes:

> Swami Vivekananda, who was acquainted with the caste system prevalent all over India, had condemned Kerala's caste hierarchy as the worst. He called Kerala a lunatic asylum when he visited the southern parts towards the close of the nineteenth century. It was in this asylum that Ezhuthachchan was born. Ezhuthachchan's works hardly reflect these political situations.

The role of Ezhuthachan's Ramayanam in shaping Malayalam language and literature and the importance of Kilippattu style in accommodating all audiences still remain

undebatable. However, these cannot be passed as the characteristics of the Bhakti movement that had been instrumental in the reformation of Indian societies that were rooted in extreme sentiments of caste and religion. Therefore, the arguments on the impact and spirit of Bhakti movement in the works of Ezhuthachan can be nullified.

Jnanappana or *The Songs of Wisdom* written by Poonthanam Namboothiri is another one of the prominent texts often mentioned in the discussions on the Bhakti Movement in Kerala. The poem is in praise of Guruvayurappan, the presiding deity in the famous temple of Guruvayoor who is worshipped as one of the forms of Vishnu. One of the striking features of the text is the simplicity of the language used, which could be influenced by the writing of Ezhuthachan. Poonthanam Namboodiri was born to a Brahmin family in Keezhattoor village in Kerala. He was a fervent devotee of Guruvayurappan who is said to be a manifestation of Lord Krishna. According to the legend, Lord Krishna himself consoled the poet at the loss of his new born baby. The poems of Poonthanam reflect his love towards Krishna whom he considers to be his own child. Jnanappana contains the lines, "While little Krishna is dancing in our hearts, do we need little ones of our own?"

Jnanappana as the name indicates are words of wisdom, which is a philosophical treatise in 360 lines in the simplest language. The book is often considered as the Gita for Hindus in Kerala. Poonthanam, in this work, criticises people who go behind material wealth and carnal pleasures in the short term of ‘gifted’ human birth. He insists on the greatness of the one truth which is God and those who deny this are deemed to be ignorant. He also criticises social

inequalities where the rich oppress the poor and vouches for a world free of evil. There are also evidences for his disapproval of Brahmins who consider themselves the greatest. He writes, “Then there are those who boast about their Brahmanyam (caste), as if not even the Brahman could win against them”. He calls out the evil doings of man and preaches that the righteous path can be nothing but of the Lord’s.

Jnanappana could be considered closest to the literature born out of Bhakti movement from other parts of the country. This can be considered only as a coincidence rather than as a part of a movement which explicitly questioned the evil system of caste, and conventional norms that oppressed people. It can be viewed as an easily comprehensible and regionalised version of the teachings of Bhagavad Gita.

Karen Pechilis Prentiss notes that Bhakti tradition is often studied as a reworking of a tradition within a distinctive religious frame. In my understanding, Bhakti is not a break away from the existed norms but is a continued efforts of reforms within the society. It encompasses the reviving and recontextualising of a tradition (Prentiss, 15), while also putting forth innovative ideas that are not synonymous with the old ones. The aforementioned works of Ezhuthachan and Poonthanam had been very effective in popularising the path of devotion in different strata of the society regardless of the caste and class. They also had considerable impacts on the growth and development of Malayalam language. However, their impacts and influence in developing an anti-caste consciousness in a predominantly caste-based society like that of Kerala’s are arguable. Therefore, Kerala has not witnessed Bhakti as a movement,

but has been a stage for a celebration of devotion set on the foundation of upper caste sentiments.

It shouldn't be left unnoticed that the history and literature of Kerala however, has witnessed movements of reformation much later in the 19th century which can be very similar to that of the Bhakti. The cult of devotion in Kerala around the 15th century was much intertwined with the religiosity of the time. Later by the 19th century, Kerala had witnessed an era of major social reformations, where Bhakti (devotion) was instrumental against the discriminatory systems of caste and religion. However, it would not suffice to label this period of radical social changes as wave of Bhakti movement. The reformatory spirit of the period had massive impacts in the caste-ridden society of Kerala as a result of the efforts of reformers like Narayana Guru in devotion coupled with reformation. Therefore, the period was rightly called as an era of 'Kerala Renaissance'.

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The Impact of Missionary Morality on the Language and Culture of Kerala

—Soumya Mathew Kutty

Abstract: The resolution that was passed at the onset of the Church Mission Society's pursuit of evangelising the East proclaimed the ultimate goal of the mission as the propagation of the knowledge of the Gospel among the Heathen. Although the success of the mission was partial as the vast majority of the natives held fast to their customs and beliefs and staunchly resisted the ecclesiastical endeavours of the foreigners, the moral and religious values propagated by the missionaries indisputably left its marks on the indigenous languages and cultures of Asia. A notable instance of such influence can be seen in the cultural transition that occurred in Kerala as a result of the efforts of the European missionary groups. Several centuries of evangelic work carried out by different missionary societies have brought forth numerous transformations in the way of life, language and cultural practices of Malayalam speaking communities. The cultural drift which resulted from imbibing the missionary values was not confined to the traditional and newly converted Christian communities of Kerala; it found its way into the mainstream culture of the land, as evident in the fact that a number of commonly used phrases and proverbs in Malayalam reflect monotheistic ideology despite the rejection of Christian theology by the majority of population. This paper explores the influence of missionary morality in the language and culture of Kerala.

Keywords: Missionary morality, Evangelism, Culture, Monotheism, Monogamy.

The resolution passed at the inaugural conference of the Church Missionary Society held on 12 April 1799 at the Castle and Falcon Inn, Aldersgate, London, stated, "It is the duty highly incumbent upon every Christian to endeavour to propagate the knowledge of the Gospel among the Heathen" (Keen). It was not a new-fangled notion for the

missionaries; ever since the genesis of Christian evangelical missions, the motto had been to disseminate the message of Christianity among Pagan communities all over the world. This charge proved to be a problematic one since the very beginning of the missions, as religious proselytism was not an easy policy to be implemented among the societies and civilisations that were so closely intermingled with the histories and milieus of the lands in which they flourished. The indigenous cultures, myths, beliefs and rituals were deeply embedded in the consciousness of the natives, as they evolved along with the evolution of the civilisation since primordial times.

The Christian ecclesiasts encountered the colossal challenge to uproot such deeply ingrained beliefs and replace them with the hitherto unheard of monotheistic, or rather Trinitarian Christian faith which was too intricate even for the early Jewish converts to fully comprehend. In order to fulfill their mission, the emissaries of Church had to convince the natives that Christianity is superior to the endemic religions of their homeland. This necessitated the indigenisation of Christian faith, which means translating the Christin message into local cultures and permitting it to imbibe certain regional traits while ensuring the retention of the essence of its Scriptural foundations. Such a cultural blend could be made possible by means of inculturation, which Marcello De Carvalho Azevedo defines as “the dynamic relation between the Christian message and culture or cultures; an insertion of Christian life into a culture; an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them” (1).

The missionaries had to prepare the local cultures for the reception of the new faith. They had to persuade the natives to repudiate their current religion and to embrace

the new faith in the pre-existent cultural milieu in which the old faith (which is to be renounced) had evolved. They began their endeavours by devising a three-step programme which constitutes closely observing the customs followed in the area, identifying inconsistencies and contradictions within those customs, and convincing their practitioners regarding the aforementioned fallacies using their native tongue. Once they see the faults within their system, they would be willing to espouse the flawless, perfect alternative, which is Christianity. Therefore, the first task the missionaries took upon themselves was to get acquainted with the language and culture of the people to whom they were supposed to preach Gospel. This too was an arduous task for the Europeans, as the indigenous languages of the distant lands they chose to work in differed from their own in structure, sounds and the ways in which meaning was conveyed. They realised that most of those languages were inadequate to impart the message of the Scriptures due to the phenomena of cultural untranslatability. Therefore, they had to adapt and reconstruct those languages so as to transform them into apt receptacles of Biblical faith. Similarly, they had to adorn the message they wanted to propagate with a tint of local colour in order to make it more acceptable to the natives. It was a strenuous exercise that continued for several centuries, resulting in constant cultural interchange and the subsequent inception of hybrid cultures. This paper explores the cultural transition that occurred in Kerala as an outcome of the missionary work that lasted for centuries and the resultant imprints in the language, beliefs and general consciousness of Malayalis.

The ecclesiastic endeavours in Kerala dates back to several centuries. The earliest mission that had a noteworthy sway

over the population of Kerala was that of the Jesuits. With the assistance of the growing political power of the Portuguese, they started instituting churches, schools, seminaries and presses in Kerala in sixteenth century. For proselytisation, they chose the challenging but popular medium of Malayalam poetry. Missionaries such as Arnos Pathiri and Paulinose Pathiri acquired proficiency in the poetic diction, rhythm and meters of Malayalam and began composing Christian songs and poems, which were modelled after the traditional poetic genres in Malayalam. The aim of this Herculean task was to acclimatise the Biblical stories to fit into the poetic meters and tunes with which the natives were already acquainted. Arnos *Pathiri's Misihacharithram Puthanpaana* was a remarkable instance of the conscious attempt to bring about a cultural amalgamation by providing a familiar form to an unfamiliar theme, and thereby eliminating the sense of incongruity.

Soon the missionaries realised that poetry alone was not adequate to spread the message of Christ among the masses. The majority of the population in Kerala were unlettered and were not capable of appreciating the highly Sanskritised poetic forms that the Jesuits preferred. The most effective means of persuasion was a purified form of the conversational language, which could be grasped by the illiterate and admired by the elite. But Malayalam prose was at its infantile phase, as the upper strata of the society thought poetry as the sole prestigious literary medium and the folk literature continued to be an oral tradition due to the lack popular literacy. The prose used for mundane documentation was not sufficient to convey the Christian message in a convincing manner. The attempt of the missionaries to reshape Malayalam prose to make it fit to bear Scriptural message commenced with the introduction of a new style of prose writing, which later came to be

known derisively as *Pathiri Malayalam*. One of the earliest notable documents composed using this new prose style was the Canons of the Synod of Diamper, which took place in 1599 as a measure to enlist the St. Thomas' Christians of Kerala as the affiliates of the Roman Church under the jurisdiction of the Pope. The Canons of the Synod were compiled in the form of a book, which is often dubbed as the earliest model of modern Malayalam book (Thomas 21). It was followed by a number of tractates and pamphlets copied and circulated among the literate populace of Kerala. Once the language is adapted to suit their purpose, the stage was set for the most crucial mission of the ecclesiasts in foreign lands, namely the translation of the Scriptures into the vernaculars. The first known attempt in this realm was made through the benefaction of Claudius Buchanan, and was taken up later by the European missionary groups such as CMS, Basal Mission and so on. The Bible translators meticulously adapted the scriptural stories in such a way as to make them fit into the cultural milieu of Kerala, so that the new readers would not be intimidated by the foreignness of the book they were holding. Therefore, bread and wafer became *appam* and *dosa* in the Malayalam Bible and the Hebrew names were transliterated with certain modifications to enable Malayali readers to pronounce them effortlessly. The next task undertaken by the missionaries was the creation of Malayalam dictionaries and grammars, primarily for the use of the new missionary workers to gain proficiency in Malayalam. Due to the absence of any predecessor in the sphere of Malayalam lexicography, these foreign wordbook compilers enjoyed immense freedom to mould language to suit their purpose. They wielded the power to assign meanings to words, and thereby determine the structure of the language. It paved way for many words from Western

Christian traditions to find their way into the mainstream Malayalam language.

Missionary morality imposed itself on the lives of Malayalis in the guise of traditional virtue despite the existence of numerous paradigms of actual Keralite tradition in the literary works of the past. This newfound morality spread across every domain of an individual's life including his/her lifestyle, way of clothing, sexual behaviour, childrearing etc. Therefore, monogamy became the only acceptable family system and concubinage began to be viewed as an immoral practice. It was eventually accepted as tradition, even though various historical narratives provide evidence for the existence of polygamy as well as polyandry among some communities in Kerala. Madras Church Missionary Records of CMS shows several examples of newly converted bigamous men being forced to renounce either one of his wives. Upper garment became an inevitable part of a woman's attire and its absence was seen as evidence of unchaste conduct. The women of all communities were quick to adopt this new custom, resulting in several conflicts among various caste groups. These moral codes were first espoused by the conventional and newly converted Christians, and gradually they assumed the role of the common moral standard of Malayalis. The primary agency that assisted the transmission of missionary morality into the culture of Kerala was the educational institutions established by ecclesiasts all over the province.

Another instance of missionary influence in the language and culture of Kerala can be seen in a number of proverbs, common sayings, expressions and exclamations that allude to the Single-God theory propagated by the missionaries. Majority of the populace of Kerala worship multiple deities despite the conversional endeavours of the missionaries

that lasted several centuries. Yet, there are numerous old adages in Malayalam that refer to God as a single, omnipotent entity. The monotheistic philosophy promulgated by the western evangelical societies had irrefutable impact in the life and culture of Kerala, as evident in the well-known maxims and expressions such as *than pathi daivam pathi* (If one takes half of the required effort, the other half will be provided by God), *daivam chodikkum* (God will avenge), *daivam thunayullappo palarum thunayundu* (When God is with us, so will be many), *aarumillathavarkku daivamundu* (God is with those who have no companions) and so on. Such expressions can be perceived as the imprints of the inculturational attempts of the missionaries that lasted for more than five centuries.

What is currently considered as the Keralite tradition is often regarded as something that originated in ancient times and preserved from external influence for several generations by vigilant ancestors. These traditionalists believe that the long-conserved tradition is currently under threat from the 'western influence' induced by new media. In reality, many of the most valued traits of this so called tradition was shaped by European missionaries from western models. They had been incorporated into the social structure of Kerala for a long period of time that is has become impossible to distinguish them as foreign; indeed, they now appear more traditional than the real tradition of the land.

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Keralised English: A Survey on Sociolinguistic Awareness and Communicative Competence in Kerala

—Flergin Antony

Abstract: English being a global language is accessed from every culture and language. English is born and reborn every day in different culture and region across the world. In a multilingual society like India, English finds its unique place in the course of history. Kerala has its own contribution to English language. At the same time, English is reborn in the culture, values and tradition of the Kerala society. This has been both natural and academic process in the history of English language in Kerala. Here is an attempt to explore socio linguistic awareness of Keralites and process of cultural exchange based on the English by Keralites in different social media platforms. This will challenge and enhance sensibility and competency of learning and teaching of English in Kerala society.

Keywords: Culture, Competency, Sociolinguistic awareness, *Keralised* English.

Introduction

In a multilingual society language competence in several languages is an adorable skill from a linguistic point of view. The challenge before a professional, a business man or a student is to address various situations with proficiency in various languages. Indian social situation is fertile enough to develop multilinguistic competence. This competence may be assessed easily in terms of speaking skills. However, there are hardly any attempts to testing and assessing competence of various Indian languages. The mapping of languages in Kerala during precolonial period can be Tamil, Kannada, Sanskrit, etc. Malayalam itself is evolved in the

context of this multilingual environment. It has borrowed from these languages; vocabulary, syntax, semantics etc. During colonial era, Portuguese, Dutch, French and finally English had been part of Keralites linguistic development. The colonial and postcolonial India had faced the emergence of English learning and teaching. Hence English has significant impact on Malayalam language and vice versa. This enhanced sociolinguistic awareness and communicative competence of language learners. Communicative competence is defined as competence in language use as well as sentence creation in a speech community (Hymes 269). Sociolinguistic awareness enables one to be competent in a speech community. This paper discusses how English in Kerala is capable of reflecting sociolinguistic awareness and competence.

Significance

Kerala society has been witnessing a drastic change in social system very recently. There is an overwhelming desire to fly abroad for studies and jobs. Every nook and corner are displayed with number of flyers and advertisement hoardings to attract youngsters to equip with better English. IELTS, TOFFEL, OET, PEARSON, etc. are some of the most selling products in these centres. English has been commodified and sold in the market more than any product in Kerala. At the same time the level of English in Kerala is quite embarrassing. Despite the state has implemented policies promoting English more than any time, the academic deterioration is headache for language planners. Employability in terms of Linguistics is shocking. 93% of MBA students are unemployable, 80% of engineers are not fit for any job according to the Annual Employability survey 2019 Report by Aspiring Minds (Saxena and Anshuman 159)

Communicative competence

There are four areas of linguistic knowledge and competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. a) Grammatical competence covers the mastery of phonological rules, lexical items, morphosyntactic rules and rules of sentence formation. It refers to what Chomsky calls linguistic competence. b) Discourse competence involves mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified or written text in different genres such as narrative, argumentative essay, scientific report or business letter. c) Strategic competence involves the mastery of verbal and nonverbal strategies to compensate for breakdowns and to enhance the effectiveness of communication. d) Sociolinguistic competence refers to an understanding of the social context in which communication takes place, including role relationships, the shared information of the individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relation to the entire discourse or text (Canale and Merril 29-31). Communicative approach emphasises how language is used in real social settings to perform communication function and how language is used in varying contexts. Linguistic competence and social competence should be combined to learn. This made second language specialists look into sociolinguistic research for developing teaching methodologies and enlarging the area of objectives of language education.

Sociolinguistics

According to Trudgill (179), “Sociolinguistics is that part of linguistic which is concerned with language as social and cultural phenomenon.” It can be defined as a science that investigates the purpose and function of language in society. Sociolinguistics also conduct research on how language is used in diverse social contexts and the suitability of language used in certain contexts, this is taking into account factors such as etiquette, interpersonal relations, and regional dialects. The major study of sociolinguistic is divided into two: micro sociolinguistic and macro sociolinguistic. Micro sociolinguistic refers to study of the language phenomenon in social context symbolised by micro factors, its scope of interpersonal communication (person to person). Macro sociolinguistics tends to study of sociolinguistics phenomenon, including wider variable, population, language deployment, or the continuity of language, it refers to bilingualism, language attitudes, planning, variety, choice, accent, shift, accent, education, etc. As far as English is concerned in Kerala it is to be realised both in micro and macro levels. Individual repertoires to be explored and expressed in localised English at micro level and regional, cultural, religious phenomenon has to be represented at macro level.

McKay (139) in her theoretical approach, ''emphasises that the local and international culture must be represented in the teaching of English''. Language represents the culture of a particular community. Hence the realisation of language in a situation is taken place according to the culture, attitude and value system of that particular society. English in Kerala should represent the culture, tradition and value system of Kerala community. Hence analysing cultural elements in English used by Malayalees is relevant today.

This would rightly reorient learning and teaching of more *Keralised* English.

Methodology

What is the best part of English used in Kerala? How does Kerala society and culture influence and contribute to English language teaching and learning? Sociolinguistic awareness of Malayalee is critically evaluated in terms of culture, attitudes, beliefs etc. The transcript of English speech, interviews, debate etc. by Keralites in social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram etc. are used as data for analysis.

Language Attitudes and English Education

English language act as a power under the guise of empowerment. The hegemony of English language has uprooted one from one's cultural roots and renders one amnesiac towards one's local heritage. The Lord Macaulay words strangles Indian consciousness that Indian languages are not worth enough to learn than English. So, it's neither completely ignore English language learning nor discard native language. There can have more positive and dynamic approach to English language learning holding native language intact. The halo and horn of English may be dismissed and localised English is to be promoted. In the other words, Indian education system to be transformed and many have claimed that learning through mother tongue helps children to strengthen their creative and professional prospects. (Saxena and Anshuman 158). This is likely to be done considerably through culture. The attempts to disseminate Kerala culture through English will change the attitude to learn and use more Keralised English.

Semantics of Language

Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication and understanding. Language is not only a tool for communication but also a reflection of cultural values and norms. According to Hymes, language is intertwined with the social life of a community (Pinzón 29). As languages develop and adapt to societal and cultural changes, the meanings assigned to words can shift, resulting in semantic change. Semantic change is a dynamic process that occurs naturally as languages evolve. In multilingual settings, code-mixing and borrowing words from different languages can lead to semantic change. Language shifts, which occur over time, also contribute to semantic change.

Language and Culture

The Indian users of English have to live, interact and communicate in the Indian socio-cultural settings. They have to communicate with other Indian users of English, and they have to deal with aspects of Indian reality. The point is that the Indian reality, Indian subjects and Indian contexts and norms of behaviour reshape and reform English in India. It is this reshaping and reforming of English that leads to what we call the Indianisation of English. According to Raja Ram Mohan Roy the tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into theirs. Sociolinguists, however, have a more dynamic perspective: culture is continuously reconstructed in accord with knowledge and experiences acquired as a result of interactions in different contexts (Baker 567). Hence here

are some instances of English which are shaped out of typical Kerala culture and social context.

Keralising English

There are a few tools available to localising a language. Keralising English means adapting and incorporating culture and ethos of the society to redesign the language. The major tools are code switching, idioms and metaphors, cultural references from myths, literature, history and tradition, adaptation of vocabulary etc. Here there few texts from contexts of Kerala have been analysed.

Culture is often expressed and reflected in language in various ways. Language is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of cultural identity, values, beliefs, and norms.

1. Idioms and expressions unique to a culture often carry specific cultural meanings that might not be easily understood by outsiders. Idiom has a specific cultural context that might not make sense in other languages.

*To put pressure on tribal affair or tribal commission…Kerala needs a very different focus…toxicity which is **pushed on to their tongue**. Please send the tribal commission on a **very harsh survey**…* (“Shri Suresh Gopi on Discussion”)

*…that many people will find you know they can **easily puncture the holes**… Something that you will feel that I am joking right…* (“CPIM's Chintha Jerome”)

*It's **on your shoulder**…M. Gandhi is **purest soul** who was willing to sacrifice anything to all of us…* ("Chandy Oommen | Speech |Election")

2. Proverbs and sayings reflect the wisdom, beliefs, and values of a culture. They encapsulate cultural knowledge and convey messages in concise, memorable ways.

Burn not your house to fright away the mice, come uncalled, sit unserved, To add fuel to the fire, Don't jump the gun, Pride goes before fall, A close enemy is better than a distant friend, Get out of hand, stones and thorns, born with a golden spoon in mouth,

3. Different cultures have distinct ways of greeting and addressing people. The choice of words, level of formality, and gestures used in greetings reflect cultural norms and respect for social hierarchy.
4. Names have cultural significance and can reflect religious, ethnic, or familial values. The order of names, the choice of names, and the use of honorifics can all convey cultural meaning.
5. Taboos and Euphemisms Cultures often have words or topics considered taboo or sensitive. Euphemisms are used to discuss these topics indirectly, reflecting cultural norms around what can be openly discussed.

*He will **salute any idiot** but not a woman…but never a woman…it's a **male chauvinism** at its height…he got red faced …* ("Kerala's First Lady IPS Officer")

Youth is a complex term*…a young man at the age of 20 can be old, and a man at 90 act as a young leader …politics is the art of changing impossible things of today to possible things of tomorrow. India is guided and lead by a* ***young brains and fresh bloods*** (“CPIM's Chintha Jerome”)
…a lady wearing uniform ***khaki*** *and then coming as…DGP announced at a conference my visit as a pollution…do you know* ***a woman is coming to pollute our department*** *and* ***everybody laughed…*** (“Kerala’s First Lady IPS Officer”)

6. Cultural concepts and Untranslatable words Understanding how culture is expressed in language is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication and for appreciating the richness of linguistic diversity around the world. It helps people navigate interactions, avoid misunderstandings, and foster respect for different cultural perspectives.

Aiyo, coir, congee, curry, dosa, godown, Idli, jaggery, coolie, mango, orange, teak, areca, copra, Jackfruit, Betel, candy (“List of English Words”)

Chillu, chuckram, mundu, nercha, payasam, poda patti, thaali, thottam, zamorin, Malabar (“English Terms Derived from Malayalam”)

7. Narrative styles: The way stories and narratives are structured can vary across cultures. Different cultures emphasise different aspects of storytelling, such as plot development, character motivations, or moral lessons

*I would like to **again again**…I would like to prayer before the honourable chair, you **please insist him to withdraw the bill**…I am strongly condemned. … this is a very **aggressive matter*** ("A. A. Rahim's Remarks")

*…it's an **effort** by the cpm government…. government is worried about gold smuggling scam and that gold smuggling for which **People in the government** and cpim party….* ("V. Muralidaran, BJP leader")

8. The use of pronouns can reveal cultural values related to hierarchy, formality, and collectivism versus individualism. Some languages may have more or fewer pronoun distinctions based on age or social status

*After that, two ministers called **me**…Rajiv…and also culture minister…distasteful incident…as long as you find Marx, Angles, Lenin and Stalin on the...billboards...it seems his head is there…whoever is in power, **we can** support them, **we can** move towards them* ("The weakening of Congress")

9. Cultural references in Language References to historical events, folklore, literature, and pop culture in language use can provide insights into a culture's shared knowledge and values

*Should we use that line…I don't quiet buy it …it's kind of like it's very Indian thing to kind of see it's just it's … fortunately I think, I think, I think…it's not, it's not right…**if if if** we know…**I think I think I think** it's just all… car head **car guys car guy**…* ("Interview with Dulquer Salmaan")

10. Metaphors and analogies often draw upon cultural symbols and references to convey complex ideas.

> *…**meetings and meetings**…wherever I go, I **take my house in my head**…it is very difficult to completely eradicate familial obligations…but **family centred ideology** still haunting me throughout my career…completely ignore domestic friend* ("Women Have Come Long Way")

> *I don't have **faculty of making friends** very easily and all but I think she is an expert in it. You need to be seriously talented not to be friend with Nasiriya after this interview…eventually a short might take four hours to set up and then finally actors In front of camera **ok…ok...ready ready...let's go…let's go…*** **(**"Acting with Anjali Menon")

The challenges of translating Malayalam into English

Translation is both a literary activity as well as a creative writing. It is a process of reproducing Source Language (SL) text in to Target Language (TL) text. According to Ayyappa Paniker, a notable Malayalam writer, "till the 19th century, Indian translators were not affected unduly by the anxiety of being through to the original and the spirit" ("Difficulties" par.1). Indian translators before the 19th century did not experience a strong compulsion to remain faithful to the original text and its spirit when translating. This viewpoint implies that earlier Indian translators may not have felt the same level of pressure or anxiety to capture the exact

essence and meaning of the source text when undertaking translation work.

Malayalam language is known for its varieties of word usages. Through these usages, its cultural background and hierarchical discourses are seen. Each word is unique in its original language. When it is translated, its irony and cultural values moves onto unfamiliar scenarios. In the process of translation, the essence of a text is more prominent than words and phrases. Words will not be used in its ordinary sense, but in different implication. The main drawbacks of translation include the use of footnotes in each and every page and without the footnotes, one cannot appreciate the significance properly. ("Difficulties" par.2) As a result, the reader loses his/her attention and focus. Kerala is very rich in cultural practices and traditional beliefs. So, they are very concerned about their ancient customs. Translating Malayalam idioms and proverbs into English can be challenging for several reasons, as it is with translating idiomatic expressions from any language.

Cultural Context and Linguistic nuances: Malayalam idioms and proverbs have specific cultural, historical, or regional contexts that may not have direct equivalents in English. Translating them while preserving their cultural nuances may be embarrassing. The linguistic features and nuances in Malayalam do not exist in English. It is difficult to realise the original meaning without losing its nuances.

Wordplay and Rhyme: Some Malayalam proverbs and idioms may have wordplay, rhyme, or alliteration that is challenging to recreate in English. Translating these features can alter the original charm of the expressions. Certain idioms and proverbs are inherently untranslatable because they rely on unique phrases or concepts that have no direct counterparts in English. In such cases, an

explanation or paraphrase may be necessary, which can make the translation less concise

Structure and Local Flavour: Malayalam idioms and proverbs are concise and to the point, while their English equivalents may require more words to convey the same meaning. This can affect the flow and impact of the expression. While translating, there is a risk of losing the local flavour and authenticity of the expression, especially if the translated version sounds too formal or generic.

There are a few popular proverbs in Malayalam language translated into English:

Offer an elephant but not high hopes (*Aana koduthalum aasha kodukaruthu),* Baby squirrel has its own share (*Annaan kunjinum th annaalayathu),* Even an elephant falls while missing a step (*Adi thettiyaal aanayum veezhum)*, The grass is always greener on the other side (*Akkara ninnal ikkara pacha, ikkara ninnal akkara pacha),* An arecanut is held in the lap but can an arecanut tree? (*Adakya madiyil vkyam, adakyamaram madiyil vakyamo),* It's enough eating cake and don't count the pit (*Appam thinnaal mathi kuzhi ennanda*), When there is no way, even tiger eat grass (*Gathi kettaal puli pullum thinnum),* Empty vessels make more noise (*Nirakudam thulumbilla)*, Barking dogs seldom bite (*Kurakum patti kadikilla)*

There are also some idiomatic and metaphorical expressions:

Golden son/ daughter *(ponnu makan/ makal),* Double standard (*Irattathappu),* Castle in the sky (*Aakashakotta),* Milk cow (*Karava Pashu),* Cow in the page (*Eettile pashu)*, Bend backbone (*Nattellu valakkuka)*, Self-praise (*Meni Parayuka)*

Findings

1. As far as English language teaching is concerned an authentic teaching material rooted in social and cultural situation of Kerala has to be developed at school and college level. The language courses at CEFR levels are to be redesigned according to sociology of language.
2. Sociolinguistics has direct and strong impact on language learning and teaching. It teaches social life and culture. Cultural integration in English language teaching is very helpful for students to understand the concepts in other languages easily.
3. Competency in language means grammatical, discourse, strategic and communicative competency. A balanced and comprehensive teaching has to be promoted. The known speakers are competent public speakers however sociolinguistic competency is varied among them.
4. Culture is often reflected through idiomatic expressions, proverbs, metaphors etc. Hence a deliberate attempt should be made to translate those expressions without ignoring cultural and metaphorical features.

Conclusion

The study of language and its relationship with culture and society is known as sociolinguistics. Incorporating sociolinguistic perspectives will help more effective and meaningful language learning and competence in language. It reflects the complexity and diversity of language use in the real world. *Keralised* English may not be a major variant of English in the world. However, much efforts to be taken to explore cultural expressions and translating them into English.

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History and Trajectory of English Language Teaching/ Education in Kerala: Implications of Language Policies in India till NEP-2022

—**Viju M. J.**

Abstract: This research paper examines the history and development of English language teaching and education in Kerala focusing on the evolution of language policies in India and their impact on the Kerala Model of Education. The study spans from pre-independence to the introduction of the National Education Policy in 2022, examining the dynamics and relationships between language policies and English language education within the Southern Indian context. The Kerala state's linguistic diversity and commitment to language and education make it an enthralling case study. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining historical analysis, policy critique, and empirical substantiation. Drawing from existing literature, government archives, and educational statistics, the study provides an all-encompassing panorama of English language education within Kerala, contextualising it within the unfolding tapestry of language policies.

Keywords: English Language Teaching/Education, Language Policies, Kerala Education Model, Christian Missionaries' Role, National Education Policy (NEP), Language Diversity.

Introduction

Kerala, a southern Indian state, is a unique case study in English language education due to its pedagogical creativity and linguistic diversity. According to George (2005), the Kerala Model of Education[1], also known as the "Kerala Experience," is a key part of this approach, focusing on excellence, inclusivity and accessibility. Kerala's history of English language instruction is a microcosm of India's journey from pre-independence to the recent adoption of the National Education Policy in 2022[2]. The Kerala Model is

a shining example of literacy, emphasising gender equality and basic education. The state's linguistic diversity, including a complex tapestry of languages and dialects, coexists with Malayalam, the principal language. This study uses a flexible mixed-method approach to explain the complex relationship between language policies in India and English language instruction in Kerala, combining historical analysis, policy critique, and empirical substantiation.

Background of the Study

Kerala's English language instruction has a long history that is deeply entwined with India's more general language policies. The linguistic diversity of Kerala and the country's emphasis on language and education make it a compelling case study (Krishnan 4457-4462). The principal aim of this study is to present a thorough historical account of English language instruction in Kerala. It will look at how language policies have shaped the state's language learning and teaching environment. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic, the research draws on previously published works, official records, and data on education (Kerala State Council for Educational Research and Training).

English Education in Kerala

Kerala's English language education system has been significantly influenced by India's language policies and the state's linguistic diversity. The British colonial influence in Kerala led to the first official English language instruction in schools and universities, with English-medium schools often overseen by Christian missionaries[3]. India's emphasis on language education and the linguistic variety of the

country significantly impacted Kerala's English language education system. The Official Languages Act of 1963[4] preserved English use for official purposes while designating Hindi as the official language of the Indian Union. The National Policy on Education (1968)[5] introduced the three-language formula, teaching Hindi, English, and a regional language. The 1986 National Policy on Education[6] favoured mother tongue-based education, emphasising Malayalam as the major language of instruction. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, India's language policies saw a dramatic shift as the nation embraced globalisation and liberalisation. Kerala, one of the most literate states in India, welcomed this development, as proficiency in English opens doors to higher education and greater career prospects both domestically and abroad.

Historical Analysis

An extensive analysis of historical sources, archives, and academic publications was done in order to recreate the historical evolution of English language instruction in Kerala. Pre- and post-independence publications, school reports, colonial records, and other original historical sources were referred to for this paper. By highlighting the significant occasions and choices that have influenced Kerala's English language education trajectory throughout time, historical analysis helps to explain how and why it has changed over that period.

Policy Review

Empirical data, when accessible and pertinent, were used to supplement the historical and policy analysis. This contains data on language preferences and choices in educational institutions, surveys of language proficiency, and educational statistics. An up-to-date view of the state's English language education trends and patterns can be

obtained using empirical data. The research report offers a thorough and multifaceted viewpoint on the topic to the triangulation of historical analysis, policy review, and empirical data. This method is essential for comprehending the historical development of English language instruction in Kerala and how it relates to changing linguistic regulations. Furthermore, it is imperative to employ extant literature, official reports, and government documents to verify the conclusions and arguments put out in this study.

Empirical Data

The study used empirical data to analyse the historical and policy aspects of English language teaching in Kerala. This included data on language preferences, proficiency surveys, and educational statistics. The mixed-method approach provided insights into the dynamics of English language instruction in Kerala and the historical context of the policy, allowing for a comprehensive investigation of the subject.

Historical Overview of English Language Education in Kerala

The historical overview of English language education in Kerala reflects the complex interplay of missionary initiatives, government support, linguistic reorganisation, and evolving language policies. These historical foundations have significantly impacted the linguistic landscape and the role of English in education in the state.

Pre-Independence Era

English language instruction was established in Kerala before independence as a cornerstone of the area's educational system (Sreekumar 54-55). During British colonial control, English was made mandatory in schools

and colleges for administrative and commercial reasons. According to Sreekumar, missionary schools were essential in spreading English education, offering it alongside general education and Christian-related courses. This missionary-driven strategy emphasised the importance of the language in the world. British colonial authority recognised the strategic value of English for government and communication, making it the official language for administration and documentation. Government programmes were launched to assist English language instruction in schools, and the state provided funding to universities and colleges teaching the language. These early initiatives laid the foundation for English language instruction in Kerala, with infrastructure and educational facilities playing a crucial role in determining the future linguistic makeup of the area.

Post-Independence to 1990s

Major shifts in language regulations and education occurred in India throughout the post-independence era. These changes had an impact on Kerala specifically, both nationally and state-wise (Sreekumar 56). The linguistic restructuring of Indian states was one of the major policy shifts that occurred during this period. The 1956 States Reorganization Act[7] resulted in the linguistic redrawing of state borders. The state of Kerala was established in 1956, and this linguistic restructuring affected the language used in schools. The official language of the state, Malayalam, became more popular in schools but English remained a subject. In 1968, National Policy on Education introduced a three-language formula, requiring Hindi and English to be taught in schools. This led to a trilingual educational environment, exposing children to multiple languages at an early age. English remained the major language, and English-medium schools and universities grew in number,

especially in urban areas, fostering future success in the language.

Late 20th Century

In the late 20th century, Kerala's language education policy underwent significant changes, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Mother tongue-based education gained traction, aligning with the national push for regional language preservation and promotion. The National Policy on Education in 1986 emphasised mother tongue-based education, leading Kerala to select Malayalam as the primary language of instruction. This approach aimed to improve education standards. However, concerns about the place of English in the educational system arose. English continued to be taught at secondary and tertiary levels, while Malayalam gained popularity at the primary level. This dual approach allowed students to become proficient in both their native tongue and English. The late 20th century saw a transition between preserving regional languages and accepting English as a global communication and opportunity language, which still impacts language instruction in Kerala today.

Evolution of Language Policies in India

The development of language policies in India has had a significant impact on how language education is shaped in different states, including Kerala, especially with regard to the position and function of English. The evolution of language policy in India is examined in this section, with a focus on significant turning points and how they affected language instruction.

Early Language Policies

According to Kumar (2014), India's language policies in the early years after independence prioritised multilingualism and the preservation of regional languages to promote national cohesion and language diversity ("Multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Kerala" 35). The majority of the population speaks regional languages, which are crucial for inclusive education. Despite being adopted as a teaching language during British colonial authority, English remained essential in post-independence India. The Official Languages Act of 1963 established English as an associate official language with Hindi for administrative and communication purposes. English is useful globally and required in many professional domains, and schools in Kerala taught regional languages, particularly Malayalam, alongside English. This period marked the beginning of a complex linguistic landscape in education, highlighting the coexistence of regional languages and English.

The Three-Language Formula

A major shift in language policy at the national level was brought about by the 1968 National Policy on Education, which included the establishment of the Three-Language Formula ("National Policy on Education" 1968, sec. 1). The method required students to study three languages in school: Hindi, a regional language, and English. This policy sought to encourage multilingualism in order to advance linguistic harmony and national integration (Kumar 35). The Three-Language Formula's adoption presented particular difficulties in Kerala. The state has to introduce Hindi as a second language to the curriculum because of its already bilingual educational environment. As a result, a trilingual situation involving Malayalam, Hindi, and English was presented to the pupils. English continued to maintain its significance as a global language, and the policy ensured

that it remained an integral part of the educational landscape.

Post-Liberalisation Era

In India, the 1990s were a time of economic liberalisation, which had a profound impact on linguistic dynamics (Das 110). The status of English as a worldwide language rose as the nation accepted globalisation. Speaking and understanding English has become more crucial in a number of fields, including business, technology, and higher education. In Kerala, the global importance of English has increased due to the perception that proficiency is essential for accessing international schools and improving employment opportunities. This has led to an increase in demand for English education and the expansion of English-medium educational institutions. This shift in English's role in India, particularly in multilingual states like Kerala, reflects the nation's commitment to linguistic diversity, regional language preservation, and the recognition of English as a practical tool for communication and global integration (Kumar 55).

English Language Education in Kerala: Challenges and Developments

English language education in Kerala has undergone significant challenges and developments over the years, shaped not only by historical policies but also by language movements and political demands. Additionally, the contemporary status of English in the state's education system plays a crucial role in providing access to opportunities while posing specific challenges for learners.

The Influence of Language Movements

Language movements and political demands have played a significant role in Kerala's history, influencing language laws and, in turn, the state's approach to English language education. The necessity of preserving and advancing regional languages, especially Malayalam, has frequently been at the centre of these initiatives. The "Malayalam Language Movement," which aimed to make Malayalam the state's official language, is one of the most important language movements in Kerala. This movement argued that Malayalam should be the dominant language of government and education in order to counteract the dominance of English and the inflow of Hindi. English maintained its status in education because of Malayalam's growing acceptance in the state's administration (Menon 72).

The Role of English in Kerala's Educational Landscape

English's role in Kerala's education is complex, as it serves as both a study subject and an instructional medium. It is a universal language and essential for accessing opportunities in professional courses, competitive tests, and higher education. Proficiency in English is crucial for admission to universities and employment prospects. However, Kerala's adoption of the language for educational purposes has led to unequal access to high-quality English-language education, highlighting the challenges faced by students in achieving proficiency in English.

Students from marginalised communities may face difficulties in accessing resources and quality English-medium education. Furthermore, a focus on English can sometimes overshadow the promotion of regional languages, leading to concerns about language

preservation (Chandran 45). In summary; the influence of language movements and political demands in Kerala has shaped language policies and the status of English language education in the state. While these movements have emphasised the significance of regional languages, English continues to maintain its importance as a global language. In the contemporary educational landscape, English serves as a key to accessing a wide range of opportunities, but it also raises concerns about equality in access and the preservation of regional languages.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2022 and Its Implications in Kerala

To sum up, political demands and linguistic movements in Kerala have influenced language policies and the state's approach to English language education. English nevertheless holds its position as the most important language in the world, even if these initiatives have highlighted the value of regional languages. While English is necessary to take advantage of many opportunities in today's educational environment, it also creates questions regarding equal access and the survival of local languages.

NEP 2022: An Overview

The National Education Policy 2022 in India introduces language education reforms, emphasising multilingualism and allowing students to choose any language for education, including their mother tongue. This policy presents both opportunities and challenges in Kerala, where Malayalam is the official language and English is a key component. The policy encourages multilingualism, increasing accessibility and inclusivity in education. However, it raises questions about maintaining proficiency

in English for higher education and career prospects. The policy also emphasises the importance of combining skill development and vocational education, aligning with Kerala's position as a leader in education and its ability to develop English language vocational programs that enhance students' employability.

Critiques and Controversies

The National Education Policy 2022 (NEP 2022) has sparked concerns about its language restrictions, particularly in Kerala. Critics argue that the policy, which promotes teaching in one's mother tongue and multilingualism, fails to adequately address the importance of English, a crucial aspect of Kerala's education system (Kumar 25). They fear that the policy may dilute the significance of English language instruction, impacting the early introduction of English in education. Educators and legislators in Kerala are also uncertain about the implementation of language provisions at the state level, given the state's distinct language and educational setting. Supporters argue that the policy's emphasis on multilingualism can increase inclusivity and align with the state's linguistic variety. The NEP 2022 aims to make education more accessible and inclusive, but it has also raised concerns about the importance of English in the state's educational system. To ensure the policy balances the global importance of English with regional language needs, Kerala's linguistic and educational setting must be carefully considered before implementing the policy.

Implications of NEP on English Language Teaching in Kerala at School and Graduate Level

In Kerala, English Language Teaching (ELT) is undergoing a paradigm shift due to the National Education Policy (NEP)

2022, which will have an impact at both the graduate and school levels. These effects can be further explained as follows and include modifications to curricula, pedagogical practices, and the state's ELT environment as a whole.

Early Language Development and Mother Tongue Emphasis

The importance of early language development in the mother tongue is emphasised by the NEP. The language-neutral approach of the strategy has sparked concerns about a possible loss in the predominance of English at the primary level in Kerala, where Malayalam plays this important role. It could be necessary for English language teachers to re-evaluate the methods they use to help students learn and use the English language in tandem with the development of their mother tongue. They must strike a balance between the policy's mother tongue focus and the need to maintain English language proficiency (Nayar 12).

Flexibility in Language Choice

NEP 2022 offers freedom in the language that can be used for education. This inclusiveness is in line with the linguistic diversity of Kerala, but it also calls into question the place of English. This flexible approach will need English teachers to adjust as they realise how important it is to let students select English as their medium of education. Instructors need to make sure that there is a seamless shift to this flexible model and that English stays a major component of the curriculum.

Emphasis on Multilingualism

The policy encourages students to become proficient in multiple languages. This is consistent with the multilingual

milieu of Kerala, but it also increases the workload for English teachers. English language instructors will need to use cutting-edge pedagogical techniques that promote multilingualism and allow for fluency in both the mother tongue and English. This may mean including more beneficial and interesting language-learning activities into the curriculum.

Holistic and Multidisciplinary Education at Graduate Levels

The emphasis on comprehensive and multidisciplinary education in NEP 2022 will have an impact on graduate-level ELT programs. To be in line with this more comprehensive educational goal, English departments need to modify their curricula. In order to preserve a solid English foundation while preparing students for a more comprehensive education, this adaptation should include the incorporation of multidisciplinary aspects.

Internationalisation of Higher Education

The goal of the policy is to make Indian universities the centre of international education, drawing in students from throughout the world. This may increase Kerala's need for ELT courses, particularly if English becomes a language of instruction for foreign students. Graduate-level English teachers may have to serve a more diversified student body, which may include students from other countries. This entails modifying the curriculum to support language acquisition in a variety of multicultural settings.

Standardisation of ELT across India

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2022 has sparked discussions on standardising English Language Teaching (ELT) in India. Kerala's unique linguistic and educational setting necessitates careful implementation of the policy's

language provisions. To positively impact the standardisation process and the state's educational landscape, English language educators and policy makers in Kerala must be actively involved. NEP 2022 will significantly impact English language instruction at graduate and school levels in Kerala, offering opportunities for inclusive education through multilingualism, early language development, and linguistic option flexibility. However, maintaining English language ability in an evolving language landscape is challenging. A multidisciplinary approach to ELT in Kerala is needed, considering internationalisation of higher education and standardisation discussions.

Results of the Study

This paper examines the complex relationships between language policy and the state's educational system in order to outline the historical development of English language instruction in Kerala. The impact of the latest National Education Policy (NEP) 2022 integration into Kerala's English language education system is also explored. Following an analysis of the implications of the major findings, recommendations are made for the state's future English language education program**.**

Key Findings

This study demonstrates the fascinating and complex evolution of English language teaching in Kerala. The government and missionary institutions were responsible for the introduction of English as a language of teaching in pre-independence days. Post-independence linguistic measures, such the Three-Language Formula, had a big impact. Education has taken on a new look over time.

English was still widely used in education even if in the late 20th century there was a shift toward mother tongues. Kerala's English language education system has been strongly impacted by the way India's language laws have evolved over time, reflecting the importance of regional languages and linguistic diversity. Moreover, by emphasising English's growing worldwide domination, the post-liberalisation age has altered linguistic dynamics (Sreekumar 72).

Implications

There are many and varied implications to be made from the results of this investigation. The flexible language rules of NEP 2022 have a big impact on Kerala's English language education system. In spite of the policy's significant emphasis on multilingualism and mother tongue-based education, there are worries about the possible erosion of English's importance in elementary school. According to Kumar, the early introduction of English, which is a defining feature of Kerala's educational system, may be impacted by the emphasis on mother tongue instruction and the freedom to choose a language. The strategy supports multilingualism, which is in line with the varied linguistic terrain of Kerala. Nonetheless, it also adds a new burden to English language teachers, who need to use creative teaching strategies to encourage multilingualism while preserving the vital route to work (Kumar, “Implications of the NEP 2022 on English language education in Kerala” 45).

A possible paradigm shift is introduced by the NEP's emphasis on the internationalisation of higher education. This change could increase the need for graduate-level English language programs as colleges try to draw in foreign students. English departments in Kerala's higher education establishments must react quickly to this development and

modify their curricula to better line with the goals of NEP 2022.

Recommendations

Several suggestions for the future of English language instruction in Kerala are made in light of findings of this study:

(i) Balancing Language Provisions: The importance of English language instruction in Kerala should be carefully balanced with the promotion of regional languages, especially Malayalam. To address concerns regarding the early adoption of the English language, clear rules for implementing NEP 2022's language regulations should be prepared.

(ii) *Teacher Training and Pedagogy*: The goal of teacher preparation programs ought to be to provide instructors with the abilities and information needed to promote bilingualism and English proficiency. It is important to support innovative instructional strategies that aid in language development.

(iii) *Curriculum Alignment*: English departments in postsecondary educational establishments must to match their curricula to the multidisciplinary education vision outlined in NEP 2022. This alignment should cater to the internationalisation of higher education and make English language programs more attractive to students.

(iv) *Research and Adaptation*: On-going research into language education in Kerala is essential for adapting to evolving language policies and educational contexts. This research should inform the development of effective strategies for English language teaching in the state.

Conclusion

The history of English language instruction in Kerala is closely linked to India's linguistic policies, with the National Education Policy (NEP) introduced in 2022 presenting both opportunities and challenges. The importance of English language instruction in Kerala's educational framework cannot be overstated, and collaboration among policymakers, educators, and academics is crucial. Maintaining the balance between local languages and English is essential, as language is not just a medium of instruction but also a vital component of identity. Educators should be equipped with state-of-the-art teaching resources to ensure effective English language instruction while respecting local languages.

Matching curricula with evolving education paradigms is also crucial. Kerala must adapt its English language instruction to the changing landscape of education, integrating technology, innovative pedagogical methods, and a focus on holistic development. Research should guide these adaptations, providing insights into student needs and aspirations. By adopting a holistic strategy, Kerala can preserve its linguistic diversity while ensuring English language instruction remains relevant and inclusive. Thus, English language instruction in Kerala can continue to be a driving force behind students' success, enabling them to excel not only locally but on the international stage. In an increasingly globalised world, proficiency in English is a valuable asset, and Kerala's ability to nurture this skill while preserving its linguistic heritage will be a testament to its commitment to quality education.

Endnotes

[1]The inclusiveness of the Kerala model of education is the most significant feature that the world considers. It implies that everyone has a right to accessibility and education. Nearly all of the schools here provide high-quality education to both the rich and the disadvantaged. Even if they are paying for it, they are doing it at a fair price. Thus, the Kerala educational model gained prominence due to its inclusiveness.

[2]The New Education Policy (NEP) was approved by the Union cabinet in July 2020, aiming to cover all levels of education from elementary to higher education. It proposes a new 5+3+3+4 educational system, with students having five years in primary school, three years in middle school, three years in high schools, and finally four years at college. This change is expected to be implemented by December 30th, 2022.

[3]Kerala's development is largely attributed to its education system, which was significantly influenced by missionaries. Travancore's monarch, Gauri Parvati Bai, introduced free and obligatory elementary education in 1817, leading to the establishment of schools in various regions. The Church Mission Society and the London Mission Society contributed to Travancore education. In Kochi, the first school was established in 1818 by Rev. Dow Son. Spanish missionary Rev. Twinkle Tab established English schools in the southern regions. Kuriakose Elias Chavara established the "A school along with every Church" scheme, allowing all people to get free education. The Basil Evangelical Mission opened elementary schools in Kallai and Thalassery.

[4]The Official Languages Act, 1963 allowed for the indefinite continuation of English alongside Hindi in the Indian government until legislation changed. Hindi and English are used for official purposes like legislation, judiciary, and communications. The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution lists 22 scheduled languages, giving them recognition.

[5]In 1968, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi introduced the first National Policy on Education, aiming for equal educational opportunities for national integration. The policy, based on the Kothari Commission's recommendations, proposed a three-language formula at state levels, promoting Hindi, English, and a regional language in Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi-speaking states.

[6]The 10 + 2 + 3 structure for school and higher education was introduced by the Indian government in 1986. The NPE 1986 is a comprehensive framework for education development that covers elementary to higher education in both rural and urban locations.

[7]Reorganising the states into 16 states and 3 union territories was the goal of the 1955 report of the State Reorganization Commission, which was established in 1953. Under the State Reorganization Act, which was passed in November 1956, the government divided the nation into 14 states and 6 union territories. Kerala State was formed as part of this Act.

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Victims of Development and Climate Change: A Study on the Environmental Concerns in Arundhati Roy with Special Reference to God's Own Country Kerala

—**Sijo Varghese C.** and **Denis Joseph Anatty Olakkengil**

Abstract: The world is undergoing rapid change and development and artificial intelligence is replacing our traditional ways of doing things. In the name of development, illegal constructions are permitted by the authorities. Wetland ecology is destabilised due to the filling of land for further construction. Human beings and animals are victims of climate change. Arundhati Roy raises some questions about the future of white-backed vultures in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Zoo animals are destined to entertain the human beings and their deplorable condition is the focal point of study in Arundhati Roy. Dam building industry is responsible for the climate change in India to a large extent as it affects all the living beings on earth. People become refugees in their own country in the name of development as villagers become the prime target of the corporate agencies. Dams have played destructive role in India rather than their meritorious service to the peasants. Kerala, God's own country became a land of refugees during the 2018 flood as all the eighty one dams were forced to open due to torrential rain. The peasants have to leave their native place due to the attack of wild animals as they experience severe shortage of food and water. An equilibrium has to be reached between human beings and animals for fostering holistic growth and development.

Keywords: Diclofenac, Refugees, Displaced, Extinction, Trespass.

Arundhati Roy shoots up to literary fame with her debut novel *The God of Small Things* in 1997 by receiving the Booker Prize for fiction. Ecology is the major theme of the novel and the Meenachal River is an omniscient character who witnessed the major events in the story including the death of Sophie Mol and the ardent love between Ammu

and Velutha. The novel opens with the seasons of the God's own country as:

> May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear window panes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. (1)

The rivers undergo tremendous transformations due to urbanisation and industrialisations. Arundhati Roy criticises the authorities of the Government in *The God of Small Things* for polluting the rivers. When Rahel had returned to Ayemenem after a long period, she made a visit to the Meenachal River. She was surprised to see that:

> it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth has been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed… Once it had the power to evoke fear. To change lives. But now its teeth were drawn, its spirit spent. It was just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like subtropical flying-flowers. (124)

Kerala is one of the important tourist destinations of the Europeans and the state economy is dependent on the revenue generated out of tourism. In order to promote tourism in the state, the hotel authorities try to project only the 'good' side of the 'God's Own Country'. The lucrative motive of the hotel authority is highly criticised in the novel as:

> On warm days the smell of shit lifted off the river and hovered over Ayemenem like a hat… The hotel guests were ferried across the backwaters, straight

> from Cochin. They arrived by speedboat, opening up a V of foam on the water, leaving behind a rainbow film of gasoline… They had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Kari Saipu's estate. There wasn't much they could do about the smell. (125)

Arundhati Roy is an artist cum activist of the modern world. She surprised the literary world once again with her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* in 2017. The ecological concern in the first novel is being carried over to the second one with more diligence and emotional fervour. The extinction of vulture community due to diclofenac poisoning and the deplorable condition of the zoo animals are the major issues discussed by Roy in the novel. In the Prologue to the novel, Arundhati Roy says that "Diclofenac, cow-aspirin" which is a muscle relaxant, is given to cows for increasing the production of milk. The wider use of the medicine has resulted in the death of several cows and the carcass is voraciously eaten by the white-backed vultures. The cause of death in the cow is the constant use of Diclofenac and the same is carried forward to the vultures when they consume the carcass. The vulture population has drastically disappeared and the novelist laments the fact that "Not many noticed the passing of the friendly old birds". The book is an eye-opener to the Government authorities to do something to prevent the extinction of the vultures.

Each chemically relaxed, milk-producing cow or buffalo that died became poisoned vulture-bait. As cattle turned into better dairy machines, as the city ate more ice cream, butterscotch-crunch, nutty-buddy and chocolate-chip, as it drank more mango milk-shake, vultures' necks began to

droop as though they were tired and simply couldn't stay awake. Silver beards of saliva dripped from their beaks, and one by one they tumbled off their branches, dead (Prologue).

White-backed vultures are in fact victims of human gluttony and they are on the verge of extinction. Diclofenac, a muscle relaxant medicine which is unnecessarily given to cows and buffalos for increasing the production of milk has resulted in the death of domestic animals along with wild birds. Vultures carry out a great service to the environment without harming anyone. They are in fact natural scavengers both on the wild life and some of the cities in India. The Zoroastrians have a special affinity to the vultures as they do not cremate the dead bodies of their dear ones. They worship fire and dead bodies are placed in a tower of silence which is an abode of wild birds of prey. Zoroastrians believe that human body has come from the earth and it should reunite with the mother earth. They believe that every individual has the responsibility to enrich the soil for natural vegetation in a cyclical process. When dead bodies are burnt, they emit carbon and pollute the environment. The Zoroastrian model of disposing the dead bodies is one of the oldest forms of worshiping the environment. Keki N. Daruwalla, renowned Indian poet, in his poem "Fire Hymn" refers to his personal experience of having cremated his eldest son when the 'Tower of Silence' was miles away from the poet. The poet feels the prick of conscience for having disobeyed his religious practice and promises to everyone that he will not commit the same mistake again.

> It never forgot, and twenty years since
> As I consigned my first-born to the flames —
> The nearest Tower of Silence was a thousand
> miles –

The firm-hymn said to me, "You stand
forgiven,"
Broken, yet rebellious, I swore this time
To save it from the sin of forgiving.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy speaks for the wild animals kept under captivity in Delhi zoo. In India, zoological parks are equated with nation building and they are the status symbols of development and potential arena for hiking employment opportunities in the country. The staff and management of the zoological parks are interested in their welfare rather than the animals. Wild animals are destined to remain under life-long imprisonment in the zoo and they are laughing stones in front of the onlookers. The visitors in the zoo derive an acute sadistic pleasure in torturing the wild animals. The officials in the zoo do not restrict the visitors in feeding the animals and very often they consume the food along with the plastic containers. Thilottama witnesses the inhuman attitude of "a knot of noisy young men flicked razor blades across the barred enclosure and down the cement banks of the hippo pond" in the Delhi zoo (235). The gibbon in the Delhi zoo prefers to remain on tree-top as "the ground underneath the tree was littered with things visitors had thrown at him to attract his attention" (234). The zoological parks are recreational spaces for children and adults and exorbitant revenue is expected to pay the salary to the staff. Large number of animals kept in the zoo die every year due to the lack of congenial atmosphere. The post-mortem reports of the zoo animals reveal that large quantity of plastic has been swallowed by these animals along with the food provided by the visitors.

Scientific research is promoted by every country in the world to increase food production at a larger scale. Fast food culture is gaining momentum in the society today and there is severe shortage of food as human population is on the rise. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy takes up the issue of genetic modification of animals for the welfare of human beings. Genetic modification is practiced on various animals obviously for two reasons; one is to increase the size of the animal for more flesh and the other is to reach the maximum growth within a stipulated time. Lucrative motive of the human beings is reflected on the unethical practice of genetic modification. Human beings are adversely affected when we consume the meat products of the hybrid variety of animals. Thilottama is a student of architecture in the novel and she questions the authorities for the abnormal behaviour of the animals as:

> I am witness to a curious scientific phenomenon. Two bulls live in the service lane outside my flat. In the daytime they appear quite normal, but at night they grow tall… When they piss, they lift their legs like dogs. My question is: Is there any chance that they could be genetically modified bulls, with dog-growth or wolf-growth genes implanted in them, that might have escaped from a lab? If so, are they bulls or dogs? Or wolves?… The people who breed these giant trout say they're doing it to feed people in poor countries. My question is who will feed the giant trout? Human growth genes have also been used in pigs… These days one is never really sure whether a bull is a dog, or an ear of corn is actually a leg of pork or a beef steak. But perhaps this is the path to genuine modernity? (298 - 299)

Broiler chicken has revolutionised the food culture of the modern world. The chickens attain the slaughter age within

six weeks' time. Hormone is injected to the chickens for faster growth and it is being carried over to human beings. Arundhati Roy pokes fun by stating that the "poultry industry are trying to excise the mothering instinct in hens in order to mitigate or entirely remove their desire to brood" (299). It is high time that the Governmental authorities conducted studies on animals how do they suffer when hormone is injected for their growth. Animals who have undergone genetic modification are in fact victims of development and they serve the gluttony of the human beings. India is a land of varieties and vitalities and unity in diversity is our strength. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, was an ardent supporter of villagers in India and encouraged people to make their own products. In *The Greater Common Good*, Arundhati Roy says, "India does not live in her villages. India *dies* in her villages. India gets kicked around in her villages. India lives in her cities. India's villagers live only to serve her cities" (15).

India is a land of village refugees who are being deserted in the name of development. The corporate agencies would prefer to carry out all major constructions in the villages as there is less resistance to the project by the villagers and the availability of cheap land. In *The Greater Common Good,* Arundhati Roy depicts the pathetic plight of tribals who are being victimised by the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat. Roy donated the money she received from the Booker Prize for the welfare of the displaced people on the banks of the Narmada valley. She has dedicated the book *The Greater Common Good* "for the Narmada and all the life she sustains". Roy was sent to one day imprisonment at Tihar Jail for having criticised the verdict of the Division Bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India

on 18 October 2000 in favour of the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam.

Jawaharlal Nehru was the pioneer of 'Five Year Plans' in India after independence. In order to support agriculture, the Nehruvian Government took initiative for building dams in India. Nehru equated dams as "The temples of modern India" which he himself regretted later (Roy, *Greater Common Good* 7). In "The People Vs the God of Big Dams", Arundhati Roy states that, "We must be the only country in the world that builds dams, uproots millions of people, submerges forest and destroys the environment in order to feed rats" (33). Though it appears to be funny at the outset, it has some facts in it. Better irrigation facilities have fostered agricultural production in India but the report of the Ministry of Food and Civil Supplies, Government of India, states that ten percent of India's food grain is eaten every year by rats. Arundhati Roy suggests "the construction of better warehouses as more relevant to our needs than big dams" (33).

Big dams should be equated with water bombs, and they destroy the environment by destabilising the earth. Large quantity of water stored up in a particular area can affect the natural equilibrium of the earth which might pave way for earthquakes. In *The Greater Common Good,* Arundhati Roy says:

> Big Dams are to a Nation's 'Development' what Nuclear Bombs are to its Military Arsenal. They're both weapons of mass destruction. They're both weapons governments use to control their own people. Both twentieth century emblems that mark a point in time when human intelligence has outstripped its own instinct for survival. (61 - 62)

In order to extend her support to the displaced tribals in the Narmada Valley due to the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, Arundhati Roy joined the *Narmada Bachao Andola.* The victims of development were forced to leave their native land and they had to seek accommodation in a new place. The Government of India does not have a National Rehabilitation Policy to give land for land to the victims who are affected by the development of mega projects in the country. The Government of India pays cash compensation to the victims for the loss of their land and property. Arundhati Roy has conducted an extensive study on dams in India and she is convinced of the fact that dams have created refugees in the country. In *The Greater Common Good,* Roy substantiates her argument as:

> India now boasts of being the world's third largest dam builder. According to the Central Water Commission, we have 3,600 dams that qualify as Big Dams, 3,300 of them built after Independence. Six hundred and ninety-five more are under construction. This means that forty percent of all the Big Dams being built in the world are being built in India. Yet one-fifth of our population does not have safe drinking water and two-thirds lack basic sanitation… Big Dams are obsolete. They are uncool. They're undemocratic. They're a Government's way of accumulating authority. (7)

It's a matter of greater concern for everyone that the "average number of people displaced by a Large Dam in India is 44,182 (Roy: *Greater Common Good*, 9). Central Water Commission, Government of India, records that India has 3,600 big dams out which 3,300 have been built after we attained independence from Britain. In *The Greater Common Good*, Roy comes up with an account that nearly

thirty-three million people might have been displaced by the construction of 3,300 dams in India (10). The displaced people are in fact refugees of development in the same country.

Climate change is a natural phenomenon and nature reacts in different ways to manifest its anger for the exploitation carried out by the human beings. Global warming, extreme climate variations, torrential rainfall, drought, flood, tsunami, are some of the key indicators by which nature reacts upon the humanity. Exploitation of nature has some connections with natural disasters that occur very frequently in our day today lives. The state of Kerala has forty four rivers, eighty one dams, five national parks and seventeen wild life sanctuaries. Kerala was badly affected by flood in two successive years in 2018 and 2019. In 2018, torrential rain lashed for many days during the monsoon season and filled all the eighty one dams in the state and the authorities were forced to open all of them. High rainfall combined with a large spillage of water from the dams disrupted rail, road and airport services for a long time and normal lives were affected badly. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), conducted a study on the floods and landslides in Kerala under the title *Kerala Post Disaster Needs Assessment: Floods and Landslides – August 2018* and submitted the report in October 2018. The human impact of the floods was alarming:

> People in 1,259 out of 1,664 villages, that is 75% of the villages in the state were flooded. 1.4 million people were evacuated to public camps. 433 lives were lost in the floods and landslides—268 men, 98 women, and 67 children. 44 of the dead belonged to Scheduled Castes and 14 belonged to Scheduled Tribes. 20% of the fatalities comprised the elderly. Lives of over 8,600 persons living with disability

> were affected by the disaster. Access to piped water was disrupted for 6.7 million people. 1.4 million people lost access to water from shallow wells. 400,000 people were left without access to toilets due to damage to latrines. Severe damage to more than 17,000 houses jeopardised access to home, water, electricity, cooking fuel and assets for approximately 74,000 people. 1,74,690 buildings were damaged either fully or partially, potentially affecting 7.5 lakh people All schools closed from 2 to 23 days in affected districts. A total of 1,613 schools affected. (357)

In 2019 also Kerala experienced high rainfall but the authorities had taken preventive measures to keep the water level of the dams at a very low level during the monsoon period. The Government of Kerala learnt from the mistake of the 2018 flood that it was highly hazardous to keep the water level of the dams at a high level during the monsoon season. The dam safety authorities became vigilant and they monitored the water level in all the dams and gave warning to people before they opened the dams. Out of the 81 dams in Kerala, 59 of them are being owned by the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB). The board produces hydroelectricity with the help of their dams. The KSEB was highly criticised for their lucrative motive for having stored water at the highest pinnacle during 2018 monsoon season which could have been used for generating electricity. The authorities were forced to open all the dams and all their aspirations went in vein. It resulted in the deaths of valuable lives and damage to properties. The 2018 flood in Kerala should go down to the annals of the state as a historic man made blunder. If the dams had been regulated as per the warnings given by the National

Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), the result could have been different.

One of the contributing reasons for the successive floods in Kerala is the illegal constructions. The natural flow of water is blocked and wetlands are being converted into residential plots for making apartments and villas. The river bank is a favourite location for hotels and apartments as they have easy access to water bodies for discarding garbage. They pollute the environment and also contaminate the water bodies that will further pave way for different kind of diseases. Kerala witnessed severe drought and extreme hot weather after the two successive floods. This new phenomenon of extreme climate variation is the early process of becoming the fertile land into a desert. The ground water level has also gone down since the 2018 flood in Kerala.

The treasure of a welfare state is based on its rich flora and fauna. The animal kingdom was badly affected by the 2018 flood in Kerala. The extreme change in the climate had driven the wild animals into new pastures. The wild animals attack human beings obviously for two reasons: first of all the extreme climate variations drive them out of forest and they fail to recognise their boundaries and secondly severe shortage of food induce them to attack human beings as prey. The officials of the Kerala Wild Life Department have a tough time now to combat the issue of animal trespassing into the residential areas of human beings with the limited number of staff and lack of modern equipment. The authority has to abstain from killing the Wild animals who trouble the human beings as they have to uphold the Wild Life Protection Act 1972 of the Government of India. They officials can adopt preventive measures to send the wild animals back to the forest or catch them with cage traps.

The wild animals caught by the cage traps are later given to the zoological parks in the state. Professor Madhav Gadgil, ecologist and wild-life activist, had conducted extensive study on the Western Ghats of India, was of the opinion that the Government should legalise hunting wild animals that pose threat to humans" (*Onmanorama*, 19 January 2023). The Wild Life Department has set up camera in those areas where people suffer due to the attack of wild animals and report to the higher authorities for taking preventive measures. There is also political pressure on the Government to curb the attack on human beings by the animals. The wild animals also attack domestic animals and destroy the agriculture crops. The poor peasants have lodged a number of complaints against the authorities to take stringent action to check the attack on human beings by the animals. The Government of Kerala has given permission to the peasants with licensed guns to kill wild boars who destroy crops on condition that they should burn the carcass and the meat should not be sold or eaten by anyone.

Human beings trespassed the boundaries of the animal kingdom as part of cultivation in the beginning and later for making residence. *Arikomban,* a tusker, is well known to everyone. He had the habit of raiding rice-shops during night and created troubles to lives and property in Chinnakanal area of Munnar. Due to vehement protests from the people, the Government of Kerala was forced to take action against the tusker. On 29 April 2023, the Kerala Wildlife Department tranquilised and captured Arikomban from Chinnakanal and released into the Periyar National park. As per the directions of the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala, radio collar has been fasted to the tusker for enabling the authorities to monitor the movement of the

animal. The tusker has crossed the border and now resides in Tamil Nadu with the same old behaviour. Human beings and animals fight against each other and they are victims of development and climate change.

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Rewriting Gender: An Interview with K. Satchidanandan

— **Avani C. S.** and **Nandana S. Warrier**

The definition of gender has evolved alongside humankind. With differing views and experiences, gender is a nuanced subject which has still not been comprehensively explained. However, gender is a facet of every person's identity. Being born storytellers, humans have written histories and stories, and these have shaped and solidified certain notions about gender and personhood. Literature, along with the other arts, shows the evolution of how different genders were perceived, and how gender today came to be crafted.

K. Satchidanandan is an Indian bilingual poet who writes in both English and Malayalam. He is the current president of Sahitya Akademi. No reader of K. Satchidanandan would be a stranger to his nuanced, philosophical, and more often than not ironical articulations of contemporary socio-political systems and issues. Satchidanandan's activism goes beyond technical iterations of theorised social systems in his papers. "An address to your mother, a letter to your beloved, or a poem on the felling of a tree can well be a political statement as well", to quote him. His poetry, he says, naturally responds to societal events that shame him as a human being.

Gender proves no exception in his activism. "Burnt poems" is a masterpiece walkthrough of instances of women's love throughout history, denied expression by society. His critical studies have introduced significant literary categories including feminism and its multiple facets to

mainstream Malayalam literary audiences. He coined the term *pennezhuthu* in his introduction to Sara Joseph's short story collection *Papathara* that sparked constructive discourse on literary expressions of feminine experiences. As the former editor of the journal *Indian Literature* and the current president of Kerala Sahitya Akademi, he played a pivotal role in fostering literary discussions, bringing attention to various gender minorities who deserve a separate platform to express their exclusive experiences in a hetero-normative society.

One face of K. Satchidanandan's poetry offers solace more than confrontation. An example of this, his poem "She, Inside Me", is a deeply introspective and nostalgic poem that acknowledges a feminine aspect of his gender identity. The poem "Women" pays homage to the manifold dimensions of womanhood. But there are instances when moments of intense despair naturally take the shape of a vivid, disturbing poem like "Non-negotiable". This face is deeply philosophical and saturated with irony. His poetry also deconstructs stereotypes that have long pervaded literature. He unabashedly critiques himself and his male ego in works like "Kayattam" and "Bodhavati".

In this interview, conducted at the Kerala Sahitya Akademi in May of 2023, we gleaned his insights on the complex history of feminism in India and the social discourse that developed with it, as well as the immediate representation of this new consciousness in literature. Themes of intersectionality, academia's attitude to social causes, political philosophies and representation in various industries naturally emerged in the conversation. Democracy and the fight for democracy was a recurring theme in his answers. We honed in on terms like *pennezhuthu*, and also differentiated 'women writers' from

'feminist writers'. Some of our questions for Satchidanandan Sir were inspired by his poems themselves. Among these are "Women", "She, Inside Me", "Non-Negotiable" and "Bodhavati".

1. The consideration of women in literature began with magazines in 1887, like *Keralee Suguna Bodhini*, and such magazines began the social discourse on gender in Kerala. How has this discourse and social image of women in literature changed since then?

   In the beginning of the 20th century, there was a kind of awakening in women which was reflected deeply in literature. There is no denying that women have been present in literature since the beginning of time, but their group consciousness manifested itself in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. The ripple effect of this realisation of the hostile world they have been living in culminated in the various local, national and international movements. From a theoretical standpoint, differences in approach are apparent from French Feminism to American Feminism, where each leads to distinct interpretations of women's status in a man's world. Nevertheless, they have collectively illuminated the existing enslavement of patriarchy, and inspired an awakening in arts and literature. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was another step forward. It put into words the literal and figurative lack of a space for a woman to write or express herself. Women are omnipresent but invisible. That perspective puts the aforementioned 'room' in a multi-dimensional light.

2. Feminism is often mistaken as the female equivalent of patriarchy. According to you, how is patriarchy deeper than a mere power play between men and women?

   Patriarchy is not necessarily confined to men alone. For generations, society has seen to it that women also imbibe this ideology and become willing contributors to patriarchal cruelty. It is not just men who need conscientising. So, I have never seen it as a fight between men and women, but as a fight between the ideology of patriarchy and the ideology of democracy, where all kinds of equality are implied, be it of gender, class or caste. All of these hierarchies are interconnected and feed off of each other. In the context of class specifically, women from lower strata of society are more vulnerable. A woman whose routine includes eighteen hours of work, and then returning home to do the household chores singlehandedly, would seldom find an opportunity to think about herself and her condition. The different hierarchies are not to be isolated from each other, and that is how the supposed man-woman contradiction is part of a larger power play.

3. Media and real life reflect and influence each other. Amidst these representations that range from fantastical to sober, how has the depiction of women in art and media changed, in your opinion?

   As with everything in art and media, there has been a considerable shift in artistic depiction of women. There is a growing prevalence and public support for

independent women characters. They are particularly known to express a long-contained inner rage and a fervent desire for liberation. This, in my opinion, is a significant milestone in the evolution of art and media. However, popular media, especially soap operas, still ascribes stereotypes to its female characters. Women characters are confined to a narrow range of archetypes. At worst, they are labelled aggressive, unpleasant libertarians who disregard morals. They are often characterised as conspirators, home-wreckers, and the list goes on. I do not claim to be a great social analyst, but from what I observe, there has not been progress. The wider film industry is more responsible with their characterisation, but this has not seeped into mainstream media, which is unfortunately the more influential of the arts. Their depictions are still conventional and contrary to the idea of women's freedom.

4. Your image of women is clear from the poem "Women". Would you describe yourself as a feminist? How would you say language has affected women's expression? And how is this expression changing?

   I would not call myself a feminist but rather a democrat in the wider sense, and I find all discrimination to be inimical to the idea of democracy and equality. I have been aware of women's movements and various feminist theories. My first expression of that was in the introduction to Sara Joseph's collection of stories, *Paapathara*, where I used the word *pennezhuthu* which became

very controversial. That takes us to the question of language that women writers often face. Elaine Showalter spoke about the Mother Tongue, in other words, the language of a woman. Language has historically been shaped and constructed by the dominant group, which has been men. The language and liberty to express experiences specific to women is limited in several cultures. Even Kamala Das, a nationally beloved author of her time, had initially faced mistreatment by her own family for her candid expression of women's desires and dreams. The women of my generation thought it taboo to allow their daughters to read Madhavikutty. It wasn't until later that she was joined by other such trailblazers like Sara Joseph, Gracy, Chandramathi, C. S. Chandrika and theorists including J. Devika. Despite personal differences in opinion, I cannot but acknowledge Devika's scholarship in the study of women. Their efforts were supplemented by the contributions of other creative writers and theoreticians, and various women's organisations who have been fighting for women's freedom.

On the surface, things seem to be changing, but I am unsure if that applies to the unconscious resistance of the collective when women declare independence and establish their language. It is not as easy for a woman to flourish in any field, especially art, as it is for men. Even in representational spaces like film or creative writing, their language still lingers in the periphery. Perhaps virtual platforms have played an unacknowledged role in enhancing the freedom of uncontrolled

expression to an extent. As long as they are undiscovered.

5. In your poem “She, Inside Me”, there are traces of your personal journey in coming to terms with your gender. What is your personal definition and relationship with gender as a member of Malayali society?

   Some theoreticians too have pointed out that gender is social not biological, which I agree with. It is true that there exist biological differences between the sexes. It is often by suppressing the women inside them that men are compelled to play their assigned role of manhood and vice versa. Society expects men to be stoic and unfeeling, especially in public, while the opposite is assumed of women. As a man who is emotionally open and easily moved, I refuse to fit into that mould. I have felt that in all men and women, the other gender is present and it is by suppressing them that they perform their own. If one fails to perform their assigned gender to perfection, they get subjected to derogatory speech and invalidation. The resulting cognitive dissonance is what I tried to bring out in that poem. Like I said in the poem, as a child I had never felt this distinction. I used to dress in skirts and dance in front of the mirror, and my mother would let me, although laughing. Perhaps, in doing that, I was addressing the woman in me. Men also suffer with both the bodily and mental image of manliness, including their reactions, dressing. This distinction of gender is artificial which we have accepted and played along with. Taking the case of

even a progressive place like Kerala, you seldom find the natural freedom a man and a woman should have as two individuals. Moral policing is rampant; people are stared at and driven away. Malayali society is a voyeuristic, gossiping one, eager to find things that don't exist in the privacy of a friendship. As long as society stays so; it's difficult for anyone, let alone a woman to be free.

6. The question of the LGBTQ+ community is a given when discussing gender. What is your take on the position that they now have, in the legal sense and the social sense?

   I do not believe there has been a sweeping transformation, but we see more instances of gay and lesbian marriages. They have also gained legal recognition in more countries over the years. Instances of same-sex couples receiving blessings from their parents do occasionally surface on social media. However, these remain rare so I am unsure whether society and even the families of these people completely approve of such unions. Mere legal acceptance only needs the support of a handful of progressive judges. But in the more volatile social sphere, it is still wrongly regarded as immoral. This prejudice forces a kind of isolation upon them. Gradual progress is undeniable from the growing number of individuals publicly embracing their identities. Nevertheless, true acceptance still proves a distant goal.

7. What has the Sahitya Akademi's approach been towards promoting women in literature, and towards gender equality in general? Has it had women in positions of power?

The Akademi has had women in positions of authority, like Khadija Mumtaz. Moreover, the new dispensation for the last one year has held women's camps and at least five special programs. We also collaborate with women's organisations for such camps and literary festivals. One was a literary camp for emerging women writers, held in partnership with Kudumbarsee. This was followed by two programs that focused on gender equality specifically, and then a literary camp for women, held independently by the Akademi. By my own initiative after gaining my position, we successfully held an LGBTQ+ festival. It was meaningful, judging by the appreciation expressed by the participants. I insisted we have a transgender person on the executive board and we now have Vijayarajamallika as a member. She actively helps us orchestrate various events centred on the LGBTQ+ community. The previous event was merely the beginning. It was a half day event which led us to discover new talent like Vishnu Sujatha Mohan, who was awarded the Mathrubhumi Vishu Special Poetry Award. We are planning a bigger festival. I have translated some of Vijaya's poems, and Lullaby is a favourite of mine. It is a lullaby for someone who is neither a girl nor a boy.

Finding a distinct language for themselves has been a struggle for queer people, even more so than it has been for women. Women have had a longer writing tradition, dating back to the Bhakti poets like Meerabai, and the Buddhist nuns like Ubbiri and Sumangalamata. Comparatively, queer tradition is

sparse, which necessitates the creation of an entirely new one. They have been doing that and there are a number of people who are leaving a stamp of their special kind of existence through their writing. Some of them are even public about their life.

Concerning the dialogue around women in positions of power, it is important to note that one institution alone cannot move forward. The dynamics of society at large is echoed in every institution within it. I do not justify the imbalance in power as that is not my call to make. Nevertheless, changes are noticeable, though the pace is not as rapid as it ought to be.

8. Your coinage of *pennezhuthu* had sparked a lot of debates in the intellectual circles of Kerala. The criticisms include the term's inadequacy as a critical category, and alleged exclusionary politics. What was your intention for the word?

Pennezhuthu was intended as a direct translation of the French word *écriture féminine.* Perhaps if I had used *mahilasahithyam* or *vanithasahithyam* it would have gained more acceptance. We practise discrimination even at the verbal or linguistic level. Sanskrit words supposedly sound refined compared to pure Malayalam or Dravidian words which are perceived as obscene. This phenomenon can be seen in all major social movements. For instance, Dalits who have emerged in literature have labelled themselves ‘Dalits’ and their writing ‘Dalit writing’. It was Marathi writers like Namdeo Dhasal who pioneered this. This mainstream’s reluctance to

accept these groups is evident in the attempts to silence them by calling these 'labels' sectarian. All identity-centric movements have been suppressed in similar ways. To identify oneself as a woman, queer or Dalit writer is sectarian to some critics, because to them, literature is this monolith devoid of any distinctions. I too envision a future where no community needs a label to have a voice. However, there are periods in the evolution of society where previously silenced sections suddenly emerge into speech, establishing their presence in the wider discourse. I would call them 'periods of break' in literary history. Democracy itself is actually a continuous process of the invisible becoming visible and the unheard becoming heard. During such periods, these sections will have to assign themselves a name, and find their language, forms of expression, words, structures and syntax. I have written about this idea too. There may come a time when gender distinctions in literature dissolve and a woman will have the same opportunities as a man, and not need to call herself a woman writer in order to write. Such a literary utopia would only feature the single classification of 'good' or 'bad'. This is a distant goal even for Kerala where the absence of distinction is just superficial.

9. You talked about women calling themselves women writers. What are your thoughts on women writers getting called 'feminist writers' purely due to them being women?

I believe a distinction between those terms is necessary, which theoreticians have already made.

A feminist woman writer is someone who is conscious of her identity as a woman, and is also deliberately fighting the patriarchy. K. Saraswathi Amma could be aptly referred to as a feminist writer, due to her contributions to this kind of writings and harsh criticism of patriarchy. Contemporary perspectives may be evolving but figures like Mary Benigna or Lalithambika Antharjanam cannot be called feminist writers in the full sense, although in retrospect, there was a lot that was feminist in them and some of their stories could only have been written by a woman. However, there is no assertion of a feminist identity or a conscious opposition to the patriarchy in many, or at least some of these women writers. There exist both 'feminist writers' who actively confront the patriarchy and others who do not even want to be known as women writers. I have no objection to either. Chandramathi has once expressed her aversion of being called a feminist writer or even a woman writer. Ultimately it is the woman's choice, or more correctly, the writer's choice, whether they be a Dalit or a woman. In the case of third generation Dalit writers of Maharashtra, they have discarded the 'Dalit' label and instead want to be judged simply as writers.

10. You have used domestic imagery to convey deeply political messages in your poetry. Applying that to a feminist context, do you carry similar views in the case of politicisation of a woman's personal or domestic life? What are your opinions on the argument "personal is political"?

The personal is indeed political, I think that feminist slogan is applicable to everyone, not just women. When someone's politics is scrutinised, their personal life is often relevant. In a recent discourse on Indian Secularism, I asked the listeners to consider the number of members of their families who have married from other castes and communities. In the silence that ensued, it was obvious that when it comes to the marriages of their own children, most self-proclaimed progressivists would cite caste issues. I believe I was qualified to ask that question as a person coming from a diverse family with four religions and at least five castes. Growing up, my daughters had a good degree of autonomy, including in choosing their life partners. I ensured that my daughters never felt alienated, by garnering acceptance from the elders in the family. I do not claim that this is exceptionally progressive but it must be acknowledged that this is a rare family set-up in India. Certain things are instilled in us from childhood. These get exacerbated in a religious setting, as seen in instances such as Hindu families dissuading their children from befriending someone from a different religion. This was inconceivable in the Kerala of my generation. Religion has never deterred my friendships. Clearly, family is the bedrock of social life and the values imbibed from it define one throughout their life. However, the wrong values so imbibed, such as caste prejudices, are what snowball into wider political issues.

11. Your poem "Non-negotiable", included in the anthology *Collegiality and other Ballads*, received a

part of all the backlash it had to face. People have interpreted it as glorifying a victim's death by fire rather than survival. What was your intention?

Literary works permit different interpretations that may not always align with the author's intention. I am by no means advocating for suicide, but the fact remains that I have seen it become an act of not only helplessness but also an ultimate act of protest and rejection of society. In such cases, it carries the sentiment along the lines of "I don't need your advice, I don't accept you and I don't want to be one of you." There are phases in a person's intellectual life when they reject society. I have written a poem titled, "An Old Poet's Suicide Note", which could have easily been my own suicide note, had circumstances been less fortunate. It echoes the sentiment of refusing to continue within an India that seems to have regressed from its once-liberal and secular stance. For many people of my generation, who grew up with dreams of a liberal, secular India, and now find themselves suffocating in a narrower, constricted India, this is a sentiment we are bound to share. This often prompts the thought "I don't want to die in a society worse than the one I was born into." I disagree with aspects of progressive literature which insist that writing must end in hope. This is removed from the realities of life. Sometimes despair becomes the only candid reflection of one's feelings. And these moments also deserve poetic expression, which was what I was trying to do in that poem. How it is read is not my consideration. It can be read in many ways, I do not object to that. I will always believe in the reader's freedom.

12. You are broadly a leftist sympathiser, yes? How has the left party promoted women in literature? What has the Left done to amplify voices of women and other gender minorities?

    I am unsure whether the Left has been correct in their approach towards the welfare of women in that they have not been as assertive as they should have been. There is an ideal Left in my imagination that takes up not only class struggles but also struggles of various marginalised communities including gender minorities. To construct a truly egalitarian society, eradicating class disparities alone is not sufficient. Figures like Rosa Luxemburg have opined that despite numerous class struggles and revolutions, the fight for women's liberation remains as relevant as always.

    When I say the Left has not done as much as it should have, I do not negate the progress it has indeed managed to bring about. This started with the freedom struggle, when women emerged out of their homes and joined men in the battlefield.

    Some of this spirit has been carried on by the Left, but it has not evolved to adapt to the times. I find token representations and symbolic inclusion efforts like seat reservations, particular meetings and other ceremonial observances insufficient. The lacklustre interventions of the existing Left is because it sees liberation movements like feminism as an opposing force to the larger class struggle, as seen in the reaction to the Munnar plantation

workers' strike. Ideally, the Left should be an ally and fight for all causes, whether they pertain to the Adivasi community, Muslims, or any other community whose needs are overlooked. I was one of those who publicly stood in support for Hadiya, along with others like Devika, because I recognised the fundamental question of choice there. People were making her choice of selecting a life partner for their business. A few of us held a press conference for her in Thiruvananthapuram. My stance earned her gratitude which she expresses till date through her letters, and I was even invited to her wedding. And so, simply standing with the oppressed is the ultimate slogan of the Left, no matter the source or cause of oppression. This is why I sometimes find myself at odds with the existing ideas.

13. What was your motivation to write "Bodhavati", which narrated the story of Tagore's *Chandalika* and Asan's *Chandalabhikshuki*? Did you see anything more to the story that you wished to express through a separate poem that they may have overlooked?

"Bodhavati" is an extension of both narratives. The title of my poem holds great significance as here, the protagonist is conscious of her womanhood and her inner strength. Her awareness of her caste and gender is coupled with her love for the bhikshu. That is where it becomes more conscious than Tagore's and Asan's Chandalika. She becomes more aware of her real position as a human being through her contact with the bhikshu. It is up to the reader to discern the differences between her depictions in

the other two works from mine, where there is a deliberate emphasis on her caste and gender.

14. Do you think a commodification of social movements such as feminism will take place in the commercial art industry and academia in Kerala? Or is it already happening?

I would not label it as a commodification process, but perhaps there is a trend of it turning into a kind of cultural capital. Academia undeniably has this strange tendency to absorb radical ideals. When an idea is born, and academia makes it a part of the syllabus, it loses some of its dynamism and force. You need not be a feminist to get a Ph.D. in feminist theory. It is reduced to a mere academic topic rather than something to stand and fight for. The case of visual art however is different, as there are artists who resist this commodification like Vivan Sundaram or K. M. Madhusudhanan. Some even choose to not display their work in commercial galleries and capitalise off of it, though they remain a small minority. However, more often, when an artwork is commercially successful, there is a tendency to replicate it to reproduce the same success. Picasso has said “Painting is not made to decorate apartments. It’s an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy.” Unfortunately, a lot of art has turned into decoration. Both established and emerging artists are increasingly caught in this commercial trap. Art loses some of its authenticity when selling it becomes the primary consideration. In this case, the focus shifts to the buyer's perspective rather than

prioritising artistic expression. I personally do not write for the reader but to express myself, which is the approach an artist would also ideally have. Installation started as a protest against commercialisation as it cannot be bought and sold like any other product. However, when someone has established themselves as an installation artist nowadays, they are often commissioned to produce work for corporate organisations. This is how even art that emerged as a protest against commercialisation becomes commercialised. This makes me anxious about the future of genuine art.

15. How can literature craft a new dialogue and narrative for gender in Kerala? How can society be more welcoming to women and non-binary people?

Yes, I believe literature has already started that kind of dialogue. As I have said previously, with the coming of Sara Joseph, Gracy, Chandramathi, Chandrika and others, quite a lot of people have already initiated that kind of dialogue, whether consciously or unconsciously. Additionally, various organisations such as Manushi and Anweshi, despite all their differences, have also played a significant role in promoting such discussions and addressing such problems, including in the film industry and literature. I particularly remember Ajitha leading a struggle of sex workers in Calicut, advocating for their right to choose their partners. Being a previously overlooked issue, this was a ground-breaking step in the women's struggle. Though the LGBTQ+ community is gradually gaining a social presence in Kerala now, they still face barriers that keep them from a normal life. While the state,

women, and the LGBTQ+ community have initiated positive actions, there remains a substantial journey ahead before we can realise the aspiration of being free citizens within a liberated society. The dialogue has been thrust into the public eye. Whether embraced or contested, these topics have become impossible to avoid. The nature of democracy itself is such that it is never a finished product but a process. To attain that elusive ideal, it is imperative that differences, power plays, hierarchies, undemocratic ideologies like patriarchy and queer phobia, and all other obstacles are removed. The key lies in understanding that individuals have unique orientations, viewpoints, and identities. By embracing diversity, we move closer to the constitutional ideal of equality.

This interview was an exploration of the entanglement of gender, politics and literature. The interview started off with a recapitulation of the beginning of feminist awakenings, especially in literature. What followed was a clarification of how patriarchy isn't a battle between the sexes but between patriarchy and democracy. The conversation moved on to his views on how art and media have evolved with more fleshed out woman characters, whereas some forms of media still rely on the age-old archetypes of women characters. We then talked about language being a barrier for women writers, and even more so for LGBTQ+ and Dalit writers. The roles of the Sahitya Akademi and the Left in promoting women was another area of focus. We moved on to the tendency of academia to dilute social movements, and about the authenticity of art being compromised by commercialisation. We also ascertained the poet's intentions for the poems

"Bodhavati", "She, Inside Me", and "Women", and his response to the controversies surrounding *pennezhuthu* and his poem "Non-Negotiable". We ended the interview on a hopeful note, with comments on the future of literature inclusivity.

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