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Hybrid Assemblages: Modernity and Exceptionalism of Kerala

Partha Chatterjee's refusal to subscribe to the formulation of Benedict Anderson on nation, as a western normative import to non-western contexts, has also significantly debunked universal biographies of modernity. Attempts to map the difference of *our* modernity has become an important intellectual preoccupation since then, with considered confutations of the totalitarian views of modernity from various locations. The engagement of erstwhile colonies with modernity was ambiguous and ambivalent not just because of its often cited cultural incompatibility but more importantly because of the broken promise of modernity. The values of modernity as taught were not only unavailable, but also became tools for domination in the historical process of making them victims of modernity. The universalist ideals of modernity itself spawned discontents as it made the colonies as a whole the outcasts of modernity, apart from creating outcastes and untouchables within the sites of colonial modern. It unleashed varying options and conflicting responses of attaching with the past on the one hand and abandoning the past on the other, with significant spatial, temporal and denominational differences. The resultant modernity was bound to be a package of tendencies and consciousness that are seemingly dissonant and disagreeing, permanently postponing the arrival of an impeccable kind of homogenous empty time.

Such a dissident genealogy of modernity at the national, sub-national and regional levels reveals its configuration as an ensemble of hybrid assemblages. Heterogeneous in composition and unfolding it permits legitimate claims of exceptionalism, renouncing any idea of essentially linear temporalities and transformations directed only towards progress. The modernity

of Kerala is not different either – neither in its present architecture nor in its trajectory until now. Moreover, the course of modernity in fact offered Kerala extraordinary claims of exceptionalism with capabilities of capturing the global attention. However, both the assemblages of modernity and its claims of exceptionalism undergo constant change and recreation in the changing processes of materiality and knowledge production. Modernity and exceptionalism as hybrid assemblages hence are in a constant state of flux, leaving space for critique and reformulation. Assemblage as a concept do not concede ideas of primordial formations and essentialist theories of origin, instead give credence to the practices of choosing and picking and then assembling. The twin concerns of understanding the assemblages shaping Kerala's modernity and the dispositions in its claims of exceptionalism as much as the expediency of problematizing them bring the articles of this issue of *Tapasam* together. By interrogating those assemblages in their specificities these scholarly exercises not only map the mutations and departures from the past in their making but also continuities and possibilities, from the vantage point of the present.

Anna Lindberg in her intervention on the debates about discontinuing matrilineal inheritance and child marriages in Malabar/Madras highlights the uneasy assemblage it involved. There was no homogeneous Hindu or Muslim discourses across these subjects, instead they adeptly straddled between religious and secularist arguments. While the reformist argument against marumakkathayam in Hindu community sought its justification in the discourse of modernisation, the Muslim (male) reformers wanted a similar change in the family and inheritance system in their community for religious reasons, for becoming part of pan Islamic systems. At the same time Islamisation as modernisation also sought its legitimacy around claims of greater rights for women particularly in comparison to other communities. The opposition to polygamy too was resisted by emphasising the welfare it ensures to women as a whole and the superiority of Indian morality over its Western counterpart. On the other hand, on the question of child marriage, while the conservative Hindu Brahmins opposed the move as a violation of their religious

traditions and the Muslim men resisted state intervention in matters related to personal law alongside asserting the superiority of the community in this regard as there was no precedent of child marriage in the Koran, the Muslim political women had no qualms in the secular taking over religious in outlawing child marriage. Lindberg points out that the sentiments against child marriage became the dominant discourse by the 1920s and the debates over the issue in Madras legislature projected it as part of a larger agenda of modernisation, an endeavour to build a nation of healthy mothers of healthy children and an essential step towards independence. The legislature too vacillated between the secular and the religious amidst identity claims to superiority and modernity; while certain communities got their better traditions abolished for religious reasons, certain other communities did not succeed in converting their age old customs into legislations. At the same time identities are malleable and are responsive to historical change, to the extent of often abating their fundamental markers of identity. Amali Philips gives an anthropological narrative of the changing marriage practices of the Knanaya Syrian Christian community in Kerala, which has been traditionally practicing communal endogamy. Endogamy has been at the centre of Knanaya identity. But this rule is increasingly confronting breach in the contemporary times due to the pressures of competitive marriage market and middle-classisation under the enduring process of modernisation and urbanisation, though still a norm dominantly adhered to in marriage arrangements. Philips argues that the Knanaya endogamy both in its observance and circumvention are driven by pragmatic considerations rather than the questions of normativity. In response to the shrinking marriage pool of eligible partners within the community, some families intensify links to families that are already related in violation of the customs involved in endogamous matrimonies. On the other hand, economically and educationally sound and mobile Knanayate families, though do not find themselves in any difficulty to enter in endogamous marriages, sometimes break the rule to connect with families from the affluent Syro-Malabar Christian community of comparable or greater status and wealth. Knanaya families

with weak economic and symbolic capital too many a time find it easier to find suitable partners from outside the community. Realistic concerns and class interests thus can take the marriage in the endogamous or exogamous route, in reification or violation of the community norm. Modernity here could be alluded as a phenomenon that unleashed processes of tightly marking caste and ethnic boundaries apace with opening up spaces for its dilution.

Human body was another important site of modern interventions and health represents one of the prime claims of Kerala to its acclaimed exceptionalism. Aparna Nair engages with the history of Western medicine in Travancore and map the trajectory of its expansion in the princely state as a vital tool for the statist claims to colonial modernity, coupled with a stated programme of engendering healthy and modern body among its subjects. The steady expansion of medical infrastructure in the state was coincided with efforts for elaborate propaganda with the help of print, audio and visual media, magic lantern, radio and public lectures to generate modern health consciousness across the population. One of the central targets of this diffused propaganda, which allowed the state among other things to fashion productive and disciplined citizen subjects, was the exigency of crafting conscious and physically fit mothers in order to produce and rear healthy children. A well dispersed bio-political/medical network brought mothers and children under the disciplinary power and governmentality. The project also involved identifying defective children and transmuting them healthy, for which schools were modified into sites of laboratory and experiment through the modality of school medical inspections in an effort to project transformed bodies of young children as the symbols of modern Travancore. Nair argues that engagement with western medicine not only allowed the state to forge its identity as modern and progressive, but also opened avenue for different groups to claim modernity and forge new subjectivities through medicine. The claim of Christians as progressive has been buttressed by their espousal of Western medicine and choosing the same as an important career option; so also was the case with Nairs and to a certain extent even Pulayas. On

the other hand, resistance to it by Namboothiri Brahmins ascribed them with an identity of conservatism and irrationality.

The presuppositions on Kerala's exceptionalism also often get unsettled due to the ruptures to its seemingly neatly ordered public sphere as demonstrated by Navaneetha Mokkil in her contribution by analysing two important visual texts and their journey across time. *Avalude Ravukal*, the film that said to have brought shame to the region of Kerala for its excessive display of sex and eroticism when it hit the screen in 1978, found its valued afterlife in the public sphere since the late 1990s as a realistic portrayal of the life of a prostitute. The custodial death of Kunjibi, a sex worker from Calicut, in 1987 has been a founding moment of feminist movement in Kerala; but the figure found its convenient retrieval from the 1990s in the human rights and AIDS awareness rhetoric, in which the state and non-state agencies participated. At one level, the re-articulations on *Avalude Ravukal*, which redeemed the film from condemnation to recognition, confirms to an unstable public sphere which rebel against foreclosure and permanent fixations, alongside challenging extra-historical norms on the category of soft-porn cinema. But this has been done by attempting to sanitise the region and it's viewing through a denial of what is perceived as pornographic and upholding what is considered as realistic in the film, an endeavour that retained the entrenched binary between bad and good cinema, and progressive and ordinary viewers, maintains Mokkil. The visual text of Kunjibi's custodial death too in its re-invocation anchored arguments of human rights as well as functioned as spectacle of suffering and pathos, realist gaze coincided with affective excess in viewing as well as narration. But as texts that could produce inherently unstable viewing positions, the progressive narratives that re-articulated these sexual/cultural events are couched with anxieties to control the ways of seeing them and advocated a considered combination of sympathising and distancing.

Jenson Joseph's paper too raises questions about providing viewing alongside controlling it as a precondition to reform, as seen in the case of *Neelakkuyil* (1954), a Left social

realist film, which represents a curious mix of popular aesthetic and the political aspirations of the caste middle class over the Malayali nation. The Left social realist films of the 1950s were part of a larger pedagogic project of reforming the masses into a political awakening by reaching out to them by portraying their own everyday life and ordeals; making ordinary masses simultaneously the source and target of political awakening through art. *Neelakkuyil is* seen here as a film that advocates caste egalitarianism in a peculiar way with a transformed upper caste male subject at the heart of the project. Joseph contends that the placing of the self-reformed Nair protagonist at the centre of the new Malayali nation defined by rationality, caste egalitarianism and secularism is done in front of and with the endorsement of the subaltern spectators institutionalised within the diegetic world of the film. The self-reformation was mediated by another upper caste character, a Communist figure, who is the supreme modern rational figure in the film. It is argued that the film symbolically authorize the upper caste Hindu protagonist to speak for the nation and envisage a nationalist consensus achieved through exchanges between *men* of different castes and communities in public spaces and by containing the radical energies caste discrimination could potentially set free. The assemblage of modernity/nation herein also involves muting the questions of women's subjectivity, apart from feminising the silenced Dalit community, whose voice has to be articulated by none but the Communist upper caste figure. At the same time, claims of exceptionalism being presupposed by the Left cultural interventions against its regional counterparts do not hold much ground as it borrowed heavily in technology, aesthetics and devices of star cinema from other South Indian industries like Tamil, even while constructing the latter as its cultural other.

Tamil has been a leading influence on the Malayalam literary sphere in any case. The Malayali exceptionalism in the fictional imaginations, if any, is constituted by diverse influence within the region and beyond, as Shalini Moolechalil demonstrates in her intervention through reading a set of retellings of Ramayana stories by Sarah Joseph. While the influence of Dravidian movement under Periyar in Tamil Nadu

forms a powerful affect from the region down South, a wider geography of retellings across South and Southeast Asia constitute a transnational context of circulation and the feminist movement and its ideological conjectures impinged into the re/de-articulations as a result of transactions at a global level. Even while acknowledging the influence of Self-respect movement, Sarah Joseph's recastings are more women oriented and view Sita as a victim of the Aryan justice system by refusing to demoralise her with the aid of supposedly superior Aryan morals as did by Periyar. In her later renditions, even Rama and Lakshmana are viewed sympathetically and portrayed as victims of the ideology of *sanatana dharma*, the power of which made them dutiful subjects of the same, apart from attempting to fragment womanhood in terms of caste, community, ethnic and racial identities. Moolechalil thus locates the new literary imagination of the region and the exceptionalism it alludes in the confluence of circulations within and across geographies. Tradition and its grand narrative forms are not seen here as resolute artefacts frozen in time, but as entities dispersed in their lives and meanings, and retellings as indispensabale political endeavours in a never ending process of resistance and knowledge production as against constancy and enclosures.The configurations of Kerala's modernity and claims of its exceptionalism, in their quiet and disquiet assemblages, would also change in textures and constituents over time through a simultaneous process of affirmation, contestation and renewal. We hope the articles assembled in this issue of *Tapasam* would bolster chances of considered renewals of our modernities and exceptionalisms, apart from offering an exceptional reading to everyone.

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(*Issue Editor*)

Modernization and Religious Identities in Late Colonial Madras and Malabar

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Aspects of family laws during the late colonial Madras presidency in South India are considered in this paper from the perspective of secularism, modernization, and gender relations. Two legal issues debated by the Madras Legislative Council in the late 1920s are examined: child marriage and the discontinuation of matrilineal inheritance rules among Muslims living in Malabar. A secularization discourse is traced that paralleled one which brought about Islamization in the field of personal laws. Religious and secular discourses were both crucial in the construction of the nation, but they were not each other's opposite and legislators in Madras moved between them. The debates over child marriages and inheritance rules were part of a larger modernization agenda that included improving conditions for women and children. While gender equality was on the agenda, the legislature's silence regarding the favorable inheritance rules enjoyed by matrilineal women confirms that modernization was a patriarchal endeavor.
Keywords: Marumakkathayam, child marriage, colonial Madras, Malabar, modernisation, secularisation, Islamisation, Mappila, religious identity, matriliny.

Introduction[1]

The present essay considers some aspects of family laws during the late colonial Madras presidency in South India from the perspective of secularism, modernization and gender

relations. Focusing on two specific legal issues that the Madras Legislative Council debated, child marriage and the discontinuation of matrilineal inheritance rules among Muslims living in Malabar, it examines a secularization discourse which paralleled one that brought about Islamization in the field of personal laws.

The period shortly before and after 1930 was crucial for the secularism versus communalism debate. It was the time of the Round Table Conferences, convened to draft a constitution for a future independent India (Tejani 2007: 46). The Indian National Congress (INC) was then conducting lively discussions concerning the appropriate relationship between religion and the state, and in 1931 they issued their Bill of Rights. It declared that the state should not interfere in religious matters, and that no citizen of the projected independent nation of India should be discriminated against because of religion (Richman and Geetha 2007: 75). In the years leading up to Independence in 1947, the ideology of a modern state became firmly entrenched in the minds of the emerging political elite.

Although the word secularism itself was seldom heard in the 1920s and 1930s, the revision (or modernization) of family laws that was undertaken at the time included discourses grounded in what later would be called secularization. It has been argued that secularization and modernization should be viewed as concurrent histories, embraced by both colonial rulers and the Indian elite in exercising power over traditional cultures and minority groups (Prakash 2007). To this double current one might add the simultaneous process of intensifying religious identities and nationalism.

According to Partha Chatterjee, anti-colonial nationalism in India (as in many other places in Asia or Africa) was based on an identity that was constructed as *different* from the West. Thus, he contrasts the thesis that Benedict Anderson asserted in his influential book *Imagined Communities* (1983), that colonizers learned from the West and imitated certain forms of the national society it propagated (Chatterjee 1993: 5). Nationalism should not be taken literally as a political movement that started in India when the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885. Instead,

anticolonial nationalism created its domain of sovereignty within colonial society before political nationalism had emerged and when political collaboration with the colonial power characterized India.

The West dominated in the material, outer world, but in the inner spiritual domain of the home, India's culture remained untouched by the British (Chatterjee 1989). This did not mean that the inner sphere was as it had always been, but that modernization had to occur without Westernization (Chatterjee 1993: 6). However, as pointed out by historian Praveena Kodoth, in Malabar the colonial government did intervene through legislation in personal laws when it came to the abandoning of matrilineal family system. The reason, according to Kodoth, was probably the "'correctness' of this agenda" and the stability in hegemonic Hindu (viz., Brahmin) family system (Kodoth 2001: 356).

Early studies and theories of modern nationalism have been criticized for taking it for granted that the experience of the creation of nations and national identities was gender neutral (Yuval-Davis 1997). Today there seems to be a consensus among scholars that nationalism has often constructed both masculinity and femininity in a very tangible way (see, for example, Burton 1999; Levine 2007). Nationalism was not only gendered but included other divisions such as ethnicity, class, caste, and religion.

Indian nationalism solved the so-called women's question precisely in accordance with its goal. The inner, spiritual domain was associated with women who were different from and superior to Western women. The new Indian woman contrasted all that was ridiculed about Western women, such as being fond of luxury and idleness (Chatterjee 1989: 240). Chatterjee places this resolution of the women's question in the second phase of the reform period (1820 to 1870), and as part of pre-political nationalism (Chatterjee 1993: 6).

Neither tradition nor modernity should be seen as essential or timeless entities. By analyzing discourses about sati (widow burning) in the early nineteenth century, Lata Mani has shown

how Indian tradition and modernity were produced simultaneously. Whether for or against sati, both colonial and indigenous arguments rested on Brahmanic scriptures, the older the more valuable, in order to define a tradition. Customary, non-scriptural evidence was excluded from this Indian tradition, as were other castes or religions (Mani 1989). Thus, Mani rejects the form of rationalism that Chatterjee seems to ascribe to the first phase of the reform period (1820–1870) and its sudden change into a more romantic discourse of "tradition" with regard to women and the Indian family. The nationalist construction of a romantic (and Brahminic) past had already begun in the 1820s when reformers discussed sati.

Our attention will be directed at the dilemma that Indian legislators in Madras faced when discussing family laws in the context of secularism, modernization, nationalism, and religious identity politics. On the one hand, the legislative assembly mainly stressed secular arguments when dealing with child marriage; on the other, a religious discourse framed the debates about the abolition of matrilineal customs among Muslims. Both of these discourses announced a concern for modernity.

The history of extant family laws in India dates back to colonial times, a period when legal systems underwent considerable change. First, a legal structure shaped by English courts was introduced. Then customary laws were codified in an attempt to reduce the multiplicity of regulations in India's diverse communities to a few essential systems that were considered authentic. The many unique family and personal laws concerning marriage, inheritance, succession, divorce, kinship, adoption, and guardianship were replaced by four main categories: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Parsi. As a result, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains, tribal groups, and so-called depressed classes found themselves classified with Hindus. The marriage, kinship, and inheritance customs they had previously practiced were often based on community traditions, rather than religion, and in a great number of cases afforded more freedom to women than the dominant Hindu tradition they were now expected to follow.

Changes in the sphere of personal law affected Indian women in two major ways during colonial times. The first

occurred within the movement to reform Anglo-Hindu law, as leaders sought to replace what they saw as the traditional patriarchy by more enlightened ideals. Efforts to restrict child marriage and allow widows to remarry are examples of such reforms. A second shift resulted when an Anglo-Indian judiciary that considered itself modern and enlightened replaced existing legal regimes and customary laws with strong patriarchal system (Parker 2001: 193). The matrilineal Mappilla Muslims of Malabar belong to this second category.

Personal Laws and Religious Identity

On March 27, 1928, Mahmud Shamnad Sahib introduced a bill in the Legislative Council of Madras that was considering a revision to the Malabar Wills Act of 1898. The idea behind this bill, entitled the Mappilla Will Act of 1928, was to exempt matrilineal Muslims from compliance with the 1898 Act and instead allow them to be governed by Islamic Law. Sahib declared:

> Sir, this Bill seeks to make Muhammedan law applicable to the will executed by the Mappillas governed by Marumakkathayam law. These Mappillas are living in the North Malabar and in a portion of South Kanara. It is simply islamising some of the customs prevailing among these Mappillas. . . . It is anomalous and improper that it should remain permissible to this class of Mappillas to make testamentary dispositions that violate the principles of Muhammedan law. . . . The present state of law in regard to wills exposes Marumakkathayam Mappillas to adverse criticism and even ridicule on part of other Muhammedans. (Government of India 1928: 16)

This bill was an attempt to eliminate the custom of bestowing property other than as prescribed by Islamic law in its current interpretation. Accordingly, it now became difficult to entail property according to the Mappilla custom which followed the female line. The reform bill was passed with little opposition in 1928. Notably, when discussing this bill and similar issues concerning the abolition of the matrilineal system among

Muslims, the legislators used a religious discourse, in contrast to other contemporary modernization discourses within the field of personal laws.

Some communities in colonial India could not be clearly identified as either Hindu or Muslim because of their mixed laws and practices. In many parts of the country, people who considered themselves Muslims (or were viewed as Muslims by others) were governed by laws akin to customary Hindu or tribal practices. In places like the Punjab, the North West Frontier Provinces and the Central Provinces these customs were strongly patriarchal, whereas the inheritance and family systems of the Mappilla Muslims in the Madras Presidency were based on matrilineal principles (Gough 1961).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a movement to make Muslims in India embrace homogeneous family laws based on Islamic principles and thereby abandon what some considered un-Islamic customs. The *Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind* (Union of the Ulamas of India), founded in 1919, became instrumental in these attempts to standardize personal laws among Muslims (Ali 2000: 147–8). Muslim women in the Punjab supported such efforts primarily in expectation of being granted inheritance rights. However, when in 1937 the Shariat Bill was finally introduced, it was not applicable to agricultural holdings, a provision that exempted most of the property in India (Parashar 1992: 148). Nevertheless, the Bill was endorsed by large groups of Muslim men and women for religious and material reasons, and also as a symbolic protest against British rule and the economic conditions it had created. The invigoration of Islamic law also bolstered community identity at a time when the Muslim minority felt threatened. However, the patriarchal (and patrilineal) landowning rural Muslim elite in North India were in favor of maintaining the status quo. They opposed the introduction of Shariat law and Islamization (Parashar 1992: 146–50; Ali 2000: 146–52). Their matrilineal coreligionists in South India, the wealthy Mappillas, were also against changes in inheritance laws and the family system, and they wanted property to remain undivided (Government of India 1938; Lindberg 2009).

The decades leading up to introduction of the Shariat Bill saw a gradual dissolution of the *marumakkathayam* (matrilineal family system) in South India, among Hindus as well as Muslims. Contributing to this institution's demise were numerous factors: the emergence of a capitalist economy, European trade (Panikkar 1995: 198), the privatization of land (Gough 1961: 420), cash-crop farming (Jeffrey 1992: 37–41), as well as Western ideologies of fatherhood and the patrilineal family (Arinuma 2003). Praveena Kodoth, in an analysis of the legal discourse related to Hindu matrilineal systems of South India in the late nineteenth century shows that legislators homogenized the complex marumak-kathayam system. The result was its form in Travancore, where a woman most often lived in her mother's *taravad* (a collective to which all property of matrilineal families belonged) after marriage, become governed by the power structure that the Nambothiri-Brahmins created in that area. In contrast to this monolithic construction, the matrilineal system was very complex and existed in many forms. For example, in Malabar, married women often moved to their husbands' *taravad*. Kodoth also concludes that female elders generally had more power than the legal discourse would seem to indicate, and that the role of the *karanavan* (senior head of a taravad), should not always be equated that of a patriarchal father—legislators described him as a surrogate father with great authority (Kodoth 2001, 2003, 2005). We find the colonial legal discourse framing the marumakkathayam according to familiar patrilineal systems.

Prominent in the dissolution of matrilineal family system was the concept of self-acquired property and individualization (Kodoth 2001: 369). As men began to acquire wealth that they could control, some used it to build houses and establish nuclear families of their own. Others in the community sought to have the *taravad's* joint holdings divided as individual shares. In Travancore, the abolition of the matrilineal system may have been accelerated by the ideology and prosperity of Syrian Christians, which contrasted with the situation in Malabar where there were less Christians (and where the marumakkathayam remained longer) (Fuller 1976: 146). Ideological arguments related to modernity that were propelled by Westerners, who often

described matrilineal systems as "primitive", were also decisive in this process (Nair 1990).

Family structure, the support of women and children, and inheritance became subjects of open debate in British Malabar and in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin (Jeffrey 1992: 34–54). As a result, by the turn of the twentieth century new laws were introduced challenging polygamy and jointly held property and, although legal and cultural changes continued to take place gradually, the patriarchal nuclear family became the accepted norm in official discourse.

It should be stated that the marumakkathayam was not synonymous with matriarchy, and it would be misleading to romanticize the matrilineal system as more favorable in all respects to women's interests. Nevertheless, the marumakkathayam did provide married and unmarried women with security and maintenance for life, whether they were married or not, and bestowed upon them a certain status as carriers of the family line (Saradamoni 1999; Renjini 2000).

In the matrilineal tradition, all property, both ancestral and self-acquired, had belonged to the *taravad*. This included family holdings that were considered indivisible unless members agreed to partition it into two or more jointly owned units. The Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 was the first step toward abolishing the marumakkathayam system among Hindus of the region. It gave men the option of bequeathing half of their self-acquired property to their wives and children (Arunima 2003: 128–56). The Malabar Wills Act that followed two years later gave people living under the marumakkathayam system in Malabar the right to convey upon their demise any property they could have presented as a gift during their lifetime (Jeffrey 1992: 43).

The Mappilla Succession Act of 1918

Reforming the family system continued to occupy the Madras Legislative Council as the twentieth century progressed. In the case of the matrilineal Muslims, the Mappilla Succession Act of 1918 declared that all self-acquired property belonged to the individual and must be divided among that person's heirs in

accordance with Islamic law, which stipulates that a wife is in all cases entitled to a share of her deceased husband's property (Diwan 2010: 181ff). The passage of this Act entitled a woman to inherit some of her husband's possessions, whereas under the marumakkathayam system all property was collectively owned by the *taravad* (although it may have been held in the name of women). However, rather than strengthening the economic position of women, the Act only enhanced the status of husbands vis-à-vis the elderly authorities of the *taravad*, most of whom were males. Ancestral land was excluded from the Act and continued to be treated according to matrilineal inheritance rules. The preservation of such jointly owned land was in agreement with the outcome of other legal debates during the period.

The colonial political economy was one of competing interests: on the one hand, individual ownership was encouraged by a capitalist system; on the other, the landowning elite tried to maintain their supremacy by rejecting any division of land (Washbrook 1981). The classification of property into self-acquired and ancestral was an attempt to seek a compromise to this conflict. As a result of tension created by these circumstances, a woman's property rights were linked to her marriage, which resulted in her right of individual ownership being largely curtailed (Sreenivas 2004).

The Mappilla Succession Act of 1918 only applied to persons who died intestate, thus making it possible to circumvent the Act's intention. Syed Sahib Bahadur had been a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly and a leader in efforts to change personal laws and bring all Muslims under a uniform legal system. Twenty years after the Act had been implemented, he described its impact to the Legislative Assembly:

> In the actual working of this Act, it was found that the enactment was shelved and that custom had the upper hand, and that property was being divided mostly according to the Marumakkathayam system. (Government of India 1939: 339)

Thus, changing the cultural and legal system of people who were simultaneously Muslims and matrilineal Mappillas was not an easy task.

The Mappilla Will Act of 1928

During the same year that the Mappilla Succession Act was passed (1918), an All-Kerala Muslim Conference approved several resolutions urging Islamic law upon the Mappilla Muslims (Government of India 1939: 339). In 1928, as we have seen at the beginning of the previous section, the Madras Legislative Assembly agreed to amend the Malabar Wills Act of 1898. The proposed amendment, known as the Mappilla Will Act of 1928, implied that it would no longer be possible for a Mappilla Muslim to bequeath property in a way that was said to "violate Islamic law" (Government of India 1928: 16). As indicated by Syed Sahid Bahadur's statement, people tended to bequeath property to women according to the custom in matrilineal societies. However, wealthy Mappilla families found an indirect means of continuing their traditional practice. They declared the *taravad's* holdings *wakf* (literally "to detain, prevent, or restrain"), thereby earmarking the *taravad* for donation to charity after the demise of the owner, in accordance with Islamic law.

The intention of *wakf* is to entail heritable possessions and prevent them from passing into the hands of a third person (Rashid 1978: xvii). In this way, affluent Muslim families could bequeath their estates to the poor, to a mosque, or to a charitable institution—but with the stipulation that it would only take effect in the event that no female offspring would be born to their family—something unlikely in those large families. This evasion of the law for financial or symbolic reasons is still in effect among many wealthy Muslim families in Calicut, who have wills containing *wakf* clauses dating back to the 1930s (Lindberg 2009: 92–3).

Mahmud Schamnad, who moved the Bill in 1928, reiterated religious arguments about Islamizing the Malabar Mappilla community. He described the Mappillas as anomalies who were being derided because of their un-Islamic inheritance rules. "All enlightened Mappillas of North Malabar," he declared, "are reported to be in favor of the legislation" (Government of India 1928: 16–7). Schamnad's motion about inheritance laws was adopted with almost no debate. Opinions about the introduction of a uniform civil code on the grounds of secularization were not

raised at this point, although they were when child marriage came under discussion later that day, an issue to which we shall return.

The Madras Marumakkathayam Bill of 1932

On January 26, 1932, the Madras Legislative Assembly considered the Hindu marumakkathayam system at length. Although the final bill, the Madras Marumakkathayam Bill of 1932, affected only Hindus, it also cited the Mappilla Muslim community by name. It seemed to be taken for granted that sooner or later matrilineal Muslims would have to relinquish their family system (Government of India 1932a: 199–221). In fact, as legislative records show, the discussion centered equally on Muslims and Hindus.

The reformers of the Hindu system stressed "modernity" as well as economic factors in seeking to effect a change from matrilineal joint families to patrilineal nuclear families. The history of nations has elsewhere been related to a family structure that was considered "natural", namely, the patriarchal, nuclear, and heterosexual family (Sinha 2007: 187-8). This notion of how a modern family was construed also became deeply entrenched in India. When Muslim politicians sought to bring about a similar shift in the family system among their constituents, they took up a religious discourse, calling for the Islamization of their community. The "normal" Muslim family system in other parts of India was already considered modern. They urged the introduction of Shariat law and denounced the "anomaly" of having a matrilineal (Hindu) marumakkathayam system in effect over a Muslim community (Government of India 1932a, 1932b, 1939).

In addition to condemning the "un-Islamic" nature of the marumakkathayam, Muslims emphatically declared Shariat law favorable to women because they claimed that, in comparison to (patrilineal) Hindu law, women under Islam were given greater rights in matters of inheritance, financial support, and divorce (Government of India 1932a, 1938; Agnes 1999: 33–6).

Although the protection of women and women's rights were among the topics debated by the legislature, only males took part in the discussion; the opinions of women were introduced indirectly

and were not considered in a serious way (Government of India 1932a: 212, 215).

Nevertheless, women were at the center of this discourse on family systems and modernity. However, as in the case of the sati discussions a century earlier, women were neither subjects nor objects, but were the "ground" of this discourse (Mani 1989: 117). It was urged that Islam's generous inheritance rules for women were more advanced than family laws in non-Muslim communities. As one speaker pointed out:

> So far as the Muhammedan law of inheritance is concerned, it has been stated by the highest authorities, including the late Sir V. Bashyan Ayyangar [Hindu attorney who practiced before the Madras High Court], that this is the most equitable system of inheritance in the whole system of law that is prevalent in the whole world. (Government of India 1932a: 210)

In their zeal to claim gender equality as a unique feature of their modernization and Islamization program, the same Muslim reformers neglected to mention that matrilineal communities had long passed property down through the female line.

The Issue of Polygamy

The abolition of the matrilineal inheritance system called new attention to fatherhood by emphasizing a man's responsibility for his biological children. Although, since Islamic law is dependent on various schools of Koranic interpretation, one cannot speak of it as homogenous, various Muslim authorities in India regarded men as the natural guardians of their offspring (Diwan 2001: 108–18). In the debates of the Madras Legislative Assembly, the word "natural" was frequently used to describe the link from father to child—a connection generally applied in other contexts to women and children. Muslim members of the assembly claimed that fatherhood was already enshrined in Islamic law, making Muslims not only more modern than Hindus, but closer to a natural state of humanity.

Mappilla Muslims were more inclined to speak proudly of their marriage practices than Hindus, asserting that they had only occasionally tolerated polygyny, but never polyandry (Government

of India 1932b). The fact that women were permitted to have several husbands under Hindu matriliny, although power over female sexuality was commonly exercised by elderly male leaders, made the need for reform legislation more pressing an issue for the Hindu community than for Muslims. In addition, fatherhood was generally not a strong identifying factor among matrilineal Hindus. As a result, Hindu fathers in matrilineal families did not have responsibility for maintaining their biological children and were, in fact, derided by some people for tolerating "bastards" and not keeping their wives' sexuality under control (Government of Travancore 1896). By the 1930s, Hindu leaders argued that polygamy was outdated and monogamy was the only acceptable institution for a modern country (Government of India 1932b: 350–7).

The issue of polygamy resulted in lively and sometimes chaotic discussions in the Madras Legislative Council during 1932. One of its members, Basheer Ahmed Sayeed, opposed a clause in the Madras Marumakkathayam Bill that would have imposed monogamy on India society, stating that a civilized country like India had no need to restrict the rights of individuals, either females or males, to have more than one marriage. Monogamy ought to be the result of advancement of any order of society, but it cannot be forced from outside. That is exactly what has happened in Islamic society. (Government of India 1932b: 348)

Sayeed argued that enforcing monogamy in the West had done no good, as could be seen by that region's deplorable record of divorce, adultery, and bigamy (Government of India 1932b: 348 ff.). He declared that although Muslim law permits a man four wives, only a few men in a thousand have more than a single spouse. The reason for polygyny, according to Sayeed, was to permit a man to shelter destitute women or retain an infertile wife, rather than divorcing her if the desire for offspring caused him to remarry. On the other hand, those who were in favor of monogamy for Muslims also invoked a woman's welfare, but stressed the situation of the *first wife* and her prerogative not to share her husband with others. Whichever position members of the council took with regard to polygyny, they all agreed that

a modern, civilized society should move toward monogamy (Government of India 1932b: 348 ff.). However, they wished to bring this about in a non-Western way by asserting the superiority of Indian morality in matters of gender relations. If any appropriation of Western modernity was included, it had to be selective and justified by the nationalist project (Chatterjee 1989: 120). Seen in a larger context, the shift towards monogamy, especially among Hindus who had practiced polyandry, corresponded to the then current discourse on masculine eugenics (Hodges 2006; Whitehead 1996).

Unlike the case of a matrilineal Hindu woman, a Mappilla Muslim woman's reproductive life was generally controlled by her husband, although the *karanavan* may have remained her formal guardian. Thus, there was less doubt about fatherhood among the Mappillas, making a revision of the family system on ideological gender grounds less essential than among certain groups of Hindus. Muslim reformers, considering Islam more modern than Hinduism, felt unaffected by the antithesis of traditional versus modern. Consequently, their discourse on the family system and women's rights sought to dissolve any tension between that dichotomy.

However, strife continued over what was viewed as the politically unacceptable notion of communalism and providing support for a secular nation-state that would logically require uniform legislation. Muslim legislators who called for Islamization of the private sphere did not see the two positions as incompatible. The strategy they proposed would also lead to modernization, but in a way that, as they saw it, would be superior to secular Western policies. They predicted that other communities would come to emulate the Muslim family laws.

A legislative committee asked Mappilla Muslims in Malabar, who were lay people, whether they were for or against the proposed right to demand a per capita division of the matrilineal *taravads*. Their response took the form of a religious discourse and they were only concerned with the legitimate interpretation of Islamic law. The strong idea of modernizing society was not on their agenda and appeared to belong to the nation builders and the elite in legislative bodies (Government of India 1938).

Indian nationalism was to a great extent a Hindu and a Brahmin project. It was the Hindu scriptures that were used to construct a tradition, and consequently Muslims were excluded as national citizens. When Muslims were able to assert their religion as more modern and reflective of the values of the family in the nationalist project, it was probably a reaction to the increasing stress on Hinduism in the national discourse and a way to triumph over less modern Hindu traditions.

Child Marriage and Nationalism

Another issue within the field of family laws that also was discussed in the Madras Legislative Council in 1928 was age at marriage. It took the form of a dispute about the relation between religious leaders and the state, and the government's power to regulate the personal lives of individuals. On February 27, 1928, in a speech before the Council, a female member, Muthulakshmi Reddy, attacked the control exercised by religion over "modern citizens". She declared, "[E]very social evil in this blessed country goes by the name of religion" (Government of India 1928: 43).

Child marriage had been argued about for decades by the time the Age of Consent Act was introduced in 1891. While it did not restrict the age at marriage directly, it raised the point at which sexual intercourse was considered legally permissible from ten to twelve years. Social reformers had had concerns about the health and welfare of young girls and the problems of early motherhood, but these were sidetracked when the issue was reformulated as a question of whether the colonial government had the right to regulate family matters within the private sphere (Forbes 1979: 407–11).

Child marriage resurfaced as a social concern when the League of Nations in 1921 recommended that its member states raise the minimum age of consent for unmarried females, that is, the legal threshold for premarital sex, to twenty-one years. As the intention was mainly to halt sexual trafficking of unmarried women, there was no minimum age for marriage or age of consent *within* marriage on the League's agenda. In India, however, reaction to the League's recommendations prompted

a discussion of both the marriageable age and the age of consent within marriage. Several bills were introduced in the Indian Parliament in the 1920s, the two most prominent being the Children's Protection Bill, which proposed raising the age of consent for girls to fourteen within marriage and sixteen outside of it, and the Hindu Child Marriage Bill (also referred to as the Sarda Bill), setting the marriageable age for girls at fourteen. The Age of Consent Committee combined both bills into one. The Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) became law in 1930 and established the marriageable age at fourteen for females and eighteen for males.

Before any Act could be put into effect in India, however, the central government was obliged to consult with elected officials in local areas. In Madras it happened that a medical doctor and member of the Legislative Council had introduced a resolution a year before raising the marriageable age of boys and girls to twenty-one and sixteen, respectively (Government of India 1928: 30–46). The doctor was the previously mentioned Muthulakshmi Reddy, who in 1912 had become the first female physician in India, and who was appointed to the Madras Legislative Council in 1926 as the country's first female legislator (Forbes 1996: 103–5). When Reddy addressed the Council on March 27, 1928, she commanded attention for her knowledge and expertise. Speaking as a healthcare professional, she described the situation of young wives and mothers as deplorable, citing her own experience and that of several female medical colleagues. The health conditions of every young married girls and their babies were vividly described, and examples of the misery faced by such mothers and widows were presented. She succeeded in convincing many of those present that the Indian Government should intervene in the matter (Government of India 1928: 30–46).

Reddy was devoted to bringing about social change for women and children. Still, she did not question the prevailing gender roles in criticizing child marriage. For example, in the few instances where she mentioned young males, she only lamented that early marriage would hamper the groom's education:

As for the boy husband, his lot is very often more to be pitied; even while he is a student he is burdened with the heavy responsibility of a family. . . . How could we expect him to reap the full benefit of education, how could we expect him to seek knowledge for knowledge sake? . . . How could we expect him to become independent, self-reliant, and assertive? (Government of India 1928: 34)

According to Reddy, a girl's education should "enable her to be an efficient housewife, a wise mother, and a useful citizen" (Government of India 1928: 34). What she expressed is similar to the Gandhian notion of a woman's role (Joshi 1988: 14–16), as well as a national hegemonic discourse on women as goddesses and mothers with new responsibilities (Chatterjee 1989: 244). This new woman, educated so that she was not rude and loud like lower class/caste women, or idle and lavish like Western women, had to be useful for the nation, but mainly exercise her role within the family–a family that was highly romanticized and had bourgeois ideals about respectability and sexuality (Sinha 2007: 187–190).

Also reminiscent of Gandhi is Reddy's characterization of males as having a natural sex drive that needed to be kept in check (Joshi 1988: 88)—especially those under twenty-one whom she thought of as incapable of restraining their "animal passion." As a result, she lamented, multiple pregnancies for their young wives and subsequent misery for the whole family would follow (Government of India 1928: 31, 34).

Reddy's concern for the welfare of people who marry prematurely went beyond the level of the family and addressed the greater good of the nation:

Nations that do not indulge in such customs [as child marriage] are happier, healthier, and more prosperous —are physically stronger than we are. . . . We are poverty-stricken, we are disease-stricken, and we are not a free nation either. So if we want to grow into a strong, robust, and a self-respecting nation, if we want to reach our full physical and mental height, the system

of child marriage must go, because science and experienced observation tell us that a girl becomes a woman only at the age of sixteen and a boy [achieves] his manhood only after twenty-one years (Government of India 1928: 36–7).

Reddy's arguments for strengthening the nation and her inclusion of child marriage among the reasons for India's inability to free itself from colonial rule were part of a general discourse on gender, nationalism, and eugenics that is reflected in the Indian Government's *Report of the Age of Consent Committee* of 1928–1929. It declared that "the great European war had proved the need for a more healthy and sturdy race" (Government of India 1929: 10). In order to create such a race, India needed strong mothers who were able to bear and raise healthy children. The report cited evidence to show that infants of mothers who were themselves still children were often weak, and that a correlation existed between maternal age and infant mortality (Government of India 1928: 159–64). This discourse was further reinforced by an attack on Indian customs, especially the treatment of women, by the internationally known American journalist, Katherine Mayo. Her book, *Mother India*, appeared in 1927, shortly after the bill was introduced, and had great repercussions in India, Europe, and America. It was an attack on Hindu society, which it portrayed as backward obsessed by sex and one that encouraged child marriages and premature maternity. A work of undisguised colonial propaganda, *Mother India* was discussed all over the world and often referred to in Indian legislative debates. Some of her contemporaries charged Mayo with being in league with the colonial administration (Ramusack 1981: 206). Historian Mrinalini Sinha, in an analysis of the rhetoric surrounding the child marriage debate, argues that Mayo's intention was to expose India as uncivilized and unworthy of self-rule. Many Indian leaders, including Gandhi, condemned Mayo's account of Indian society (Sinha 1999: 109–23; 2006: 109 ff.), particularly her conclusion that Indian social customs had weakened the Indian race and as a result the Indian people were not ready for self-rule (Mayo 1927: 32).

Reddy, in her address to the Legislative Assembly in 1928, used Mayo's book to illustrate how disastrous child marriages were. Whether Reddy's views on gender roles and pronouncements on the nation's destiny were her own, or were strategic arguments aimed at convincing legislators to support her resolution, cannot be stated with certainty. Historian Janaki Nair has argued that women's demands for new rights were received with less antagonism if they were related to duties to the nation and the race (Nair 1996: 83). Reddy's words illustrate a hegemonic discourse that might be expected to meet with legislative approval. Because people often opposed the intrusion of foreign governments in their private affairs, Reddy's advocacy was calculated to forestall such criticism, especially since she had been accused earlier of collaborating with the colonial government (Basu 1986: 16).

A group of Brahmin women in Madras also came before the Age of Consent Committee to propose eighteen as both the minimum age of consent for girls and the minimum age for marriage. According to the Committee's report, some witnesses (probably orthodox Brahmin men) accused the petitioners of being Theosophists in order to discredit them by implying they were influenced by Western concepts (Government of India 1929: 58). The allegation may have had some factual basis: Reddy had met with Annie Besant in Madras around that time (Basu 1986: 29). However, to counter the claim that she and her supporters advocated Western ideas or favored the colonial government, Reddy stressed the correlation between national independence and healthy mothers of healthy children. In the hegemonic nationalist discourse there was an emphasis on hygiene and eugenics that reinforced the nuclear family and the role of mothering (Whitehead 1996: 192).

Conservative Brahmins throughout India opposed restrictions on the age of marriage, basing their arguments on religious traditions. There were Brahmins who defended their marriage practices by citing the Vedas and other ancient traditions as legitimizing the marriage of young girls. Reddy call them a "backward set of people . . . who are worshippers of mad custom." She was of the opinion that rational leaders could "well

afford to ignore them" (Government of India 1928: 36). Reddy stressed that a young girl not only had to serve as a cook, nurse, wife, and household servant, but often had to "observe all the foolish *acharams* prescribed by the elders in the house" (Government of India 1928: 32). In her resounding attack on orthodox Brahmins and the traditional opinions of elders, she spoke for those who had had difficulties convincing legislators when the Age of Consent Act was discussed forty years earlier.

One member of the Madras Legislative Council openly challenged the Government's right to intervene in areas of society that had long been governed by custom. However, he was told that the question was without merit since the Government had already passed related acts, such as the Abolition of Sati (1829), the Widow Remarriage Act (1856), and the Civil Marriage Act (1872) (Government of India 1928: 40). Finally, there were some objections to Reddy's resolution on practical grounds, suggesting it was inadvisable for lower class girls and boys to wait until they were sixteen and twenty-one, respectively, to get married. Nevertheless, all efforts to modify the resolution failed to convince a majority and Reddy's resolution was carried unchanged.

Muthulakshmi Reddy's daring and professionalism were symbolic of the growing women's movement in India. The Sarda Act was the first social reform legislation in India where women played a major role. Still, opposition to the Sarda Act on the part of orthodox Brahmins continued in the Madras Presidency. After Reddy's resolution appeared in the local press, she was attacked in open meetings, by letter, and in the newspapers (Reddy 1930: 102–3). However, orthodox Brahmins sitting in the Legislative Assembly were no longer as strong as they were once. Earlier, the orthodox Brahmin group had been very effective in resisting government intervention in marriage customs. Now, although child marriage was less prevalent in Madras than elsewhere in British India, one-fourth of all written objections received by the Age of Consent Committee came from Madras—many submitted by orthodox Brahmins. In fact, in 1914 a Brahmin man introduced a bill in the Madras Legislative Council that would have validated post-puberty marriages among Brahmins; but because of strong opposition from other Brahmins, the bill was withdrawn

(Government of India 1929: 56). By 1928, the discourse had changed and the question of marriage and its consummation was no longer of parochial concern, but had become an issue linked to the future of the nation and its move toward independence.

A Religious Modernization Discourse?

Many Muslims also opposed state interference with their practices. In contrast to the Hindu position, which was based on religious belief, the arguments of Muslim men in Madras were mostly political: they flatly resisted any state intervention in matters related to personal law. They pointed out that laws regulating the age of marriage were unnecessary since there was no precedent in the Koran for girls marrying before puberty and so child marriage was not common among Muslims. By contrast, Muslim women, active in such organizations as the All-India Women's Conference, favored legislation outlawing all child marriages, and had no objection if secular laws took priority over religious custom in this instance (Basu and Ray 2003: 59–60).

Instead of giving credence to religious arguments, the discourse over child marriage in the Madras Legislative Assembly, as we have seen, stressed the health of individuals. To some extent this was done in the name of nationalism by proclaiming the abolition of child marriage as an essential step toward independence. In this regard the views of orthodox Brahmin pundits were ridiculed and it was urged that the modern nation of India should disregard them. The legislative record indicates a consensus among a majority of the members of the assembly. There was a general call for all communities and religions to embrace the new law on child marriage, as it embodied enlightened principles of human development. Here the legislators appear to have taken a secularist view. However, as we have seen, the same assembly had unanimously passed a law earlier that day intending to "Islamize some of the customs prevailing" (Government of India 1928: 16).

Legislation against child marriage also became an issue in Travancore, although the state prided itself on not having such a tradition. In 1932 a member of the legislative Council in

Travancore, Rama Varma Raja, introduced a resolution in support of the Sarda Act. Its intention was to prohibit child marriage in this princely state. Although Travancore was known to have fewer child marriages than the rest of the subcontinent, many legislators there felt the need to emulate the legislation passed in British India. The reason given was that Travancore should not become a haven for people who want to evade laws in force elsewhere in India, and that even if child marriage was less common in Travancore, such marriages did exist, and so a law was necessary (Government of Travancore 1933: 693 ff). According to the Census of Travancore, two communities were, in fact, known for marrying off their daughters and sons at an early age: the Tamil Brahmins and the Syrian Christians (Government of India 1932c: 189–90). As the latter community was considered the most modern and most educated group in Travancore, it was somewhat surprising to legislators that Syrian Christians practiced child marriage, and especially the fact that boys were married quite young. In contrast to the Tamil Brahmins, who had given religious reasons for favoring child marriage, Syrian Christian put forth financial arguments (Government of Travancore 1933: 804, 809-10). However, just like in Madras, Brahmin voices were stifled and their views were often ridiculed as obsolete and superstitious (Government of Travancore 1933: 794).

The similarities between the dominant discourse in the Travancore Legislative Council and the one in Madras were striking. R.V. Raja and others supported the secularist position that laws should embrace every citizen. They cited examples from the *Report of the Committee on Child Marriage, Government of India* to proclaim the detrimental outcomes for girls who marry and bear children at an early age. Often their discourse also took a nationalistic turn, as, for example, when they too argued "we want sturdy men and women in this nation" (Government of Travancore 1933: 804).

Conclusion

We have considered some public discussions and some less official comments on family laws that reflect the secularism

versus religion debates that took place in South India in the 1920s and 1930s. As we have seen, both Hindus and Muslims invoked religious arguments in one context, and secularist ones in another, showing that there was no essential or homogeneous Hindu or Muslim discourses. The introduction of Islamic law governing the family in some areas, and the passage of legislation to curtail child marriages in others, illustrate alternate efforts to regulate the private sphere by a legislature that vacillated between a secular approach that would encompass all communities, and a religious discourse in which communalism was dominant.

Since in the end popular sentiment prevented the legislature from taking a rigidly secular stance, family laws based on religious custom were difficult to abolish. Nevertheless, the power to assert religious doctrines had visibly declined in some contexts. Orthodox Brahmins had diminishing success in imposing their views, in contrast to Muslims clerics who wanted to Islamize the law.

In their struggle to accommodate both religious and secular points of view, the members of the Legislative Assembly had to show British colonial authorities that they were capable of self-rule and could handle communal conflicts and at the same time abolish such social evils as child marriage. The debates over these issues were part of a larger modernization agenda that included improving conditions for women and children. While gender equality was on the agenda, the legislature's silence regarding the favorable inheritance rules enjoyed by matrilineal women under the marumakkathayam system is yet another example of that modernization was a patriarchal endeavor, and not primarily concerned with improving conditions for women (Forbes 1979). Matrilineal Muslims were marginalized as anachronistic for failing to institute male heads of families.

Legislators formed their policy on the basis of ideals they considered modern. Although vehemently denouncing Westernization, they chose to follow a Western paradigm in supporting nuclear families headed by males (perhaps an example of the colonizing of the Indian mind). However, they also

needed to avoid clashes with powerful religious groups and demonstrate to the people that their decisions were not simply echoes of colonial ideas, but in the best tradition of the country.

The empirical examples from South India in the 1930s that we have examined show how parallel and sometimes paradoxical arguments were intertwined in a complex way in legal discourses about family matters. We cannot see a shift from a rational view of the nineteenth century reformers who used no religious arguments, to one that is a nationalist romanticism and makes women goddesses and mothers who carry the culture of the nation on their shoulders. Rather, we can trace at least two entangled discourses in the legislative bodies: a secular and rational view that highlights the welfare of women on the one hand, and a religious one that goes back to a pure interpretation of texts on the other. Both of them, however, claimed to be concerned about the best for the nation and held that they asserted a superior cultural difference from the West.

Notions of religion *and* secularity were crucial in imagining the modern nation and should not be viewed as opposites. Instead, contemporary religious notions were constructed when the nation-state was formed (van der Veer 2001). In the process of building the nation, many groups claimed the modern high ground for their religion, leaving the religious and the secular to constitute a paradox at the heart of modern India.

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Endogamy Revisited: Marriage and Dowry among the Knanaya Syrian Christians of Kerala

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This paper examines the modalities of arranging marriages among the endogamous Knanaya Christians of Kerala, South India. Using Bourdieu's ideas on 'symbolic' and 'social capital' and the mediating role of dowry as 'material capital' in arranged marriages, this paper highlights the pragmatic considerations underlying the observance or breach of communal endogamy in Knanya marriage arrangements. Data gathered from several cases of marriage and dowry negotiations within this community reveal the sustainability and strength of communal endogamy, as well as the circumstances of its breach within a competitive marriage market and an expanding Christian middle-class. The paper argues that endogamy both in its observance or, in its breach may reveal practical considerations at play, rather than conformance with 'categorical preferences' and prescriptions. It seeks to highlight the need to attend to the interplay of 'structural rules' and the actual 'processes' involved in marriage making, and the mediating role of dowry in actualizing and giving form to structural rules such as endogamy, as well as their circumventions and transformations through community practices.
Keywords: Knanaya, Syrian Christians, endogamy, symbolic capital, exogamy, dowry, marriage market.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the endogamous Knanaya Syrian Christians in the Southern Indian State of Kerala. *The Notes and Queries on Anthropology* defines 'endogamy' as the "rule enjoining

marriage within a specified social group" (Marx 1967: 223). My discussion of communal endogamy among the Knanaya Christians (henceforth referred to as KN) will focus on its characterization as a social prescription (Bourdieu 1977) and preferred practice, its sustaining elements and circumstances of its breach, its duality with exogamy and the intensification of ties within an urban middle-class community.

I examine the pragmatics of marriage and dowry within the overall framework that recognizes the interplay of structural norms and processes. Structural-Functionalist and Structuralist explications of marriage and dowry in South-Asian societies have tended to focus more on the structural norms and rules (descent, endogamy, caste etc), underlying marriage than on the processes through which structural norms are reproduced or challenged. Dowry according to these explications is the mechanism for creating permanent affinity between wife-giving and wife-taking groups (Dumont 1983; Goody 1989; Goody and Tambiah 1976; Harrell and Dickey 1985; Madan 1975; Sharma 1980; Vatuk 1975). Later Anthropological studies of kinship and marriage moved away from this traditional focus to recognize the dialectics between norms and processes or structure and actions (Bourdieu 1977; Bradburd 1984; Comaroff 1980; Ladislav1976). These studies have shown that a focus on events, situations, and actions are as important as structural rules and normative concepts for describing the constraints and choices faced by individuals and families in the process of marriage making. The shift in emphasis from structure to process led to a greater appreciation of 'choice' in the regulation of social action or practice. John Comoroff's (1980) seminal work on marriage payments recognized the dynamic function of marriage payments as points of articulation between structure and action or rules and processes. They constitute one medium in the context of marriage for actualizing and giving form to structural rules or their circumventions and transformations through individual or kin actions.

Structural norms and values provide the broad framework within which families operate in the marital arena, but families are able to manoeuvre the 'hand of cards' they are dealt with

(see Bourdieu 1977; Caplan 1984) to pursue the desired goal of securing a 'good marriage', or, in fulfilling the basic responsibility of getting their children, particularly daughters married. Thus, marriage provides an arena for the instrumental use of the stock of capital that families can strategically harness for matrimonial arrangements. Following Bourdieu (1977: 68), such capital comprises the social (community membership and social networks) and symbolic (visible aspects of distinction and intra-cultural evaluation) resources available to families. In the KN case, the structural characteristics of caste and communal endogamy, religion, descent and individual attributes such as age, education, occupation, family status, house names and social connections constitute the social and symbolic capital of a family. A family's success in the marital arena also depends on its material capital consisting of attributes such as family wealth, the income and earning capacity of potential mates and dowry endowments. The ability to pay or receive high dowries increases a family's 'choices' in the marital arena either in terms of forging links across or within status lines or across communal boundaries inasmuch as a lack of material or symbolic capital may provide the temptation to forego communal endogamy in favour of expanding ties outside the community.

This paper is based on material gathered for an anthropological study of marriage and dowry among middle-class Christian families in the city of Trivandrum, the capital city of Kerala State. The data on marriage relates to the fieldwork period between 1988-1989, but includes marriages contracted over a period of five decades since the earliest marriages recorded were from the late 40s up to 1989. This paper does not claim to speak for contemporary developments in Christian marriage and dowry arrangements. Given the paucity of anthropological writings on Kerala Christian marriages and communal endogamy in particular, this paper offers a modest contribution to the ongoing discussion of marriage and dowry in India.[1]

Kerala is one of the few states in India that is not predominantly Hindu (over five million Christians) and Trivandrum had the fifth largest concentration of Christians in the State during the time of fieldwork. There is an acknowledged lacuna in studies con-

centrating both on urban communities and Christian minorities in urban contexts (see Caplan 1987 and 1984 on Madras Christians). The Middle-East oil boom in the 1970s gave a new boost to the process of urbanization in Kerala, leading to transformations in the spatial and social landscapes of Trivandrum city and its suburbs. This was evident in the changing architecture of private residences, the migration of Keralites and others into the city from within and outside Kerala, and the injection of 'new wealth' into the economy by new rich Gulf expatriates. Gulf migration, upward mobility and the concentration of high quality schools, businesses and government jobs provided an ideal setting for studying marriage and dowry issues among urban, middle-class Christians.

The material on endogamy is from an in-depth study of 100 marriages from a select group of 10 core middle-class KN households. The core households were part of a sample of 100 households and 530 marriages covering Latin and Syrian sects. The smallness of the KN sample, notwithstanding, my purpose here is to identify and extract a few patterns to illustrate the interplay of endogamy, marriage and dowry within the KN Christian community. The inspiration for the topic of endogamy and marriage came from the concerns of my KN informants about the challenges of endogamy, the impacts of close marriages on future generations and the future of the community as a distinct religious community.

From a comparative level, the dynamics of marital choices and arrangements among the KN are similar to those found among Arab communities with a preference for descent-group endogamy. As Kressel (1978) observed, class mobility and the breakdown of traditional structures in urban contexts may endanger endogamous preferences and increase the pressure for outward marriage even as close marriages may function as 'fall back' alternatives in the absence of material and symbolic capital. The marriage patterns of the Latin Catholics of Kerala also bear some similarities to the general patterns observed among the KN insofar as they relate to patterns of extension and intensification of marital ties within and across caste, ethnic group, regional and status boundaries (e.g., Kerala and Tamil Nadu). Unlike in the

past, there is no strictly enforced communal endogamy among Latin Catholics. The high incidence of communal and caste endogamy within the Latin community (9 of the 73 marriages recorded), however, is the result of enforced caste restrictions on the part of the Syrian Christians (10 of the 457 Syrian marriages recorded). Latin families who were successful in negotiating marriages with Syrians are those who were of comparable class status, were endowed with the necessary material and symbolic capital and/or able to make claims of Brahmin or Nayar caste origin (see Philips 2004).

Endogamy and KN Christian Identity

The origin of Christianity in Kerala and the consolidation of sub-communal identities among the Syrian Christians is shrouded in legends and myths about which there is little agreement. Such origin narratives, however, form part of the collective memories of the community and operate as the basis for the formation of a strong Syrian Christian identity.

The Knanaya community, also known as Southist Christians (*thekkumbagar*) numbering around 300,000, trace their origins to 4th century migrants from Syria who came to Kerala under the leadership of a merchant by the name of *KnaiThoma*. The Knanaya Christians claim 'pure Syrian' origins and distinguish themselves from the numerically larger Syro-Malabar or Northist (*vadakkumbagar*), Christians, also known as Thomas Christians, who claim descent from the early converts of St. Thomas the Apostle who is believed to have come to Kerala at the beginning of the early Christian era. The two communities are part of Kerala's Syrian Christians and form a separate caste-like group at the apex of the Christian caste structure.[2] The Knanaya and Syro-Malabar Christians are not separate 'sub-castes', as Dumont (1972) has suggested, despite their endogamic preferences, claims of exclusiveness and membership by birth. Fuller's (1976) description of these two groups as sects is not accurate either since the criteria he uses to distinguish between caste and sect such as birth and affiliation respectively does not apply to the KN, for whom birth is the only criterion of membership within the community. The Romo-Syrians and Jacobites, each with its own

internal divisions, are the other two sects that are part of the Syrian Christians.[3] The KN are divided into two main divisions, i.e., Catholic and Jacobite, with populations of 190,000 and 100,000 respectively.[4] Each of the two divisions within the KN community exercise separate ecclesiastical jurisdictions and maintain their respective Churches and parishes exclusively within the community. While marriages between the Catholic and non-Catholic sects were prohibited in the past, this rule does not seem to exist anymore as marriages cross sectarian boundaries but largely within the Knanayite Syrian community. The Churches endorsed the practice of communal endogamy and rejected inter-communal and inter-caste unions by threatening those who violated these rules with excommunication and/or denial of sacraments. The Knanaya Churches have also traditionally discouraged the religious conversion of other Christians into their denominations as a means of preserving their exclusive KN identity. Shared history, claims to pure Syrian origins, cultural traditions, and 'close community ties' define the Knanaya Christian identity.[5]

Endogamy has also been one of the factors contributing to the strong perception of a KN identity. Of the100 marriages considered, 88 of the marriages were endogamous while 12 marriages were exogamous involving Syro-Malabar, New Christian and Hindu partners. Thus, endogamous preferences within this community are not merely the "legal language" of rules and prescriptions (Bourdieu 1977: 31); nor are they merely "fictional" as Peters (1980: 137) has observed for Arab Bedouin of Cyrenaica that practice lineage endogamy. In a study of endogamous preferences among this group, Joseph (1988) observed that the younger generation is more relenting towards endogamous marriages compared to their parents. However, parental and ecclesiastical pressures are strong and restrain the pressures for communal exogamy. Communal endogamy is consistently observed in practice despite the growing awareness among middle-class families that endogamy is limiting their marital choices within a dwindling demographic pool. An additional concern is the long-term effects of close marriages through intensified marital links on the genetic health of the community.

The KN also express their preference for 'close marriages', i.e., with families between whom there are already existing marital links (*bendham*). However, unlike most South-Indian communities that permit cross-cousin marriages, the Syrian Christians including the KN prohibit cross-cousin marriages, and endorse sapinda exogamy defined as the marriage of near relatives by birth (Trautmann 1981: 246).[6] The marriage rules among the Syrian Christians thus place them closer to the North-India marriage system than to the Dravidian system of the South (See Philips 2003).

Two other features that are relevant to the discussion of endogamy among the KN are their low level of educational qualifications and professional employment relative to the Syro-Malabar Christians.[7] Even the KN Christians tend to agree somewhat with this characterization. One indication is the scarcity of professionally qualified men and women compared to the Syro-Malabar Christians who rank well above the KN in this regard. The KN attributes their relative backwardness in these areas to the trading, landowning and business opportunities available in the areas commonly populated by their community.[8] Families in business and trade are primarily associated with the timber business while small and big landowners are engaged in the cultivation of paddy and rubber. Although the expansion of employment opportunities in urban Kerala and migration outside Kerala has led to the diversification of occupations among other Syrians, the KN as a whole had not been very responsive to these changes. Of the couples involved in the 100 marriages examined, 55 percent of the males were in business while the rest were in professional, technical and teaching occupations with a smaller number in farming. The Syrian Christians as a whole place a high premium on the education of girls. Education is valued not merely as a means to secure employment, but for its own sake and to increase the marital prospects of daughters. Although 80% of the women in the sample were unemployed, the education of women plays a significant role in marriage and dowry negotiations as more young men began to speak of 'companionate marriages' which education is seen to facilitate.

As symbolic capital, education opens up possibilities of its conversion as material wealth or dowry endowments. The Syro-Malabar Christians use their educational and professional achievements to define their superior status vis-a-vis the KN community. They are also able to command higher dowries. The low educational levels and absence of employment diversification among the KN Christians give members of this community less of a competitive edge in the marriage market and contributes to lower dowries compared to the dowry payments among Syro-Malabar Christians. They also inhibit families that wish to seek marriage alliances with well-placed families of comparable or higher status among the Syro-Malabar community.

An index of status (*anthasu*) among the Christian Middle class is a family's association with a particular *veedu* (house) i.e., a named patrilineal and exogamous descent group that operates as a status-bearing unit within the Christian middle class. A combination of symbolic, material and social capital had a bearing on the collective status of a *veedu*. House names (*veettuperu*) index a family's position as *parambariya* (traditional), *pazhaya* (old), *nalla* (good), 'well-known' (*prasastha*), or *puthiya* (new) families.[9] As status bearers, house names signal wealth, pedigree and genealogical connections; they 'record historical events and relationships', and act as "praise singers" (see Goody 1990: 217-18). Family history and religious history are also intertwined in the construction of house names particularly when, as Visvanathan (1986: 257) notes, "... family members were involved in their making." Family gatherings (*kudumpayoham*) are popular vehicles for asserting strength and identity but were the privilege of 'aristocratic lineages' in the past. I was informed that such gatherings are now held by 'little known' families to signal their arrival within the class system. A surge in the writing of family histories in recent years among upwardly mobile families shows a desire to claim high status. The manufacturing of aristocratic and ancient (*pazhaya*) origins (see Varghese 2004: 899), also serves to correct status inconsistencies in economic and symbolic capital and are strategies used to affect marriage alliances with the old and traditional families. House names have also come to index newer attributes of status such as the educational and

occupational achievements of member units within the larger *veedu*. Hence, a house may be collectively described as, "educated" in recognition of the educational achievements of member families.

House names are often the subject of contention in matrimonial arrangements and dowry negotiations, and families that are part of or linked to particular houses are in a better position to negotiate successful marriages. Houses as 'status-bearing units' form particular 'marriage circles' with other such units of comparable status. A concomitant of modernization induced changes and economic mobility, however, is the increasing differentiation of nuclear family households within the larger house or veedu. This differentiation is largely the result of the achievements and accomplishment of individual households. Women and men within nuclear families may also gain an autonomous identity in their own right based on their personal merits and demerits. As Beteille (1991: 17) has suggested, "the modern occupational and educational systems are highly dynamic" and are not always inclined to privilege 'old wealth' or traditional privileges such as honorific titles and ancestral success. The nuclear family also "takes an active role" in reproducing the "advantages at its command" through strategic marriage choices that enhance their own benefits. One outcome of these changes is marriage links between previously closed 'marriage circles' as links are made with families higher or below status. The dowry is one factor in mediating such 'status mismatches', involving endogamy and exogamy, the intensification of links within the community and the expansion of links between previously unmarriageable marital circles.

Marriage as 'Rules' and as 'Process'

The significance of a social norm maybe better understood in its breach. If communal endogamy is a norm among the KN, the instances of its breach are not simply a negation of the endogamic rule. Nor is conformity to prescribed or preferential rules of marriage an indication of the strength of endogamy as a structural rule. The practices of endogamy and exogamy, whether in their observance or breach may reveal 'practical concerns' rather than categorical preferences (Bradburd 1984). Bradburd's

(1984: 750) study of the Komachi of Iran reveals two important ways in which preference may affect practice: first, rules operate as strategic devises for the successful negotiation of marriages. Second, they may operate to constrain marriage options. The marriages described below demonstrate the different ways in which rules and processes articulate and the choices and constraints facing families and individuals involved in marriage making.[10]

My first example is the family of Joseph. Joseph is a Jacobite businessperson who could not muster enough dowries for his daughters' because his business was failing. His eldest daughter, Lilly, has a Masters degree in Education. A relative working in Liberia sponsored Lilly to Liberia. After a few years working as a teacher she managed to sponsor her brother, George (a non-graduate), and her sister, Sarah, who had a post-graduate degree. Lilly was 30 years old when she returned to Trivandrum to get married. She placed an advertisement for a groom in the marital column of the local newspaper and received a number of responses, but she chose a Syrian Catholic lecturer to be her husband. As was usual among many migrant women, Lilly had saved for her own dowry of Rs. 30,000 in cash and 10 gold sovereigns, which was at the low end of the dowry scale in the early 1980s. Lilly was well past the average marriageable age; her mature age and poor dowry were constraints that prevented her from finding a suitable partner within the community's limited marriage pool because of what Billig (1992) describes as the "marriage squeeze", i.e., scarcity created by competition for professional grooms. Communal exogamy opened up more options for Lilly to find an educated partner within the numerically larger Syro-Malabar community. Sarah, Lilly's sister, faced a similar predicament. She returned from Liberia a few years after Lilly's marriage with savings of Rs. 100,000 in cash and a few sovereigns. She was looking for a groom with post-graduate qualifications since they were in high demand in Liberia. Unable to find such a groom in her community, she settled for a Syro-Malabar Catholic who was "not from a very good family," meaning that the prospective groom was not from the same status circle. The dowry was Rs. 35,000 in 1985. While the two sisters married outside

their community, George, their brother married a girl from the Knanaya community in 1988. The dowry was Rs. 25,000. The family "is not a good family" but he had few choices as he had no qualifications and few prospects for entering into an alliance with a wealthy or well-known family within or outside the community. I met Sarah and her young son when they were on holiday in Trivandrum. The marriage was in trouble and she complained about the poor treatment she received from her in-laws. She pointed out that her marriage proved the importance of communal endogamy. The general perception among many KN families is that the quality of kinship among the Syro-Malabar Christians is poor compared to the close ties among the KN Christians. A similar point was also made by many of my Latin-Catholic informants who endorsed the marriage of close relatives (*sondakkar*) for the same reasons (see Kapadia 1995).

Along with communal endogamy, the KN also show a preference for intensifying links with previously known families or families connected through marriage. However, as previously mentioned, the KN Christians, along with other Syrian Christians proscribe all forms of cousin marriage and prescribe sapinda exogamy. However, both rules are ignored if extenuating circumstances prevail to warrant their breach. These circumstances may range from poor dowry and a "deficit of normative femininity" (see Kodath 2008: 264) such as good looks, dark skin colour, mature age and poor health. The urgency of marriage for women is also a factor for breaching normative rules (Philips 2003). Thus, while communal endogamy seems to be a more important consideration than sapinda exogamy in marital arrangements, there may be extenuating circumstances other than a mere preference for intensifying kin links with marriageable or unmarriageable partners which direct marriages in this direction.

To demonstrate this point, I turn to the marriage of Simon and Preetha who were closely connected through their paternal side. Simon was not well educated and was involved in business, a line of work that was not secure and thus had less prestige. Simon was also experiencing "financial difficulties" and was getting on in age when he married Preetha in 1972. Preetha's mother was a widow with four unmarried daughters and very little wealth.

The marriage was a convenient arrangement that satisfied both parties since Simon had little education and no secure livelihood and Preetha had a minimal dowry of Rs. 3,000. Cash dowries that were given in the case of grooms in business at the time was as low as Rs. 3,000 and high as Rs. 40,000. Previous connections helped in this case to successfully negotiate a marriage, even though the marriage broke the sapinda rule.

The marriage of Arjunan and Nirmala exemplifies the strategic use of cross-cousin marriage to circumvent material and educational disadvantages. Arjunan was not an educated young man and his parents had difficulty in finding a good match for him within the community. Nirmala's father had died and her mother was facing enormous challenges arranging marriages for her children. Although it was a "wrong marriage", it conformed to the normative prescription of communal endogamy. According to one of my informants, their Church sanctioned this marriage of cousins on "sympathetic grounds." The breeching of the cross-cousin rule and the Church's flexibility in this regard in comparison to their stand on cross-communal marriages, serves to reinforce the importance of communal endogamy.

I use the example of the nuclear family of Jacob and his spouse Sosamma and the example of Mary's family to demonstrate this point further. Jacob and Sosamma are retired teachers from the Jacobite denomination. Jacob is from Ranni, an area predominantly known for its timber business, while Sosamma, his wife, is from the Kottayam district. Although they had previous connections through marriage, there are subtle status distinctions between their respective families with Sosamma's family being of slightly higher status based on education and the reputations of individual members. Sosamma's father belonged to a "well known" family while her mother belonged to an 'educated' family. The family boasts of priests and bishops among its members, which were an indication of good standing. Jacob's father is from one of the earliest families to settle in Cranganore (i.e., old family) and was a state politician. However, apart from Jacob, most of his siblings did not study beyond secondary education. Soasamma observed that she would have had to be content with marrying an "agriculturalist" if her marriage to Jacob had not been

'arranged' given the paucity of educated men within the community at the time. Jacob's education and his father's political reputation thus outweighed considerations of the status differences between the respective families of this couple.

The couple has two daughters. Rita is the oldest who married her college mate who was a Hindu. Because of the opposition of the Church and community, her parents registered her marriage first and solemnized it later in the Syro-Malabar Church, which was the only Church that would accept their son-in-law as a convert. The KN Jacobite Church to which Jacob and Sosamma belonged denies Rita and her two children sacraments, and they are persona non grata as far as the Church and community are concerned. Although Jacob and Sosamma supported their daughter and did not view with favour the unsympathetic attitude of the Church and community, they expressed their support for communal endogamy citing closeness of community and community consciousness as reasons.

The proverbial wisdom among all Christians in general is that a "bad" or "shameful" marriage (on account of love marriage) often repeats itself, while the "first marriage" is always important to secure the position of a household in the marital market and the status circle. Thus, both Jacob and Sosamma had been concerned that the marriage of their older daughter to a Hindu would impede the marital prospects of their second daughter, Lizzy, who is a Dentist. Jacob and Sosamma's preference was for a Doctor as a spouse for Lizzy but they had to "settle for an Engineer" instead as "Doctors are hard to come by". This was a "good marriage", in their view and a restorative marriage to mitigate the effects of their older daughter's marriage. Their second son-in-law was a professional with good family connections, and previous marriage ties to Jacob's sister-in-law. The couple were pleased with their choice since the son-in-law had been receiving a number of marriage proposals because of his "good looks" and professional qualifications. They could only provide a dowry of Rs. 100,000, the average dowry given in the community at that time, even though the groom had received better offers. From the perspective of the son-in-law's family, Lizzy was a Dentist; she came from a good family and had a reasonable dowry as well.

An additional bonus was the fact that Lizzy, being one of two daughters and no sons, would inherit part of the family property consisting of a house with an adjoining apartment, and 22 acres of rubber land. Lizzy's marriage lends support to the view that family connections and individual attributes such as education and occupation including dowry considerations could collectively neutralize the negative impacts of an initial 'exogamous' marriage in the family.

However, status restoration is not always attainable for families with a history of exogamous marriages. I turn briefly to the extended family of Mary, who has marriage connections with the family of Jacob and Sosamma. The marital data collected for Mary's family reveal marriage links with families with reputable house names. However, Mary's family on her father's side were tainted by a few cases of communal exogamy. The first such marriage was contacted by Mary's paternal uncle in the 1920s, when he married a woman from a lower caste from the 'new Christian' community. The main attraction had been the dowry of Rs. 2,000 which was considered a high amount at the time. Most of the children of this particular union have married outside the community or class. The oldest son married a labourer's daughter within the KN community; the second son married a Marthomite Christian from the Syrian group; a daughter married a Syrian-Jacobite farmer; another married a Jacobite Syrian businessman, and the youngest daughter married a Romo-Syrian who ran a 'chitty fund"(saving scheme). None of these unions, according to Mary, were 'good unions' in terms of status, class or endogamic requirements. A second paternal uncle of Mary married a KN woman and they have seven sons and a daughter. Many of the sons are unmarried; two of his children married outside the community, one to a Bengali Hindu and another to a Jacobite Syrian. Mary's immediate family, however, were not affected by the marriages of her paternal uncles or their children. Mary's own children had married reasonably well within the community but all of her children married into known families with previous marital links.

I make three points with regard to the adverse effects of exogamous or wrong marriages on the collective identity of

related households. First, time is a great healer, and so is 'distance'; as kinship distance increases, the negative effects of such unions may decrease. The exogamous marriages in previous generations of Mary's family were contracted at a time when 'house status' was the main criterion of status since few families were engaged in professional employment. Most families were in business or farming. Second, in a community already constrained by demographic constrains and endogamic marriage rules, very little marital manipulations are possible, such that the avoidance of families even remotely connected to families with cases of communal exogamy or wrong marriages would further restrict the marriage pool within the community. Finally, success in overcoming the disabling effects of exogamous, wrong or shameful marriages, depend on the respective positions of individual households in relation to their material wealth and symbolic capital, as demonstrated in the case of Lizzy's 'restorative marriage' after her sister's 'shameful marriage'.

Well-established families who are secure in their positions may show a willingness to undertake the risk of exogamous marriages as in the case of Miriam, the daughter of Issac who is from a 'well-known family'. Miriam married an Engineering Professor from the Syro-Malabar community. Issac and his wife wanted an educated groom for their daughter. The dowry was Rs. 300,000 and far exceeded the average dowry of Rs. 100,000 recorded for this community at the time. The consensus among other householders who knew this family was that members of this family did 'exceptional things because they were exceptional people', meaning they were well connected, wealthy and educated.

The rule and preference for communal endogamy as these particular marriages reveal compete with other requirements such as educational and occupational credentials of individual members. George's (Joseph's son) endogamous marriage was at the expense of family status and his choices were constrained because of his lack of educational credentials and poor job prospects. Both Lilly and Sarah are no longer accepted as members of the Knanyite Jacobite Church because of their exogamous marriages. Communal exogamy may result from two separate yet interrelated processes emerging from the 'constraints' imposed

by communal endogamy. First, those who are financially constrained may extend their ties outside the community even if the marriages fall short of their own expectations or preferences for marrying within the community. Second, families seeking 'good connections' and qualified partners for their children, and who are also financially well placed, maybe inclined to extend their search outside their community in order not to lose out in a highly competitive marriage market. The marriage of Miriam is a case in point and demonstrates the fact that some families are willing and able to compromise communal endogamy in pursuit of establishing alliances with well-placed and successful families in Kerala's modern economy. The KN Christians regard the choice between 'endogamy' and 'exogamy' to be increasingly difficult given the attraction of well-qualified and successful persons outside their community and the paucity of similarly well-placed members within their own community.

Often, the intervention of relatives as mediators may help in the successful negotiation of a marriage, in situations of low dowry or perceived physical demerits in a marriageable woman. When Jacob, heard that his brother's son, who was working in Saudi Arabia, was looking for a bride, he suggested Sosamma's niece, Leila, who was a lab technician. She had a dowry of Rs. 30,000, part of which came from her own earnings. The dowry had to be negotiated despite their previous connections since Sosamma, who mediated on Leila's behalf, explained that her sister-in-law was "greedy for money". Sosamma was able to convince the family to accept the dowry offered. Often, when kin are involved as mediators, families may be reluctant to refuse outright, or demand more money but this depends on the closeness of the relationship involved.

In some instances, physical demerits are offered as reasons for rejecting a marriage. For instance, Sosamma noted that she was able to persuade Jacob's youngest brother to marry a distant relative of hers when he initially showed some reluctance because she was "too thin and sickly." Jacob and Sosamma had convinced him to agree to the marriage insisting that it was "better to marry a known family than an unknown one" (see Philips 2004). Not all marriage negotiations are successful despite kin

interventions and previous marriage links. An example of a failed negotiation involved Susan, the daughter of Jacob's brother and John, the son of Sosamma's female cousin. Although the proposal of marriage came from the potential suitor's mother, the marriage negotiations fell through because Susan's family could only offer a dowry of Rs. 50,000 including cash and jewellery. Jacob's brother was prepared to provide Rs. 40,000 and Rs. 10,000 later, but John refused because Susan was not good looking. Sosamma described the young woman as being "very pretty", and she was convinced that John was using her "looks" as an excuse to turn down the proposal of marriage since the real issue was the dowry. John's brother had received Rs. 100,000 as dowry, a few years earlier and often the dowry of older siblings may set the standard for later marriages. In this particular case, previous family connections had little impact on the marriage negotiations.

The KN preference for close links is self-perpetuating, since every marriage link in turn provides the opportunity for negotiating further marriages. They provide the opportunity for pursuing "well-trodden paths" (Bourdieu 1977: 52-58). The marital data collected for KN reveal a pattern of repetitive marriages between households with particular house names within particular marriage circles. However, while social connections are 'resources' that can be utilized for arranging marriages, for negotiating dowries, and forging desirable links, they are inadequate by themselves for successfully negotiating a marriage. The success of a marriage negotiation also depends on the particularities of individual and family circumstances, the strength of intra-family mediators, the social networks that can be utilized (including the help of college lecturers, neighbours and friends), and the desirability of links. In short, the successful negotiation of marriage requires the mobilization of all that a household possesses in terms of its social, material and symbolic capital.

The KN, like other Syrian Christians are quite explicit about the conventions regarding dowry within the community. They insist that only *puthupanakkarar* (new-rich families and generally referring to Gulf migrants), would try to use their wealth to "buy" prospective professional grooms. Members of "traditional" and "good" families do not regard such tactics favourably and they only

serve to increase suspicions about possible 'cover ups' for individual defects. A good dowry can compensate for perceived physical defects or some other shortcomings in a woman but compromises are possible if the prospective groom is from a lower status or is the only brother for many sisters, which can be a negative qualification for a groom. The average dowry recorded for the sample of 100 marriages among the KN was Rs. 100,000 at the time of fieldwork in 1988/1989. The highest dowry in cash recorded for the Syro-Malabar community during the same period was Rs. 500,000. There were two cases of higher dowries of Rs. 125,000 and Rs. 150,000 given at the marriages of two of Jacob's nephews in 1980 and 1989 respectively. In the first case, the groom was a business graduate who married into a wealthy but 'new family'. In the second case, the groom was working in the United States. Foreign residence and prospects for migration through marriage make such grooms attractive as prospective spouses and may explain the high dowry recorded in this particular instance.

There are no clear-cut correlations between endogamy, close marriage and low dowry. This is in contrast to the nominal, symbolic or insignificant bridewealth payments among Arab communities known for kin endogamy, FBD marriage, and close marriage (Granquist 1975; Peter 1980). While endogamy and marriage with previously known families may not entail lower dowry amounts, it may involve less exacting and mutually favourable dowry transactions due to the intervention of relatives in the marriage negotiations. When mutual relatives negotiate a marriage, the contracting parties are obligated to give due consideration to the counsel of mediating relatives. However, as we saw in the case of Susan and John, mediating kinsmen may not always be successful in negotiating a favourable dowry. Besides, many of the close marriages contracted were to some extent convenient arrangements to compensate for the lack of dowry or some other shortcoming in the marital proponents.

While closeness of ties may open up opportunities for negotiating lower dowries, low dowries may also prompt families to seek close marriages. A plausible explanation for the lower dowry payments among the KN community relative to the Syro-Malabar

Christians is not endogamy per se but the educational and occu-pational profile of this community. Although professional men have a competitive edge over others in negotiating higher dowries, this may be somewhat blunted by the smaller marriage pool as a re-sult of demographic constraints and endogamous pressures within the KN community. Families seeking professional brides for their sons must also make compromises by not making too many de-mands within a limited pool of professional women, as was seen in the case of Lizzy's marriage.

Concluding Comments

The Knanaya community, like other communities such as the Arabs who also have endogamic prescriptions, strongly en-forces endogamic rules while extending links across denomina-tional and sectarian boundaries. While exogamy has been viewed as a precondition for maintaining the discreteness of descent groups and other 'consecutive units' (Levi Strauss 1969), endogamy may serve the same function as exogamy for maintaining the discreteness of the KN as a separate Christian community. Communal endogamy among the KN is not merely a rhetorical device or a normative prescription but is an ideal that is fiercely adhered to in marriage arrangements.

There are two current challenges to endogamic norms among the KN Christians. The first is the shrinking marriage pool of eligible partners which force some families to intensify links with families that are already connected. In some cases, marriages may contravene both sapinda exogamy and proscriptions against cousin marriage. Second, occupationally and economically mo-bile KN families may break the rule of endogamy by marrying into Syro-Malabar Christians of comparable status and wealth. Ex-ogamy also enables families without adequate material or sym-bolic resources to increase their options of finding suitable part-ners for their children outside their community. Thus, class inter-ests and pragmatic considerations in contexts of poor dowry or lack of other symbolic attributes may push families in the direc-tion of communal exogamy.

Endogamy and exogamy provide 'options' and produce 'con-straints' in the arrangement of marriages. Lionel Caplan's

(1987:129) study of marriage among Christians in Tamil Nadu shows that "the intensification of relationships within the lower class is the obverse of the restrictive connubial policies of dominant sectors of the community". In short, the middle classes are in the privileged position of expanding their links within a greater marriage pool, in contrast to the lower classes that are forced to intensify links within their narrow marriage pool. Among Middle-class Knanaya Christians, restrictive endogamous rules result in strategies of both 'intensification' and 'extension', within and outside the community. Both strategies are available to families having the necessary material and symbolic capital or those lacking them. Marrying a close relative or moving outside the marriage circle defined by house position enables a family to circumvent some perceived or real disadvantage such as low dowry, poor educational or occupational prospects or even physical or age deficits. Similarly, communal exogamy may open up more options for families seeking favourable class alliances in a competitive marriage market just as marrying out may increase the choices available for families or individuals lacking the necessary material and symbolic capital to compete within the limited marriage pool of occupationally and educationally qualified individuals.

Marriage rules in the form of preferences (links within marriage circles) and prescriptions (endogamy) present possibilities that can be adduced or ignored, utilized, or avoided as individual situations and purposes vary (see Rosen 1984 on Moroccan kinship). Some of the cases discussed in this paper, reveal the sustainability and strength of endogamic rules and the circumstances of their breach both of which reflect emergent challenges to the continued existence of this community as a discrete and bounded group within the larger Christian community.

Lower dowry has been associated with cousin marriages and close marriages among other South-Indian groups and among the communities in the Middle East with preferential parallel-cousin marriage. I have argued that in the KN case, lower dowry is the result not so much of the endogamic norm and intensification of ties with previously known families but a variety of other factors including the limited pool of professionals. Educated and professionally qualified grooms may have

a competitive edge over other members of the community who lack these attributes but their manoeuvrability may be limited due to endogamic prescriptions, normative dowry conventions, demographic constraints and compromises that require sacrificing high dowry for marrying educated and professional women within the community. It is a moot point whether or not communal exogamy may result in an increase in dowry amounts among the Knanyites in the future or whether endogamic prescriptions will hold strong in the current competitive marriage market in contexts of economic liberalization, socioeconomic mobility and an expanding middle class.

Notes:

[1]   The changing aspects of South-Asian marriage is reflected in the forthcoming anthology by Ravinder Kaur, Rajni Parliwala and Shalini Grover (eds.), *Marriage in Globalizing Contexts: Exploring Change and Continuity in South Asia*, Orient Blakswan.

[2]   According to Maclean (1924), the term 'Syrian Christian' does not refer to the inhabitants of Syria but to the use of the Syriac language in the liturgical services of Syrian Christian Churches. The Syrian identity also manifests itself in terms of such secondary attributes as alleged skin-color differences and sartorial styles, customs, and the general prosperity of this group in comparison to the New Christians (new converts) and Latin Catholics, who are Portuguese converts who follow the Latin rite of worship.

[3]   The Malankara Catholics broke away from the Orthodox Jacobites in 1930. Fissions among the original Jacobites led to the creation of the Orthodox Jacobites in 1889, the Marthomites in 1889 and the Anglican denomination in 1840. The Jacobites are further divided into the Orthodox and Jacobite Syrians. The three divisions among the Anglicans are the CMS (Church Mission Society), LMS (London Missions Society) and the CSI (Church of South-India). Membership within these latter denominations cross caste lines with the lower caste converts labelled as "new Christians" to distinguish the Syrian Christians from the new converts. The Latin Catholics comprise the non-Syrian Catholics from a number of caste groups who were mainly converts of Portuguese missionaries in the 16th century.

[4]   The population figures given are from 2001 estimates and taken from Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/knanaya).

[5]   The Knanya Christians take pride in the privileges and honours granted to their ancestors by the Hindu kings, and oral traditions, copper-plate inscriptions and origin songs are given as testimony to these privileges (Travancore State Manual 1940: 226).

6   The prohibition includes three generations on the mother's side and five generations on the father's side.

7   'Education' in the context of marital negotiation, usually means post-graduate standing or professional qualification.

8   Some of these areas include places like Ranni, Kottayam, the headquarters of the Jacobite Knanaya Church, Kuttanad area in the interior of Kerala and primarily known for paddy and rubber cultivation, and Kallicheri.

9   Members who share the same house name are prohibited from marrying.

10 I have used pseudonyms throughout this paper. As such, the names used in this paper do not reflect the actual names or identities of the families or individuals.

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Magic Lanterns, Mother-craft and School Medical Inspections: Fashioning Modern Bodies and Identities in Travancore

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Beginning with an account of the development of public health services in Travancore, the paper explores how the state articulated its perception of the 'healthy, modern' body and communicated this design to the general population through the extensive investment in and use of public health education. I explore how the 'modern' mother and child, central to the enterprise of creating a modern society, were crafted through the use of maternal and child welfare programs. Lastly, I investigate how the state began to intervene in schools through the use of school medical inspections and used these interventions to fashion a sense of the modern body in young minds.

***Keywords*:** colonial medicine, princely states, Travancore, public health, school inspections, mothercraft, identity.

Sociologists have articulated identity/identities as unstable and dynamic; constantly and continually being constructed discursively (Hall 1996). One such discourse which offered (and continues to offer) spaces where identity can be negotiated, re-negotiated and articulated is medicine (Sutphen and Andrews 2003). 'Colonial' and 'western' medicine, particularly after the sea-changes beginning in the mid-nineteenth century had come to represent the rational, the scientific and the progressive; therefore, individuals, groups and states could utilise the spaces of 'colonial', 'Western' medicine to highlights those very facets within their own identities. This paper considers the ways in which 'western' medicine/public health was utilised by

the state, individual and the community in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore to shape and re-shape aspects of 'modern' identity in multiple contexts.

By the end of the nineteenth century, issues of human life-birth, health and death - had become crucial concerns of the administration in Travancore. In response, new forms of biopower and a more extensive public health infrastructure had emerged, which was British in essence (based on Western ideas of medicine and public welfare) but functioned through local power networks and knowledge structures. Although the seeds of this public health system had been sown in the early nineteenth century, it was in the twentieth century that it expanded in scope, reach and effect. But public health was far more than a set of ideas, policies and initiatives to improve population health. In Travancore, as in other parts of the world, public health was a transformative force; an instrument of state 'discipline', which 'composed forces' in order to obtain the efficient machine, or body (Foucault 1991: 164). This healthy and productive (in both the economic and procreative sense) modern body came to be considered an essential prerequisite for membership/citizenship in modern society.

Beginning with an account of the development of public health services in Travancore, the paper explores how the state articulated its perception of the 'healthy, modern' body and communicated this design to the general population through the extensive investment in and use of public health education. I explore how the 'modern' mother and child, central to the enterprise of creating a modern society, were crafted through the use of maternal and child welfare programs. Lastly, I investigate how the state began to intervene in schools through the use of school medical inspections and used these interventions to fashion a sense of the modern body in young minds. My sources include the Travancore Administration Reports, the Sanitary Department Reports, Public Health Department Reports, the Travancore State Manuals and other miscellaneous official records and communications preserved in the Kerala State Archives (Main and Fort Branches) in Trivandrum.

The politically enervated state of Travancore, which was indirectly governed by the British, had publicly expressed its interest in introducing and establishing Western medicine in the region and exposing its population to the 'benefits' of this system very early in the nineteenth century. This commitment became more firmly entrenched in later decades and is perhaps best encapsulated by a much-quoted speech given by then Travancore ruler Ayilyam Thirunal, on the opening of the Trivandrum General Hospital; who emphasized the reputation of Travancore's rulers as the *Dharma Raj*. "One of the main objects of my ambition is to see that good medical aid is placed within the reach of all classes of my subjects. It is a blessing which is not at present in the power of individuals generally to secure, howmuchsoever they may desire it. It is hence the obvious duty of this state to render assistance in this direction"; because he stated, no more charitable endeavour could exist than the mitigation of sickness among his subjects (Aiyar 1923: 216).

A single European doctor had been established in Trivandrum since the beginning of the nineteenth century - appointed by the Madras presidency at the court's request - dispensing Western medicine as well as some vaccination among the members of the court and to a lesser extent, in the town.[1] By 1846, Travancore established its own Medical Department and numerous hospitals and dispensaries were set up across the state in the decades following. There was also some limited state investment in smallpox vaccination for the general population (Pillai 1940: 606). In 1896, a newly-established Sanitary Department was made officially responsible for public health work, vaccination and the collection of vital statistics information. By this time, the state commenced on several intense biopolitical campaigns - including a more wide-ranging vaccination drive against smallpox, dogmatic quarantines and *cordon-sanitaire* in response to the 1896 plague pandemic as well as several intensive sanitary drives in public spaces such as fairs and festival grounds.

By the 1920s, the state was routinely declaring that it was the "long established policy of the Government (to) see that proper medical aid is placed within the reach of all classes of people."[2]

The 1930s saw Travancore re-organizing its public health infrastructure, seeing the need for "a modern public health department to cope efficiently with the numerous public health problems of the state."[3] The state did away with the preexisting system of a Sanitary Department and instituted a formal Public Health Department responsible for vital statistics, control of communicable diseases, epidemiological surveys, rural sanitation and public health education.[4] The newly founded Public Health Department was to "co-ordinate the public health activities of the State on an up-to-date and scientific basis, under a single direction."[5] This era in public health marks the emergence of the interventionist, draconian state, which was far more comfortable with the idea of imposing itself on the bodies of its population through increases in health and medical legislation from the 1930s onwards-including the compulsory vaccination rules of 1932, the Epidemic Diseases Acts and the Public Health Act.

Shaping a Modern 'Public Health Conscience': Public Health Propaganda

The history of Western medicine and public health in Travancore through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illustrates Travancore's desire for being perceived as 'modern' and 'progressive'. Introducing Western medicine into the region, building hospitals and dispensaries, supporting and promoting policies such as smallpox vaccination and training nurses and midwives in Western medicine were some of the more visible signals of the state's aspirations to colonial modernity. Travancore also used its extant public health infrastructure to inculcate and encourage acceptance and utilisation of public health services and ideas among the population. By the 1930s, the state had begun investing significantly in several parallel forms of 'health propaganda', whose primary purpose was the cultivation of a 'health conscience', which in turn was the 'prerequisite for the success of every...activity' (Pillai 1940: 812).

Even as early as the nineteenth century, the state had been disseminating information about Western medicine and methods of treatment and prevention to encourage public utilisation of health services. This propaganda effort was largely *ad hoc*, with

efforts increasing during major epidemics or the threat thereof. During cholera epidemics, for instance, it was common practice to 'advise' people with informal conferences, lectures and leaflets.[6] In neighbouring Cochin, as well, the princely state also carried on a great deal of 'propaganda work' to popularize Western medicine. During major festivals, such as the Trichur Pooram, when people travelled to and congregated in one place, authorities utilised events in order to "popularise the principles of public health, sanitation, hygiene and allied subjects."[7]

From these rudimentary and often temporary propaganda programmes evolved a more intensive system through the Public Health Education Unit which became a regular feature of the public health system in Travancore. The unit developed into an 'intensive and well-equipped propaganda' machine; intended as a "potent medium for...the eye and the ear" to broadcast essential 'Health Knowledge' in the most effective manner possible (Pillai 1940: 811). The unit was to disseminate "sound knowledge of popular hygiene and preventable diseases" among the people.[8] The ultimate aim was to craft a 'sense of responsibility' for their bodies, and "in the matter of preservation and promotion of public health."[9]

Lectures and conferences were popular and inexpensive forms of health education. By the 1930s, lectures were routinely given on subjects as varied as hygiene, disease causation, treatment, prevention, vector control, and nutrition to an estimated audience of roughly 4,000,000 people annually. Routine public health conferences were a part of the Public Health Education Unit's work. While overall health was the general theme, the unit often identified specific diseases or topics as the need arose. For instance, during plague scares in neighbouring areas such as British Madras and Cochin, Travancore began 'well organised educative propaganda' in these border areas. In 1935, for instance, the Public Health Department conducted conferences on plague disease epidemiology and vector control with the 'leading merchants and citizens' of the city.[10] From 1938-39, the unit conducted a series of lectures on the advantages of the "bored-hole latrines in rural areas."[11]

The Public Health Department used a widespread range of print media in the health education drive-this included tens of thousands of printed sources such as bulletins, pamphlets and posters on various health and related subjects in both English and Malayalam.[12] Pamphlets such as 'Mosquito and Man', which was obviously intended to improve understanding of disease vectors in epidemiology, were also published in the Travancore Gazette.[13] During specific epidemics of cholera and malaria, illustrated posters were printed and circulated, particularly at and near epidemic centres.[14]

Visual media was also very important in state health education efforts.[15] Travancore began to buy and hire increasing numbers of public health films for demonstrations. 'Magic lanterns' were the predecessor to the modern slide projector and magic lantern shows usually comprised pictures/images projected onto a white screen accompanied by a narrative (Nightingale 1896, Sargent 1948: 202). The magic lantern was a common medium of instruction, propaganda and entertainment and lantern slide shows were particularly popular in rural areas. Lantern lectures were considered to be more effective in conveying consistent messages-for instance, private individuals used the magic lantern very effectively to propagate the *swadeshi* message (Tharu and Lalita 1993: 171). Travancore appointed 'magic lantern' operators who travelled around the state. Images of good health, proper hygiene, childcare and nutritive practices were projected on to a large screen for public viewing. Magic lantern lectures were also used during the hookworm eradication drive of the 1930s, when lantern lectures was practised in all taluks across Travancore.[16] Such lectures and print and visual media were employed extensively by the state to iterate 'modern' values about the previously 'defective' body among the general population of Travancore.

The public health department was also producing a quarterly Public Health Bulletin, copies of which were circulated free of charge to several schools, colleges, libraries, reading rooms, municipalities and social service organisations.[17] The Public Health Bulletin was suspended in 1941, due to the war, but was revived in 1948, as a monthly magazine in English, Malayalam

and Tamil. By this stage, free copies were sent around also to many rural centres.[18] After 1948, Travancore's Public Health Education Unit was enhanced with new talkie equipment, several films on cholera, smallpox, malaria, tuberculosis as well as 'certain films on health subjects of much educative value' received from American and British donors.[19]   When the state was threatened by specific diseases, the Public Health Education Unit took a particular interest in disease-specific propaganda in order to disseminate information about disease prevention and cure as well as to ease the way for new therapeutics. For instance, when the B.C.G vaccination campaign commenced in 1948, it was accompanied by extensive propaganda to propel the campaign and to "dispel the misgivings in the minds of the public."[20]

In Trivandrum, a 'health education van' was purchased in 1936, equipped with 'Microphone, Gramophone, Amplifier and Loud Speaker' (Pillai 1940: 810). The van initially operated in the city's Public Gardens from 1937 onwards on a fortnightly basis, and was reported to be very popular, attracting large groups.[21] 'Musical lecture records' on public health, hygiene and nutrition were played to often crowded audiences. Elaborate health exhibitions and conferences were organised every year after 1934- for instance on the occasion of the All India Exhibition held honouring the birthday of the then king, an extensively equipped public health conference was also set up by the Public Health Department. Such mechanisms were not restricted solely to urban areas - in the mofussil areas, for instance, health exhibitions and conferences were frequently organised.[22] By 1942-43, the public health education effort took another direction - Travancore Radio was inaugurated during this year and several officers gave talks on health and related subjects on this service.[23]

The interest and investment of Travancore in public propaganda programmes for health and related subjects is a signal of the state realisation that the efforts to fashion the 'modern', healthy and 'normal' body were futile without the creation of the 'public health conscience'. Subsequently, they began the extension of public health information well beyond the previously exclusive professional realm into the worlds of laypersons. This propaganda

programme is part of the state effort to craft conscious, productive and manageable citizens.

'Crafting' the 'Healthy' Mother:
The Maternal and Child Welfare Programs

Across the world, the relationship between the family and the state was in the process of change at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the next generation of modern citizens were raised within and by families, the state displayed an increasing interest in the 'production' and 'processing' of these children. Consequently, 'motherhood', increasingly equated with the essential enterprise of perpetuating a healthy population and safeguarding the future generations of 'modern' citizens, became of great importance to society and state (Allman 1994).[24] The health of mothers therefore became very important and women who were unaware of the rules for the maintenance and productivity of their bodies were considered a threat to a population striving for modernity (Porter 2005: 182). Unhealthy mothers and children were at higher risks of ill health and death, and thus constituted both an unproductive and un-'disciplined' population (Foucault 1991). The maintenance of Empire itself, it was argued, was conditional on healthy mothers raising healthy children; who were essential for the functioning of the Imperial machine (Davin 1978).

A slew of policies had emerged worldwide at this time intended to increase knowledge of, control over and direction of every step of pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing. One of these included the 'mothercraft' movements, which had picked up momentum from the 1920s onwards across England, United States, Canada and Australia (Lewis 2003: 215, Smith 1989, Cooter 1992: 177). The development of maternalist discourse and accompanying policies at the metropoles contributed to the eventual conquest and transformation of the 'traditional' role of motherhood in India as well. The colonial state began several endeavours to teach the 'moral but ignorant Indian woman' the specifics of being a 'good mother' through lessons in print, visual and participatory media. In Madras, these mothercraft tutorials extended beyond the domain of motherhood into 'the art of housewifery',

defining the expectations which would describe the role of women in the emerging modern nation (Van Hollen 2003: 51).

By the early nineteenth century, commercialised agriculture, the spread of education and social reform movements in Travancore all contributed to a exaltation of and fervent belief in 'development'; contingent upon the existence of a 'modern' society supported by a 'modern' family (Devika 2008: 28-29). In order for the modern, nuclear, conjugal family to flourish, the health of the mother, the infant and the child had to be protected. The state was offered the opportunity to broadcast the 'superiority' of Western science and medicine in addition to safeguarding that cornerstone of colonial modernity - the family. Although, as Devika points out, the state had officially excised itself from the private and domestic spheres by the late nineteenth century, Travancore was quite willing to transgress that boundary when it came to the project of crafting the healthy mother and child. It could well be that the perceived necessity to fashion the modern family/mother/child was more urgent than any potential offences resulting from an invasion of the private spaces of the household (Devika 2008). In addition, the conditioning of this family in Western ideas, structures and practices, it was believed, could erase ideas, structures and practices which threatened the modern aspirations of the state.

Travancore had realised the importance of reducing child and maternal mortality relatively early and had publicly declared its aim of producing healthy mothers, 'normal' pregnancies, deliveries and children; targeting the mother and child through a few public health policies and provisions for medical care. The Western trained midwife had been practising in Travancore for several decades before the Maternal and Child Health programs - from as early as the 1860s, several Madras-trained midwives had been practising in Travancore (Lang 2005). By the 1900s, however, the state of Travancore became more interventionist in its intent to 'craft' a healthy new generation of mothers and children in order to ensure the health and welfare of future generations of citizens and the reproduction of labour (Sen 1999: 143). This is the beginning of the 'mothercraft' movement in Travancore - although this word 'mothercraft' is not explicitly mentioned in the

administrative records, the desire to 'craft' the healthy, normal mother is clearly the driving force behind the maternal and child welfare movements of the 1920s in Travancore. In both explicit and implicit statements, the roles of mothers in both giving birth to and raising the next generation of citizens and reproducing labour was emphasised by the state. For instance, in one of the propaganda films on maternal health, then Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bhai praised the Public Health Department for coming up with the "happy thought of popularising sound ideas regarding the fundamental problems of maternity and child welfare." She went on to comment that the 'health and happiness of the future generation(s)' depended on such activities (Pillai 1940: 810-11). Armed with an unassailable confidence in the infallibility of Western science and a desire to transform maternity and childhood along 'modern', British lines, Travancore's elites began on a concerted project of mothercraft.

Most deliveries earlier either took place at home and were attended by the traditional birth attendant - the *dai* or the *vayattati*-and/or members of the household and childrearing skills had been usually picked up by emulation/observation of senior members of the household through private, personal interactions. By the early 1900s, these old 'authorities' of motherhood were deemed unclean, unscientific and unsatisfactory; being a proficient mother was considered so demanding that it now required advice from 'experts' and 'professionals' in mothercraft.

As early as 1926, the state expressed a 'keenly felt' need for the medical aid specifically targeting women and children 'in a more extended form'.[25] In order to remedy this situation, the Medical Board had been reconstituted and a separate Women's Medical Service has been formed. The Medical Board had continually noticed the 'necessity for antenatal care and the prevention of infantile mortality'.[26] Maternity and child welfare work began as early as 1928. Sanitary assistants, nurses, rural midwives, health unit workers and midwives were increasingly encouraged to and capable of intervening into the previously private spaces of the household and into the rituals and processes of pregnancy and childbirth. Several of the midwives and nurses serving in rural areas were in the habit of community practice, encouraged by the

state, in order to improve maternal and child health, particularly under the provisions of the Maternity and Child Welfare Scheme instituted in 1938-39. Midwives were stationed specifically in relatively isolated rural areas which were usually underserved by hospitals and/or dispensaries. These midwives were trained in the Western tradition; they conducted home visits, did routine urine examinations, registered pregnant women, tracked pregnant women through their terms, attended their deliveries and also provided medical attention and advice to new mothers regarding hygiene, natal care and care of infants.[27] Often they would attend deliveries and re-visit them ten days later. Midwives based in urban areas such as Trivandrum and Cochin's maternity hospitals also regularly visited local households to popularise the 'Western way' among women.[28]

With the establishment of the first health unit in Neyyantinkara, Travancore experimented with greater surveillance and intervention into the community, the household and the lives of women. Public health nurses began home visits and by 1934, at least one in four births was attended by the health unit midwives in districts with health units, with the ratio increasing to one in three births in 1936.[29] Finding the health unit system very successful, particularly in reducing maternal and infant deaths, the state repeated the experiment in other parts of the state subsequently.

Other activities also contributed towards the 'schooling' of mothers, in order to attain and maintain this healthy, modern body/child. By the end of 1943-44, 'milk canteens' were moving across rural and urban areas of Travancore distributing condensed milk to expectant and breast feeding mothers and to all children under five years. The donors that funded this program were private individuals and groups from across other countries of the British Empire as well as the USA.[30] Health education and propaganda also focussed extensively on maternal and child health. 'Baby week' began to be celebrated in Travancore, with its commemoration of Western perceptions of ideal motherhood.[31] By 1940, a 'lady propaganda officer' was appointed to the public health education unit in order to carry the health education efforts more effectively among women.[32] Several films on childcare, proper

hygiene practices, nutrition and maternal health were bought and distributed in Travancore (Pillai 1940: 810-11).

With the Post-War Reconstruction Efforts of 1947, state focus on mothercraft efforts had increased. By the end of this decade, fifty midwifery centres were operating in Travancore and 43 in neighbouring Cochin. Additionally, three maternity and child welfare centres also operated in the Cochin area.[33] Two additional health units were established at Vaikom and Sherthalla by 1946; forty three Rural Maternity and Child Welfare Centres were functioning across the state in addition to twenty midwifery centres administered by Public Health department, the village Uplift department, village unions and panchayats.[34] By 1948, the major towns of Travancore - Trivandrum, Allepey and Nagercoil - all employed female doctors, nurses and midwives to carry on maternity and child welfare work in the urban areas.

Private actors also contributed to the mothercraft efforts in Travancore - at the end of 1948, 255 canteens of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, Calcutta, were working in the state and catered to about 2700 individuals monthly. These canteens distributed condensed milk, biscuits, canned food stuffs and multi-vitamin pills to expectant and nursing mothers as well as to under-nourished children.[35] Several 'private agencies' begin maintaining qualified midwives in certain parts of the state such as Mallapalli, Keezhvaipur, Kurumannoor and Maramon.[36]

As in other parts of the world, the state began to formally recognise, identify and address the needs of working women during pregnancy and childbirth. Legislation such as the Travancore-Cochin Maternity Benefit Act of 1943 sought to protect women working in all regulated industries, offering them three months of maternity benefit under the Act (Sharma 2003: 152). Similar acts had already been in action in neighbouring Cochin and in British territories for some years. This Act 'prohibited' the employment of women for at least four weeks after their deliveries, and that all such 'confined' workers would be eligible for maternity benefit at the rate of about 0.5 rupee a day for every day she was absent from work immediately before and following confinement.[37] Such legislation was also intended to shape

'healthy' mothers and children; and consequently increasing productivity, both economic and procreative.

The Transformation of 'Defective' Children: School Medical Inspections

Childhood has been conceptualised as the space where 'adult experiments' were undertaken in order to 'satisfy the grandest of national aspirations' (Bose 1995: 120). One of these experiments was through medicine, which sought to transform and to protect the new generation from the detrimental "old practices and corrupting influences" (Bose 1995: 120). Modernity and national 'progress' was conceived of as conditional on the maintenance of 'proper' habits of child rearing, dietary habits, hygiene and nutrition, among others. The child became the locus of state action and mothers had become central to this enterprise; as did schools. Travancore's commitment to the transformation of the child is evident in a speech given by a Dewan of Travancore in 1919, which commented that education should be provided under conditions that 'favoured the health of pupils.' In order to achieve this healthy 'citizen-subject', the body and all the senses required honing and training; in order to extract "in the fullness of time, good men, men of character and morals, and useful and exemplary citizens."[38] The school in Travancore, as in the Western world, became both laboratory and experiment - here the body of the child was analysed, experimented upon and transformed (Armstrong 2002: 48). But, equally, the child within the school premises was transformed by training in the precepts of Western medicine and sanitary science.

School medical inspections had emerged as a common feature of the wider sanitary regimes of the late 1800s and the early 1900s and they offer fascinating insights into the social project of transforming 'defective' children and 'constructing' healthy children. The broad spectrum of numerous child welfare policies which had emerged in Britain in the late 1800s and early 1900s were deeply influenced by the perceived need for the state's intervention to guarantee children's welfare and rights in the adult world, linked to the emerging interest in promoting social and economic 'efficiency'. School medical inspections had

been supported with the contention that continuing to provide a basic education for unhealthy children was an unconscionable waste of resources; it was therefore necessary that the state step in and ensure that Britain raised healthy generations of children 'if we desire to keep our place in the civilised world.' (Harris 2003: 94). The school medical service in early twentieth century Travancore, however, served the additional purpose of allowing the state to 'transform' the bodies of young children into their image of the 'modern' Travancorean.

Travancore's schools (and particularly Western style schools) served as a prominent signal of the state's often-cited commitment to the cause of modernising its population, in addition to being mechanisms for learning. An additional, but very important, process that took place in school sites was the school medical inspection which was part of the efforts towards the development of the individual child into "healthy, respectable and self-supporting citizen" (Gleason 2005: 287). Such inspections were conditioned by ideas of contagious disease transmission in addition to dominant ideas of sanitation and hygiene; thus exposing entire generations to Western systems of medicine. The relative isolation of the school from the perceptions, attitudes and prejudices of families permitted the functioning of the school as a laboratory of sorts, where the body of the child was subjected to assessment, analysis, transformation, regulation and experimentation (Armstrong 1993).

Although school medical inspections had been conducted intermittently in earlier years, it was only in 1936-36 that the government put into operation an official, initially experimental, scheme to conduct 'proper medical inspection of school children'. The Travancore Education Reforms Committee expressed an 'imperative need' for a school medical inspection service as it was 'essential for the preservation of the health of the school children' (Pillai 1940: 809). A combined effort of the Education, Medical and Public Health Departments, this system was put into effect in 1936. Eight Assistant Surgeons were transferred out of the Medical Department into the Public Health Department specifically to conduct systematic and routine school medical inspections.[39]

These school medical inspectors were expected to conduct complete physical examinations of all students, notify parents of any 'defects' in their children, treat such 'defective' students at the nearest district hospital or government dispensary, procure specialist care for 'defects' as the case may require, conduct follow up of 'defective' cases by re-visiting schools around six weeks after the initial visit, inspect the sanitary condition of the schools and to provide health education for school students (Pillai 1940: 809). Afternoon meals were being distributed among school children. Attempts were also made to track students who had been reported as having been reported 'defective' in the previous year and attempt to take some action.[40]

This program was proclaimed as an unmitigated success by the state, as it revealed the health status of the next generation of citizens of Travancore in addition to highlighting the specific health needs of this particular population. For instance, the poor nutritional status of several of the children was repeatedly pointed out during inspections (Pillai 1940: 810). This system of school medical inspection was the norm until 1948, when the government decreed that the entire process was overhauled in order to ensure better coordination between departments and that the 'curative aspect should not be neglected'. School medical work became a part of the activities of doctors stationed in state hospitals and dispensaries.

The results of these systematic school inspections were classified into 'healthy' and 'defective' - in the first year, out of the 28769 students examined, close to half were found 'defective'. The primary conditions for which medical inspectors deemed children 'defective' were 'Affection of tonsils', 'Malnutrition', 'Defective teeth', 'Defective vision', 'Diseases of the skin', 'Malnutrition' and 'Anaemia'. Among the girls' institutions, these medical inspectors had noticed a higher prevalence of anemia, in spite of lower prevalence of malnutrition compared to male children.[41] Other commonly observed 'defects' among the children were helminthic infections such as hookworm and roundworm.[42]

There is the strong taint of early twentieth century eugenics discourses in Travancore's reports of 'defective' and 'healthy'

children (Cornell 2008: 388). While race and ethnicity were often blamed for producing 'defects' in children, in Travancore, these 'defects' were considered the result of the ignorance of the pre-requisites and conditions for the 'modern' body. Very aware that medical inspections captured the attention of schoolchildren at an 'impressionable' age, the state actively encouraged the prac-tice of teaching habits of 'hygienic ways of living' and 'health hab-its', arguing that they would be imbibed quickly and effectively. Significant focus was therefore given to health education during the school medical inspections.[43] Lectures were conducted within the schools on practices of "health and hygiene with particular bearing on the health of school children".[44] 'Health plays' were being conducted in schools, with messages on health, hygiene and nutrition (Pillai 1940: 811). The talks on health habits were also attended by the parents of the schoolchildren on the school premises.[45] Children were also assessed on their 'health habits' with a monthly score card, which was supposed to be very effec-tive.[46] Schoolteachers were targeted for a routine vacation course on hygiene from 1941 onwards.[47]   Aside from schoolchildren, Travancore's adult education institutions also taught a course content of which included health, hygiene and first aid topics (Balakrishnan and Dubey 2008: 115).

Schools were not merely a site for state assessment of health status, but also a very important site for state interventions in public health. After identifying the health problems of the school children, the sub-assistant surgeons who conducted these rou-tine examinations also provided some limited treatment for the students at the schools. For instance, the state had made some arrangements for the conveyance charges of poor children who required specialist care, as discovered through the school medi-cal inspections, to Kottayam and Trivandrum for further treatment. Opthalmo-logists also visited different rural areas at least once in two months to treat cases of 'defective vision'.

The state also utilised school medical inspections to enforce potentially controversial public health policies, such as smallpox vaccination. Schools were an un-supervised space where the state could impose its will on the bodies of children in the absence of the apprehensions, fears or hesitation of guardians/

parents. Although introduced as early as 1805, vaccination had a distinctly uneven record in Travancore despite numerous public avowals of the policy. This was part of the motivation for the proclamation of 1879-80, according to which vaccination became an essential criterion for admission to state schools. All incoming students were asked to produce vaccination certificates and vaccination was also an essential criterion for all students remaining in school (Pillai 1940: 531). By the beginning of the twentieth century, children were regularly vaccinated and verified by vaccinators on the premises of state and state-aided schools.[49] Similarly, vaccinators were able to assess the vulnerable populations of unvaccinated children in state funded and aided schools.[50] School children appearing for the School final examinations were also made to undergo vaccination.[51] School medical inspections were thus used to assess populations vulnerable to smallpox as well as the uptake of vaccination among young age groups.

The Emergence of Group Identity in Public Health Spaces

Public health, which was inextricably associated with the superiority of Western science and the narrative of modernity, was integral to the processes through which the state began to formulate its own identity within the state and in relation to others. While in locations such as colonial Madras, or in the United Kingdom, public health served the dual purpose of protecting population health (and indirectly contributing to the state exchequer) as well as allowing the state to re-cast itself as an entity committed to population welfare, in places like Travancore, public health served the additional purpose of indicating to (usually colonial) observers the states' commitment to the dual causes of development and 'modernity'. Since the late 1800s, Travancore had conceived of its nascent public health infrastructure as one of its most prominent claims to modernity; as evident throughout the Travancore Administration Reports, where the state opened its remarks on the state of the public health with a eulogy on the progression of Western medicine through the 1800s in Travancore. The reports continually attribute the 'European system of medical aid' to the 'enlightened reign' of Her Highness

Gouri Lakshmi Bhai. By the 1920s, the state was routinely declaring that it was the "long established policy of the Government (to) see that proper medical aid is placed within the reach of all classes of people."[52]

Medicine and public health both possessed considerable inherent potential for contributing to the articulation and imagining of group culture or identity. For instance, the collective and coherent responses of a group to a particular public health policy (such as smallpox vaccination, for instance) or their utilisation of services aided in building a sense of community across region and class. In nineteenth century England, for instance, the furore around the Compulsory Vaccination Act among the working classes "helped to reorganise working class identities around the vulnerable body." Unlike middle and upper middle class objectors to vaccination, the working class objection to vaccination was predicated on the belief that compulsory vaccination was a direct and immediate threat to their bodies. The Compulsory Vaccination Acts served as an "extreme example of class legislation," a reaffirmation of extant class structures, a rallying point for the classes and brought together groups under the classification of the 'respectable working classes' as opposed to the tyrannical and elite upper classes (Durbach 2000).

I argue that key public health policies had also afforded groups in Travancore in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the space to imagine and communicate their collective identity. For many communities, their 'identities' had been the product of complex religious and caste dogma and the relation of these communities to others. At the advent of modern governmentality in the princely state of Travancore, it became more difficult for individuals and groups to continue to use their religious/caste identities pragmatically within the state; particularly as a platform for resisting the policies of the ruling elites. At the turn of the twentieth century, these communities had begun to forge identities based on distinct, different criteria founded around the ideas of modernity in addition to pre-existing criteria of caste and religion. The demands and requirements of colonial modernity urged communities to re-think and re-fashion themselves into groups which 'fit' better into the new social and economic structures emerging

in Travancore and into entities which were more distinct and individual from each other than before. This is where public health-as-strategy-for-identification becomes important. Public health served as a standard of certain aspects of identity: response to public health policy, for instance, permitted groups/individuals to demonstrate how 'modern' they were, particularly as groups struggled to distinguish themselves from others and to prove their relative 'modernity'. Other groups had also begun to utilise the spaces offered by public health policy to forge new 'modern' identities for themselves within the twentieth century state.

Confronted with controversial policies of limited efficiency, such as smallpox vaccination, some groups had, at least initially, chosen to reinforce powerful religious and caste identifiers and vigorously opposed state vaccination efforts (Nair 2010). The Namboothiris for instance, resisted vaccination because of the use of humanised lymph harvested from young children belonging to the 'lower castes' and the affronts afforded to community ideas of bodily purity and ritual pollution by the practice of arm-to-arm vaccination (Pillai 1940a: 506-7). Further, Namboothiris resisted the vaccination of the females of their community, the *Antarjanam*, who were not to be seen by unrelated individuals. Their 'purity' was ferociously guarded by most Namboodiris, which meant that most state vaccinators seeking to vaccinate the *Antarjanam* were refused access. Although vaccination numbers among the Namboodiris rose after the introduction of calf lymph, this community remained very voluble in their resistance to vaccination and continued to mount campaigns against the policy. The *Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha* even passed an official resolution opposing vaccination against smallpox in 1909.[53] Even in the instance of far less controversial provisions, such as the women's and children's hospitals and wards in larger general hospitals, religion and caste identity defined acceptance and utilisation of Western medicine and public health.

Several communities engaged with smallpox vaccination, for instance, as a tool with which to establish themselves within the new landscape of the modern state as modern, progressive and adaptable. For instance, the Christian population were

reported to be the best vaccinated in all of Travancore; compared to both Hindus and Muslims. Due in large part to the work of missionaries and missionary doctors, vaccination had become associated with the narrative of indomitable, scientific, Western progress. Christians also actively participated in the burgeoning public health/medical system as doctors, nurses and midwives trained in 'Western' medicine, as opposed to 'traditional' indigenous medicine. For instance, by the late 1920s, the more than half the nurses working in the Travancore Medical Department were reported as Christians.[54] Other groups besides Christians also sought careers in the health services. Even as early as 1868, there were Nair women recruited for training and later employed as obstetric nurses by the Travancore Medical Department.[55] By 1896, six adolescent Nair girls were employed as smallpox vaccinators, speaking volumes about the acceptability of careers in public health by this date.[56] By the 1930s, Travancore employed more than 90 midwives and 14 women doctors, many of them, to be sure, Christians, but a proportion from matrilineal Hindu families (Harigovindan 1999).

Other traditionally disadvantaged groups such as the Pulayas too used public health policy to mint their new, 'modern' identities; although to a lesser extent. Even as early as the 1860s, some among the Pulayas were also utilising existing structures of public health for socioeconomic mobility, which was facilitated to some degree by the state itself. For instance, some members of this community were entered as free students into the compounders and midwives classes.[57] Even as early as the 1860s, Pulaya men had been recruited into the nascent public health system of Travancore to assist in the vaccination efforts among groups such as the Hill Tribes.

Conclusion

This paper underlines how important medicine is as a discourse through which identity/identities are shaped and transformed. Health was always central to sustaining the enterprise of modernity; and through the complex apparatus of public health and medicine, which the state 'compos(ed) forces in order to obtain an efficient machine', the modern body was conceived,

achieved and maintained from the 'defective', 'abnormal', unproductive and 'unhealthy' pre-modern body (Foucault 1991: 164). With the emergence of the 'biopower', the body was regulated and disciplined in schools, through media, public health policy and ideological shifts. The emerging capitalist society of Travancore allied to the increasingly powerful bureaucratic state identified the body as essential to its needs and requirements; and the body thus becomes the site of an increasing number of interventions and policies. What I argue here is that in the process of regulating and disciplining the body, there emerged spaces where public health and modern medicine were also used to articulate individual/group identity.

For instance, with and through the increasing exposure to Western medicine, the idea of the healthy and 'normal' citizen, who in turn was essential to 'modernity' in Travancore, was framed and enunciated. The history of the Public Health Education Unit illustrates how the state used health propaganda to increase the association of (Western) medicine with modernity and progress, in addition to improved health. We are able to observe how the state imposed itself on female identity/identities through polices such as the Maternal and Child Welfare Programs of the 1920s which contributed to the essentialisation of 'womens's health' 'to maternal health', the de-sexualisation of women and the emergence of the 'procreative' female body as crucial pre-conditions for the modernisation of the state (Devika 2009). Further, fashioning 'motherhood' out of biological maternity was one of the most critical steps in modernising the Travancorean family to adapt and contribute to a modern society/economy. Travancore's burgeoning interest in maternal and child health was therefore aimed to the transformation of the family from within; as well as to ensure a productive next generation of citizens.

As this paper deals exclusively with the role of the state, I have not engaged at all with other, non-state actors who may have contributed to this process of crafting of the modern body-notably, civil society and the Rockefeller Foundation. The latter in particular had been most active in this region in the years under consideration in this paper, and this may prove a fruitful avenue for future research.

Notes:

1. Tamil Nadu State Archives (Hereafter TNSA), Surgeon General's Records Volume 20, 296-7, Letter from George Garrow Accountant General to the Medical Board, 14 November 1814.

2. Travancore Administration Report (TAR hereafter), 1925-26: 122.

3. TAR, 1933-34: 180.

4. *Ibid*: 181.

5. *Ibid.*

6. TAR 1925-36: 129.

7. Report on the Administration of Cochin, 1114 ME, 150.

8. TAR, 1936-37: 196; TAR, 1938-39: 178.

9. *Ibid.*

10. TAR, 1935-56: 193.

11. TAR, 1938-39: 178.

12. TAR, 1933-34: 187.

13. Kerala State Archives (KSA hereafter), Bundle 202, SL No 59, File No 367, 1922.

14. TAR, 1934-35: 202

15. TAR, 1934-35: 201.

16. TAR, 1933-34: 187.

17. TAR, 1947-48: 196.

18. Administration Report of the Public Health Department for the Year 1124 ME, Trivandrum: Government Press, 1950: 20

19. Administration Report of the Public Health Department for the Year 1124 ME, Trivandrum: Government Press, 1950: 20.

20. Administration Report of the Public Health Department for the Year 1124 ME, Trivandrum: Government Press, 1950: 20.

21. TAR, 1936-37: 196.

22. *Ibid,*

23   TAR, 1942-43: 138.

24   'Motherhood' here is used to represent the 'proper, nurturing' condition Allman distinguished from 'biological maternity' (Allman 1994).

25   TAR, 1925-26: 122.

26   TAR, 1925-26: 123.

27   TAR, 1925-26: 123.

28   KSA, Cover Files, Letter from the Durbar Physician to the Dewan, 23 October 1903.

29   TAR, 1933-34: 186; TAR 1935-36: 196.

30   TAR, 1943-44: 136.

31   KSA, Bundle 220, SL No 930, File No 36, 1926.

32   TAR, 1939-40: 163.

33   TAR, 1947-48: 145.

34   TAR, 1947-48: 145.

35   TAR, 1947-48: 145-6.

36   TAR, 1940-41: 164-5.

37   *The Acts and Proclamations of Travancore, 1117-1118,* Vol XIII, Part I: 750.

38   From *Occasional Speeches Delivered by Dewan Bahadur M. Krishnan Nair, 1916-1920,* Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1920, 87-88.

39   TAR, 1935-36: 197.

40   Administration Report of the Public Health Department for the Year 1124 ME, Trivandrum: Government Press, 1950: 22.

41   *Ibid.*

42   TAR, 1942-43: 137.

43   TAR, 1938-39: 178.

44   TAR, 1939-40: 162

45   TAR, 1942-43: 137.

46   TAR, 1939-40: 162.

47 TAR, 1942-43: 138; TAR 1947-48: 145. In addition to teachers being instructed in hygiene, prison officers were also trained, as part of the Jail Officers' Test.

48 TAR, 1936-37: 195.

49 KSA, General Section Files, Bundle 126, SL No 2508, File VII-13/4, 1089 ME.

50 Report on the Administration of Cochin, 1074 ME, 66.

51 KSA, General Section Files, Bundle No 203, S.L No 115, File No 637/GA, Date 5/7/1922

52 TAR, 1925-26: 122.

53 http://www.namboothiri.com/articles/yogakshemasabha.htm (Accessed on 29 October 2010)

54 Travancore Legislative Assembly Proceedings, Volume 8, p.1926.

55 Travancore Government Gazette, New Series, vol. 9, no. 9 (14 March 1871)

56 Durbar Physician to the Dewan, 6 November 1894, Travancore Government English Records, Cover No. 2698 (Kerala Secretariat in 1971).

57 KSA, General Files, Bundle 202, SL 43, File number 260, 1922.

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Remembering the Prostitute: Unsettling Imaginations of Sexuality

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This paper examines pre-1990s political and cultural events on the representation of the prostitute in Kerala, specifically the death of sex worker Kunjibi in 1987 and the Avalude Ravukal (Her Nights 1978) debate, to track the ruptured histories of sexuality in Kerala. How does the prostitute figure become visible and recognizable within shifting frames of reception that operate in an affective public sphere? Realism and human rights are two of the rhetorical forms within which representations of the prostitute can gain legitimacy in the present. But human rights documents, couched in the language of realism, often move into the territories of melodrama and pornography. The diffuse networks of circulation of a cult film and a political event staged on the violated body of the prostitute both signal the anxious attempts in the public sphere to control ways of seeing cultural texts. The paper analyzes how marginal sexual figures are constitutive of the unruly public sphere, even as they are marked as excessive and improper.
Keywords: *Sexuality, prostitute figure, sexual events, Avalude Ravukal, Kunjibi.*

Two Sexual Events

A film poster of a young woman dressed in a flimsy white shirt that clings to her body. Wet hair scattered around her face as she pulls up the shirt to examine a scratch on her thigh. Glass bangles on her hands. Bend eyes that do not meet the viewer's gaze.

A black and white news photograph of a woman's dead body in a police lock-up. Her sari forms the noose around her neck. The camera is positioned behind her body. Dangling feet and a long strand of plaited hair meet the viewer's eyes.

These are two images that have an iconic value in the public sphere of Kerala -- they are controversial visual texts that become the center of two foundational events on sexuality in pre-90s Kerala. The film poster is from I. V. Sasi's cult film *Avalude Ravuka*l (Her Nights, 1978) on the life of a struggling prostitute. This film was a huge hit at the time of its release in Kerala and there are multiple, contentious circuits through which it has lived on in public memory. This is one of the most notorious films produced by the Malayalam film industry, perceived as being responsible for launching soft-porn cinema as a genre in the nation. But the film undergoes a dramatic transformation in its public positioning as it is recouped as a realist depiction of the life of a struggling prostitute in the post-90s period. The news-photograph is of the death of a prostitute, Kunjibi, under police custody in 1987. The Kunjibi case resulted in organized protests that resonate in Kerala history. Bodhana, the feminist organization that lead this protest has been renamed as Anweshi, and is still one of the prominent feminist organizations in Kerala. Kunjibi case is a milestone because it is one of the first political incidents in the history of Kerala that positioned the prostitute as the central figure of feminist mobilization.

Since 'event' is a term that has multiple usages and theoretical implications let me explain in what particular ways I invoke it in this paper. The sexual events I examine can be mainly classified into two groups: (1) political events that have at their center the question of sexuality, such as the Kunjibi murder case, (2) cultural-texts which become events because of their tumultuous circulation in the public sphere. Thus 'event', as I use it, does not refer to a spontaneous, mass-scale occurrence — that changes the trajectory of a nation or a region. Nor does it refer to a staged performance — for an audience, as the term would be used in Performance Studies. My use of 'event' refers to texts and 'real' happenings that circulate and get sedimented in the public sphere. These events are valuable because they

provide a node through which I can explore how possibilities of difference and resistance are kept alive in spite of violent, regulatory mechanisms of gender and sexuality. They have an illuminatory power to show the process of containment and excess at work within discourses of sexuality.

Drawing on my larger research project,[1] in this paper I examine certain pre-90s political and cultural events on the representation of the prostitute, specifically the death of Kunjibi in 1987 and the *Avalude Ravukal* debate, to raise these questions: What are the ruptured histories of sexuality in Kerala? How can we track this through the sexually charged network of cultural practices? How does the prostitute figure become visible and recognizable within shifting frames of reception that operate in an affective public sphere? Realism and human rights are two of the rhetorical forms within which representations of the prostitute can gain legitimacy in the present. But I show how human rights documents, couched in the language of realism, often move into the territories of melodrama and pornography. I examine how the charged cultural sites that produce the prostitute figure disturb the ideals of femininity and sexuality foundational to the regional identity of Kerala.

My primary interest is to track the process of figuration, i.e. the workings of visual and cultural production that posits certain recognizable sexual icons in the popular imaginary of Kerala. It is in the mediated zone of contact between viewing and reading publics and cultural events that figures take shape. Thus the material, affective process of circulation and reception of cultural texts is central to the formation of figures. While the domestic woman occupies the privileged position in Kerala, other sexual figures such as the prostitute have a long, shifting history of representation. These marginal sexual figures are constitutive of the unruly public sphere, even as they are marked as excessive and improper.

The ambiguities and contradictions in the circulation of *Avalude Ravukal* and the Kunjibi case make it productive to read them in conjunction with each other. These are both cultural occurrences from the past that have afterlives in the present and I

examine the political significance of the process of remember-ing; a process I also participate in as a researcher. The diffuse networks of circulation of a cult film and a political event staged on the violated body of the prostitute, both signal the anxious at-tempts in the public sphere to control ways of seeing cultural texts. There are contradictory affective responses and textual codes that are straddled by the representation of these two public events. There are also significant differences in the positioning of the prostitute figure within print and film cultures. But for the norma-tive order to be maintained it is essential to sanitize and control multiple mediums, codes of representation and modes of recep-tion. My focus on the detailed analysis of the recent past through a vernacular archive also questions the nostalgia for an organic, fluid pre-colonial past and the quick celebration of post-global-ization representations of sexuality. Between the romanticized past of *Kamasutra* and the global-radicalism of Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1998), there are multiple unsettling imaginations of sexuality in the recent past in India, that are alive in the public memory, and we can locate this only if we look closely at regional cultural pro-duction.

The Walls Feel Ashamed

> As this film became a major hit in theaters in Kerala it was also released in the big city of Madras. The walls of this major city were adorned with posters of Raji ex-amining the scratch on her thighs. […] At that point I wrote that this girl who came from the Kerala coast is destroying the respectability of the walls of Tamil Nadu. Malayalees there have to bend their heads in shame. If these walls had life they would have shooed this girl away (Sreedharan 1999: 3).

At the time of its release, *Avalude Ravukal* was lampooned as a disgraceful film that soiled the name of Kerala as a region. Journalist and film critic, E. V. Sreedharan's comment captures the anxiety about how this film tarnished the good name of Kerala in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. It is not just the people of Kerala who are ashamed by this film poster, but he claims that

even the inanimate walls of Madras city would have come alive and remonstrated against the indecent exposure. It was labeled as an immoral film that aims to titillate and gross money through the sexualized representation of the female body. But since the late 1990s, the film has been recouped as a bold, progressive portrayal of the subaltern prostitute. In 1999, E.V. Sreedharan backtracked and critiqued his own hyperbolic report on the film, "The Walls Feel Ashamed," written in 1978.

In the film, a Hindu woman from a working class background loses her parents at a young age and enters into prostitution as a means of survival. Actress Seema as Rajamma (Raji), the outspoken prostitute in this black and white film, is one of the most remembered characters in Malayalam screen history.[2] Raji uses her earnings to support herself and her younger brother. The film shows her everyday struggles as she works as a prostitute who has sex with men in hotels and other semi-public spaces. During the course of the film her younger brother dies through police torture. The school teacher, who is indirectly responsible for her brother's death, tries to have a sexual relationship with her, but she refuses his advances. Her object of love is Babu, an MA English literature student, who lives close to her house. She seduces him, but also refuses to have sex with him without romantic involvement. Throughout the course of the film he does not reciprocate her declarations of romantic love, but towards the end of the film in a dramatic turnaround he decides to marry her. The film ends with her entry into an upper-caste domestic setting, but the narrative focuses on her life as a prostitute. Manjunath Pendakur in his article on the role of censorship in Indian cinema mentions *Avalude Ravukal* as a film that could "push the limits of allowability by providing morally acceptable endings" (Pendakur 2003: 76). He quotes the director I. V. Sasi's comment that he had to reshoot the ending of the film because the censors refused to give the film a certificate "unless there was a happy ending. They wanted the hero to marry the prostitute, even though it went against the grain of the film and the prostitute's character" (*cf*. Pendakur 2003: 76). The history of circulation of the film and its textual codes marked by sexual excess demonstrates how the film retained its moral ambiguities

in spite of the censor board's attempts to control the diegetic flow of the film. The public debate around the film, staged primarily through the print media, from its time of release to the present draws attention to the irresolvable tensions and anxieties in its modes of reception.

The prostitute as a figure has a long history in Kerala and there are certain accepted modes through which this figure can be represented in literature or on screen. Often the prostitute is positioned as an emblem of exploitation, a victim of social inequality who deserves sympathy and not chastisement. For example, P. A. Bakkar's *Chuvanna Vithukal* (Red Seeds or Seeds of a Revolution, 1977), a story about two sisters caught in the net of prostitution and police harassment, won much appreciation in the state. The main actress, Shantakumari, was given a State Award in the best actress category. The moral anxiety that *Avalude Ravukal* evoked is linked to the commercial success of the film and its huge popularity in states outside Kerala. The disapproval it generated is based on the characterization of popular cinema as a mass medium that may appeal to all sections of society, unlike Bakkar's film which is labeled as 'art cinema' that is made for judicious consumption by an 'educated' audience. *Avalude Ravukal* was decried as a titillating, skin-show at the time of its release and given an 'A' (Adults Only) certificate by the censor board.[3] Shereef, the screenplay writer, recollects the opposition the film encountered during the time of its production:

> When the film was completed and previewed in Madras all the reigning kings of Malayalam cinema predicted that people would tear apart the seats in the theater if we took this film to Kerala. The film was banned by the censor board. Then it was after much difficulty that [the producer] Ramachandran got permission for exhibiting the film (Shereef 1999: 4).

Thus during the preview the prediction was that the 'enlightened audience' of Kerala would violently disapprove of a titillating portrayal of a prostitute's life. But contrary to such expectations, the film was a big hit in Kerala and in other states in India. The film is consistently mentioned in discussions about Malayalam

cinema's investment in the production of soft-porn films.[4] In 1978, an article in the popular, national film magazine *Film Fare* uses *Avalude Ravukal* as an example of how Malayalam cinema was becoming increasingly sex-oriented.[5] It mentions how this film was a box-office hit in the neighbouring state of Karnataka and how it changed filmgoers' taste to such an extent that even people who could not understand the language flocked to the theater to watch the film ("Show All, Tell All"1978: 10). In the *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* the editors describe it as, "originally a poignant if sexually explicit love story featuring an orphan brother and sister, notorious in a dubbed version titled *Her Nights*" (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1994: 192). This notoriety that the film gained in the first two decades, both through its national and regional reception, plays a significant role in its cult status in public memory.

Since the late 1990s, there is a renewed interest in the film *Avalude Ravukal* and attempts have been made to retrieve it as a bold portrayal of a prostitute that was far ahead of its times.[6] In 1999, two decades after the release of film, the screenplay of *Avalude Ravukal* was published for the first time by Imprint Books. In the preface to the book, screenplay writer Shereef reminiscences about apprehensions concerning the making of a film on a prostitute's life, a film "that was not suitable for a family audience, sex, anti-sentimental" (Shereef 1999: 2). But the publication of the screenplay was to him a testimony that the film had outlived such fears and found a place in the public sphere of Kerala. E.V. Sreedharan, the journalist who attacked the film tooth and nail at the time of its release, wrote the preface for this edition of the screenplay in which he regrets his earlier lack of judgment: "when *Avalude Ravukal* was released in 1978 I did not have any faith in that film. But today not only do I have faith in the film, but I also believe that we should seriously examine the human-interest issue put forward by the film in 1978" (Sreedharan 1999: 1).

In 2004, almost twenty five years after the theater release of *Avalude Ravukal*, Mathrubhumi books, released a new edition of the screenplay. "This film was the story of a *thevadisi* (prostitute) in the language of those days, in today's language it would

be described as the life-story of a sex worker," observes film critic Premchand in the introduction to this edition of the screenplay (Premchand 2004: 9). This shift in terminology points to the changing position of the prostitute. By the 1990s the discussion on sex work in Kerala entered a different phase because of the emergence of the sex worker as a target of governance and a participant in global AIDS awareness and prevention programs. From the vantage point of these new developments, *Avalude Ravukal* is recast as a progressive text. The two screenplays showcase the critical attempts to re-vision this film as a valuable cultural product in the post-90s context when the sex worker has a new position in the Kerala public sphere.

But in spite of this changing political debate on the question of sex work the aesthetic categories used to judge the films has not shifted radically. Critics who assert the artistic value of *Avalude Ravukal*, like Premchand and E.V. Sreedharan, erase the sexual scenes in the film even as they celebrate its powerful appeal through the use of realism. Premchand argues that this film outlived many other films which were hailed by critics and film-historians as 'good cinema' and sees this as a revolutionary move against the reified institution of film history and criticism which does not reflect the 'mind of the public' (3). But, he does not question the seamless link between realism and good cinema. The film acquires value for him when it is watched not for 'obscene pleasures' (5), but for its faithful representation of marginal lives. There is a circularity in the argument here, because though the object of attention is a film that has a long history of circulation as soft-porn, the critical tools that are used to analyze it does not move out of the binary divide between good and bad cinema, were good cinema is what comes in the realist mode. It is clear that what is perceived as the pornographic in *Avalude Ravukal* has to be actively denied in order to recoup this film, and it is important to understand what is at stake in this disavowal.

There is also an implicit distinction between two kinds of audience being made by film critics, the unenlightened audience who sees the film through a smutty gaze and sensitive viewers who can read a political message in the film, the film demands

'a new viewing eye -- an eye that can recognize life's misery' (Sreedharan 1999: 4). This is in keeping with Madhava Prasad's argument that realist cinema is marked by a secure positioning for the viewer who can be a distanced, 'sympathetic consumer' (Prasad 1998: 204) of the spectacle of suffering. When Sreedharan calls on the viewer who can see life's misery, it is this detached vision of the secure, spectatorial position of realist cinema that he evokes. These strategies of distanciation can be applied to classic realist films in Malayalam, but a film like *Avalude Ravukal*, because of its conflicting textual codes and diffuse modes of circulation, produces an inherently unstable viewing position. The motivation to fix the gaze of the spectator as a realist one is also a reflection on the need to sanitize the regional space of Kerala as one in which the figure of the prostitute is viewed only through a distant, rational gaze, not smudged by desire or titillation. But the anxiety engendered by Raji's graphic image on the film poster does not quite go away. In the volatile public sphere there is the nagging concern that it might not be the right eyes watching in the right way. The contradictory affective responses and codes straddled by the film text and extratextual materials signal the unstable, incomplete attempts in the public sphere to control ways of seeing cultural texts.

Film theorists have argued that cinema is pivotal to the making of the modern nation because realism as a form calls forth on the legal, rights bearing citizen subject as its addressee: 'realism […] is a mode of cultural production that is tied to the fiction of the social contract. The legal citizen-subject of the modern capitalist state is its only possible addressee' (Prasad 1998: 196). Thus realist cinema is tied to the imagination of a bourgeois public sphere made up of individual subjects who have a controlled gaze. But, Prasad highlights the constant compromise and negotiation between realism and melodrama as social and aesthetic forms in Asia, 'the persistence and dominance of the melodramatic mode in Asia, by contrast to its steady absorption into the realist framework in the West' (Prasad 2001: 2). The popularity of a film like *Avalude Ravukal* points to the conception of the public which does not fit into the mould of rationality, a public whose intimacy with the screen is visceral and unbound. Track-

ing the history of the cinematic medium in India, Rajadhyaksha observes how institutions of social governance from the early years of cinema have noted the social and economic conse- quences of cinematic 'excess' and how 'cinematic exchanges trigger off something that can spill over into extra-textual and other social spaces' (Rajadhyaksha 2009: 7). He argues that a particular kind of public is produced through celluloid by the twin regulatory mechanisms of containment and excess, containment being a formal requirement for the film frame and a social requirement of the movie theater (Rajadhyaksha 2009: 7). While Rajadhyaksha is focused on the unstable public engagement with celluloid, I analyze how excess and containment is a process through which all cultural production takes place and tracking these tensions produces a ruptured, representational genealogy of sexuality in Kerala. The debates and shifting trajectories of the reception of *Avalude Ravukal* point to the murky zones of the public sphere were the figure of the prostitute is not always met with a rational, controlled viewing response. In the post-90s context, as this film is re-viewed, there are vehement attempts to contain it as a real- ist text that demands a distant sympathetic viewer. But this is contrary to both the textual codes of the film[7] and also the more diffuse circuits of its reception.

Policing the Social Body

The heterogeneous strands of *Avalude Ravukal* and its dif- fuse modes of circulation over a span of time, challenges fixed assumptions about the category of soft-porn cinema. Publicity materials like posters have different modes of circulation from the film itself. Elements of the film like the songs and the screenplay can become unmoored from the film and acquire a more respect- able status. From the 1990s onwards, *Avalude Ravukal* has been available in VHS and VCD format; it has been shown on Malayalam television channels and clips of the film are available on You Tube and on Malayalam cinema websites. The concep- tion of the audience as a body of people who watch a film in the theater is broken prior to the video, TV and DVD revolution be- cause a film's publicity is staged primarily outside the theater. The debate around this film suggests a more dispersed realm through

which a film circulates, so much so that an 'A film' that is meant primarily for a male audience can enter the mindscape of a child or of women. If one takes into consideration the publicity materials and the songs,[8] which includes one that belongs to the most feminine of all genres, the lullaby sung in a maternal voice, then the reasons for its popularity points to the particular modes of circulation of cinema as a heterogeneous medium that can cut across gender and age barriers, even as movie going practices may have excluded women from going to a theatre to watch an 'A film'

Figure 1: Frame-grab from *Avalude Ravukal* (1978): The material for the controversial film-poster

There is an imagined audience that is projected when censors give this film an 'A' certificate and a journalist comments that: "[T]his was the first time a Malayalam film had a poster like this. The women of Kerala saw the poster, said 'chee' with a slight smile and bend their head in shame. But male desires were inflamed by this poster" (Sreedharan 1999: 2). In this statement there is a conjuring up of a social body, consisting of men and women, who should be protected from such a shameful or titil-

lating poster. This anxiety about the affective pull of film posters is played out in the discussion about the poster for *Avalude Ravukal* which is seen as irredeemable and as the most disgraceful aspect of the film's publicity. The theater is marked off as a dark space to which people go on their own volition to watch films and there are gradations between theaters that are more 'family-oriented' and those that are dominated by men, but the poster which accosts the viewers in public spaces has a ubiquity which is the cause of more anxiety.

This film creates a debate about representational forms, specifically the links between the visual and literary mediums and the possible responses elicited by these two forms. The link between literature and cinema is made in *Avalude Ravukal* within the diegesis of the film through Raji's love for literature. Her intellectual capability and depth of thinking is demonstrated when she refers to her reading practices in a conversation with Babu. Babu is awed by her insights and says that though he is a student of English Literature, he does not have the ability to think like her. The film posits a 'reading prostitute' to demonstrate that she deserved to be far above her situation.[9] This turn to literature as a site of moral upliftment is mirrored in the reception of the film also. The preface to the first edition of the screenplay ends with the exhortation that this screenplay is sure to give reading pleasure to the audience and therefore it deserves to enter into the realm of 'Literature' (Sreedharan 1999: 4). The initial form of the film in its verbal format becomes the core that is resurrected to claim a new position for the film.

Sreedharan reclaims the film-script as a tragic narrative that captured the 'scent of real life,' but he holds on to his opinion that the poster for the film was an offensive one (Sreedharan 1999: 4). He does a comparative reading of the film sequence and the poster depiction of the 'seduction sequence'. In the film Raji comes out after a bath wearing Babu's white shirt, and stands before him rubbing a scar on her thigh muttering, 'when I jumped over the gate, the nail scratched me'. He argues that screenplay places this act within a narrative, but the poster functions as pure image and divorced from the realist appeal of the film, it aims only at titillation. Thus the screenplay brings *Avalude Ravukal* closer to a realist

text to be appreciated by the right kind of audience. While the image runs the risk of being misused by a larger public, 'attracted to the nudity and sexuality of the body being sold' (Sreedharan 1999: 4). The film sequence is seen as woven into a narrative and therefore addressing a thinking spectator who can make these diegetic connections, while the poster as an iconic visual image is perceived as made for surface-level, sensory consumption. Here again the visual image is associated with dangerous, bodily excesses of the cinematic medium, while the verbal in the form of the narrative and dialogue reins it in and calls for a controlled, rational viewing practice.

Avalude Ravukal strategically recalls other instances of cultural production in Kerala, which created a debate on what can be the subject matter of art. Raji mentions her fascination for the writing of Vaikom Mohammed Basheer during her first visit to Babu's house, but the more direct link between her life and Basheer's writing is established when the police come to arrest her at Babu's house. In the high-pitched sequence where the police barges into the house in pursuit of her, she is engrossed in reading Basheer's novella *Shabdangal* (Basheer 1947). First published in October 1947, *Shabdangal*, was a text that blatantly challenged norms of morality and respectability. This is the first well-known text in the history of modern Malayalam literature to take on the issue of homosexuality through its representation of a transgender sex worker's encounter with the narrator, who is an ex-soldier afflicted with venereal disease. Thus it pushed against the conventions of what subjects could be represented in art. The impetus of the text was not to create boundaries between the licit and the illicit, rather it questions the structuring logic of morality itself.

Shabdangal immerses the reader in a cacophony of voices of people who are all unmoored and dispossessed.[10] The prostitute, the disabled, the homeless, the poor - Basheer's canvas is populated with characters who were perceived as the dregs of society. His novel is seen as a powerful example of social realism within Malayalam literature because it documents the gruesome, uncensored realities of 'raw life.' At the time of publication the novel was sharply criticized by the high priest of Malayalam literature Guptan Nair, "this book is populated with many wastrels

and their fornications. […] Homosexuality is a serious problem in our society. I feel that to write about it in such a casual fashion is a criminal offence" (Nair 1947/1994: 153). Literary battles were staged as critics argued about what liberties representational practices can take under the umbrella of progressive writing.[11] The reference to *Shabdangal* and the creation of a reading prostitute are moves that establish the director's realist, literary credentials even as he is crafting a 'commercial film'. This citational practice also hinges on the superior moral status of literary production vis-à-vis cinema in Kerala history. When a film like *Avalude Ravukal* remembers a controversial representation of sexuality from one of the most iconoclastic Malayalam writers it draws the viewer's attention to interconnected social practices of reading and viewing films. It points to how the figure of the prostitute emerges within circuits of cultural texts that occupy the grey zones between 'obscenity' and realism.

The publisher's note to the 1999 edition of *Avalude Ravukal* equates this film text to the literary experiments of the progressive writer's movement that challenged the conventions of morality, "like *Anchu Cheetha Kathakal* (Five Bad Stories) in Malayalam literature, in film *Avalude Ravaukal* was described as a 'bad film' when it was released 21 years ago"(Raheem 1999: 1). Published in the 1946, *Anchu Cheeta Kathakal*, was a collection of short stories by five leading progressive writers in Malayalam including Basheer, Keshavadev and Thakazhi. Through its provocative title the book is upfront about how it plays with the sensitive borders between social realism and the graphic representation of sexuality. The preface of the 1996 reprint edition recounts the high level of controversy the book created, "this was an attempt to show that the stories of people thought to be bad should be written too. We wanted to prove that no subject matter was alien to an artist. There was no limit to the criticism we faced then" (Thakazhi 1996: 8). *Anchu Cheeta Kathakal*, when it was published in the 1940s, was regarded as a threat to the moral fabric of society— by very significant and at that period, very powerful segments of the literary public. But in spite of the sharp attacks and criticism it faced all the writers who figure in the collection are considered as stalwarts within the literary canon today. The

ambiguous positioning of these 'texts of excess' points to how what is labeled as 'bad' circulates widely, becomes a subject for high literary debates, and finds a place within the cultural history of the state.[12] Thus the attempt to sanitize and monitor aesthetic codes and modes of reception is constantly under threat. *Avalude Ravukal* is a text that gets labeled as pornography and re-visioned as a realist text, but the slippages between these categories are evident in the history of the film's reception. The cultural policing of frames of reception hinges on the awareness that texts and bodies circulate in a disorderly public sphere, where the boundaries between morality and immorality, the rational and the pornographic are shifting and unstable. These slippages in modes of address, textual codes and forms of reception are also central to documents that are at the core of other significant public events that configure the sex worker in Kerala.

Affective Politics

The mobilization against state violence after the custodial death of Kunjibi in 1987 and the different mediums and texts through which this incident resurfaces in the public memory, in the last decade, is an important site to examine the overlaps between the rational language of human rights violation and sentimental modes of address. The custodial death of Kunjibi constituted a founding moment for the feminist movement in Kerala and produced print and visual documents that straddle the thin line between realism and melodrama. Kunjibi murder case is reconstructed in the public sphere of Kerala within the rubric of the post-1990s human rights and identity politics discourses on sex work. Within state discourses, prior to the 1990s, the prostitute had a marginal position, in contrast to the domestic woman who is the target of family planning campaigns. In the post-90s, the specific shape of the AIDS pandemic in India and its modes of transmission and prevention have shifted the sex worker into a more pivotal position. The Commercial Sex Worker (CSW), normed as female, though there is a limited recognition of male sex workers in the AIDS framework, is perceived as one of the primary nodes of AIDS prevention and control in India.[13] In fact the change in terminology from 'prostitute' to 'sex worker' is linked to the AIDs discourse and the subsequent rights-based mobilizations

by sex workers.

Velutha Nizhalukal (White Shadows, 2006), a documentary film produced by *Vanitha* Society, a state supported self-help group in Calicut reenacts in a docudrama format the story of Kunjibi. The film opens with the mirror shot of the Kunjibi character who says, "by now all of you must have forgotten me." This is an admonition to the public that they have the obligation to remember Kunjibi. The documentary film channels Kunjibi's spirit to narrate the history of struggling sex workers who have recently mobilized to better their conditions. Her story of denied justice is recast as a tale of martyrdom that animates the current era of collective struggle, "I see how after my martyrdom, you have awakened and organized. I bear witness to all this. I am still here with you, your Kunjibi." Kunjibi is a figure from the past redeployed to inspire the new configuration of the sex worker in the human rights and AIDS awareness discourse.

I recount here the details of the Kunjibi murder case. A divorced Muslim woman, Kunjibi did sex work and supported her family. She lived in Bangladesh Colony (now renamed as Santhinagar colony), a non-affluent, urban settlement in Calicut. She was arrested one night in May 1987 and subjected to police torture. Her body was found hanging in the police cell the next morning. An investigation was ordered due to public pressure and this led to the suspension of the town's Sub-Inspector.[14] The investigation under the district collector submitted a report that said Kunjibi had committed suicide and the case was squashed before it could reach the court.

A women's group in Calicut *Bodhana* (Awareness), took this up as their first case and they organized a protest movement with women from the Bangladesh colony. Sex workers formed a bond of solidarity with feminist groups and "for the first time in the history of Calicut we organized a rally of hundreds of these women," said the established feminist activist, Ajitha, in a conversation with me.[15] She marks this as an important moment when sex workers came out into the public sphere and shared a platform with middle class feminists. Here a tenuous link between feminists and sex workers was formed in the late 1980s using the language of

solidarity across class boundaries, "this was our humble attempt to alter the situation where no one asks a question when any violence is done to women on the street," says Ajitha. Within this rubric of re-membering, Kunjibi was presented as a woman who was economically deprived and therefore became an easy target for police violence. Her class status as a 'woman on the streets' is emphasized in the feminist reconstruction of this case. Kunjibi's positioning as a lower class, Muslim woman follows the pattern of many other founding events in the early phase of the feminist movement in India where the subjugated "other" woman is the object of concern in organized protests lead primarily by more privileged women (Rowena 2005: 26).[16]

When sex workers who were Kunjibi's contemporaries reminiscence about this case they say they came out in support because she was a woman like them. I spoke to a former sex worker who is now part of an NGO that addresses sexual minority rights issues, Federation for Integrated Research on Mental Health (FIRM) in Calicut.[17] She spoke about how it was a clear case of police torture, "we went and saw the body hanging in the police station, with marks of being kicked on her spine. I was not very brave then, I was very young but I went out for the public protest against her death. She was one among us." In this recollection of Kunjibi's death there was a sense of community and also an evocation of how the incident impinged on her life in material ways, "after this incident in the jail the police would take away our sari and underskirt, we would be left only with our underclothes." The everydayness of encounters with police and state structures was emphasized in her comment about how Kunjibi's hanging to death lead to other sex worker's being deprived of articles of clothing in the police cell. Police violence and blatant state power leveled against sex workers is a matter of concern for sex workers in the present as well. The police system as a sovereign and coercive form of power operates in producing the figure of the prostitute as well as the sex worker. Since these forms of power have historical continuities, the rhetoric for embodying the sex worker and the prostitute are not mutually divorced. The representational tropes and regula-

tory mechanisms used in the pre-1990s period recur in the post-1990s era too.

The media coverage of the Kunjibi case, mainly through reports in Malayalam newspapers, played a significant role in putting pressure on the administration and garnering attention for the case at that time. There was a renewed debate of the Kunjibi case in connection with an exhibition of the work of news photographer Choyikutty in the Lalita Kala Academy Hall, Calicut in 2004.[18] The photograph by Choyikutty of the hanging body of Kunjibi in the prison cell was pivotal in triggering public debate on this occurrence. Choyikutty, in a conversation with me, observed, "if the photograph had not been published, this incident would not have become an event in history." His comment draws attention to the multiple mediations through acts of documentation and memorializing necessary to produce an event and the power of the medium of photography.[19] Kunjibi's photograph has travelled through time and become a 'freeze-frame' in the public memory (Sontag 2003: 22) of Kerala. This photograph is referred to and republished in all contemporary discussions about the Kunjibi case. It is the central document of what is now perceived as a case of human rights violation, but it also becomes the core around which a melodramatic story of oppression is narrated.[20]

Theorists such as Lauren Berlant have argued that citizenship far from being an abstract category, becomes imagined and mobilized in a live social scene. Political subjectivity and its mediations are staged within intimate publics, "on the body, in the media, in the nation" (Berlant 2004: 27). The documentation of Kunjibi case and her memorialization as a charged figure who can now speak for all disenfranchised sex workers shows the traffic between a controlled, rational language of human rights and sentimental narratives of compassion and domesticity. Thus it points to the affective workings of the public sphere in which embodiment, sexuality, and sentiment is integral to the drama of state recognition and the demands for rights. It is the mechanical quality of the photographic medium to record the reality of an event, but also its affective pull that makes it function as a powerful artifact in the public sphere.

This is a series of black and white photographs of Kunjibi's

Figure 2. Reproduction of the Kunjibi murder case photographs. The central image was the one printed in newspapers in 1987.

lifeless body resting on the bars of the prison door taken by Choyikutty in 1987. In the frontal shot her face is partially hidden from view by the bars and her hand dangles through a gap between the prison bars. In the second shot, we get a back-view of her inert body as the camera is positioned inside the cell. We can see a group of three people including one policeman looking at the body. The uniformed police officer stands out as much as the dead body because of the proximity it suggests to the cause of the death. On the one level these photographs functioned as evidence to counter the police claim that this was a suicide and not a murder. Here the purported objective and, mechanical quality of the photographic medium, its ability to produce a "record of the real" (Sontag 2003: 26), becomes central. Detailed attention was paid to the photograph with regard to the positioning of the body so as to determine the cause of death. The fact that her legs hit the floor and the positioning of her hands, as though it was placed on the bar, suggested that this was not a suicide. The scattered alcohol bottles and cigarette stubs on the floor of the prison, clearly seen in the second photograph, also functioned as clues to what happened in the prison cell, prior to Kunjibi's death. The photographic medium's ability to recreate a scene of crime is operational here.

Madhyamam, a Malayalam newspaper, first carried this back view photograph the day after the murder, as a small one column news report. This photograph was reproduced in later media accounts of the Kunjibi case and the visual evidence thus has an afterlife in public memory. A *Mangalam* report on the photo exhibition by Choyikutty focuses on his controversial pictures of Kunjibi's death, "when Choyikutty used his camera to capture the picture of Kunjibi's death, that picture became the first witness for the murder case" (*Mangalam*: 2003). According to a newspaper article "Even After Eighteen Year Kunjibi's Sobs Do Not Cease", Kunjibi's dead body communicates what she could not say, "this picture of the dead body leaning against the bars of the prison, will silently speak to you and tell you what happened there the previous night" (Hareesh 2005). The paradoxically 'silent voice' that the reporter attributes to the photograph is on one level evidential, but on the other hand it is the animating power of the photograph to reach out to the readers and communicate a powerful story of injustice. There is an affective pull conceded to the photograph which exceeds its function as an image that operates as evidence.

News photography has a pivotal role to play in revealing acts of atrocities and can become the basis of a political struggle as in the Kunjibi case. But this photograph also generates multiple codes of viewing. In fact, the photograph that leads to a rights claim can also function as a spectacle of suffering and pathos. The scene of violence, the dead body and the presence of the police man saturates the photograph with the aura of death, the sense of violence that-has-been. The complicated affective responses that the photograph calls forth shows how a news photograph may also position the viewer in such a way that the realist gaze is disturbed by an affective excess. In her reflection on the function of war photographs, Sontag observes:

> There are many uses to the innumerable opportunities a modern life supplies for regarding — at a distance, through the medium of photography — other people's pain. Photography of an atrocity may give rise to opposing calls. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked

> by photographic information, that terrible things happen (Sontag 2003: 13).

The distant, controlled 'bemused' observation of a photograph of an atrocity is one demanded by a realist spectator, the one in which the photograph does not disturb the spectatorial positioning. But in the case of this photograph, the ability to prick the viewer's position of comfort could be what makes it a remembered picture. There are many ways in which this affective excess is managed in the framing of this photograph. It is positioned as realistic evidence, but also harnessed to a melodramatic narrative in which the viewer can occupy a position of sympathy. Compassion, as a mode of viewing the 'pain of others', can function as a way of stabilizing the viewer's position and creating a modicum of distance from the spectacle of suffering, "in operation compassion is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is *over there*" (Berlant 2004: 4). Compassion, as Berlant suggests, can work as a way of managing emotional distress so that the spectator can become an ameliorative actor not implicated in the structure of oppression.

V. C. Hareesh's reconstruction of the Kunjibi case in *Kerala Kaumudi* uses the language of sentimentality to create sympathy in the minds of the reading public towards the prostitute figure. The report starts with an account of how even after eighteen years some policemen say that they hear Kunjibi's cries echo from the lockup. The emphasis on her tears and cries shows how the report aims to create a sentimental link between the reader and the image of the prostitute. "When we discuss the pitiable situation of sex workers, one image might appear clearly in some of our minds - Kunjibi," he writes, setting up Kunjibi as representative of all sex workers who are helpless victims in need of pity and compassion (Hareesh 2005). It draws a sentimental pageant of the Kunjibi as the loving, all sacrificing mother, "some of the older people in the colony can still remember the image of a mother who held her beloved daughter close to her chest, as she showed her the moon and fed her rice" (Hareesh 2005). Kunjibi's arrest and police torture is reconstructed as a tragic narrative of a mother who is torn away from her young daughter, a mother who's "only

desire was to bring up her daughter in comfort" (Hareesh 2005). Through the trope of destroyed motherhood, Kunjibi's life story is linked to that of a sex worker in the present who was arrested while she was buying milk for her young child. "The law keepers and the judicial system do not think of the baby crying for milk. When this mother returns, where will this child be?" is the emotional plea with which the report ends (Hareesh 2005). Thus the human rights discourse whose addressee must have a controlled gaze that views suffering and responds with an "*average* affect" (Barthes 1980: 26) is fused with the sentimental tropes through which the reader is asked to sympathize with the prostitute figure from a distance. My reading of representational practices point to how the prostitute as the figure of rights and figure of compassion are both produced through similar processes of controlling the affective excesses of the public eye. The prostitute as a figure is predicated on the play between excess and containment in the modes of reception of the seeing public eye.

The ideal viewer of *Avalude Ravukal*, the distant, contained subject who will sympathize but not be seduced by the erotic scenes, is also not a given in the case of a news photograph which circulates as a social justice document. Other than functioning as evidence or producing an ameliorative sense of compassion, the photograph may also disturb the spectator's stable positioning. It is difficult to predict in any exhaustive fashion the possible responses triggered by both *Avalude Ravukal* and the Kunjibi photograph. The sentimental excesses in the purview of documentary and filmic realism point to how the process of figuring, tied to practices of print and visual culture, retain a level of instability. The crisis produced by the representations of the prostitute is not countercultural, nor is it in the future. It is a part of the transitive process of the affective public that operates through excess and containment. In the afterlives of *Avalude Ravukal* and the Kunjibi case, the emphasis is on harnessing these texts and events for a human rights discourse which privileges the aesthetic of realism that has a distant, sympathetic viewer as its addressee. But a mapping of the circuits of this film and the Kunjibi case signals to the fractures in the aesthetics of realism. Pulling out these contra-

dictions from the vantage point of the present, makes possible the creation of a regional history in which norms around sexuality and the public sphere are not rigid and foreclosed.

Tracking cultural circuits on sexuality is productive because it shows the tensions created by texts and events and the attempts to control their circulation and reception. It is in the incompleteness of such processes of control and the perverse re-enactments and transpositions of cultural texts and events that sexual norms are disturbed. The afterlives of certain texts and events have the power to question the foundational narratives of Kerala as a region, not merely because of the representation of desire in these texts. Indeed some of these texts, such as the film *Avalude Ravukal*, are not per se celebrations of trangressive desire. But the messy trajectories of the production and circulation of these texts and events give us access to the shifting contours of a regional public sphere shot through by erotic tension. The affective dynamics in the making of sexual events disturb the neat ordering, in foundational narratives of Kerala, between the domestic women and her others.

Notes:

[1]   See (Mokkil 2010).

[2]   Film reviewers mention how this was a controversial role that none of the established heroines in Malayalam were willing to take up (Sreedharan 1999: 6). So it became the launch vehicle for a new heroine and Seema went on to become one of the most successful heroines of Malayalam cinema. Her entry through a film like *Her Nights* did not restrict her acting career. From action films to family drama, Seema was noted for her versatility and range.

[3]   Official film censorship in India started with the Cinematograph Act of 1918. The certification system was introduced in 1949 with two kinds of certificates, 'U' (Universal) and 'A' (Adults Only). A Central Board of Film Censors was also established during this period. After independence, a committee was set up to look at the state of the film industry and the Cinematograph Act of 1952 was enacted. The name of the committee was later changed to Central Board of Film Certification.

[4]   Questioning quick assumptions that soft-porn is a 'regressive', 'anti-woman' genre, Radhakrishnan argues for the need to examine what the category of

soft-porn is, "if we were to maneuver outside accepting the genre as a given, we will have to start with defining the genre" (Radhakrishnan 2010: 196). He observes that it is through the process of circulation, labeling and modes of reception that a film gets slotted as soft-porn more than whether the state has given it an 'A' certificate or not. The absence of a separate pornographic film industry, as in the case of Western countries, also complicates the category of soft-porn in India.

5   Malayalam cinema since the sixties has produced directors who played a significant role in the development of art cinema in India, mainly distinguished by realist aesthetics. But it is also perceived as the state invested in the production of sexually explicit films which are dubbed and circulate in all parts of India. Thus it is a film industry that oscillates between, what is perceived as, two extremes. I. V. Sasi's ambiguous positioning as a director who made commercially successful films, but also had a commitment to political issues, contributed to the contested positioning of *Avalude Ravukal* in Kerala's public sphere at the time of its release.

6   I must qualify this statement. *Avalude Ravukal* is still seen as responsible for unleashing a series of soft-porn films in Malayalam by many film critics. In a recently published article on the female body and Malayalam cinema, C.S. Venkiteswaran writes, "the watershed film that turned the tide was I.V. Sasi's *Avalude Ravukal* (Her Nights, 1978) which virtually opened the floodgates of a soft porn genre that went on to capture a national market for a brief period of time" (Venkiteshwaran 2010: 46). The notoriety that the film has because of its national circulation co-exists with more recent attempts to recuperate the film.

7   For a detailed analysis of the fractured aesthetic codes of this film, see (Mokkil 2011).

8   The music of this film, especially the title song and the lullaby sung by the noted playback singer S Janaki, "Unni Arariro" (My child, let me sing you to sleep) are significant elements in the sustained popularity of the film. "Sleepless, Her Nights" receives nostalgic praise on the You Tube site where the song sequence is available for viewing, 'Sweet voice of S. Janaki . How can we forget this song,' 'One of the best songs...evergreen....everlasting'. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6C0OYvjgZFI (Accessed on July 5, 2010).

9   This trope is repeated in a more recent film *Susanna* (2000), which received public attention as an iconoclastic representation of the prostitute figure and was lauded by the sex worker's organizations in the state. In this film the protagonist asks, 'Can't a *Veshya* (Prostitute) read Kazantzakis?' thus deploying her reading practices as a marker of her emancipated status

10   E.V. Ramakrishnan observes that this 1947 novel written from the perspective of the outcasts of society is dwells on "the morbid and the ugly to demonstrate

a sense of bad faith in the very emergence of the nation" (2011: 108). I focus on the reception of *Shabdangal* to gesture towards the debates on social censorship and representation within the Progressive Writer's Movement which emerged in 1937. Within this literary movement there was a desire to engender an aesthetic sensibility that would shock the reader's consciousness and produce a sensual and bodily relationship to the text (See Ramakrishnan 2011, Chandrashekharan 1999).

[11] Literary critic Kesari Balakrishnapillai, supportive of Basheer's mandate, predicted that *Shabdangal* would raise a storm in critical circles.

[12] Thakazhi mentions how *Five Bad Stories* sold out very quickly. As Imprint Books published the second edition of the book in 1996, the publisher Y.A. Raheem argues that the lasting presence of this book in the cultural archive of Kerala shows that "society agrees that this book was necessary" (Raheem 1996: 8).

[13] The AIDs control programs positions MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) as a high risk category and male sex workers are put into this grouping. The official website of the Kerala State AIDS Control Society mentions that the route to HIV transmission is 82% heterosexual and 2% homosexual. (http://ksacs.in/hiv-aids-in-kerala.php) Accessed on June 10, 2010.

[14] In order to track how the Kunjibi case lives on in public memory I spoke to different people associated with it including feminists, sex workers and news photographers. This information is from the interview with Ajitha that I conducted on December 13, 2008.

[15] The political alliance between feminists and sex workers in India has been complex and shifting. The reform model through which feminists operated in the 1980s later led to clashes with sex worker's mobilizations in the post-90s context. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan argues that the prostitution question has gathered around itself many of the issues that remain unresolved in feminism such as the relationship between feminists and female "victims of oppression", the construction of the female subject in terms of "agency" (choice, autonomy, desire, "voice") and the narrativisation-as-progress of women's history (Rajan 2003:117).

[16] This pattern of early feminist struggles in the 1970s and 1980s has been rethought in the post-1990s context with critical interventions by Dalit and Muslim feminists and a deeper feminist engagement with questions of caste and religion.

[17] I spoke to her in February 2009. She asked me not to use her name in my writing because she did not want any form of publicity.

[18] Choyikutty is a news-photographer who has worked in the print media field since the 1960s. He is noted for his photographs on the life of the marginalized and did a photographic exhibition "Memories from the Street" in 2004. In an interview with me he said how his aim as a photographer has

been to "make known unknown issues, what is the point in exhibiting famous people? The street is my issue."

[19] My conversation with him in February 2009 was in a small, dusty studio where he also conducted photography classes for teenagers from Bangladesh colony. He mentioned that he feels a sense of closeness to Kunjibi from having recorded her tragic end, a sense of responsibility, which troubles him even today.

[20] My focus is on how this case is redeployed in the post-1990s context where the sex worker is primarily framed within a human rights and public health discourse. Before the Beijing World Conference on Women (1995), feminist discourse in Kerala was dominated by Marxist theory and socialist feminism, and was suspicious of human rights and all the other trappings of liberal feminism. But in the current scenario, most feminist activists draw on the language of rights to reconstruct this case. This points to how the process of history-making is often grounded in the registers of the present.

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Revisiting *Neelakkuyil*:
On the Left's cultural vision,
Malayali nationalism and the questions
of 'regional cinema'

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Taking up Neelakkuyil (d. P. Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat, 1954) as one of the early interventions of the Left in Malayalam popular cinema, this paper analyses the film to explore a few significant questions: What precisely was the nature of the cultural vision that the Left proposed for the region in the wake of linguistic reorganization of the states in South India in 1956? How did this vision determine the attempts to imagine a just social order in Kerala during and around the 1950s? How do we historically understand the interventions of Left-affiliated artists in cinema, and what exactly was the cultural politics of the aesthetic of 'social realism'? Taking up these questions for discussion, the paper argues that the history of Malayalam cinema needs to be understood as part of the regional history of South Indian cinema — an approach that would take us closer towards an historical understanding of the generic elements and the narrative components that the Left's 'social realist' cinema borrowed and reformulated from the cinematic traditions in the region and across the subcontinent.

***Keywords**: South Indian regional cinema; Malayali nationalism; Left cinema; social realism, Neelakkuyil.*

Academic attention on Malayalam cinema of the 1950s revolves almost entirely around the films belonging to the genre of 'social realism' — a loose term used in the scholarship on Indian

cinema to refer to the aesthetic project that introduced "a thematic shift [from the socials, mythologicals, stunt and adventure films, romances, etc.], focusing attention on the poor and the exploited but continued to feature a melodramatic narrative" (Prasad 1998: 160). In Malayalam cinema, this movement begins with interventions of the artists and writers associated with the Progressive Writing Group[1] and Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC)[2] — two bodies that were closely affiliated to the Communist Party in Kerala. In the available scholarship, this cluster of films is mostly examined in retrospect, where the discussions are framed by the terms set by the dominant historical accounts as well as the contemporary revivalist discourse— for both of which the social realist cinema of the 1950s remains an object of nostalgia. This had an inadvertent effect of the recent scholarship, often revisionist in impulses, selectively focusing on some claims that the dominant historians make on behalf of social realism, while discarding other significant aspects about this aesthetic movement.

The paper opens with a discussion on the cultural-political context of the Left's interventions in popular cinema in Kerala and examines the precise terms within which dominant histories of Malayalam cinema have accommodated the social realist films of the 1950s. Analyzing *Neelakkuyil* it later argues that the aesthetic domain of social realism provided the Left-associated artists with a ground to negotiate with an industrial-cultural medium like cinema, marked by its popular, melodramatic excesses, and to mould a sphere of the 'new popular' that would address 'the masses' — the object of the Left's political mobilization — and, at the same time, negotiate the (high caste) middle class's position in the imminent modern nation of Malayalees. The early initiatives of these artists in cinema attempted to address and educate the masses in the reformed idioms of popular cinema, and sought to call into existence a 'new Malayali nation of rational subjects' on behalf of them, even while catering to the aesthetic-cultural desires and political anxieties of the high castes and the middle class literati. It argues that *Neelakkuyil* combines the elements of the star-cinema typical of the South Indian case, and the aesthetic traits — in its choice of the theme and the representational

strategies — that one can identify in the progressive realist cinema in Hindi and Bengali during the late 1940s and the early 1950s.[3] The essay also argues that if the 'nationalist' address based on a common language characterized the commercial, star cinema of the 1950s in the other south Indian states, in the case of Kerala, the Left conceived and proposed a discourse of rationality, imagined as emanating from Communism, as the uniting element of Malayali nationalism — an aspect which was to have major implications in the region's cultural realm towards the end of the decade.

Social realist films of the 1950s
in the dominant history

A careful analysis of some of the historical narratives makes it clear that the dominant history's stake in the social realism of the 1950s begins and ends with the possibilities of the latter to function — in the historiographical exercise — as the precursor to the 'art cinema' of the 1970s and the 1980s that brought international acclaim to the Malayalam cinema. The primary interest of these narratives written during the 1980s or later, rests on this 'art cinema' which is considered a matter of pride for Malayalees, at a time when the institution of popular cinema in India was being looked down upon by critics as well as academicians for failing to adhere to the standards of realist narrative cinema. As the dominant historical accounts, written from a teleological perspective, attempt to construct a longer history for the moment of arrival of the 'aesthetically matured' art cinema of the 1970s and 1980s in Malayalam, the social realism of the 1950s was identified as a *preliminary phase*, mainly because of its thematic engagement with 'social issues' and the attempts to introduce 'nativity' in character portrayal, dialogues, music as well as the narrative backdrop.

For example, discussing *Neelakkuyil* and other social realist films of the 1950s in Malayalam, Vijayakrishnan writes:

> The exposure to international cinema [after the international film festival of 1952 in India] and its influence were not reflected in South Indian film industries except in

Malayalam cinema. The [progressive] transformations that were taking place in Malayalam cinema were clearly noticeable. However, these changes had nothing to do with the International film festival or the arrival of [Satyajit] Ray. Rather, Malayalam cinema was gradually coming under the influence of literature. […] *Neelakkuyil* had a *keraleeyatha* [Kerala-ness] that was never seen in Malayalam films until then. Every frame of the film pulsated with the rustic images of a Kerala village. Characters were drawn from everyday life. The most important aspect about this film was that it replaced the artificial backdrops used in films until then, with its dynamic, vibrant and realistic settings. […] The screenplay reflects the skills of Uroob in writing touching stories about the ordinary life of people. However, theatricality dominates in dialogues and the conception of scenes. As was the convention in other popular films of the time, dialogues continued to gain prominence [over visual elements] in this film too. […] The photography signified a shift by introducing depth to images, compared to the conventional use of 'flat' images. […] The film also inaugurated a tradition of using authentic tunes and lyrics in film music (Vijayakrishnan 1987: 74-78).

As the passage quoted above suggests, what prompts the dominant historians to claim the social realist cinema of the 1950s and to begin the story of the 'aesthetically superior' Malayalam cinema from this movement is mainly the deployment of *nationalist realism* that imagines the nation, its people and landscape, rather than the use of *narrative realism* (associated with classical Hollywood cinema), where all the elements in the film are subordinated to the linear progression of the narrative.[4] Beyond that, these films are described as "*not worthy of even being compared* to films like Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*" (Vijayakrishnan 1987: 81; emphasis added).[5] The impulses of nationalist realism seeking to portray the people in the region "represented in their objective thereness" (Prasad 1998: 62) was one of the most appreciated aspect of the film when it came out, as the reviews that appeared in the print media during the time also suggest. For example, Cynic, a

prominent film critic of the time, begins his review of the film by saying that "notwithstanding its limitations, *Neelakkuyil* is a good Malayalam film worth watching." Listing some of the alluring elements in the film, he writes:

> Uroob, who wrote the story, screenplay and dialogues, deserves credit for the film's success. He succeeded in creating characters that connect well with the common people. Though some of these characters do not have any function in the linear progression of the narrative, they do not bore us because of their authentic portrayal. The vibrant, lively dialogues ooze life into the film. […] The outdoor shots, used in plenty, succeed in conveying the sense that the story takes place in Kerala. The *uchikuduma* [typical tuft of hair] of the Nair *karanavar*, the Namboodiri's paan-box, the traditional evening lamp customarily lit beside the *thulasi* [holy basil] plant at the Nair house, the village restaurant, the Marar and his drum, the Mappila's fishing net… all these add to the Kerala-ness of the film. […] Though Moithu's character does not fit into the narrative scheme, the role was essayed excellently by Balakrishna Menon (*Mathrubhoomi*, 7 November, 1954: 31-3, emphasis added).[6]

The point of quoting lengthy from these accounts was to foreground the visual pleasures that the film evoked, both for the writing elites of the time as well as for the historians later. While the portrayal of nativity was one of the highlights of *Neelakkuyil*, the film clearly did not qualify as a text that follows conventions of classical realism. This should persuade us to revisit and historicize the Left's interventions in art and cinema.

Cultural interventions of the Left and popular cinema

Theoretically, a commitment to social progress (over aesthetic, literary values) and an insistence on reaching out to the masses to educate them in 'good', 'progressive' art seem to be the central governing principle behind the interventions of the artists and writers associated with the Left in the fields of literature, theatre

and cinema. In addition, aspects like portraying 'authentic' images of the region's landscape and people, and an ethnographic detailing of the mobilized working class were the other important aesthetic considerations for this movement. The essays of E M S Namboodiripad on art and literature reflect an endorsement of a lesser emphasis on literariness and a greater stress on the need to adopt from, as well as reflect, the day-to-day life of the common people.[7] In these essays, E M S was positioning himself, as a Marxist, in favour of a meaningful practice of art that supports progressive social movements, as against the proponents of the 'art-for-art's-sake' theory, by endorsing a model of literature that combines aesthetic concerns with social commitment, where the emphasis is on the latter.[8] This was to be supplemented by the authentic representation of the region, its culture and people, etc., as evident in the choice of the title for the movement he was a founder member of - *Jeeval Sahithya Prasthānam* ('Movement for the Literature about Life'). The espousal of nationalist/aesthetic realism combined well with the communists' desire to see the mobilized working class represented in literature and plays.[9] This is evident in his essays discussing the popular plays written by the playwrights associated with the KPAC. Endorsing the transformations that KPAC's popular socialist plays like $P\bar{a}ttab\bar{a}kki$ (Rent Arrears: K Damodaran, 1939) and *Ningalenne Communistākki* (You Made Me a Communist: Thoppil Bhasi, 1952) effected in the theatre traditions that existed in Kerala, E M S wrote:

> In $P\bar{a}ttab\bar{a}kki$ and *Ningalenne Communistākki*, Damodaran and Bhasi have tried to mould characters and their relationships out of the social reality they encountered while trying to support and lead the organised movements of the working class, farmers and agricultural labourers. […] The success of these plays rests on the playwrights' ability to grasp the pulse of people's lives, their quest to understand the everyday struggles of the masses as well as the transformations that happen in the society, and their skill to mould characters and plot out of such experiences (Namboodiripad 1954/ 1998: 40-1).

Though O N V says that the peasant woman "showed courage", the song is written in a tone of advice [to peasant women in general]: "*Moolippattumayi Thambran Varumbol, Choolaathangu Nilladi Penne*" ("When the lord comes humming a tune/ O girl! Be strong and stand up to him"). Ultimately, it becomes the task of the Communist to liberate the "peasant woman" by uprooting the feudal order (Ajithkumar 2008: 16).

This represents the simultaneous imagining of the working class or 'the masses' as the source for creative and political energy, as well as the targets of political awakening through art. Such a conception of the 'masses' had decisive significance for the narratives that the social realist films of the 1950s staged, the representational strategies in them and the spectatorial address they constituted, given the fact that these 'masses' constituted (in the imagination of the cultural producers) the traditional audience of popular cinema and theatre. The 'mass audience' was attributed with a certain rationality and modern values that other sections of the population seemed to be lacking, in the Left imagination. Moreover, the look of this 'rational subaltern' audience - often conceived in the Left imaginary as what I would call 'the ethical population' - attained crucial significance. Both of these were decisive factors in the dominant textual form of the new popular cinema that the Left-affiliated artists shaped during the 1950s.

Arguing that the Muslim character Moithu in the narrative schema of *Neelakkuyil* stood for the *look* of the 'rational subaltern' audience institutionalized within the text, I shall try to delineate some of the important elements related to the Left's imagination of 'the masses' and their close relation to the nature of subnationalism in the region as well as the preoccupation of socialist realism with self-reforming protagonists. Moreover, the film has two protagonists: one (the school teacher) is the middle class/caste character who undergoes self-reformation; the other (the postman) is an ideal figure who, I would argue, represents the moral authority of the region. The available scholarship on *Neelakkuyil* has focused only on the former. It is important to analyze the significance of the latter figure as well.

On *Neelakkuyil*, Moithu and the Left imagination of 'the masses'

Produced by T K Pareekkutty and written by Uroob, *Neelakkuyil* puts forth the reformist message of caste egalitarianism. The film is about the self-reformation of Sreedharan Nair (Sathyan), an upper caste school teacher, who impregnates Neeli (Miss Kumari), a peasant Dalit woman, but refuses to marry her saying he has to "respect the sentiments of his community." Sreedharan Nair later marries Nalini (Prema), who is from a decaying Nair family. Meanwhile Neeli, the pregnant Dalit woman, after being expelled from her community, gives birth to a boy and dies near a rail track. Neeli's baby is rescued and nurtured by Shankaran Nair (P Bhaskaran), a postman and a radical figure in the film, who is ignorant of the fact that Sreedharan Nair is the father of the child. Later, Sreedharan Nair feels guilty for what he did to Neeli, and decides to adopt the Dalit boy namely Mohan. In the end, Shankaran Nair, the foster father, hands over the Dalit boy to Sreedharan Nair and Nalini, asking them to "bring him up as a human being, not as a Nair, Pulaya or a Mappila."

Most of the critical attention in the scholarship on *Neelakkuyil* has revolved around the self-reforming character of the schoolteacher Sreedharan Nair. The centrality of this upper caste character in a narrative that advocates caste egalitarianism has been pointed out as indicative of how the Left-initiated project of social realism in cinema had the (upper caste) middle class as its primary addressee from its beginning. Meanwhile, the morally upright, ideal character of the postman Shankaran Nair — played by P Bhaskaran, one of the directors of the film — receives far less academic attention, possibly because of the 'unglamorous' way in which he is casted. This strategy of casting provides us important clues about the commercial as well as aesthetic aspirations of the Left's interventions in popular cinema in Malayalam. The splitting of the audience 'identification' between two protagonists — one the self-reforming middle class hero and the other a morally resolute figure — signifies the film's attempt to combine the elements of star-cinema of the South Indian variety addressing and mobilizing the masses (where the star

protagonist symbolizes and represents the regional polity) and the elements of nationalist realism catering to the middle class audience. However, the strategies of casting suggests that the devices of the star cinema were being deployed and appropriated for reinstating the middle class hero at the centre of the cultural imaginary. An examination of the place of the Muslim character Moithu in the film's narrative schema would be a good starting point to examine how the portrayal of the postman Shankaran Nair closely resembles the modes in which 'the star' was often portrayed in South Indian language films of the period as the representative of the region and its people.

Moithu (Balakrishna Menon) is a marginal character in the film as far as the plot is concerned, and his function would appear to be somewhat that of a comedian. He does not have any significant role in the narrative progression as well. However, Moithu's presence in the narrative has a crucial significance in understanding the nature of audience to whom the aesthetic reform project of social realism was addressed, and how this audience was conceived. Evidences suggest that Moithu's character and the 'Mappila' song that he sings in the film became major attractions of the film. While the song 'Kayalarikathu', composed by the music director K Raghavan, became extremely popular, the critics were similarly impressed by the character portrayal and the actor who played the role. Apart from the impressive lyrics and composition of the love song, the character's appeal - both to the masses and to critics — could probably be the result of factors that arouse ethnographic interests, like his attire, the 'Muslim dialect' interspersed with puns that Moithu speaks, as well as the pranks he plays upon other characters in the film. Moreover, the prominence that Moithu's character gets in the film seems to indicate the film's attempt to appeal to the audience from Malabar, a region that was considered culturally distant from other parts of the Malayalam-speaking regions, and considered 'backward' in the development index than the other two, and importantly a region where the Communist Party had a decisive influence.[11]

A close look at some of the scenes in which Moithu appears in the film would suggest that his presence within the narrative

coincides with or duplicates the presence of the viewers watching the film. Both Moithu as well as the viewers are 'witnesses' to the 'real' story in the film, and they commonly share the same knowledge about the film's diegetic world. I shall try to substantiate this claim by referring to three scenes.

(1) Early into the film, the spectators see Nalini's mother and the Karanavar in the family deciding to arrange Nalini's marriage with her wayward cousin Kuttan Nair in the hope that the latter would mend his ways once he gets married. In the next scene, Moithu stops Kuttan Nair on his way, and asks him whether it is true that he is getting married soon. The narrative does not offer any justification as to how Moithu came to know about the private discussion regarding Kuttan Nair's marriage which happened in the Nair household where Moithu was not present.

(2) Later, Nalini's marriage is fixed with the school teacher Sreedharan Nair after the postman proposes the alliance to Nalini's mother. In the following scene, Moithu again stops Kuttan Nair on his way and informs him that the marriage between Nalini and Sreedharan Nair has been fixed. Again, the narrative does not clarify how Moithu came to know about the marriage between Nalini and Sreedharan, even before Kuttan Nair gets to know about it.

(3) In another instance, after the postman Shankaran Nair rescues the Dalit woman Neeli's child, Moithu meets the postman at a teashop. In this scene, Moithu offers the postman tea, saying that he admired the postman for deciding to rescue the child, braving the opposition of the upper castes from the village. Once again, it is intriguing to note that Moithu was absent when the postman rescued the child.

Significantly, Moithu is absent in the scenes when the *real action* takes place on all the three occasions mentioned above. However, in the scenes that follow the above-mentioned developments on all the three occasions, Moithu appears to have

already known what happened in the previous scenes, just like the audience watching the film (naturally) gets to know what has happened in the previous scenes. Hence, it seems plausible to argue that Moithu's presence in the film duplicates that of the audience watching the film. His presence within the narrative *is the presence and the look of the audience institutionalized within the diegetic world of the film*. There is an interesting relay of knowledge between the audience and Moithu that enables the latter to make ethical judgments about the diegetic characters and situations. What is the significance of this — a non-Hindu character's look duplicating that of the audience in a social film which propagates caste egalitarianism in the multi-religious Kerala society?

It is obvious that a film with a reformist message presupposes a target audience — a social group to which the message should reach; a section that needs to be reformed. However, what we have in *Neelakkuyil* is a case, where the delivering of a reformist message to a particular social group within the narrative is staged as a spectacle for an audience whose social profile is conceived as different from that of the 'target group' that receives the reformist message *in* the film's narrative. Thus, the postman — the radical modern figure in the film — delivers the message of caste equality to the upper castes in the village, including the school teacher protagonist who practices untouchability. But the film's ideological task is completed only when this act of delivering the message, as well as the self-reformation of the upper caste Nair protagonist, *is staged in front of the look* of people from other castes and communities. Hence, the audience's gaze becomes an integral part of the film, and the way in which this audience is conceived by the filmmakers —- in terms of its social profile and cultural attributes — plays an important part in the way the narrative elements are organized in the film.

Keeping this in mind, we shall try to explore the possibilities of making some useful assumptions about the *social and cultural profile of the audience a film like* Neelakkuyil *presupposed.* As we discussed earlier, the interventions of the Left in theatre and cinema during the 1940s and the 1950s were governed by the aspiration to reform the sites of popular entertainment

culture, and 'the masses' were conceived as the primary target audience for this pedagogic, aesthetic project.[12] A quick overview of the print-media discourse on cinema during the time would tell us that the mass audience of popular cinema, in the dominant cultural imagination, was not a neutral/secular category. Popular cinema's traditional audience was conceived as being mostly constituted by the lower class, plebeian, subaltern, illiterate masses.[13] Traces of this dominant cultural imagination about 'the mass audience' seem to have influenced the Left-affiliated cultural producers and their interventions as well (though their conception of the masses had its own specificities — an aspect we will come back soon). In other words, the gaze of the plebeian, subaltern spectators pre-existed the aesthetic reform initiatives in the field of cinema in Kerala during the 1950s, and it was this gaze that the makers of social realist films *addressed and appropriated*. While social realism introduced new aesthetic idioms (like nationalist realism, progressive modernist narratives instead of mythical themes, etc.) to the mass audience of popular cinema, the narrative strategies sought to evolve a popular consensus required for calling into existence the secular Malayali nation of rational subjects, and for instituting the reformed Hindu upper caste male figure at its centre. A process of nomination and authorization is involved here, through which a *discourse of rational-secular thinking* — imagined as emanating from the ideology of Communism — was instituted as the basis of the new 'nation' of Malayalees. The role that language played in mobilizing the linguistic nationalities in other South Indian regions is substituted by this overarching discourse of rationality in Kerala, mobilizing various communities and castes in the region into one nation of Malayalees. And it is the negotiations with this dominant discourse that institutes the Hindu high caste male figure at the centre of the new 'nation'. The space of the cinema hall, where the gaze of the 'subaltern' spectators pre-exists, becomes the site for the articulation of these processes.

If we analyse the patterns followed in the representational scheme in *Neelakkuyil*, it becomes clear that Moithu is one of the very few characters in the film who is portrayed as possessing

desirable progressive values like rationality and versatility, in sharp contrast to most of the other characters (including the protagonist school teacher) who are portrayed as either caught up in caste prejudices or as incapable of moving out of the moralities of various degenerated traditions (like Nalini's cousin Kuttan Nair, a prodigal young man from a disintegrating Nair family, and her father — an irresponsible casteist Namboodiri and others). Moithu makes fun of every upper caste characters in the film who comes to his vicinity (except the postman, because "he has real guts" and the school teacher, who is to be redeemed by the narrative through the staging of self-reformation); he invokes laughter mostly through pranks on the 'irrational' upper caste characters (the Namboodiri Brahmin, the Nair who runs the teashop, Kuttan Nair, the wayward young descendent of the Nair family, the timid Marar, etc.), and the narrative suggests that they deserve to be mocked precisely for their incapability to think rationally, which is 'the need of the time'. The humour that Moithu evokes is witty, not comical; it emerges from the capabilities that he is endowed with to make spontaneous ethical assessments of situations and characters. The rational values that the film upholds match perfectly with the values that Moithu possess; or at least there seems to be no conflict between them. He is the only one who can accept and appreciate the postman's 'radical' persona. In short, Moithu and the postman Shankaran Nair are the only rational subjects in the film.

Placing this proposition together with the earlier suggestion that Moithu stands in for the 'subaltern' mass audience of popular cinema, we can arrive at a formulation about the cultural attributes of 'the masses' in the Left's imagination. One could say that the category of 'the masses', in the Left imagination, constituted 'the ethical population', clearly endowed with certain capabilities of rational thinking and ethical judgment — values that are crucial for participation in a democratic polity, and that the other sections of population, particularly the high caste Hindus, seemed to be lacking in. This is not to suggest that the masses were conceived of as capable of articulating their 'rationality' in political terms. The film shows Moithu always talking in the 'local' dialect associated with the Muslim community, while the postman is able

to articulate in the language (devoid of dialectical influences) of rational politics with ease. What characterizes 'the masses' is, thus, their *spontaneous* rationality and their impulsive discretionary capabilities— a 'rustic modernity' if one may call it so. The postman Shankaran Nair is the 'unmarked' modern subject, whose legitimacy emanates from, and is reaffirmed by, the approval of Moithu, and the mass audience of popular cinema that he represents.

The Communist as the representative of the region

The casting of P Bhaskaran in the role of the postman is an important strategy that enables the film to construct this character as the only modern rational figure with considerable moral authority. Literally speaking, the postman's character is the only exception in the film, while all other upper caste characters are portrayed as caught within pre-modern power structures. He is a resolutely ideal figure, elevated and placed above all other diegetic characters. It is striking that this role was reserved for P Bhaskaran instead of Sathyan, a budding star of the time who played the self-reforming character of the school teacher.[15] P Bhaskaran was a literary figure already known for his communist sympathies.[16] It is by infusing the (extra-diegetic, extra-cinematic) charisma of the Communist figure, through the strategy of casting P Bhaskaran in the role, that the film constructs the postman as the supreme modern rational figure drawing adulation and reverence. He, thus, represents the unfaltering spirit of rationality, the basis of Malayali nationalism, and mobilizes the region into one unity of modern nation-hood.[17]

One of the scenes mentioned above becomes crucial in this context. In this scene, Moithu offers the postman a glass of tea, since the latter "has shown tremendous guts" in rescuing the Dalit boy. The film expects from the audience the same adoration that Moithu has for the postman. It is not a coincidence that the film chose Moithu, the Muslim character, to show admiration towards the postman for his 'bravery'. Moithu's Muslim identity, I would argue, symbolically stands for the subaltern social groups that nominate the postman, the ideal rational figure, to

represent them, authorizing him to speak/act on behalf of them. This relation of adulation and nomination between Moithu and the postman is similar, in certain ways, to the representational strategies in the star-films of South India, where the comedian would often figure as the fan/admirer of the star, nominating and elevating the latter to the position of being "the representative of the linguistic region" (Prasad 1999).

The Left and the specificities of 'Malayali nationalism'

Neelakkuyil, thus, offers us venues for reflecting on a few specificities of 'sub-nationalism' in Kerala, in comparison to the linguistic nationalities in the South India. Studies on cinema and the film culture in the other three South Indian states — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu — provides valuable insights into the political transformations that take place with the emergence of linguistic sub-nationalities in the south, following the mass mobilizations on the basis of language during the 1940s and the linguistic reorganization of the states in 1956. These were sub-national entities since they did not claim sovereignty or undermine the overarching authority of the Indian nation-state, though the relations between all the South Indian states and the federal government at the centre were fraught with tension; nevertheless, they assumed dimensions of nationalities, addressing themselves as linguistically homogenous territories, where mass mediums like cinema were used "to re-centre the popular consciousness" (Prasad 1999: 74) around these new cultural entities.

The dimensions in which linguistic nationalism and cinema are closely connected in South India (except Kerala) are well-known. In Telugu, Tamil and Kannada, with the arrival of the talkies, the film industry tried to appeal directly to the respective linguistic communities through films. As Prasad points out:

> Cinema suddenly proved itself to be an effective means of integration of populations previously scattered across different presidencies and princely states, into one linguistic nationality. For the film producers, initially, this

was no more than a marketing strategy, what they were aiming for was a national market for a cultural product that spoke in a particular language. But it soon became clear that cinema was a more productive institution that would quickly become the emblematic supplement to national identities that were restricted to cultural self-expression. The literary class soon recognised this potential and began to take an active part in the film industry. (Prasad 2009: 74)

Parallel to this direct address to the linguistic constituencies, a shift is identified in popular cinema by the 1950s that started moving away from the earlier conventions of the female star-oriented narratives towards a narrative structure in which the male star started gaining centrality. In the star-films of the 1950s in these three languages the male hero attained the status of being the representative of the linguistic community as well as the moral authority of the respective regions (Prasad 1999).[18]

In contrast, there is a general acceptance in the scholarship on Kerala that, compared to other South Indian states where mobilizations based on a common language became the most crucial facilitating factor for linguistic nationalism, nationalist mobilization based on language did not take on similar dimensions in Kerala during the 1950s. Scholars like J Devika have argued that 'developmentalism', rather than language, was the uniting factor and the dominant discourse in the region's nationalist sentiments. Devika says:

> The major instrument with which [Malayalee nationalism] was to be accomplished was to be Development. This may seem to be in contradiction with the insistence of the Communist movement on the linguistic basis of State formation. Language was certainly not dismissed; however, while the place of Malayalam in imagining the new Malayalee was beyond dispute, it could only figure as an initial condition — quite unlike, for instance, the status of the Tamil tongue in Tamil nationalism (Devika 2007: 17).[19]

Our analysis of *Neelakkuyil*, which was released close to the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956, also seems to provide a similar picture about what constituted the basis of Malayali nationalism. The 'nationalist' exhortations in *Neelakkuyil* are quite evident from its narrative, though the strategies of addressing the audience as 'Malayalees' (thus invoking language as the uniting element of this nationalism) was not resorted to. Rather, a discourse of 'rational thinking', propagating secular egalitarian values and imagined as emanating from Communism, was envisaged as the dominant interpellative structure of Malayali nationalism, if suggestions in *Neelakkuyil* are anything to go by. This discourse of 'rational thinking' formed the basis on which the Left imagined the region.[20] The postman character in the film epitomized this discourse, like MGR represented the Tamil nation or Rajkumar became the icon of Kannada language in the respective popular imaginations. Interestingly, as if in continuation with the unglam-orous casting of the postman's character, this unfaltering morally upright figure — which had the potentials of being redeployed as the moral authority of the region in similar ways the stars were cast in other South Indian language films of the period — was to disappear from the world of the social realist films in Malayalam. In contrast, the self-reforming high caste school teacher was to be repeated in a number of later films as well.[21]

The 'sexual contract' and the nationalist consensus

One of the easily noticeable features about the social realist films is the importance that 'public spaces' like teashops, streets etc., attain in these films as narrative backdrops. It would be worthwhile exploring the significance of the shift in the narrative backdrop from the 'familial' spaces of the studio socials to 'public spaces' in social realism — a major transition effected by the social realist films by the mid-1950s. In the studio socials, the primary narrative backdrop was the space of the family — often that of the joint family which would accommodate the conjugal space constituted by the young protagonists. The narrative that unfolds in the "domestic" space, where women's roles were central, becoming a commentary on the larger society. The "family"

functioned as a micro-social unit, and the moral of the story often served as a critique of the social hierarchy. The crisis within the family alluded to a larger social problem, and the narrative resolution of the crisis would often necessitate changes in the existing social order.

In *Neelakkuyil* and the later social realist films, the narrative backdrop shifts to 'public' spaces like the teashop, the streets, the court, the school, etc., which are defined by the presence of and exchanges between men from different communities. The narrative focus is mainly on the relations between communities (which constitute the 'social reality' that these films choose to portray, preferring it over a myth or the realms of affects and sentiments that circulate in, and define, the 'familial' space) unfolding in these 'public' spaces. The narrative resolution depends on the negotiations between men (often of different communities). Even when there are sequences that unfold in the 'familial' spaces (defined by the presence of women) in these films, the coordinates of the mare often subordinated to the events that unfold in the 'public spaces' or are often mere effects of them.

The shift in the narrative backdrop of the social realist films of the 1950s from family backdrops to 'public' spaces is understood entirely as the result of the aesthetic compulsions of realism. However, it is striking that most of the 'outdoor' shots in *Neelakkuyil*, as well as many other films in this genre that came later in the 1950s in Malayalam, use studio sets to reconstruct locations like the teashop and streets (for instance teashop in *Neelakkuyil* and the town and the streets in *Rarichan Enna Powran* [Citizen Rarichan: d. P Bhaskaran; 1955]). Shooting at *real locations* is not often a major concern, whereas the prominence afforded to public spaces as narrative backdrops becomes a striking feature in them as a narrative prerequisite and effect of realist cinema. However, it is also possible to understand the social realist films as tales of nationalist consensus based on caste egalitarianism and 'controlled' class revolution *achieved through a contract between men of different castes and communities*. This is not to argue that the 'family spaces' as the major narrative backdrop in the studio films of the early 1950s meant

radical avenues for elaborating women's desires, but to signal at the transformation that takes place with social realism when questions of women's subjectivity (irrespective of the ideological forms in which they were elaborated and resolved) were kept aside almost completely, and the domain of exchanges between men (of different sections of population) took the centre stage.

It is these negotiations between men that sealed the social contract between various communities ushering in the new Malayali nation, alongside muting the questions of women's subjectivity. Here, it is also significant to recall the argument about Moithu, a male character, representing the subaltern, mass audience as the legitimate source of approval. Moithu, and by extension (the male members of) the subaltern audience, are important links in the tale of the sexual contract between men of different communities, effecting a (sub)nationalist consensus. Importantly, this sexual contract is also the site where the position of the middle class, upper caste hero, represented by the Communist figure in the film, in the imminent social order is negotiated with 'the masses'.

A look at the exchanges between Sreedharan Nair and his wife Nalini in their domestic space would be productive. The film has long sequences showing the guilt-ridden school teacher striving hard to lead a normal married life. The presence of Mohan, his own son by the Dalit woman, is a constant reminder of his pre-marital affair with Neeli and the violence that he committed on the latter by rejecting her. However, he is not able to open up to anyone, including his wife Nalini. This leads to tensions between the couple, as Nalini insists that she needs to know why her husband is grief-stricken all the time. She begins to think that the school teacher is unhappy in the marriage because of her impotency. At this point, the school teacher gathers courage and tells Nalini that Mohan is his son by Neeli. He asks for forgiveness. Nalini's response is interesting to note: "I can never forgive you. I am accursed. […] Cruelty to a child is something I cannot forgive. You threw your own child away. […] Neeli bore your child for ten months, and her life ended on the rail tracks. What wrong did that girl do to you? She loved you unconditionally. But then,

she happened to be a 'Pulachi' [a Dalit]. You practiced untouchability in your love too?" She then asks her husband to talk to the postman, Mohan's foster father, and adopt the child.

The long sequences, elaborating the school teacher protagonist's moral dilemma and guilt, mainly serve the purpose of staging the drama of the upper caste protagonist's self-reformation before the mass audience. These sequences are replete with shots of the anguished school teacher looking out of the window, making abstract philosophical points about his dilemma. Nalini couldn't make sense of the situation or comprehend what her husband says for long. These sequences present the repenting protagonist before the audience and to offer him avenues in the narrative to redeem himself through self-reformation. As someone who is outside this loop of exchanges — between the school teacher and the audience (gendered as male) — Nalini fails to make sense of her husband's prolonged existential angst. Seen in this context, Nalini's response to her husband's revelation about his pre-marital affair seems to be totally framed by the film's central theme of caste egalitarianism, which subsumes and renders irrelevant all other aspects of the situation, including the ramifications of the protagonist's pre-marital affair in the life of the couple. It, then, should not strike us as strange that the only factor that pains Nalini is how her husband rejected Neeli because she was a Dalit (thus practicing "untouchability in his love"). In a narrative preoccupied with the tale of caste egalitarianism that needs to be achieved through a social contract between men of different castes, there is no space for the recognition or elaboration of the issues in the domestic space, and by extension, women's subjectivity itself. This is not to suggest that the narrative privileges the issue of caste discrimination over the subjectivity of women, but to show that even the actions that unfold in the (private) space constituted by the heterosexual couple function mostly as important links in the larger narrative preoccupation.

The construction of the Dalit woman Neeli could also be seen as an important narrative device that allows the film to effortlessly stage the tale of caste egalitarianism to be achieved through

the contract between men of different communities/castes. This would require a much more complicated understanding of the place and function of this character in the film than what the existing scholarship offers. Jenny Rowena (2002, 2008) has argued that films like *Neelakkuyil* puts forth a pseudo-radical message on the question of caste, and in fact reproduced the caste/gender hegemonies. Pointing towards the structures of 'casteist patriarchy' built into the social realism of *Neelakkuyil*, Rowena argues that the narrative of the film "does not accept the Dalit woman into its fold" and that it "lets her die helpless by the roadside" (Rowena 2002: 35). She writes:

> Here, the question of caste/gender (as in most other social-realist films of the period) is not taken up from the perspective of the person for whom [they are] most problematic - the Dalit woman. A truly radical narrative about caste/gender inequality would have represented Neeli's story from her perspective […]. [T]he entire narrative is represented from the upper caste man's perspective, for whom the discourse on caste/gender equality becomes a means to establishing his superior identity. In fact, it is by assimilating the radical discourse on caste/gender with pseudo-radical films such as this that [the upper caste man] is able to posit himself at the center of Malayalee progressiveness and culture (Rowena 2002: 36).

For Rowena, *Neelakkuyil* becomes problematic since it is not told in the Dalit woman's perspective and it abandons her. She also adds that "there is a near absence of Dalit woman in the entire history of Malayalam cinema" before and after *Neelakkuyil* (Rowena 2002: 35). Similarly, discussing the distinct modes in which Neeli and Nalini are portrayed in the film, C S Venkiteswaran says:

> While Neeli enters Sreedharan Nair's world from the outside, seeking refuge, Nalini belongs to an honourable *taravad*, an alliance with it being considered an honour by Nair. While Neeli is always shown in the open, frolicking and working in the exteriors, Nalini is firmly placed

within her home first, and then after marriage in the new home. While Sreedharan is a playful lover to Neeli, he is a proper husband to Nalini. While one is all sensual and inviting, the other is controlled and prohibitive (Venkiteswaran 2006).

While these critical observations invite our attention to some of the dominant representational strategies of portraying Dalit women in Malayalam cinema, they do not engage with the logic behind placing the Dalit woman as one of the central characters in *Neelakkuyil* (whereas there is a near absence of Dalit women characters in the representational horizon of Malayalam cinema before and after this film, as also pointed out by Rowena). That the film's intention is not to tell the story of untouchability from the Dalit woman's perspective, and that its representational registers the Dalit woman with certain characteristics, are rather obvious. But the crucial question is why the Dalit woman is a central character in the film?

The dominant structures of representation — whether novels, dramas or films — portray only *adult men* as politically agential (capable of deliberating on social issues, enunciating political positions, etc.). Other categories like women, children, the youth, the aged, etc., are conceived as vulnerable, less agential and incapable of deliberating on social and political issues. The latter categories often need nurturing and patrons. In *Neelakkuyil*, one can notice that the Dalit characters belong to the category of women, children and the aged. The two prominent Dalit characters in the film are Neeli, the Dalit woman, and Mohan, her son. Using these two characters, the film foregrounds, in a compelling manner, a number of issues specific to being a lower caste, especially by portraying the humiliation they have to face from the upper castes in the village. His school mates humiliate Mohan by calling him 'a *pulachi's* son'. In this moving scene, the film uses close-up shots and a poignant background score, in an attempt to generate sympathy from the audience towards the Dalit child. Evidently, the scenario would have changed radically, if the film had replaced the Dalit child with an adult Dalit man, thus placing new demands on the narrative to come up with devices to contain the much more radical political energies that such a scenario

would have released (given the agential position that the dominant social imaginary attributes to the adult man, as opposed to a child or a woman, 'other things being equal'). This 'reducing' of Dalit characters to categories of women and children — conceived as non-agential in the dominant imagination — enables the narrative to render the Dalits as voiceless who needs to be represented by the Communist figure. It is interesting to note that in the film, Neeli never articulates her rejection as an instance of the practice of untouchability; she does not have the enunciating capabilities to articulate her condition as part of a larger social issue. It is the postman Shankaran Nair, the radical Communist figure, who is endowed with the authority to *represent* the issue of untouchability in the language of rational politics; he is the custodian of Mohan after Neeli's death; he is the object of admiration for Moithu.

Thus, it is with this Communist figure that the school teacher has to negotiate in the end, not with Neeli or Mohan, in order to redeem himself from the guilt of practicing untouchability. Towards the end of the film, when the school teacher falls on his feet and admits that Mohan is his son, the postman gives a long, moving account of how the whole village discriminated Neeli and Mohan because they were untouchables. He even punishes the repenting school teacher by refusing to hand over the custody of Mohan to the latter, thus bringing the narrative to a momentary crisis, forcing the latter think of anything else other than ending his life. In the end, the postman concedes the custody of Mohan to the school teacher, thus offering him a chance at redemption. Significantly, it is this negotiation between the Communist figure, legitimized and nominated by Moithu who represents the mass audience, and the self-reforming Nair protagonist, that brings the narrative to a closure.[22]

The film do not make any attempt to represent the desires and distresses of the Dalit woman, nor is Neeli an important link in the emergent social contract despite her prominence in the narrative. The primary function of Neeli's character is to *effeminize* the Dalit community, a crucial strategy that enables the film, on the one hand, to elaborate the issue of caste discrimination in a controlled manner so as to contain the radical energies that such

narratives could unleash, and on the other hand, to institute the ideal Communist figure to represent and speak for the Dalits. As a film that concedes agency of political deliberation and action to *only adult men*, the Dalit protagonist's femininity was a crucial representational strategy for achieving the terms of the social contract that the narrative sought to effect. Feminizing the Dalit community was a way of silencing it within the film's representational horizons, so that the Communist figure can *represent* the former. It then sets the stage for the final negotiations between the Communist radical and the self-reforming high caste protagonist.

Women's cinema

Significantly, one clearly recognizable genre that was emerging and getting consolidated by the late 1950s and during the 1960s was the 'women's cinema', which included mainly romance melodramas and a few 'tearjerkers'. These films dealt with a number of themes and issues related to women's desires in many ways. Here, the term 'women's cinema' does not mean 'cinema by/of women'. Rather, it refers to the cluster of films that tried to address women as a separate audience segment by foregrounding and elaborating certain narrative elements and affective realms which were considered as directly appealing to this audience segment, and were left largely unaddressed by social realism. While Prem Nazir epitomized the romantic hero in this category, Padmini, Ragini, Sheela and Sarada — the leading actresses of the industry during the 1950s and the 1960s — came to be known for their roles in the tearjerkers during this period.

The romance melodramas mostly dealt with the theme of an estranged romantic couple or the love between protagonists from disparate socials backgrounds. A number of these films drew from pulp fiction, the so called *painkilisahityam* in Malayalam, a genre of titillating and sentimental romance novels, considered as catering mostly to women readers. The genre acquired this name from the title of Muttathu Varkey's famous novel *Padatha Painkili* published in 1955, and was made into a film in 1957. Muttathu Varkey's novels, and *painkili* romances in general, are devaluated and stigmatized in elite literary circles mainly for their

sentimentality and sensual content. Udaya, Merryland, Associated Pictures and other producers made a number of films based on the stories of Muttathu Varkey,[23] Ponkunnam Varkey[24] and E J Kanam,[25] in which Prem Nazir played the roles mostly of the young romantic, the dissenting younger son in a feudal joint family.[26]

An examination of various aspects of the 'women's cinema' and its connections with Prem Nazir's stardom is beyond the scope of this paper. However, as a concluding note on the Left's interventions in cinema, we can put forth certain broad hypotheses in the light of the observations made above. The Left and its aesthetic project of social realism conceived the realms of rational politics and the relations and negotiations between communities/men as the *only* constitutive elements of 'social reality'; consequently, it marginalized or delegitimized the affects and energies of romance and sentiments, perceived as circulating in the 'familial' spaces and as appealing mainly to women. The commercial film industry that emerged in Malayalam by the late 1950s, facilitated by the local studios like Udaya and Merryland, on the other hand, commodified and addressed the subjectivity of women in various forms, offering avenues of covert gratification of their desires and anxieties.

Notes:

[1] Progressive Writing Group was begun as *Jeeval Sahithya Prasthanam* (Movement for the Literature about Life) in 1937, with people like E M S Namboodiripad, K Damodaran and P Keshavadev as its founder members. The movement was renamed in 1944 as *Purogamana Sahithya Sangham* (Progressive Writing Group). This forum consisted of most of the well-known writers of the period from Kerala, including P C Kuttikrishnan (known as Uroob) and Ponkunnam Varkey who had written for cinema during the 1950s. See Gopalakrishnan (1987) for a history of *Purogamana Sahithya Sangham.*

[2] Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC) was formed in 1950 by a group of young Communists. KPAC was later affiliated to the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). See Mohandas (2002) for a history of KPAC. Thoppil Bhasi, the most prominent playwright of the KPAC, wrote screenplays for a number of films in the second half of the 1950s and later.

3   Hindi films like *Dharti Ke Lal* (K A Abbas, 1946) and *Do Bhigha Zameen* (Bimal Roy, 1953), Bengali films like *Udayer Pathe* (Bimal Roy, 1946), Babla (Agradoot, 1951) and *Chhinnamul* (Nimai Ghosh, 1951) are examples. The involvement, direct or indirect, of the artists associated with Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) in these films is striking (Biswas 2010).

4   Madhava Prasad uses 'nationalist realism' to describe Italian neo-realism and the realist experiments in Indian 'new cinema'. This aesthetic movement, according to Prasad, functions as "one of the mechanisms of the modern state's hegemonic project, giving *substance* to the state's claim to represent the 'nation' that it encompasses" (Prasad 1998: 61; emphasis in the original). In contrast, the realist imperative in classical Hollywood cinema "consists in according primacy to the features of a rationally-ordered society – relations of causality, progression along a linear continuum marked by motivation, credibility, and action submitted, in the ultimate instance, to the narrative possibilities arising from the operation of the rule of law; the realist text in this sense is a sign of bourgeois hegemony" (Prasad 1998: 62).

5   Another account describes *Neelakkuyil* as a "melodramatic film full of songs and dance" (Ramankutty 1989/2006: 6). It says: "[T]he linear flow of the narrative was not given importance in the early Malayalam films. Films were often made by simply sticking together a number of disparate incidents. At times, they dealt with social issues, directly or indirectly. They also tried to entertain the audience. Scenes were not organised along a linear thread. One can see all these aspects in *Neelakkuyil*" (Ramankutty 1989/2006: 11).

6   The terms Nair, Namboodiri and Marar refer to Hindu caste groups. Mappila is a term commonly used to refer to especially Muslims and also to Christians in Kerala. Here it refers to the Muslim character Moithu in the film.

7   See Namboodiripad 1937/1998, and Namboodiripad 1954/1998 - two essays that elaborate his views on the ideal use of literature and theatre.

8   E M S wrote in 1937: "[W]hat does the *Jeeval Sahithya Prasthanam*propose to the artists? It is that they should advocate and support the progressive forces in the society. […]. This does not mean that *Jeeval Sahithyam* should sacrifice artistic values in favour of progress. *Jeeval Sahithyam* does not disrespect aesthetic values. However, the movement would insist that one should not stand for conservatism in the name of defending aesthetic values" (Namboodiripad 1937/1998: 19–20).

9   See also Menon 1994: 148-51.

10   Commending the initiatives of the KPAC in theatre, E M S lists three reasons to assert the historical importance of this movement: "1. KPAC's

plays were *the most frequently staged* plays in Kerala, 2. these plays led to the emergence of several theatre artists and facilitated the formation of theatre groups all over Kerala, and 3. they were *extremely popular*" (Namboodiripad 1954/1998: 34; emphasis added).

[11] An article titled 'Chalachitra Vyavasayam Keralathil', written by Achyut in 1956, says: "Moithu's character played by Balakrishna Menon and the Mappila song *Kayalarikathu* became very popular among Malayalees, especially those from Malabar" (*Mathrubhumi*, October 28, 1956).

[12] P Bhaskaran was a proponent of an aesthetic which connects with the masses and he believed in the use of cinema for facilitating social transformation. He wrote in 1974: "[S]ome of the proponents of 'new cinema' believe that if cinema as a medium has a commitment towards anything, it is only to itself, and that it is in no way committed to the audience, the society or the nation. (…)I believe that cinema should be used as a progressive medium containing messages of social transformation. (…) All the thinking directors and filmmakers should try to use the potentials of the medium and bring in radical changes in the life of the common people" ("Cinema cinemakkuvendi?" *Nana*, 29 December, 1974: 46).

[13] S V Srinivas (2000) has also argued that irrespective of the audience's social background, the cinema assumed the status of a subaltern institution during the 1940s and the 1950s.

[14] It may be remembered that Krishna Pillai, the co-founder of the Socialist Party, wrote in 1934 that "Capitalism will be destroyed and the ruling of the country will pass into the hands of *daridranarayanan* [the poor]." Krishna Pillai, "Fascisavum Kammyunisavum" (Fascism and Communism), *Mathrubhum*i, 18 April 1934; quoted in Menon 1994: 190).

[15] By the time *Neelakkuyil* was released, Sathyan had acted in three films – *Athmasakhi* (G R Rao, 1952), *Ashadeepam* (G R Rao, 1953) and *Lokaneethi* (R Velappan Nair, 1953).

[16] P Bhaskaran was a member of the Communist Party in Kerala, and had a brief career as the lyricist for Left theatre before coming to cinema. His poem *Vayalar Garjikkunnu*, inspired by the peasant rebellion of Punnapra-Vayalar (1946), was banned in Travancore.

[17] See Radhakrishnan (2010) for a discussion on the exchanges between the popular Left and the middle cinema in Malayalam, including the social realist films of the 1950s, though *Neelakkuyil* does not figure in this list of films in his analysis.

[18] These textual strategies created avenues for the male stars in Telugu, Kannada and Tamil film industries to gain considerable popular appeal and

authority that often spilled over to other domains including electoral politics. For various aspects of this, see Prasad 1999, 2009; Srinivas 2009. See Radhakrishnan (2010) for an account on why this did not happen in Kerala. Radhakrishnan argues that, "[t]he transformation of star charisma into the field of electoral politics was impossible in a region like Kerala, as the former was being channelised into already existing structures of the Left, infusing leaders […] with star power" (Radhakrishnan 2010: 36).

19 'Developmentalism', in Devika's essay, stands for a discourse of rapid industrialization that the political leadership of the official Left envisaged during the time as essential for fashioning a 'modern Malayali culture', which included promoting "large-scale industries, scientifically reorganized and managed farms and forests and hydel projects, enlisting its labor force rationally in productive activities, zestfully promoting scientific research and technical education" (Devika 2007: 17).

20 This is not contest Devika's claim about 'developmentalism', rather broadens the proposition by arguing that the emphasis was more on a modernism based on rational thinking and social egalitarianism.

21 For example, in films like *Mudiyanaya Puthran* (Ramu Kariat, 1961) and *Mooladhanam* (P Bhaskaran, 1969) Sathyan himself plays the high caste protagonist who undergoes certain self-transformation in the course of the narrative, after spending time with the lower castes/class.

22 We may also recall Carole Pateman's famous argument that the social contract, which is the basis of polities like nation-states, is dependent on a prior sexual contract - a contract not between the man and the women who form the couple, but between the men who all agree to subordinate themselves to an overarching authority (of the state, in case of nation-states); the family and the woman becomes the property of the man. The authority of the modern state derives from this dual contract (Pateman 1988: 2). The term 'sexual contract' here is borrowed from Pateman. However, it is not using Pateman's formulation - which indicates the conditions of bourgeois hegemony and the emergence of modern state - to apply it directly to our context. In the case of *Neelakkuyil*, the sexual contract between men in the film's narrative symbolically stands for the contract between various castes and communities, represented by men, in the region. This contract is negotiated by the Communist figure who represents the region/nation and its people (especially the subaltern sections), and whose paramount authority is acknowledged by all.

23 Muttathu Varkey wrote the story and screenplay for films like *Padatha Paingili* (P Subrahmaniam, 1957), *Mariyakkutty* (P Subrahmaniam, 1958), *Poothali* (P Subrahmaniam, 1960), *Christmas Rathri* (P Subrahmaniam, 1961), *Jnanasundari* (K S Sethumadhavan, 1961), *Snapaka Yohannan* (P Subrahmaniam, 1963), *Ina Pravukal* (Kunchacko, 1965), *Sthanarthi*

Saaraamma (K S Sethumadhavan, 1966), *Velutha Kathreena* (Sasikumar, 1968), etc.

[24] Ponkunnam Varkey began his career in films by scripting *Navalokam* (V Krishnan, 1951), an early social realist film in Malayalam. A number of his plays were staged by the KPAC. He wrote the screenplay and dialogues for films like *Ashadeepam* (G R Rao, 1953), *Snehaseema* (S S Rajan, 1954), *Bharya* (Kunchacko, 1962), *Nithyakanyaka* (K S Sethumadhavan, 1963), *Sathyabhama* (M S Mani, 1963), *Susheela* (K S Sethumadhavan, 1963), *Kalanjukittiya Thankam* (R S Puttanna, 1964).

[25] E J Kanam was a novelist who entered the film industry by writing the story for *Bharya* (Kunchacko, 1962) and *Kalayum Kaaminiyum* (P Subrahmaniam, 1963). He wrote the dialogues for films like *Bharthavu* (M Krishnan Nair, 1964), *Kudumbini* (Sasikumar and P A Thomas, 1964) and *Adhyapika* (P Subrahmaniam, 1968).

[26] Director J D Thottan is another figure who tried to address this segment during the period, often by associating with these writers. His films include *Sthree Hridayam* (1960), *Kalyana Photo* (1965), *Anadha* (1970), *Vivaham Swargathil* (1970), *Gangasangamam* (1970), *Vivahasammanam* (1971), *Omana* (1972).

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Recasting the Marginalised:
Reading Sarah Joseph's Ramayana Stories in the Context of the Dravidian Movement

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The paper intends to look at how Sarah Joseph, a contemporary Malayalam woman writer, attempts to retell the Ramayana *in some of her short stories and in a novel by subverting the dominant versions of the text to provide feminist and subaltern critiques of it. The paper also looks at how the writer has taken a line similar to Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's readings of the* Ramayana *and the ideology spread as part of the Dravidian movement in South India, particularly in Tamil Nadu. The paper attempts to look at how Sarah Joseph has made use of the mode of deconstruction of the text made possible by Periyar to counter a monolithic text. It pauses to identify how her methods of deconstruction, which extend from Periyar, have created many sub-texts or subversions.*
Keywords: Ramayana, Dravidian movement, Sarah Joseph, Periyar, retelling, identity.

Retelling *the Ramayana* has been part of the literary and performative traditions in India and South Asia, although many of those are still left unexplored. However, there have been works that have examined and analyzed some of these diverse narrative traditions in opposition to the conventional view that holds the Valmiki Ramayana as the standard and authentic text. These retelling traditions can be considered as expressions that try to critique the dominant version, even while thriving under/within the dominant version. Different versions of the *Ramayana*

therefore signify the varied attempts on the part of different cultural identities to deconstruct a monolithic construction. In this context, retelling a particular text becomes part of a movement, foregrounding a certain ideological/political position. The present paper focuses on seven short stories and a novel written by Sarah Joseph. The short stories—"Karutha Thulakal" (Black Holes), "Taikulam" (Mother Clan), "Kathayilillathathu" (What is Not in the Story), and "Asoka" focus on Manthara, Soorpanakha, Sambooka and Sita respectively, exploring different aspects of identity and treating the *Ramayana* as a text of political domination while also reversing the conventional understanding of villain and hero as suggested by Periyar. "Oru Prayopaveshathinte Katha" (The Story of a Self-Willed Spiritual Death) portrays a sad and dejected Angadan, son of Vali, after Rama kills Vali. "Bhoomirakshasam" (Earthly Demon) gives a picture of the earlier encroachment on the part of the Aryans on Dravidian land and its women, by narrating the story of Araja and Dandhakaranya. However, "Kantharatharakam" (The Forest Star) reveals some thoughts of Rama and Lakshmana. The story "Jathigupthanum Janakigupthanum" (Jathigupthan and Janakigupthan) could be considered a political allegory set in the present time, which uses instances and quotations from the *Valmiki Ramayana*. The novel *Ooru Kaval* (Guarding the Homeland) gives the version of Angada and the Vanara clan on the Rama/Ravana war.

Not many literary works have reflected the "Dravidian" feeling/identity of Malayalees in Malayalam Literature. When I read Sarah Joseph's short story, "Taikulam" which portrays Soorpanakha as the main character, what caught my attention was the assertion of a Dravidian identity. Although the movement is centuries old in Tamil Nadu, it has had only a minimal presence in Kerala. Many Malayalam poets sang about Tamil being the mother of Malayalam language, while writing it out in Sanskritic Malayalam. In "Taikulam," Sarah Joseph uses a kind of Malayalam which is a mixture of Malayalam and Tamil. This, for me, offered an entry point to connect Sarah Joseph's *Ramayana* stories and the Dravidian movement. Later, in my interview with her, she said that she has been influenced by the writings of

Periyar and that had motivated her to explore the Dravidian identity in texts like the *Ramayana*.[1] However, Sarah Joseph has not mentioned Periyar and his influence anywhere else. These stories have appeared in different times, and in different collections spanning 1990-2003. Only in 2005 was it put together as a collection in English. In Malayalam, it was complied only in 2006 with the title *Ramayanakathakal Veendum Parayumbol* (On Retelling the Ramayana). However, in my opinion, in both the editions, the critical comments offered did not highlight the Dravidian import of these stories, though the word is used a couple of times.

The writings of Sarah Joseph, a feminist activist and a professor of Malayalam, I would like to reiterate, consistently comprise current debates on identity politics. Therefore, the writer's subjective position becomes very important. Moreover, if we examine the retelling traditions, the social location from where the narrating ensues, is one of the main deciding factors in defining the text. Sarah Joseph's subjective position in relation to her attempts in retelling the *Ramayana* is multi-layered. Apart from being influenced by Periyar's readings of the *Ramayana* and the ideology that spread as part of the Dravidian movement which manifest her identity as a South Indian, her position in retelling also stems from her ideological position as a feminist. Therefore, it becomes possible to categorize her attempts as constitutive of feminist myth-making. Nabaneeta Dev Sen expounds on the relation between women and epic:

> Epic poets the world over are men singing the glory of other men, armed men, to be precise. In a study I did a couple of years ago, I noticed that out of the thirty-eight basic things upon which most epic narratives of the world are based, only nine are associated with women. The ideals of the epic world obviously do not have much to share with women, nor do the women enjoy the heroic values. There is little they can do there—other than get abducted or rescued, or pawned, or molested, or humiliated in some way or other (Sen 1998).

Sen further explains her experiences of reading versions of the *Ramayana* narrated by women. She describes different versions of the *Ramayana* written by women and approaches they assume. She identifies four different approaches, in a sample of the existing versions of the *Ramayana* by women.

> 1) You could tell it like it is, by borrowing the traditional eyes of the male epic poet, as Molla does in her 16th century Telugu *Ramayana*. Or 2) you could tell it like it is, looking at it with your own women's eyes, as Chandrabati does in her 16th century Bengali *Ramayana*. Or 3) you could tell it like it is by borrowing an ideological viewpoint as Ranganayakamma does in *Ramayana Vishabriksham*, rewriting the Rama tale from the Marxist point of view. Or 4) you could tell your own story through the story of Sita, as the village women of India have been doing for hundreds of years (Sen 1998).

Molla, a woman who belonged to the shudra community, rendered a perfectly classical version of *Ramayana* and challenged the upper caste court poets. More than the theme, it is the identity of the writer as a woman and a shudra that offended the dominant sections of society. Chandrabati's *Ramayana* took sides with Sita and criticized Rama from a woman's point of view. Ranganayakamma rewrote the *Ramayana* from the point of view of Marxism, an ideology she believed in. But society was not kind to these women writers. The Brahmins opposed the reading of Molla's work in the royal court, whereas critics rejected Chandrabati's work as weak and incomplete. Ranganayakamma was ostracized socially for attacking the sacred text. We see that Sarah Joseph's versions of the *Ramayana* follow all the approaches mentioned by Nabaneeta Dev Sen except the first one.

Another aspect is her identity as a Christian. How would one locate *Ramayana* stories written by a non-Hindu writer, especially if they contain a deeply critical perspective? Barbara Metcalf suggests how in the second half of the nineteenth century, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians criticized the religious beliefs of their opponents through hyper-literal readings

of mythical texts (Richman 1991: 190). Paula Richman considers Periyar's readings of the *Ramayana* and his attack on orthodox Hinduism to be part of the same technique (Richman 1991: 191). *Jain Ramayana* and *Buddha Ramayana* also belong to this category, which criticize the Hindu religion. Sarah Joseph's retellings are not exactly the result of a hyper-literal reading of the *Ramayana*. However, her identity as a Christian would have helped her to subject the text to a more radical analysis. Moreover, it is likely that her familiarity with Malayalam Literature, given that she was a teacher, made available to her opportunities to close-read the *Ramayana*. She offers:

> While studying and teaching the *Ramayana*, I used to imagine so many *Ramayana* stories… With our own justice, each one will examine the justice system in the *Ramayana*. That is how many *Ramayanas* take birth. Different *Ramayana* stories, that are told differently based on differences in race, region, gender, class, etc., ask the question 'who is the righteous man?' When Seeta, Soorpanakha, Sambooka and many other characters ask the question 'is Rama the righteous person?' different *Ramayana* stories take birth (Joseph 2006).

I place Sarah Joseph's retellings within the contexts of existing as well as currently developing retelling traditions in Southeast Asia, India, South India and Kerala. Different versions of the *Ramayana* are available in Balinese, Cambodian, Chinese, Japanese, Lavosian, Malaysian, Thai and Tibetan languages. Many versions of the *Ramayana* are available in most of the Indian languages and in languages like Tulu, which do not have a script, as well as in in tribal languages like Bheeli and Santali. In Sanskrit, there are about 25 versions of the *Ramayana*.

There are a number of versions of the *Ramayana* in Malayalam as well. Cheeraman's *Ramacharitam*, Niranam Ramapanikkar's *Kannassaramayanam*, Ayyappilla Asan's *Ramakathappattu*, Punam Namboothiri's *Ramayana Chambu*, Ezhuthacchan's *Adhyatma Ramayanam*, *Keralavarma-ramayanam*, Azhakathu Padmanabha Kurup's *Ramachandra-*

vilasam, Kottarakkara Thampuran's *Attakkatha*, *Ramanattam*, Oduvil Shankarankutti Menon's *Ramayanamanjari*, Kadathanattu Krishnavariyar's *Bhasharamayanachambu*, Mannantala Neelakanthan Mosse's *Ramayanam Attakkatha*, Kumaran Asan's *Balaramayanam*, Kunchan Nambiar's *Ramayana*-based *thullal kritis,*[2] translations of *Tulsi Ramayana*, *Bhasa Ramayana*, *Kamparamayana,* etc are examples. Different genres inspired by the *Ramayana* include lullaby, *vanchippattu* (song sung during boat race), *tiruvatirappattu* (sung during a particular dance performance), puppet shows, etc. There are several plays that concern themselves with different instances in the *Ramayana* - *Seetha Swayamvaram* (Kodungallur Kunjikuttan), *Mandhodari* (Sardar K.M. Panikkar), *Adbhuta Ramayanam* (M. Neelakanthan Moos), *Seetaharanam* (N. Sankaran Nair), *Bhasharamayanam* (A. Govindapilla Chattambi), *Ravanaputran* (Pallathu Raman), *Lankam Ravanapalitam* (Madasserry Madhavavariyar), *Ramarajabhishekam* (E.V. Krishnapillai), *Pushpavrishti* (Tikkotiyan), *Kanchanasita, Lankalakshmi* and *Saketham* (C.N. Sreekantan Nair) are examples (Satchidanandan 2006: x). There are also a number of poems written by modern poets which interpret incidents from the Ramayana variously. Apart from Kumaran Asan's "Chintavishtayaya Sita," there are poems like P. Kunhiraman Nair's "Sita Devi," Sugathakumari's "Innathe Sandhya," Punalur Balan's "Samarpanam," Pala Narayanan Nair's "Tamasaakananangalil," Vishnunarayanan Namboothiri's "Lakshmanan," Balamaniamma's "Vibheeshanan," Vayalar's "Ravanaputri," Ayyappapanikkar's "Sabari," K. Satchidanandan's "Ahalya" and "Janaki Poru" etc (Satchidanandan 2006: x).

The spirit of challenging the *Ramayana* characterizes many of these texts, but can be specifically found in "Chintavishtayaya Sita," a poem by Kumaran Asan, a twentienth-century poet (Richman 2008: 20). In "Chintavishtayaya Sita," we see Sita, living in Valmiki's ashram after being abandoned by Rama, questioning Rama's actions as an individual as well as a ruler. She takes the position of his wife as well as his subject (praja) and judges his actions. C.N. Sreekantan Nair's play *Kanchana Sita* is another twentieth-century literary work that interrogates Rama's deeds.

In *Kanchana Sita*, not only Sita, but Urmila, Kausalya, Bharatan, Hanuman and Valmiki challenge Rama and his actions. They stress on the point that a justice system that does not take human emotions into consideration is after all no justice. Hanuman chants "Jai Sitaram" and says: "[A]re Sita and the kingdom opposing forces? A kingdom without Sita! Like a man without a soul…" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 82). Another venture along similar lines is filmmaker G. Aravindan's movie, *Kanchana Sita*. The film was not made for commercial audiences and therefore was included in the category of parallel cinema. The film does not present Sita in human form. She is represented as Nature, its movements, changes and so on. She speaks in the film through the changes of Nature and its silences. The film maker also uses tribal men to portray the role of Rama, Lakshmana and Bharata, to denote the indigenous nature of the *Ramayana* story.

There are versions of the *Ramayana* existing among adivasis in Wayanad, Kerala. A different version of the *Ramayana* is prevalent among the Muslims in Kerala, known as the *Mappila Ramayanam*. *Mappila Ramayanam* is said to have been composed in the twentieth century in north Malabar by an anonymous Muslim. T.H. Kunhiraman Nambiar, an exponent of *Vadakkan pattu* (Northern ballads), recollects some of these from his boyhood days, sung by a supposedly insane person Hussankutty.[3] In the *Mappila Ramayanam*, Rama is a Sultan and he is named Lama. The available text includes episodes such as "Hanumante Poonkavana Pravesam" (Hanuman's Entry into the Garden), "Ravanante Pranayabhyarthana" (The Proposal of Ravana), "Soorpanakhayude Chamanjorungal" (Soorpanakha's Dressing-Up), "Soorpanakhayude Pranayabhyarthana" (Soorpanakha's Proposal) and "Hanumante Poonkavana Naseekaranam" (Hanuman's Destruction of the Garden) [Kunjiraman 2007]. The language and imagery employed in the *Mappilapattu*[4] are resonant of the social fabric of the early Muslim community. Sources suggest that the *Mappila Ramayanam* cannot claim antiquity, considering the language of the compositions and given the fact that Father Camille Bulcke, author of the *Ramakatha*, does not mention this version (Bulcke 1978).

There are many versions of the *Ramayana* available from ancient, medieval and modern India. However, the commendable retelling traditions that need to be acknowledged here are the versions from women and subaltern sections of the country. Velcheru Narayana Rao examines the *Ramayana* songs sung by upper caste women in Telugu which, even while belonging to the framework of the dominant text, interrogate Rama's sense of justice in relation to Sita. He terms these songs as "Seethayanas" (Rao 1991: 130). These songs are predominantly sung in private gatherings of women held in the backyards of Brahmin households or sung during daily chores. Prominence is given to women characters and roles of otherwise obscure women characters like Santha (elder sister of Rama), who is not mentioned in the dominant version. Reference to rituals, women's daily chores, pregnancy, motherhood, female bonding, etc. can be found in these songs. Rao also talks about the *Ramayana* songs sung by non-brahmin/lower-caste women, which emphasizes the glories of Ravana, Lanka and so on. Rama, in these songs appears only as a devotional refrain whereas the role of a hero is bestowed upon Ravana (Rao 1991: 132). Nabaneeta Dev Sen explains the selection of themes from the *Ramayana* by women as follows:

> It is natural in women's retellings of the *Ramayana* for them to pick and choose their episodes; they are not interested in the heroic epic cycle, which has no relevance to their lives. If what they create is fragmentary, it is because their lives are fragmentary. For them, it is the whole story. It reflects a woman's world in its entirety (Sen 1998).

The multiplicity of these traditions is becoming increasingly neglected or sidelined as a result of the homogenization of culture, resulting in what could be called cultural loss. Romila Thapar argues on a similar note while discussing about the televised *Ramayana*, as an expression of the mainstream, marking a project of homogenisation to create a "national culture" (Thapar 2001: viii). She suggests that such homogenization of culture forces other versions to become irretrievably submerged or marginalized. Since there is little evidence that any one

rendering of the *Ramayana* could stand as the original text, as *the* Ramayana, it is difficult to understand the reason behind the State's choice of Ramayana for nation-wide telecast. Thapar suggests that when the State acts as a patron of the arts, it often favours dominant groups in society. Each *Ramayana* then, comes with the signature of the social location and ideology of the respective group that appropriates it. These appropriations and retellings are fashioned by deliberately reinventing the story and selectively dismembering/decontextualising particular incidents or by adding incidents that adhere to particular ideological positions (Thapar 2001).

In the context of the above background of retellings, I will briefly explain the significance and characteristic feature of Periyar E.V. Ramasami's exegesis of the *Ramayana.* Periyar started the Self-Respect Movement, a radical anti-caste movement in 1925 in Tamil Nadu. It was a movement against caste, Brahmanism, religion, cultural domination of North Indians on South Indians, and the rule of men over women (Richman 1991). Periyar interprets the *Ramayana* as a text of political domination on the part of North Indians/Aryans on South Indians/ Dravidians. Periyar's readings of the *Ramayana* are developed in two works: *Iramayanapathirangal* (Characters in the Ramayana), *Iramayankurippukal* (Points about the Ramayana) [Richman 1991: 180]. The gist of his ideas in these two books is translated into *The Ramayana: A True Reading* (Veeramani 1981). This paper draws from the latter English text and not directly from the Tamil versions. He reads the story of the *Ramayana* as a vehicle to spread awareness about the cultural domination of North India. In his comments on the *Ramayana*, he reverses the very story and uses it for spreading his anti-North Indian ideology. He challenges the conventional understanding of villain and hero, by demythologising Rama and presenting Ravana as the real hero. He deconstructs the image of Rama as an exemplary and divine character. In *Iramayanapathirangal*, Periyar criticizes thirteen major characters from the *Ramayana* on the basis of the deeds they perform. He cites fifty incidents of apparent improper behaviour on the part of Rama, which include coveting the throne of Ayodhya, killing Vali, his treatment

of Sita, his attitude towards Sudras which is manifested in the killing of Sambooka and so on. Meanwhile, he portrays Ravana as a monarch of the ancient Dravidians, a responsible political leader. He substantiates this point by providing details from the *Ramayana*. According to Periyar, Ravana was forced to avenge his sister's disfigurement. Ravana's death was possible only because of his brother, Vibheeshna's betrayal. He subjects the now standard *Ramayana*, a text with mythical features, to scientific analysis in order to highlight the anachronisms of the text. The manner of Periyar's criticism is unconventional, and yields dramatic interpretations. His intention was to disseminate Dravidian ideology among the masses, not the scholars. However, one could say that his interpretation has precedent in Chittalai Chattanar's *Manimekalai*, a 6th century Buddhist text, the Jain *Pratipuranas*, Vimalasuri's *Paumachariyam* and other texts in this vein (Richman 1991).

Norman Cutler observes a close connection between the Tamil Renaissance movement that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the Dravidian movement. The Tamil Renaissance marks the rediscovery of many early Tamil classics, their editing and publishing. This also becomes a moment in the evolution of Tamil cultural and political identity. The Dravidian political agenda emphasised the antiquity of Tamil civilization and its essential independence from Sanskritic culture (Cutler 2003: 288). K. Nambi Arooran observes that there was an intimate relationship between the Tamil Renaissance and the ways in which Dravidian sentiments arose. And the Dravidian ideology was formed mainly on the basis of the ancient glory of the Tamilians, revealed through literature (Cutler 2003: 288). What Periyar does is to use the *Ramayana* as a tool to forward his ideology, just as his opponents (the Aryans) had done, but his use of it entirely subverts and deconstructs their use of the same text.

I will now examine the details of the *Ramayana* stories written by Sarah Joseph and show how she has attempted to retell the *Ramayana* from the perspectives of different characters in the text. The protagonist of Sarah Joseph's story "Black Holes"[5] is Manthara – Kaikeyi's maid who is portrayed in the *Valmiki*

Ramayana as a liar, scandalmonger, and spy. However, in "Black Holes," Manthara is portrayed as a subaltern woman, a victim of power and intrigue, who is forced to act as a spy for her survival. The writer, by assuming Manthara's viewpoint, deconstructs Ayodhya's image as an ideal kingdom. She also makes us look at the traditional sage-like characters Dasaratha and Vasishtha in a completely new light. The story dwells with Manthara's escape from Ayodhya on the night of Rama's coronation, after she was blamed by everyone as the cause of all misfortunes. Ayodhya, to her, is not the ideal kingdom, but a stage set for a game of power. She says:

> What a supreme stage Ayodhya is! An unusual play was being performed where everyone takes on the role of the *sutradharan*. Naiveté was written on the faces of all actors and actresses. The white clothes that spoke of extreme satwa. The canine and tusk alone kept hidden and invisible from the spectator. 'I am the *sutradharan*,' the character Dasarathan says, dancing and holding on to the curtain. A face overflowing with compassion. Gentle, sweet words. The great tradition of *Raghuvamsam* should be preserved. For that, the eldest son Rama alone should be crowned…The Kekaya king, Aswapathi, bursting with anger, waiting to rush from the green room to the stage. 'I am the *suthradharan*. Dasaratha on stage is old, lustful, and a cheat. Only after he promised the kingdom as bride price did I give my young daughter in marriage to him. Ayodhya is Bharatan's. If he does not keep his word, there will be a war.' Between the stage and the green room stands another character holding the curtain. It is Vasishtan, taking the role of *sutradharan* ostensibly to uphold the honour of Ayodhya! Aswapathi should never reach the stage. So he dances blocking the door of entry (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 101).

She sympathises with Bharata for not knowing how he is exploited. She says: "[T]he sword that he raised against his mother must be piercing his own throat now. A world of fathers ordering their sons to raise their axes and swords against their

mothers' necks to preserve power" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 101). Manthara, in the standard version that circulates, is ugly, old and poor. She has to protect herself. She does not have any help or divine weapons with which to defend herself. She says: "[F]or that, one should have secret assignations with *devas*. Also, *devas* preferred very beautiful women. And then there was penance! But could starving people find time for all that?" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 99). Here, by locating Manthara as a person from the lower strata of society, Sarah Joseph brings out the politics of power experienced by a subaltern woman, whose very position enables such a politics as well as the organization of power. Manthara's version of the story throws light on the darker and uglier side of the ideal kingdom of Ayodhya and the kings of the renowned Raghuvamsa. Periyar also criticizes Dasaratha and Vasishtha. He describes Dasaratha as a person enslaved by passion, as someone who broke promises and acted irresponsibly. The main charge against Vasishtha is for parti-cipating in the plot to crown Rama. The charges made by Periyar against both the characters are developed in the story "Black Holes."

One can see an interesting connection between the stories "Black Holes" and "Asoka" as the first one speaks about the victor's (Rama) kingdom and the second one speaks about the loser's (Ravana) kingdom. While in the story "Black Holes", Manthara's version reveals the misdeeds that take place off-stage in Ayodhya, in "Asoka," the protagonist Sita announces "all glories are rightfully Lanka's" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 113). "Asoka" portrays the incidents that occur in Lanka where Vibheeshana, Ravana's brother, is made king after Rama kills Ravana. Lanka, destroyed completely after the war, looks sorrowful and frighteningly silent. Vibheeshana informs Sita that Rama wishes to see her after her bath. Sita says to Vibheeshana that she wishes to see her husband without taking a bath. However, Vibheeshana is helpless since it is an order from the victor. In Sarah Joseph's words:

> The odour of the sin of fratricidal betrayal in his breath disturbs Sita. The new master of Lanka was struggling to hold his neck erect, crushed by the crown grown

lustreless with the smeared blood of his brothers (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 108).

This is one of the main charges that Periyar makes against Vibheeshana. He argues that Vibheeshana betrayed his brother Ravana and led him to his death in order to gain the throne of Lanka. Periyar also criticizes him for not avenging the mistreatment his sister had to endure from the Aryans. He writes:

> To commend a wrong-doer of many horrible blunders as an honest, just and brave man and to despise his own brother [Ravana] who treated Sita while in his custody honourably, as a vicious man–all these were not without ulterior motive of defrauding his brother Ravana and taking possession of Lanka. What can all these be, but selfishness and mean mindedness (Veeramani 1981: 636).

In a manner distinct from the many texts that describe Sita and her beauty, Sarah Joseph describes Sita as follows:

> Clay, battered and destroyed by continuous onslaughts of snow, rain, sunlight, lustful gazes, destructive stares, falling one upon the other on her face, neck, hands, breasts, navel, waist, legs and feet. Scars of severe bru-talization, scabs of drying tears, wounds of humiliation. Trailing in mud and dust, hair so matted that the strands could not be separated. Nails grown long. Skin drying and peeling off (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 108).

Sita, alone in her misery, feels closer towards the women in Lanka. Sita, although an Aryan woman, is also the victim of the justice system of the Aryan male. Here, Sarah Joseph deftly inserts a feeling of sisterhood between Sita and Vibheeshana's women. They console Sita by holding her in their arms. They say: "[T]his is not our justice, we, a subjugated people. This is the order of the victor" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 110). Sita wonders:

> Whose was the sin? Was it that of Aryan virility that had slashed the nose and ears of a lower caste woman who dared to make the mistake of begging for love? Or was it that of the justice of the subjugated, which seeking

revenge, laid hands on the woman and the land of the dominant? Finally who suffered the result of the sin? (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 111)

Sita shrinks with humiliation for being led as a culprit into the presence of the victor. He says: "I did not win this war to reclaim you. The insult inflicted on me and my clan…" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 113). At this moment Sita identifies herself with Lanka. She thinks: "[T]he soil flung aside contemptuously by the victor is Lanka. Sita and Lanka are one and the same" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 113). However, in Periyar's take on the *Ramayana,* Sita is presented differently from Sarah Joseph's intervention to the story. While Periyar charges Sita for allegedly feeling attracted to Ravana and for being unchaste, Sarah Joseph uses Sita to voice out the differences in justice systems followed by the Aryans and the Dravidians and to highlight a potential of a possible alliance between upper-caste women and the subalterns/subaltern women.

Differences in the justice systems of the Dravidians and the Aryans and the problems that result when one system forcefully replaces another, are voiced in the story "Mother Clan." In "Mother Clan," Sarah Joseph goes a step further to show how biased, male-centred and brahminical the Aryan laws are, compared to the Dravidian justice system which follows Nature. It tells the story of Soorpanakha, Ravana's sister, after her encounters with Rama and Lakshmana. In most of the *Ramayanas*, Rama orders Lakshmana to mutilate Soorpanakha, after she proclaims her love and makes advances to Rama at Panchavati. In some tellings of the *Ramayana*, Lakshmana cuts her ears and nose and in some other tellings he cuts her nose and breasts. Sarah Joseph follows the second version. In "Mother Clan," Soorpanakha's breasts become a symbol of female sexuality. It throws light on Rama's attitude to women and female sexuality, which is also normalised in Indian culture. The writer juxtaposes two different kinds of attitudes regarding women in Rama—one about protecting women and the weak and another about the tendency to criminalize and penalize women's sexuality which is beyond man's control. Soorpanakha finds the attitude of the Aryans alarming and strange. She says:

> The tree blossoms because of passion. The forest blooms because of passion. If a woman's passion is denounced as wrong and harmful, it is the fruit-bearing earth that will suffer… In my forest no man has shown cruelty to any woman. Filled with passion, if a woman approaches a man and he is unable to fulfil her desire, he would speak to her as he would to his sister and show her another direction. King Ravana has never lifted his sword to turn a woman's body into a barren land (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 120).

In the story, Soorpanakha is found waiting for Ayomukhi who is expected to arrive with 10,000 women to forge an attack on the Aryans. She fumes with the insults she had to endure from the Aryan male. She says:

> They severed the very roots of my clan; insulted my colour and race; despoiled my body and speech. They butchered the root and source of my breast milk. The roots of my clan and blood! (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 119)

From Ayomukhi, Soorpanakha finds out about the fall of Lanka. She states that not a single woman from the expected 10,000 turns up, fearing Vibheeshana. After hearing from Ayomukhi about Lanka's fall, Soorpanakha asks:

> 'Cheeta?' [Sita]. Ayomukhi whispers: 'They did not cut off her nose and breasts, but for the sin of having spent her days fearful, weeping, in King Ravana's garden, they prepared a blazing coal-fire and asked her to jump into it!'(Sankaranarayanan 2005: 125)

Listening to this, Soorpanakha roars with laughter. Soorpanakha laughs as she finds how unjust Aryan laws are to their women, let alone its injustice towards Dravidians and Dravidian women. The main charges that Periyar makes against Rama are his ill-treatment of Sita and the mutilation of Soorpanakha and Ayomukhi. Periyar contrasts Rama's treatment of Dravidian women (Thadaka, Soorpanakha, Ayomukhi) with Ravana's treatment of Sita. His identification of Ravana as the noble and righteous king of ancient Dravidas is promoted in Sarah Joseph's story.

A marked difference one can see in the positions assumed by Periyar and Sarah Joseph is their attitude towards Sita. Even while taking a strong anti-Aryan stand, Sarah Joseph identifies Sita as a victim of the justice system of the Aryans. She, being an object of exploitation, identifies with the other objects who were exploited—the Dravidians and their land. However, some scholars find the charges that are raised by Periyar against Sita a bit ironic as these criticisms are based on the *dharmasastra* text – the Laws of Manu, which he burnt along with the picture of Rama in 1956 (Richman 1991: 182). Periyar's negative interpretation of Sita is not a reflection of his anti-woman stand because his primary concern in deconstructing the *Ramayana* was to question Aryan supremacy mediated through the text. Moreover, he is known to be one of the very important reformers in this century and Periyar's writings and speeches given as part of the Self-Respect Movement, questioned all traditional images of women. Apart from advocating widow remarriage and women's education as did many reformers of the time, he de-ritualised marriages and stood against the system whereby women had to wear symbols of marriage. C.S. Lakshmi points out that Periyar's vision did not materialize completely, even within the movement, as women were not able to entirely abandon certain recognised and accepted roles that they had internalised. V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai have studied the role of women, especially Brahmin women in the movement, and the different dimensions of it (Geetha and Rajadurai 1998). K. Srilata's work provides important insights about submerged histories of women's involvement (Srilatha 2003). However, one could assume that the demoralization of Sita by Periyar using the same Aryan morals works as an effective strategy to convince the masses. What Periyar attempts to do is to use Aryan morals to criticize Aryan heroes. He condemns Rama, Lakshmana, Dasaratha, Vasishta, and many other characters by employing this method. Although Sarah Joseph uses the mode of deconstruction employed by Periyar in recasting each Ramayana character in a different milieu, unique concerns render Joseph's retelling attempts as distinct from that of Periyar's. Periyar used his retellings and recastings to campaign for the Dravidian

ideology to the popular reader, whereas Sarah Joseph's attempts are more women-oriented. Periyar's attitude about women expressed through the Self-Respect Movement would give us an idea that the demoralization of Sita does not come as part of his notions about a woman being pure, but as a means to attack the *dharmasastra* and an ideal woman character created through the influence of that text. Periyar used more popular ideologies for deconstruction, whereas the retellings by Sarah Joseph are more feminist and academic in nature.

"What is Not in the Story" portrays the meeting of five children – Rama and Sita's sons Lava and Kusa, the Shudra sage Sambooka's daughter and son, and the Brahmin boy who got back his life after Rama murdered Sambooka for practicing asceticism with the sage Valmiki in Naimisharanya. They all meet in the forest as Rama's sons are going to recite the *Ramayana* in Naimisharanya, Sambooka's children too are going there to sing about Sambooka's tale, and the Brahmin boy has lost his way during his search for his lost calf. They share their stories and realize how their stories are interconnected. Lava and Kusa, along with Valmiki, reach an open space in the forest, where they prepare to rest. They hear a song in the distance and Kusa asks Valmiki: "[E]veryone names you as the first poet. Then how can there be this song?" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 132). Later they learn that Sambooka's children had sung the song. This question opens up the possibility of the existence of older *Ramayana* stories, and acknowledges the existence of other *Ramayanas* than the *Valmiki Ramayana*. After meeting Valmiki, Sambooka's daughter asks him:

> 'Writer, why didn't you give us place in your writing?' For the first time, during the journey through the forest, Valmiki fell into a deep meditation. Slowly a termite hill grew around him and covered him (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 133).

Valmiki does not answer the question. The story ends as follows:

> Did Unni get his calf back? Perhaps he did. Till his next death he may have lived suffering the pain of sleep-

> lessness. In Naimisharanya, Sita's son recited the *Ramayana* and they were the focus of the eyes and ears of all who listened, says the narrator of the epic. But what we do not have any information about is Sambooka's children. Did they reach Naimisharanya? After the recital of the poet's version, did they sing their version of Sambooka's story? We do not hear anything of them in history, epics, or even oral folklore (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 136).

The writer uses this story to ask questions about the politics of omission and simultaneously points to significant gaps in the standard narrative. It also gestures at the possible multiplicity of versions and their loss, a result of the spread of the dominant culture.

"Jathigupthan and Janakigupthan" is vastly different from the other four stories. It could be considered a political allegory. Although not linked directly to the *Ramayana*, the names Janaki, the forest, and verses from the *Ramayana* used ironically suggests that it is a parody of the *Ramayana*, intended to make fun of contemporary politics and bureaucracy. Jathigupthan and Janakigupthan are the new incarnations of Rama and Sita in Kaliyuga. Janakigupthan is hysteric and her hysteria is a favourite subject of the media. Jathigupthan is portrayed as having severe constipation problems. This is the result of a curse given to him by Janakigupthan in their previous life. Janakigupthan and Jathigupthan appear as if they constitute a well-known scene from the *Ramayana*, where Sita asks Rama why he carries weapons even in what appears to be a harmless and beautiful forest. Sarah Joseph at this juncture, uses the same verse from the *Ramayana*, as a narrative technique to take her readers back to the myth. Janakigupthan curses Jathigupthan for not paying attention to the question: "[B]ecause of your passion for weapons, in Kaliyuga you will suffer from severe constipation" (Sankaranarayanan 2005: 139). Jathigupthan's main concerns are his constipation and his wife's hysteria. Throughout the story he appears naked, desperately trying to cover himself with weapons. Jathigupthan's personal assistant, who we see is frequently slapped by him, draws a parallel between the current

bureaucratic system and monarchy. The story exposes the absurdity of contemporary politics and the triviality of bureaucracy. This could be one of the ways of retelling the *Ramayana* in modern times, where the ideal images are again destroyed. It deconstructs the text by trivializing its high-sounding verses, exposes the marital discord in the relationship, and the fears of a leader and power-monger.

"Bhoomirakshasam" (Joseph 2006a) is a story about the pre-*Ramayana* times of Aryan invasion on subaltern lives and women. Dandhakan, son of Ayodhya's king Ikshvaku, who encroached the forest land and forced his rule among the Danava tribes, comes to Dandhakaranya and accidentally sees Araja, the daughter of the Asura sage Sukracharya. He forces himself on Araja and rapes her, not paying attention to her pleadings to leave her alone. Sukracharya, while coming back, sees that the forest, which was in full bloom, is now completely destroyed. Trees have shed their leaves and flowers, all the greenery had turned grey. Slowly they heard the sound of something falling like rain from the sky. And for seven days continuously the soil rained on Dandhaka's kingdom. Cities, people, and houses – everything went under the earth.

> Araja, feeling the insult and pain, kept her ears close to earth and listened to the thunders of Spring. The land around her was still green and alive with trees, birds, water, and breeze.

> For several thousand years, not even a single blade of grass sprouted in Dandhaka's kingdom and it was called as Dandhakaranya. People were terrified to go near that (Joseph 2006a: 37).

There is an obvious association between woman and nature in this story. But more than that, it records the Aryan invasion of subaltern land during pre-*Ramayana* times. It also records the arrogance and lack of respect towards others' lives on the part of an Aryan male.

"Oru Prayopaveshathinte Katha" tells the story of Angadan, the son of Vali who was killed by Rama. Angadan, his father dead

and his mother and country under the control of his father's brother Sugriva, is ordered to head the group which searches for Sita. In their journeys to unknown and unfriendly terrains "in search of a woman who none of them have seen or would recognize" (Joseph 2006a: 44), Angadan remembers a golden past when his father was alive. The story narrates the Aryan colonization in Kishkindha, Vali's kingdom, from the point of view of Angadan.

In a recent novel, *Ooru Kaval*, (Joseph 2007), Sarah Joseph revives the same plot to deconstruct the much valorised episodes of the search for Sita. The novel focuses on Vali's kingdom and its culture, thwarted by Aryan invasion. Characters like Thara who was forced to become Sugriva's wife after Vali's death and Maruti (Hanuman) are given prominence. The novel narrates how Aryans under the leadership of Rama make use of Sugriva's desire for Kishkindha's throne to impose their domination on the Vanara clan. The novel which has the same theme as that of the short story lacks precision compared to the latter. However, this is a theme that has relevance to Dravidian ideology as Periyar cites the killing of Vali as one of the most unjustifiable acts of Rama.

The story, "Kantharatharakam," I think, is crucial because it redefines the ideology behind Sarah Joseph's *Ramayana* stories. The story tries to express the thoughts of Lakshmana after Sita is abducted by Ravana. Lakshmana is convinced about their actions against the Rakshasa clan, but he remembers how Sita was against coming to Dandhakaranya on the requests of sages. He also remembers how his anger which resulted in the mutilation of Soorpanakha has caused the abduction of Sita. He recollects how, like Sita, his mother Sumitra and step-mothers Kousalya and Kaikeyi used to criticise sages for inducing violence among young children. In Sarah Joseph's words:

> Why do sages give weapons to children and make them do things? Sages have powers to kill any mighty Rakshasa. Then why are they making children kill them? Sumitra asks. "The fate of Kshatriya," answers Kousalya (Joseph 2006: 39).

Rama and Lakshmana have heard their mothers and wives talking among themselves, objecting to the widespread use of weapons and criticising a justice system that concentrates on killing innocent people. However, Rama and Lakshmana are portrayed as those who classify such attitudes as womanly, and of the weak-hearted. Here we can also see the attempt on the part of the writer to view Rama and Lakshmana as victims of *sanatana dharma*. They believe it is their duty and follow it blindly.

Looking at all the characters with sympathy was definitely not Periyar's mode of telling the story. Therefore, the ideological similarity that we find between Sarah Joseph and Periyar is limited. Periyar's de/reconstructions had a strong motif because it referenced a movement, more specifically, a people's movement. Sarah Joseph's stand in "Kantharatharakam," may appear as if she were assuming Rama and Lakshmana's perspective, the very villains of Dravidian ideology put forward by Periyar. But this does not mean that Sarah Joseph's intention is to retell the story along lines of the dominant versions. More than looking at Rama and Lakshmana sympathetically, Sarah Joseph here attempts to look at the internalization of the ideology and its source. In this sense, Sarah Joseph's retellings function more like a woman's version of the *Ramayana*, the kind put forward by Navaneetha Dev Sen. However, they go beyond the agendas of feminist retellings to incorporate racial and ethnic identities. In her writings, these stories mark an ideological shift, a manoeuvre that inaugurates discussions of caste.

Retelling the *Ramayana* has been an ongoing project in several research circles, and Sarah Joseph's undertaking can also be included in this category. The stories have appeared in English translation as *Retelling the Ramayana: Voices from Kerala* (Sankaranarayanan 2005). Although the book identifies different versions of the *Ramayana*, it continues to attach these retelling traditions to the *Valmiki Ramayana*, while placing that text in the centre. It does not abandon the idea of considering the *Valmiki Ramayana* as the text from which all other *Ramayanas* descended. From the cover illustration she uses (*Sita Bhumipravesh* by Raja Ravi Varma), to the dedication of the text by the translator (dedicated to her mother who taught

her from age seven, to recite the *Ramayana* flawlessly and rhythmically, without making any mistakes), the book appears to contradict its own content. As a result, the English translation reproduces the dominant and re-subverts the subversion, while presenting it to a foreign audience. *Retelling the Ramayana: Voices from Kerala* also includes a play called *Kanchana Sita* (Golden Sita) by C.N. Sreekantan Nair. The Malayalam book, on the other hand, contains only Sarah Joseph's stories, which include three more stories that are based on *the Ramayana*. The Malayalam book is named, *Puthu Ramayanam: Ramayana Kathakal Veendum Parayumbol* (New Ramayanam: Retelling Ramayana Stories). It does not carry a dedication and the cover illustration does not suggest any scene from the traditional *Ramayana*.

Periyar's attempts to critique North Indian cultural domination through criticizing their religious/cultural icons like the *Ramayana,* is still carried out by the Dravidar Kazhagam, the party established by him in 1944. Although Periyar's opponents and the supporters of the dominant culture mock his attempts, his method still continues to be the most popular and mass movement against the *Ramayana*, Rama and other Aryan cultural symbols. Its appeal to the comprehension of the common people makes it different from other similar attempts. Sarah Joseph's attempts, which are a result of her feminist and activist sensitivities, are definitely influenced by Periyar's readings of the *Ramayana*. Both these retellings, along with countless versions of the *Ramayana* from different locations, demonstrate how a particular text has been used as a way to normalize and standardize the dominant.

These three renderings – Periyar's interpretation of the *Ramayana*, Sarah Joseph's retellings, and the English translation of Sarah Joseph and Sreekandan Nair's writings – address different publics. Periyar's public was constituted by people, the masses. He used the deconstruction method, to awaken the masses from Aryan indoctrination. It is not creative, imaginative or aesthetically appealing. It is done based on pure reasoning and ideological commitments. And these renderings were part of a political or social movement. The public that Sara Joseph

addresses is a literary/reading public. This kind of writing is also political as it spells out the political stand and views of a writer. What both Periyar and Sarah Joseph are trying to do is to question the dominant justice system. Sarah Joseph tries to fragment the text into many versions. And Sarah Joseph, unlike Periyar, is not part of the Dravidian movement.

The different nature of the publics[6] addressed by the translation and the Malayalam collection is obvious from the author's note in both the texts. The author's note in the English collection focuses on the doubts that form in a child's mind while listening to stories from the *Ramayana*. She writes:

> All the versions of *Ramayanam* that children hear and read were filled with cruel rakshasas and rakshasis. They had been obstructing yagas, and attacking hermits. I continue to read and study that Raman killing them has become even a child's need. The death of every rakshasa is marked by devas showering flowers. Children love flowers. The innocent children desire the noiseless, painless showering of flowers (which trickle like honey on their heads) to a shower of arrows, the rivers of blood, and the jingling of weapons. As they grow up, some children may read and believe that the killing of the rakshasas signifies the victory or the defeat at the end of clan conflicts. That is the kind of reading that I also did. My reading is that all killings of rakshasas need not end in a 'victory' of human/divine beings (Joseph 2005: xiii).

She further explains what makes her see the side of characters like Sita, Soorpanakha, Sambooka etc. is that, for her, Sita and Soorpanakha are two aspects of the loss of love in 'Rama Rajya.'

> Oh, certainly! All children have doubts. When the 'laws and justice' that prevailed centuries ago do not coalesce with modern practices of justice, children feel confused. Only for a short span of time can we fool children offering lessons and prayers with the use of force. Truly, it is from the doubts arising from a deeply

pained self that my 'Ramayana Stories' were born (Joseph 2005: xv).

The author's note is titled "Ezhuthalare Kathayil Njangalude Idamevide?" (Writer, where is the place for us in the story?) in Malayalam. Here she details the politics of *Ramayana* and its justice systems.

> We can see that there is no work which has traveled so vibrantly and widely through speech and narratives like the *Ramayana*. The sources of *Ramayana* stories never get over, regardless of how much ever it is consumed. For each generation the *Ramayanam* becomes a different one. Each period and region owns its own readings. With each one's justice, they measure the justice system of the *Ramayana*. That is how many *Ramayanas* take birth. All the versions of *Ramayana* that have been told from different locations like race, caste, region and gender search for an answer to the question, who is the complete human being (Joseph 2006: vii).

According to her, a different version of the *Ramayana* is born when Sita, Soorpanakha, Sambooka, and Nature challenge vibrantly the standard view of Rama as 'a person' who is 'brave' and 'good.' She offers:

> Rama stories become so vibrant and radiant because the characters in the boundaries mark themselves and search for a place in the story asking the ancient poet "writer, why haven't you acknowledged us in the story?" The *Ramayana* is seen by generations as a touchstone for regional and temporal justice systems and cut it across with a new sense of justice. This will continue to be an unstoppable process. Each *Ramayana* story will be told as a new *Ramayana*… (Joseph 2006: vii).

The cover of the Malayalam collection has the picture of a bronze face on fire, whereas the cover of the English version has a painting by Raja Ravi Varma named *Sita Bhumipravesh*. The translator, in her "Translator's Note," touches upon the Dravidian take of the stories when she says that:

Both are written from a woman's perspective. Both bring out the political context of Aryan versus Dravidian, the upper castes versus the lower castes, rajya dharma versus the dharma of love and human relationships. Both emphasize the importance of questioning tradition and having a new outlook with regard to the language and literature of the land (Sankaranarayanan 2005: xxiv).

But her dedication nullifies this view: "[T]o My mother who taught me, from the age of seven, to recite the *Ramayana* flawlessly and rhythmically, without making any mistakes" Sankaranarayanan 2005: xxvi). A more interesting observation that one can make of the English collection, is the imprint used at the beginning of each section, of an artistic bow and arrow. And we can locate a reaction to this image in Sarah Joseph's "Taikulam" and "Oru Prayopaveshathinte Katha." The image stands as the ultimate symbol of Aryan cunningness and shrewdness. Soorpanakha says:

There are many weapons made of copper and iron in my people's worksheds– swords, spears, axes–an endless number of weapons. As for the arrows! King Ravana is not fully aware of the strength of those arrows, that fell in the Dandaka forest like hail. Arrows pierced the chests of Kharan and other fighters and cut through to the other side, as they rushed, howling and holding their weapons aloft. In the time it takes to blink, those heroes fell like small mountains, their heads and torsos scattered, their chests and faces pitted with holes. I have no arrows that are as weightless as feathers, and can yet pierce rocks and speed off (Joseph 2005: 120)

The paper has attempted to view Sarah Joseph's Ramayana stories as articulating another dimension of her feminist concerns. These stories also mark a shift in her ideology by moving to a more specific notion of womanhood which is constructed within the frames of caste, community, ethnic and racial identities, unlike the early stories which focused more on women's roles. I have

placed Sarah Joseph's retelling of the Ramayana within the context of similar narrative attempts from South Asia, India and Kerala. The paper also reads Sarah Joseph's stories within the context of the Dravidian movement and its proponent Periyar E.V. Ramasami's interpretations of the *Ramayana*. Sarah Joseph's retellings, which could be influenced by Periyar's readings, are viewed as an instance of a woman's retelling of the *Ramayana*. In this sense, these stories can be viewed as Sarah Joseph's attempts to write about the self-discovery of women within their own space.

Notes:

[1]   Researcher's interview with the writer in May 2006.

[2]   *Thullal* is a traditional dance from South of Kerala, in which a story is enacted through dance and music.

[3]   "A Different Song," *The Hindu*, 12 August 2005. http://www.hindu.com/fr/2005/08/12/stories/2005081201210200.htm, (Accessed on 26th November 2007).

[4]   *Mappilapattu* or Mappila songs are popular folk song genre rendered in Arabic-laced Malayalam, predominantly by Mappila Muslims in the Malabar region of Kerala (Vallikunnu and Tharamel 2006).

[5]   (Sankaranarayanan 2005).

[6]   By publics, I mean different kind of interest groups in the public sphere.

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പരിഷത്ത്രൈമാസികം

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ലിഖിതി

ഭാഷാചച്ച

എൽ. വി. രാമസ്വാമി

എ. താരതമ്യാർത്ഥത്തിൽ 'ഇൽ'

"ധണിയിൽ വാഴയിൽ നല്ലമരണം" പണ്ടതിൽ പങ്കിട്ടിച്ച് " ഈ വാക്യ അളിൽ താരതമ്യാർത്ഥത്തിൽ പ്രയോഗിച്ചി ട്ടുള്ള 'ഇൽ' എന്ന പ്രത്യയത്തിൻറ ഉഗാ മം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നതായാൽ, ഇത്‌ സപ്പ്മ്യ ന്തമായില്ലാ പഞ്ചമ്യന്തമായിട്ടാണ് കാ ണപ്പെടുന്നത്. മധ്യതമിഴ്‌വ്യാകരണമായ നന്നൂലിൽ അഞ്ചാമത്തെ വിഭക്തിയുടെ പ്ര ത്യയങ്ങളിലൊന്നായിപ്പറഞ്ഞിട്ടുള്ള 'ഇൽ' ആണ് ഇത്. പ്രാചീന തമിഴ് വ്യാകരണ മായ തൊൽ കാപ്പിയത്തിൽ അഞ്ചാമത്തെ വിഭക്തിക്ക് 'ഇൻ' എന്നൊരു പ്രത്യയം മാ ത്രമേ വിധിച്ചിട്ടുള്ളൂ. എന്നാൽ നന്നൂലിൽ 'ഇൻ', 'ഇൽ' എന്ന രണ്ടു പ്രത്യയം ഉണ്ട്. സാഹിത്യകൃതികളിൽ രണ്ടിനും ഉദാഹര ണങ്ങൾ കാണാം. തൊൽകാപ്പിയത്തിലും സംഘതമിഴിലും 'ഇൻ' മാത്രമേ ഉള്ളൂ; മധ്യതമിഴ് കൃതികളിൽ രണ്ടും പ്രയോഗിച്ചു കാണുന്നു. "കാരൈക്കുറിറ്റ് കലിത് കളമ്പ' എന്ന മാതിരി പ്രയോഗങ്ങളിൽ സ ന്ധിജന്യമായ 'റ' കാരം 'ന' കാരത്തിന് ആദേശമായി വന്നതാണെങ്കിലും, 'ഷ' കാരം മാറിവ്ന്നതായിരിക്കാം എന്നുള്ള ഭ്രമത്തിൽ നിന്ന് 'നാടോടിനിരുക്തി' (Folk-ety- logy or False etymology) അനുസരി ച്ച് ഉത്ഭവിച്ചുതാവാം, 'ഇൽ' — എന്ന് അധ്യനിക ഭാഷാശാസ്ത്രജ്ഞന്മാർ അഭിപ്രാ യപ്പെടുന്നു.

ഇപ്രവിധത്തിൽ 'ഇൽ' പ്രത്യയത്തിന് പഞ്ചമീപ്രത്യയമായി സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യവും പ്രാ ധാന്യവും ഉണ്ടായെങ്കിലും, പിന്നീട് തമിഴി ലും മലയാളത്തിലും താരതമ്യാർത്ഥത്തിൽ മാ ത്രമേ 'ഇൽ' നിലനിന്നുള്ളൂ. ചീവാതിലക കാലംതൊട്ട് മലയാളത്തിൽ 'ന്തിന്ന് 'ഇൽ- നിന്ന്', 'കൽ-നിന്ന്' 'മേൽ-നിന്ന്', 'പക്ക ൽനിന്ന്' മുതലായവയായാണ് പഞ്ചമീ പ്ര ത്യയങ്ങളായി ഗണിച്ചവന്നിട്ടുള്ളത്. ഇതി ൻറ കാരണം: മധ്യതമിഴിലും മലയാളത്തി ലും സപ്പ്മ്യ്ന്തമുള്ള 'ഇൽ'-പ്രത്യയത്തിന ുണ്ടായ പ്രാധാന്യമത്രേ. തൊൽകാപ്പിയം വിധിക്കുന്ന സപ്പ്മീപ്രത്യയം 'കൺ' ആ ണ്; ഈ കൺ പല അർത്ഥങ്ങളോടുകൂടി ('കാൽ' 'കടെ' 'അകം' 'പുറം' മുതലായവ) വരാമെന്നും ഈ വ്യാകരണത്തിൽ പറഞ്ഞി ട്ടുണ്ട്. ചില വ്യാഖ്യാതാക്കന്മാർ 'കാൽ' 'കടെ' 'അകം' 'പുറം' മുതലായ മയേയും പ്രത്യയങ്ങളായിക്കരുന്നു. 'സ്ഥലം' വസേ സ്ഥലം' എന്നീ അർത്ഥങ്ങളിൽ പ്രാചീന ത മിഴിൽ ഇൽ എന്നൊരു പദമുണ്ടായിരുന്നു; ഈ പദത്തിനെ മേല്പറഞ്ഞ 'കാൽ' 'അകം' പുറം' എന്നവപോലെ പ്രാചീന തമിഴിൽ ഉപയോഗിച്ചിരിക്കവാൻ പാടില്ലെന്നില്ല. തൊൽകാപ്പിയത്തിൽ "നാന പിറവും" എന്ന സൃഷ്ടിപ്പിട്ടിട്ടുള്ളത് ഈ മാതിരി പദങ്ങളെപ്പുററിയായിരിക്കാം. ഇത് ഏ ങ്ങിനെയായാലും, 'ഇൽ' — പ്രത്യയത്തിന

തൊൽ കാപ്പിയത്തമിഴിലോ സംഘത്തമിഴി ലോ പ്രചാരമുണ്ടായിരുന്നതായിക്കാണുന്നി ല്ല. നേരെ മറിച്ച് "ചെമ്മൈ മങ്കിനം വഴികിയാൽ മങ്കിനം മെയ് പൊറുകില ന്തു......" എന്ന തൊൽ കാപ്പിയ സൂത്രത്തി ലെന്നപോലെ, വിഭക്തി പ്രത്യയം ലോപി ച്ച്, 'ഇൻ' എന്ന ആഗമം ശേഷിച്ചു നിൽക്കു ന്ന പ്രയോഗങ്ങളാണ് സ്വാഭമായിക്കാണു ന്നത്. മധ്യതമിഴിൽ പ്രചാരത്തിൽ വന്ന 'ഇൽ' ഈ 'ഇൻ' പ്രത്യയത്തിന് മേൽപറ ഞ്ഞ വ്യൽപ്പത്തിയനുസിച്ചു വന്ന പരിണാ മമായിരിക്കാമെന്ന വാദം സംഗതംതന്നെ.

ഇനി, പഴയ മലയാളത്തിൽ 'ഇൻ' എ ന്ന ആഗമം ചേന്ന 'ഇനിൽ' എന്നൊരു പ്ര ത്യയം കാണുന്നുണ്ട്. രാമചരിതത്തിലും കണ്ണശ്ശകൃതികളിലും ഈ പ്രത്യയം സമൃദ്ധ സ്ഥത്തിൽ കാണപ്പെടുന്നു. എന്നാൽ കേര ളീയം ഭാഷാവ്യാഖ്യാനത്തിൽ പഞ്ചമൃസ്ഥ ത്തിലുംകൂടി പ്രയോഗിക്കപ്പെട്ടുണ്ട്: 'കീഴെ തിൻ നാമ്പെങ്ങ്' 'നാല്പതിൽ ഇരണ്ട് പോവോയിത്' എന്ന പഞ്ചമീവിഭക്തി പ്രത്യയമായ, 'അതിൽ തീയിട്ട' 'വിജി ഗീഷുവിൽ ഒണ്ടെൻപെട്' എന്ന സപ്തമീ

തിലും കാൺക. ഇതുപോലെ മധ്യ തമി സാഹിത്യത്തിലും 'ഇനിൽ' അഞ്ചാം വി ക്തിയിലും ഏഴാം വിഭക്തിയിലും ഉപയോ ഷ്പെടുത്തിക്കാണുന്നുണ്ട്. എന്നാൽ പിന്നീ ണ്ടായ തമിഴ്സാഹിത്യത്തിൽ അഞ്ചാം വി ക്തിയിലുള്ള പ്രയോഗം ലുപ്തപ്രചാരമായി ഏഴാം വിഭക്തിയിലാണ് ധാരാളമായി യോഗം. ആധുനിക മലയാളഭാഷയിൽ 'ഇ നിൽ' അന്തരിച്ചുപോയി; പക്ഷെ തമി കവിതകളിൽ ഇന്നും പ്രാസത്തിനും മറ്റ മായി ഈ പ്രത്യയം നിലനിന്ന് പോരു ണ്ട്. തൊൽ കാപ്പിയത്തമിഴിൽ, 'ഇ എന്ന അഞ്ചാം വിഭക്തി പ്രത്യയത്തിന്റെ മുമ്പിൽ 'ഇൻ' ആഗമം ഉപയോഗിച്ചു എന്നൊരു വിധിയുണ്ട്; എങ്കിലും, തൊ കാപ്പിയത്തമിഴിന് പിന്നിട്ട് ഉണ്ടാ സംഘസാഹിത്യത്തിൽ (പ്രത്യേകിച്ചും ക ത്തൊകൈ, കുറും മുതലായവയെപ്പോ യുള്ള വയിൽ) 'ഇനിൻ' പഞ്ചമൃസ്ഥത്തി ഉർല്ലഉം ചില സ്ഥലങ്ങളിൽ സപ്തമൃസ ത്തിലും ഉപയോഗപ്പെടുത്തിക്കാണുന്നു. 'ഇനിൻ' ആണ് മധ്യതമിഴിലെ 'ഇനി ആയി പരിണമിച്ചത്".

സമ്പാദനം: വേണുഗോപാലപ്പണിക്കർ ടി. ബി.

ഗവേഷണരംഗം

കേരളപഠനസംബന്ധമായ വിഷ
യങ്ങളിൽ വിവിധ സർവകലാശാ
ലകളിൽനിന്നു   ഡോക്ടർ
ബിരുദം ലഭിക്കുന്നവരുടെ പ്രബ
ന്ധങ്ങൾ പരിചയപ്പെടുത്തുന്ന
പംക്തിയാണിത്. വിവിധ പഠനവ
കുപ്പുകളിൽനിന്നു കേരളപഠനവി
ഷയങ്ങളിൽ ബിരുദം ലഭിക്കുന്നവ
രുടെ പ്രബന്ധങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള
കുറിപ്പുകൾ ക്ഷണിക്കുന്നു.

മഹാഭാഗവതം കിളിപ്പാട്ടിലെ ദശമസ്കന്ധം
ആമുഖപഠനമടങ്ങിയ സംശോധിതസംസ്കരണം

(2014)

രഘുവാസ് എ. വി.

മാർഗ്ഗദർശി: ഡോ. പി.എം. വിജയപ്പൻ

ഗവേഷണകേന്ദ്രം: കോഴിക്കോട് സർവകലാശാല മലയാളവിഭാഗം

സ്കറിയാ സക്കറിയ ∎

കോഴിക്കോട് സർവകലാശാല മലയാളം വിഭാഗത്തിൽ രഘുവാസ്
എ.വി. സമർപ്പിച്ച ഗവേഷണപ്രബന്ധം മഹാഭാഗവതം (ദശമസ്കന്ധം)
കിളിപ്പാട്ടിന്റെ സംശോധിതപാഠമായിരുന്നു. ഗവേഷണത്തിന്റെ അടിസ്ഥാ
നലക്ഷ്യം വ്യത്യസ്ത ഗ്രന്ഥശേഖരങ്ങളിൽനിന്നു കൈയെഴുത്തുഗ്രന്ഥ
ങ്ങളും പഴയ അച്ചടിപ്പകർപ്പുകളും ശേഖരിച്ചു പാഠവിമർശനത്തിലൂടെ ശുദ്ധ
പാഠനിർണ്ണയനം നടത്തുക എന്നതായിരുന്നു. അംഗീകൃത രീതിശാസ്ത്രം
അനുസരിച്ചു മൂലപാഠം നിർമ്മിച്ചെടുത്തു. പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ട പാഠഭേദങ്ങൾ രേഖ
പ്പെടുത്തുകയും ചെയ്തു. പ്രബന്ധത്തിന്റെ പ്രാരംഭഭാഗം (നൂറോളം പുറം)
ആമുഖപഠനമാണ്. കർത്താവ്, പ്രാചീനപ്രസാധനങ്ങൾ, ബന്ധപ്പെടുത്താ
വുന്ന പ്രാചീന രചനകൾ, കൈയെഴുത്തു കൃതികൾ, ഭക്തിഭാവം തുട
ങ്ങിയവയെല്ലാം ആമുഖപഠനം ചർച്ചയ്ക്കെടുക്കുന്നു. ഇക്കാര്യങ്ങളെല്ലാം
ചേർത്തു ചില്ലറ പരിഷ്കാരങ്ങളോടുകൂടി പ്രബന്ധം പുസ്തകരൂപത്തിൽ
പ്രസിദ്ധീകരിക്കാവുന്നതാണ്. മലയാളവിദ്യാർത്ഥികൾക്കു വിലപ്പെട്ട ഉപാ
ദാനമായിരിക്കും ഇത്തരമൊരു സംശോധിതഗ്രന്ഥം.

മൊത്തത്തിൽ ലാളിത്യമാണ് പ്രബന്ധത്തിന്റെ മുഖമുദ്ര. പാഠപു
സ്തക മാതൃക. വ്യത്യസ്താഭിപ്രായങ്ങൾ നിലനിൽക്കുന്ന സങ്കീർണ്ണ

പ്രശ്നങ്ങളിൽപോലും സ്വന്തം നിരീക്ഷണം രേഖപ്പെടുത്തി ഗവേഷകൻ കടന്നുപോകുന്നു. വ്യത്യസ്ത പാഠഭേദങ്ങളിൽനിന്ന് ഉത്തമമെന്നു തനിക്കു തോന്നുന്നവ തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കുന്നു. ഇത്തരമൊരു സമീപനം ഗവേഷണ ത്തിന് ഇണങ്ങുന്നതാണോ? നിഗമനങ്ങൾ പരീക്ഷിച്ചു നോക്കാൻ കഴിയ ണം. പുനർപരിശോധനയ്ക്കുള്ള സാധ്യത നൽകുന്നതാവണം പ്രബന്ധത്തിന്റെ ഭാഷയും ശില്പവും. രീതിശാസ്ത്രം ശാസ്ത്രീയമാക ണമെങ്കിൽ കാര്യകാരണബന്ധത്തോടുകൂടി കാര്യങ്ങൾ പറഞ്ഞുറപ്പിക്ക ണം. ഗവേഷകൻ നടത്തുന്ന തെരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പുകൾക്കു വിശദീകരണം വേണം. ഇതിനെല്ലാം വിമർശനാത്മകമായ ചർച്ചകൾ വേണ്ടിവരും. പാഠ വിമർശനരംഗത്ത് അടുത്തകാലത്തുണ്ടായ പല കൃതികളും ഈ വിമർശ നധർമ്മം ഏറ്റെടുക്കുന്നില്ല. സംവാദാത്മകത പാഠഗവേഷണത്തിന്റെ ഭാഷ യിൽ കൂടിയേ തീരൂ.

പാഠഭേദങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഗവേഷകന്റെ മനോഭാവം കാലോചിത മായി തോന്നുന്നില്ല. പാഠവൈവിധ്യം ഒരു കൃതിയുടെ സംഭവബഹുല മായ ജൈവികപരിണാമകഥയാണു രേഖപ്പെടുത്തുന്നത്. കൃതിയുടെയും കൃതി ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്ന സമൂഹത്തിന്റെയും ചിന്താപഥങ്ങൾ രേഖപ്പെടു ത്താൻ പാഠഭേദങ്ങൾ ഉപയോഗിക്കാം. അങ്ങനെ നോക്കുമ്പോൾ ഒരു പാഠ ഭേദവും അപവാദമല്ല. ഭാഗവതംപോലെ ജനമനസ്സുകളിൽ പടർന്നു പന്ത ലിച്ച കൃതികൾ നൽകുന്ന പാഠഭേദങ്ങൾ പൈതൃകപഠനത്തിൽ വില പ്പെട്ടവയാണ്. ഈ വൈവിധ്യസമൃദ്ധി പാഠനിരൂപണം പ്രയോജനപ്പെടു ത്തേണ്ടതല്ലേ? ഇക്കാര്യം വിശദമായി ചർച്ച ചെയ്യാവുന്നതാണ്.

ചർച്ചയിൽ പരിഗണിക്കേണ്ട മറ്റൊരു കാര്യം:

പാഠഭേദപഠനത്തിലും പാഠവിശകലനത്തിലും പരിഗണിക്കേണ്ട കാര്യമല്ലേ ലിപിപരിണാമം? ഓരോ പാഠവും പ്രത്യേകം പ്രത്യേകം ചർച്ച യ്ക്കെടുത്തു ലിപിപരമായ സവിശേഷതകൾ ചൂണ്ടിക്കാണിച്ചിരുന്നെങ്കിൽ പാഠവിതരണത്തിന്റെ ഭൂപടം തെളിഞ്ഞുകിട്ടുമായിരുന്നു. കൈയെഴുത്തു ഗ്രന്ഥങ്ങളുടെ പഴക്കം, ദേശമനുസരിച്ചുള്ള വിതരണം തുടങ്ങിയവയെല്ലാം ഇത്തരമൊരു പഠനത്തിൽ നിർണ്ണായകമാണ്. ഭാവി ഗവേഷണത്തിലെ ങ്കിലും ഇക്കാര്യം ശ്രദ്ധിക്കേണ്ടിയിരിക്കുന്നു.

നിഘണ്ടുകൾ പലതുണ്ടെങ്കിലും ഭാഗവതം കിളിപ്പാട്ടിൽനിന്നും ഉധ രണികൾ ഏറെ ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നതു ഗുണ്ടർട്ടാണല്ലോ. നിഘണ്ടുക്കളുടെ പട്ടികയിൽ അതില്ലാതെ പോയതു കൗതുകകരമായിരിക്കുന്നു. പാഠഭേദ ചർച്ചയിൽ ഗുണ്ടർട്ട് സഹായിക്കുമായിരുന്നു.

വീണ്ടുവിചാരം

പാഠം (text), പാഠത്വം (textuality) തുടങ്ങിയ സങ്കല്പനങ്ങളുടെ വ്യാ പകമായ പ്രചാരം പാഠവിമർശനത്തെ കൂടുതൽ വിജ്ഞേയമാക്കിയിട്ടുണ്ട്.

അപപാഠമില്ല (there is no misreading) എന്ന നിലപാടും പാഠവിമർശത്തെ സങ്കീർണ്ണമാക്കുന്നു. ഭാരത്തിലെ പാഠവിമർശകർ പൊതുവേ സാമ്പ്ര ദായിക രീതിശാസ്ത്രം പിന്തുടർന്നു മൂലപാഠം പുനർസൃഷ്ടിക്കാൻ ശ്രമി ക്കുകയാണ്. കൃതിയുടെ ഇഞ്ചിമാതൃകയിലുള്ള വളർച്ചയാണ് പുതിയ വിമർശകരെ ജിജ്ഞാസുകളാക്കുന്നത്. പാഠഭേദങ്ങൾ മുഖവിലയ്ക്കെ ടുത്തു വ്യാഖ്യാനിക്കാൻ അവർ തയ്യാറാവുന്നു. ലിപ്യന്തരണം, ഭാഷാന്ത രണം എന്നിവപോലെ മൂല്യവർധനയുണ്ടാക്കുന്ന പ്രക്രിയയാണ് പാഠഭേ ദരൂപീകരണം. ഇത്തരം വിർശനാത്മകപഠനത്തിന് ഇവിടെ നിർവഹിച്ചി രിക്കുന്നതുപോലെ മുന്നൊരുക്കങ്ങൾ ആവശ്യമാണ്. ഏറെ ഉത്സാഹവും ക്ലേശസഹിഷ്ണുതയും ആവശ്യമുള്ള പഠനസംരംഭമാണ് ഇത്തരം പാഠ സംസ്കരണം. സമകാലിക ശൈലിയിലുള്ള വിമർശനാത്മകവും വ്യാഖ്യാ നാത്മകവുമായ പഠനത്തിനാകട്ടെ ഭാവനാത്മകവും സർഗ്ഗാത്മകവുമായ ഇടപെടലുകൾ വേണ്ടിവരും. ഭാവനയുടെ ഭാവനാത്മകവും സർഗ്ഗാത്മക വും രാഷ്ട്രീയവുമായ പ്രയോഗമാണ് ഇവിടെ ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നത്. മല യാളക്ലാസിക്കുകൾ ഇത്തരം വിമർശനാത്മക പാഠനിരൂപണത്തിനുവേണ്ടി കാത്തുകിടക്കുന്നു. ഈ ഘട്ടത്തിൽ മറ്റൊരുകാര്യംകൂടി സൂചിപ്പിക്കേണ്ടി യിരിക്കുന്നു. മാനവികവിഷയങ്ങളും ഡിജിറ്റൽ സാങ്കേതികവിദ്യയും തമ്മി ലുള്ള അഭിമുഖീകരണം ശ്രദ്ധാകേന്ദ്രമാവുന്ന വൈജ്ഞാനികഘട്ടത്തി ലാണ് നാം ജീവിക്കുന്നത്. പാഠങ്ങൾ ശേഖരിച്ച് അപഗ്രഥിക്കുന്നതിൽ ഡിജിറ്റൽ സാങ്കേതികവിദ്യയ്ക്കു സുപ്രധാന പങ്കു വഹിക്കാൻ കഴിയും. എഴുത്തച്ഛൻ കൃതികൾക്ക് പാഠഘനനത്തിന്റെ സാങ്കേതികവിദ്യ ഉപയോ ഗിച്ചു ശാസ്ത്രീയമായ നിഘണ്ടു നിർമ്മിക്കാൻ കഴിയണം. പഴയ സമ്പ്ര ദായങ്ങളോ ഡിജിറ്റൽ സാങ്കേതികവിദ്യയുടെ ബാലപാഠങ്ങളോകൊണ്ടു തൃപ്തിപ്പെടാതെ ഡിജിറ്റൽ മാനവികവിജ്ഞാനങ്ങ(digital humanities)ളുടെ സാധ്യതകൾ മുഴുവൻ ഉപയോഗിക്കാൻ പുതിയ ഗവേഷകർക്കു സാധി ക്കണം. മലയാളഭാഷയുടെ വേരുകളും വഴികളും തേടാൻ ഇതാണ് ഇന്നത്തെ രീതിശാസ്ത്രം. ഇഞ്ചിമാതൃകയിൽ പാഠപരിണാമം ചിത്രീകരി ക്കുമ്പോൾ പാഠത്തിന്റെ ബഹുമുഖത്വം വെളിവാകും. അതിന്റെ ബലത്തി നുണ്ടാകുന്ന സംവേദനക്ഷമതയും വെളിപ്പെടും. ഭാഷയുടെ സംവേദന സാധ്യതകൾ വെളിപ്പെടുത്താൻ കഴിഞ്ഞാൽ ഭാഷാസൂത്രണം സുഗമമാ കും. മലയാളത്തെ സമകാലിക വിജ്ഞാനഭാഷയാക്കാൻ ഇത്തരം സമീ പനം ഉപകരിക്കും. ഇങ്ങനെയൊക്കെ ആലോചിക്കുമ്പോൾ ഇവിടെ പരി ചയപ്പെടുത്തിയ ഗവേഷണപ്രബന്ധം മഹത്തായ ലക്ഷ്യത്തിലേക്കുള്ള നല്ല ചുവടുവയ്പായി വിലയിരുത്താം. ഭാഗവതത്തിന്റെ മലയാളത്തിലെ ഇഞ്ചി മാതൃകയിലുള്ള വളർച്ചയായി പാഠഭേദങ്ങളെ വിശകലനം ചെയ്യാൻ ഉപ രിഗവേഷണങ്ങൾക്കു കഴിയട്ടെ.
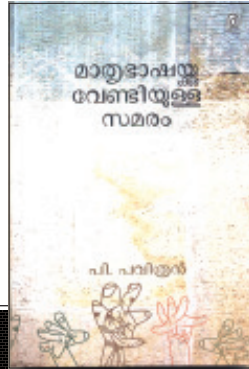
മാതൃഭാഷയ്ക്കു വേണ്ടിയുള്ള സമരം
പി. പവിത്രൻ

ദ്ധീകരണങ്ങളിൽ വ്യത്യസ്ത വെല്ലുവിളികളെ അഭിസംബോധന ചെയ്തു കൊണ്ടു രചിച്ച പ്രബന്ധങ്ങളുടെ സമാഹാരം എന്ന നിലയിൽ വേണം ഇതു വിലയിരുത്താൻ. സമരത്തിൽ പങ്കെടുത്തവർക്കു മാത്രമല്ല, ഭാഷാ വിഷയകമായ കൗതുകമുള്ള എല്ലാവർക്കും വിലപ്പെട്ട അനുഭവം നൽകുന്നതാണ് ഗ്രന്ഥത്തിലെ പ്രതിപാദ്യവും പ്രതിപാദനവും.

മലയാള വായനക്കാർക്ക് അപരിചിതനല്ല പി. പവിത്രൻ. കഴിഞ്ഞ ഏതാനും ദശകങ്ങൾക്കിടയിൽ മലയാളത്തിലുണ്ടായ ഏറ്റവും പ്രൗഢ

മായ ആശാൻപഠനഗ്രന്ഥത്തിന്റെ (*ആശാൻകവിത ആധുനികാനന്തരപഠ
നങ്ങൾ*, 2002, സാംസ്കാരിക പ്രസിദ്ധീകരണവകുപ്പ്) കർത്താവെന്ന നില
യിൽ മലയാളികളുടെ കൃതജ്ഞതാദരവുകൾ പവിത്രൻ നേടിക്കഴിഞ്ഞു.
തത്ത്വനിഷ്ഠമായ പ്രതിപാദനശൈലി, ഊർജ്ജസ്വലമായ വൈജ്ഞാനി
കകൗതുകം, പുതുമയാർന്ന നിഗമനങ്ങൾ എന്നിവകൊണ്ടു ശ്രദ്ധേയമാണ്
പവിത്രന്റെ രചനകൾ. വിവരശേഖരണത്തിലും സിദ്ധാന്തീകരണത്തിലും
സാമൂഹികപ്രസക്തി നേടലിലും നിർബ്ബന്ധപൂർവ്വം ഏർപ്പെടുന്ന ഇത്തരം
ഗവേഷകർ ഇന്നു മലയാളത്തിൽ വിരളമാണ്. അങ്ങനെയൊരാൾ സമര
രംഗത്തുനിന്നുകൊണ്ട് എഴുതിയ ലേഖനങ്ങൾ എന്ന നിലയിൽ ഇവ കഠി
നമായ പ്രതിപത്തിയും വിപ്രതിപത്തിയും ജനിപ്പിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഇഷ്ടപ്പെടാൻ
പല കാരണങ്ങളുണ്ടാവാം. മാതൃഭാഷാസ്നേഹംതന്നെ മതിയായ ഇന്ധ
നമാണ്. അതിനുമപ്പുറം മാതൃഭാഷാപഠനത്തെ ഒരു വൈജ്ഞാനിക വിഷ
യമായി വികസിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിൽ ഗ്രന്ഥകർത്താവു പ്രകടിപ്പിച്ച സാമർത്ഥ്യം
അഭിനന്ദനീയമായിത്തോന്നാം. വ്യത്യസ്ത ഭാഷാശാസ്ത്രപ്രസ്ഥാനങ്ങ
ളിലും സാമൂഹികസംരംഭങ്ങളിലും രൂപപ്പെട്ടുവന്ന ആശയാവലികൾ കൂട്ടി
യിണക്കി വാദമുഖങ്ങൾ ഉന്നയിക്കുന്നതിൽ പ്രകടമാകുന്നത് ആഴവും പര
പ്പുമാണ്. പക്ഷേ, ഇതൊന്നുംകൊണ്ട് വിപ്രതിപത്തികൾ ഇല്ലാതാവുന്നില്ല.
ഭാഷയെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഏതു രചനയും ജനപ്രിയമായിരിക്കണം എന്നർത്ഥം.
ഇങ്ങനെ നോക്കുമ്പോൾ പവിത്രന്റെ രചനകൾ ആൾക്കൂട്ടത്തിന്റെ പ്രീതി
നേടിയെന്നുവരില്ല. പവിത്രൻ എഴുതുന്നതും വാദിക്കുന്നതും പൗരസമൂ
ഹത്തിനും പൊതുമണ്ഡലത്തിനും വേണ്ടിയാണ്. എങ്കിലും പൗരസമൂ
ഹത്തിന്റെ പ്രതിനിധികളായി പ്രത്യക്ഷപ്പെടുന്നവ—ഭരണകർത്താക്കൾ,
വിദ്യാഭ്യാസവിചക്ഷണർ, മാധ്യമപ്രവർത്തകർ—രൊന്നും കനപ്പെട്ട കാര്യ
ങ്ങൾക്കു ചെവി കൊടുക്കാൻ തയ്യാറാവാറില്ല. ഈ ഗ്രന്ഥത്തിന് അങ്ങ
നെയൊരു ഗതികേടുണ്ടാവരുത് എന്നാണ് ഞങ്ങളുടെ ആശംസ. ഇതു
നമ്മുടെ ഭരണകർത്താക്കൾ വായിക്കണം. വിദ്യാഭ്യാസവിചക്ഷണർ ഗൗനി
ക്കണം. മാധ്യമപ്രവർത്തകർ ആശയങ്ങൾ ഗ്രഹിച്ച്, നിലപാടുകൾ പരി
ഷ്കരിക്കാൻ ഉപയോഗിക്കണം. പ്രശ്നത്തിന്റെ ഗുരുതരസ്വഭാവവും സാമൂ
ഹിക സാമ്പത്തിക രാഷ്ട്രീയപ്രശ്നങ്ങളോടുള്ള ശൃംഖലബന്ധവും തിരി
ച്ചറിയാൻ വൈകിക്കൂടാ.

പി. പവിത്രൻ ഉന്നയിക്കുന്ന എല്ലാ വാദങ്ങളെയും അംഗീകരിക്കുന്ന
വ്യക്തിയല്ല ഇതെഴുതുന്നത്. പക്ഷേ യോജിക്കാൻ കഴിയുന്ന അനേകം
കാര്യങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ട്. പവിത്രന്റെ പുസ്തകം വായിക്കുന്നവരിൽ വിപ്രതിപ
ത്തികൾ ഉദിക്കണം. മലയാളം പഠിച്ചിട്ട് എന്തു പ്രയോജനം എന്നു ചോദി
ക്കുന്നവരെയെല്ലാം ശത്രുനിരയിലേക്കു നീക്കിനിർത്താൻ തുനിയേണ്ട.
അവരുടെ ധാരണകളെ പരിഷ്കരിക്കാൻ വേണ്ടുവോളം വാദങ്ങൾ ഗ്രന്ഥ
ത്തിലുണ്ട്. ഉന്നങ്ങളിലല്ല അഭിപ്രായവ്യത്യാസം, തന്ത്രങ്ങളിലാണ്. സ്കൂളു
കളിൽ മലയാളം എങ്ങിനെ നിർബന്ധിതവിഷയമാക്കാൻ കഴിയും? എന്തു

കൊണ്ട് നിർബ്ബന്ധിതവിഷയമാക്കണം? തുടങ്ങിയ ചോദ്യങ്ങൾക്കു മാന്യ
മായ ഉത്തരം പറയാൻ നമ്മുടെ ഭരണകർത്താക്കളോ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥപ്രമു
ഖരോ മിനക്കെട്ടു കണ്ടിട്ടില്ല. ഈ വിഷയം ആഴത്തിൽ പഠിച്ച പണ്ഡിത
ന്മാരും നമുക്കില്ല. പവിത്രന്റെ പുസ്തകം ആ പോരായ്മ നികത്തുന്നു.
മാതൃഭാഷയെക്കുറിച്ച് അന്തിമതീർപ്പുകളല്ല പുസ്തകത്തിലുള്ളത്. വൈവി
ധ്യമാർന്ന അഭിപ്രായങ്ങൾ ക്രോഡീകരിച്ചവതരിപ്പിച്ചിട്ട് സ്വന്തം നിലപാടു
വിശദീകരിക്കുകയാണ്. വിശദീകരണം നൽകുമ്പോൾ സ്വന്തം നിലപാടു
മറച്ചുവെയ്ക്കാൻ തുനിയുന്നില്ല. തുറവിയാണു പുസ്തകത്തിന്റെ സാമാ
ന്യസ്വഭാവം. പൗരന്മാർക്കു കടന്നുവരാം. സ്വന്തം ബോധ്യങ്ങളുടെ ബല
ത്തിൽ സംസാരിക്കാം. അചാല്യമായ സത്യപ്രഖ്യാപനം എന്ന ഭാവമില്ല.
എന്നാൽ താൻ മുന്നോട്ടുവെയ്ക്കുന്ന വാദമുഖങ്ങൾ ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ പിന്തു
ണയോടെ വേണ്ടുംവണ്ണം ബലപ്പെടുത്തുന്നുണ്ട്. ചരിത്രബലം, അതു പവി
ത്രന്റെ രചനകളുടെ വലിയ ബലമാണ്. കേരളീയ നവോത്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ
സവിശേഷ സാഹചര്യങ്ങൾ അപഗ്രഥിച്ച് സമൂഹപരിണാമപ്രക്രിയയിൽ
ഭാഷയ്ക്കുള്ള പങ്കു വിശദീകരിക്കുന്നു. ഗ്രന്ഥകർത്താവിന്റെ വിശകലന
സാമർത്ഥ്യത്തിന് ഉത്തമ ഉദാഹരണമാണ് മക്തിതങ്ങൾ മാതൃഭാഷയുടെ
പോരാളി എന്ന ലേഖനം. കേരളീയ സാഹചര്യങ്ങളിൽ പരിമിതപ്പെടുന്നില്ല
പവിത്രന്റെ ഉപാദാനശേഖരം. ഹീബ്രുഭാഷയുടെ പുനർജന്മവും വികാ
സവും ഹീബ്രു സർവകലാശാലയുടെ പ്രവർത്തനവും വിശദീകരിക്കുന്നി
ടത്ത് വിജ്ഞാനചക്രവാളത്തിന്റെ വൈപുല്യം വെളിപ്പെടും.

ഭാഷയും അധികാരവും തമ്മിലുള്ള ബന്ധം സവിശേഷ കേരളീയ
സാഹചര്യത്തിൽ സ്പഷ്ടീഭവിക്കുന്ന അനേകം ഭാഗങ്ങൾ ഈ പുസ്ത
കത്തിലുണ്ട്. കേരളത്തിന്റെ സംസ്കാരപരിണാമവും ഭാഷാഘടനയും
രാഷ്ട്രീയവിശകലനം അർഹിക്കുന്നതാണ്. ഉപാദാനങ്ങളിൽ തുടങ്ങി
തത്ത്വനിഷ്ഠമായ വിശകലനം നടത്തി സാമൂഹികപ്രസക്തിയുള്ള നിഗമ
നങ്ങളിൽ എത്തിച്ചേരാൻ പവിത്രനു കഴിയുന്നു.

അനുബന്ധമടക്കം ഏഴു ഭാഗങ്ങൾ ഉള്ളതാണ് പുസ്തകം. അനു
ബന്ധത്തിൽ മുഖ്യമായുള്ളത് വിവിധ കമ്മിറ്റികളുടെ റിപ്പോർട്ടുകളും ഉത്ത
രവുകളും നടപടികളുമാണ്. ഇവയെല്ലാം ഒന്നിച്ചു സവിശേഷപശ്ചാത്ത
ലത്തിൽ വായിക്കാൻ കഴിയുന്നതു വലിയൊരു സൗകര്യമാണ്. അധികാ
രസ്ഥാനങ്ങളിൽ ഉള്ളവർക്കും ആക്ടിവിസ്റ്റുകൾക്കും ഏറ്റവും പ്രയോജ
നപ്രദമയിരിക്കും അനുബന്ധം. വിദ്യാർത്ഥികൾക്കും അധ്യാപകർക്കും
ഗവേഷകർക്കും ചിന്തകർക്കും സൈദ്ധാന്തികപഠനത്തിൽ നല്ലൊരു വഴി
കാട്ടിയാണു പവിത്രന്റെ ഗ്രന്ഥം. പക്ഷേ, ഒരു കാര്യം എടുത്തുപറയട്ടെ,
നിരന്തരം സംവദിക്കാൻ തയ്യാറായിട്ടുവേണം പവിത്രന്റെ രചനകൾ വായി
ക്കാൻ. കീഴടങ്ങിയുള്ള വായനകൊണ്ട് വലിയ പ്രയോജനമുണ്ടാവുകയില്ല.
വൈജ്ഞാനികമായ നേട്ടങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാവുക എന്നതിനേക്കാൾ പ്രധാനം
ധാരണ വളർത്തുക എന്നതാണ്. അതിനുതകുന്ന തരത്തിലാണ് ഗ്രന്ഥ

ത്തിന്റെ സംവിധാനം. ഉദാഹരണത്തിന് മലയാളസർവകലാശാലയെക്കു റിച്ചു പവിത്രൻ എഴുതുന്നത് ആലോചനാമൃതമാണ്. മലയാളസർവകലാ ശാലയെ തങ്ങൾക്കുമാത്രം കുടിപാർക്കാനുതകുന്ന ഇടമാക്കി മാറ്റാൻ ബഹുവിധശക്തികൾ മത്സരിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. രാഷ്ട്രീയം, മതം, വംശം, ദേശം, എന്നിവയെല്ലാം പല തോതിൽ സമ്മർദശക്തികളാണ്. ഇത്തരം കാഴ്ച പ്പാടുകളെ അമർച്ച ചെയ്തുകൊണ്ട് സർവകലാശാലയ്ക്കു പ്രവർത്തി ക്കാനാവില്ല. പൊതുവേദികളിൽ വിശദമായ ചർച്ചകൾ ഉണ്ടാവണം. നമ്മുടെ സർവകലാശാലകളിൽ ഭാഷയുടെ കാര്യത്തിൽ സംഭവിക്കുന്ന കാര്യങ്ങൾ സുതാര്യമാക്കാൻ മാധ്യമങ്ങൾക്കു ബാധ്യതയുണ്ട്. ഇങ്ങനെ ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടവരെയെല്ലാം പ്രചോദിപ്പിക്കാനും പ്രബോധിപ്പിക്കാനും ഉതകു ന്നതാണ് പി. പവിത്രൻ രചിച്ച മാതൃഭാഷയ്ക്കു വേണ്ടിയുള്ള സമരം എന്ന ഗ്രന്ഥം.

ഇതു ഗ്രന്ഥത്തിന്റെ ഒരു വിമർശനാത്മകപഠനമല്ല. മറിച്ച്, ചർച്ചാ വേദികളിലേക്ക് ഈ പുസ്തകത്തെ എത്തിക്കാനുള്ള വിനീതമായ ആഹ്വാനം മാത്രം. അതായിരിക്കും ഗ്രന്ഥകാരനും കൃതിക്കും മാതൃഭാ ഷയ്ക്കും നൽകാൻ കഴിയുന്ന ആദരം.

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അടുത്ത ലക്കത്തിൽ

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