DIOTIMA'S

A JOURNAL OF NEW READINGS

Issue on Visual Culture and the Humanities

Peer Reviewed Journal

Published by

Editor's Note

The visual is a field of interdisciplinary inquiry, traditionally associated with the study of fine arts, art history, museum studies and curatorship, dance, theatre and other performing arts, visual communication, television studies, film studies, etc. In recent times, many Humanities and Social Sciences departments have assumed an interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary focus. This, along with the increasing influence of Cultural Studies, has led to a change in how visual culture was perceived. In the contemporary conjuncture, the scope of the visual sphere has vastly expanded to flow over into all other spheres. Today, when our everyday existence is constantly assailed by a barrage of images that also presume to occupy a position of surveillance, the study of visual culture takes on an intensely political significance. The traditional binaries of text and image, the social and the imaginary, the empirical and the discursive, have been challenged forcefully. In such a context, English departments have much to learn from the interdisciplinary field of visual culture, and much to offer in terms of theoretical insight.

The majority of the essays collected in this volume were initially presented at a two-day UGC-sponsored national seminar conducted at the PG Department of English, Providence Women's College, from 17-18 September 2015, titled *Image, Text, and Subjectivity: Visual Culture and the Humanities*. In addition, a few articles were solicited on topics that were not covered in the seminar.

This volume starts out with an article by Dr. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan on literary and cinematic excursions into the concept of the "world" — a revised transcript of the talk he delivered at the seminar — in which he problematises the academic

tendency towards conceptualizing "visual culture" in ways that assume that both the "visual" and "culture" are well-defined spheres that do not need further interrogation. This is followed by a paper in which Dr. Deepa Sreenivas revisits her earlier work on illustrated comic books for children, by comparing Amar Chitra Katha to a project from the far end of the ideological spectrum, Different Tales, a series of comic books on marginalised lives for which she was also the series editor. Priya Chandran's paper, detailing the religious iconography of the Mata Amritanandamayi faith, is a welcome addition to this collection, dealing as it does with a new range of deployments of the visual. Likewise, Aby Abraham looks at the circulation of the photograph as a visual document of Adivasi struggles; Micah Thamby studies contemporary reincarnations of Hindu myths in the form of televised cartoons like Chhota Bheem; Shivshankar Rajmohan A.K. and Dr. Sudhesh N.T. analyse the virtual worlds occupied and traversed by young people through new media technologies; Prasanth P.S. examines the relevance of graffiti to youth subcultures; and Ann George and Manju E.P. attempt to go beyond representational/ideological readings of films to understand more complex aspects of cinema such as the formation of superstars and cinema's increasing tendency towards self-referentiality. To round out the argumentative papers, we have an essay by Dr. Sunitha Srinivas and Dr. K. Arunlal on reading poetry spatially in the age of visuality. The collection closes with a set of two interviews, of media professionals Sashi Kumar and B.R.P. Bhaskar, by Dr. Jenson Joseph, in an attempt to unravel the ideological, economic, and technological threads that constituted the early history of Asianet, India's first private satellite television channel.

CONTENTS

Horizons of Visibility:
On literary and Cinematic Excursions into the 'World'

Dr. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan

The occasion of this paper provides me with a pause, a necessary pause, to look at my own scholarship from a vantage point that I have as yet never occupied. This vantage point is that of "visual culture". I have always been interested in and have investigated objects that are conventionally thought of as visual – visual, in simple opposition to the verbal or the written – oppositions that we will have occasion to come back to. But it was never framed as "visual culture". Attempts at a clear conception of roads not taken are necessary exercises, as it provides us with a sharper sense of the limits and possibilities of the ones taken.

One of the difficulties presented by the category of "visual culture" is the term "culture", which according to Raymond Williams, in his legendary *Keywords*, is, "… one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams 87). For Williams the difficulty that the term presents us with is one of lack of clarity because of widespread usage both in intellectual and common parlance. While it is the desire to define the term in its manifold uses that drives Williams, it is the problem of delimitation, rather than meaning, that interests me. By delimitation, I mean the discursive effect that the term produces when deployed in the everyday. The word "culture", I argue, as it is used introduces particular forms of delimitation; it produces boundaries, insides and outsides. In

anthropology, at least in its more classical forms, delimitation is engendered by imagining communities, by default of the non-West, as the ground of delimiting "culture" resulting in the binary "culture"/ "modern" which is familiar to us from social discourse in our own contexts. Williams, by designating "culture" as "structures of feeling" makes a temporal demarcation. "[S]tructure of feeling", writes Williams, "is a cultural hypothesis, … derived from attempts to understand [elements of impulse, restraint and tone… affective elements of consciousness and relationships] and their connections *in a generation or period…*" (Williams 132-133). While Williams' definition is enticing and productively elusive, we are all too familiar today with the limits of taking temporal coherence and attendant linearity as a given in an uneven world.

To relocate the discussion from definitional inquiries to one of discursive practice, we have to ask, what do we do when we use the term "culture". Or how do we find ourselves deploying it; to what end? Curiously, it is by adding adjectives to "culture" that we have resolved the constitutive instability of the term. In contexts where we do not use an adjective, the adjective "high" is usually implied. The adjectives to "culture", "visual" being one, is introduced to delimit the sphere of culture, conceptualized as inert or dynamic or as both, pertaining to practice or to conceptual structures or both and so on. What the adjective does is then to give the impression that it stabilizes the field of culture. For that the adjective is imagined to be stable and thus the locus of meaning. I have explored this elsewhere in relation to the use of the term "regional culture". The same could be said about the use of "visual culture". In the use of "visual culture", it is assumed that "visual" is always already intelligible. Or to put it differently, the usage gives us the impression that the work of delimitation to the term "culture" will be carried out by "visual" by providing a conceptual grid of what counts as its inside and what

doesn't. Let me put it in simple Q&A form. What cannot be discussed within visual culture? All that is not visual. Its inside is populated in most iterations of the term with media forms and the arts. This leaves the ground of what constitutes the "visual" in "visual culture" and what constitutes the non-visual unexamined, by making it the property of certain objects.

Mieke Bal, in her astute critique of the field of "visual culture studies" argues that thinking outside the limits set by the various mediatized forms and art is necessary for a productive discussion of the visual. She writes:

> [Visual culture] describes the nature of present-day culture as primarily visual. Alternatively, it describes the segment of that culture that is visual, as if it could be isolated […] from the rest of that culture. Either way, the term is predicated upon […] a kind of visual essentialism that either proclaims the visual 'difference' – read 'purity' – of images, or expresses a desire to stake out the turf of visuality against other media or semiotic systems. (Bal 6)

While the first mode delineated by Bal imagines some epochs as verbal and some as visual (we are *now* in the age of the visual) and the second projects the visual onto a set of objects, objects that could be studied in isolation and, by implication or through explicit argumentation, hierarchized. Following Bal's incisive critique of the field, I want to propose that the necessary move to the study of the visual is to think of it as a regime of what is possible and not possible in a given field of activity. Or to put it differently, we inhabit a regime, which is structured through rules as to what is seeable, how and under what conditions. Far from being isolatable, the regime of the visual, says Bal, is inherently impure and interwoven with other sensory engagements. Investigation into the regime of the visual

will have to undertake a description of the conditions of visibility within which specific encounters with objects take place in a particular space/time. The eye is not separate from the object that it encounters – in simple physics, it is the relationship between the body (the retina) and the object through light that makes vision possible. Neither is it separate from the other sensory organs of the body; in simple biology, we know that the eye by itself cannot see and that it operates in conjuncture with other organs including other sensory organs. The looking subject (you and I, thinking of ourselves in the first person, in a given historical moment) is formed within a regime of the visible, in and through a relational logic. Forms that announce themselves as invitations for visual apprehension, media forms and art forms, need to be understood as occasions for investigating this regime. We need to be cautious not to reduce the regime to these forms. These forms should be seen as more self-conscious interventions into the regime of the visual. Let me attempt an example. Imagine a research project that investigates the significance of technologized art forms such as photography or cinema in early 19th and 20th century Travancore or Malabar. One of the elements of the regime of visibility that the technologization of vision navigates in these contexts – both by working within parameters set by it and by reshaping it, will be that of a visual ordering specific to caste and gender relations. I refer here to the fear of pollution or *theendal* central to which were rules regarding what and who can be seen and not seen, and various practices veiling that were prevalent at the time. The practice of taking photographs and producing and watching moving pictures emerge within these regimes, making them not objects of visual culture, but occasions that allow us to reconstruct and interrogate the regime of the visible. The study of the visual then, is the study of encounters that allow us *to understand the conditions of possibility of seeing.* These practices are made possible within a regime of norms about what could be seen and could not be seen, how and where it could

be seen. What needs investigation then is not the patently visible, but the structures that make visibility possible.

The rest of this paper will traverse three textual sites – two related to film festivals and world cinema and the third, a literary extract. These texts are part of my research where I have been attempting to work with a conception of what I call "horizons of universality" that the subject of the region is formed through, outside the well-entrenched binary of the universal and the particular, where subject formation in contexts such as ours is mired within the limits of the latter (Radhakrishnan "The Worlds of the Region"). I hope that some aspects of this conception will become clearer as the paper proceeds.

The attempt has been to understand the import of the post-independence linguistic region in the formation of the subject of modernity. I have been working with Kerala as my site, not merely to examine the modern Malayali, but to produce a theoretical frame that will help us understand the subject of modernity, in an erstwhile colony like ours. Till date my focus has been on cinema and the institutions of cinema that pertain to Kerala's self-description as a region. I intend to examine travel writing and cultural productions with political formations in the future. In my research on cinema, one of the nodes that have been central is the role of institutions in producing our horizons of visibility. In the following part, I intend to explore the notion of "horizon" in the coinage "horizon of universality". "Horizon" is a patently visual concept. I animate "horizon" through the consideration of another concept, the "world", familiar to us literature students through usages such as "world literature", and also "world cinema", "world music", and even "world cuisine". After that, I will present part of my research which looks at how we conceptualize the centrality of institutions of various kinds – in this

case the film festival – in construing the subject of the visual regime. And the final part will be a (non)discussion of a literary extract to point to the impossibility of separating the visual from other sense perceptions.

The horizon

I would like to begin by discussing the opening sequence of K.R. Manoj's documentary *16MM: Memories, Movement and a Machine*. The film opens with a series of shots of Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala. The everyday lights and glitter of the city at night are shot mostly in tight shots, without giving a larger spatial dimension to the city. These tightly composed shots are punctuated with frames that show a wider view of the city. But every time the camera pulls back to give us an image of a dynamic city, we are confronted with computer-generated images (CGI) of hoardings and advertisements publicizing "world cinema" (a gloss of this category is outside the scope). While the grammar of the documentary tells us that we are witnessing real-life images, the presence of the hoardings that show posters of cinema from all over the world introduces the fictional into it. The images appear at the limits of our field of vision – as the horizon of our everyday, as documented through documentary footage. *16MM*, which proceeds with familiar structures of documentary filmmaking, presents its argument about the status of "world cinema" as it sees it, in this opening sequence. It appears that the film is saying that we live our lives in the hustle and bustle of the everyday without noticing the horizons that structure it. Contrast the night sequences with hoardings to the later shots of the streets in the day. Here the camera never pulls back, the soundscape that structures the everyday in these sequences are then linked directly through wires to a darkened room where Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* is being screened –

we see a machine, a public and an institution called the film society in action. Unlike the men in the film who watching *Potemkin* at the film society screening, the people on the screen are oblivious to the images and sounds that seem to be constraining their "frames" of existence. The tight framing in these sequences produces this feeling. The people seem to be imprisoned within these sounds and images: there is little free space around the centralized image. The people we see on the streets are not those who normally plug themselves into the world of art-house cinema, which uses the film festival circuits for its circulation.

I will pick up the film festival and the specificity of "world cinema" later in the paper. At this point, I am interested in the film's choice of "world cinema" to think of the horizons of everyday existence. This leads one to investigate into the various forms that structure the "world" of the subject of the modern region (in contrast to "cosmopolis" and the "international"). Strangely, I stumbled upon the potential of the term "world" through my interest in "world cinema" only to discover that the term has had a long lineage in Western philosophy. First used by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and later invoked by other philosophers like Hannah Arendt, Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, and literary scholars such as Gayatri Chakaravrati Spivak and recently by literary theorist Pheng Cheah, the category has had a significant life. Cautioning us against conflating "world" with the "globe" – the latter being a spatial logic of expansion founded on extending capitalist markets (from colonialism to globalization), Pheng Cheah argues that "world" should be thought of as a normative (horizon) phenomenon: "the world is an ongoing dynamic process of becoming, something that is continually being made and remade because it possesses a historical-temporal dimension" (Cheah 319). The "world" is an imagination, and the globe as spatialized, waiting to be harnessed, is one representation of it –

like all representations, ideological in nature. The historico-temporal dimension that Cheah talks about operates on the logic of a present where the subject is formed, to use Heidegger's terminology, in folding the four – the earth and the sky, the divine and the mortal – into a single fold, a form of universal Being which forms the ground on which the subject is formed (Heidegger). This process he calls "worlding". That is to say, the "I" is an effect of a folding together of what we think in simple terms as human and non-human elements. By imagining the "I" to be an effect is in contra-distinction to imagining the "I" as a place from where other human and non-human elements are apprehended. The most important aspect of this line of theorizing is that it decenters the ego, the "I", as the locus of meaning production, and points to the fact that the "I" is formed in its worlding. Such a conception rescues the universal from the clutches of capitalist imaginings of the globe (and even the vanguardist imagination of the cosmopolitan) and cause-effect teleology of modernity with a capital M. Following from this critique, for Cheah, "worlding" "constitutes the openness of a world, the opening that is world" (Cheah 323). The subject that is formed is formed as oriented to the opening, the openness called "world".

The sequence from *16MM* exceeds the limits of the norm that it has set for itself, which is of verisimilitude. It resorts to fiction to access the "truth" of our lives. One needs to note that it is shifting technology that allows for the insertion of these images into the "actual" city shots. What the sequence does then is to intervene in our everyday, the contemporary, to alert us to the fact that we need to think of ourselves – we who are stitched into the empty time of the modern as willful subjects, that we are formed through horizons that cannot empirically, through verisimilitude, be accessed. Fiction, of which "world cinema" for me and "world literature" for Cheah are exemplars, can visibilize these horizons. The sequence, presenting

a dimension of "world cinema", examines the horizons of visibility, the regime under consideration, as constituent of the "world" inhabited by the subject of the modern region.

The subject

Let me now turn to the subject of this "worlding". For this, I will use another film sequence. This is from the 2009 Malayalam short film titled *Dear Kim* directed by Binukumar.[1] I intend, in this section to focus more on the institutional dimensions of our visual culture – as one of the central organizing logics through which we access the world.

Dear Kim centres around three friends: daily wage labourers in the hill ranges of Kerala, desperate to watch the films of the Korean auteur Kim Ki Duk. Even though the plot seems to be ideal for a comedy, the film chooses the register of pathos, and is indulgent towards the desire of the lead characters, making it more of a tragedy. The film plays upon two commonly held ideas about the region and its film culture. One: that of the film-literate Malayali and about the successful spread of world cinema into the deep corners of this region. The second: that Kim Ki Duk is one of the most watched and sought-after foreign filmmakers in the region following the very successful retrospective of his films at the International Film Festival of Kerala in 2005. The keenly anticipated attempt by the protagonists of *Dear Kim* to attend a local film series, a weekend affair at the nearby town, is thwarted by a strike by the public transport employees. What is more, to their utter heartbreak, the pirated copy of Kim Ki Duk's *Wild Animals*, which they procure with the help of a friend, turns out to be a pornographic film. Finally, Ajimon, the leader of the gang, decides to write a letter and email it to Kim Ki Duk, even though they share no language with Kim Ki Duk, and none of them have ever used email before.

Ajimon and his friends, the protagonists of *Dear Kim* are the subjects of a film culture that is put together within a particular historical trajectory. The International Film Festival of India (IFFI) emerged in the mid 20th century out of a complex interweaving of shifting geo-politics where the pedagogic initiatives of modern nation-states came into conversation with new institutional regimes across the globe. The newly independent nation-state's interest in cinema, which saw the transformation of the colonial Information Films of India, which made "war effort" films during the second World War, into Films Division of India mostly for state propaganda in the form of educational shorts in 1948, was in tandem with the setting up of the Edinburgh Film Festival under the tutelage of John Grierson in 1947, the focus on film as educational tool by agencies such as UNESCO, the setting up of the Calcutta Film Society in 1947 and so on. The SK Patil Film Enquiry Committee of 1949 which submitted its report in 1951 provides us with a clear picture of the state's understanding of cinema as a pedagogic tool, informed by developments outside and within the nation. Films Division organized the first IFFI in 1952 in Bombay with the festival traveling to other metros in the country. This logic of state intervention goes through a crisis by the early 80s especially with the advent of state television. I have elsewhere discussed how the relocation of IFFI to Goa in 2002, and the emergence of film festivals in Kolkata, Kerala, and later in Bombay, are part of a systemic shift that functions as a resolution for this crisis.

The first film festival in Kerala was in 1965 as part of the Literary Festival organized by M. Govindan. As retrospective retellings of the event goes, Govindan invited Adoor Gopalakrishnan, student at the newly set up Film Institute in Pune, and G. Aravindan, then an employee at the State Rubber Board to put together a film festival. Rather than leading to more festivals, the 1965 event resulted in the

mushrooming of film societies all over the state, with the number going up to a hundred by the mid 1970s. The 1960 and the 70s were the decades when film screenings — both as smaller festivals and regular screenings of film societies — became common not only in Kerala, but in most parts of the country. In 1988, the 19th edition of IFFI, which was travelling to different Indian cities in alternate years, was held in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala. The first IFFK was held in 1996 following the 1995 celebration 100 years of cinema, which screened 100 "classics" from around the world, and since, as we all know, it has become one of the most sought after festivals in the country.

It is with this in background that we have to attend to Ajimon's letter. Here is the full text of the letter.

Dear Kim,

I am one among the numerous fans that you have around the world. I could be the only fan of yours who has not managed to see a single film of yours. I wonder if you have heard about Kerala, a South Indian state. You have a huge fan following here [….] I write this from Illikkunnu, a faraway village in one of the hill districts in Kerala. I have read a lot about you and your films through magazines and newspapers. That is how I have become your fan. I have read in newspapers that your films draw huge crowds at film festivals in Kerala. Film festivals are held in cities that are far away from our village. Even though it is expensive to go for these film festivals, a group of us plans to attend it every year. Nevertheless, when the time comes, something or the other will come in the way of our plans. This is because, as daily wage labourers, our lives are tied to the fluctuating market price of ginger and pepper. The audiences in the city are

lucky. They get the opportunity to see great movies. I write this to tell you that your films do not reach the villages. The same is the case with Indian art house films. This letter is not an attempt to find solutions to such issues. I write this because of the disappointment I feel in not being able to see a single film made by you. We have been trying to access at least the DVDs of your films. We could not find any. Dear Kim, I request you to kindly send me the DVDs of some of your films. Kindly consider this as a plea by a village-bred Kim Ki Duk fan.

Hoping that you are able to make many more great films,

Ajimon K.S.

The letter is overlaid by a montage of sequences from the village and images of magazine articles. Apart from closely shot sequences of magazine articles on world cinema, the sequence shows the four protagonists taking part in the activities of the local library, rehearsing for a street play, organizing a football event and carrying out their daily work. This clip allows us to think through the positioning of world cinema in relation to what is presented as a dynamic public sphere structured through a strong print culture, libraries, theatre and so on. Such a dynamic political cultural public has been one of the claims of distinction that region has made in relation to other parts of India, within the dominant nation-region structure. This notion of the region, "Kerala" as a dynamic political public structured through reading that appears in scholarly descriptions and popular discourse, is the ground of which the governmental "region" gets re-iterated. The montage presents our protagonists as being embedded in the local, revelling in their everyday – the "authentic" subjects of locality, of Kerala, the governmental region.

Ajimon's claim that he is fan of Kim Ki Duk though he has not seen his films is worth noting. Still, the relationship he seems to have with Kim Ki Duk is an intimate one. This affective "world" that he has created – as we see from his utter disappointment before he begins penning his letter – is structured by his immobility and lack of access to some of the taken for granted luxuries of globalization. This domain of affect is not structured by consumption, including that of cinema, but rather through its impossibility. Usually, film festivals and alternative distribution systems such as DVDs are seen as engendering new avenues of consumption of world cinema. I intend to demonstrate here that film festivals, even while being reified spaces of consumption of cinema, could engender unexpected modes of being. To understand Ajimon as a non-consuming fan of Kim Ki Duk, we will have to look at the specific nature of his relationship with world cinema. To do this, we need to look at what kind of a festival IFFK is.

The ritual of attending the annual film festival has been compared in popular culture in Kerala to the pilgrimage to Sabarimala, a hill temple in the region where male pilgrims visit once a year. The sarcasm involved in bringing a religious event and one that is secular modern *par excellence* together is not unlike the tone employed by Andre Bazin, the French film theorist, as he lampooned the Cannes Film Festival as a ritualistic and quasi-religious spectacle (Bazin). I argue that unlike the Bazinian description of the rituals at the film festival and the place of the "festivalgoer" in it and the homology with the life in a religious institution, the comparison obtained at IFFK has more to do with a relationship between the subject of cinephilia, as the member of a collective rather than as an individual, with the institution of film festival itself. In Bazin the homology is between a believer in the church and the cinephile at the film festival. In the case of IFFK, I argue that the homology is between a pilgrim, whose

identity as a believer is tied to a collective of believers, and the cinephile for whom world cinema and the sense of collectivity it provides are more significant than cinema as an object of consumption. The film festival-goer in consideration, much like the pilgrim, derives his identity not by constructing a singular relationship with cinema/God. Rather, it is the membership in a collective that creates this sense of identity. His relationship with the object of devotion/desire is not that of an individual but that of a member of a crowd. Here, brotherhood and the bonds of the collective supersede the desire to consume. You can be a subject of "world cinema" by not watching "world cinema", but by being in its presence. This presence is structured around intermedial practices such as reading about cinema, which as I have mentioned above constitute the "locatedness" of the subject in the governmental region.

The comparison with religion in this description should not be read as an example of the supposed inherent-religiosity of the non-West. The parallels with religious ordering, as Madhava Prasad reminds us in his discussion of fan communities and popular sovereignty in India, is not necessarily an indication of the presence of religiosity (Prasad 72-73). After pointing out that the use of the term "bhaktho" (devotee) to refer to a fan in Satyajit Ray's *Nayak* (1966) has no religious connotations, he writes:

> [E]nthusiastic communities can form around a variety of entities, and that the nature of the community thus formed will have to be inferred from the nature of the entity, the nature of the acts of bhakti addressed to it, the nature of the satisfactions derived from these acts, etc. (Prasad 73)

Thus, pushing the literal meaning of the comparison between film festivals and pilgrimage, one can discern that IFFK, while it does

offer avenues of consumption of cinema, also presents us with *a cosmology of cinema* that allows for a relationship with cinema outside of the consumption of film. If the direction of this argument is right, it presents us with a curious paradox.

Construing the film festival enthusiast as a member of a collective (the pilgrim) as opposed to an individuated subject seems to be at odds with what is presumed as the role that institutions such as film festivals and film societies were to play in the imagining of a modern nation. These institutions that were formed under state tutelage, were part of a pedagogic enterprise by the new Indian state. Continuing the colonial structures of governance, cultural policies of the time made stark distinctions between the enlightened citizens as the legitimate subjects of modernity and the not-yet citizens, as evidenced by the differential logic of censorship for film festivals and commercial screenings. A clear understanding of the difference between the film festival-goer as the discerning moviegoer (who can see cinema for what it is) as opposed to the commercial cinema-loving "mass" (who cannot distinguish cinema from the real world) is at the heart of this distinction. Film societies emerged as the part of technologies of the self initiated by the enlightened *bhadralok* in Calcutta and the emergent bourgeoisie in cities such as Bombay, where the shaping of the utopic possibilities of the liberal public sphere as a collectivist of rational individuals was underway. This impulse was imbued with a pedagogic role (and a democratic impulse) in the context of state-centred development in the two decades after independence, with the setting up of institutions such as the Federation of Film Societies of India in 1959 and the National Film Archives in 1964. These formations, which led to the emergence and later the proliferation of film festivals, were aimed at the individuation and rationalization of the Indian citizen as part of the logic of passive revolution where the state had to tutor its subjects

on the mores of citizenship. If this is indeed the case, how can the film festival viewer be part of Prasad's "enthusiastic community" – a member of a group, non-individuated, outside the rational structures of the modern individual? How does one square this paradox?

I propose that the conceptions of the individuated citizen and the member of the collective are not inherently contradictory and do not presuppose different constituencies. This proposition calls for a conception of the subject of region/cinema as one that is performative, one that can incorporate within itself, as I have argued before, multiple "horizons of universality". By "horizon of universality", I indicate the potential of transcendence from one's own particularities that a discourse such as this makes visible, the figure of the citizen, as mentioned before, being such a limit within the framework of the modern nation-state. If the individualized figuration of the subject of cinema is within the domain of citizenship and the imagination of the fully modern subject of the nation, the figure of the collective is the subject of the "world" that I investigate, one that is formed within the regimes of visibility. The discursive binding that engenders the nation-region structure does not exhaust the limits of subject formation even while it provides one of its co-ordinates. The idea of the "world" is constitutive of another horizon of universality, where the regional sidesteps the national. In a paper that explores the film festival in detail, I go on to demonstrate, using a debate that was staged at IFFK, how the film festival as an institution allows for the performance of the universal as constituted through the "world" as "the visible". It needs to be added as a necessary caution that one should not imagine this subject to be autonomous to the nation, but as performative and hence formed through these multiple registers, and thus radically and productively unstable.

It is in this context that we have to understand Ajimon, the protagonist of *Dear Kim*. He is a subject of the film festival as we have described it: whose "world" is constituted as regimes of the visible by structures that are not even accessible to him. Ajimon is an immobile subject whose relationship with "world cinema" is at the core of his rootedness. His letter suggests that his inability to travel to the film festival is a consequence of the fluctuating prices of spices. Thus his immobility is also tied to developments elsewhere. *Dear Kim* demonstrates how, unlike this agential elaboration of cosmopolitanism by constituting the local and the global, its subject of locality is always already a global one; or, to put it differently, there is no distinct local and the global, vernacular and cosmopolitan. What I have tried here is to demonstrate through an example from my own work how the horizons of visibility are structured of institutional norms among others, and form a central node around which it can be apprehended. Ajimon's "world", a regime of the visual, is mediated by, among others, the institution of the film festival.

The senses

In this brief concluding as-yet-incomplete section, I intend to get back to some of the concerns I started with. This section uses a literary extract to think through the limits of thinking visuality through objects that present themselves as visible. Unlike the films before, here I turn to a piece of travel writing; and unlike Ajimon who is an immobile subject, here I turn to the work of a rank cosmopolitan – one whose work provided most of us from Kerala our first encounter with an imagination of a "world".

Samsaarikkunna Diarykkurippukal, published in 1981, contains snippets of S.K. Pottekkad's life that he culls out of his diaries that were written from the 1930s onwards. One of the chapters, titled "Sounds and Images", begins thus:

Recently, as I was walking through the valley of a hill in the outskirts of Kozhikode, a loud shout-out (*neettivili*) reached my ears: "Ammaaluooo". One woman, standing at the fence in her property was calling out to Ammaalu, who could be nearby. It is in our experience that some sounds and images have the ability to awaken scenes that are hidden away in our unconscious. The call "Ammaaluoo" that I heard transported my ears and heart to the Capri Islands in Italy of thirty years ago. I heard in it the echoes of the call 'Oliviaa, Oliviaa' and remembered it. (Pottekkad *Samsarikkunna Diarykkurippukal*, 113)

I do not want to spend too much time on this passage except to point out the amazing deftness of assembling the senses, which is mobilized to produce a "vivid picture" written to be accessed by us readers. The subject of speech is formed through and through the "world" of the visual that he is assembling as he goes along. The experience of reading Pottekkad, for most of the young readers who read him in their schools if nowhere else, is the vividness of his descriptions, a vividness that invites us to inhabit that "world". What Pottekkad does is to stage the encounter as one of visuality, and in turn opens that "world" within the normative limits set by the form of the travelogue. But the image is not thought to be autonomous and works through a mobilization of senses and memory and more important a "world". In the chapter that begins with the call, Pottekkad moves on to compare the lives of the people of Capri Island to that of Kerala. He is insistent that the most beautiful place he has ever seen is Kerala, but Capri Island comes a close second, and proceeds to create a sense of the world book-ended by Kozhikode. The sensory openness that is performed by the writer in text, as he writes after having travelled for decades: the memoirs are published in 1981, four years after the last travelogue. The attempts to reprise Pottekkad,

by others who followed his trails, including Paul Zachariah, fails because of the impossibility of replicating another's world – a world that is staged for the reader as encounters of the visible. One could suggest polemically that Zachariah managed to traverse the Earth (for Heidegger) and the Globe (for Pheah), but could not access Pottekkad's "world". Pottekkad's first encounter with a zebra, which appears in his travelogue *Simhabhoomi* results in this well known passage: "Nobody knows whether the zebra is a white donkey that wears black lines on its body, or a black donkey that wears white lines on its body. A student has defined it as a 'horse standing in the shadow of a fence'" (Pottekkad *Sanchara Sahithyam,* 117). Where in the writings of Pottekkad do the text end and the image begin? It is only by recognizing the methodological imperative of visuality as orientation, a regime that governs our everyday, and by setting aside the desire to stabilize "visual" with "culture" and vice versa, that we can even begin to ask the question.

Notes

1. This section of the paper uses almost entirely segments from an earlier published paper. See Radhakrishnan" Kim Ki Duk's Promise, Zanussi's Betrayal".

Works Cited

Bal, Mieke 2003. "Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture". *Journal of Visual Culture* Vol. 2, No. 5, 2003, pp. 5-32. Print.

Bazin, André. 1955/2009. "The Festival Viewed as a Religious Order" in *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals* edited by Richard Porton. London: Wallflower, 2009. Print.

Cheah, Pheng. "World against Globe: Toward a Normative Conception of World Literature" *New Literary History* 45, 2014. Print.

Heidegger, Martin. "Building Dwelling Thinking" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (translated by Albert Hofstadter). New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971. Print.

Pottekkat, S.K. *Samsarikkunna Diary Kurippukal* . Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi Books, 2013. Print.

—-. *Sanchara Sahithyam Vol. 1*. Kottayam: DC Books, 2003. Print.

Prasad, M. Madhava. "Fan Bhakti and Subaltern Sovereignty: Enthusiasm as a Political Factor". *Economic and Political Weekly Vol.* 44, No. 29, 2009, pp. 68–76. Print.

Radhakrishnan, Ratheesh. "Kim Ki Duk's Promise, Zanussi's Betrayal: Film Festival, World Cinema and the Subject of the Region" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol. 17, No. 2, 2016. Print.

—-. "The 'Worlds of the Region" *positions: asia critique*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2016. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords : a Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976. Print.

—-. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.

Illustrating Traditions: The Visual Order of Children's Literature

Dr. Deepa Sreenivas

This paper is about two different modes of children's writing that I explored at different points of my research. The first, well known as Amar Chitra Katha (Immortal Picture Stories, henceforth ACK), has an indisputable place in mainstream children's literature in India. Through the seventies and eighties, these books became a part of middle-class homes, roadside bookstalls and libraries, recognized by parents and teachers as an important means of imparting moral and traditional values to the young. The second set of stories that I deal with does not have the ready the status of the "story" — especially that of the "children's story". Embedded in the lives of children from non-mainstream backgrounds, these stories barely have a presence in the domain of printed, mainstream children's literature.

In an earlier work on Amar Chitra Katha (Sreenivas, *Sculpting a Middle Class*), I had tried to tease out the many visual traditions that constituted the complex intertextuality of its images. ACK was loosely referred to as a comic; even its founder Anant Pai called it an "Indian comic". However, a close look at its narrative form revealed its distinctiveness from the comic form as it had evolved in the West, although it shared many of the formal conventions of the latter. ACK combined various pre-modern visual narrative conventions of India, the traditions of modern Indian popular art with some of the narrative

and visual conventions of the western comic to produce an effect that was altogether unique, and mediated through the historical contexts in which it came into existence.

It is true that ACK is easily recognizable as a comic, even though its visual familiarity comes from many sources. Under what circumstances did the comic format come to be the primary/ conspicuous visual medium of ACK, notwithstanding its other borrowings? I contend that it was important for its founder Anant Pai to find a medium that was a familiar format in children's literature. Even as he told mythological stories, he needed to find a modern medium, one that urban middle-class children of his time could quickly identify with.

Anant Pai started ACK as a publishing enterprise in the late sixties with an avowed intent to bring to children the stories that speak of "Indian themes and values". I have argued elsewhere (Sreenivas, *Sculpting a Middle Class*) that this fits in with the larger cultural project of the time aimed at reinstalling an upper caste Hindu tradition as "Indian culture". This coincides with the moment of the rise of a competitive middle class, impatient with the welfarist ideology of the Nehruvian state. Pai's ACK rises to meet the challenge by combining the competitive individualist ideology with the ethic of a Hindu heroic self that is at once spiritual and material, extraordinary yet human. In other words, it attempts to put together a practical ethic for the nation. As it re-presents and re-packages the lives of mythological and historical heroes, in story after story, it sends out a strong message to children that it is possible to rise above caste, class and community on the strength of one's innate potential; that it is possible to achieve excellence on the basis of individual merit. This discourse maps onto a conservative middle class ideology, during the seventies, contemporaneous with the radical contestation

of the developmental state by the subaltern classes — peasants, women, workers and large groups of disgruntled youth.

Pai's ambition is to retell the history of India in a way that would provide the child readers with models for emulation. He shrewdly figures out that this cannot be done through the more conventional/academic modes of narrating history, such as the style adopted by textbook history. He finds history textbooks uninspiring — "a record of facts and dates", as he puts it. He searches for a new way of recounting history, and must undo and rethink the textbook mode of narration/illustration.

The illustrations in school textbooks in the post-independence era, especially the ones designed by state educational bodies, are black and white — mostly line drawings and sometimes prints of photographs. We should not be surprised to find a drawing of Qutb Minar or Taj Mahal that appeared in a textbook in the 1950s reproduced in a textbook published in more recent times. One clear explanation obviously is the fact that colour publishing requires more money. But the characteristic "frozenness" of schoolbook illustration has a more complex rationale. Partha Chatterjee pursues this question by looking at the school textbooks of Bengal, which I assume must bear a resemblance to textbooks in other states.

In nineteenth century Bengal, school textbooks of history rarely carried illustrations — cost being the major reason for this. Wood engravings, though cheap and widely used, were rarely employed in textbooks, possibly because of their association with the pulp literature of the bazaar. We have to move forward to the 1920s to find illustrated history textbooks for school children. From 1924, we find engraved illustrations of rulers and monuments — exactly the same sort one would have found in colonial histories and

travel accounts with a picturesque quality — identified with the company school of art. In the handling of illustrations, there is an important shift in the 1950s right after independence. Line engravings are replaced by photographs printed from half tone zinc blocks. But the picturesque quality is no longer there. To cite Chatterjee, "There are no trees or stray human figures in the foreground. Historical monuments are acquiring an iconic quality. What else can one say about the photographic image of the Taj, obviously printed from a metal block that has long outlived its aesthetic appeal?" (282-283). From the late 1950s, photographs disappear from history textbooks to be substituted by pen and ink drawings. "They are not however artist's sketches, there is not the slightest touch of an individualized aesthetic gaze. These are representations of historical monuments as icons" (283). He locates this move in the necessity to create a reverential distance between the object and the viewer. As he puts it: "An iconic image is not merely an easily recognized depiction or a conventional logo. It is the representation of a sacred object in which the image itself partakes of the sacred quality of the original.… the school child must be presented with a gallery of iconic images that are situated in no particular place or time but in fact belong to the whole of national space and to all time" (284).

Partha Chatterjee's analysis of the dominant strand of illustration in post-independence history textbooks helps me to highlight a very disparate trend that happens in Amar Chitra Katha. In order to initiate a different history, ACK must fill its images with colour. This is in keeping with its historiography, shaped by the objective to teach children values by re-telling the lives of great men and a few great women. It takes history right into the domain of popular culture, engaging with and reshaping the commonness of the people, drawing on the visual material they are surrounded with every day, in the form of calendars, posters, films and regional/

indigenous storytelling formats. The effort is to reduce the distance between the visual object and viewer, straining against the grain of history textbooks.

In this, Pai closely works with the twin goals of children's literature — to delight and to instruct, a trend that starts in the 18th century, initiated by John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* in 1744. For Newbery, illustration carries the major share of the responsibility to delight. Like Newbery, Pai takes on an avuncular persona, teaching values even as he makes learning fun. Just as Newbery breaks from the "drab" effect of hornbooks and chapbooks which were the only reading material available to children so far, Pai must break with school history and draw on alternative sources, notwithstanding their "unacademic" associations with the popular.

Let us look at some of the important influences on ACK, drawn from popular art. The advent of new realistic, illusionist pictorial techniques had initiated a complex interplay of the real and the mythic, thus fashioning a new iconography. This is perhaps most demonstrable in the works of Ravi Varma who borrows oil and easel painting techniques from the west but transforms their function and effect by creating Ideal Indian types. He evokes the erotic fullness and the erect poise of archetypal figures from a classical/Aryan past and imbues them with immediacy and tactility through the use of the oil medium. It is through the privileging the classical and the concomitant exclusion of other bodies/histories that he, as Geeta Kapur puts it, "aspires for a universally attractive human ideal through an Indian manifestation" (71).

I would argue that ACK brings back a similar project into the domain of children's literature. The critical shift is from lifeless if imposing monuments to real tangible people — even when they are

exemplars from history or mythology. As is the case with the paintings of Ravi Varma[1], ACK is a nationalist project which aspires to bring the past alive but there are simultaneous exclusions or displacement of subaltern lives and aspirations (in order to demonstrate/create an 'ideal' India). This fits in with the historical mandate of children's literature to produce 'citizens'—through erasure or subordination of the particular markings of class, gender and community. As Deepta Achar and I have argued elsewhere, from its inception, children's literature has assumed the responsibility of moulding a "national child" and in the process, has taken on a subtly disciplinary and normative form. The result is the marginalisation of non-normative childhoods (See Achar and Sreenivas for an extended discussion on the upper caste middle class bias in storybooks.)

In nationally circulated children's literature itself, Amar Chitra Katha finds a precedent in the popular and colourfully illustrated *Chandamama*. To cite from archives.org:

> *Chandamama* was established in 1947, the brain-child of visionaries B.Nagi Reddy and Chakrapani. The magazine was launched with an aim to entertain and educate young minds about the rich traditions of India. *Chandamama* has been delighting readers since then with engrossing stories, amazing facts, and thought-provoking features. Mention *Chandamama*, and one will instantly recall popular features such as Vikram/Vetala, stunning artwork, and beautiful renditions of mythological tales. Known for its vibrant illustrations and accurate depiction of traditional stories, the magazine has maintained its position as a brand that you can trust. ("Chandamama Magazine")

Unlike ACK, in *Chandamama*, one finds a mix of genres and gradation of visuals in terms of colour. The covers are in 4 colours and some other visuals use only three tones such as black, white and and one more colour. Interestingly, the mythological and adventure stories have vivid and fully coloured visuals. Later, into the 70s and 80s, most of the *Chandamama* stories have vivid full-colour illustrations. However, the story of Mahabharata would have more detailed and grander illustrations compared to a fable such as "The wise judge" — which has illustrations with splotchy water colour effect. Sections called "News Flash" or "Do You Know?" have the least detailed illustrations, accompanied by information vignettes. While *Chandamama* carries different narratives for children, the most brilliant colors are reserved for stories about mythology or magic. Coming to the late sixties, ACK adopts the mythological or heroic as its predominant narrative mode and its illustrations resonate with the *Chandamama* tradition. I feel that *Chandamama* balances the mythological and the magical with the secular/western, sometimes having stories from *Mahabharata* and *Treasure Island* in the same issue. One would also find tiny knowledge capsules from all over the world. With ACK this cocktail is dispensed with; it retains the mythological and drops the magical and the non-Indian bits.

Yet ACK's mythological is closely mapped on to the modern Hindu self. I would argue that while illustrations in textbook history were distanced from the popular, it is the association with the popular that brings the heroic and the iconic closer to children. ACK unabashedly draws from calendar art, bazaar art, poster art, and as we have discussed, conspicuously models itself on the comic book. The influence of lithographic reproductions of Ravi Varma's paintings and calendar art is perhaps most visible in the depiction of women, the figures having a half clad full-bodied quality. As Tapati Guha Thakurta has noted, "The woman's image, like the very ideas of

womanliness and womanhood, exuded strong 'iconic' potentials. If the changes in painting and printing techniques gave the image a new seductive tangibility, a parallel accretion of religious, mythic, aesthetic, social and political values transformed the same image into an icon" (WS-91). In this new iconography, mythic heroines are embodiments of the nation (as an imagined geography and community) on whose behalf the Hindu male must be vigilant and fight. It is significant that ACK avoids popular styles such as the Kalighat pat tradition that produced bloated figures drawn in bold strokes and lampooned the westernised middle class at the close of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

There is a relentless focus on the heroic, and the illustration goes a long way in sustaining it. As Perry Nodelman has argued, in children's literature, it is the visual which can amplify the verbal and add multiple meanings. The ACK images arrest the gaze on a central figure and individualize mythic or historical characters. Following poster art the masculine hero's face/figure dominate the space. R. Srivatsan points out that while there may be many human figures in a poster or hoarding composition, but it is one face or body that extends its force across the composition and holds it together. The impact of poster art is most visible on the front covers of ACK. Illusionist techniques centre a heroic figure, drawing the gaze on to him and turning him into an exemplar for the the viewing child.

While the ACK initiative demonstrates crucial traffic with a conservative middle class ideology, mainstream children's literature in general is almost always addressed to an audience that is middle class and elite. Childhood has been hegemonically represented in children's literature, textbooks, and popular media as a stage of innocence, play, spontaneity and vulnerability, clearly marked off from the adult world. But the dominant ideal of childhood is underwritten

by middle-class and upper-caste affiliations, unsettling its claim to universality. Standard reading materials are addressed to an urban, middle-class and upper-caste child and reflect his/her everyday routine, emotions, economic resources, family relationships, beliefs, school experiences, food habits and dialects. Children from other/ minor contexts sometimes do find a place in these stories, but measured against the 'norm', they need to establish their 'smartness'. In such stories, a tribal boy may have to prove that his knowledge of the forest has relevance in the modern world; a disabled girl may have to excel as a craftsperson (Sreenivas, "Telling Different Tales").

I now turn to my more recent work on a set of children stories that provide a strong counterpoint to the ACK mode of heroism. I draw on my involvement in a project titled *Different Tales*. *Different Tales*, a series of children's books developed by Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad, marks an endeavour to find images and stories that mirror and dignify the childhoods of the majority of Indian children whose stories are rarely found in mainstream children's writing. The first phase of the series features books in Telugu and Malayalam, translated into English and across the two regional languages. Most of the writers are from Dalit and other minority communities, and their stories draw from their own childhoods. The stories problematize the dominant notion of "childhood" and bring out the complex ways in which children cope with the difficulties and failures, not letting go of hope and aspiration— often drawing on the resources and relationships within the community. In contrast to mainstream representations of childhood as a period of innocence of vulnerability, marked off from the adult world of responsibility and work, these stories portray children working alongside family members and even their games and toys are steeped in community living and agricultural life (Sreenivas "Telling Different Tales", 316).

Let us look at some examples that are illustrative. "Braveheart Badeyya" by Gogu Shymala, a Telugu Dalit feminist writer, is a story about the only boy from the Madiga community to go to school. He is the pride of his community, and yet in school he is made to sit apart so he does not pollute others. After only a brief reference to this, the story moves into his world to focus on the nurturing relationship between him and his community — one that teaches him the skills of everyday living and gives him the ability to respond to injustice in a novel and creative way. "Tataki" is another such story by Shymala, where eleven year old Balamma, hailing from a dalit agricultural family, breaks an unwritten but incontrovertible law of the village when she channels the water let out from the canal into her family's tiny plot, before the landlord's land is irrigated. As a consequence, she faces sexual violence from the landlord for whom she is no "child" but a "*mala* slut". Balamama must draw on the community memories circulated among the women of her caste to escape from the situation. "Moon in the pot" is a story that draws on mythology but humanises the *rakshasa* — the perennial villain of dominant Hindu mythology as also initiatives like Amar Chitra Katha. Mythology in the story is embedded in the local familial/community setting of the child-addressee.

Let me now recall the reflections over illustrating the marginalized worlds that formed a central part of the *Different Tales* project. This involved a survey and critique of mainstream and existing children's illustrations. We worked with a group of artists from the School of Fine Arts, M.S. University Baroda. Unlike in most cases, where the illustrators come in after a story is in place, these artists were involved at every stage right from the beginning. An aspect that received much attention was the relationship between the text and the image. As the artist Chinnan put it, "Illustration for me means the invisible spaces left by the text." The artists figured

that it was in these invisible spaces that illustrations could open up other meanings, offering possibilities and nuances that are flattened by the text.

The group had to keep in mind that they are addressing a constituency of children where there are not many storybooks/picture books available, and most of the visual information is from textbooks and from pedagogic devices like charts that are put up on the school wall. One of the issues that emerges then is "What are the existing languages with which bodies are represented?" School charts on professions and occupations — titled "Our Helpers", "At Your Service" and so on — completely drain away details from the bodies that are represented. Children would equally be surrounded by popular visual language of the everyday — cinema, advertisements and posters. Since the series was addressed to older children, one needed to work with the visual language familiar to them and yet transform these to address non-mainstream realities.

Realism was also central to the discussions on illustration because it is through the codes of realism that certain bodies become naturalized. The artist group looked at the choices in play in the way African-American bodies are represented. In most children's stories involving African Americans, the body postures, facial expressions and the nature of the skin colour is such that the politics of the body is lost and the black face becomes a timeless exotica. Often the visual derives from a painterly European tradition where the single body is fetishized. However, visual trends in many Caribbean stories, represent the complex racial history of the place.[2]

We noted a critical emerging trend in children's literature since the 90s, introduced by publishing houses such as Tulika, Tara Books and Puffin Books, which addressed none too mainstream lives. These

signal a break from the heroic mode of ACK. At the same time, such representations are often addressed to the gaze of the middle class child. In the mode of multiculturalism, a tribal boy may find a central place in a story but may still need to prove that his knowledge of the forest has relevance in the modern world. Similarly, a story may attempt to represent a disabled girl in such a way that she is not the object of pity or derision. However, her acceptance would need to be carefully achieved; she would in all probability be an excellent craftsperson. A larger discussion on this is not within the scope of the paper. But I would like to say that the new stories develop strategies of acceptance (of marginalized children/childhoods) keeping in mind the middle class paradigm. This is not to dismiss the stories, they obviously have the difficult task of making visible lives that have had no presence in printed children's writing. Yet it is important to complicate the terms on which visibility is rendered possible.

In *Different Tales*, we too ran the risk of anthropologizing or domesticating subaltern lives and conflicts. In Kancha Ilaiah's autobiographical "Mother", while there is a possibility of the verbal narrative representing the Dalit mother as heroic (and, thus fixing her into the heroic mother slot), the illustrations work against it. The size of the Mother's figure is reduced and set in a world of a myriad other figures, buildings and practices. It conveys the complexity of her world where she must try to get her son educated so that he has a chance to break out of traditional, caste-bound destinies. The landscape does not confirm to any pre-existing notion of village life and details of semi urban, industrial landscape creep into the pictures.

Different Tales is a tentative beginning, and by no means the final word on how children's literature may be re-imagined. Indeed, the re-imagination should be an ongoing process, the lacunas in

each story/project leading us to think afresh about ways of representing plural childhoods (as against normative childhood). *Different Tales* marks an attempt to address to the lacks and exclusions of children's literature, opening up modes of addressing the new constituencies of children in public institutions and life. It has been accused of turning stories into vehicles of ideology, but, in its defence, I would say that this particular criticism perhaps stems from the misconceived understanding of children's literature as an zone of innocence. Minor narratives need to come into children's literature, but not in a folksy or romantic fashion, keeping in mind the "sensibilities" of children's literature. Similarly, inclusion cannot be achieved simply by turning the minor protagonist into an object of pity or a victim, or even an exceptional individual.

Having engaged with Amar Chitra Katha as a powerful intervention into the popular, I do feel that Different Tales perhaps did not adequately engage with illustrating traditions of children's stories. The avant-garde quality of the visuals points to other ways imaging childhood but sometimes is handicapped by its exclusivity and art school paradigm. Perhaps that is something to think about in the next phase, if there is one.

Notes

[1] Kapur (1989) writes, '[T]here is the evidence of his paintings that indigenous and more ancient but also Muslim appearances are more or less subsumed by the 'lofty' race in the name of an Indian synthesis and in the hegemonic interests of national unity' (71).

[2] I draw extensively on the valuable inputs on illustrative languages by Deeptha Achar, who was centrally involved in the project.

Works Cited

Achar, Deeptha and Deepa Sreenivas. "Beyond the National Child: How to Create Storybooks for a Plural World". *Himal Southasian.* May 2010. Web. http://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/160-beyond-the-national-child.html.

"Chandamama Magazine". *Archive.org.* n.d. Web. https://archive.org/details/chandamama_magazine?   and%5B%5D=subject%3A%22amir%22.

Chatterjee, Partha. "The Sacred Circulation of National Image", in Maria Antonella Pelizzari (ed), *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850-1900.* Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2003. Print.

Nodelman, Perry. *Words about pictures: The narrative art of children's picture books.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988. Print.

Shyamala, Gogu. *Tataki Wins Again and Braveheart Badeyya.* Kottayam: DC Books, 2008. Print.

Sreenivas, Deepa (Series Editor). *Different Tales.* Hyderabad: Anveshi and Kottayam: DC Books, 2008. Print.

Sreenivas, Deepa. *Sculpting a Middle Class: History, Masculinity and the Amar Chitra Katha in India.* New Delhi: Routledge, 2010. Print.

Sreenivas, Deepa. "Telling Different Tales: Possible Childhoods in Children's Literature". *Childhood: A Global Journal on Child Research Vol.* 11, No. 3, 2011, pp. 267–281. Print.

Srivatsan, R. *Conditions of Visibility: Writings on Photography in Contemporary India.* Calcutta: Stree, 2000. Print.

Mother Icon: Investing Meaning in an Image

Priya Chandran

Icon is a familiar word since the twentieth century, and has gained more currency than ever before. There are, for example, several usages such as humanitarian icon, cricket icon, icon of revolution, youth icon, iconic place, iconic car and so on. According to the Oxford dictionary, icon means "an object of particular admiration, especially as representative symbol of something". Apart from the above icons there is another group of icons. They are iconic images, a simplistic image or drawing representing a large idea, concept or a personality. A computer icon for instance, is an iconic image. In each case, meaning is constructed through engagement with an aesthetic surface and a discursive depth.

Icons are cultural constructions. On the surface, icons are produced by sensorial engagement with the audience and the image. In its depth the icon is constructed through multiple discourses. Institutions, practices and narratives mediate the engagement between the image and the audience. According to Dominik Bartmanski, "icons are signifiers of ideationally and affectively intuited signified" (Bartmanski 2). The icons are carriers of affective imaginations as well as ideas. They embody meaning aesthetically and carry across both ideas and experience.

In this article I will examine the iconicity of Mata Amritanandamayi. Before examining the iconicity of the Mata let me explain the term iconicity. Iconicity is the "power of objects, images

and events to mobilise people and form communities" (Giesen 247). It "consists in retrieving, activating and articulating the depth of the signified by introducing it to the realm of immediate sensory experience connecting discursive meaning with the perceptual and palpable" (Bartmanski 2) There are two main points in the above definition that concerns the present study — icons retrieve, activate and articulate the depth of sensory experience, and connect the discursive meaning with the perceptual and palpable.

To the followers of Mata Amritanandamayi, the Mata or Amma symbolizes the universal mother. To them she represents the essence of motherliness and ideal motherhood. It is through a process of aesthetic and discursive meaning-making that this idea and affect of divine mother is constructed and attributed to Mata Amritanandamayi. In this article, I will show how the aesthetic practices in the Mata Amritanandamayi faith formation construct mental images of the Mata that contributes to the making of the *mathrubimbam* (mother icon).

Mata Amritanandamayi is the leader of a spiritual institution in Kerala, named Mata Amritanandamayi Math. She is popular across the world as a saint woman who spreads the message of love. She has followers across the world who address her as the "Amma" (mother) or the "Mata". Mata Amritanandamayi was born into an Araya family on 27 September, 1953. Her parents named her Sudhamani, the name that she retained until 1981, the year in which the Mata Amritanandamayi Math was established. In her biographies Sudhamani is said to have lived a childhood devoid of love. According to her biographies, in her early teens Sudhamani started to look after her younger siblings, help her mother with domestic chores and work for relatives. The loneliness she felt in the absence of love led her to find solace in devotion. Her expressive devotional experience drew the attention and interest of other people, especially those who are

familiar with the imagery of similar expressions in stories of mystics. She was asked to perform for a religious audience. Within a short period she became popular as an ardent devotee of the god Krishna. People began to visit her when she performed as god, for an experience of devotion and sought advice in matters of life. During this period, a group of young men in search of spiritual enlightenment visits her. They identify their guru in her and give meaning to her acts inspired by the spiritual learning they acquired in the company of seekers from Ashrams in other parts of India, such as the Ramakrishna Math. In their company, Sudhamani identifies herself as the "divine mother", takes the name Mata Amritanandamayi and establishes an Ashram to practice spirituality. The Ashram develops its discourse, spreads them as messages, attracts more people, builds other institutions and expands its reach across different parts of the world. Mata Amritanandamayi — now called by her devotees as "Amma" — emerges as an icon of maternal love.

Cultural Practices and Icon-making

Institutions, practices and narratives bring into being engagement between the Mata and people. It is through this engagement that an image of the Mata gains affective meaning and discursive depth. The institution of the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, the cultural practices in the Ashram and by devotees, and narratives about the Mata construct the mother icon. In the following pages I will give some instances of how cultural practices engage in the process of icon-making.

The Divine Embrace

The Mata is popular across the world as a hugging saint. The divine embrace or *alinganam* is one unique practice that distinguishes the Mata from other such guru figures. It is through

the divine embrace that the Mata graces those who come to her. It introduces the element of immanence, proximity, tactility and interaction into the idea of the divine and practices of worship. This is unlike the traditional temple practices of Hindu worship where the deity is an idol, which is worshipped by the priest, whose body cannot be touched, as it is sacred in mediating the deity, and the deity's grace shared among the devotees in the form of prasadam. Such traditional dalit and lower caste practices of worship as the Velichappadu Thullal, Thira and Theyyattam are performative acts done in the image of God. In such practices the performer is believed to be a representation of the deity and in a state of trance; the performer interacts with the devotees making predictions, giving advice and blessings directly and through touch. However, after the performance, the performers go back to live their daily life persona. Unlike this, Mata Amritanandamayi embodies the ideal mother image in *roopam* (form), *bhavam* (expression) and *sankalpam* (imagination), not just during a performative occasion, but throughout her public life. In this way, by narcissistically becoming one with the image itself, she closes the gap between the 'image' and the object of representation.

The divine embrace gives the feeling of a caring warm cuddle accompanied by the smell of agarbathis (incense sticks) and sights of flowers, sounds of bhajan and sweetness of the prasadam. The soft bhavams of the Mata and the affectionate interpellation "Amma-Kuttan", "makkale" or "molootty" complements them. The devotees wait for a long time in queue to experience this embrace. The darsan on a normal day in the ashram begins as early as 2:00 in the morning. The Mata sits there for hours at a stretch giving *darsan* and offering consolation. Some devotees weep, some tell their problems. The Mata listens to them for sometime and then embraces, sometimes offers a solution or wipes their tears.

As a cultural practice within the ashram the embrace brings bodies together along with extreme affection and sensoriality. It creates an intensely affective and sensorial setting where many devotees are equally brought to a cathartic mood in the presence of the Mata. The affect and sensoriality of divine embrace is one of the several factors that produce the aesthetic aspect of the Mata's iconicity. Apart from the embrace there are other affective and sensorial practices such as the manasapuja and Amma doll worship.

The Amma Doll

The Amma doll is a small doll made of soft materials. It wears the rudraksha beads and saree that the Mata has worn. It offers the feeling of presence in the absence of Amma. Amma doll is not very popular among the devotees in Kerala. Its consumers are mostly the Western devotees or the devotees who stay abroad. The Amma doll is a product of Mata Amritandamayi Math, handmade by the disciples. They are just one among the many products sold by the ashram, mainly to the followers, such as spiritual books, magazines, videos, DVDs and photographs of Amma. However, they are different from this particular product, the Amma doll, in that the latter is a reproduction of what Amma stands for in Amma's form, the loving/healing embrace. The dolls are made in the form of offering an embrace—with stretched out arms. They are available in various sizes. Most of the narratives about the Amma doll happen in online portals where the devotees share their amma doll experiences. One such narrative is as follows.

> After viewing the Amma doll pages that have recently been added on the amritapuri.org site, I feel like sharing my Amma doll experience.

> I had wanted an Amma doll for a long time, but always came up with some excuse for not buying one.
>
> Doll in hand, I awaited Amma's darshan. Amma might not see too many grown men bringing dolls for blessing, but without having to ask "your doll?" she knew it was a special gift for myself. She tilak'ed the doll- and me too! I don't recall Amma ever sticking kumkum paste on my forehead before. Since the doll received Amma's blessings, it's not easy to let go of her. She is sitting on my lap as I work on my computer. I sleep with her, and reach for her when I wake up. I talk to her and hug her as if this doll is Amma herself. The doll is not only soft and nurturing to cuddle but fills the longing for Amma's darshan during the long wait between her tours. It's like a murti of the Divine Mother. But while most murtis are made of hard metal or stone, this is very warm, fuzzy, huggable, snuggable murti. And now other devotees ask me if they could hold my doll. (Keval)

This narrative shows the extent to which a devotee engages with the doll sensorially and imaginatively. Through the connection he makes with the doll the devotee affectively imagines his feelings for the Mata. This affectively intuited signified forms the aesthetic surface of the mother icon. Practices such as these are examples of icon-work. According to Stuart Hall, popular culture is the domain where transformations occur. As a sign in the domain of popular culture, the Mata is continuously undergoing icon-work.

Photographs of the Mata

The devotees circulate, ritualize and exhibit the photographs of the Mata. Many devotees keep a large photograph of the Mata in the drawing room of their house. With the Mata's photograph thus

exhibited the family is introduced to the new visitor through the image of the Mata. Some photos are framed and garlanded; some are just fixed on the wall with adhesive, along with other pictures of deities. Some devotees like to keep the framed photograph in a sacred place such as the puja room. As the following photographs (Figures 1-4) show, devotees use the photographs in their living room, puja room and study room for individualised worship. The iconography of the Mata also appears on calendars, pens, paperweights and other objects that the devotees use while studying or working in the office.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

The above photographs show some of the ways in which the followers of the Mata use her photographs. By using these photographs in certain ways such as placing them along with other figures the devotees make a narrative. In one photograph (Figure 3), a small framed photograph of the Mata is kept alongside figures such as Gandhi, Ramana Maharshi and Vivekananda. In the puja room, the photograph of the Mata is placed below the photographs of gods. In another iconography (Figure 4) sanctioned by the Math, a large oval frame represents photographs of Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swami, Mata Amritanandamayi, Sankaracharya, and pictures of gods. These photo narratives play significant part in producing devotee's imaginary of the Mata.

The image of Mata Amritanandamayi is undergoing icon-work in the historical context of women's struggles against the subjugation by patriarchal institutions. There have been several discussions on motherhood in Kerala. In her book, *Kulastreeyum Chandappennum Undayathengane*, J. Devika talks about changing ideas of motherhood, through a literary survey of early women's writings in Kerala. She points out that the traditional ideas of motherhood and mothering have been contested by upper caste women as the traditional roles of these women changed, with education, work, and

engagement in public sphere. Even in the changing contexts of the material socio-economic conditions the traditional roles of mothering and motherhood for most women, especially those from the lower castes and dalit communities who are late to emerge in the public sphere, remain unchanged. Some of the early sources that Devika cites concern upper caste women seeking possibility of a social role for their maternal subjectivity. For instance, the works of K. Saraswathiyamma that she cites in this context, questions the limitation of possibilities, imposed upon women by framing them within what is understood as "feminine qualities", such as tolerance, compassion and patience. Another woman writer, Lalithambika Antharjanam questioned what she considers as the "mechanization of motherhood" and contested the idea that motherhood is confined to the practice of nurturing. She argued that the process of giving birth to a child itself is transformative at many levels to the individual. She claims that this process of mothering unites all women regardless of caste, class or religion. She questions the idea that motherhood and public life are not complementary and argues that a public life that ignores motherhood and a motherhood that ignores public life are incomplete.

Women writers have been writing about maternal subjectivity for a long time. However, Mata Amritanandmayi as an iconic formation seems to have ignored these questions. The meaning produced by an affective engagement with the Mata does not concern itself with the actual conditions in which motherhood is lived or is produced as an idea. As a popular cultural formation the icon of Mata is a domain of struggle for meaning. Here the Mata faith phenomenon is based on traditional conceptualisations of the maternal.

Works Cited

Bartmaski, Dominik and Jeffrey C. Alexander. "Materiality and Meaning in Social Life:

Toward an Iconic Turn in Cultural Sociology" in *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.

Devika, J. *Kulastreeyum Chandappennum Undayathengane*. Thiruvanandapuram: Centre

for Development Studies, 2010. Print.

Giesen, Bernhard. "Afterword" *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*.

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.

Keval. "My Amma Doll" India Divine.Org The Hinduism Forum Archive. 23 December

2001. Web. Accessed on 10 August 2012. https://www.indiadivine.org/content/topic/1123336-my-amma-doll/

Collective Instruction: Signature Pictures of Muthanga Struggle

Aby Abraham

On 3rd September 2015, the refugee crisis due to the political tribulations in Syria took a new turn with the publication of a photograph of a three-year-old boy who was washed up on one of the beaches of Turkey. The photograph, taken by Nilufer Demir of Dogan News Agency, of Aylan Kurdi who was trying to reach Greece in a boat was one of many migrants who died while trying to escape from their homeland due to the civil war in Syria. Within hours, this particular image became one of the most circulated pictures across the world, representing the entire crisis. It became impossible for the world leaders not to acknowledge the situation as the image evoked such an outcry from people across the world. Within days, this picture became what Sontag calls a "signature picture" of the refugee crisis of this decade.

According to Susan Sontag, images instruct us on what to remember. The photographs that everyone recognizes are a constituent part of what a society chooses to think. It is a declaration about what the society has chosen to think about. Here she rejects the idea of "collective memory" and "collective guilt" and proposes the idea of "collective instruction". According to Sontag, memory is individual and "unreproducible". She says "What is called collective memory is not remembering but stipulating: that *this* is important,

and *this* is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds" (Sontag 67-68).

She points out how the image works as memory and how these images are those which work as the agency of memory. According to her, the basic unit of memory is the single image (Sontag 20). Sontag introduces the role of "signature pictures" which represent each event in history. Sontag takes the examples of poster-ready photographs from history — the mushroom cloud of the Atomic bomb test, the picture of Martin Luther King, Jr., addressing the crowd at the Lincoln Memorial, the astronaut walking on the moon — and calls each of these the visual equivalent of sound bites which act as the compact form of memorising each event.

Sontag also notices that, on the other hand, the lack of well-known pictures of certain events or atrocities seems to be remote to our memory. She takes the examples of events such as the execution of the Herero people in Namibia decreed by the German colonial administration in 1904; the Nanking Massacre of 1937, where the Japanese raped over one hundred and thirty thousand women and girls; the violence of Soviet soldiers in Berlin in 1945 after their victory etc (Sontag 67). These are memories that few have cared to claim.

India has a long history of photographic circulation, beginning right from the invention of the earliest photographic equipments. Christopher Pinney in his book *The Prosthetic Eye: Photography as Cure and Poison* talks about how the colonial officers used the camera as a tool in various colonial practices and how the camera became a cure and a solution to the weakness and corruptions of earlier techniques of representation in India (Pinney S34). Even though photography has travelled very far from the earlier technologies and a technology where digital manipulation is possible

at several stages, even now it acts as the one of the most used tools to represent the "real".

By the beginning of the 21st century, Kerala witnessed a series of movements led by otherwise marginalised communities, especially by the adivasis. This could be read along with the emergence of identity movements, which evolved across the world and the impact of the increased number of dalit and other marginalised scholars in educational institutes who were otherwise kept outside the realm of education.

The land struggle led by the adivasi communities for land rights count among the most important struggles in this era. Adivasis, who were mostly otherwise part of the communist party cadre, moved away from the party and organised themselves under banners like Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS) guided by adivasi leaders and took out a series of protest movements across the state. Among these, the Muthanga struggle of 2003, led by C.K. Janu, an adivasi woman, under the banner of AGMS, could be seen as one of the most important moments of 21st century social movements in Kerala. On January 4, 2003, a group of adivasi families marched into the Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary under the leadership of AGMS and established a Grama Sabha of its own. This was after the realisation that the then state government was not committed to the promises made by the government during the negotiation of the "refuge hut" struggle of 2001, and prompted the adivasi leaders to start the occupy movement. On February 19, Kerala witnessed one of the most brutal attacks on adivasis in the post-independence era. The state government unleashed a well-coordinated police action using several hundreds of armed policemen (Thenadikulam 298). Several adivasis including women and children were injured and the clash resulted in the death of a adivasi activist and a policeman. There were reports of missing adivasis as the police chased them to forest.

In my study I am trying to analyse two photographs related to the Muthanga struggle which were widely circulated in Malayalam media and how it fits into mainstream narratives of the movement. In his essay, Ravi Raman pointed out that even though Muthanga struggle could be compared parallel to movements such as Zapatistas movement in Mexico and other indigenous movements elsewhere in terms of the demands of the struggle, it gathered little attention outside Kerala (Raman 126).

The picture of a group of adivasi men, armed with bows, sticks and stones aiming at the police (who remain beyond the frame of the photograph), was one of the most circulated images of the Muthanga land struggle. In this photograph taken by S. Ramesh Kurup, there was an adivasi man holding a bow and arrow staring at the camera and he was placed at one of the intersection points of the "rule of thirds" of the frame, a common technique used by the photographers and painters to foreground the subject of the image.

There was another series of images carried by many newspapers and magazines which portrayed C.K. Janu with a swollen face standing in the middle of the police force. Most of the newspapers of Kerala carried photos with a similar pattern and perspective in the few days following the police action. These two photographs were the most circulated images related to Muthanga struggle and were reproduced several times across various media platforms irrespective of the ideology and position they had taken regarding the struggle.

The image of Janu standing in the middle of the police force perfectly fits into a pattern of image-taking which can be traced back to another historic movement of Kerala. This image which announces the surrender of the "violent adivasi" and the victory of the state over "the undemocratic and anarchist movement of adivasis" could be

read as a recreation of another image which was massively reproduced in the Kerala public sphere, that of K. Ajitha standing in front of Pulpally police station surrounded by police. The "display" of Ajitha, a young Naxalite, in front of the public by police was also meant to announce the near end of the Naxal movement of Kerala which faced many repercussions in the late 60s and 70s in Wayanad and other parts of Kerala.

While talking about how the Haitian Revolution was represented in photographs, Leah Gordon says that "one of the simplest ways to undermine a political movement was to demonize the culture behind it". The photographic representation of the marginalised across the globe carries certain elements which they always associate with the bodies of the marginalised itself; such as poverty, violence, AIDS etc. The Muthanga struggle was a struggle unparalleled by a movement which has happened in Kerala, and challenged the whole pattern of erstwhile movements in Kerala. Kerala witnessed an implausible unity which cut across all political factions, social groups and media enterprises in their unmitigated vilification of the adivasis. The media's acrimonious reaction was by no means surprising, as the most popular newspaper publications, Mathrubhumi and Malayala Manorama, had their own direct agendas regarding the struggle. Incidentally, Mathrubhumi itself was facing several allegations of land grabbing in Wayanad district while Manorama has a huge subscription base among non-tribal settlers who were apprehensive of the outcomes of the adivasi struggle.

Ravi Raman questions the way in which the state legislative assembly, including the Speaker, responded to the whole incident. The speaker considered the gun firing at the adivasis as a "fitting reply" to the claims of self-rule by adivasis (Raman 130). The media, along with the official versions of state government, harped about

the involvement of LTTE[1] and People's War Group[2] in the Muthanga movement. The police, with the complicit involvement of media houses, also tried to examine the history of each adivasi activist in order to connect them to some extremist groups which they were previously associated with. The media used the figure of Geethanandan, another leader of AGMS who was priorly involved with some radical groups, to "prove" the hands of radical organisations behind the struggle. The photo of Janu among the police constables should be analysed in this background where there is a constant attempt by the media and police to connect the popular struggles to the Maoist and Naxal movements. So along with announcing the "end of the struggle", this photo tries to link two episodes which happened across two different time frames. It is also important to notice that, even geographically, Muthanga is not too far from Pulpally police station, where Ajitha's photo was taken.

In the "armed adivasi" photograph, the conjectural positioning of the "man with the bow and arrow" as the subject is heightened through the absence of police force in the photograph. Clearly these photographs are real, taken from the spot itself, rather than being enacted or set up in a studio. But the framing of the image as well as the selection of these particular photographs from probably hundreds of others taken on that day and the reproduction of these photographs while talking about land issues of adivasis reveals an implicit interest among news agencies in representing a largely peaceful land rights movement as one riven and ingrained with "barbaric" violence, one which threatens not just the state but the reader/viewer whose gaze is met by the subject figure. Instead of invoking the guilt of complicity amongst the readers, the picture successfully produces the fearful dread of encountering the "other" — the primitive civilization outside the borderlines of governmentality, challenging all that is good and guarded in our safe democracy.

With the advent of social media and parallel media organisations, we expect exposition of metanarratives within the public domain. Interestingly, even in posts and narratives about Muthanga and similar struggles circulating within these alternate media, you could see the reproduction of the same photographs. This itself shows the power of these photographs and their deep entrenchment within the psyche of the reader, who can associate these photographs with the struggle without any further explanation. As Sontag stated, this association is not something innocent but a product of constant servings of a particular image to the viewer which in turn become part of the reader him-/herself and also part of the memory of the public about a particular event.

Signature pictures of the Muthanga struggle are not about the adivasis who showed the society how they can survive if they were given enough land of their own, it is rather not about how they are capable of self-rule which is guaranteed by the constitution of India, it is not about the social change they brought among themselves by establishing schools and alcohol-free environments. Signature picture of Muthanga is about the 'violent' adivasi, who took arms against the government, who are 'immature' and 'irrational' and it is a 'failed struggle' which was effectively crushed down by the government.

Notes

1. LTTE- Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who worked for Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka.

2. PWG- People's War Group- a Naxalite movement based in Andhra Pradesh started by Kondapalli Seetharamayya, who was a CPI (ML) member before.

Works Cited

Pinney, Christopher. "The Prosthetic Eye: Photography as Cure and Poison." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 14, The Objects of Evidence: Anthropological Approaches to the Production of Knowledge*, 2008, pp. S33-S46. Print.

Raman, Ravi K. "Muthanga: A Spark of Hope." *Social Analysis: THe International Journal of Social and Cultural Practise, Vol. 48, No.1*, 2004, pp. 126-135. Print.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. Print.

Thenadikulam, George S.J. "Tribal Life and Culture in Kerala." Vilanilam, V J, Antony Palackal and Sunny. Luke. *Introduction to Kerala Studies Vol. 1*. New Jersy: IISAC, 2015, pp. 285-295. Print.

The Portfolio of Superstars in Malayalam Cinema: The Visual and the Creation of Stardom

Ann Mary George

A star is an image, not a real person that is constructed (as any aspect of fiction is) out of a range of materials. (e.g. advertising, magazines. etc. as well as films).

(Dyer, 1979)

The stars are the main components of film industries around the world. Contrary to popular narratives, the Malayalam film industry is not immune to this phenomenon. The use of the term "superstar" by Andy Warhol was gaining popularity in the 1960s in the western showbiz. The trend soon caught up with the Indian showbiz and, considering his popularity, Rajesh Khanna was given the status or tag of a superstar by the Hindi film industry. Other regional film industries were not to be left behind and soon superstars began to emerge in other industries as well. Most of us are aware of the trajectories followed by the stars in the other South Indian states and extensive scholarly work has been done on them.

While it would be safe to assume that Malayalam actors like Jayan, Satyan, Prem Nazir and Madhu who were extremely popular during their times could have laid claim to the title "superstar", none of them made the effort to jump onto the bandwagon of superstardom. Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair, however, felt he was most deserving of the title. The cinema-goers of the Malayalam film industry did not seem interested in bestowing the title "superstar" on him or any other

actor from the Malayalam film industry. He closely followed the stars of the other industries and came to the realization that there are two things that make an actor a superstar — the media and a group of supporters, namely the fans. But when he realized he did not have the proper platform to launch him, he decided to do it himself. The perfect opportunity presented itself when Thikkurissi was invited to a function organized by certain film lovers and film organizations to honour veteran film actors at the Town Hall in Ernakulam in 1982. Thikkurissi, who was a special invitee, was a notable absentee when the meeting started with a jam-packed auditorium and other notable actors and writers of the industry present there. To the surprise and amusement of many, Thikkurissi turned up a few minutes into the meeting clad in a dark blue T-shirt and black pants and on his T-shirt embroidered in silver were the words "Super Star Thikkurissi" with a prominent star on the back of the T-shirt. He had also dyed his hair and mustache black (Chelangad). It was obvious he was dressed to get attention and that he did. I would like to develop on this incident and explore the role of the industry, media and other factors, in the creation of the star persona and how they play an important role in the creation of the identities known as the star and the fan.

The Malayalam film industry has been seen as an exception to many of the South Indian film making and viewing practices. The star system in Malayalam cinema had been seen as a temporary phenomenon by many. Early newspaper articles hint at the dissent many felt towards the star status bestowed on Mohanlal and Mammootty. Noted novelist and former bureaucrat Malayatoor Ramakrishnan is reported to have said: "I am ashamed that Malayalees are falling victims to the star charisma. About 10 years ago, Prem Nazir would have walked into the state secretariat unnoticed. Today Mammootty and Mohan Lal can create traffic jams

wherever they go in the state" (Pillai). New films were released only if they had time, even the scripts of the films were changed to suit the star image of the actor as seen in the case of Mammootty's *1921*. A newspaper article reported the "highly conscious cinema goer" being swayed by the charms of the actors and forming film clubs and queuing up for films that feature the two actors. On the opening day of Mohanlal's *Moonam Mura* (Third Technique), at least 15 fans were injured in a stampede in Trichur. The article also mentioned a certain Nafeesat Beevi in Perinthalmanna about 70 kilometres from Calicut who watched Mammootty's *1921* a dozen times just to hear his "soul-stirring dialogues". Theatres started to pay an advance of up to Rs 2 lakh interest-free if they wanted to screen a superstar film. Ramshackle theatres in villages were giving a sum from Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000 as advance. (Pillai)

I.V. Sasi noted, "Even Prem Nazir could never whip up such passions like Mammootty and Mohan Lal. In the case of these two it is a rare and right mixture of charisma and acting ability" (Pillai). But was it just the combination of charisma and acting ability that made them superstars? In my paper I would attempt to understand what it was that made Mammootty and Mohanlal emerge as "superstars" in an industry where actors like Prem Nazir and Satyan wavered at the threshold of superstardom.

It can be agreed upon that both Mohanlal and Mammootty are not the ideals that run into one's mind when we use the term superstars, but I think the industry has played an important part in making them the superstars they are now. If we were to look at their career trajectory, both Mohanlal and Mammootty started their careers around the same time, both have their first release in a main role in the year 1980. Mohanlal entered the industry as a villain in *Manjil*

Virinja Pookkal, and was cast in similar roles in the next few films; he became a successful hero with Sasikumar's *Ivide Thudangunnu* (1984).

1980s was a period when the Malayalam film industry was trying to shift its roots from Madras to Kerala. The industry needed stars, and Mohanlal and Mammootty were available to fill the role. The mid-1980s was also a time when Doordarshan started regional channels and in 1993 Asianet entered the broadcasting business. I propose that these two factors among others contributed to the creation of superstars in the Malayalam film industry. I put forward the argument that if one were to look at the films of these actors we can notice the grooming of these actors into the superstars they are now. It has been pointed out time and again by many and the actors themselves that they are incomparable and work in their own style: while Mohanlal is credited with being more of a spontaneous actor, Mammootty is said to be a very methodical actor.

Ratheesh Radhakrishnan in his essay "'Looking at Mohanlal: Spectatorial Ordering and the Emergence of the 'Fan' in Malayalam Cinema", notes the dual ending of *Harikrishnans* as an indication of the anticipated emergence of the fan in the narratives of films and in the modes of representation of the star. Radhakrishnan refers to four films of Mohanlal which he says are representative of the specific periods they were released in. While Radhakrishnan notes the creation of a fan I would like to look at the creation of the star.

I would like to look at a few films that mark the gradual emergence of the superstar in the Malayalam film industry. *Athirathram* (1984), a film directed by I.V. Sasi, includes Mammootty and Mohanlal in its cast. Interestingly, the actor Shankar who made his debut as the hero in *Manjilvirinja Pookkal,* is cast as Mammootty's

driver in the film. Mammootty plays the character of Taradas, a smuggler, while Mohanlal plays a policeman. The introduction given to Taradas' character differs from the usual entrances, you see a character that smugly gives out his name and spells out his profession as a smuggler to the police and the shot is followed by a chase sequence.

Mohanlal's film *Shobaraj* (1986) was a remake of *Don* (1978) which was also remade into Tamil with Rajnikanth as *Billa* (1980). The Malayalam version was however slightly different from the other two where one sees Amitabh Bachchan and Rajnikanth blowing up some of their competitors in the first scene. Such show of heroics is missing from the Malayalam version where Shobaraj is imprisoned and trying to break out of the prison.

During the 80s, one observes a build-up to superstardom for both Mohanlal and Mammootty which becomes more evident in later films of both the actors in the 1990s. In films like *Samrajyam* (1990), the narrative builds up a mystery around the character of Alexander, the viewer is made to anticipate what the character would be like, and then we see a grand entry of Alexander who enters into the screen space with a convoy of cars.

Till about 1993, both Mohanlal and Mammootty acted in films that were predominantly family- centered films. 1993 saw the release of Mohanlal's *Devasuram,* while 1994 heralded Mammootty's *The King;* both the films presented the actors in a new avatar. In *Devasuram* one hears a lot about Mangalassery Neelakantan, the character played by Mohanlal but the viewer only gets the first glimpse of Neelakantan about 20 minutes into the film. Similarly in *The King* featuring Mammootty as an IAS officer, the first scene with him shows him rebuking the Police Commissioner and trying to stop a riot.

Later films like *Rasikan* (2004) and *One Way Ticket* (2008) allude to the superstar status of both Mohanlal and Mammootty and the fan rivalry. Through these observations, I would like to propose in this working paper that factors such as the shift of the industry from Madras to Kerala and the creation of regional channels by Doordarshan have contributed to the creation of stardom in the Malayalam film industry. My broader areas of interest include questions such as how did the stars Mohanlal and Mammootty get created? How did they maintain their stardom? Is their stardom on a decline? I'm also interested in other stars in the industry who did not make it to the superstardom Mohanlal and Mammooty command. These are questions I would like to explore in the future.

Works Cited

Athirathram. Dir. I.V. Sasi. Perf. Mohanlal, Seema, Mammootty. 1984. Malayalam. Film.

Chelangad, Saju. "Malayalam's First Superstar." *The Hindu.* 5 October 2014. Web. 10 June 2017, http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/malayalams-first-super-star/article6471449.ece.

Devasuram. Dir. I.V. Sasi. Perf. Mohanlal, Revathi, Nedumudi Venu, Innocent, Napoleon. 1993. Malayalam. Film.

One Way Ticket. Dir. Bipin Prabhakar. Perf. Mammootty, Bhama, Prithviraj Sukumaran. 2008. Malayalam. Film.

Pillai, Shreedar. "Celluloid Sultans of Kerala." *India Today.* 31 December 1988. Web. 10 June 2017, http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/mammootty-and-mohan-lal-emerge-as-unprecedented-superstars-of-malayalam-films/1/330129.html.

Radhakrishnan, Ratheesh. "'Looking' at Mohanlal: Spectatorial Ordering and the Emergence of the 'Fan' in Malayalam Cinema." *Deep Focus,* July-December 2002, pp. 29-38. Print.

Rasikan. Dir. Lal Jose. Perf. Samvrutha Sunil, Dileep. 2004. Malayalam. Film.

Samrajyam . Dir. Jomon. Perf. Mammootty, Madhu, Srividya. 1990. Malayalam. Film.

Shobaraj . Dir. Sasikumar. Perf. Mohanlal, Madhavi. 1986. Malayalam. Film.

The King. Dir. Shaji Kailas. Perf. Mammootty, Vani Vishwanath, Vijayaraghavan. 1994. Malayalam. Film.

Cartoon India: A Problematique of Recreating Myths

Micah K. Thambi

"He, who controls the past, controls the future.
He, who controls the present, controls the past."

(Orwell 40)

This quote is very relevant in the post Babri Masjid Indian Society where the past is constantly being modified to fit into the present. Especially when contemporary India is facing the narrowing of free thought and cultural diversity. It is a premonition on the possibilities of a state which looks forward to a 'perfect society' where only power counts. India has always witnessed a certain kind of historical revisionism as per the political leanings of the ruling party. The country has gone through such situations where some historical narratives are relegated to the background or eliminated because they do not cater to the dominant ideology of the state. At the same time, a huge number of myths are being constructed under the label of history as part of this political agenda.

The re-constitution of myths as the historical past has so far been an important political tool to consolidate the state as well as to pander the vote banks. Such attempts to rewrite history had led to the misinterpretation of historical knowledge, which caters to the agenda of the people in power. Every political party has tried distortion of history: the Congress party in India was eager to include religious programmes in the government-owned television channel to appease the Hindu religious sentiments. It became more intense with the

cultural nationalists or the right-wing political parties, who go through a rigorous movement to reinterpret history in their way.

As K.N Panikkar noted, the Hindu nationalist ideology created a "molecular transformation" in contemporary India and has altered the everyday public life of the country. Romila Thapar in one of her article titled "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity" reflects on how the past and present of a post-colonial society changes through colonization, which alters the existing knowledge about the past. For her, this new past is developed through a political ideology, which justifies and glorifies a particular communal identity. She explains the "communal" as a consciousness based on religious identity, that later transforms into an ideology (209). These ideologies demand political support for particular communities to attempt homogenising the culture. History is used as part of this propaganda to justify the ordinary existence of these communities. India contains multiple communalisms, the largest and the so-called dominant group is "Hindu communalism". At present its religious identity is "…ironing out the diversity and confining to a uniform framework, that can best be used for political ends" (210).

The broadcasting of the tele-serials based on the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* at the end of the 1980s in India's government-run television was a cultural experiment. This provided a visual space where it offered a narrative, where everyone can be part of it and share the "identity of India". Tele-serials had the power to effect a feel of intimacy and approachability to the narratives and characters that existed in these religious narratives. The characters' identification as the real image of the deities by the people created a kind of visual iconography of Hindu gods (Lutgendorf, Ramayan: The Video, 133). "Ramayan concretised a religious and aesthetic vision

that was deeply imbricated with Hindu nationalism, and that its enthusiastic viewers received it religiously in their daily lives.Watching television became for many a religious act and a personal devotion to the actors playing the gods emerged as form of popular piety" (Cusack 2). The telecasting of the epics is not the primary reason for the growing cultural nationalist sentiments, instead it worked as a catalyst for spreading the idea that Hindu religion is inseparable from India as a nation. It also filled a gap that existed between the urban middle class and the rural masses which existed since independence.

At the same time the government used this narration for creating a glorified image of national identity and as a symbol of national unity and integration. "Serialised epic portrayed on television allow the collective sharing of an idealised past, one that archived a certain verisimilitude but whose veracity was crucial to its collective enjoyment, and can be broadly understood at two levels, socio-cultural and technological" (Rajagopal 25). RomilaThapar criticises the Hindu communal ideology which asserts a "…legitimacy from past" (Thapar 209) with claims on its historical evolution. She calls it a "search for an imagined Hindu identity from the past" (Thapar 209), a search which has drawn on historiography of the last two centuries.

The system used television for its power to circulate ideas to people and produce a hegemonic idea of India and being Indian which operated in a broad cultural, social and political scenario. The wide spread circulation of Amar Chitra Katha with its visuals inspired from the Hindu mythology paved way as a prequel to the television serials. Nandini Chandra in her book The *Classic Popular Amar Chitra Katha*, 1967-2007 (2008), says the Amar Chitra Katha (*ACK)* comics created a series of superheroes which fought against foreign oppression,

"whether the foreigner was the Asura, Muslim or British" (2). It created these heroes who solely fought for Hindus or the nation.

With the coming of private television channels *ACK* had a steady decline in their readership due to the televised children's cartoons. Though the beginning of this genre came up with animated series produced outside India, with the arrival of Indian cartoon productions, the postmillennial television channels witnessed a steady decline in the dominance of Disney and Japanese animated series. Television networks like Cartoon Network and Pogo started to telecast more stories from Hindu mythologies under the label of 'Indian folktales'. *Amar Chitra Katha* and the televised Ramayana has already been part of this construction of a new "politicised Hindu orthodoxy" (Barton Scott 189).

These cartoons merge "present-day India" and Hindu mythology and present it as "Indian". There is a constant intrusion of the upper middle class ideals and the cultural nationalist values in these cartoons. The time and space of these cartoons are toggling in between the sci-fi future and the mythological past. In the beginning, with English as its medium, these cartoons addressed a young, mostly urban and middle class audience. But they soon began to be broadcast in other Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and so on. The stories presented in these shows are mainly Hindu mythological stories based on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

Chhota Bheem is one of the most successful Indian TV animation series which started in 2008. The main character is Bheem and he is pictured as a brave boy who solves problems around him with his companions in the fictional city-state Dholakpur. He is protecting the kingdom of Indravarma by fighting against evil forces. The nine-year-old boy Bheem is eponymous of the character from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. This child uses his strength to help

those who are in need, punish the perpetrators of evil and is portrayed as a guardian of the innocent poor people. Bheem's main rival is a ten-year-old boy Kaliya who takes after *Duryodhana* from *Mahabharata*. There are many special episodes which naturalises many Hindu religious festivals as national festivals which can be seen as a kind of modern way of re-appropriating the Hindu myths as part of the modern public sphere. There is an episode in which Raja Indravarma announces *Dusshera Maha Mukabla* contest based on the epic Ramayana at Dholakpur and invites Bheem and other kids to participate in it.
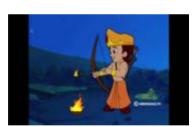

Fig.1

Fig.1.2

Fig.1.3

Fig.1.4

Fig.1.5

The episode starts with worshiping different Hindu gods and goddesses (Fig.1). A Brahmin is doing pooja, who is portrayed as fair-skinned, while a dark-skinned person is playing a music instrument (Fig.1.2). This single image is indicative of how this show toes the notions of the caste and class hierarchy of a highly Brahminical system which also assumes the visible skin tone of different professions to speak of the invisible caste affiliations and positions in the hierarchy. The episode moves forward through different contests inspired from the tale of *Ramayana* and ends with Chhota Bheem as the winner of the contest. The king invites Bheem and asks him to put the effigy of Ravana on fire for the prosperity of Dholakpur (Fig.1.3). He asks Bheem to kill Ravana like Ram did centuries before. Bheem is represented as 'Ram' who is brave and virtuous and capable of killing an Asura (Fig.1.4). The episode ends Bheem burning the effigy with his arrow and so the celebrations begin (Fig.1.5). These cartoons are created in a different dynamic by combining the mythical past and present scenario such as taking some character from Hindu mythology and using it in the present Indian context. Using some "secular" Hindu symbols and icons (Chandra 23), the heroes are laid out for the quest for Dharma using a simple narrative. There are several similar episodes where the visuals reference the "golden" Hindu past and give legitimacy to the Hindu religious concepts as nation's heritage.

The cartoons *Roll No 21* tells the tale of *Krishna* and *Kansa*'s rivalry in a modern space. In this version *Kansa* is re-incarnated as principal *Kanishk* of Mathura Anath Ashram. He plans to take over Mathura and the rest of the world. He is supported by demons from *"Paathal Lok"* like Doctor J, the dentist at the school, who is the re-incarnation of *Jarasandh*. Another one is Taarak, the Maths teacher at the school, who is the incarnation of *Taarakasur* and finally, Suparna, the Chemistry teacher and the re-incarnation of *Pootana.*

Kris, the hero of the cartoon is presented as the "godly child" and he represents Krishna. He is a student of Mathura Anath Ashram; at the same time, he stops Kanishk's "evil" plans. His skin is blue in colour just like how Krishna is presented in Hindu mythology. Kris appear as a normal schoolboy but behind closed doors he transforms into Krishna and uses his power to stop Kansa. He is surrounded by his friends (their mythic references provided in brackets) like Pinky (Radha), Babloo (Sudama), Madhu and Balu (Balarama) the elder brother of Krishna. Sukhi, the reincarnation of Muni Narada, is a security guard in the school who is to report everything to the Gods. He owns a phone booth outside the school, where he has a divine phone which connects straight to heaven where he informs the gods about Kris' activities. As RomilaThapar said in her book *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, some myths legitimize a changed social and political condition (127). These myths always try to establish a thought pattern that a 'perfect society' is possible only through a divine intervention. Both the cartoons Chhota Bheem and Roll No 21 reinforce this idea of past.

These cartoons can be read as a historical bricolage. They are presenting the existing nationalist discourse with the label of historical facts. Indian future is entangled in an ambivalent retention of the Hindu past. These visual narratives explain the modern nation through the lost 'classical' past, the episodes we are discussing present a culture which deliberately eliminate any chance to mythologize the state beyond the Hindu heritage. The cultural diversity of the country is minimized to a religion, especially the imagined Hindu community.

The imaginary land in which these two cartoons take place seem to be celebrating the past in the present, here the celebrated past is the popular Hindu 'classical' past. "Indeed, both past and

future become more stylish, more distinctive, and more eminently marketable, due to the visual confusions between them. I would term this aesthetic the "future antique" (J. Barton Scott 193). The city of Dholakpur or the Mathura Anaath Ashram School, share the futuristic and the classical elements and they are combined to project a future which again refigure the past. These fictional landscapes are representations of the contemporary urban India and are rendered in a mythological background.

Fig.3.1a special Republic Day episode

Fig.3.2 Kris in the forefront

Fig.3.3 Kris and his friends celebrating the day

National symbols and ceremonies also influence the community one represents, which means these artefacts can raise a collective consciousness of who we are, and where we are from.

The origin of the concept of a nation cannot be dated precisely as it is a constructed one with national symbols like national flags and ceremonies. Anderson says "…that nationality, or as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meaning has changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy" (Anderson 4).

Roll No 21 aired episodes to commemorate this emotional passion over one's own country on the days of Indian Republic and Independence Day (Fig.3.1and 3.2). we can see attempts to use these visuals as tools for learning through which they try to nationalise Hindu myths. "…myth is capable of manipulating the positioning of the audience/reader to invoke identities which are resonant with different political ends, whether to serve the nation or its corollary modernity with its compulsive consumerist patterns" (Chandra 23).

The two television cartoon productions *Chhota Bheem* and *Roll No 21* analysed in this paper have been very successful in marketing the elements of Hindu mythology in the children entertainment market. These cartoons had created a world where myth and development portrayed a golden age which was much more advanced in governance and warfare than today. Both are major productions in the Indian cartoon industry which concentrate on projecting the Indian (Hindu) mythological heritage. The heroes in these cartoons, Krishna and Chhota Bheem are presented as if endowed with some special faculties. Claiming such exceptionalism and supremacy over everything without whom the world would grind into a standstill is a dangerous mode of representational economy.

Works Cited

Barton Scott, J. "Comic Book Karma: Visual Mythologies of the Hindu Modern." *Postscripts* 2010, pp. 187-197. Print.

Birch, Dinah. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Ed. Dina Birch. 7. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Birnbaum, Beth. "Humanism at Large: Cartoons Religion." *Free Inquiry Magazine* vol. 24 no. 1, 2004, p. 5. Print.

Chandra, Nandini. *The Classic Popular Amar Chitra Katha, 1967-2007*. New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008. Print.

Cusack, Carole M. "The Gods on Television: Ramanand Sagar's Ramayan, Politics, and Popular Piety in Late Twentieth Century India". *Academia.edu.* n.d. Web. Monday June 2015. http://www.academia.edu/738550/The_Gods_ on_Television_Ramanand_ Sagar_s_ Ramayan_Politics_ and_Popular_Piety_in_Late_Twentieth_ Century_India

Guha, Ramachandra. "In Absentia: Where are India's Conservative Intellectuls?" *The Caravan* March 2015, pp. 28-49. Print.

Green Gold Animations. "Chhota Bheem - Dusshera Maha Mukabla in Dholakpur". *YouTube*. 30 September 2016. Green Gold Animation. Web. 10 January 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYybOFKju2c.

Green Gold Animations. "Chhota Bheem — Diwali is Here". *YouTube*. 6 November 2016. Web. 10 January 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUHF_N3CXi4.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. New Delhi: Princeton University Press, 2007. Print.

Livingstone, Charlotte. *Oxford Mini Dictionary and Thesaurus*. United States: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Lutgendorf, Philip. "A Ramayana on Air: "All in the (Raghu) Family", A Video Epic in Cultural Context." In John, Stratton, Hawley and Narayanan Vasudha. *The Life of Hinduism*. US: University of California Press , n.d., pp. 140-157. Print.

—. "Ramayan: The Video." *TDR* 1990, pp. 127-176. Print.

Manwani, Akshay. "The Caravan : A Journal of Politics and Culture." 1 April 2013. *Caravan Magazine.* Web. 26 May 2015, http://www.caravanmagazine.in.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New Delhi: Prakash Books, 2015. Print.

Panikkar, K N. *An Agenda for Cultural Action*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2006. Print.

—. *History as a Site of Struggle*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2013. Print.

Puniyani, Ram. "Situating Anti-Muslim Hatred in Contemporary Indian Society." *Arches Quarterly* vol. 4, no. 7, December 2010, pp. 102-105. Print.

Rajagopal, Aravind. *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.

Raza, Danish. "Saffronising textbooks: Where myth and dogma replace history". *Hindustan Times*. 08 December 2014. Web. 20 July 2015, http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/saffronising-textbooks-where-myth-and-dogma-replace-history/story-CauM4dmmsPGrjZ3APAvNxO.html.

Richman, Paula. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Ed. Paula Richman. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.

Saturine, Dr. Ruebert. *Animation World Network*. 1 April 2004. Web. 6 July 2015, http:/www.AWN.com.

Singh, Vikash. "Religion and Neoliberalism: TV Serial Ramayana and the Becoming." *International Journal of Zizek Studies* vol. 7, no. 2, 2013, pp. 1-17. Print.

Thapar, Romila. *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

—-. "Imagined Religious Communities? ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity." *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 2, no. 23 (1989), pp. 209-231. Print.

—-. "The Ramayana Syndrome". *Helter Skelter*. 28 April 2014. Web. 20 June 2015. http://helterskelter.in/2014/04/the-ramayana-syndrome.

The Real and The Ideal: The Unthought Axiom of Selves on Social Media

Shivshankar Rajmohan A.K.
Dr. Sudhesh N.T.

Dramatic developments and innovations in the field of science and technology, particularly that of Portable Computers and the internet, make life and presence on earth complex and eventually bring about a situation where the virtual turns out to be more genuine than the "genuine". We have plenty of hypotheses and books itemizing the many-sided quality of the human character. However, there appears to exist a lacuna of hypothesis and understanding with regard to the notion of "presence" on the virtual space/the internet. The amount of netizens who routinely utilize person-to-person communication destinations like Facebook and Whatsapp are expanding wildly, yet the components that make these virtual spaces so appealing remain understudied.

Do we truly accept a personality which is not our own, particularly when we enter the universe of the web? Is there a contention between the self we anticipate "on the web" and our genuine self? The paper is an attempt to conceptualize such complex notions of "self" on the cyberspace. It has constrained its field of study to person-to-person communication destinations, particularly Whatsapp. A significant part of the accentuation is laid on the idea of "profile picture" or "DP," an element that is both theoretical and experimental in nature.

The paper warrants, at this crossroads, a look into the arrangement of digital occasions that captured my consideration as of late. The accounts given underneath are my own encounters with two young ladies, who were my students and whose identities I don't wish to reveal, on Whatsapp. These two young ladies seem impossible to miss on the virtual world. I have been watching the profile pictures they use on Whatsapp for about two months. Strikingly, there seems, by all accounts, to be an example in the way they upgrade their profile pictures. The primary young lady, A, uses only the pictures of an Indian performing artist and former Miss World named Aishwarya Rai as her show picture. It turns out to be significantly more perplexing when one investigates the last twenty pictures of Aishwarya Rai that she has utilized. These twenty pictures could be classified into two categories. One classification of six pictures comprises of the photos of Aishwarya Rai in customary, traditional Indian Silk Saree with plaited hair enriched with jasmine. In the second classification one would discover fourteen pictures of Aishwarya Rai in either swimsuit or cutting edge dress that tend to uncover her middle. In all these twenty back-to-back profile photos of A, one would discover Aishwarya Rai sporting a smirk.

The second girl, B, in the last two months, has not used a single photograph as display picture. Interestingly, she uses only Kahlil Gibran's observations, specifically from *The Prophet*, on her status bar. The statements that she uses as her Whatsapp status convey not only a heavily loaded philosophical thought, but also a sense of deep-rooted frustration and anger targeting something invisible. The statements like: "Nay, beauty is a thing of might and dread" or "Beauty is not the image you would see nor the song you would listen" or "Like the tempest beauty shakes the earth beneath us and the sky above us," which are taken directly from *The Prophet*, might camouflage itself as random, but on a deeper analysis would

reveal certain contradictions, for they are both rebellious and consoling simultaneously.

These are the two digital occasions that confounded me and requested a point by point analysis of the reasons for these odd behavioural examples on the virtual universe of Whatsapp. These two behavioural examples are symptomatic of a bigger and stealthy move that has occurred in the way individuals distinguish and characterize themselves, particularly after the approach of long range informal communication destinations like Facebook and Whatsapp.

The developing adulthood, which is depicted as within the age group 18-25, a "blend of the late immaturity and early adulthood stages, is a period where people attempt to discover a feeling of self-esteem while investigating conceivable outcomes of adoration, work, and world perspectives" (Arnett). Character development happens amid rising adulthood as youthful grown-ups are making sense of their identity as a man or a woman. Since this is a period of investigation and change, people may look for associate criticism to encourage their self-character. Rising grown-ups "utilize online networking specialized strategies as they settle on long lasting choices for themselves" (Arnett). Online networking permits an outlet for "character investigation to happen through associate criticism and fortifying of connections" (Pempek).

A review directed by Luigia S.S. and group merits exceptional consideration in this unique circumstance, for it exhibits certain truths which we are just starting to figure out. Their review was on a quarter century grown-ups (normal age 23 years), adjusted by sex. These members were described by Facebook profiles, blogging, and day-by-day use of MUVE-Multi-User Virtual Environment. The writings created by them were investigated. The investigation depended on

the factual circulation of words in the content. The T-lab programming depends on the checking of co-events of words and gives an outcome as a progression of lexical fields in which every term is joined by factual components.

	Name	Typical words	Text
Cluster 1 (21.21%)	Curiosity and exploration	Reflect curiosity, to understand, identity	"My avatar reflects me. I'm fine with myself. The need for change is absent in me"
Cluster 2 (14.14%)	The need for affiliation and masking of emotions	I need, time, to write, blogs, free, easy, person, to prefer, to think, reality	"I think the blog is easy and straightforward. Especially because you do not have that person in front of you, do not fear confrontation, do not be influenced and you are free writing more frankly"
Cluster 3 (51.52%)	The 'potential self'	People adding, meet, depend, finally to lean, born.	"There are people who are talking so much of their virtual life that ultimately have consequences in real life. Our expectations seem to find relief in the "way of toys"
Cluster 4 (13.13%)	The mask effect	Character, day, play, interact, form, create, read	"My avatar is the opposite of me. Internet creates the mask effect"

(fig.1. Description of the clusters with typical words and parts of text)

The main bunch alludes to the lexical depiction of the utilization of the Internet as a method for investigation, play, and interest. The second group alludes to utilization of the Internet as a substitute for genuine connections. In this bunch, the requirement for connections is communicated and it is connected to solid psycho-social challenges which are understood through the making of virtual informal organizations. The third group depicts a utilization of the Internet as a continuation of genuine living. In these portrayals, a nonstop trade between virtual self and genuine self appears, yet it comes about uneven for the virtual character: individuals trust that the virtual personality may have a part and an effect on genuine living, changing the genuine character. The fourth bunch depicts considerably more serious hazard. Albeit even in these depictions the subject of the inclination of the virtual life returns; in this bunch the qualification between genuine self and perfect self is more accentuated. The virtual personality is depicted as the inverse of the genuine one, for which individuals feel disappointment and disgrace. The error between the levels of self for this situation is most extreme.

It has been recommended that people share in "particular self-presentation via web-based networking media locales so they may seem to need to awe others" (Jiang). This is particularly valid for understudies as they self-unveil oftentimes amid this exploratory period. As per Arnett's hypothesis, developing adulthood is a period when there is a "time of opportunity and freedom" in a youngster's life (Arnett). "Self-exposure is a character challenge in rising adulthood" (Pempek). Self-divulgence helps by getting input from associates that builds up a feeling of self and reinforces existing connections also (Pempek). Numerous people utilize interpersonal organization locales to feel famous, attempting to include however many "companions" as possible so that they have all the earmarks of being more respected. Furthermore, another review found that youngsters made a virtual character in which they molded a perfect self with the goal that they would inspire others. This strategy for

"enhancing social capital and appearance gloated one's self-idea and self-regard in both the on the web and this present reality" (Urista). Acquiring remarks from different clients on pictures and divider postings enhance pictures that people have of themselves. It is a method for getting consideration from an expansive range of individuals in a circuitous way. A convenient reaction inspires delight and nice sentiments of self and fulfillment of individual and interpersonal longings (Urista, 2009).

It is in this setting that the previously mentioned two (ab)normal cases ought to be contemplated. While Girl A is showing only the primordial human inclination to search for change, Girl B is experimenting with various approaches to grapple with the errors she finds between the genuine self and her optimal self. Young lady A, all things considered, does not take after Aishwarya Rai, her idea of perfect magnificence. My own collaboration with her uncovered to me that she gets a kick out of the chance to wear present day garments. However, she has a negative conclusion about the body she has in her genuine living. Considerably stunning was the fact that she prefers not to see herself in photos in view of her dark skin. For her the virtual universe of Whatsapp gives a domain for encountering things that might be difficult to deal with in the genuine world. She feels sure while interacting with individuals on the web; for her, show picture gives a "mental ban," a brief help from the feeling that she is not lovely. At the end of the day, those things that are denied in the genuine word are the things that we request and recreate in the virtual world, for individuals could never wish to have clashes between their genuine self-qualities and their optimal self attributes. Young lady B is also endeavoring to tackle this issue in a more imaginative manner. She looks for the assistance of logic and tries to demonstrate to the world that magnificence is intrinsically discretionary. She likewise endeavors to taunt the general public which rejects her for not complying with their idea of magnificence. A nearby investigation of her Whatsapp status gave above would

demonstrate that it has twin goals. One is self-compromise and the other is aimed at companions and relatives who do not understand her genuine worth and judge her by outward appearance. The feeling of mediocrity developed in them by their surroundings is increased because they, like most netizens, shape an idea of self "by taking a gander at others' profiles." Teen agers "get a feeling of what sorts of presentations are socially proper from others' profiles" for they "give basic prompts about what to exhibit all alone profile" (Boyd, 2007). Consequently, it turns into a standard that a lady must have magnificence and a man a macho. Dark skin, pimples, and nonappearance of facial hair or mustache turn out to be a matter of self-esteem, bringing about what I would term "Whatsapp melancholy."

Following Goffman's understanding of "front stage/back stage" metaphor, where the "front stage" offers execution to a group of people, and the "back stage" a place where just the entertainer exists without the gathering of people, it could be argued that web-based social networking prepares a stage for setting specific "execution." It should also be noted that neither Girl A nor Girl B is attempting to escape from their "genuine" life. However, they are making frantic endeavors to participate in a critical exchange of imperative occasions and connections in their "genuine" life with the "perfect/virtual" life.

Works Cited

Arnett, J.J. "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties." *American Psychologist, v*ol. 55, no. 5, 2000: 469-480. Print.

Boyd, D. "Why youth (heart) Social Network Sites: The role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life." D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. MIT Press: Cambridge, 2007. Print.

Goffman, E. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor: New York, 1959. Print.

Higgins, E. T. "Self-discrepancy Theory: What Patterns of Self-Beliefs Cause People to Suffer?" L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology, v*ol. 22. San Diego: Academic Press, 1989, pp. 93–136. Print.

Jiang, L. C., Bazarova, N. N., & Hancock, J. T. "The Disclosure-Intimacy Link in Computer-Mediated Communication: An Attributional Extension of the Hyper-personal Model. *Human Communication Research,* vol. 37, no. 1, 2011, pp. 58-77. Print.

Luigia, S.S., Palma T.D., & Sestito, L.A. "Virtual Identity: Risk or Resource? A Study about Effects of Using Social Network and Multi-User Virtual Environment (MUVE) on Processes of Identity Construction of Emerging Adults." *The Future of Education*. Library Genesis. 12 May 2015. Web.

Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. "College Students' Social Networking Experiences on Facebook." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology,* vol. 30, no. 3, 2009, pp. 227-238. Print.

Urista, M.A., Dong, Q., & Day, K.D. "Explaining Why Young Adults Use Myspace and Facebook through Uses and Gratifications Theory." *Human Communication,* vol.12, no. 2, 2009, pp. 215- 229. Print.

Cinema within Cinema: Tracing the Trajectory

Manju E.P.

Introduction

Cinema is one of the most popular inventions of the twentieth century, especially, in the dynamic field of art. With its powerful rendering of visuals and sound together, combining the virtual and the actual worlds, cinema has become an influential agent in the society. This paved way to discussions on cinema in the academia, though film studies still remains a developing discipline. Like the literary techniques, cinematic techniques play a crucial role in making cinemas meaningful. This paper seeks to study the cinematic technique – film within the film, I would rather like to term it as cinema within cinema, particularly, in Malayalam. By cinema within cinema, I mean film narratives which are made conscious of the production of cinema, where cinema becomes the subject of its story telling. The paper attempts to delineate the history of "cinema within cinema" from world cinema to the cinemas of India by not only looking at cinema but other forms of art and literature.

In the recent past, Malayalam cinema has produced a plenty of films that were centred around cinema and film industry. In the context where such an attempt had failed miserably in the 1980s and 1990s, an increased production of cinemas on cinema and its success, especially in the post 2000s, generated certain important questions on the medium of cinema and its reception. Even though,

cinema within cinema itself can be treated as a genre, it however comprises of various genres. What are the major genres in cinema within cinema in Malayalam? What does cinema intend to do by showcasing itself? Can cinema within cinema be an archive of cinema? These are some of the questions which the paper explores.

The paper is divided into three segments. The first part discusses the anxieties of picturizing film within the film. It also captures the debates around the medium of cinema and its distinctiveness among various other art forms. The second part looks at meta-narrative as a reflexive technique both in theatre and cinema. The last part of the paper traces the trajectory of cinema within cinema and discusses selected films and genres.

The Anxieties of Cinema within Cinema

Initially, the world behind the scene was hardly presented before the spectator as cinema is perceived as an illusory art. As in other illusionary arts like magic, cinema also preserved its secrecy of production, by not disclosing its technological gimmicks that has contributed to perceive it as an act of illusion, wonder and spectacle. These discourses still influence the theatrical experience of cinema and the film makers were initially apprehensive about exposing the multilayered realm of the film industry. However, when they started producing cinema within cinema, the critics became skeptical of its portrayal. They believed what held the audience captive was the shroud of mystery. Their concern was, once the illusion is cracked, perhaps the fascination would be lost. But these claims couldn't sustain when cinema on cinema was well received by the audience.

In Hollywood, film within the film started appearing from the silent film days onwards. Those films concentrated on the glamour and exposure associated with the term Hollywood and engaged with

the techniques of both demystification and mystification. As mentioned above, critics responded critically against such endeavors in Hollywood as they were anxious that such films might irreparably tarnish the glamour and aura of Hollywood. Films like *How Motion Pictures are Made* (1914), *His New Job* (1915) and *Behind the Screen* (1926) are some of the films that challenged the invisibility of Hollywood. Apparently, *The Motion Picture News* had warned that *The Goat* (1918), a film about a stunt man, by disclosing "picture making as it actually is … will lessen the pleasure of a spectator derives from watching a picture as it will destroy some of the illusion due to the mystery surrounding picture production" (Stam 78). Later, when another significant movie on Hollywood *A Star was Born* got released in 1937, the *New York Times* compared such Hollywood expose films to a striptease (Ames 5). Stam notes that the Hollywood critics, journalistic appendage of the industry, tried to protect the aura and magic of Hollywood by shielding its Achilles' heel – the trade secrets of its illusion (78).

In the Indian context, the analysis of early Indian mythological films by Chidananda Das Gupta suggests that the audience mistakes whatever they see on the screen as "real". Das Gupta "conforms to the safe model of cinema as myth" where his "central thesis is masses' inability to distinguish myth from fact" (Prasad 17). This argument follows the same discourse of illusion and ignores the role of the spectator in the meaning making process, thereby, treating the spectators as mere consumers of the product. Das Gupta's thesis which underestimates the spectators and critics' anxiety over exposing the techniques of cinema through cinema reiterates the illusionary effects of cinema as a technological medium. However, it can be argued that the beauty of cinema lies in the fact that the audience who know about the techniques of cinema still enjoy watching it on the screen and are curious to know more about it.

Cinema always tried to construct a unique space among other visual media like television and theatre. In 1950s, in the world scenario, there was a relentless effort to maintain cinema's status as a prestigious experience and as an "Art" against other visual arts. This was in the context of the economic crisis, which the postwar Hollywood faced at that time and when Television was a technological challenge to be confronted. Even though licensed for commercial use in 1941, it was only in the postwar period that television became the standard electronic furniture of American homes (Stam 86).

> Hollywood attacked television through advertising ("Don't be a living room captive") and within its own films, either through systematic exclusion – Jack Warner forbade the appearance of television sets in Warner Brother films – or through satire (Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?) and calumny (a character in Dreamboat calls television, 'The idiot's delight'). (Stam 86)

The same anxiety is also foregrounded in Rodowick's work, *The Virtual Life of Film,* where he focuses on the attempts of cinema in distinguishing itself from television.

> In response to the explosive growth of television in 1950s, cinema represented itself as a spectacular artistic and democratic medium in contradistinction to television, whose diminutive image belied its potentially demagogic power… As television took on the role of a mass, popular medium, cinema reserved for itself, at least in the world of product differentiation, the image of an "aesthetic" experience.

This distinctiveness was vital not only in the aesthetic realm but also in the commercial sphere. In fact, this move helped the cinema industry to assert its financial superiority over other visual mediums at that point of time. But later, spectators' inquisitiveness

on film industry lead to the increased number of shows on film production. It could be argued that the shows on cinema resulted in the increased number of spectators for films on films, thereby narrowing down the gap between cinema and television.

Meta-Theatre and Play within the Play

Unlike other forms of meta-narrative, cinema within cinema is a less explored area of study. Whereas, "story within a story" and "play within a play" have been widely studied in literature, per se. Among them, "play within a play" is more prevalent, especially with the analysis of Shakespeare's well-known tragedy, *Hamlet* and many other prominent works. "Cinema within cinema" is different from the "play within the play" narrative technique, which is the actual enactment of a play within a play. Whereas, "cinema within cinema" is not just a showcasing of a fragment of an actual film in a film, rather it might include a lot of cinematic constituents like the lives of film personae, the technical, artistic and the monetary aspects of film making, and the like.

Both "play within play" and "cinema within cinema" use the technique of *mise-en-abyme* – where the narrative of the film within film may directly refer to and reflect on the real film being made. But sometimes, there is a conscious process to distance cinema from reality. This produces an alienation effect among viewers, where they do not simply identify with the film text, but critically analyze it. This is the alienation effect which Brecht puts forward, criticizing the passive nature of the audience, and particularly points out the importance of developing a critical attitude in analyzing the representational aspects of the medium itself.

The earlier discourse on meta-theatre and meta-cinema concentrated on the Brechtian epic theatre model to explicate the

significance of enabling the audience to be critical viewers. Play within a play, as a narrative mode, attempted to subvert the theatrical conventions by challenging the binary conceptions of reality and fiction, thereby, questioning the form of theatre itself. Richard Hornby notes that, play within a play is one among the metadramatic devices which works along with other techniques of meta-theatre such as – role within a role, ceremony within the play, literary and real-life reference and theatrical self-reference (32). This is precisely what Brecht developed through epic theatre, where the rational self-reflection of the audience was preferred over the emotional identification with the characters in the play.

Following Brecht, many scholars studied the technique of play within film and reflexivity. One of them is Sarah Hatchuel, who in her work on Shakespearean plays and film adaptations, discusses the question of ideology where she suggests that in order to avoid the "passive absorption of ideology" by the spectators, "a film should perhaps attempt to reveal the fact that it is only a manufactured product and that its diegesis is only simulated" (73). But she also notes the fact that most directors clearly opt for diegesis over discourse and narration over enunciation. According to her, the exposure of discourse remains outside the films, mostly through interviews, publicity announcements, reviews, and any other authorial/editorial communication" (73).

These 'epitexts' somehow aim at establishing the films' authorial intentions, indicating how the films should be 'properly' interpreted. Therefore, instead of deconstructing the films from within, this particular unveiling of what goes on behind the scenes controls and channels the audience's reception, emphasizing the correctness of the authorial point of view" (74).

Even though, the epi-texts are used as the fundamental marketing strategy, cinema within cinema as meta-cinema becomes a document of cinema, so as to publicize the medium of cinema. Meta-cinema, as a reflexive technique, presents a commentary on the form of cinema. In fact, cinema within cinema is one among the meta-cinematic devices which self-consciously comments on cinema as a cultural commodity. Moreover, through this technique of film production, cinema documents, presents, represents itself as a socio-cultural institution. Cinema within cinema uses these epi texts within the form itself, as a piece of document to enunciate its authorial intentions apart from using it externally. The epi-texts (external) participate in stimulating the inquisitiveness among spectators to know cinema more, whereas the epi-texts embedded in the structure of cinema, in the case of cinema within, add to the claims of cinema's legitimacy while capitalizing on the spectatorial inquisitiveness.

In literature, the main text of published authors often accompanies other materials supplied by the editors and publishers, which is known as para-texts. Genette describes paratexts as accompanying productions of literary main texts such as – the author's name, a title, a preface and illustrations (1). He also discusses the term, epi-texts which will also come under para-texts, but it doesn't come along with the text. Cinema, like literature, uses these epi-texts to promote and publicize the film. This will be clear from the success of the Television shows on cinema which work as epi-texts in promoting the films.

In Malayalam film industry, however, this trend of portraying cinema world in cinema became popular only in the 21st century. It was the time when cable TV channels overtook the state-run Doordarshan with their 24/7 telecast with a variety of programmes which included particular shows on cinema. Programmes like

"Cinema Diary" on *Asianet*, "Shoot and Show" in *Kairali* (two of the pioneering shows on cinema production in Malayalam channels) focused on the reports from the sets, spot interviews with actors, directors and producers of concerned films, song recordings, music releases, and a repertoire of things related to cinema. Every channel in Malayalam has specific shows on film production and distribution. Reportedly, the numbers of viewers for these shows are quite high. These shows on cinema made film world a familiar arena to the audience and this resulted in the production of increased number of movies on cinema.

Cinema within: A Trajectory

During the silent days of cinema, the number of films on films were less in western cinema but the sound film era witnessed the production of such films in high numbers. Some of the most famous films in Hollywood during the financial crisis are Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), Donen's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952). Later, films across the world attempted to showcase cinema such as, Fellini's *8 ½,* (1963, Italian), Truffaut's *Day for Night* (1973, French), Wenders' *Lightening over Water* (1980, German), Tornatore's classic film, *Cinema Paradiso* (1988, Italian) and Kiarostami's *Close Up* (1990, Iranian).

Coming to Indian cinema, "cinema within cinema" as a genre appeared only in the later stages of sound cinema. In Hindi cinema, Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Guddi* (1971) and Benagal's *Bhumika* (1977) are the first prominent movies in the genre of "cinema within cinema". *Guddi* portrayed the recurring theme of cinematic world as fictional in opposition to the real life world through the story of a school girl (Guddi) who admires the star Dharmendra. Whereas, *Bhumika* was based on the life of Hansa Wadkar, a Marathi/Hindi film and stage

actress. After these, *Rangeela* (Ram Gopal Varma, 1995), a romantic comedy, became the first block buster in this category. Later, especially in the post 2000s, a lot of movies got released and became successful including *Om Shanti Om* (Dir. Farah Khan, 2007), *Luck by Chance* (Dir. Zoya Aktar, 2009), *Billu* (Dir. Priyadarshan, 2009), *I Hate Luv Storys* (Dir. Punit Malhotra, 2010), *Dirty Picture* (Dir. Milan Luthria, 2011), and *Fan* (Dir. Manish Sharma, 2016).

Other than Hindi, *Vinnaithandi Varuvaaya* (Come across the skies, will you? Dir. Gautham Menon: 2010) in Tamil, which portrayed a film within the film exploring the complicated relationship between a Hindu Tamil assistant director and Malayalee Syrian Christian girl. The film was simultaneously shot and released in Telugu as well titled as *Ye Maaya Chesave* (What Magic Have You Done?) but with a different cast and climax. It was later remade in Hindi as *Ekk Deewana Tha* (There was a Crazy Lover, 2012). All the three versions of the film were directed by Gautham Menon. After these, *Jigarthanda* (Cold Heart, Dir. Karthik Subbaraj; 2014) became another notable movie in this genre in Tamil. Coming to Kannada, *Lucia* (Dir. Pawan Kumar; 2013) a movie which combined cinema and dream (or illusion) together offered a unique film experience. Whereas in Marathi, *Harishchandrachi Factory* (Dir. Paresh Mokashi, 2010) picturized the making of *Raja Harishchandra* by Phalke. These are some of the major movies that dealt with cinema within cinema across the country.

In Malayalam, *Lekhayude Maranam: Oru Flashback* (The Death of Lekha: A Flashback, 1983) directed by K.G. George is the first in this genre along with *Prem Nazirine Kanmanilla* (Prem Nazir is Missing; Dir. Lenin Rajendran, 1983). After this, we saw a series of films like *Annakkutty, Kodambakkam Vilikkunnu* (Annakkutty, Kodambakkam calls you, Dir. Jagathy Sreekumar, 1989), *No 20 Madras Mail* (Dir. Joshy, 1990), *Maanathe Kottaram* (Castle in the

Air, Dir. Sunil, 1995), *Sreekrishnapurathe Nakshthrathilakkam* (Twinkling Stars at Sreekrishnapuram, Dir. Rajasenan, 1998), and *Azhakiya Ravanan* (Ravana, The Handsome!, Dir. Kamal, 1995), all of which depicted the film industry. But all these movies except *No 20 Madras Mail* and *Azhakiya Ravanan* failed in the box office. *No. 20 Madras Mail* was an investigative story more than a film about the industry, but the presence of actor Mammootty as himself was quite crucial. Whereas, *Azhakiya Ravanan* shows film shooting and the difficulties in the production.

It is interesting to note that the 2000s heralded a new breed of Malayalam cinema, which did not hesitate to portray cinema within cinema and most of them were blockbusters. It was *Chathikkatha Chandu* (2004) which started "cinema within cinema" as a trend in Malayalam cinema. As a multi-starrer venture without any superstars, the movie was a surprise hit. It dealt with the technique of cinema within cinema, especially in exposing the techniques of creating horror in cinema. After the success of this movie, similar movies in this category appeared in the box office and the trend still continues. As mentioned earlier, this trend can be seen as a self-conscious archiving of itself. Here, cinema as a culture industry tries to document itself thorough the medium of cinema itself, thereby, it could be argued that it writes its own history.

There are different categories and genres of such cinemas such as biopics on film personalities, films about production and industry, historical narratives, technical gimmicks, and so on. Even though such categorization is not rigid enough, it helps the spectators to know what to expect from a film. Here, it is significant to look into the categories in detail to unpack the medium of cinema itself, which include the ideological influence of cinematic apparatus on the spectators.

Films about production and industry top the list here with *Chathikkatha Chandu* (Chandu Never Deceives, Dir. Rafi Mecartin, 2004)*, Udayananu Tharam* (The Real Star is Udayan, Dir. Roshan Andrews, 2005)*, Kadha Parayumbol* (While Narrating the Story, Dir. M. Mohanan, 2007)*, Best Actor* (Dir. Martin Prakkat, 2010), *Cinema Company* (Dir. Mamas, 2012)*, Hero* (Dir. Diphan, 2012)*, Scene Onnu Nammude Veedu,* (Scene One, Our Home, Dir. Shyju Anthikkad, 2012)*, Makeup Man* (Dir. Shafi, 2011)*, Josettante Hero* (Dir. K.K. Haridas, 2012) and *Matinee* (Dir. Aneesh Upasana, 2012). Among these, many portray the struggle to become successful in the industry. When *Chathikkatha Chandu* shows Chandu's aspiration to become a script writer, both *Udayananu Tharam* and *Scene Onnu: Nammude Veedu* portray the struggle of a director. As the name suggests, *Best Actor* is about the endeavors of a normal school teacher to become an actor. *Hero* and *Josettante Hero* are films which deal with the stories of other technicians like the dupe and the camera man, and their eventual success as actors by chance, while *Makeup Man* depicts the tumultuous life of a newly-wed couple, after the wife becomes a heroine just by chance and the husband is forced to disguise himself as her makeup man. *Matinee* is the story of two person's journey to stardom and how their life changes after a Friday's matinée show. *Kadha Parayumbol* is the only exception among these success stories with the story of a villager, who shared a strong friendship with a popular cinema actor, in his childhood. More than being a story on the film industry, the film narrates the story of their friendship.

The other prominent genre is biopic or the life story of film personalities. *Celluloid* (Dir. Kamal, 2013) is one of the most discussed films in this genre. It is the biopic of J. C. Daniel, who is considered as the father of Malayalam cinema. The movie is based on the making of the first motion picture in Malayalam titled *Vigatha*

Kumaran (The Lost Child, 1928) and the story of *Vigatha Kumaran*'s heroine P. K. Rosy. Another film in this category is *Thirakkatha* (Screenplay, Dir. Ranjith, 2008) which is a tribute to the actresses of earlier times who had been popular during their younger age but later got completely neglected by everyone. Ranjith (the director of the movie) has acknowledged that the movie was inspired from the life of actress Srividya. *Nayika* (Heroine, Dir. Jayaraj, 2011)*,* followed the path of *Thirakkatha*, in paying tribute to the actresses of the past. The movie tells the story of a popular heroine of old times, Gracy (Sharada) and her adopted daughter. The last movie in this list is *Vellaripravinte Changathi* (White Dove's Friend, Dir. Akku Akbar, 2011) which is based on the tragic story of film-maker Augustine Joseph. These kinds of films used cinema within cinema as a mode of historiography which I had discussed elsewhere (Manju E.P).

Conclusion

Within the dynamic technological-marketing field, cinema is forced to incorporate other media forms, thereby, it endorses the products through cinema. Films on advertisements (*I*; Dir. Shankar, 2015, Tamil), modelling (*Fashion*; Dir. Madhur Bhandarker, 2008, Hindi), serials (*Thinkal Muthal Velli Vare*; From Monday to Friday, Dir. Kannan Thamarakkulam, 2015, Malayalam) and short films (*Kerala Kafe*, 2009, Malayalam, *5 Sundarikal*; Five Beautiful Women, 2013, Malayalam; *Aviyal,* 2016, Tamil) became a necessity along with films on films. Among these, advertisements, fashion shows and channels, serials or soap operas are always present in the Television and are inescapable at times. Along with the marketing strategies outside, cinema itself becomes a marketing strategy. Rajadhyaksha had discussed the cinema's role in advertising products in the globalized world where cinema benefits from the corporate entities as the source of money and this gets extended to

the promotion of certain international brands through cinema. He cites the examples of Stroh's beer in *Dilwale Dulhaniya Leh Jayenge* (1995), Coca-Cola in *Taal* (1999), Swatch watches in *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (2000), and notes that such developments are "symptomatic of the nature of funding that the cinema increasingly depends upon" (Rajadhyaksha 2010). Even though cinema was used as a political and nationalistic medium in the earlier times, it is in contemporary times that we see the economic endorsements through cinema. It is in this period that we look at the promotion of cinema through cinema.

However, all the movies which portray cinema within cinema in Malayalam, try to construct a world of cinema which is meritorious in nature. The recent movie *Chirakodinja Kinavukal* (Broken-winged Dreams, Dir. Sathosh Viswanath, 2015) is a spoof which satirizes Malayalam cinema through the medium itself. It reveals the existing clichés from the past in contemporary Malayalam cinema but it skillfully avoids the questions of caste and communities. When cinema picturizes itself, though the major concern is economic, it is significant to look into the issues of documenting the medium as such. I argue that cinema within cinema as a different mode of film production is self-reflective and at the same time self-erasing. Nevertheless, cinema within cinema does not constrain itself in just documenting the medium but fulfils other functions.

As mentioned earlier, the use of epi-texts and intermedia helps in popularizing such productions, thereby offering cinematic spectacle to the public. Unlike Brecht's theory of alienation, one can find that cinema within cinema does not guarantee critical aptitude among the spectators but it capitalizes on the spectator's knowledge/ ignorance of cinema.

Works Cited

Ames, Christopher. *Movies about the Movies: Hollywood Reflected.* Lexington : U of Kentucky, 1997. Print.

Brecht, Bertolt. "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting". Trans. John Willet. Web. 9 May 2013.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time Image.* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. Print.

Genette, Gerard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP,1997. Print.

Gupta, Chidananda Das. *Seeing Is Believing: Selected Writings on Cinema.* New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2008. Print.

Hornby, Richard. *Drama, Metadrama and Perception.* Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1986. Print.

Hatchuel, Sarah. *Shakespeare: from Stage to Screen.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.

Manju E.P. "Cinematic Erasures: Configuring Archives of/in Malayalam Cinema." Spec. issue of *Caesurae: Poetics of Cultural Translation Vol.* 2, No. 1, 2017. Print.

Prasad, M. Madhava. *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction.* Delhi: Oxford Uuniversity Press, 1998. Print.

Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency.* Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009. Print.

—"The 'Bollywoodization' of Indian Cinema: Cultural Nationalism in a Global Arena." *Global Bollywood.* Eds. Aswin Punathambekar and Anadam P. Kavoori. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008., pp. 17-41. Print.

Rodowick, D. N. *The Virtual Life of Film.* Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007. Print

Stam, Robert. *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. Press.

Defending the Concept of Visual Pollution: Traces of Social Identity in Graffiti Subculture

Prasanth P.S.

Abstract

Graffiti is one of the major forms of artistic expression indicating the outlook of a major subculture. The analysis of this public visual narrative paves way for a re-interpretation of the postmodern socio-political surveillance. Being a troublesome working-class resistance, drawings and paintings used in graffiti with different complicated patterns of obscene words or colours actually come from a troublesome psyche of dissatisfaction. A writer of graffiti stands in between the actual self of a writer and a subcultural alter ego, keeping two different identities. Among these personal and social identities, the latter is subject to membership in the graffiti subculture or counterculture and this identity is not fixed but subject to transformation from teenage to adulthood. Various types of graffiti frequently cover the facades of abandoned structures which are often marked as visual pollution, including subcultural jargon, spray paint techniques and cartoons. Within the graffiti subculture, a writer escapes their real life to enter the dream by making his identity anonymous. Anonymity offers him protection from law enforcement and societal judgment and allows him to communicate any offensive or controversial idea. The ethical concern regarding graffiti subculture is challenging. Here, the micro-relation of power to the construction

of youth is to be analyzed. New forms of power produce new types of resistance. Hiding in the light of graffiti counterculture, youth plays with trouble and fun by making a spectacle of themselves for the admiring glances of strangers and media though they are called anarchists by the dominant culture and law. Graffiti in this way can be identified with the artistic forms of the main stream culture. The paper investigates the scope of visual sphere in the analysis of cultural space using graffiti as a psychological and ideological motif. It tries to analyze the popularity of visual culture among the youth as something that could introduce their sense of detachment through the so-called street art.

Key Words: Graffiti, Subculture, surveillance, resistance, visual sphere, visual pollution, anonymity, counterculture, street art.

The common notion of a subculture or counterculture is rather different substantially from that of the mainstream culture. The aspirations of a specific population like Bohemianism, Beat Generation and hippie subculture could trigger dramatic cultural changes in society. This kind of social revolution is conceptualized in terms of rejecting older values. The psychedelic rock music and pop-art have taken over the social and political scenario of UK and US in the mid 20th century. Graffiti in the same sense has played a prominent role in making an unconventional academic entry into Cultural Studies.

Graffiti is one of the major forms of artistic expression indicating the outlook of a subculture. Moving drastically in an opposite direction to the dominant cultural framework, it challenges the system of law. The politics behind this street culture is interestingly represented in its content and structure. The primary investigation on graffiti should be located in its way of focusing attention on how

to defend the conventional practices of the so-called legal and moral concepts, while retaining a constant mood of agitation against the authority of the government. Drawings and paintings with different complicated patterns of obscene words or colours actually come from a troublesome psyche of dissatisfaction. Here the question is about the much-discussed and controversial aspect of the contemporary clash between culture and counterculture. In establishing a group's identity, external conflicts are highly essential and influential:

> For cultural Studies, the culture in subculture has referred to a 'whole way of life' or 'maps of meaning' which make the world intelligible to its members. The 'sub' has connoted notions of distinctiveness and difference from the dominant or mainstream society. Hence, the notion of an authentic subculture depends on its binary opposite that is the idea of an inauthentic, mass-produced main stream or dominant culture. (Barker 410)

At their intention, the people who attempt graffiti are marginalised and considered as antisocial with reference to their differences which make others outside their culture believe that they are unorthodox. This observable section of society, graffiti writers, being a part of youth culture, idealises their social identity through writing a unique tag. A writer of graffiti stands in between the actual self of a writer and a subcultural alter ego, keeping two different identities. Among these personal and social identities, the latter is subject to membership in the graffiti subculture or counterculture and this identity is not fixed but subject to transformation from teenage to adulthood. The fallacy of counterculture is always exclusive to the youth, where the aged writers may not adequately address the experience of the exciting graffiti culture:

> Subcultural affiliation is most likely to begin during adolescence, but its significance can last a lifetime. The concept of 'Youth Subcultures', so commonly used in social science writing, rhetorically denies the continuing significance of subcultural participation to those of us who have accidentally grown up and grown older over the years. (Williams ix-x)

Various types of graffiti frequently cover the facades of abandoned structures and are often marked as visual pollution, including subcultural jargon, spray paint techniques and cartoons. It was in the 1960s and early 1970s that contemporary graffiti gained its practitioners in America. Writers like Demetrius got famous through nicknames, since they were/are the victims of law enforcement. Demetrius wrote his name as "Taki". There were members named "Joe 136", "CORNBREAD", etc. They have been judged severely on the complexity and originality of their own style, but are constantly haunted by the law enforcement to keep the streets free of visual pollution. The resistance of social control practiced by these writers often indulges in a clash with the anti-graffiti protesters:

> Emerging from the confluence of practiced artistry and dangerous illegality, the adrenaline rush defines for writers the wired excitement of writing graffiti. Grounded as it is in illegality and danger, the adrenaline rush grows in intensity and pleasure as aggressive anti-graffiti campaigns proliferate. (Ferrell 29)

A graffiti writer sends a message to those in authority by tagging his expressions of fear, paranoia, triumph and pride — all of which are a part of the thrill and risk for him. Doing graffiti does not provide substantial respect; instead, it is ultimately a form of

hedonism. Here, his tags (name or signature) serve to identify his subcultural persona from others, executing a unique place of his own. Thus, the name or signature is at the centre of all graffiti art. The writer is free or bound to drop his real name and simply (?) adopt a new one, a stylised mark of the writer's social identity, a component of his alter ego. The conventional society offers no space for adolescents to develop their wished identities. Such a situation compels the youth to carve their own way by constructing a cultural space, a space to generate the meanings of a subcultural entity. Writers want to escape their everyday identity, creating better names in each attempt. For organizing group values in a subculture, the youth make use of vulnerable identities so that they can be heard at any time. Within the graffiti subculture, a writer escapes their real life to enter the dream by making his identity anonymous. Anonymity offers him protection from law enforcement and societal judgment and allows him to communicate any offensive or controversial perspectives. They are known for being unknown.

Identity is a social phenomenon. It is developed and maintained in the social contexts. Relationships and interactions are the by-products of this social identity. Humans are reflexive beings, always engaging in a process of self-labelling, and place themselves within a system of social classification. To verify who they are by comparing themselves to others is a natural, sometimes deliberate process of fluidity. Self-categorisation is thus a process of individual and social agency. It can be done with the help of an intellectual shift, a kind of depersonalisation where one assumes him-/herself to be an embodiment of the in-group prototype, meaning a cognitive representation of the social category, containing meanings and norms that the individual associates with the social group. A person who gets depersonalised is identified with the behaviours, thoughts and values of the other group members altering his own personal identity.

Chris Barker connects individual identity with the social identity in his work *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*:

> Self-identity may be conceived of as *our* project. Nevertheless it is a sociological truism that we are born into a world that pre-exists us. We learn to use language that was in use before we arrived. We live our lives in the contest of social relationship with others. In short, we are constituted as individuals in a social process using socially shared materials. This is commonly understood as socialization or acculturation. Without acculturation we would not be persons as we understand that notion in our everyday lives. (218)

The ethical concern regarding the graffiti subculture is challenging. Both men and women have claimed membership in this subculture. Among them, most are passionate perfectionists and they are only concerned with generating a street screen of surveillance. The micro-relation of power to the construction of youth is to be analysed. New forms of power produce new types of resistance. Hiding in the light of the graffiti counterculture, youth plays with trouble and fun by making a spectacle of themselves for the admiring glances of strangers and media. Naturally, artists find themselves spending hours, sometimes entire days creatively experimenting with new designs and styles. This commitment is their only ethics. All other common artistic ethics have been neglected because of their own sense of alienation from the mainstream culture. Hebdige argues that subculture is neither an affirmation nor a refusal. It is a declaration of independence and of alien intent. It is a great play for attention and a refusal to be read transparently.

> Subculture forms at the interface between surveillance and the evasion of surveillance. It translates the fact of being

under scrutiny to the pleasure of being watched, and the elaboration of surfaces which takes place within it reveals a darker will to opacity, a drive against classification and control, a desire to exceed. (54)

The idea of resistance is the outcome of a cultural politics. What defines the merits and values of this resistance is probably a confusing question. In Cultural Studies, critics value the working class art more than they value masculinity. That's why resistance comes to be a matter of value. A graffiti writer is basically an individual who wants to achieve a sense of notoriety. He does even call himself a writer though his works share the concept of bricolage, by which previously unconnected symbols are juxtaposed to create new meanings of subcultural values. Reading graffiti is actually entering a community of artistic outlaws.

The graffiti writers have got familial ties. Being a minority subculture, they never wish their children move away from the rapid professional realm. Their anonymous fame is short-lived. It is capitalism and the expansion of consumerism that have provided the increased supply of symbolic resources for young people's creative work. The creative toil of the graffiti writer is undoubtedly shared by his family and the rest of the subculture. They are the real cultural producers. Based on their everyday informal life, their creativity is infused with the view of a world which they could perceive. Their creative relation with television and the customization of fashion provoke them to carry out a postmodern rendering of creativity.

> […] postmodernism, whatever form its own intellectualizing might take, has been fundamentally anticipated in the metropolitan cultures of the last twenty years: among the electronic signifiers of cinema, television and video, in recording studios and record players, in fashion and youth

> styles, in all those sounds, images and diverse histories that are daily mixed, recycled and 'scratched' together on that giant screen which is the contemporary city. (Chambers 7)

The population of graffiti writers shows a collective psychological identity trait. The anonymity doesn't prevent the group from identifying one another in their own cultural context. Their identity is comprised of the archetypal characteristics representing the graffiti writer's social identity. They are risk-takers as well as thrill-seekers who eagerly embrace the illegality and dangers of doing graffiti. They are highly skilled in "shameless" acts of marketing their subcultural personas. They are called anarchists by the dominant culture and law. Morality is hijacked and the freedom of creativity is upheld in graffiti subculture. The public spaces are thus almost privatised as art galleries of the graffiti writers, but in the presence of their absence. There people are often kept in agony to interpret what they see as private or public. This is a mode of invasion successfully made practical by the section of the counterculture as a response to the dominant cultural practises.

Illuminating the contemporary urban culture, graffiti in the United States has been shaped by the cultural practises of the street gang environments. The writers from the inner-city and suburban neighbourhoods rooted in young black culture practise hip hop graffiti, reflecting their social problems. Focussing on the fashionable insight of complicated postmodern meanings of life, graffiti moves towards a shocking realisation of colour-word combination as representations of real life issues. It is an enquiry on the external world and the dominant culture as intelligible to the members of any subculture:

> The defining attribute of 'subcultures', then, lies with the way the accent is put on the distinction between a particular cultural/social group and the larger culture/society. The

emphasis is on variance from a larger collectivity who are invariably, but not unproblematically, positioned as normal, average and dominant. Subcultures, in other words, are condemned to and/or enjoy a consciousness of 'otherness' or difference. (Thornton 5)

Working-class resistance is subject to historical ebbs and flows. It never entirely disappears for it is placed in a position of structural defence and resistance to the hegemonic culture. Youth cultures share the same problematic space in relation to the dominant culture as the parent working-class culture. In simple terms, subculture involves the expression of difference from the identification with the parent culture. Graffiti in this way can be identified with the artistic forms of the mainstream culture. The specific generational consciousness possessed by the youth comes from a problematic experience that is distinct from a parent culture. Youth subcultures including graffiti are practised to win the space conventionally allotted for the parent dominant culture through the various symbolic cultural signs organised into new codes of meaning.

> In relation to the hegemony of a ruling class, the working class is, by definition, a subordinate social and cultural formation. ... Of course, at times hegemony is strong and cohesive, and the subordinate class is weak, vulnerable and exposed. But it cannot, by definition, disappear. It remains as a subordinate structure, often separate, and impermeable, yet still contained by the overall rule and domination of the ruling class. The subordinate class has developed its own corporate culture, its own forms of social relationships, its characteristic institutions, values, modes of life. (Clarke et al 41)

Works Cited

Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice.* London: SAGE Publications Inc, 2008. Print.

Chambers, I. *Maps for the Metropolis: A Possible Guide to the Present'*, Cultural Studies I, 1987. Print.

Clarke, J., Hall, S., Jefferson, T. and Roberts, B., Ed. "Subcultures, Cultures and Class in S. Hall and T. Jefferson". *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain.* London: Hutchinson, 1976. Print.

Ferrel, J. "Youth, Crime and Cultural Space". *Social Justice,* 1997. Print.

Hebdige, D. *Hiding in the Light.* London: Comedia, 1988. Print.

Thornton, S. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995. Print.

Williams, J.P. *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011. Print.

Poetry in the Age of Visuality:
Exploring a Method of Spatial Reading of Verse

Dr. Sunitha Srinivas
& Dr. K. Arunlal

Contemporary theory and cultural studies have together changed the very nature of one's understanding of space. It is not merely a variable in physical science but a crucial dimension in making sense of human sociality and cultural activities. Obviously, studies about urbanity, architecture, environmentalism and city planning use space as a major trope in their theses, but the implications of the philosophy of space extends farther beyond. The current paper is an attempt to think of how one of the oldest cultural practices of the human societies, poetry, simultaneously responded and contributed to the evolution of the human sense of spaces. Whereas visual arts used space for its being from the time of the cave-drawings, poetry did not become a space art in that sense until it was radically assimilated into modern print culture. In its pre-print period, poetry was more or less exclusively a time art: all the classic stylistic devices of poetic composition, viz. alliteration, assonance, rhyme etc. are meant to facilitate the memorization of a piece of verse. They are devices that repeat in calculated intervals, adding rhythm and music to the verse that unravels itself in time.

However, contemporary poetry printed and internationally circulated, extending in an ever increasing pace to preservation in cyber print archives, has apparently rendered redundant the mnemonic facilitation of poetry through means of classical stylistic devices. Poetry (especially the international manifestation of the art, relying heavily on translation) is now more than ever a spatial reality: it is printed in a certain manner on a page, to begin with. At the micro level, in most world languages, metrical versification has yielded to free verse experiments, literary collages, pastiches and graphic poetry.

Spatiality and a sense of space are central to contemporary sensibilities and identities. The socio-psychological and phenomenological approaches to time and space that have been put forward by de Certeau, Bachelard, Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault show that poetry, like any cultural enterprise, is a field of experience developed in time and space. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault presents cultural space as the 'sedimentation of layers over time'. The mental structures capable of generating cultural patterns account for consistencies that social and symbolic forms exhibit in relation to spatial organization. As Bourdieu puts it, because social practice activates spatial meanings, they are not fixed in space but are invoked by actors - men and women - who bring their own discursive knowledge and strategic intentions to the interpretation of spatial meanings. The contemporary period of socio-cultural restructuring is accompanied by an accentuated visibility and consciousness of spatiality and spatialisation, regionalisation and regionalism (Soja 173). The correlation of spatialized poetry with the ideas of space can be therefore explored in multiple angles: the way poetry can turn places into spaces; the modes through which poetry 'depicts' real experiences; the space and body relations as manifested in poetry; the cyber reserve of poetry accessed, commented and shared across the web and so on.

Whereas space *is* material in an obvious sense, there is a side of it that is abstract too: space is at once both 'lived' and 'conceptualized'. The lived space may be called an embodied experience and the conceptualized one, a mental experience. The sense of where we are is a combination of the two: the immediate embodied experience has to come to an agreement with our location within a larger picture; the larger geographical and social structures that we are part of must make sense of the embodied experience if a place should become a space for us. Henri Lefebvre, in his pioneering study on spatial logics, *The Production of Space,* says that the mental conception of space that is developed alongside if not within practical, real-world experience, is by default ideological. If we dissociate the mental space from everyday social practice, Lefebvre says, we create 'an abyss between the mental sphere on one side and the social spheres on the other' (6). Lefebvre argues for a spatial materialism in thought, where (forms of) knowledge is always situated and embodied. In the late twentieth century, Deleuze and Guattari approached the argument from another angle: they conceptualized a 'haptic space' where the sensory interrelation of the eye, the ear and the limbs is extended to address the essence drawn of material spatial perception. Lefebvre's embodied spatiality is supplemented in this model with an emotional component. Human spatiality, according to *A Thousand Plateaus,* consists not just of material and mental realms, but also the haptic where myths, dreams, potential schizophrenia, and art exist. Earlier theoreticians like Merleau-Ponty and Kant also had touched upon the idea of the haptic space that correlates emotional experience and sentimental attachment. Merleau-Ponty, for instance, had distinguished three ideas of space: first, a physical space constructed by perception, then, a geometrical space conceptually comprehended, and, thirdly a lived space (*espace vécu*).

Poetry exists at once in a factual historical space (of large-scale migrations, of class struggles, and political power-games) and a space that constantly tries to contest with factual historicity (myths, dreams, fears, madness). It maintains this doubled space by investing in languages' other properties than communicability. Poetry is the rise of a new space in the reader's sense of language and thus the world: the rise of an idiom that does not seek to communicate, but as such exists. Poetry exists as a special space in our languages not because it *resembles* reality, but because it seeks to *represent* reality in terms that have little to do with resemblances. The poetic 'representational space' is structured by an interpenetration of real experiences and knowledges: the biological, cultural, historical and psychological spaces create their ghost existences in poetry.

While on the one hand the space of the page in which a poem appears determines its meaning, on the other, the same phenomenon renders poetic meaning ambiguous. A poem's printed space orients the access of the message by heightening the impenetrability of the text viz. interrupting common groupings, multiplying the possibilities of convergence and divergence, and dispensing phonic units. In modern English poetry, Dylan Thomas's poetry would be an evident example of how the impenetrability of text is devised by co-ordinating printed language in a certain fashion. In order to access Dylan Thomas's poems, it is necessary that one should access his subversive coinages such as "once below a time", or "as the heart was long" (both from "Fern Hill"). These coinages interrupt familiar grouping of English words and thus build a new space for the poem to exist in the language. Gerard Manley Hopkins also used in the late Victorian period, the resistance that poems show to common groupings of words and ideas. In "The Windhover", for instance, Hopkins splits the single word 'kingdom' into two lines: 'king' ends the first line and 'dom' begins the next, all the while keeping the

sprung rhythm going. In Malayalam, Ayyappa Panikkar, among modern experimentalists, has used such inversions of usual linguistic spaces by means as varied as neologisms and portmanteau. In the wider European scenario, the major achievers in poetic surrealism, viz. Garcia Lorca, Osip Madelstam, Cesar Vallejo, and Pablo Neruda among others, had inverted usual mental and conceptual spaces and derived vantage spaces in poems that could at the same time be spiritual, material and historical narratives. In *Gacela of the Remembrance of Love,* a typical surrealist work, Lorca uses thirteen two-line stanzas giving the apparent impression of a neatly constructed world within the poem. But as the reader develops the space of reading-experience, Lorca slowly uncovers a representational space of stark disorder and loss. He dispenses with 'the conventions of despair' right after leaving a very conventional opening couplet:

> Do not carry your remembrance.
> Leave it, alone, in my breast. (151-2)

The poem proceeds to "give the pain of fresh lily for a heart of chalk", makes "a tulip of fear" out of wind, erects "a wall of difficult dreams" to separate the grieving narrator from the dead and so on, till finally repeating the opening couplet and sealing the disorder. The fear-tulip which is sick in winter points obliquely at the solidifying oppressive regime in the land twice in the poem. In essence, the spatial and temporal imaginary ("remembrance" being a temporal marker requested to be deposited within the narrator's breast) and the construction of alternative possible worlds using subsequent imagery, supply the poem inexhaustible metaphorical potential. The "mental" or "imaginary" space and time in the work become terrains to understand personal and political subjectivities and their consequences when materialized as human action in space and time.

During the late twentieth century, in general, Cubism, collage, pastiche and several other avant-garde innovations in the spatialization of art were furthered. Instead of inscribing something into a space, these innovations sought to use space itself as a coordinate in artistic production. In tune with this spatial turn in visual aesthetics modernist avant-garde practitioners and readers of poetry saw that the art became very productive when it engaged with the spatial logics of a collage or pastiche. Language was looked upon by at least a large section of the avant-garde poets as "material", and it was consequently imagined to be "tactile" in its most effective deployment. Dadaists even achieved a kind of linkage between poetry and visual arts in that their collagist methods - designing pages with words, making prints with linocuts and carving words into wood - made their ideology more apparent. In a lighter version, these "cut and paste" techniques were used by such establishment poets as T.S. Eliot (who added extensive notes to end the cleverly collaged "The Wasteland") and Ezra Pound (at the end of *Cantos,* Pound states "I cannot make it cohere") too. They "want" the reader to search "before" the poem happened, and find out ways to retrieve a past that is now cut-up and lost.[1] In artistic terms, this results in a work in which language is reduced to "an experience of pure material signifiers", and a "breakdown in the signifying chain" within a continuous present in which the subject is unable to map either their own history as they are lost in a "present…[which] …engulfs the subject with indescribable vividness", to quote Fredric Jameson (26–7). It is the construction of the poem itself that is the event, not some occasion or emotion that passes through the poem to the reader; the poet becomes a constructor, bringing in data from different sources. The relationships between words within the poem, often extracted from a variety of media and sources, are mapped across the page rather than following one another, a page that becomes the

'construction site' of the poem. If there is a single difference between poetry's modernity and post-modernity, it should perhaps be located in the process of "space-time compression" as David Harvey calls it. Though the proliferation of spatial concepts is aggravated by this space-time compression, the reason for it is often political and epistemological.

The poet and critic Jeremy Hooker refers to a place as "a totality… all that has created it through the process of time…the connection within a single compass of all those living forces" (Acheson 392). Traditional, physical geography is the study of places within space, where a "place" is a bounded area set within "space" that is best described through a set of co-ordinates. Space is therefore "a priori", it was already there; and places, such as towns, villages, homesteads, farms, cities, regions and so on, are located within it. If a place is traditionally characterized as a bounded community with its own history, then a "poetry of place" frequently seeks to identify the *nature* of a place through an exploration and recovery of its past. In this sense, representations of community life against/alongside individual life in poetic art (one of the original motives in pastoral and lyric poetry of old) often seek to establish a geographical community that subscribe to a common set of values. In Sapphic lyrics, the brilliant coloured grass, the fruiting groves, heterosexual wedding songs and bisexual lovers comment on the values as much as construct them.

Graphic poems and concrete poetry which engaged with late-modernist contents during the 1940s and 1960s in England and elsewhere recorded "resistant" rejections of the idea of syntactical punctuation, which landed in the genres' definitive points of departure with less spatially aware, essentially language-driven poetry. An early precursor to these supra-syntactical developments can be traced

back to Emily Dickinson's transcendentalist poetry where capitalization and print-spacing builds geography and ideology into the body of the poem. But later, the practice was revolutionarily reworked by visual poets such as ee Cummings and obscurists like Mallarme and Wallace Stevens. Their poetics of space corresponds to Jean Piaget's belief that the "capture of conceptual spaces by the reader" will largely be "a process of creating" that space "from the receiving end", backwards. Poetry talks about a space – in Cummings's case, using bold and audacious line-breaks on page – which the reader perceives and then is imagined upon and inhabited (the quizzed state of mind of the poem/poet is *simultaneously* the unease of the reader too). The open-ended possibilities of meaning to which they give rise – the relative absence of interpretative clues – are a source of conflict for the reader. Visual poetry after these major innovators found its forte in the social imagination of post modern society and further mixed together the aesthetic properties of images and words. The white space of the page turned into what Nelson Goodman described as a "dense signifying field" (in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*). In poets like Mallarme and Gomringer, silence constitutes the basic structural framework of the poem (a correlation between space and silence), that which imposes on the text a rhythm of presence and absence. In Mallarme, especially, silence is evoked both literally, in the repeated use of the word, and conceptually, through the irregular use of spaces.

Graphic poetry, otherwise called concrete or visual poetry, offers other spatialities than those offered by print and blank space or clever punctuating. To an extent, the process of a reader's sharing the complex space of visual poetry is completely unconscious, but at certain moments, as Jean Piaget suggests, the space becomes a site of conscious reflection too. The genre of children's poetry and nonsense poetry, which use visual poetry modes extensively, may

be read very effectively using this insight. Apart from breaking down the syntax, these genres *place* words in new contexts and make the poem more of a dialogue between the "meanings" a word carries and the visual apprehension of that word in the context of the poem. The work's performance is outside the pages of a book, the spatial context in which it finds itself.

The Piagetean paradigm also explains why new breeds of graphic poetry that experiment with the two dimensionality of the printed space and are largely non-realistic (engagements with graffiti and poster art) tend to easily immerse themselves into the memory of the reader. Like most children's rhymes and limericks, these poems presuppose a performer — someone who "presented" the poem rather than someone who wrote and cased it in a book. The ideology predicating the text, gestures (real and virtual), and expressions of the performer stay with the written text as projected dimensions of the poem.

Whereas the new age graphic poetry denotes resistance by marking its space out in social visibility, on the other side, the linear poetry of our times has started to implicate on social non-spaces and nomadic energies. In his discussion of postmodern capitalism and consequent "mentalities", Deleuze presents the agency of the nomad, who runs counter to "the State" in the sense that s/he is aggressively creative. The State is a *consolidator* of nomadic innovations, says Deleuze: the state appropriates the creative energy of the nomad for its own specific needs and at the same time, also induces renewed nomadic aggression. The basic principle is that the postmodern nomad space is "smooth" and heterogeneous, while State space is "striated" and homogeneous. The theory also carries resonances from Foucault's idea of heterotopia where he theorizes modern places having non-spaces within the design. Non-spaces

do not require the subject to belong to the variables that create them. Spaces like airports, shopping malls, or public booths are places where a person may enter his physical details and officially register, but never have any sense of belonging towards them to make their appearance as spaces in contemporary poetry. Postcolonialism and travel have marked these spaces (involving spatial tactics) with a poetic vantage that is potentially critical. Wole Soyinka, for instance, uses a telephone booth's non-belonging public-ness to lodge the Black caller's sarcasm on the white landlady in "A Telephone Conversation". In Tiang Hong's landmark Malay poem, "Arrival," airports are used as a reference point to comment on socio-ecological crises. The hybrid construct of postcolonial identity uses these non-spaces as nodes that connect the past to the present and roots to routes.

Heterotopias, however, are not completely compatible with nomadic spaces conceptually. Nomadic space presumes a vigorous non-belonging and freedom to the degree of cancelling out very histories. By moving from the modernist notion of collage to a more postmodern idea of the nomad, Pierre Joris in *Nomad Poetics* derives a perspective that shifts from the location of objects within a frame to the idea of a system that produces its own spaces. The "nomad" explores the possibilities of subverting bureaucratic functionalism, and celebrates the synchronic and the situational as against the intrinsic:

> Nomad thought rejects the thinking subject as the producer of truth about the world, locating thought "with a singular race" or tribe, a way of thinking that is neither individual nor emanating from a nation-state, and is deployed in a "horizonless milieu that is a smooth space, steppe, desert or sea". (379)

Most poetry of resistance in the autocracies of the postwar world can be understood in a distinct light using the spatial philosophy of nomad poetics. In the poetry of Stalinist Russia, of which many poets met with persecution and untimely death, the spaces that emerged through the composition and distribution of poems deserve special note. A lot of poetic material was burnt or expurgated, and lost to time-memory. But during the Thaw period they came back (to print), as if a historic hibernating space was made nomadically available. Osip Mandelstam, for instance, was one whose poems were all destroyed or censored. Most of his works were written on paper with ink or pencil and were usually raided away by the authorities from coat pockets. The poems which now compose his esteemed oeuvre were remembered by-heart by his wife. The space where his poems circulated transcended the state repressive apparatus and returned to print circulation to occupy the space of revolutionary nostalgia. Mandelstam writes of language itself as a field of duration:

> The age will cease its noise, culture will fall asleep, the people will be regenerated after having been given over their best energies . . . and all this current will draw after it the fragile ship of the human word into the open seas of the future, where there is no sympathetic understanding, where sad commentary replaces the fresh wind of the enmity and the sympathy of contemporaries. (Freidin 191)

Mandelstam saw language as moving through a fluid space polluted by history but transcending it and linking the future to its past through the memory of what cannot be purified. He concluded in one of his powerful indictments of the times, "The Age":

> And the buds will go on swelling
> and the spirit of green will burst,
> but your backbone has been shattered,
> my beautiful, pitiful age.
> Cruel and weak, you'll look back
> smiling senselessly
> like an animal that used to be supple
> on the tracks of your own paws. (32)

In the wake of the Holocaust, one of the most powerful poets of the time, Paul Celan, described poetry as a message adrift, a bottled bundle battling to find its proper shoreline. With his ever-acute sense of isolation of the poet in times of state-driven atrocity, we see how the space of the nomad is a vantage point for the poet to speak from.

In more recent times, poets like Bill Griffiths, a cult figure in modern English literature, can be studied extensively for the nomadic space they constructed by means of non-conventional poetry printing and circulating. Clive Bush, one of the prominent critics of Bill Griffiths's work in *Out of Dissent: A Study of Five Contemporary British Poets*, describes Griffiths as someone for whom, although "never seeking disaster, his disassociation from the dullness of British culture is no mere gesture of alterity, but a passion for the differences of actual life actually lived in the British Isles" (212). A major figure in the 1970s British revival, almost all his publications were pamphlets and chapbooks, hand-sewn, stapled or with spiral binding, distributed via alternative networks. In most cases, (even when he was later published by publishers like Etruscan and West House), "the cover is paper, hand sewn with five internal sheets folded once to give 20 unnumbered pages. It looks photocopied, and in places the text is barely legible, and the mixture of typefaces, sometimes on the same

page, gives it a 'cut and paste' feel. The contents are divided into five 'texts', with each text made up of a combination of genres including poems, prose, newspaper reports and 'visual' works by Sean O'Huigin" (212). Such a text, by its very nature, distances itself from official literature.

Just as nomad subjectivity and heterotopias imbricate in the study of poetry, Deleuzean and Foucauldean notions of body too may be used to understand present-day poetic space. A poem is not a body and a body is not a text, yet both exist in a relationship between their materiality (the text as material and the body as material); their conceptualization through processes of representation; and their performance in specific times and places. It is in this complex of relationships that a focus on the body can support various readings of poetry.

Body, in theory, is a site or container of power which usually constrains but sometimes liberates the processes of *Becoming,* according to Foucault. In 'Ode Long Kesh', one of the most cited rebellion-poems of the recent past, the Irish poet Barry MacSweeney combines Foucault's interest in the "micro-politics of the regulation of the body and the macropolitics of "surveillance of populations" (Quartermain 120). Flapless Man, the weird narrator/protagonist of the ode, is never quite complete and all the figures of speech that relate to him do not make sense. The body, here, does not just occupy space, but produces space and, as importantly, provides, as Lefebvre puts it, a "route from abstract to concrete which has the great virtue of demonstrating their reciprocal inherence" (171).

Another "bodily" space visible in postmodern poetry can be drawn from Deleuze's and Guattari's idea of the Body without Organs (BwO) in *A Thousand Plateaus* - an idea of the body capable of

providing both freedom from desire and freedom of desire. They draw on a post-modern aesthetic of fragmentation in their description of the process of dismantling the "organism" and repeatedly affirm that the body without organs is not "against" organs, but against organism and against the organization of the individual through processes of signification (saying what something means) and subjectification. There is a double argument going on in their description of the body without organs. On the one hand, it is simply a complex intellectual take on Zen and Hatha Yoga, on the need to live with the world rather than against it, of the need to open up the body to flows, and exist within an immanent now, to balance the external and internal pressure, to removing "blockages" which dam up negative feelings. On the other hand, they are continuing their argument with psychoanalysis and its representation of desire as conscious or subconscious fantasy. Psychoanalysis, they assert, simply locates desire in the conscious or subconscious rather than in and through the body. It is relatively straightforward to make connections between poetic form and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the BwO; ideas of open form and of flows and rhythms link easily to more experimental ideas regarding poetic form. The poetic practice of Fernando Pessoa, one of the harbingers of postmodern sensibilities in Portuguese poetry, marks instances of this spatiality. In a psychoanalytic study of the poet, Anna Klobucka has observed that Pessoa was suffering from schizophrenic bouts and that poetry was a death-replacement for him: "Instead of committing suicide in life, Pessoa decides to multiply himself existentially through the text" (120). Pessoa, famously, used a heteronymic device to exist as body-without-organs in the poetic space, "the function of the Klobucka flows of the unconscious and desire … eloquently describes the vital impulse of the Pessoan heteronymic device, [and] belongs in the end to the domain of art, or in the specific case of Pessoa, to the

poetic space", says Kloubacka (181). It is within this space that the body-without-organs is potentialized, thus mobilizing the creative energy that multiplies the possibilities of "the process of becoming-being". The desire, the materiality of the body, and acts of imagination, are all subjected to a "regime of the aestheticization of existence" or in other words, a creation of mental space, the rejection of normativity, reason, and of social conventions; and on the other hand, the search for refuge in art, in the body, and in individualized ways of being. However, even in this poetic/aesthetic space, the body and desire do not entirely escape the materiality of the Real, nor the ideological structures that delimit the circulation of desire, and the production of certain identities. As much as in the spectacular odes of Alvario de Campos as in the sensitive and amorous "Antinous" or the sadly tender unattributed "gay poem", we witness the expression of desire in a diversity of registers just as we also witness the relative textual liberation of what would be in life a repression of desire.

Beyond the nomadic, heterotopic and BwO, "liminal spaces" have developed in contemporary culture where "rules" are overturned to host poetic works: the extension of new spatiality produced by new technologies, cyberspace and cyber culture. Individuals caught in the space of flows become networks themselves, and networked individualism becomes the new social pattern. Castells puts forward his concept of "the space of flows . . . [that] links up distant locales around shared functions and meanings on the basis of electronic circuits and fast transportation corridors, while isolating and subduing the logic of experience embodied in the space of places" (Himanen 155–78). These informational flows connect people to a continuous, real-time cybernetic community that differs from the global village because the groups' positions in time become more important than their places.

Virtual poetry publishing defies the clutch of capital over intellectual material and becomes a nomadic site, at least in its visible tenets. The archives of internet sites host poetry virtually on web pages. Among the hyperlinks that can access glossaries, poet biography and history of the poem, the archived poem inhabits a space (a "public", "discursive" space) that defies the striated archival spaces that it used to be in. The smooth space of the virtual world allows not only access but also a repertoire of accessories to the realization of the spatial axes of a poem. In other words, the production of space, the representation of the space and the representational space are all enhanced with dramatic results in the nomadic space online. Digital poems or the works that are published by a poet online are subject to editing at any point of time and can be withdrawn at will. The poem is not as "helpless" as a hard-release. It is a live entity if the author chooses it to be. If the surfer does not copy down versions of poetry from the site, he may not ever know differences between versions of poems that are uploaded. Another aspect of the context of experiencing artworks via the Internet is that a work can be seen one day, with free and democratic access, only to be charged the next. Different versions of paper-based texts exist, and are the subject of considerable scholarly enquiry, but the production of one new text does not overwrite another. Those different versions can be gathered together and compared. And one principal feature of the printing press and the published book was the ability to reproduce an identical text across space and time. This is not the case with digital works where the new or amended text overwrites previous texts, virtual versions that become really untraceable.

Spatiality is not much more than a method in the case of poetic drama and verse novels. More than spatialization, in both these sub-genres, poetry presumes actual performance. The spatial perception emanating from a novel seeks to produce a space very

different from the one that is being read: in other words, a translation need not aim at the fact of rendering the space of a poem, but the plot situations. The readers of dramatic and fiction poetry, or those who experience dramatic and fictional structural space in poetry are lost to the subtleties of poetic spatializations: there are no viewpoints from which the totality of the poetic work can be perceived, whereas a verse drama and a novel impinges on this "total" view, a spatial coherence that is more "rigorous" than the one embarked by poetic practice. This complexity and closed nature of "narrative" art coded in poetry in particular, become more apparent when they are translated. Verse drama and the novel may therefore be characterized at best as beings with multiple perspectives.

An attempt to read poetry with an awareness of spatial logics in the field demonstrates how, poetry, by means of form and content, engages with some of the most pressing and urgent social and cultural issues of the day. New insights regarding political relationships, social and cultural structures, human geography, language (oral and written), identity and bodies, and epistemological issues relating to language and "reality" may be arrived at. Spatial logics in poetry, unlike rhetorical analytical apparatus, do not offer easy answers or solutions, but signify specifically and implicitly and at a macro-level, and critique a culture or cultural products. The spatial analyses may seem to have too little "meaning", if meaning is what one deems to take away from a poem, or too much. Unlike conventional poetry criticism, spatial interrogations of poetry do not seek either to define a particular history, or set out a particular way forward for poetry. Spatial perspectives supersede such reductive lenses and bring in more inclusiveness in understanding poetry. These logics testify for the theoretical diversity of contemporary poetic practices and their complex engagement with political and social concerns.

Notes

1. The cut-up method, as such was developed about forty years later, and showed that the turn poetry had taken in the avant-garde towards spatialization meant to stay. William Burroughs, the most popular theorist and practitioner of the method, declared that the cut-up finally installed the collage successfully in poetry. The essential experience of fragmentation and decontextualization of historical narratives as commented upon by Burroughs is further advanced in Frederick Jameson who suggests that there is a "compartmentalization of reality" (Jameson,1984:373) that conceals the truth while providing the facts and consequently a language usage ever more divorced from reality.

Works Cited

Acheson, James, Romana Huck, ed. *Contemporary Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996. Print.

Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature*. Trans. Ann Smock Lincoln. NE: U of Nebraska P, 1982. Print.

Bowie, Malcolm. *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. Print.

Butler, Chris. *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life, and the Right to the City.* New York: Routledge, 2012. Print.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. M. Jolas. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969. Print.

Bradford, Richard (1993) *The Look of It: A Theory of Visual Form in English Poetry.* Cork: Cork UP. Print.

Bush, Clive. *Out of Dissent: Study of Five Contemporary British Poets*. London: Talus Editons, 1997. Print.

Castells, Manuel. *Class, City and Power,* Trans. Elizabeth Lebas. London: Macmillan, 1978. Print.

Castells, Manuel and Donna Haraway. *Cyberculture Theorists.* NewYork: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Davidson, Ian. *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry*. NewYork: Palgrave, 2007. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987. Print.

During, Simon. *The Cultural Studies Reader* New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Foucault, Michel. "Different Spaces," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984,* Volume II, ed. J. D. Faubion, Trans. R. Hurley *et al*. New York: The New Press, 1999. Print.

—. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. AM Sheridan Smith. NewYork: Routledge, 2002 (1969). Print.

Freidin, Gregory. *A Coat of Many Colours: Osip Mandelstam and his Mythologies of Self Presentati*on. Berkely: U of California P, 1987. Print.

Gombrich, Ernst. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000. Print.

Goodman, Nelson. *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols.* Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976. Print.

Harvey, David. *Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985. Print.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1989. Print.

Higgins, Dick. *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature.* Albany: State U of New York P, 1987. Print.

Himanen, Pekka. "Informationalism and the Network Society" in *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age*, New York: Random House, 2001. Print.

Jackson, K. David, EricVos & Johanna Drucker eds. *Experimental–Visual–Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry Since the 1960s.* Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* I/146. 1984. Print.

Joris, Pierre. *A Nomad Poetics.* London: Wesleyan, 2003. Print.

Larrissy, Edward. *Cambridge Companion to British Poetry 1945-2010.* Cambridge UP: New York, 2016. Print.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space.* trans. D Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991. Print.

Lefebvre, Henri and Catherine Regular. *Rhythm Analysis: Space Time and Everyday Life*. London: Continuum, 2004. Print.

Lorca, Federico Garcia. "Gacela of the Remembrance of Love". Trans. James Wright. *Poetry.* June 1960. Print.

Mandelstam, Osip. "The Age". Trans. A.S Kilne. *Twenty-Four Poems.* www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Russian/Mandelstam. htm. April 17, 2016. Web

Merrifield, Andy. *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction.* London: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Nischik, Reingard M. *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. New York: Camden House, 2000. Print.

O Donoghue, Bernard ed. *Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

Perloff, Marjorie. *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994. Print.

Quatermain, Peter and Richard Caddel. *Other: British and Irish Poetry Since 1970*. Wesleyan University Press: London, 1999. Print.

Robb, Graham. *Unlocking Mallarmé.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1996. Print.

Roberts, Neil, ed. *A Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry*. MA: Blackwell, 2003. Print.

Russell West-Pavlov. *Space in Theory: Deleuze, Kristeva, Foucault.* New York: Rodopi, 2009. Print.

Shields, Rob. *Love and Struggle - Spatial Dialectics.* London: Routledge, 1999. Print

—. *Places on the Margin: Alternate Geographies of Modernity.* London: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Soyinka, W. *Idanre and Other Poems.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1967. Print.

Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory.* London: Verso, 1989. Print.

Stanek, L. *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011. Print.

Thrift, Nigel. *Spatial Formations*. London: Sage, 1996. Print.

Walcott, D. *Omeros*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990. Print.

Williams, Emmett ed. *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry.* New York: Something Else Press, 1967. Print

Asianet and Kerala's Contemporary Media Modernity: Interviews with Sashi Kumar and BRP Bhaskar

Dr. Jenson Joseph

A lot has changed over the last 25 years. And when we ourselves are in the midst of much of these transformations, or even function as their agents, we do not realize the gravity of their impact on the way we used to live till then. Moreover, the historical trajectories that we are familiar with in our history texts would rather consider this time span too short to effect any change worth registering.

Conversely, we also tend to think that too much has indeed changed around us, especially as the result of technological advancements, even though we don't deem these changes to be worthy of being considered turning points in social-political history. Take for example, the mobile phone. Despite knowing very well that this technology has altered the way we used to be in touch, we tend to think of our obsessions with this machine as peripheral to the fundamentals of our lives and the social organization we have taken for granted. We tend to think it is absurd to consider mobile phone or satellite television as an agent of change like we consider the World Wars or a Temple Entry movement to be. Perhaps because we wouldn't want to be held responsible for the changes that we have willingly introduced to the way the world used to be, so that we can continue to indulge guiltlessly in the pleasures that our favourite gadgets promise us. In other words, we need to consider whether some of the effects of the advancements in technologies of

information and communication that we have lapped up over the last few decades are significant enough to be analysed as historical — in the true sense of the word.

Satellite television, for example, has now transformed almost all aspects of our lives. It has changed how and where we deliberate upon politics, it has introduced new rhythms and patterns in our domestic lives, it has given us new modalities of religiosity, and the sensations of the real that it conjures up are radically different from previous media forms. Yet, we do not think about this medium and its effects, as much as we should. A productive beginning point for such exercises could be to revisit the times when satellite television started entering our lives. In Kerala, satellite television – or modern television – does not have a history longer than 25-odd years. When the first private satellite television in Malayalam was launched with the name Asianet in 1993, it also happened to be one of the first in India. Asianet was envisaged initially as the national channel of PTI TV. Sashi Kumar, who was one of the chief producers at PTI TV and the joint general manager of PTI then, was the brain behind the channel. Sashi Kumar, along with his uncle Reji Menon (a doctor then practising in Russia), set up the channel with an initial capital investment of Rs. 6 crores. He was inspired by Ted Turner of CNN, who combined direct broadcast satellite technology for uplinking programmes, with the idea of introducing a cable network across Atlanta for distributing the beamed down content to homes. In order to bypass the government's restrictions on up-linking content from India, the channel started transmission in 1993 from a hired studio in Philippines, using a Russian satellite transponder called Ekran, which until then was used by the USSR state television for its transmissions, and was later made available for commercial use after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

It started as a current affairs and entertainment channel, with news broadcasts added to its staple a few years later. The channel's programs were to reach homes through a special antenna (costing approximately Rs. 2000 then) for individual households that opted for their own receivers, or through cable networks distributing other satellite TV channels as well. A small group comprising renowned artists and intellectuals – the most prominent among them being the renowned writer Paul Zachariah, poet and filmmaker P Bhaskaran, the Left ideologue K Ravindran, and senior journalist BRP Bhaskar – were roped in into key decision-making positions. Sashi Kumar envisaged the channel as nothing short of what he calls in his interviews "a new cultural renaissance movement".

Here, I talk to Sashi Kumar and BRP Bhaskar about the vision behind launching the channel, its early years, and the programming aesthetics and patterns that introduced a new experience of media modernity to Kerala.

Interview with Sashi Kumar

Jenson Joseph: The emergence and spread of satellite TV in India is often understood as part of the story of Western media's global expansion, as the result of an America-propelled media imperialism's attempts to reach to the Third World market, etc. However, the history of a channel like Asianet does not fit easily into this framework. This was one of the first satellite television channels in India, and it was envisaged from within the local context. In that sense, that envisioning is something we need to revisit.

In the late 1980s, you were already in the field of television when you came up with the proposal for Asianet. You were with PTI TV then. This was also the time that witnessed several formal experiments in the field of television in Indian metropolitan cities.

From home to home cable television networks in cities, to video magazines, different formats of television were being tried out. PTI TV also had plans to launch its own video magazine. How did the journalists' fraternity look at television as a medium at that time?

Sashi Kumar: I was chief producer at PTI TV at that time. I started to work as a news presenter in Doordarshan. I broke into print journalism for a brief period but I came back, as certain things were happening. The state of affairs in the state-owned Doordarshan was jokingly referred to as "Glasnost and Perestroika". Even though it was a government channel, the brief was that "you can be open; you can be critical", etc. Many critical programmes on government and the state started appearing on state television. A lot of this programming were not done by the Doordarshan staffers, but by the outsiders, as slots were contracted out to others.

Parallel to this, there were video magazines. *India Today* had a video magazine called "Newstrack". This is how Prannoy Roy, for instance, started "The World This Week" in Doordarshan. I was called back by PTI in 1986, and we set up a television centre in PTI. We became a big banner for production of current affairs documentaries on domestic and particularly international issues, on Doordarshan. We did a number of important documentaries; we did many-parts documentaries on what was happening after the break-up of the Soviet Union, withdrawal of the Russians from Afghanistan, the Sri Lankan IPKF engagement, what was happening in Iran-Iraq, the Kuwait attack….

Because of a certain restriction on free expression of ideas in Doordarshan, video magazines like Newstrack emerged. In the South, before the coming of Sun TV, Kalanidhi Maran started a video news magazine from Chennai in Tamil called *Poomalai*, for which the North Indian component was done by PTI TV.

So there was a kind of effervescence in the air [about TV]. That set me thinking. Time was becoming ripe for an independent-minded television network in the country. The initial expression was in the form of these video news magazines, as only the state had the rights to uplink content, and TV was still operating in terrestrial telecast format. Incidentally, technology also came to our rescue, as direct broadcast satellite technology came into being in the mid-1980s, enabling us to look beyond terrestrial broadcasting. Direct broadcast satellite technology is liberating because if you have a transponder up in the sky and if you are able to uplink a signal to that transponder, that signal can be beamed down to the footprint of the transponder. That was the principle.

The big player who had already used direct broadcast satellite technology by then and started an independent channel was Ted Turner of CNN. This is when BBC was still operating on terrestrial transmission, though BBC World was using satellite transmission to a greater extent. Thus, my real inspiration was Ted Turner and what he did. He not only started satellite transmission, he also cabled up Atlanta. It is from him that I got the idea that we can use utility poles for cabling up: the poles are already there and all you need is get a licence from the state to use them for your cable networking.

Asianet was not meant to be a Malayalam channel. It was meant to be the national channel of PTI TV. As the chief producer of PTI TV and the joint general manager of PTI, I had proposed to the board of PTI that PTI is well positioned to start a national news channel, and that the channel should be called Asianet. Otherwise why would you call a Malayalam channel Asianet!

A number of people on the board were very enthusiastic about the proposal; some of them were not very enthusiastic because they had their own private ambitions to start channels. They saw PTI as a probable big player, which created conflicts of interest in that situation. I wasted almost one year waiting for the nod, but nothing was happening. And I decided to start it on my own. I spoke to my uncle Mr Reji Menon, who was a trader in Russia.

The Soviet Union was breaking up, and a lot of transponders were being liberated. Because of a certain confusion there, state-owned transponders were being made available, but for a huge cost because that was still the age of analogue technology. Indicatively, the cost of a transponder was something around 18 crores a year (whereas today you get a transponder to uplink for 1.5 crores). As the law of the land said you can't uplink from here, we started with a Russian transponder called Ekran. To receive the signal, one had to use helical antennas. We started selling those helical antennas in Kerala when Asianet started.

I knew that it would be difficult to launch this at the national level, and hence started looking at a region. Though I lived all along in Chennai, I thought, let me look at Kerala. Luckily for me, when I went and talked about it to the then chief minister K. Karunakaran, he was very enthusiastic about it. I presented both the ideas to him: we will have a satellite channel, and also a state-wide cable networking which was unprecedented in India. We entered into a contract with the Kerala State Electricity Board to use their poles, for a monthly payment per pole for a period of 10 years.

The initial impetus was that the technology was available. And we wanted to do something different from Doordarshan. When I moved to Kerala, it looked quite easy to decide what is to be done there in the state – as a cultural, political, social intervention. K.

Karunakaran inaugurated it in Guruvayur, and later in Thiruvananthapuram, by receiving the signal.

We continued with the Ekran transmission for almost a year. Many companies started making the special antenna for households. It was a simple technology and was as cheap as Rs. 2000. We didn't ask for any royalty from the manufacturers of these antennas. It was potentially a big thing. But what we didn't know was, this transponder we contracted was one the life of which was over. It was already drifting out of its orbit. That, the Russians didn't tell us!

After we started all this, suddenly the signals started becoming weaker. Initially, they wouldn't tell us the reason. Once the cat was out of the bag, we were in deep trouble. We frantically started looking for alternatives. I went to Hong Kong and started negotiating with IntelSat. Thus, we moved on from the Ekran transponder to the more modern, American, C band transponder. This is where you have a big dish and an offset sort of a receiver, and you have to distribute the signal via cable.

This was a big let-down. On the one hand we got a good reception in Kerala; on the other hand, technologically we were suddenly shifting track in a very early phase which can kill a project. We had to survive that.

JJ: How were the programs uplinked?

SK: Initially, the content was uplinked from Russia. We would send tapes through Aeroflot or Air India pilots or air hostesses we knew. We used the connections of my uncle who was in Russia. The uplinking station was 3-4 hours away from Moscow. Later, the uplink for the C band transponder was from Philippines. And then we shifted to Singapore.

JJ: How did the newspapers respond to the emergence of private television?

SK: Newspapers did not believe in the future of TV. They thought this was too expensive and people wouldn't come to it… and after all, the state-owned Doordarshan was there. In fact, we decided to start on our own, we thought of finding big partners. The first big partner I approached was Vivek Goenka of *Indian Express*. I met him at Express Towers in Bombay. I knew him; he was from my school in Chennai. He was very receptive to the idea. But he had just taken over the newspaper after Ramnath Goenka passed away, and was still under the tutelage, in some sense, of the textile man Nasli Wadia. He took me to Wadia's office; we had a long chat. Nasli Wadia told Vivek: "This is a great idea. I understand why Sashi Kumar wants to do this. But you should decide whether you would want to be a newspaper baron or a cable operator."

It was seen like that. Because our first direct satellite broadcasting experience was during the Gulf war, CNN's war coverage was shown across homes by cable operators who just strung cables on the multi-storeyed buildings in particularly Bombay, and also in Kolkata, Delhi, etc.

Then I approached *Manorama*. In fact, Philip Mathew from the *Malayalam Manorama* family was already in the PTI Board, and he was one of those who was enthusiastic about the project. Philip Mathew told me to talk to his father K. M. Mathew. I went and met K. M. Mathew at *Manorama* office in Kottayam. He listened to everything and said, he finds this too risky. Then I approached *The Hindu*, as N. Ram was my friend. *The Hindu* group was also too conservative to venture into TV at that point of time. Much later, when Asianet became popular, K. M. Mathew called me and said "I should have listened to

you; I made a mistake." Out of sheer compulsion, I was forced to do it on my own.

After we started, once or twice, when we ran out of money to pay the transponder; the uplink stations in Philippines pulled the plug a couple of times. We managed to cover it up with sending out video cassettes to be played from cable network stations. Only those outside Kerala came to know that the channel was off the air for a brief period. Later, we managed to get some money from the bank and paid them. In short, it was like a tightrope walk in the beginning. I don't think I slept properly for almost a year. I knew without money one can't run the channel, and the advertisements were going to take time to come.

Later, we signed a contract with the Kerala State Electricity Board for using their poles. This contract was something I could leverage. Many foreign as well as Indian companies including BPL and Reliance were interested in the cable network – which was named Asianet Sat Com – and we had discussions with them. But they couldn't see the full potential of it. The first big money came for the channel when I divested 50 percent of the stakes of the cable network to the Raheja Group in Bombay for roughly 40 crores, which was big money those days. I put this money into the channel.

JJ: How did you decide what to offer on the channel?

SK: Initially, the programs on Asianet were a judicious mix of entertainment and what I would call informatively stimulating programming. The logic of entertainment programming has gone through three broad phases: the first big spurt of programming was film-related. We went and bought the rights of as many Malayalam films as we could – mainly the old ones. We had recruited Shobhana Parameshwaran who was in charge of film acquisition. The producers

also thought of this as additional revenue from films that had completed their theatrical runs. These films would run as films; then we would extract parts from them and make programs based on comedy scenes, romance scenes, etc.

In the initial budget allocation, I said: for entertainment programming, we will just use films and spin it off into other programs. And let us invest more money on other kinds of programs like *Ente Keralam* by Chintha Ravi, K. P. Kumaran's attempt to do serials based on literary works, etc. We had recruited big people to do all these tasks.

The first big break happened when we commissioned out a serial to Shyamaprasad: *Sthree*. Suddenly the whole logic of the channel underwent huge transformation. This was a learning experience for me. You are running a channel, and you think you are in control of everything that goes on there, editorially. *Sthree* became such a big hit, and took the channel in a particular direction beyond that control. I even think it was the beginning of all soap operas in regional channels. Shyamaprasad was a bright chap and had a hunch that housewives would watch this.

JJ: Did *Sthree*'s success change your idea about who is or who can be television's audience? Especially in terms of the gender composition?

SK: Yeah, it certainly did. Before that, we were marketing for a family audience, but we were marketing for the male more than the female audience. Because conventional wisdom was that it is the man of the house who would looks at news and related programming. But suddenly it became the woman, for the wrong reason though. Till then, I was telling the advertising and marketing guys what to do; after *Sthree*, they started telling me what to do!

JJ: You have also mentioned in interviews that the attempt was to introduce a media sensibility different from the one that print had enabled. What was to be the new sensibility of media and how was it envisaged as different from that which was determined by the print medium?

SK: Surely. Print has its limitations. The experiences that print enables are limited. You can't have interactions in print, outside the "letters to the editor". That is why social media has taken over. Television was the intermediate phase, where we had progammes like *Nammal Thammil* [Between Us], or *Ente Keralam* [My Kerala], which was a micro level ethnographic look at the region, its life, etc.

Print was at its arrogant heights those days. It was the most dominant medium. The bulk of the print media was talking only about politics and changing governments. Reporting about other spheres like culture was in clichéd formats in print. The lived life of people in an urban-rural continuum was missing from newspapers.

And print also had the habit of not critiquing itself or other media. One of the early programming in Asianet was *Pathravishesham* [News from Newspapers], which was unique and critical of the print media. On BBC, I had seen programmes where they would review newspapers and be critical of them. I said, why don't we have a program like that?

JJ: So media literacy was one of the key agendas?

SK: More than media literacy, our aim was to make people critically aware of the media. In fact, when we started *Pathravishesham*, the chief editor of *Malayala Manorama* K. M. Mathew wrote to me asking whether it was a healthy thing to do. He said he heard about the program from his people that this program talks about the

shortcoming in the coverages of *Manorama* or *Mathrubhoomi*, etc. I took his words seriously and wrote back requesting him to watch the program and decide for himself whether this was some unhealthy subterfuge of the media. He later wrote back to me, saying he watched a few episodes and that it was good that there was a constant invigilation of what the media is doing. He said, "you will be happy to know your *Pathravishesham* is routinely discussed in our editorial meetings".

JJ: Can I say human rights stories have emerged as a key component of journalism after the coming of television? Is it safe to assume so?

SK: That is true. A program like *Kannadi* started out by just talking about the plight of the people, etc. It soon turned into an activist program, exploring way of intervening and helping people. Getting an impact from your program emerged as important. Issues of human rights lapses or violations became an important part of programming.

Moreover, some of the stories that Asianet did during its initial days in fact set a new standard in investigative journalism. The ISRO spy case is an example. It was Asianet which said this is all cooked up. The print media was sure that this is a genuine case, and they went on with it. Neelan used to be the editor, and I had called him up asking: "are you sure, because we are the only ones saying it's all cooked up. We would look very foolish at the end." To which he would reply: "No problem; we have all the inputs." I had to take anticipatory bail from Cochin Court, as the Kerala Police filed a case against me saying I am defaming them. Paul Zachariah was my guarantor. Shekhar Gupta was the other man who wrote that this is all cooked up, and he was summoned. He didn't appear before the court, and an arrest warrant went for him. He somehow got out of it.

The other example was the Chekannur Maulavi murder case. We did an investigation and said he was in fact kidnapped and murdered. The government and the police held to the version that he had just disappeared, or that it was a suicide.

JJ: So what exactly was print doing at that point of time, in your opinion?

SK: Print was sitting comfortable because they were making money. Print thought this television thing is a foolish exercise. Once they found the advertising started shifting to television, they started getting anxious. *Malayala Manorama* started a full-fledged campaign, carrying a series of full and half page ads mocking television viewing, mocking people who think television is going to take readers away from print. They even started putting up big hoardings! In short, these big media were so convinced that nothing can shake them. They were powerful, and making profit; they didn't think a new medium was going to make a dent into their share. That is the reason they were not going out of the way to do anything different or difficult. Whereas for us, the only way to garner viewership was to do the difficult. That had to be our trademark. Unless we took those risks, we could not score a point over them, because they had many correspondents; they had contacts in governments; they could get an interview with a minister at any time. Often, the opposition was willing to come to us, but the government would not; so we had a problem in balancing, etc.

JJ: How did the Malayali viewership outside Kerala figure in the discussions on marketing and distribution? Was the diasporic Malayali a serious consideration?

SK: Yes. Especially the Gulf Malayalis. The footprint of our satellite was anyway covering the Gulf regions. So we knew we had to have

programs that appeal to Gulf Malayalis. I went to the Gulf. I organized the distribution in Gulf; spoke to local agencies that had rights to distribute channels there. At that time, we had only started talking about America and all. That came much later. We also thought of having a spread in Singapore and Malaysia too. There were some programs that looked at the issues of the NRIs. But they were all interested in what was happening here [in Kerala] rather than what was going on there.

We set up a marketing department in the Gulf right in the beginning as we knew a lot of them were watching it there. In fact, a lot of people here would tell those in the Gulf, "bring us this product, that product," etc. Such products were interested in advertising on the channel. So there was sort of a relationship through advertisements. We realized that right in the beginning.

Interview with BRP Bhaskar

Jenson Joseph: *The public that existed in a region like Kerala, until the coming of television channels like Asianet, was a public mediated primarily through print. The public that TV channels sought to enable seems to be different from, and even oppositional to, this "print public". Nevertheless, we have not accounted for the exact difference between "the print public" and the public mediated primarily by television.*

BRP Bhaskar: We had television before the coming of channels like Asianet. We had Doordarshan. It has been there for a while when Asianet came. It didn't have much influence though. Initially, Doordarshan aired only Hindi programs. Moreover, as an institution within the government's control, it didn't have much influence. Just like the government-controlled radio didn't affect or alter the print media and its public in any significant manner, Doordarshan did not

have much significance on the public. Nevertheless, people had started watching Doordarshan, and responding to it too.

Doordarshan started telecasting serials quite late. In one of its first long serials, it used to introduce new characters in its weekly episodes. In one such episode, it introduced a Malayali character – a Malayali woman looking for a job in Delhi, being introduced to two scheming [male] politicians. It turns out that her father was an independence struggle veteran, and the family is now in penury; the two scheming politicians plot to manipulate her vulnerability. After the episode was telecast, many viewers from Kerala responded angrily and wrote letters alleging that the episode portrayed Malayali women in bad light. The following episode opened with an apology, stating that it regrets the fact that a character portrayal in its earlier episode insulted the sentiments of the viewers in Kerala.

This was an indication of television's potential to influence people. However, Doordarshan would hardly telecast much content related to Kerala. It is after the coming of Asianet that television became an institution with tremendous influence on everyday life in the region, making TV-viewing a habit. One fundamental reason could be this: a crucial element in habit-formation is the frequency of exposure [to media]. For example, a weekly would have more influence on readers than a magazine, because the weekly comes out more frequently, maintaining a stable continuity especially through serialized stories and novels, etc. Magazines cannot maintain such continuity due to the inevitable lapse in publication. Similarly, a daily might have more influence than a weekly. Television takes this a step forward, and tries to maintain this continuity uninterrupted. Live telecasts and breaking news accentuates this further. Thus, its capacity to hold people is more. That is one element.

The other element is related to the nature of the content. Certain content has the capacity to form strong viewing habits than others – a factor that television exploits in its favour.

In fact, all media is habit [forming]. When we say one medium is more effective than the other, what we mean is, it is more habit-forming than the other. If one newspaper makes the reader crave for it intensely, it has a greater ability to influence you and form a habit in you. How? This is because it is easier to pick up a bad habit than a good habit. Equally, it is easier to give up a good habit than a bad habit.

JJ: *Had you started watching Asianet even before you became associated with Asianet's "news division" as a member of its editorial advisory board? Or, even before Asianet launched its news-related telecasts?*

BRP: Not much. Initially, the reach was poor. And I was in Bangalore those days. And it was not possible to pick up the signals from Bangalore. One needed a special antenna which the Russians supplied, to pick the signals from the Russian satellite [using which Asianet beamed its signals initially]. It was a U-shaped antenna that looked like a lightning arrester. One of my neighbours in Bangalore had a Russian wife. He was picking up Russian television by making an antenna.

JJ: *During its initial years, was it perceived as an initiative which would inaugurate a new "media culture"?*

BRP: Undoubtedly, it was perceived as a medium that was to make a change. For example, when Asianet launched its news-related programs, there were hardly any women in the newspapers in Kerala. In fact, when I came back to Kerala in 1992-93, some magazine

asked me for an article, and I said I will write about the absence of women in media in Kerala. Even if there were women in newspapers, they led an invisible career. This was the backdrop when Asianet was launched. And from the beginning, it was felt as if this is going to make a difference.

JJ: Even in terms of the representation of women?

BRP: Yes.

JJ: Why?

BRP: Because it was already happening in places like Delhi after the arrival of Television. In Delhi, there were indeed a few women in newspapers, but miniscule in number. When I worked in the *Statesman* in Delhi, there were no women. In UNI, when I used to work there, there was one girl in the desk. She used to be on a permanent evening shift from 3 to 9 pm. She wanted that shift. At 9 pm, she would go to All India Radio and read the 10.30 bulletin. When Doordarshan came, she became a news presenter there. So, the change in the presence of women with the coming of television could be seen in Delhi. Gradually, the status of women in newspapers also improved, as they were given better reporting tasks.

In Doordarshan, Prannoy Roy's programmes started offering women important roles in them. But in fact, the man who brought girls into Indian television was M.J. Akbar when he did a program for Doordarshan. In this program, he used women journalists from his newspaper. He had already started employing a lot of women journalists in his newspaper – *The Telegraph*. He had brought in a lot of women from all over the country.

When Akbar and NDTV used women in their news programs for Doordarshan, these women did very well. That was a major change, and it was hoped that the same will happen here too. However, the initial efforts towards that didn't succeed. There were very few women candidates during the recruitment.

JJ: So you were actually looking for women candidates?

BRP: Oh yes. In fact, in contrast to the conventional approach of "other things being equal, a girl is disqualified", we adopted the approach: "other things being equal, a girl will be preferred to a boy", during the recruitment.

In newsrooms, men never used to like the presence of women because that affected their freedom. They wanted to be boisterous, use language without bothering about the presence of women, etc. Such resistances were there in Asianet too, initially. Of the first batch of three women who joined, only one survived – Leena Manmadhan; the other two discontinued, probably because of such problems. The atmosphere was not very conducive. The men were not very receptive of women being around. But later this notion was broken, and several women started joining in the following batches.

In fact, before the recruitment of journalists began, we recruited one of the women candidates for the travelogue that Ravindran did in the channel. We had interviewed the candidates and the selection process had been completed, but we had not started giving out the appointment letters since we didn't know when we would start the news transmission. Ravindran wanted a woman companion for his travelogue – a fellow traveller on his journey across Kerala. So we decided to use one of these candidates whom we had interviewed and selected. She was the first to be appointed.

JJ: Did Asianet want women as news presenters?

BRP: Among our first set of newsreaders was Maya, who came from Doordarshan. She was the first known face of Malayalam television. She was taken off Doordarshan after an issue regarding her appearance in some advertisement. In the beginning, she was the only person in the team who came with some experience in visual media.

We had male news readers as well in the beginning. We – especially Sashi – were particular that *journalists* should read the news; we didn't want presenters reading the news mechanically. Maya herself was rather a newsperson than a mere news reader, who was shaped up in UNI and Asianet.

JJ: In an interview, Sashi Kumar has said the intention was to mould a media sensibility which is different from the one that the print was nurturing. What exactly was imagined as that difference?

BRP: There were two aspects to our approach to the news. On the one hand, we didn't want to follow the bureaucratic approach of Doordarshan towards what is news, i.e. "if the prime minister wants to say something, or if the minister says something at a function, that is news". On the other hand, we wanted to remain close to the newspaper – in the concept of news. The attitude of the people of Kerala towards news has been shaped by the print media. They have certain concepts in their minds about news, and those come from our newspapers. We wanted to remain close to them. This approach reflected in our recruitment as well: people from the newspapers were recruited at the higher levels, so that certain professional values can be established. And we didn't take anyone from Doordarshan, because we didn't consider Doordarshan experience as an asset from our point of view, though Doordarshan was the only visual media

at that time. There was also the element of corruption which affected Doordarshan significantly.

JJ: Can you elaborate?

Answer: For example, in allotting slots for serials. There were instances of officials getting arrested after allotting slots for the next one and a half years by taking money just before the transfer from one station to the other. I myself have had a bitter experience. I had given a proposal to make a serial out of Thakazhi's novel *Kayar* for Doordarshan, with M.S. Sathyu as the director. The approval was pending. Soon, middlemen approached us. It was a Malayali from a Madras-based advertising agency. They made an offer: "if we pay Rs. 1 lakh, we will get the slot easily. The agency will pay the money and get the slot; in return, it should get the right to produce it." When I had proposed the idea to Sathyu, he wanted to produce it himself. So I told them their offer is not acceptable. They went straight to Thakazhi, booked a flight ticket for him and brought him to Bangalore where I was based. I scolded Thakazhi, and I told the agency: "This man is an eminent writer. Just because you can flaunt an air ticket, do you think you can drag him all the way here?" Later, Thakazhi told me he agreed to come to Bangalore just to see his grandson who was settled in the city!

Ultimately, Doordarshan rejected the proposal. Roughly five thousand serial proposals were waiting for approval. They could not have read all of them; so they started summarily rejecting many.

JJ: Sashi Kumar also talks about a "renaissance" which the channel was trying to inaugurate. What was the mission?

BRP: Renaissance, everywhere, is a movement that reflected on all spheres of life. In Kerala, the first communist government of 1957

was the result of the renaissance. It reflected in spheres of art, literature, cinema, industry, etc. It reflected in the print medium too, and most of our newspapers are products of it.

After the 1970s, with the coming of editions, newspapers strived to become the most widely read newspaper rather than the best newspaper. Increasing the circulation began to be the ultimate test. Using this analogy, one can say when Asianet started, we were a movement which stood close to the spirit of renaissance or what was left of it. Sashi Kumar maintained it throughout his period.

Asianet started going into the mode of competitive marketing and serial-oriented culture when the Sun Network introduced Surya channel in Malayalam. Initially, Surya operated within the format that Asianet had introduced; they had a counterpart for each and every program that Asianet had introduced, except one: *Pathra Vishesham*. Ironically, later Asianet started following Surya's path. Asianet started serials because they were anticipating that Surya will come up with serials which they were already doing in Tamil.

Surya came ready to compete with Asianet on its terms, after conducting market studies which proved Asianet's popularity. But when Asianet went into the path of commercial telecasting, the competition shifted onto Sun Network's terms.

JJ: How crucial was the migration factor?

BRP: The satellite used for transmission determines your footprint. Initially, what Asianet does is to unite the Malayali community in the Indian subcontinent. I used to do *Pathra Vishesham* those days. People in Bangalore and Bombay started recognising me. Asianet people – those who appeared on the channel those days – would be

identified immediately anywhere; those who used to travel extensively would know that.

Later, the Gulf becomes a major factor. But that was the case with newspapers too. Malayalis in Gulf desperately looked for Malayalam content. In fact, it was a Pakistani named Mallik who found out that there is a market for Malayalam print in the Gulf and started bringing newspapers and periodicals to the Gulf. I happened to meet this Mallik once when I was in the Gulf on a UNI assignment. He told me: "If you give me more Malayalam newspapers, I can sell all of them too." Such was the craving there for Malayalam content in the Gulf. But our newspapers and periodicals reached the Gulf late.

JJ: So it is with the coming of cable television that Malayalis in Kerala and outside started consuming news together again?

BRP: True. When large-scale migration started, those who went to various parts of the world had already developed a habit of reading while they were in the region. However, the unavailability of publications in Malayalam in these areas meant that Malayalam started losing its readers. It took a while for Malayalam publications to start their editions in the Gulf and other diaspora. But Asianet had succeeded in reuniting the Malayalis with the diasporic Malayali.

JJ: Was *Pathra Vishesham* popular? What was the idea behind starting a program like that?

BRP: It was Sashi Kumar's idea. Initially, there was the concern of sustaining this from episode to episode. Because, how do you sustain the interest in a program that discusses what was printed in newspapers in a visual medium? We started using clippings of the

newspapers in the beginning. Later, we started using visuals related to the news we discussed in the programme.

Malayalis were already a newspaper-savvy people, and a people under the heavy influence of media. They could easily relate to the program.

JJ: This was also a platform to nurture a critical relation to media among the public?

BRP: Yes indeed. And we started getting evidences that this was happening quite effectively. After the programme was on for some time, viewers started writing their responses to us. Some of these responses were in the format of the programme itself, analysing what a newspaper was doing, etc. They did it almost the way we would do in the programme, often imitating our style and format closely. I still remember this young chap who was doing his medicine at Kottayam Medical College: one Sajan Raghavan. He is a doctor now. He used to write to us regularly. These letters reflected how the programme influenced how the readers looked at newspapers.

But beyond its criticism of newspapers, much more profound was the programme's effect in bringing the newspaper within the limits of where you can deal with it. Before that, newspapers would stand above you and talk down to you. The programme started with the message: here is somebody who is able to talk to them.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of DIOTIMA'S will focus on 'The Body: History, Representation, Resistance'. We invite submission of articles not exceeding 3,000 words, documented in accordance with the latest edition of the MLA Handbook and with contact details of the author. Address editorial correspondence to The Editor, DIOTIMA'S, Department of English, Providence Women's College, Kozhikode – 673 009, Kerala (e-mail diotimajournal@gmail.com, Ph: 0495-2371696). Authors should send both soft and hard copies of their contributions. It should be composed in MS Word, 12 point, Times New Roman, double space.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan
Associate Professor
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
IIT Bombay

Dr. Deepa Sreenivas
Associate Professor
Centre for Women's Studies
University of Hyderabad

Priya Chandran
PhD Scholar
Dept. of Cultural Studies
EFL University, Hyderabad

Aby Abraham
PhD Scholar
Dept. of English and Comparative Literature
Central University of Kerala

Ann Mary George
PhD Scholar
Dept. of Film Studies
The English and Foreign Languages University
Hyderabad

Micah K. Thambi
PhD Scholar
Dept. of English and Comparative Literature
Central University of Kerala

Shivshankar Rajmohan A.K.
Research Scholar
Kannur University

Dr. Sudhesh N.T.
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Psychology
Christ University, Bangalore

Manju E.P.
PhD Scholar,
Centre for Comparative Literature
University of Hyderabad

Prasanth P.S.
PhD Scholar
Dept. of English
Kannur University

Dr. Sunitha Srinivas
Assistant Professor
PG Dept. of English & Centre for Research
Govt. College Mokeri

Dr. K. Arunlal
Assistant Professor
PG Dept. of English & Centre for Research
Govt. College Mokeri

Dr. Jenson Joseph
Postdoctoral Fellow
Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences
IIT Bombay