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CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Popular Culture with its multiple significations remains as a pertinent site of critical enquiry and analysis. Though imbued with varied meanings and attributes, popular culture exerts tremendous influence on socio-cultural formations and expressions, thereby also pointing to the powerful interplay of contradictory cultural forces at work within society. It is indeed noteworthy that contemporary social existence necessitates a constant engagement with the different manifestations of popular cultural forms ranging from popular media to, sometimes, the most innocuous daily practices and routines of everyday life. Thus, the experentiality of popular culture and its embeddedness within the complex network of social relations transforms it into a field of reciprocity/ negotiation that accommodates the dominant and the subversive alike. It becomes a dynamic and flexible space that suggests the presence of disparate strands of political thought that emanate from and also sustain the existing cultural system, for as John Fiske says, it is "contradictory and conflictual to its core."

When popular cultural expressions tend to be examined with respect to the different parameters of social understanding it would also open itself up to multiple interpretations, attitudes and concerns that are worthy of serious consideration. Such insights would certainly enrich the evolving sphere of scholarly debates and discussions leading to the creation of newer critical perspectives and interests. The current issue of DIOTIMA'S intends to explore such facets of this vibrant and powerful space of popular culture in terms of the production and dissemination of messages that are ideologically articulated. Accordingly, this issue of the journal attempts to incorporate research articles that capture the discourses, images and ideas perpetuated through popular cultural representations. These papers display a keen interest in probing the underlying cultural meanings and codes that invariably shape and inform cultural texts. The issue thereby seeks to generate newer dialogues that would draw upon the existing body of theoretical knowledges and also to further their aims and concerns.

The paper **Possibilities of Theorising the Aesthetics and the Diegesis of the Ugly, Monstrous and the Mad in Malayalam Commercial Cinema** by Dr.Arunlal K. and Dr. Sunitha Srinivas C. tries to understand the construction of the 'ugly' as the 'othered' aesthetic category in Malayalam cinema and relates it closely to the representations of 'madness'. The paper draws attention to the strategies employed in cinema for the creation of images of objection and proceeds to examine the multiple ways in which the notion of the 'ugly' gets expressed through the cinematic medium.

Dr. Mohamed Shafeeq Karinkurayil's paper **On the Rise of the Midfielder in Football** looks into the phenomenon of the rise of the midfielder in the popular sport of football as a cultural development that is inherently connected to the context of a global culture industry. The paper concentrates on the means through which football gets 'ancilliarised' in an attempt to cater to the demands of media platforms and changing conceptions of entertainment.

In Dr. Kavya Krishna K R's paper **Politics of Gender, Body and Caste: Understanding the Ban on Cinematic Dance in Schools of Kerala** the intricate patterns of relationship that characterise gender/ bodily performance in a given society is examined. It particularly focuses on the history of dance ban within the Kerala sphere and tries to relate the debates about a cultural ban to the markers of body, caste, gender and sexuality. The paper also critiques the category of the 'classical' by studying it in relation to the subversive and transgressive power of cinematic dance forms.

The paper **Forgotten Food And Lost Memory: A Study of Culinary Memoirs Through Malayalam Films** by Roshni P and Anuradha P R seeks to establish a connection between food and memory through an analysis of two popular Malayalam film narratives *Ustad Hotel* and *Salt and Pepper* and locates them within larger contexts of a market driven, commercialised culture.

The interplay of the politics of caste, locale and cinematic representation is explored in Priyadarshini Panchapakesan's paper **Whose Madras? Caste, Gender and Aesthetics in Tamil Cinema** by analysing Pa Ranjith"s Madras. It begins by unravelling the images and ideas about city spaces and communities disseminated through popular Tamil cinema and proceeds to close read the film Madras in terms of its portrayal of a new socio-political awareness with respect to the oppressed and the marginalised.

Abhirami Ranjith's **Breaking and Building Stereotypes on Screen: The Politics of *Orange is the New Black*** tries to understand the ways in which popular culture functions to create stereotypes that tend to be challenged within the same space, by referring to the prison genre drama and its representation, the American web series, *Orange is the New Black*. The paper points to the contradictory status of the text by arguing about the popular ideas about its supposed feminist content and the negation of the same by a more pronounced strain of gender stereotyping that adheres to popular conception.

Arathy Asok's paper ***The Metamorphosis of a Moustache: Theatre as Resistance in a Campus*** tries to analyses the role played by campus theatres as sites of cultural resistance and resurgence, drawing upon actual instances of critical questionings and personal experiences.

Mariyumma V. K's paper **Rootless Trees in Search of Soil: Othering of the Other- State Workers in Kerala with Special**

Reference to *The Bengali Riot* ponders over the influence of popular social media platforms in perpetuating misconstrued images and ideas about individual identities by referring to the Malayalam novel Bengali Kalapam authored by Amal. The paper also studies the significances of cultural impact with reference to the social othering of migrant labourers within the Kerala context.

Anagha Anil's **Transposed Iconographies, Transcended Ideologies: The Commercialisation of Che Guevara, Bob Marley and Hinduism in Popular Culture** observes the transformation of culture-specific icons into products of mass consumption, aided by the proliferation of technology- driven popular cultural forms. It takes into consideration the democratisation of religious and cultural figures and images to stress the dynamic nature of an emergent popular culture.

In Anaswara Ramachandran's **Young Adults, Serious Fiction: Effects of the Representation of Suicide and Mental Illness in *13 Reasons Why***, the subtle nuances associated with popular cultural representations of suicide and mental illness are examined in relation to Jay Asher's novel *13 Reasons Why* and its subsequent television adaptation by Netflix as a series. The central aim of the paper is to determine the means through which such depictions engage with the socially relevant concerns and the extent to which they consolidate/ alter prevalent notions about such issues.

This issue on Popular Culture, thus, incorporates varied thematic strands that significantly constitute the contentious site of popular culture and offer newer ideas about the ideological values, beliefs and attitudes that regulate and form its different cultural manifestations.

Regards
Editor

POSSIBILITIES OF THEORISING THE AESTHETICS AND THE DIEGESIS OF THE UGLY, MONSTROUS AND THE MAD IN MALAYALAM COMMERCIAL CINEMA

DR.ARUNLAL K. AND DR. SUNITHA SRINIVAS C.

The term 'ugly' refers to the *other*ed aesthetic category in a culture. This category demarcates a dis-identification with the *beautiful* subjects. Though an abstract category in itself, 'the ugly' is understood as delineable because the aesthetics of everyday experience evolves from a catalogue of encounters with *ugly* physicalities (of things as well as bodies). The category of 'ugly,' is also a component in shaping the commonsense surrounding the minorities and unprivileged strata in gender, race, caste or class divisions. The commonsense of ugliness around the marginalised groups is reinforced as they are performed in representational arts such as cinema and television.

Malayalam cinema assembles and configures the ugly components in its own specific ways. The current paper is an attempt towards understanding the various representations of the variations of the category of ugly in Malayalam cinema. The cinematic space cannot shy away from depicting what is 'cast off': both the commercial and the art-house movies find themselves incumbent on representing the category of the ugly and the politically incorrect. The paper tries to address mainly the representation of madness in Malayalam cinema since this is a major subcategory of the idea of the ugly/monstrous, and also historicise in a perfunctory manner the New Generation cinema's fascination with the representation of the abject.

Cinema, among many things, is also a way of perceiving cultural realities. It addresses the audience using culturally intelligible narratives and performances. Consequently, they can reaffirm and intensify a sense of belonging and impart a rarefied aesthetic education through these narratives. In this sense, cinema as a 'shared narrative' falls within the ambit of the 'social imaginary'—a narrative that is developed in relation to other human narratives to locate themselves in a community. They are anchored in a complex system of cultural relationships determined by institutions and social forces. In its potential to address large communities — in the case of Hollywood productions, for instance, cinema is made to address a global consumer crowd — cinema communicates a comprehensive artistic vision that few other contemporary cultural artefacts can aspire to develop. A total grasp of the whole 'text' (a visual assemblage) at any one time eludes the audience, and a 'complete' understanding arises only as the act or interpreting comes to an end (or even much later). As an 'imaginary' (a representation of collective life) it visualises a set of values, bodies, laws and symbols common to a particular group and the corresponding society through which people imagine their social whole. It (as a 'social imaginary') presents an array of visual images which are socially shared and let the individuals belonging to a society identify and distinguish what should be considered real/unreal or normal/abnormal in their milieu. Social imaginaries (like of violence and beauty) are often constituted by the circulation of literary metaphors and visual images; in this sense, a 'social imaginary' is a specific network of significations, collectively shared in a society at a point in history. This network and its referrals could be circulated outside the original society so as to represent its aesthetic, moral and political stands.

Early twentieth-century thinkers like Benedict Anderson and Arjun Appadurai have described how with an increasing affordance of the mass mediation technology, "imagination" as politico-cultural category gets

increasingly incorporated into the everyday practices of modern subjects. Appadurai even goes to the extent of stating that 'imagination' is "a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity." He points to how it has become "a collective, social fact" (3-4). Cinema, television, Cable TV and the related visual culture industry, have transformed prior forms of social production, consumption, and circulation of cultural texts and have doubtlessly brought about a change of social relations. A variety of emergent imagined communities imagining and feeling together (a collective imaginary) has now become a reality. In other words, cinema offers moral and aesthetic systems that feed on and is fed upon by actual human community systems. The judgment of what is aesthetic and what is unaesthetic, what is ugly and what is monstrous, what is heroic and villainous and so on, are therefore important to the constitution of a cinematic narrative system.

According to Cornelius Castoriadis, the 'imaginary' may be both individual and collective. It gets expressed by means of the narratives that socio-cultural representations create. There are two processes that go into the expression of this: one is the process of anchoring, where a certain meaning is given to a new object by bringing it among the previous stock of notions. The second is that of objectifying. Here, an object is given concreteness selecting its main features and recomposing them in a scheme or figure. In objectifying, it gains a more accessible structure and becomes tangible as an object. Being a social representation cinema supplies the 'social imaginary' with ample raw materials regarding the beautiful and the ugly. Since it relies on the affect-aspect for its narrative impact, a multi-layered analysis of the main features of the film text (the filming angle, the star persona of the actors/characters, actions, affects and the soundtrack, a content/discourse analysis of the verbal material), as its aesthetic resources, becomes essential. In fact, the affect aspects of stars, music, spectacle, emotion, and dialogue have always been

investigated seriously by film theorists. Allusive words, images and ideas when deployed successfully, bring out an explosive effect on screen.

Since the visual aesthetics of modern feature cinema is principally constituted around representing the concrete and the physical, body is cinema's central semiotic site wherein ideas of beauty and ugliness are played out. In a popular cinema, the representation of the body more often than not revolves around the depiction of the hero, the heroine and the villain, three important bodies that form the focal points of the unfolding narrative. Their bodies serve as 'locations' of the preferred and the ugly, and consequently, the good and the evil. While watching an engaging popular film, the narrative can get the spectator to identify with the Hero/star as a superhuman/charismatic individual and allow himself/herself to engage with society's prevalent political and moral convictions.

On a micro-level, representing the Ugly in cinema involves several picturisation procedures that dispense images of abjection centered on the human body— depiction of the dead, dying or diseased bodies, and bodily waste like blood, vomit, sweat, tears, saliva, and putrefying flesh are frequent. On the other hand, representing the aesthetic of ugliness in a macro-level involves redrawing the representational boundaries. The vampire/zombie cinema and the horror genre in general, for instance, redraws the binary differences between human and nonhuman, man and beast, and natural and supernatural; the soft-porn cinema problematises the divide between normal and abnormal sexual desire and gender roles, the ideal and the dirty/abject body. It is possible to read the portrayal of murder, carnage, adultery, jealousy, craftiness, sorrow and similar morally problematic acts as extension of this problematisation of boundaries: it is possible that the cinematic portrayal of a psychopath serial killer might add more glamour to the character in question, though the horror of the murders is graphically depicted in the cinema. Some psychological states such as hysteria, schizophrenic behaviour, depression, obsession and

misdirected desire-related diseases are now part of popular vocabulary and visual commonsense thanks to their repeated representation in commercial cinema. In the popular imagination a hysterical, or a schizoid person might coincide with how the popular films represent them. In fact, one of the central depictions of the 'Ugly' in Malayalam films happens to be the representation of the mad subject.

The 'impaired body' is often placed in antithesis to the 'normal body.' Acts of madness and animality make the former category 'outsiders' and position them outside of the rational social order. Onscreen representation of abject bodies is a two-faced activity: on the one hand, it stresses on the need of psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry, and on the other it legitimises sorcery and exorcism as well. The mad subject's exclusion and the taboo of the possessed body are juxtaposed in the plots: the exorcist shares his insignia with the psychiatrist's couch.

In the years that marked Kerala's modernity and Malayalam cinema's coming of age cinematic representation became perhaps the most important means to demarcate the abominable from the acceptable. The popular conception and faith in modern medicine gathered strength during these years. However, the arrival of newer medicinal practices did not replace the earlier norms of social exclusion completely (viz. physical disability, caste hierarchy etc): illnesses carried metaphors of exclusion with them. Movies that had hospitals as their plot setting, or doctors as their protagonists, took liberties in the representation of excludable 'mad' bodies. Cinematic madness took its primary lessons always from popular psychoanalytic ideas. Psychoanalysts like AT Kovoor wrote movie scripts during the 1970s, and even played the character of psychoanalysts in films. With the release of such marital and erotic psychodramas as *Punarjanmam* (1972)*, Swapnadanam* (1976) psychological narratives emerged as a subgenre in Malayalam cinema.

In *Punarjanmam* and *Swapnadanam*, the two original, early and successful psychologically inclined film narratives, the mad characters are represented as patients controlled absolutely and exclusively by the institutions of psychological authority. The bodies of the mad are sites where power was exerted visibly and with impunity. The psychological institution could 'discipline and punish' so that the subject improves status and becomes 'normal.' The subjects were also 'monster-patients' who posed threats to the 'normalcy' of the society. This stigma has a long genealogy, connecting it up to the pre-modern social understanding that mad people carried God's will or judgment against sinfulness.

Certain mannerisms such as innocent nudity, inability to engage with the hospital's procedures, an inclination to 'break the law', a lack of proper sense of the past, or a confused memory mark the aspects of the physical monstrosity of mad subjects. In the cinemas that came after the 1970s, mad characters were shown to be treated with corporal punishment: it was passed off as 'part of the treatment'. Sequences of punishment-treatment involved subjecting the patient to electric shock, performing bloody surgeries on the patient, castration, paralysing and caning. The punishments of caning and blood-letting were also part of the indigenous witchcraft regime: the exorcist performed these acts to rid the body of the demons. Exorcism meets psychoanalysis squarely in this aspect, and in many a successful psychodrama of Malayalam cinema, (such as *Manichithrathazhu* 1993) the two figures of exorcist and psychiatrist work together. Exorcising a demon and curing madness (even delusional projections of characters as in *Arikil Oral* (2013) and *Njangalude Veettile Athithikal* (2014)) both use, in the cinema, an esoteric vocabulary and sadistic methods.

Psychiatrists in the cinema signify a central social agency: he clearly exercises a power directly connected to the ugly body and aberrant mind at his disposal. The characters' penal-cum-therapeutic

improvisations in the plot (which often involves prolonged corporeal torture of the mentally sick subject) are both popularly applauded and medically sanctioned. In such plot events, the character of psychiatrist wins positive support from the other characters; they even agree to play roles in the drama that he would direct. Films like *Ulladakkam*(1991)*, Manichithrathaazhu*(1993)*,* and *Ayal Kathayezhuthukayanu* (1998) and *Naranathu Thamburan* (2001) are cases in point. In the Malayalam movies, the institution of the mental hospital is a lock-away of not just derailed minds, but also gross and monstrous physicality. The assumption is, individuals here are "trained to new habits, new patterns of conduct; their bodies subject to a dressage of disciplinary routines, their conduct monitored as closely as possible. […] Classifications, timetables and routines organize activity in space and time" (Jones 118).

Apart from hysteria, schizophrenia and erotic abnormalities which went into the plots of a majority of the psychodramas, the cinema of the 80's and 90's also used the loss of memory as a trope to represent mad and maladjusted subjects. There were many movies — *Innale, MookkillaRajyath, PidakkozhiKoovunna Noottandu, Friends, Varnakkazhchakal, OruAbhibhashakante Case Diary, Pranayavrnangal, Thoovalkkotaram, Thilakkam* to name a few — that portrayed characters who partially or completely lost their memories. This amnesiac condition also placed the affected under the protection and scrutiny of the institution of psychiatry. In films like *Innale*, the heroine who cannot recollect her past after she meets with an accident, is protected first in the mental institution, and later as an extension, in the marriage to the man who runs the institution.

Films used varieties of amnesia freely in the decades to come for the obvious reason that the condition offered easy diegetic reversals, suspense or plot resolutions. Regardless of whether the film was a comedy or melodrama, the plots reinforced that the mad persons must be separated from the family; that the hospital is the best choice for accommodating these people; that, if they are kept in the family, they must be chained; that the modern state allows the mad subject 'a license to kill' (a dangerously distorted reading of the legal provisions allowed for the mentally abnormal) and therefore the farther away s/he is kept, the safer the society. The psychiatrist and the institution of psychiatry was represented to be wielding a license to confine and control the 'monstrous' people. The plot-horrors about 'demonic possession' extended to the beliefs that mental disability is a concern beyond the scope or control of scientific/medical knowledge. The operative aesthetic metaphor in this case — of the 'mad monster' as an 'outsider' or an abnormal creation — also depends largely on a culturally enforced equation (between inner and outer beauty and goodness, along with its converse), according to which 'outer ugliness' visibly testifies to the state of an 'inner world' (individual or collective).

In recent decades, with the institutions of modernity running into several historical crises, and post-modernity and digital technologies finding their way into the social structure, the cinematic aesthetics has come to change significantly. A newer 'Noir' variety of cinema, dubbed "New Generation cinema," appeared in Kerala roughly in the first decade of the millennium. These films tried to connect to Noir experiments elsewhere in the world, and many promising cinematic experimentations that were afoot in Tamil cinema during this period. As is usual with noir varieties, a closer and more realistic take on the monstrous and uglier side of life was a major preoccupation of Malyalam New Generation cinema too. Plots stopped shying away from discussing extramarital relations, and the camera started picturising violence and sex in a more graphic way. Special effects and computer generated graphics were increasingly deployed in the visualization of the seamier side in these films (as in the spectacle of mayhem one finds in *Angamali Diaries* and *Jallikettu*).

Apart from the Noir variety, the New Generation Malayalam cinema also ushered in an interesting brand of comic films into the culture. These were increasingly meta-cinematic and self-referential in nature. Language is less dramatic, expletive-ridden and more dialect-based than it was in earlier comedies. One of these recently successful comic films, *Kattappanayile Hrithik Roshan* (2016) was built explicitly on the idea of the aesthetic superiority of the fair-skinned. The film revolves around a dark-skinned youth who cannot make it big in the films because of his looks. He debuts in a film during his school days as an extra, playing the role of a chain-snatcher. Ever since, he was offered only roles of petty thieves, pickpockets and chain snatchers. The charisma of the name of the North-Indian film-star Hrithik Roshan is used as a foil to foreground the 'ugliness' of Kichu, the protagonist. The film brings a fair-skinned heroine as Kichu's object of desire.

Using ugliness and deformity as resources for comedy is however not new. From circus clowns to television shows, the stereotypical comedians have for the most part been physically 'unaesthetic.' Or rather, the fact that they perform crude comic episodes made it imperative in the representational logic that such bodies are not to be taken seriously—'they are ugly and undesirable, and at best only laughable'. Physiognomical differences are underlined and are symbolically accentuated by differences in bearing, gesture, posture and behaviour. Dress and food are all signposts that derive their meaning and value from their position in the system of distinctive signs which they constitute.

The body is perceived as the most natural expression of one's personality in visual culture. The 'physical'/facial signs (the colour and thickness of lips or expressions as well as the shape of the face or the mouth) are indices of a 'moral' physiognomy that is socially characterised. In other words, in the representational visual culture, body is usually perceived as the very materialisation of class and taste. In New Generation

cinemas like *Kammattippadam*, *Salt and Pepper*, *Da Thadiya* and *Thamasha* these differences are shown in a very pronounced fashion. *Kammattipaadam* supposedly uses the dark-skinned characters, played by Vinayakan, Manikandan and Anitha to dismantle the stereotypes of hero/heroine that exist in Malayalam cinema. Yet, the depiction or superimposing of typical features on the characters Balan and Ganga raise questions of 'ethnographic violence' even here. Though it subverts the dominant aesthetic sensibility, the Dalit body is maintained in the visual fabric as the 'other' (Markose 50-51).

Aesthetic engagement is also an aspect of spectatorship since objects are understood through particular embodied positions, cultural values, beliefs, and points of view. The significations of ugliness and monstrosity attach themselves to individuals in ways that grow in and out of the concept's changing cultural construction. The Ugly has its own identity in systems of aesthetics where it generates tension in intriguing and repelling—one of the ways it challenges a pure aesthetic judgment. It is to a collective imagination that cinema appeals. On another axis, cinema also goes into creating this collective imagination. In the years to come, understanding cinematic aesthetics in our culture will also mean understanding the category of ugly in its nuances. As Zizek points out, contrary to the standard idealist argument that conceives ugliness as a defective mode of beauty (as its distortion), "one should assert the ontological primacy of ugliness. It is beauty that is a kind of defense against the ugly in its repulsive existence *tout court*, since . . . what is ugly is ultimately the brutal fact of existence (of the real) as such" (21). In a convergence of aesthetic and social practices, bodies in art and in society not only contribute to a genealogy of ugliness but also destabilise a singular definition of the category of the ugly.

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ON THE RISE OF THE MIDFIELDER IN FOOTBALL

DR. MOHAMED SHAFEEQ KARINKURAYIL

This paper looks at the prominence the midfielder has gained in global football in the past few years, and connects it to tiki-taka, a successful football formation. After tracing a genealogy of tiki-taka and the rise of the midfielder, this paper reads both these developments symptomatically as operations of the ancillarisation of football.

Introduction

This paper is a modest attempt at what is an enormous task – to study the form of a global game in the context of the global economy. The work only deals with broad outlines, and merely gestures to the possibilities for future and more in-depth engagement. In particular, this paper is an attempt to look into the phenomenon of the rise of the midfielder in football as the symptom of how football got ancillarised into a burgeoning culture industry and its need for round the clock entertainment. Ancillarisation of football, here, refers to the diffusion of football into multiple modes of engagement with it, and is characterised by and dependent upon the diffusion of the game into multiple media such as the television and OTT platforms, the presence of 24x7 sports channels and the establishment of channels dedicated to particular football clubs (such as MUTV of Manchester United), multiple programmes based on football in addition to live matches, and multiple means of engagement with sports such as through computer games, hash tagging opinions on social media, selecting dream team, etc.

A New World

The 1998 World Cup in France signalled a paradigm change. The world of Maradona, Klinsmann, Romario and Bebeto would give way to a world in its birth pangs. The new age would be crowned by Zidane, and the old world was both unhappy and stupefied. Zidane's first goal in that unbelievable final match against Brazil came from a header from a corner kick. Headers were not the path to glory in football. It missed the charisma of a forward's charge towards the enemy goal post. It missed the epic and allegorical dimensions of a single player who would face the tackles, the shoulders and the shins of the enemy as they will to his fall. An indistinguishable header from a headless swarm! The old world was unhappy. Later in the match, another header from another corner. Another goal by Zidane. There was no dribbling, no miracle. Two set-piece goals with players of both teams swarming around the goal post. It could have been any one. Is this whom you call a hero? And a third one came from Emmanuel Petit. A centre midfielder! Who would have thought a centre midfielder would come all the way ahead, solo, and charge against the opponent goal keeper? The old world was dumbfounded. And would score a goal? Even his own teammates found it incredible.

But this was a new world. In 1998, I, along with my brother and my youngest uncle, spent more time on the terrace trying to adjust the tv antenna to watch the Japan-Argentina match than the time of the match itself. Doordarshan 1 (DD 1) was not airing that match (DD2 was, and it wasn't available except by tweaking the antenna). Soon the tv antenna would give way to the cable. Those like me whose switch to cable tv would happen in the early years of the new millennium would see more of Zidane in the coming years. We would see the swirl of his feet in his goal against Munich, we would see the grace with which the ball traps against his foot. We would see a hero who wasn't afraid of speaking politics. We would also see a tragic hero whose loss of emotional control in one crucial moment would spell the fall of a nation.

Zidane was an unlikely hero. He was a midfielder, and an immigrant. But Zidane was just a beginning. Or to put it more accurately, for those like me whose only touch with world football was the once-in-four-year tryst with FIFA World Cup, Zidane was just the flash of a wider change unbeknownst to us. The next crop of heroes in World Cup would confirm that a new world was now a fact of life. David Beckham, Edgar Davids, Ronaldinho, Luis Figo… In hindsight, the dialectical battle between forwards and midfielders were at play in 1994 too. After all, Roberto Baggio, the hero who will fall and who will rise and keep walking, was a midfielder. To recount an anecdote from Freud: *Ex ossibusultor-* – out of my bones shall arise my avenger.

At roughly the same time, another footballing style was on the rise, at times donning the mantle of invincibility – the *tiki-taka*. The rise of the midfielder and the rise of tiki-taka are not just coincidentally of the same time. They are in fact of the same marrow. Taken to its extreme, a tiki-taka team would only have midfielders, a logical extremity that would also spell doom if at all realised, as numerous commentators have noted in the aftermath of Spain's exit in the 2014 world cup. Tiki-taka is in fact one of the symptoms which are hyper visible, which in fact hides the fact of how much the abnormal is part of the normal itself – just like how the figure of a corrupt politician hides and is a window to the general corruption of everyday life.

At One with the World

In a non-peer reviewed paper, Laszlo Gayarmati, Haewoon Kwak and Pablo Rodriguez, in their 2014 study of dataset from the English, French, German, Italian and Spanish first divisions for the 2012/13 season contend that, one, Barcelona has come up with a unique style of soccer (which was then already called tiki-taka), and two, that tiki-taka is not at all a random passing around but predominantly follows a mode of ABAC passing (A passes to B, B passes back to A, and then A passes to a

third player C). 2012/13 was definitely not the best of the seasons for Barcelona. They lost the La Liga title to Athletico Madrid, and they crashed out of Champions League in the semi-final by a 7-goal margin against Bayern Munich (who would then go on to become champions). Similarly, a 2017 study of linguistic heterogeneity and football performance by Keith Ingersoll, Edmund Malesky, and Sebastian M. Saiegh, based on Champions League matches between 2003-2012, while finding out that there is a positive correlation between linguistic heterogeneity in a team and their success rate, also found that Barcelona is among the lowest amongst the top-flight teams in terms of heterogeneity. This is despite the fact that Barcelona has remained a very successful team for the time period considered. Both of these studies imply that Barcelona is an exception. However, I would argue that in the style of tiki-taka Barcelona was playing out on the field what was happening to the thought-process in football all around. I will come to that later, but before that a little more about the fascinating historical underpinnings of tiki-taka.

Tiki-taka was named so in 2006 by the football journalist Andrés Montes who compared the to-and-forth style of passing to a toy. But the roots of tiki-taka go back to the years of the World War II and the Cold War that followed it. The concept of cybernetics, which has at its core the treatment of human beings and machines as mechanisms that are connected in a network of information, was ideologically central to imagining a new style of play that would eventually evolve into tiki-taka. Cybernetics reimagined the world as one interconnected network in which the trajectory of mechanism within a system can be predicted, notwithstanding human will. A project that found simultaneous application on both sides of the polar cold war, cybernetics was influential in the field of football. Hans-Joachim Braun mentions how the idea of cybernetics was in sync with the idea of scientific socialism in which the individuality of the player was to be made subservient to the total system of the team and found implementation especially in Dynamo Kiev. On the other side

of the Cold War, cybernetics was influential in two and apparently oppositional positions. Fred Turner, in his book *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, argues that cybernetics was an intersecting point of interest for the US military establishment as well as for the counterculture youth which followed in the coming decades, especially in the 1960s. The idea of cybernetics promulgated interdisciplinarity in scientific (war) research while on the other hand it also gave way to conceptions of an interconnected non-hierarchical universe for the counter culturalists who retired from society to form communes based on such ideals.

The two universes came together in the figure of Johan Cruyff whose demeanour and individual charisma on the pitch and outside combined with the system of football the Dutch team was playing, a system called "Total Football" which was formulated in Ajax which closely followed the developments in Kiev, on the other side of the wall. Total football as a concept was first put in place by Jack Reynolds and was a response to the change in off-side rule in 1925 according to which there need to be only two players (including the goalkeeper) of the opposing team between a player and the goalpost, while the rule which preceded it from 1863 required three. The system of total football was modified by Rinus Michels in the 1960s. Michels, and his mentee Cruyff moved to Barcelona later on. Total Football in theory gets rid of positional football and instead envisages a system in which any player could play in any position. For this, as Hans-Joachim notes, the field is visualised longitudinally thus giving way to a pressing football in which the players move forwards and backwards en bloc.

The football that is now known as tiki-taka was a further development on Total Football by Pep Guardiola who trained under Cruyff in Barcelona. With the ABAC pass format the longitudinal lines could give way to geometric shapes that could portion off the playing field giving stress to zonal play. The tactic demands high mobility on the part of the players, and is effective precisely due to fluctuations in formations,

to be epitomised in Lionel Messi as the "false 9". Guardiola would carry the style with him to Bayern Munich, and then to Manchester City. The success of the style has also led to styles that were meant to counter tiki-taka.

Tiki-taka as a symptom

In his book, *The Ball is Round*, David Goldblatt opines that the post 1990s European football has reached the levels of the absurd. Football telecast is no more the monopoly of national broadcasters. DD 1 is a distant memory now. The numbers in terms of player wages, television right prices and hours dedicated to football, the exclusive football presses, combined with the loop of rumours, gossip and the other blades of the celebrity mill, the flying in of millionaires and foreign brands, the newly constructed stadia, all of this doesn't tally with the economic fact that only the very top clubs are ever making a profit in the football business. This ancillarisation of football – the explosion of football into media and accessory merchandise – is also accompanied by the increasing fact of migration, national, racial and linguistic heterogeneity in football. According to Sunder Katwala, at the 2014 FIFA World Cup, 65% of all the players lived or worked outside the states they were representing at the tournament. Moreover, 12% of the players were playing for countries they were not born in. This was an unprecedented turn of events.

The Bosman ruling of 1995 had, by quashing restrictions around a number of foreign players from within European Union and curbing the right of one nation or entities therein from hindering its citizens from working in another member state, already removed restrictions from personnel moving around within the European Union. The age that we are in also sees increasing numbers of bestowal of citizenships and dual citizenships in a bid to be noted in the footballing arena. The movement of managers across nations has also meant that the era of national styles, if ever there was one, is decisively over. The year-long national

leagues combined with European championships and the world club championship, the continental tournaments and world cup, the international friendliness, etc. all squeezed into the break period, international football now demands extreme mobility on the part of the players inside and outside the pitch. Part of this mobility is also the potential to switch between playing styles, as when playing under different managers.

The rise of the midfielder is, in such a light, not just a coincidence. What it signals is the coming of an age in which high efficiency is to be paired with multi-tasking that would allow rapid structural shifts in the play, and may indeed be a pointer of the world to come with the unprecedented levels of automation requiring personnel to switch roles at short notice. This is not to say the midfielder heroes are shorn of charisma. Just think of Beckham. The point on the other hand is that this charisma, or even divine-inspiration, as Eric Brons points out, is precisely because these are individuals who display flashes of other-worldliness in this rigidly ordered world of play strategies and stadium alignments including the grid like seating arrangements where earlier one could have expected people to be rubbing shoulders against each other in the joint commune of football fandom.

Postscript: What should also invite our attention is whether we have as yet developed a language that could speak about sports in a collective rather than an individuating vocabulary. Perhaps the passions attached with teams that we increasingly witness is an image that is yet to find words and therefore seeking refuge in worn words of yesterday. One should also ask if the increasing visibility of managers as stars in their own right often acquiring much more prominence in our everyday football talk is how the language of sports is channelling itself between the move away from specialists to the group-system and yet eager for heroes in their epic narratives.

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POLITICS OF GENDER, BODY AND CASTE: UNDERSTANDING THE BAN ON CINEMATIC DANCE IN SCHOOLS OF KERALA

DR. KAVYA KRISHNA K.R

Introduction

Dance and its performers were always under the surveillance of colonial and postcolonial authorities in India. The reform of *Devadasi* dance in early twentieth century, the ban on *Lavani* folk dance in 1940's and the 2005 ban on Bar Dance are instances of the same. The ban on Cinematic Dance in schools of Kerala issued in 2005 and 2011 by Kerala Educational Department adds to the history. Focusing on the moment of Cinematic Dance ban in schools, the paper will try to do two things: on the one hand it will try to map the debates on dance ban generated in Kerala Public Sphere and secondly it will try to read the apprehension on Cinematic Dance, actually the anxiety about the function of dance as a social text that can pose threat to the existing norms of gender/bodily performance in the given society. The question of gender/bodily performance cannot but intersect with that of caste in the Kerala/Indian society. To explore the above concerns the paper has to analyse contemporary print, online and visual materials on the Cinematic Dance ban and it also will go back to the history of classical dance reform in Kerala/ India[1].

The Ban on Cinematic Dance in Schools of Kerala

Even though not strictly implemented, it was in 2005 that the first circular to stop Cinematic Dance along with Fashion Shows was issued by the Kerala Education Department. Yet, the heated debate on ban on Cinematic Dance in schools of Kerala started with the then Director of Public Instruction (DPI) APM Muhammad Hanish issuing a special circular to stop teaching and performing cinematic dance in government, aided and unaided schools of Kerala with immediate effect from 1 August , 2011. The director in his press statement said, 'It has come to our notice that certain private organisations and TV channels are promoting Cinematic Dance in schools all over the state. It has reached ridiculous levels with classrooms being used for Cinematic Dance training' (Hanish)[2]. He further added that the dance trainers are using it as an opportunity to exploit the students and a ban is the need of the hour. The ban invited varied responses with many parents welcoming it as they considered cinematic dance as 'low' and 'vulgar' art which demoralise the children. Many artists from film fraternity expressed their concern over the ban. For instance actress Swetha Menon in her press statement said that 'cinematic dance per se is not the problem and the ban is not a solution, instead teachers and parents should take care of children's presentation and attire for the dance' (Menon)[3].

Mapping the Debates on the Ban: Dance, Body, Caste and Gender

This section will try to map some of the debates on the ban on Cinematic Dance that emerged in Kerala Public Sphere which can be read as focused on questions of dance, body, gender and caste. K.K. Chandran (2005) in his article titled 'Cinematic Dance Zintabad' made some interesting observations on the implications of the cinematic dance ban in relation to the larger socio-cultural milieu. He points out that the ban on Cinematic Dance reinstates the status of Kadhakali, Mohiniyattam,

Bharatanatyam etc. as classical and aristocratic art forms. All classical art forms have religious connotations; cinematic dance is a secular art form without the backing of God/religion. It may be because of the lack of religious backing that there is nobody to oppose the ban on cinematic dance. The classical art forms have repetitive structure in movements, costumes and literature and it never fully utilises the possibilities of the body. On the other hand cinematic dance celebrates the body. Those who oppose cinematic dance even forget the history of exploitation that the female performers of the so called classical dances have undergone while it was considered as *devadasi* dance.

The article argues that in India dance was seen as feminine and the arena of women and its main intent was to provide visual pleasure to men. Cinematic Dance questions the belief in India that dance means feminine movements. In cinematic dance both men and women perform same kind of dance steps/ body movements and use same kind of costume. And thus Cinematic Dance creates a kind of gender equality. It is meant for the enjoyment of both men and women. It gives ample space to use the movement possibilities of the male body. The article poses the question, while the showing off of the bare upper torso of the male body in Bharatanatyam on stage is not considered as vulgarity how can fashion shows be considered as vulgar.

The article further criticises the socially recognised group-dance forms like Thiruvathira and Oppana. Thiruvathira (historically performed only by upper caste women of Kerala) is a dance form where only the back of the women performers are visible for the audience. Oppana, is a group dance Muslim women performs can never untie itself from the institution of marriage. These dance forms got recognised and made their way into public stages and became competition items in School Youth festivals in Kerala because they have caste/ religious backing. Cinematic Dance does not have any institutional support. The article

argues that if dance positions and movements needs to be criticised based on Victorian morality then some *karanas* (dance postures) in *Bharatanatyam* can also be criticised. Instead of being stuck with tradition/ blind following of *Natyasastra* and gendered beliefs about body and dance, the article asks society to understand the historical and social changes so that they do not feel the need to oppose Cinematic Dance.

Another interesting debate on the issue of Cinematic Dance ban can be found in the documentary 3D Stereo Caste (2012) directed by the Dalit musician and researcher A S Ajith Kumar. The documentary deals with the question of caste in the field of arts in contemporary Kerala. The documentary is divided into different chapters and sections. Chapter two of the documentary titled 'Shakin', Singin' and Caste' has got two further sections 'Cinematic Dance' and 'Folkin'Caste'. The section on Cinematic Dance interviews a few cinematic dance troupes in Kerala and records their opinion on the ban on cinematic dance in schools. In the opinion of the dancers, if cinematic dance is substandard, classical dances too can be considered so. If movements in Cinematic Dance are vulgar, then the body movements and the projection of only certain body parts in classical dance can also be read as vulgar. They feel that what is appropriate and what is inappropriate depends on the perspective of the viewer and there is nothing which is particularly gross with Cinematic Dance per se. For the dancers, cinematic dance gives them the chance for instant improvisation. They feel that Classical dances are so rigidly structured that there is no scope for improvisation. Male dancers in Cinematic Dance troupes says that most classical dances are traditionally performed by women but cinematic dance allows the male dancer to explore the dancing possibilities of male body. In cinematic dance there is less gender segregation in terms of body movements or steps, both men and women can perform same dance steps (a point that was made earlier by K.K. Chandran as well). The male dancers also express their grievance regarding the general public viewing their self styling in the

form of wearing ear rings, modern dress or maintaining long hair as criminal act. The cinematic dancers see the ban as an attempt to boost classical dance and marginalise Cinematic Dance. The Cinematic Dance performers shown in the documentary and for that matter most of the cinematic dance troupes in Kerala, are from subaltern or minority backgrounds. The domain of the Classical dances still belongs largely to the upper castes. The documentary in a way confirms that the issue of caste and gender plays a crucial role in making Cinematic Dance as something to be monitored or banned.

Another two sections of the documentary, even though not directly related to Cinematic Dance can add to the discussion on dance as its relation to body and gender. One section of the documentary shows the opinion of the veteran playback singer Dr. K.J. Yesudas on the recent practice of professional singers dancing while singing on stage. He expresses his dismay about the practice of dancing or doing any kind of body performance while singing. He considers dancing while singing as an act which 'defiles' music. He voices his agony about the disappearance of melodies and emergence of 'fast numbers' which calls for the 'shaking' of the body. He considers such music compositions as having less musical quality and names that kind of music as 'work out' music and considers them as good only for body exercise or work out. Yesudas's argument points to the belief that music is 'pure' and 'divine' and the inclusion of body movements or dance into its performance 'defiles' music. In this discourse, dance becomes something impure' as it involves 'body'. This argument demands us to think about dance as part of our studies on embodied gender experience or the need to study dance as a 'bodily text'.

The opinions of K.J.Yesudas will be clear when it is contrasted with the views of Praseetha, a Dalit folk song performer shown in the next section of the documentary. She dances and shakes her body according to the rhythm of the song she performs and even goes amidst the audience. In that way she transgresses the spatial limits set for female performers by classical art form practitioners. She says that there is nothing wrong in dancing or moving the body while singing. She is happy if her song succeeds in making her audience to dance to its rhythm. She says that folk songs always have a story, an idea and a politics to convey; the success of the performance and the song depends on how successful she is in conveying that politics through her eye contact with the audience, through her voice and through her body. The folk song performer obviously transgresses the rule that music should not be made impure by use of 'body' and 'dance'

As the ban on cinematic dance is in educational institutions, it is imperative to discuss the Kerala State Youth Festivals: a yearly festival conducted to promote art among school children, which is also the largest school youth festival in Asia. Winning a prize in State Youth Festival makes the child an artist with prospects for an acclaimed future. It is a moment of pride for the child's family as he/she will be made a celebrity by the media coverage of the event. Many who made achievements in the festival were absorbed by the film industry. The art forms which secured a place among the competition items for the festival are considered as socially approved art forms. Cinematic Dance or songs are strictly prohibited in the festival as per the festival manifesto. Many dance forms including the classical dance form Mohiniyattam and the group/folk dance forms Thiruvathira and Oppana entered into the list of competition items only by 1980s. But one need to ask questions like who could study the classical dance forms like Mohiniyattam, Bharatanatyam or Kuchipudi which are the prestigious competition items in the festival and what is the economic and cultural capital required for the training in such art forms. By banning Cinematic Dance, not only from School Youth Festivals, but also from the premises of schools, the authorities are negating the very possibility of doing a dance performance for many students who could not afford to study or perform classical dances.

Making it Classical: The Case of Bharatanatyam and Mohiniyattam

To understand how Cinematic Dance becomes a social issue and something which needs to be banned from schools, it is necessary to understand the process of cleansing and setting of rules and regulations the so called classical dances like Bharatanatyam and Mohiniyattam have undergone in the early twentieth century. A close reading of the changes and rules made while 'reinventing' these dances as 'classical' will help us understand that the aim of the regulations were to make the dance form into something which can be performed by a middle class, upper caste woman in a public space by distancing the dance from its Devadasi history. In that sense I have argued elsewhere too that the aim of reinvention was not just to set rules for training in a dance form but to make the body and movements of the performer ideally gendered[4].

Let us first look at the case of Bharatanatyam briefly, focusing on the contributions of the pioneer dance reformer Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986). Arundale along with E. Krishna Iyer (1897-1968) and V. Raghavan (1908-1979) played a major role in converting Sadir into modern Bharatanatyam at Madras Music Academy. The aim of the reform movement in 1930s was to overcome the repudiation attached to Sadir as a Devadasi dance form and make it into a dance form which can be taken up by 'respectable' middle class/upper caste women. Some of the changes introduced includes (as discussed by Meduri: 2008): stopping the practice of the nattuvanar/male dance teacher and the musical accompaniment artists going/standing behind the dancer and instead giving them a place on the side of the stage. The aim of this change was to spatially segregate the female dancer from other male artists on stage. Most of the performances are solo performances by women. If there are more dancers on stage they will be of same gender and even if there are dancers of opposite gender there won't be any steps which involve 'impurity by touch'. Another attempt was to give textual authenticity to

the dance by connecting it with Bharata's Natyasastra and renaming it as Bharatanatyam. Religious fervor was added by placing the icon of Nataraja on stage and by reinterpreting overtly sexual songs used for dance as part of a search for Paramatma (God) by jeevatma (the human being), the dancer. In that sense the dance/art became a spiritual journey in search of the Paramatma/God.

The reform and reinvention of Mohiniyattam as the classical dance form of women of Kerala at Kerala Kalamandalam too shares most of the factors about Bharatanatyam reform mentioned above in terms of adding textual vigour, religiosity and respectability. But adding to it, as Mohiniyattam was being reformed as a gender and region specific dance form which can represent Malayalee women, there was a special focus on gendering the body movements. The reform of Mohiniyattam starts in the nineteen thirties under the patronage of Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958) at Kalamandalam but later on, it reaches its completion in the nineteen fifties and sixties under the veteran Mohiniyattam teacher who is considered as the mother of Mohiniyattam, Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma (1915-1999). Kalyanikutty Amma's book *Mohiniyattam Charitravum Attaprakaravum* (1992) has a chapter called 'Instructions' on body behaviors for the trainees in Mohiniyattam. Some of the instructions are as follows: the space in between the feet should never be more than two finger space, the dancer should never jump or shake the breasts, she should never bite her lips or do Sringara in ways which are not meant for 'family' women. The movements of the Mohiniyattam dancer, she suggests, should be like that of the tender paddy leaves in breeze, it should flow slowly without any jumping or jerking movements. A close reading will let one see that the instructions are not just instructions for performing a dance form but they are directions regarding what are the body behaviors allowed for a woman who is a public performer. It even overlaps into instructions to control one's body behavior to be ideally gendered within a given culture, which girls in Kerala might have received during their teenage.

Theoretical Understanding

Judith Butler (1990) describes performing gender as legitimising norms, as making explicit the social norms through repeatedly performing them. She tries to explore how the reiterative or repeated act of gender produces a kind of static or normal view of gender which obscures the contradictions of gender act. She says that one becomes gendered over time by repeatedly performing acts and there is no pre-given or abiding gendered body or identity. Classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam/ Mohiniyattam gets its significance mainly through repetition. A good classical performer is supposed to reproduce or repeat the essential qualities and specialties of the art form. This repetition especially with the claim that it represents the culture of the nation/state of its origin through highlighting its "decent" women (as in the case of Mohiniyattam) gets sedimented over time and becomes the ideal of femininity and woman's identity of that region. Butler's argument opens up the possibility to think about the role of dance in relation to gender. Dance can be read as a site where the pedagogy of gendering/ disciplining the body is available for detailed analysis through its syllabus, textbooks, performance videos and photographs (Krishna). One can read how social identities are codified in performance style. Dance is visually perceived and it attracts our attention to the performing body which is semiotically marked as gendered makes it important to study the performative aspect of gender through dance.

In the Indian context the question of gender intersects with the question of caste. In a similar way Jane C. Desmond has argued the importance of including movement as a primary social text. She has argued:

> if we are to expand the humanities now to include "the body" as text, surely we should include in that new sense of textuality-bodies in motion, of which dance represents one of the most

highly codified, widespread, and intensely affective dimensions. And because so many of our most explosive and most tenacious categories of identity are mapped onto bodily difference, including race and gender, but expanding through a continual slippage of categories to include ethnicity and nationality and even sexuality as well, we should not ignore the ways in which dance signals and enacts social identities in all their continually changing configurations. (57)

In this sense the ban on cinematic dance makes one see the relation between the uses of the body in dance to the non-dance bodily expression within a specific historical context.

Towards a Conclusion

While reading the history of reform and reinvention of the classical dances mentioned above from the perspective of gender, one can understand that the dances considered as 'classical' were being 'cleansed' into something which can be performed by 'ideal' 'upper caste' women in public space by the reformers in early twentieth century India . Because, even while being in public space the ideal Indian woman is supposed to be held within the inner spiritual realm (as per the structure of nationalist ideology (Chatterjee). One can understand from the history that the questions of gender, body, caste and religion were integral to the reform project. Dance becomes a symbol of Indian culture in the reformist project. It is this framework of Indian dance that the Cinematic Dance questions and transgresses. The Cinematic Dance becomes something to be banned in educational institutions as it breaks the boundaries or laws for public performance laid out by classical dance forms. The transgression of spatial and gender boundaries by men and women performing together the same dance steps, wearing similar costumes, and involving in dance movements which includes 'touch' creates anxiety

about breaking social codes . The cinematic dancers proclaim themselves to be celebrating their body and its movement possibilities which question the 'function' of arts as search for God set by the classical dance. It does not object calling it an entertainment for the masses while Classical dance demands certain cultural refinement to enjoy the same. The theme of Cinematic Dance is not religious and the songs are not repetitive and thus are the choreographies. It doesn't require the cultural capital / economic capital which classical dance demands, whether in terms of many years of rigorous training, costly Kanjeepuram silk costumes or being born to an upper caste and wealthy family, to study and perform it. The realm of dance performance which was occupied mainly by the upper caste saw the entry of the subaltern groups into it with the coming of Cinematic Dance. The increasing lime light the Cinematic Dance performers receive through global visual media in the form of reality shows and other events too adds to the anxiety, as dance in India is historically considered not just as an entertainment or art but as a way to showcase 'our' culture and heritage.

The debate on the ban on cinematic dance makes us see the intersection between dance, gender and caste within the context of contemporary Kerala. It makes us rethink the social functions 'classical' dances have in contemporary Kerala/India. Classical dances many a times serve the pedagogic function of disciplining and fashioning the bodies (Krishna). It stands as a representation of 'Indian culture' over above being an art form. Even though 'classical dances' are considered as secular art forms of the state, are they as secular and democratic as they seem to be, is a question which has to be explored further. The ban on cinematic dance shows the parameters of judging movement behavior in dance as 'good' or 'bad' and the fear about the morality of the dance and the dancer polluting the regional 'culture' in contemporary Kerala. And dance continues to be a contentious site where discourses about gender, body, sexuality, obscenity, morality and culture meet and mingle.

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i. This paper is developed out of my PhD thesis (Krishna, 2014) and an earlier version of the paper titled "Politics of the Body: The Ban on Cinematic Dance in Educational Institutions in Kerala" was presented at the IACLALS-Indian Association of Common Wealth Literature and Language Studies Conference on 'Right to Write: The Culture of Literary Controversies and Controversial Literature' at Dept. of English, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana 22-24 January, 2016.

ii As quoted in online news portal articles in One India and Open the Magazine –reference given in works cited.

iii. Actress Swetha Menon as quoted in online news portal Filimibeat –reference given in works cited.

iv. Krishna, K.R. Kavya 2014 and 2016.

FORGOTTEN FOOD AND LOST MEMORY: A STUDY OF CULINARY MEMOIRS THROUGH MALAYALAM FILMS

ROSHNI P. AND ANURADHA P.R.

Food acts as a signifier loaded with meanings in the age of Globalisation. Food could posit as an object of memory in various cultural practices. Cultural differences in the way we produce, prepare, and eat our food can also set us apart from one another. Film is one of the most popular visual media that has its visuals constructed in many ways. This paper attempts to trace the memory of food as depicted in two Malayalam films, *Usthad Hotel* and *Salt and Pepper*. The paper tries to uncover the meaning food adds to the narratives of the cinema.

Practically, each and every member of the human race knows from direct experience the deep and inextricable link between food and memory. Since food works on multiple levels stimulating the entire gamut of our senses — visual, olfactory, auditory, dactyl and of course gastronomical — they trigger an equally huge range of signals in our brains setting off a spate of recall: of events, people, places and things long past. We all have our food memories, some good and some bad. The taste, smell, and texture of food can be extraordinarily suggestive, bringing back memories not just of eating food itself but also of the place and setting. Food is an effective trigger of deeper memories of feelings and emotions, internal states of the mind and body and associated experiences.

Food provides a powerful lens through which we can trace and illustrate the exchanges around the world that are commonly associated with globalisation. Food goes beyond nourishing and satiating our senses, it bears meaning for us. Food has always been an important signifier. Through food we realise lifestyle, rituals, customs, ethnic and regional identities etc. Ethnic foods in particular are conspicuous in transnational cuisine that constitutes and conveys cultural and economic globalisation.

Ethnic food practices of Kerala are locally positioned. In Kerala, widely shared food practices stand iconically for this state's specificity within the nation and mark out its difference from neighbouring states. Each religion, region and tribe in Kerala maintains its own styles and patterns of cooking which form a part of its identity. Different places and cultural groups have their own forte which ranges from Thalassery dum biriyani to Ambalapuzha paalpayasam, from Aranmula vallasadhya to Kuttanad tharavucurry, etc. Kozhikode is a northern trading town in Kerala where Muslim food habits and cultural practices have dominance. A close examination of ethnographic material on Kerala food practices (cuisine, serving, styles of hospitality) hints at the upsurgence of a globalised variation instead of the natural'. The modes of preparation and presentation of food practices is culturally and economically shifted to the new mode of production and consumption. Phillip McMichael has proposed that the power of food lies in its material and symbolic functions of linking nature, human survival, health, culture and livelihood (21)

This paper attempts to locate and trace the changing food habits with the advent of a globalised economy. The effortlessness of the commercialised world costs us the disintegration of our indigenous food practices. Acculturation due to migration and invasion of the neoliberal policies brought innovations in our kitchens and tingled our taste buds. Food became a commodity, something produced and consumed. Multiple brands and varieties of food substances available in the market

controlled the consumer behaviour. Restaurant and mall cultures substituted our memories of long, never-ending preparations just for the next day's breakfast or lunch. Grandmother's dishes that have vanished from our tables are being replaced by processed ready-in-a-minute versions that evoke a lost past but never quite match the remembered taste, because the nostalgic dish had a whole accompaniment of the ambience in which it was painstakingly and lovingly made.

The study attempts to mark the memories of these indigenous food practices with the help of Malayalam film narratives and literatures with emphasis on evocative memories and nostalgia. Food in these works variously becomes the starting point, channel and cache of recall. Memories have a habit of departing from reality, taking on hues that were absent originally. In many instances of filmmaking, there is no such thing as a real' presence, but only a re-presence or a representation. Representations can never really be 'natural' or authentic depictions of the object reflected. Instead, they are constructed images, images that need to be interrogated for their ideological content. According to Ella Shohat: Each filmic utterance must be analyzed not only in terms of who represents but also in terms of who is being represented for what purpose, at which historical moment, for which location, using which strategies, and in what tone of address (171).

Examining the cultural production of knowledge in Malayalam cinema necessitates a close reading of certain images which are widely celebrated as touchstones of reality. As apparatuses of continuation, these popular images perform the central problematic of burying certain gestural acts by freezing its potentialities in images (Agamben 134). It is high time to re-evaluate the way how Malayalam cinema reflected and refracted certain ideologies and images by which certain individuals and group identities are questioned, interrogated, interpreted and misrepresented in the Malabar regions of Kerala.

Films like *Usthad Hotel* and *Salt and Pepper* are marketed using the nuances of cooking and also by associating food with cultural memory. The former, scripted by Anjali Menon, pivots around the city of Calicut under the presumption that it is the cultural epicentre of Malabar Muslims. It captures certain cultural specificities of Calicut by framing samples of its rich traditional cuisine such as halwa and biriyani. Though biriyani has become a common dish of Kerala, the movie constructs it as a typical Muslim dish and attempts to define Muslim identity in terms of its tastes. It is obvious that this association is much more than an allegorical signification. It is an ideological tool that can serve to reinforce systems of inequality and subordination by equating a particular minority community with a food item and thereby suggesting its otherness by objectifying it. The movie constructs a utopian world of Karim Ikka where he cooks and serves delicious dishes. He not only wants to feed the customers but also desires to make them happy. The movie idealises and idolizes his profession to the extent of derogating Abdul Razaq, his son, who pursues a different profession.

When Karim ikka shares his romantic memory with his grandson, Faisi, it is a tale of biriyani, the fragrance of which sets him off on the trail of how he met his wife. It is at a wedding long ago, that Karim ikka was in charge of preparing the feast. The smoke arising from the dum biriyani makes him shift his gaze from the dish to the love of his life. This link between biriyani and love sets him on his life journey of carrying that love to his customers through the food that he serves. In one of the most famous scenes, the obsession with a good cup of *Suleimani* (black tea) and the paraphernalia that surrounds it is shown. When asked about the origins of this story, Anjali Menon, the script writer replied "I am a complete foodie and I believe that every time we consume something, we must give it full attention to enjoy every flavour. That is the root of the story. Distinct flavours of tea, sweetness and sourness come together in a *Suleimani* creating a blend of experience that stimulates us – quite like romance, I think."

The film *Salt and Pepper* is directed by Aashiq Abu and the male lead role is played by Lal and Asif Ali as Kalidasan and Manu respectively. The female lead role is played by Shweta and Mythili as Maya and Meenakshi respectively. The story of the film revolves around the relationship between Maya who is a dubbing artist and Kalidasan who is an Archaeologist. Both have a passion for food and can be considered as foodies according to their love of food as shown in the film. They fall in love through the medium of food when Maya calls for thattilkutti dosa from the restaurant. But unknowingly the call goes to the mobile gifted to Kalidasan by his nephew Manu who is a new generation representative in the film. Then the wrong number turns into love wherein Kalidasan tells the story of a cake, Joan's Rainbow, and how it is related to World War II. This instills an interest to make it in the mind of Maya who makes the cake in her home and Kalidasan makes it in his own house.

In the movie, Maya develops her passion for food in trying to reach out to her late mother through nostalgic dishes. It is in an attempt, to rekindle her childhood love for dosa that she places an order for thattilkutti' dosa and makes the fated misdialled call. Her interest in Kalidas is sparked

by his narrative of the rainbow cake which in turn is a nostalgic story of patient love. The narrative of Joan's Rainbow is about the French soldier's wife who started baking a strawberry cake to give her husband when he returns from the war. He didn't turn up that day, nor did he the next day, when she had added a pistachio flavour layer to the cake. On the third day, she baked the third layer, in orange flavour. But he didn't come that day either. On the fourth day, she was about to lose hope, her husband arrived bearing a box of chocolates. She is said to have melted the chocolates and made a fourth layer, serving the rainbow of layers to her husband, sealing their bond of love forever. This layer cake story forms an ideal foil for the multilayered romance narrative in the film. The

Adivasi Moopan, whom Kalidasan adopts, provides another turn down memory lane into a fading world of tribal cuisine.

Madhavikutty's famous short story Neypayasam' where the young children consume that last sweet dish prepared by their mother's hands, ignorant of her passing away, is one of the finest examples of the bitter-sweet memories evoked by food.

A favourite Malayalee dish, Puttu takes on a commercialised avatar in the food chain Dhe Puttu' with its starry aura and fusion flavours such as chocolate puttu, Joker puttu, Runway puttu (named after popular commercial movies). The treatment of the same item in Iyyobinte Pusthakam' with its crude epithet Kambuthoori' evokes an altogether different world of rough, hewn men and women battling the elements for survival. This is in stark contrast to the depiction of their conditions as shown among vinyl seats and glass top tables of the previously mentioned puttu franchise. Dosa is another traditional food that has undergone variety of experimentations in the background of commercialised culture, where we get to have the Schezwan or Lasagne dosa to appeal to our appetite.

We may see a similar edging out of Chayakada', a very Malayalee phenomenon, which has been caught in several Malayalam films like Ponmuttayidunna Tharavu', Peruvannapurathe Visheshangal', Kadha Parayumbol' etc. The teashop (chayakada) culture is another example of a world which is being relegated to the realms of memory. It was a focal hotspot for social gathering, heated discussions, exchanging news and camaraderie besides consuming the parippuvada and chaya. Whenever a person comes to the place for the first time, generally the local teashop is the place where he goes first. This is done to understand the nature of the place where he has now arrived. Teashops act as a helping guide to understand the past and present of that area. In the

globalised context they are being replaced by the advent of Wi-Fi equipped cafes. We have already witnessed how the nostalgias of the teashops are giving way to the grand hangouts in films like *Chappakurish*, *Hey Jude*, *Premam*, *Thamasha* etc.

Food is not just nourishment of our body; it sustains us on a much deeper level, touching upon the very core of our being, engulfing our senses with an ability to transport us into world's past and ideal. On this level it approximates to one of the greatest functions of art as affirmed by the classical critic Longinus. It is this aspect of food that many artists, both in film and on paper, have been exploring in the modern globalised context to look back with nostalgia to a world of memories.

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WHOSE MADRAS? CASTE, GENDER AND AESTHETICS IN TAMIL CINEMA

PRIYADARSHINI PANCHAPAKESAN

This paper proposes to explore and analyse how Pa Ranjith's *Madras* (2014) has been a breakthrough in Tamil films in terms of its representation of North Madras and characterisation of the Dalit community. The focus is on the distinct language, music, dance, sports, culture, aesthetics and social interactions prevalent within the North Madras Dalit community. The first section of the paper will look at how North Madras has been represented in other Tamil films such as *Thirupaachi* (2005), *Irudhisuttru* (2016) and *Pudhupettai* (2006). These three films will be analysed, compared and contrasted with Pa Ranjith's *Madras*. The second section of my paper will do a nuanced analysis of the plot and explore how it unravels through various techniques like cinematography, soundtrack and visual effects. The third and final section of the paper will do an analysis of the song "Madras is our hometown" to get a bird's eye view of the distinct aesthetics and culture of the North Madras Dalit community.

Tamil cinema is notorious for its representations and misrepresentations of communities rooted in a particular location and city space. Internationally acclaimed movie directors like Mani Ratnam, Shankar and Gautam Vasudev Menon have set their films exclusively in illusive fertile villages, foreign lands or the upper class neighbourhoods of Chennai city. Their rich, educated and well-mannered heroes are depicted as the only ideal Tamil citizens. Contrarily, the region of Chennai, known

popularly as North Madras, has been presented as a filthy dump, breeding thugs, villains, drug dealers and sex-workers. This historical misrepresentation and stereotyping of the Dalit community has been studied by critics and scholars in the book *Madras: Creation, Debateand Review* edited by Ka Balamurugan. Likewise, acclaimed film historian Theodore Basakran has noted the spatial division of Chennai in terms of class and occupation. He observes "North Chennai traditionally had factories- it's more working class" (Sripathi 2). It was South Chennai that became the new Madras with its wealthy residential localities and rising middle class.

Commercial action films such as *Gemini* (2002), *Thirupaachi* and *Polladhavan* (2007) among many others have portrayed the men of North Madras as thugs who are dark skinned, have filthy beards and long hair. They carry heavy metal chains, deadly weapons, and consume large amounts of meat and alcohol, evoking a sense of anger and disgust amongst the viewers. They speak Chennai Tamil (Madras Basha) an uncouth, rude and uncivilised variant of the language notorious for its loudness and abusive words. All in all, the North Madras characters are constructed and identified in stark contrast to the upper class/caste hero.

In the last decade there have been many other Tamil films which have perpetuated these kind of stereotypes and represented the people of North Madras as uneducated fishermen, violent alcoholics or cunning drug dealers. For instance, in the film *Irudhisuttru,* the protagonist's (Ritika Singh) father is depicted as a drunkard and he converts to Christianity simply to obtain alcohol (*Irudhisuttru* 19:30-19:52). Likewise, when Ritika Singh is paid for her boxing skills, she uses the money for buying biriyani rather than basic essentials (*Irudhisuttru* 21:38-21:51). This biased portrayal reflects the dominant perspective imposed on the people of North Madras, seen as desiring biriyani, meat and alcohol above everything else.

While the plot of *Irudhisuttru* often strays away from North Madras, *Pudhupettai* firmly establishes itself as a North Madras film, with layer upon layer of stereotypical representation in both its plot and characters. The protagonist of the film (performed by Dhanush) identifies and asserts himself as Kokki Kumar (Hook). He keeps up this title to instil fear amongst his people and rivals. This phenomenon can be witnessed in several other North Madras films, where the characters do not have a name but rather a title, reflecting their habits, mannerisms, the weapons they use, or their style of murder. For instance, in the film *Thirupaachi* the villain from North Madras is identified as Panparak Ravi owing to his habit of incessant tobacco chewing. While both the protagonist of *Pudhupettai* and villain of *Thirupaachi* cherish their given identity, we see no such titles being attributed to any of the characters in Pa Ranjith's *Madras.*

Furthermore, in *Pudhupettai* all the young men of North Madras have a history of broken families and resort to escapism through gangs and drug cartels. Kokki Kumar runs away from home after his father murders his mother (*Pudhupettai* 11:42- 11:50). Likewise, another youngster's mother throws boiling water at him when he questions her about a love affair (*Pudhupettai* 28:18-28:38). Jeeva recollects his mother's death and narrates how she immolates herself after contracting Aids from her truck driver husband (*Pudhupettai* 29:02-29:14). *Pudhupettai* provides a grim and hopeless image of North Madras families showing nothing more than illicit relationships, selfishness, lack of love, care, ethics and humanity. The film reinforces and emphasises occupational identities imposed upon the North Madras Dalit community. Contrarily, Pa Ranjith's *Madras* depicts the intricacies and nuances of living in a North Madras family and shows that even the so-called rowdies have love, strong families, ties and relationships. Although their lives are interspersed with tension, conflict and oppression, they stand and fight it together.

The lines of the first song in *Pudhupettai* proudly claims "Educated dog do not come near" (Na Muthukumar 03:09- 03:13). This line reflects the notion that the people of North Madras do not need an education and are content with caste-based occupations. Contrarily, in Ranjith's *Madras,* Kali, Anbu and Mary are only too eager to get rid of their designated occupation and uplift themselves through education. This is the most significant and crucial difference between *Madras* and *Pudhupettai.* While the former revolves around freeing the Dalit community from binds of oppression, the latter reinforces and imposes caste occupation. In *Madras* the peoples revert their ties with the oppressive political leaders and in *Pudhupettai*, Kokki Kumar continues to serve them and remain within the cycle of oppression.

Pudhupettai provides a one-dimensional, biased and shallow representation of Dalit women. In the film, Krishnaveni, the character played by Sneha, is depicted as a submissive sex-worker and Kumar marries her out of pity rather than for love. Ironically, Kumar tries to protect her from other men, but ends up sexually abusing her. After he acquires supernatural energy from killing the rival politician's brother, he gets into bed with Krishnaveni and makes her scream out in pain (42:20- 42:31). Through these scenes *Pudhupettai* perpetuates the patriarchal and misogynistic notion that men can abuse and harass sex-workers. Like all other masochistic Tamil films, the protagonist in *Pudhupettai* is also absolved of his unrighteous behaviour towards women. *Pudhupettai's* treatment of Dalit women can also be witnessed in Selvi, the character played by Sonia Agarwal. Selvi waits on the stage to get married to the man she desires, but a love-struck Kumar falls for her beauty and ties the sacred thread around her neck (01:41:20-01:41:31). As the most important marker of marriage, the sacred thread cannot be removed and Selvi has to accept Kumar as her husband, despite the fact that she loathes and despises him.

It can thus be concluded that the film has failed in depicting a just or holistic view of the people of North Madras. The opening title card of the film reads "Pudhupettai: Survival of the fittest" (*Pudhupettai* 11:51- 11:54). This informs the viewer that the film lays great emphasis on individualistic achievement within the status quo. Pa Ranjith's *Madras,* on the other hand, stresses the importance of a marginalised community's unity in shattering the very foundations of inequality. A closer look at Madras will illustrate how it takes a different trajectory from other North Madras films.

Pa Ranjith's *Madras* begins with a vast aerial shot of Vysarpadi in North Madras and narrates a flashback to introduce the plot, characters and conflict within the film. Krishnappan and his close friend Karunagaran, prominent and respected members of the People's Progression Party break their political unity due to internal strife and conflict. Ranjith creatively and symbolically represents the divide in the People's Progression Party by showing a split in a photograph of the two friends. Karunagaran breaks away and forms the People's Liberation Party (*Madras* 2:21:18- 2:20:51).

Understanding this initial rivalry is crucial to comprehending the various socio-political nuances in the rest of the film and for this reason, Pa Ranjith uses various cinematic techniques to keep the audience attentive, focused and engaged. Ranjith creates an interplay between painting and photography to emphasise certain frames of the film. For instance, to depict which territories in Vysarpadi are under whose control, Ranjith artistically fills the screen with colours to demarcate the localities. The left side of the screen, shaded with blue represents the People's Liberation Party, while the right, coloured with purple, is the territory of the People's Progression Party (*Madras* 2:20:49-2:20:44). Ranjith uses blue to foreshadow an Ambedkarite consciousness amongst the members of the People's Liberation Party.

Although Vysarpadi is divided equally between both the political parties, the wall occupying a central position remains the primary site of contestation throughout the film. Members of the People's Progression Party begin their encroachment upon the wall, and Krishnappan asserts his power and authority by painting slogans on its surface (*Madras* 2:20:23-2:20:19). Sengan, a housing board member affiliated to the People's Liberation Party sees this move as an invasion over his people's land, space and rights. Sengan is provoked and instigated by Karunagaran, a cunning party leader, who himself remains in the shadows (*Madras* 2:20:19-2:19:56).

Krishnappan and other members of the People's Progression Party get enraged at the fierce resistance of the housing board community and strive to crush down their insolence and impudence by taking away their homes and land. Sengan, however, counters the words of Krishnappan and reminds him that his people were rehabilitated under a government scheme and that they cannot be uprooted so easily (*Madras* 2:19:48-2:19:26). The confrontation between Krishnappan and Sengan informs the viewers that more than a political battle, the fight over the wall symbolises the housing board communities' right to land, space and livelihood.

Krishnappan's son Kannan is shocked by the people's strong hold over their land and their daring protest against his father. Kannan assumes Sengan to be the leader of the rebellion and murders him (*Madras* 2:19:10-2:19:01). This gruesome act kindles a series of revenge killings over the wall. Ranjith artfully depicts a blob of red paint spreading and covering the entire wall after multiple murders that continue till Kali's last battle (*Madras* 2:18:20-2:18:12). These murders are not a mere battle over the wall but symbolise resistance against power, authority and domination. Anbu observes that Sengan was only murdered due to his confrontation and protest against inequality.

While Anbu is determined to capture the wall, Kali, the hero of the film is more interested in knowing how it will benefit his people. In several conversations between the friends, Kali strongly asserts that the people would benefit more from education than the wall and even suggests converting the space into a neutral platform by painting it white (*Madras* 01:19:52-01:19:31). While Anbu's idea of social justice and protest is restricted to physical assertion and control, Kali acknowledges the importance of education for social upliftment and he only joins the battle after Anbu is brutally murdered. When Anbu's rising fame threatens the powers of the leaders, they form a truce and murder him. In fact, Johnny seems to have realised their false rivalry and he does not get involved or participate in Mari's political campaign (*Madras* 27:56-27:48).

Towards the end of the film Mari's façade is shattered and his real attitude towards the housing board community is revealed when he retorts that they are only dogs who survive with his money. Mari is countered and confronted by several people and Ranjith focuses on the speech of an old woman, who bravely announces that Mari would have amounted to nothing without their votes(*Madras* 18:36-18:19). Ranjith consciously asserts her voice and counters prevalent cinematic narratives where the elderly is either not present or occupy marginal roles. Likewise, another housing board member (Kalai's father) points out how these politicians have been winning the trust of the people and regarding them as nothing more than scapegoats (*Madras* 19:28-19:18).

The assertion, resistance and protest of the housing board community has been intricately woven with the colour blue and this can be witnessed in several frames of the film. For instance, the title of the film *Madras* is written on a blue painted wall, which foreshadows the community's reclamation of land and space (*Madras* 02:16:44-02:16:41). Kali's football jersey, the colouring of the Vyasarpadi locality and the bucket of blue paint thrown over the wall by the protagonist are all reflective

of an Ambedkarite consciousness. At the very end of the film people celebrate their victory by adorning blue neck ties and wrist bands (*Madras*15:49-015:44). Ranjith has confirmed that his use of blue is the perfect alternative to the colour saffron (Prabhu 93).

In the film, Ranjith has shown the transformation of the wall from a sacred, feared and revered object to an ordinary space, accessible to everyone. Initially, people are scared of the wall due to the many misfortunes which happen around it. An old man dies in front of the wall, two men ram their bicycles into it and a boy jumps from the top. A local priest adds to the existing fear and prophesies that the wall craves for more blood (*Madras* 2:17:39-2:17:20). Kali himself is challenged by the wall when his bike refuses to start in front of it (*Madras*01:30:20-01:29:55).

The representation of the wall becomes more thrilling and eerie once Kali murders Perumal, who was plotting to kill Anbu. Ranjith dims the light of all other buildings and draws our attention to the wall, which stands below a faintly flickering light. The loud buzz of the light in a silent and dark neighbourhood emphasizes the uncanniness of the wall (*Madras* 01:10:49-01:10:18). Ranjith's use of audio and visual techniques resembles the strategies employed by a thriller or horror film.

The feeling of reverence, fear and terror over the wall diminishes before the last battle. A confident Kali stands in front of the wall and his shadow grows to the very top (*Madras* 10:35-10:27). This scene foreshadows the community's victory over the wall, freeing it from ownership and conflict. The sacred objects around the wall and the domineering picture of Krishnappan are replaced by the words of Rettamalai Srinivasan, which speak of the importance of education, rationality and social awareness (*Madras* 01:00-52:00).The wall transforms into an ordinary space and provides words of inspiration for the further development of the community.

Thus, although the wall is a central factor in determining the plot of the film, it does not occupy every scene and frame. Pa Ranjith also details the personal lives of Kali and Anbu by giving us a glimpse into their family and relationships. This dispels the stereotyping and subtly suggests that the people of North Madras are not always villains; and they have a life away from the world of conflict. Although Kali and Anbu have several arguments and fights with their families, these conflicts are not serious enough to sever their relationship. The bickering and quarrelling in fact bring the family closer together and deepen their love for each other. For instance, Kali's mother argues with Kali as a way of expressing concern for her husband, who had been brutally beaten by the police (*Madras* 48:07- 47:47). Likewise, Mary expresses her affection for Anbu by constantly disagreeing with him and opposing his dedication to the People's Liberation Party (*Madras* 1:55:42-1:55:36).

To gain a better understanding of familial life in North Madras, a scene between Anbu and Mary can be further examined. Mary accidentally drops a vessel and gets scolded by Anbu. When her eyes fill with tears Anbu remedies his mistake by caressing Mary and informing her that he was only joking (*Madras* 02:06:47-02:06:27). This scene precedes the incident that occurs in Kannan's house where he shouts at his wife for letting the baby scream and not bringing a tooth pick (*Madras* 02:08:48-02:08:17). With particular reference to the latter scene Piralayan has stated in his article *Madras*: *Story Discussion/Conversation* that only men who are concerned with notions of purity would be unnecessarily aggressive towards their women (22).The upper caste members of the People's Progression Party are more unkind towards their women, whom they merely see as a means of retaining purity, legitimacy, wealth and ownership.

Going by Piralayan's observation, the housing board community has neither submissive women nor strong notions of fidelity and chastity.

Mary expresses her resentment towards Anbu's work whenever she gets an opportunity. For instance, Mary questions Anbu's relentless spending on sticking the party's posters while there is not enough money for their son's school fees(*Madras* 1:55:42-1:55:36). After Anbu's death, Mary firmly asserts that she will educate Ronaldo and make him a successful man (*Madras* 59:52- 59:42). More importantly, in an act of defiance Mary throws a bucket of paint over the powerful Mari after she discovers his plot that ruined her husband (*Madras* 16:25-16:16).

Likewise, Kalai expresses her strength of will in every possible manner. When men ogle, hoot or whistle at her, she either slaps them, or confronts them with a strong oppositional gaze (*Madras* 01:52:25 01:52:19). During the beach scene, she questions whether Kali values her opinion and leaves when she is doubtful (*Madras* 39:12-37:06). Though Kali avenges Anbu's death towards the end of the film, Kalai plays a crucial role in controlling his thirst for vengeance and enabling him to think rationally.

The women characters from the housing board community are more open in expressing their desire and sexuality. While lying on Anbu's lap, Mary kisses a photograph of her favourite actor and says she will do so until Anbu embraces her. Concepts of privacy are non-existent, and Ronaldo and Kali consistently witness the love between Anbu and Mary (*Madras* 1:56:39-1:53:54). Without any sense of shame or disgust, Mary presses her lips against Anbu's corpse and says "take the lips that you love" (*Madras*56:22-56:09).

Likewise, Kalai is the one to initiate a conversation with Kali, who is initially shy and timid. Kalai is also the one to call Kali out of his house in the middle of the night for conversation and romance. In a signature move, Kalai bluntly asks Kali to marry her without any second thoughts or inhibitions (*Madras* 01:29:18-1:26:58).Their love is accepted and witnessed by Kali's mother, who gives them enough space and freedom to make their own decisions (*Madras* 46:07-45:39). When Kalai returns

home after a disagreement with Kali, her father welcomes her into the house and even cooks for her (*Madras* 35:40-35:35). Both the families do not make any serious attempts to thwart their rights, choices and decisions.

Kali subverts dominant representations of heroism and masculinity by openly expressing shyness, passion, affection and sorrow. When Mari asks Kali about marriage, he gets embarrassed and shyly looks down at the ground (*Madras* 02:09:28- 02:09:19). After the initial rejection by Kalai, Kali gets drunk, cries like a baby and even kisses Anbu (*Madras* 01:46:44-01:46:37). Significantly, this is the only scene in the entire film where Kali is depicted in a drunken state. This is Ranjith's counter against mainstream films on North Madras, which show drunkenness as the norm and not the exception.

Ranjith's *Madras* is full of humorous scenes and he does away with the comedian- sidekick, prevalent in mainstream Tamil cinema. In most Tamil films the comedian belongs to a lower class/caste background and serves as a foil to the hero. The comedian's screen presence is merely to assert and strengthen the toxic masculinity of the hero. Contrarily, in *Madras* comic relief is provided by Kali who with his short temper and angry outbursts evokes laughter amongst the viewers and audience. What makes these scenes immensely realistic is the fact that Kali's humorous nature blooms out of his spontaneity and fierceness. For example, right after Kalai rejects Kali, his friend who fondly addresses him as Maami, proudly asks if his idea of courting Kalai worked out. Angered by the failed advice, Kali immediately goes to punch him (*Madras* 01:49:22-01:49:16).In another instance, when Kali and Anbu are being taken in a car the man near the driver's seat constantly pokes at Kali, only to receive a punch from him (*Madras* 01:08:17-01:08:09).

More than the characters, setting and even the plot, the uniqueness of *Madras* lies in its representation of the aesthetics and culture of the North Madras community. The full implication of Pa Ranjith's

revolutionary outlook can be understood through Atget, a European photographer brought to attention by Walter Benjamin. In the essay "A Short History of Photography" Benjamin highlights the significance of Atget, a man who revolutionised European photography by capturing brothels, dirty dishes, boots and trucks (21). Both Atget and Ranjith, like pianists, work with the instruments provided to narrate a different story. After all, is not every corner of our cities a scene of action? Is not each passer-by an actor? (Benjamin25).

Just as Atget redefined the purpose of photography and the use of a camera, Pa Ranjith has altered the very aim of Tamil cinema and shifted its viewership to a locality with narrow streets, clustered buildings, un-whitewashed walls, peeling paint and decaying homes. He has given us a magnified view into a modern-day Dalit colony, filled with myriads of shades and colours. *Madras* is built on the backdrop of young boys dancing to hip hop, men playing football, or people enjoying a game of carrom board. These small activities and micro-narratives in themselves can be seen as a form of resistance to dominant aesthetic trends. Pa Ranjith's intricate details and G.Murali's nuanced cinematography have brilliantly shed light into every nook and corner of North Madras.

The plot of *Madras* is revealed much earlier in the film through its very first song "Madras is our hometown" composed by Santhosh Narayanan and lyricist Kabilan. The song begins with quick crane shots of North Madras, depicting a local train, small church, closely knit buildings, and the *Ennore* chimneys smoking away in the background. As the camera zooms into the bustling streets and close-knit homes, we come to realise that there is little chance for privacy. Yet communal living is what the people desire and the song proudly says "We are not living as isolated potted plants, but together as wild trees" (Kabilan 02:15:20-02:15:11). The people live, mourn, celebrate and fight together as a unified community and stand with each other in situations like Anbu's funeral, Kali's marriage and Mari's betrayal.

"Madras is our hometown" is the most significant line of the song and it is paired with an image of Kali in a blue Jersey assertively looking at the camera. Kali's blue jersey stands out amongst other plain shades and his successful football match foreshadows a victory of Ambedkarite ideals. The very next line of the song "We are its identity" shows Kali towering in front of the conflicted wall and foretells the community's reclamation of land and space(Kabilan 02:13:10-02:13:06). Both the phrases assertively indicate that North Madras is not the slum other of the city, and its people form its very identity.

The song stresses the different living conditions within the Dalit community. On one hand, there is Kali, the well-educated IT professional who through his reading of *Untouchable Spring* is conscious of his position as a Dalit (*Madras* 02:12:50-0:2:12:48). However, another frame shows an old woman breaking bricks and labouring for the construction of the High Court (*Madras* 02:15:11-02:15:06). The latter scene realistically highlights that a decent livelihood is yet to reach everyone. Nevertheless, Ranjith never lingers on any frame that shows sorrow and pain. His very next image is that of a boy banging on a drum paired with the words "If you try to chain us, we will revolt and make noise like the round drums**!"** (Kabilan 02:15:06-02:15:01). Likewise, the end of the song depicts dhobies washing clothes and a woman collecting garbage. However, Ranjith immediately shifts to a happier image of Anbu bringing his child back from school, as if to say, education will uplift them from this occupational oppression (*Madras* 02:13:32-02:13:22).

The song also depicts games and sports of the Dalit community, including football, boxing, carrom board and Kabadi. The lyrics say "We are proud of our sport as it reflects our strength and valour" (Kabilan 02:13:46-02:13:40). Despite the prioritisation and recognition of mind games (chess) over bodily ones (Kabbadi) the Dalit community gives immense importance to their sports as a part of their culture. Kali's last

fight against the antagonist is based on his football skills, which is the central sport of the community (*Madras* 07:35-06:36).

The first song also shows the influence of Black culture on the music and dance of North Madras. The community's youngsters eagerly participate in hip-hop, rap, jazz and break dance competitions. For example, towards the end of the song, we can see a group of boys dancing in front of a colorful wall with a painting of Bob Marley (*Madras* 02:13:20-02:13:16). In the film, When Kali is mourning over Kalai's rejection the background shows a youth getting ready to practice dance (*Madras* 01:47:51-01:47:47). Ranjith has detailed the cultural activities of the community while ensuring that this does not distract the viewers from the main plot.

North Madras is also the place where the genre of Gaana music originated. Similar to rap, the Gaana songs have fast beats and lyrics without any particular meaning. The lyrics of the first song in *Madras* informs us that the people of North Madras listen to Gaana and local bands, to fill their lives with melody and music (Kabilan02:13:40: 02:13:35). Despite the fact that Gaana musicians are recognised in popular Tamil Cinema, in most films Gaana music is only used for item songs. Ranjith breaks this norm by using this style of music as a love song in *Atta Kathi* (2012) and a funeral dirge in *Madras*.

The lyrics of the song foreshadows the community's disillusionment with the political parties: "We stick election posters, construct tents and gather crowds for electioneering, and then we cast our vote and get disappointed!" (Kabilan 02:13:35-02:13:30). These phrases are paired with images of people tirelessly working for the party and two elderly women dejectedly looking at the ground. Significantly, the song does not leave us with the despair of people, but finishes with the victory of the blue jersey football team alongside the words "This

hard-working clan will win this world one day! If we keep our eyes open, then that auspicious day will become a reality someday" (Kabilan02:13:30-02:13:21).

The first song in *Madras*a also shatters the prevailing prejudice that Dalits are always in a state of pity and misery. Piralayan, P. Siddharthan and M. Kamalakannan in the compilation *Madras: Creation, Debateand Review* observe that Dalits in Tamil Cinema have always been stereotyped as desiring sympathy and pity (18, 47, 71). M. Kamalakannan further notes that Mahasweta Devi and Mulk Raj Anand portray Dalits only as victims (*Madras: Creation, Debate and Review* 71).Countering this representation, the words in the first song say "We are the instruments destroying the gateways of worry!" (Kabilan 02:15:01-02:14:56).

It can thus be concluded that Pa Ranjith's *Madras* has proved to be a path-breaking narrative, taking a different trajectory from previous Tamil films. Towards the end of the essay "A Short History of Photography" Benjamin quotes Brecht, who says a mere reproduction of reality does not tell us about what is really happening and there has to be a construction of reality (Benjamin 24). Pa Ranjith constructs the reality of the people of North Madras through minute details of culture, social interactions, and conversations, along with an interplay of images, symbols, colours and music.

Pa Ranjith's *Madras* has been the platform from which oppressed castes and genders have not only fought back, but have asserted themselves. Through *Madras,* the oppressed and marginalised have been successful in reclaiming their space in Tamil society, cinema and politics. This victory is sure to inspire upcoming film directors who work within the genre of commercial films to incite a socio-political awareness. The very last scene of the film gives a tribute to Dr. Ambedkar and inspired by him, Kalaiand Kali start a school to impart knowledge and education to their community (*Madras* 00:24-00:07).

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BREAKING AND BUILDING STEREOTYPES ON SCREEN: THE POLITICS OF *ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK*

ABHIRAMI RANJITH

Orange is the New Black self-consciously makes an attempt at breaking the several stereotypes revolving around the lives of women through the prison genre drama. Initially conceived as a white woman narrative of the prison experiences, the show falls back on the stereotypes that were in play regarding women. Later, as the show moves towards voicing the several minority communities in the show, it attempts to break away the same stereotypes it once adhered to. This paper attempts to look at how popular culture influences and contributes to the making of stereotypes through this show and later breaks away from these.

The American web series *Orange is the New Black*, created by Jenji Kohen for the online streaming service giant Netflix in the year 2013, started as a comedy set in a minimum-security federal prison in the United States. The show which was originally meant to be on the television network showtime was later produced as a Netflix Original series by Tilted Productions in association with Lionsgate Television. The most-watched original series on Netflix, *Orange is the New Black*, ran for 7 seasons (@Netflix UK). The last and the final season of the show was aired online by Netflix in July 2019.

The crossover series, which began as a comedy and later moved to the genre of drama, is noted for its queer content and the diversity of the characters that appear in the show. Discussed at large for the diverse

and inclusive portrayal of the women of the world, women from different races, women with different sexualities, women with varied interests, the show used itself to promote prison reform and throw open discussions about mass incarceration.

With the boom in the areas of television and media and the rise in their reception and rising influence on the masses, mass media is no more what Klapper, in his work *The Effects of Mass Communication*, concluded to be. That is, something that 'ordinarily do not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects.' Since the emergence of television, people have manipulated and have been manipulated by what appears on screen. While the media was once taken as the 'definers of social reality', they no more stand as the mirror to reality today. Media representations can only be understood with an understanding of the people or groups who wield power. Similarly popular culture is something that is often not made by the people but made for the people as identified as theirs by the cultural industries. To manipulate popular culture is to manipulate the masses that are at the receiving end of it. Representation in popular culture, therefore plays a very significant role in shaping the minds of the people about different races, genders and everything that stands outside the margins of the normalised and approved norms of the society.

bell hooks looks at popular culture as a powerful site of intervention, challenge and change. Popular culture looked at as one of the most compelling mediums of change and progress, is in fact a product of and is sustained by vulgar consumerism which translates into selling the audience what they want to see in the form they want it. Popular culture lays bare how the racial, sexist and social class stereotypes are constructed and reconstructed in everyday situations. While popular culture offers us an opportunity to understand how these stereotypes work, they also serve as a mechanism to question the assumptions we

have made as the audience. It is through these assumptions that we create our own images of race, caste, class and gender. Our acceptance of popular culture as the authentic expression of culture and societies influence our construction of race, class and gender, that is why it becomes important to not just use popular culture to name gender, race, class and caste but also to challenge these different forms of oppression and create a society that is based on equality in all forms.

From media content which had the stories of just the white, heterosexual male figure told and being repeated for several ages, to an age where things changed and had people from all different groups being represented and their stories being discussed, media and popular culture has come a long way. Representation in popular culture is a loaded phenomenon because it contributes largely to the meaning making of certain groups for certain other groups of people. Through the several codes of representation that the media and popular culture employs, meanings are continuously being culturally constructed and distributed. Therefore, the tendencies to generalise or stereotype a group of people belonging to a particular race, class or gender are to be looked at very critically, because they are to a large extent dehumanising the people belonging to these groups by stealing away their individuality and putting them into already constructed meanings made for them by another privileged group of people.

Stereotyping the different ethnic groups, sexual minorities and social groups, while opening up dialogues on the oppression that these groups have been facing for centuries now, also draws definitive margins and lines through which they have to think, act and perform. Themere representation of these minority groups on screen is a part of the very patronising act of the privileged, in order to 'give voice' to the minorities. This can be understood as an elitist form of silencing. The different ethnic, racial and gender groups are set in stereotypical cultural settings that

are specifically set and curated for them by the elite and expected to perform and tell their stories standing within these margins set for them. Media constructions about the people of different groups, to a large extent, legitimise the discrimination that they have been going through. Stuart Hall speaks of how media constructions of black criminality conferred popular legitimacy on state authoritarianism (Horton 61). Stereotyping different minority groups is a form of institutionalised misinformation. By presenting pictures that are in stark contrast to the facts or generalisations that are made from little research, the audience form ideas that are distorted and prejudiced. With no basis in experience and knowledge, the stereotypical representation of a community only further withholds the right for individuality that the community should possess. The harsher the process of social change is, the more generalised the stereotype about a community tends to become. This generalisation and stereotyping is generally believed to be a result of the persistence of certain characteristic features among several generations of a community. Irrationally defining people and communities using stereotypes is something that popular culture has contributed much into. As Rokeach is quoted in the article "A Theory of Stereotypes", "there is nothing more resistant to change than stereotypical attitudes towards outgroups."

With nerdy Asians, fiery Latinas and dangerous black men, Hollywood, since its beginning has been defined by its fair share of racism. Lately, with actors and technicians from different parts of the world becoming important figures in the creation of content for online streaming sites and movies around the world, there has been a commendable change from underrepresented 'others' to the 'other' being the centre. The comedy cops show *Brooklyn NineNine* stands apart for its mixture of cast and their remarkable portrayal of the people from the different ethnic, racial and gender groups. The 2019 Netflix series *When They See Us*, based on true incidents that took place in the US in the year 1989 portrays how black people were stereotyped into being criminals and how five young

black men were incarcerated for several years for the rape of a white woman they did not commit. While lately, there is an increasing number of shows and movies that break away the stereotypes and discuss in open about the practice of stereotyping that has been taking place, Jenji Kohen's *Orange is the New Black* is discussed widely even after the end of the show for its portrayal of women from different groups.

Jenji Kohan's 2013 show *OITNB* was/is discussed by the large audience for how the show broke away from the stereotypes about every minority community, namely the African American community, the other ethnic minorities in the country of America, sexual minorities and the women in prison in general. During the long seven-season series, what the audience of the show tend to forget is how the show, like any other mainstream series in the year 2013 adhered to all the stereotypical notions and launched itself as only another story of a white American middle-class woman who has to serve a term in the prison for an unintentional crime of drug trafficking that she committed ten years ago. The show catered to the demands of the male fantasies about the women in prison, bringing in several scenes of lesbian sex and fighting women, making the show the perfect recipe for its male audience. While it is assumed that *OITNB* breaks away from the stereotypical images of women in prison, women from social and sexual minorities and works to liberate them from the world that has looked at them as undervalued and kept them marginalised, the show in turn also creates a new set of stereotypes, fresher and more radical and uses the age-old stereotypes as a launchpad to get the show to its audience.

The pilot episode of the show that was used to sell the show to the online streaming network does not even attempt to move away or break the stereotypes that have existed in popular culture. In the pilot

episode of the show, the audience is introduced to the white, upper-class, thirty-something woman, the protagonist of the show, Piper Chapman, living in New York City. Piper, perfect epitome for the naive white woman, who does her best to abide by the rules and live a happily ever-after with her partner Larry, is convicted for a drug trafficking that she committed 'out of love' for the woman she was then in a relationship with. An adventure is how Piper describes her involvement with the drug cartel. She calls her lesbian relationship during the time 'a phase' in her life wherein she puts it like any other woman of her age, was seeking adventure and fun in life.

On Piper's entry into the facility what welcomes her is a black, very unfriendly police officer who does not seem to understand what it feels like to be in the prison for the first time. She is clearly one among the only four black women with dialogues in the episode. While stereotyping the white woman protagonist of the show, the show also portrays the black women in the first episode as everything that they have been stereotyped as. Unfriendly, rough, savage women with no manners or morals. Taystee, the second black character in the show's first episode, even though she turns up like nothing is portrayed in the later seasons of the show, as another black woman, eager to get in the bath, with unkempt hair making comments about Piper's nipples. While Taystee's is a clear gesture of impatience, that gesture is only an opening to the voyeurism that Piper has to undergo in the hands of her fellow black prison mates in the later episodes. Piper's entry into prison is made with two other new inmates, a black woman, and a Spanish woman. While the Spanish woman is silent during most of the pilot episode, the black woman is irritated at Piper and uses expletives at the smallest of provocations. The other black women in the prison are either looking at Piper with explicit sexual connotations or are the people who her white friend warns her to be careful of (I Wasn't Ready).

Piper makes only white friends on the first few days at the prison hinting at the racial segregation that exists in federal facilities around the world. She is taken around the prison by the very friendly white woman in the place, giving her tips on beauty and assuring her that they look out for their kind. While Piper is puzzled by her very explicit racism, she defends herself saying she was just looking out for the people of the same tribe. Piper is thus the progressive white woman who is shocked at the racist comments and mocks about how her mother told her friends that she was going to spend years at Africa, doing volunteer work. Her partner also joins her in the joke about how appalled her mother's friends would be at that because of how filthy and dangerous Africa is. They are putting themselves in the non-pretentious progressive thinking Americans while they actually do not realise that they are no different from the others. Piper is the trojan horse that the creator of the show sneaks into the prison, a multicultural setting with women from all parts of the country. The first episode is therefore how Piper sees the prison, a white woman's perspective of the new world she is placed is, all adhering to the set stereotypes about the 'rugged' black women, 'fierce' Russian woman, 'friendly' white women and lustful lesbians all around. Nothing much changes as long as the show is seen through Piper's eyes, she is troubled by the fellow inmates, taunted at for her meekness and stalked by the creepy black lesbian inmate. The show which started off like any other one with all its stereotyping and problematic portrayal of the women in prison, appealing to the voyeuristic pleasures of both the male and the female gaze, takes a very significant turn during the later seasons when it slowly drifts away from the story of Piper and speaks of all the other women in prison.

The show humanises almost every inmate, showing us their past and their family and takes on a prophetic tone telling the audience that a single, not very large mistake in their lives can end them up in prison. While the show shifts away from the protagonist what is seen is a new,

fresh perspective on each of the characters on screen. Not every black woman is rugged, there is the librarian, the singer, the erotica writer and so many more versions of the black women in the prison. The show shows us how every individual is different and throws light on individual experiences, once again trying to break away from the stereotypes which were set at the beginning of the show.

The show repeatedly constructs and deconstructs stereotypes throughout its seven seasons. While effectively breaking away from the stereotypical characteristics that are set by popular culture, they also repeatedly make the mistake of stereotyping another set of characters. With an ensemble of characters on the show, what you do with the major characters are the only things noticed, while they repeat the mistake of brown-skinned Indian woman with lots of accent, the rich white woman who is least bothered by the system, and the strong black woman who stands undeterred even as she is mowed down by the system.

While *OITNB*, works hard to break stereotypes and move away from them, it effectively brings in fresh stereotypes about almost all the women in the prison. The show, criticised for being very far away from the real prison experiences, is in itself creating a stereotype in the minds of the people on how life in the facility would be. With a lot of issues to discuss on the plate, the show, to a very large extent is successful in using popular culture as a medium to make changes. The most ironic fact about the show is that, it used the same old recipe any other American show would use at the time, the story of a naive white woman to sell itself. Most of the black characters in the show, who were signed in for just the first few episodes of the show but were later continued as they were liked and appreciated by the audience. The 'creepy black lesbian stalker' played by Uzo Aduba is one such character that was later developed and ended up being one of the best characters on the entire show. Aduba also won two Emmys for her character Suzanne Warren

aka Crazy Eyes. While the pattern of evolution that the show underwent is exemplary, the fact that it used white perspectives of things to sell itself, in the beginning, makes it very problematic. This is largely a result of the filmmakers and the creators' notion that the audience still wanted to see the usual stereotypes on screen and nothing more. The creators decide what is going to sell and end up making their characters accordingly. It is only until they have a direct evidence of what has appealed to their audience and learn that the audience have taken interest in the new characters that stand different from the usually represented ones, that they eventually start experimenting. As a result of this, stereotypes are cast and recast in different moulds until the audience get tired of it. Lately, just like how *OITNB* evolved into a series that discussed issues like immigration, transgender rights, indifference to sexual minorities, the whole of popular culture has been witnessing similar welcoming changes. Jenji Kohen's latest show *Glow*, which is the story of women wrestlers, is a result of this change that took over popular culture.

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THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A MOUSTACHE: THEATRE AS RESISTANCE IN A CAMPUS

ARATHY ASOK

But there are too many signs that everything that used to sustain our lives no longer does so, that we are all mad, desperate, sick. And I call for *us* to react.

(Artaud 77)

The campus is an organic space which not only provides freedom for free dispersion of ideas but also provides the impetus for human capital therein to develop in the most positive manner so as to raise the best questions rather than be caught in staid answers. Theatre in the campus provides the creative potential of such a space. It is not only the product (the play), but the process of the production also, that gets engaged in the most creative manner so that such a flow of ideas is made possible. A vast proportion of this work happens mostly during the pre production stage viz. the research, the rehearsal process, and the discussions. The experiences of the people who voluntarily engage in the process, their philosophies and insights, all contribute to the process. This paper aims to explore how a theatre collective in a campus, viz Chembarathi of Government Victoria College, Palakkad, became the genesis of and a survivor of a highly charged political atmosphere on the campus. The paper tries to analyse the effect of such a campus theatre/play.

It would only be correct to begin by an enquiry into the roots of campus theatre. When one tries to look for a codified knowledge regarding this, there does not seem to be ample work that satisfies the quest. From the conversations held with a few practitioners and theorists of

theatre for the purpose of writing the paper, it was found that knowledge of the emergence and practice of campus theatre was fragmentary and not codified and was a virgin territory, yet unexplored. Renu Ramnath, noted theatre critic opined that serious studies are yet to be initiated in the area. Of the people spoken to, M U Praveen and Satheesh K, Satheesh focused on Kozhikode while Renu Ramnath spoke about some experiences from Thrissur. She remembered Kaliyarang of Kerala Varma college in the year 1981 initiated by students like M Vinod, Jayachandran etc. under the guideship of Jose Chirammal. P R Rajan and others belong to the next generation. But by the time it was 1988, the theatre in campus gradually had lost strength. All of them agreed unanimously that it was very rare to find a theater in recent times, which did not exist except for the purpose of the zonal competitions. Ramnath remembers that plays were staged in MG University earlier albeit not for the purpose of zonal competitions. Deepan Sivaraman had staged *Oru Vichithramaya Kadha* in Maharajas College. Ashique Abu was also a member of that theatre team. M U Praveen points out that each university has a different theatre culture. The theatre competitions organised at zonal levels have an organised form. The SFI used to conduct Kochaniyan Nataka Malsaram. There were theatre practitioners who made notable contributions to the campus theatre like Sasidaran Naduvil, Priyanandan (Thrissur), Nandajan, Sharath Revathy (Palakkad), Satheesh K Satheesh, A Shantha Kumar, Vijesh, M U Praveen (Calicut) and Suveeran (Kannur). From Guruvayoorappan college came *Antigone* and *Oorubhangam* and finally *Metamorphosis*. Providence College Theater had a very active feminist lineage. Various plays like *Antigone on the Banks of Narmada*, and *Nagamandala* were staged by Providence Women theatre. Satheesh K Satheesh spoke on how in the yesteryears, campuses in Kerala decided the direction in which cultural Kerala would think. He remembers names like Joy Mathew and Civic Chandran. Trivandrum had an active campus theatre history with people like Narendra Prasad, Alancier,and the poet Anwar Ali. In Palakkad, a strong form of campus theatre was in Pattambi College under some teachers like Gangadharan as remembered by the noted theatre person from Palakkad, Nandajan. In the Engineering college

where he studied he remembers a drama collective called "Spark" that later began to take theater seriously. As part of its activities they used to go to villages and colleges and try to set up theatre clubs. "If the mainstream cannot celebrate a play, it will be uprooted", opined Satheesh K Satheesh. Theatre also encompassed poetry collectives and discussions. Brecht was widely read on campuses during the insurgence of the campus theatre.

Theater which is today considered as a means to more grace marks was held in better esteem in the years that went before. One approached theater as theater in its primary sense. A play that Satheesh specially mentioned was *Shavamtheeni Urumbukal* written by Karthikan. That play was staged by Rajan, the student who later disappeared during the Emergency from his college campus. He also remembers that the same play was staged in the 70s in Sharjah which led to the arrest of some people. Theatre could attract people only as long as it stood close to people. Artaud in his treatise on the *Theatre of Cruelty* mentions how we cannot blame people from moving away from theatre if theatre does not novelize itself with time. Satheesh also mentions how theater cannot find a viable place in some campuses because sometimes the very culture upheld by the campus would be non-conducive to the functioning of the theatre. In a certain college where he had to teach theater, girls were not allowed to take part in a play along with boys. He had to rethink a whole play for it to be an all girls' play. After the establishment of the School of Drama and the onset of modernity in the theatrical scenario in Kerala, there was codified study of theatre.

> The theatre at Government Victoria College which was already strong and technically sound went through a sea change by the year 2012 with a theatre collective called *Chembarathi* being formed in the campus. This collective conducted album and short film festivals and also online poetry performances. There were theatre workshops that veered on discussions and wide exchange of books, speeches and ideas. *Metamorphosis of a Mustache*

was the natural culmination of a theater that took art seriously as a tool which dealt with various issues. The nation itself was undergoing a big change in the political front. Extremist right forces that believed in theories of purity of race and the creation of an 'other' were gaining ground. The nation was shocked with incidents of genocide and the rooting of a Hindutva ideology. It is at this juncture that *Metamorphosis of a Mustache* was formulated.

The play is rooted in two texts. While the ideating sub text of the play is MN Vijayan's preface to *Mein Kampf* , it also followed the film *The Great Dictator*. The film as such does not form the backbone of the play but three scenes on the screen have been utilised in the formal adaption of the play. There is an initial talk by the dictator which is directly mimicked by the actor Unnikkuttan. The gestures of Henkell find an exact replica in the actor who surrenders his persona not to the Hitler of history but to the Hitler of Charlie Chaplin. Another part where the film is reflected in the play is where Henkell plays with a huge rubber ball bloated with air on which the globe is drawn. In the play Hitler has an overcoat with the globe drawn on it. The globe later is transferred on to a picture drawn on a watermelon that Hitler cuts up. In a frenzy he cries out that he wants "Asia.. Asia.. Asia..America…America.. America…Africa..Africa''. But the sight of blood on his finger makes him unconscious. The last scene of the film, the epic speech by the barber is a harbinger of hope. That speech sets free the entire humanity which was hitherto paralyzed in fear. But the ending of the play is different. Here Hitler exhorts everyone to hate and kill. The frenzy builds up as everyone on the stage repeats after Hitler what he wants them to say. They have been put to a sleep where they no longer think. The director Sharath Revathy, who on being asked if the ending of the play was dark, one bereft of hope, said that it was not so. Here we have to recall the premises of a Brechtian theatre and the Theatre of Cruelty.

This brings us to the basic premise on which the play functioned. As already said the play is an adaption. Linda Hutcheon remarks in her work *A Theory of Adaption* that the product as well as the process which carried the nomenclature of adaption, was equally important. Hutcheon puts forward the idea that adaption helped to make us understand that idea could be dissociated from form and carried forward. In discussing the play at hand, we focus on the third stage of adaption as pointed out by Hutcheon, the reception, which is both "the process of creation and reception"(Hutcheon 46). It is the time, the context and the reception that decided the effect of the play *Metamorphosis of a Mustache*. It is in the reception of the play that we reach the focal point of what the adaption resulted in.

Whereas most adaptions would focus on a single work, the *Metamorphosis of a Mustache* we saw, is focused on two different works. We find that when the play opens, the voice over affirms that "Our inspiration for the play includes the preface to *Mein Kemf* written by M N Vijayan entitled *Hitler Indiayilekku Varunna Vazhy* and the film *The Great Dictator* by Charlie Chaplin". The director endorses that the purpose of the direct affirmation for the idea was that he wanted the works to be acknowledged and therefore to be read and seen widely.

There is a change in genre, from an essay/film to the play. The idea as germinated in an essay is carried forward in the form of the play. In the first scene of the play we find that the circumstances leading up to Hitler's accession to power have been followed directly. The instances are drawn from history. But from the second scene on to the last scene of the play we follow Hitler's life as a fictionalised account. The cook and her lover, a psychologist, reflect the deep fears of insecurity that many who confront fascist forces encounter. A journalist, who earlier wanted to expose what was happening, is brainwashed by Hitler into believing his Aryan supremacy theory. In his last hate speech that Hitler excretes on the stage we find all the supporters chanting along with him to hate and kill. They have blinded their eyes with human waste. Hitler also drives

home the force of purity of the human race which is borne by the woman and which has to be propagated by the man. Hitler tells the journalist to think not from his brain but his penis. The Aryan male has the role of carrying forward the purity of the Aryan race. Current political scenario in India forms the actual backdrop of the play. When Hitler burns the parliament (in the play), there is the sound of a train that whistles in the backdrop giving a cue to some incidents in the past.

The play was initially staged for the interzonal competitions where it won the first place and the prizes for the best actor and actress. Later the play was staged in the Town Halls at Palakkad, and Kozhikode and also at the Manushya Sangamam, Thrissur. In the month of September, 2016, the sets of the play were burnt where it was stored in a room in the Tamil department. A collective in the town gathered together to lament the loss. Antonin Artaud says "The public, which takes the false for the true, has the sense of the true and always responds to it when it is manifested"(6). It was clear that the play did create a stir. The plot of the play called for revised thinking on who we are, that Hitler who we thought was external was internalised in us, and that we enacted each act of othering in daily life. It also tried to bring home the belief that constructed notions of purity of the race/caste are prevalent around us.

In conclusion, what the paper was trying to highlight was that the theater that was formed in Government Victoria College broke out of the "theatre-for-competition" patterns followed by colleges elsewhere. The students who were part of the theater later became professionals who conducted theatre workshops. Some joined the School of Drama for further professional studies. The collective, that in the process of the creation of the theatre tried to gather the students and the academic staff in its fold, also involved the community in and around the campus. Students from other campuses joined Victoria to take part in the album festival and painting display and also in the Online Kavi Arang. What the theater did was to rejuvenate a campus, make it stand on its feet to answer questions that arose during the time. This resistant space that

was put forward by the campus theater and the *Metamorphosis of a Mustache* is a link in the chain of a whole history of resistance. An existing theatrical tradition in the campus that was technically sound and catered to zonal competitions alone, took a decisive political turn. At a time when the whole nation was responding to the twists in political angles, when the youth all around the nation was getting geared up to meet the call of the hour, the small theatrical attempt metamorphosed to create a critical questioning space which culminated in the burning of the sets of Chembarathi. I would like to end by quoting Antonin Artaud "For the theater as for culture, it remains a question of naming and directing shadows: and the theater, not confined to a fixed language and form, not only destroys false shadows but prepares the way for a new generation of shadows, around which assembles the true spectacle of life" (12).

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ROOTLESS TREES IN SEARCH OF SOIL: OTHERING OF THE OTHER- STATE WORKERS IN KERALA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *THE BENGALI RIOT* BY AMAL

MARIYUMMA VK

The other state labourers have become a conspicuous presence among Kerala population. In this paper the general attitude of repulsive 'othering' of other state workers in Kerala who are generally called as 'Bengalis' is addressed. The anxiety and fear of people who belong to other linguistic communities even though they belong to the same nationality is rather a complicated issue. The way popular culture, especially social media, like Facebook, WhatsApp etc. deal with this issue is analysed with special reference to the Malayalam novel by Amal, titled '*Bengali Kalapam'*(translated here as '*The Bengali Riot'*).

Migration has been identified as one among the major indicators of a society's economic, social, cultural and political growth and development. Push factors like internal problems related to safety and integrity of the society and pull factors like better opportunities like employment and life style are equal driving forces for migrations worldwide. Ravi Srivastava, in his article, *Internal Migration in India: An Overview of Its Features, Trends and Policy Challenges* observes: "Migration is a form of mobility in which people change their residential location across defined administrative boundaries for a variety of reasons, which may be involuntary or voluntary, or a mixture of both. The decisions on whether to move, how, and where are complex and could involve a variety of

actors in different ways" (2).Indian Constitution under Article 19 provides basic freedom to move to any part of the country, right to reside and earn livelihood of their choice. Analysis of migration patterns reveal the disparity in the distribution of resources, labour market and other living standards.

Deepak K. Mishra in the work *Internal Migration in Contemporary India* cites the three issues related to economic development that have implications for understanding contemporary issues in labour migration in India as the agrarian question under globalisation, the questions of uneven development, poverty and migration and the informal sector perspective.(1)He adds that the informal sector, far from being a residual or a transitory sector is, in fact, the core of the economy in terms of its contribution to output and employment. The expansion of employment opportunities in the formal or organised sector being slow, the informal sector has been attracting migrants from smaller towns, cities and rural areas, alike. (7) Also, the attainment of the necessary skills in informal sector jobs being relatively easy, the migrant unskilled workers are drawn to such jobs as a means of being employed faster. The migration into Kerala in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was primarily from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. But the recent migration is from states as far as northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Assam etc. and from neighbouring nations like Nepal and Bangladesh. M.K Nidheesh quotes Benoy Peter, who runs the Kerala-based Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development, who says that Kerala's migrants come from over 195 districts spread across 25 states and that festivals in Bihar makes visible thinning of the workforce in Kerala, and contractors plan according to the festival days of the northern states in advance, so that their work is not interrupted.

Most of the migrants who arrive in Kerala cherish a plan to earn more money in a small period of time and then return home. So they are not insistent on the safety measures and living facilities that are available

for them. They do not usually complain about living in dirty and unhealthy surroundings with meagre facilities even for fulfilling their basic needs. Their helplessness is taken by the natives as their natural inclination for a dirty surrounding. In effect, it adds to the local people's aversion to the migrant settlers. Shruthi Ashok and Prof. Neena Thomas in an article titled, "A Study on Issues of Inter-State Migrant Labourers in India" observe:

> They are a floating community moving in search of jobs from one place to another, hence their instability paves way for their lack of identity. Some of them are working under contractors and some under non contract basis. As such, the labourers who are not under any contract receive no benefits or incentives and are deprived from all social welfare programs for their upliftment. Being an individual of outside Kerala these ISM labourers also face social exclusion and racial discrimination which create a sense of non acceptance in the society. (94)

The Bengali Riot by Amal is a novel written about the other state workers' living experience in Kerala today. Narrated through different narrative voices and devices, the story moves through the life of an 'other state' worker named Anarul Islam, who is a native of KarbiAnglong, Assam. Reviewers hail this work as a first of its kind novel written about the Kerala psyche from the view point of 'other state workers' and it naturally throws light on the meagre existence of these people. Keralites have a habit of calling all the work people who hail from the northern states like, Utharakhand, Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Bangladesh, etc. with a common name "Bengali". In the novel the term is used as a common denomination for them and Bengalis have become a new community and a dominant presence in the daily life of Keralites. Dr. S.S Sreekumar observes:

This novel titled *The Bengali Riot* mercilessly interrogates how narrow minds determine the creative development of a human being. This novel holds the concept of 'universal humanity' high as against the pleasure seeking, and self-centered people who in the vain pride of caste, family and nationality show toward other lives…At the same time, it is how the aversion to the 'others' that is brimming in our region- consciousness which demonise itself and affect the life of fellow human beings, that Amal looks at in *Bengali Riot*. (My Trans; Amal180)

The plot moves through the life of Anarul Islam, who is a native of Boka Jan in the KarbiAnglong Hills in Assam. His ancestors were workers brought from Eastern Bengal to the estates in the hills of Karbi before independence. These rootless people had witnessed the trauma of their birthplace being tore apart as East Pakistan and Bangladesh. Speaking Bengali, believing in Islam and living among people belonging to different tribes, they looked different and alien among people with face cuts similar to that of Chinese and Tibetans. Being surrounded by differently looking tribes of human beings, Anarul was much anguished by alienation. After witnessing the death of his teacher who had taken risks to educate the poor people, Anarul was unable to complete his education and left Karbi. He kept on writing random poems on paper planes in Karbi language about the penurious existence of his fellow human beings. Because Karbi didn't have a proper script, he had been using Assamese and Roman letters.

Anarul is a symbol of the universal immigrant in the sense, even though he travelled inside India, the severe disparity in terms of language, attires, religion and culture etc. made it feel like migrating into another country. Amal deftly uses the image of a rootless tree to reflect the lonely Anarul and the wandering interstate worker in search of a soil to re-root its life. The tree serves as a perfect symbol to reflect all the

agonies of living a meagre and scanty existence in an attempt not to wither away and keep alive. Anural, brooding over existential dilemmas of human kind: the rootlessness, the drive for achievement, money and loneliness reflects: "Human beings are like trees. Standing lonely unable to move or hug another tree… Roots will be racing selfishly, hunting for water and fertilizer that is his own. (54)

In the preface to the work, Amal says that the novel sprang from his continuous exposure to the life and shuttling of interstate workers through his travels, especially train journeys. He could interact with them back home in Kerala, where these people have become the most important work force that influence the economic field of Kerala. Amal observes:"Each character in the novel is I, as the most worthless worker, who works like machines in silence, without a form, language, country, nation, individuality or nothing of my own" (viii). Anarul had been led to Kerala by a man named Mriganga and he cherished great expectations about meeting the people of 'the rich, beautiful, literate and lucky place-Kerala'. He had embarked on the journey trusting his mind which was full of willingness for hard work and subservience. Though Anarul did not have any documents for identification or insurance, Mriganga managed to arrange him a job. Mriganga advised Anarul to greet by his community's special "AssalamuAlaikum" and reasoned it as, "'As far as I understand, this is the place where caste consciousness play hide and seek most'. He winked pointing at the caste- flags in the junction" (Amal 46). Anarul's life turned out to be a 'Kerala work expedition' throughout Kerala and like a travel writer he flew numberless paper flights imprinted with his Kerala stories. The workers' camp was just a long shed made of metal sheets. It was a mini cross section of India, with the sound and smells of different languages and foods and irrespective of their religious beliefs and caste status they toiled together to survive. Like in most of such camps in Kerala, it didn't even have a hygienic toilet and the drainage was let out to the nearby stream. During 2012-13, the labour ministry in Kerala had

put forward certain welfare schemes, acts and programmes for Inter State Migrant labourers in Kerala and currently many new schemes are introduced to get them integrated into the Kerala society.

What is contradictory in the migrant and host community's relationship in Kerala is that even after having long years of experience and exposure of being immigrants in different countries, Keralites are reluctant to give them their due recognition. They say that, "whether it is on footpath or work site, generally Malayalees do not look in our faces."(qtd. in Venkiteswaran 19).Giving face to somebody being the initial aspect of recognising somebody as a person, Keralites deny them even a personhood. We are not just averse to acknowledge their presence and being, but also sustain doubts and fears about their strangeness.

Most of the migrants who arrive in Kerala with a plan to earn more money in a short period of time are not much worried about living in dirty and unhealthy surroundings with meagre facilities even for fulfilling their basic needs. Also their past poverty-ridden life of grievances makes them adjust to the facilities in Kerala. In effect, it adds to the local people's aversion to the migrants settlers. C.S Venkiteswaran in his article "Why We Are not Talking to Them?" observes: "Another aspect is the difference in the conceptions of the migrants and locals about personal and environmental hygiene, health and behavioural peculiarities. Just like the concept of good/evil, virtue/vice etc. the conceptions about cleanliness, hygiene and honour and the customs and anxieties about them have very culturally specific dimensions. And these conceptions define otherness to a great extent" (22).The chances of native workers losing employment opportunities because of the disparity in the levels of payment that is drawn from the native employers also reasons for the aversion. The involvement of interstate people in serious crimes also contributed to the fear of natives about these strangers who speak unfamiliar tongues.

Some of the workers in the camps met with accidents in the work site and some died on the spot itself. Mriganga who took Anarul to Kerala and gave him parental care, also committed suicide in dejection over his daughter's elopement with a Facebook friend. With the incident Anarul lost the money that he had deposited in Mriganga's bank account as savings. After the death, the camp managers dispersed the camp without any prior notice or payment and a deserted and disheartened Anarul is helped by Gopal Yadav, who was a fellow worker from Bihar. Anarul meets a Bengali named Lalawho was nicknamed as 'Mallu Bengali' as he had adopted a Malayali way of life and was even about to marry a Malayali girl. Lalahad worked hard for an employer named Chakrapani and was treated by them as one of their family. Triggered by the event of a Bihari man's elopement with a Malayali police man's wife, Chakrapani's neighbours started to gossip about an affair between Lala and the girl who was like a sister to him. Even though the family avoided such remarks, when the people started to behave like ostracising Chakrapani, Lala takes his leave from there. One can see here how familiarity leads to acceptance and then to identity among the locals. Movement from places to places and to various kinds of jobs prevents the interstate worker being experienced in a particular skill. Those who were able to fit in a particular place and job could turn out to be skilled labourers- like the Mallu Bengali. Here the Malayali community was totally blinded by prejudice against his fellow citizen, just out of fear of the man's origin in a different linguistic and cultural community. Their ostracising of another Malayali for keeping up a relation with the 'othered interstate man'is also motivated by their shame and feeling of 'dishonour' in their fellow man's association with the hated and criminalized lot.

In the novel, the intolerance of Bharath Nambiar Residence Association (BNRA) towards the interstate workers settlements in the Cross and Crescent Construction Site is developed into consequences with serious dimensions. BNRAs and the relatively poor Ambedkar colony

people had lived side by side, but keeping a healthy distance. A project named, Babel which was launched as corporate project of a big shopping mall cum entertainment city, exhilarated them alike. But when more than 400 other state labourers and their families settled there, "BRNAs and Ambedkar Colony's foreheads creased into many folds together. Creased foreheads began to fume like being pressed with iron box and began to flare up" (Amal 109). The labourers were from the north and eastern states and were together addressed as Bengalis. In the mornings they were taken from the markets where they gathered together and were carried into work places in small vans and trucks like cattle. The people of BNRA called the morning market scene as 'slave markets' and gradually the mass of more than 10,000 other state people staying together began to send shivers through their spines as if they were surrounded by enemy soldiers. Even though the milkman, grocer, barber, dry cleaner, and (even in their temples) were other state people, the criminal cases in which they got involved, including the Jisha murder case caused more terror in the natives. Their women couldn't suffer even any thought of being touched by these repulsive men and they even said: "You can imagine the terror that this issue gives us women who do not even dare to leave their girl children alone in their own houses… Let Malayali men rape us, let our women be harassed by Malayali men, let them stare at our women. The dishonour is not the same if an 'other' state man commits these on us… Isn't it true...? We cannot let this happen. We don't like it" (Amal 119).

People became apprehensive of the arrival of a day when all the Bengalis in Kerala go for a united strike to encumber the normal Keralite life. The conspiracies and rumours began to escalate to the level of even denying the other state people water for their cooking needs. When the construction owners also rejected the demands of the natives to send those people away, clashes erupted amongst them. The migrant labourers also were scared by the WhatsApp spread news and videos of Keralites

torturing the labourers and they began to return in masses. The government tried to pacify the migrants at any cost as their departure may block the easy function of construction field of Kerala. In a parallel plot another three men who were natives, Sabri, Moosakkutty and Vahid, killed a man who was their rival and wanted to cover up the dead body at Anarul's place of stay. They planted fire on one of the huts and it culminated in a violent clash between the groups and then in a riot. The riot was a manifestation of all kinds of human rights violations. "Vahid felt that it is the suppressed self of man that has erupted in the riot. The space where the real human inside becomes visible is the street fights where there is no one to control. Like staying together for the survival in flood time in spite of religious and caste discriminations, all have come together to rob, to kill, and to burn" (168).

The aversion towards these strangers manifesting in rage over their entry and mushrooming in the social life and the hosts feeling suffocated is similar to a human body being defiled by foreign elements. In the article, "Genocide and the Social Production of Immorality", Ruth Jamieson quotes Claude Levi Strauss' concept of how primitives and the civilised dealt with strangers: anthropophagic or anthropoemic strategies. According to him, the primitives either devoured, digested and absorbed them into the folds of their native society; thus eliminating the threats of difference. At the same time the civilised adopted strategies of vomiting out the contaminating elements and keeping them away in the boundaries without allowing a mixture of the two and thus excluding the threat. Exclusionary practices of exile and genocide are another cruel facet of the anthropoemic strategies. The other state labourers are more or less treated with the latter anthropoemic strategies. Thus they are never recognised as equal citizens by denying the chances of absorbing and merging into the host culture. Rather they are treated as 'others' stereotyping them as unhygienic, cultureless contaminants to the so-

called literate civilized Keralite society. But as a big work force in Kerala, they are neither devourable nor vomitable.

The terrified Anarul who accidentally happens to be a witness to the man slaughter, knew that if a dead body is found at his place of stay, he will be accused of the murder and he fled from there. Exposed to rain and afflicted with severe fever caused by the terror of the cruel murder, the sight of the severed head, and the fear of prosecution, Anarul turned up in the workers' camp where some women take care of him in an ailing and unconscious state and change his dress with the available dresses including a pink ladies panties. Once he regained his consciousness, Anarul fled from there and ended up in a train to quit the so called 'peaceful-beautiful Kerala'.

The train witnesses the blatant intolerance and cruelty of the civilised. Anarul had hidden himself under the seats as he didn't have any tickets. The people in the train interrogated him and the burnt and feverish Anarul incited their curiosity, fear and rage of strangers. On hearing that his name was Anarul Islam, a person who was pecking on the riot news in the front page of a newspaper, comments:

> Assam, Manipur and Imphal are close by. Myanmar boarder is right there, isn't it? Anybody can infiltrate through the forest.' He hoisted the paper to those near him. 'IB has given reports that hundreds of Rohingyan refugees have entered Kerala. Special police group has begun enquiry. The order is not to spare any other state worker without checking. Moreover, look at this, the police is looking for a Muslim terrorist too'
>
> Then it is this man himself. (Amal 24-25)

The recent issues of mob lynching in Kerala too are mentioned. When Anarul is blocked by the mob, an elderly man warned them the incidents

of lynching the Adivasi youth who stole rice and the Bengali who stole chicken. A lad who snapped the feverish and shivering Anarul in tatters and burning marks zooms his mobile phone in on him, on his burns, on his strange language and finally on his pink panties. The pink panties added more flavour to the story and picture that the lad posted on Fb:

> #feeling doubtful situation
>
> Does anyone know this man? Do you think he has any connection with the P.N Bharathan Nambiar Residents Association issue? Body is full of burns and soot. He looks terrified and in a plan to flee Kerala… Hey, young men and women who are interested panties, come to inbox. I will tell you a pink panties secret… (31)

In a world where the buzzword is "I TAKE SELFIES, THEREFORE I AM" (31) and everyone is in a drive to be viral, the lad also was crazy to be viral and receive the satiric and sarcastic commentaries under his post and wall: "A 101 Others likes' post was his target of life… It dewed in his mind seeing many anonymous people and online newspapers stuffing Facebook, by posting the picture which they got from him, by weaving stories adding colours, horns and tails according to their imaginations. Many appeared in WhatsApp too" (56).Slogans like "I USE FACEBOOK, THEREFORE IAM" (56) that appears in block letters in the novel frequently reflects the contemporary social mindset. The novel uses the language, puns, idioms, trolls etc. that may be together called 'a social media language' which reflects the strong influence of social media in contemporary Malayali cultural life.

One is reminded of the murdercase of Jisha and Soumya which shocked the Malayali consciousness, were the convicts were other state workers. Especially Jisha murder case convict, Ameerul Islam bears close resemblance to the protagonist in the novel, beginning with the name itself. The novel points to the reality of how much drastic and consequential could be the violent and disparaging commentaries that people throw at each other from the safe zones of private individual spaces of anonymity in social media and the kind of intolerant culture it promotes and elevates in the public consciousness. Among the comments under the news on Ameerul Islam who was then suspected to have killed Jisha, hate mongering against the other state/ north east/ Muslim community was clearly visible. The comments went up from the level of blaming him 'a Bengladeshi terrorist', 'butcher him and throw to dogs', 'His name says it all' to 'God save us from Muslims, and so on(Comments on Asianet news in the facebook page 'We Love Bharathamba'). In the novel the Facebook community responds with adequate sarcasm, hatred and violence. The popularity given for disparaging matters that are unacceptable to the general public turns out to be really crucial and results in creating a violently intolerant culture that goes against secularist culture of Kerala. The anonymity that is aided by the social media networks is widely misused for meeting unsolicited ends. The author has also included many interesting social media trolls as part of the narrative (142-144), declaring that "I TROLL, THEREFORE IAM"(142).

In the novel, Murugayyan, who owned a vegetarian hotel, is a successful migrant labourer from Tamil Nadu who had experiences that were as bad and he exposes the so called clean and compassionate Malayali self in his advice to Bishnu Das, who was a Bengali employee who went desperate when insulted by a Malayali customer:

> Malayalees are educated, they won't work under anybody... They had behaved very badly toward all the Tamilians who came here for work. They treated us as uneducated thieves and dirty worthless animals…All of us who carried the blackness in our minds, washing the food waste of these people are faring today

as fair hotel owners in the nooks and corners of Kerala. Our monopoly is very strong in trade market today… Now, there is no one in this place who has not sat with bent head and eaten our food from this hotel". (154-155)

In the train, Anarul, who did not possess any identification proofs to show that he is an Indian, was arrested by the police. When he got a phone call from his father saying that their family's names were not there in the National Citizenship Register of Assam, he could realise that he is going to be treated as a 'nobody' without any rights that is due for a citizen of India. One can be reminded of Agamben's concept of 'bare life' who is put in a 'state of exception' where all his rights are withdrawn from him technically making him viable to any kind of punishment. In the novel, as in real life, language is also revealed as a spy or as a signifier of a different linguistic identity. His accent with Arabic words sending a lightening through the onlooker's spine underlines the fact that language is not just a means of communication, but a marker of identity and destiny too. The novel flushes out in the public all the hidden insecurities and infirmities that lie rotten under the veils of the compassionate 'Malayali self'. It also focuses on how demonic is regionalism and othering in India as a nation which is struggling to contain all the multitudes of difference inside it, brimming and panting, so that it almost equals the racial prejudices globally.

*All translations from *The Bengali Riot* are done by the author.

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TRANSPOSED ICONOGRAPHIES, TRANSCENDED IDEOLOGIES; THE COMMERCIALISATION OF CHE GUEVARA, BOB MARLEY AND HINDUISM IN POPULAR CULTURE

ANAGHA ANIL

A concept as old as human history, symbol is a culturally driven phenomenon that facilitates the communication of an idea or belief. Symbols could be in the form of objects, figures, sounds, and colours, which could mean different things to different people depending upon their socio-cultural disposition. Civilisations across the globe had used symbols to express specific ideologies and social structures pertaining to a specific culture, conveying a sole meaning assigned to them. However, with the emergence of a dynamic and technologically geared popular culture rooted in diversity, some of these symbols hitherto confined within religious or ideological framework, have dissociated themselves from their imposed meanings so as to gain a secular, democratic and liberal footing amongst the masses. This phenomenon proves right the Saussurean concept of sign, signifier and signified, where the signifier and signified share no arbitrary relationship, or connection bound by logic .The mass production of these icons, both religious and ideological, says how meanings could evolve over time and context despite their seemingly inseparable auras.

A street graffiti in Aluva, Kerala

Reminiscent of the concept of "Culture Industry" propounded by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, idols and symbols, both religious and social are now being remodelled to fulfil the whims and fancies of consumerism. The religions of Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism were made subject to extensive cultural appropriation, through popular culture along with ideological figures like Ernesto Che Guevara, who despite the obvious irony was transformed into the "poster boy" of consumerism. The reggae musician Bob Marley who endorsed the spirit of peace, harmony and love through his songs, was also transformed into r a consumerist icon. This paper proposes to read such representations from a cultural studies perspective by incorporating ideas like encoding and decoding in communication.

Stuart Hall in his 1973 essay, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* makes observations regarding the capacity of an encoded message to undergo distortions and "misunderstandings" during the process of decoding. He considers these interpretations to be strongly influenced by the socio-economic and political temperament of the audience. Thus at one end producers create a message which the audience may or may not decipher to its absolution. Sometimes the meanings produced are contrived and far removed from the original

message. However, Hall regards both positions as equally creative endeavours which facilitate the production of meaning. This paper would be close reading such modes by which the symbols of Che Guevara, Hinduism and Bob Marley were reproduced and democratised to comprehend how diverse socio-cultural environments lead to the production of multiple meanings. Another work which could be read along with this research is Frederic Jameson's *Reification of Utopia* which speaks about the commodification of human experiences. Jameson's key argument about the transformation of human experiences and practices into consumable, commodifiable products is fitting to describe the commercialisation of cultural icons in popular culture.

Ernesto Che Guevara

His countenance bears the anger and grief of a generation. Lost in thought, he spares but a sharp distant gaze with heavy eyebrows and unruly hair tamed by a starred beret. Little did the leader who co-led the Cuban revolution with Fidel Castro know, that this charismatic photograph of his would continue to enchant the masses over generations. Listed as one of the most reproduced images of the world, rivalling other famous images like "Mona Lisa", it is the poster that adorns student dorms, soiled street walls and of late, t-shirts and any other surface imaginable. Named later as *Guerrillero Heroico,* this iconic photograph of Ernesto Che Guevara was clicked by the Cuban photographer Alberto Korda on March 5, 1960, on the occasion of a political rally in Havana following the explosion at Havana Harbor, killing up to 100 people and injuring many more. Korda who was working with a *Revolucion* paper at that time remarked how the snap had been intuitive and not planned. He told one interviewer that Guevara had held such an intense gaze that he had been briefly taken aback and only managed to fire off two quick shots, one vertical, one horizontal. The photo was radically cropped later, to snip off a palm tree and the profile of another man amidst whom Che Guevara held his frame towards eternity and beyond.

Alberto Korda's *Guerrilero Heroico*

Che was 31 at that time, seven years before his martyrdom after which his fellow revolutionary of Cuba Fidel Castro would sanction the usage of the image as a brand symbol of Cuba. Michael Casey author of the book *Che's Afterlife* thinks that the decision was rather strategic of Castro as Che was a revered figure, especially among western intellectuals who were in agreement with his decision on denouncing the Soviet Union. This assumption significantly contributed to the popularity of Che's image in the West which was later used by politicians, demonstrators and merchants alike. In fact, red and black posters based on Korda's photograph were used at 1968 student protests in Paris as a symbol of resistance. The image was also appropriated by Black Power movements, hippies and anti-war activists of America at this time. His death at the end of the disastrous guerilla campaign as a martyr made him a revolutionary persona, an epitome of dissent, rebellion and political awareness . Fascinated by the unusual dispersion of this image, many scholars took it upon themselves to investigate into the phenomenon. *Che Guevara: Revolutionary and Icon (2006)* by Trisha Ziff*, Che's Afterlife: The Legacy of an Image (2009)* by Michael Casey, and *The Semiotics of Che Guevara: Affective Gateways (2015)* by Maria-Carolina Cambre, *Chevolution (2008)* documentary directed by Trisha Ziff, to mention a few.

Subjected to the interpretations of popular culture, various versions of this photograph have been painted, printed, digitised, embroidered, tattooed, silk-screened, sculpted or sketched. Owing to the popularity and acceptance of Che's image among the masses, Jonathan Green, director of the UCR/California Museum of Photography, notes how "Korda's image has worked its way into languages around the world. It has become an alpha-numeric symbol, a hieroglyph, an instant symbol. It mysteriously reappears whenever there's a conflict. There isn't anything else in history that serves in this way"(Lotz).

Guess Who graffiti at Fort Kochi portraying Ayyankali in a Che Guevera t-shirt

In 1968, The Times observed the posthumous transformation of Che from a revolutionary to a legend who amassed considerable followers from among radical intellectuals, workers and students. Michael Casey notes how this reception supplemented with appropriation led to the pluralistic shades of Che which includes; St. Che, known for his ability to perform miracles; Chesucristo, a Christ-like figure revered for his ideals, the Rock 'n' Roll Che, who is representative of youthful anti-

authoritarianism rather than stern political convictions (Kakutani). These representations are illustrative of the different socio-political constitutions prevalent in society. It is reminiscent of the oppositional position advocated by Stuart Hall in his essay *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. According to this position, the audience/consumer comprehends the literal meaning of the message but interprets the message differently, due to their diverse backgrounds, convictions and principles. On occasions, these lead to the accumulation of conflicting or contradictory meanings like the aforementioned Chesucristo and St. Che, both incongruous representations of a leader who vehemently fought against the disparities in society and the delusion of religion.

Chesucristo; Graffiti on the street of Lima,Peru

Regarded as the "quintessential post-modern icon" who signifies "anything to anyone and everything to everyone", Che's image as Patrick Symmes, author of *Chasing Che: A Motorcycle Journey in Search of the Guevara Legend*, remarks, gets chicer and chicer with the passage of time. "Guevara-style beards", berets, handkerchiefs, blouses, t-shirts

etc bearing the rugged countenance of the bygone hero, contribute significantly towards the present consumerist culture. The latest addition to this appropriation that finds expression on the most basic of knick-knacks like key chains and coffee mugs was made by Gisele Bundchen, a Brazilian supermodel who strolled down the runway of Paulo fashion Show 2012, wearing a bikini made entirely of faces of Che. There also exist beer and ice cream products in the market that have made use of the revolutionary's face to endorse their product. "Cherry Guevara", an Australian ice cream line had advertised their eating experience as "The revolutionary struggle of the cherries was squashed as they were trapped between two layers of chocolate. May their memory live on in your mouth!" Despite being regarded as trivial and consumerist by some, these commonplace denominations of Che, have made revolution a lasting memory among the masses.

Che wearing Mickey Mouse ears; A visual representation in UK

Gisele Bundchen in a bikini made entirely of Che's image

Marxism has always been vociferous in denouncing religion and idolatry what with Marx calling religion the opium of the masses. However, over the years Che's image acquired a status akin to a religious idol; an emergent station strongly backed by fervent followers of communism, who though ironically enough overlooks its basic tents. An instance that

would serve testimony to this fact would be the destruction of stocks and censure upon sales of footwear design that used Che's image by the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI). Here one could observe how the ideas of sacred and profane got incorporated into the image thereby transporting it into a realm deliberately removed from the exertion and strife of everyday monotonous life. The transgression of the symbol or the image to the daily life of ordinary man would be an act of profanity; a deed capable of tarnishing, or even worse shattering the carefully sculpted "idol". Thus to an extent, a hero of the masses was posthumously shunned from being a democratic idol due to certain misconceived notions of his followers.

Slippers with Che's image as seen in Varkala beach
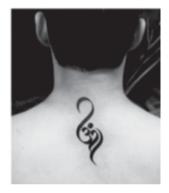Thiruvanathapuram, Kerala

Despite being regarded as a chic symbol by few, Che's image is essentially a politically loaded one that unambiguously communicates an ideology. Emanating a revolutionary zeal rooted in communist fervour, at times the image of Che with its massive popularity has been an intimidating presence to political rivals especially to right-wing parties. Bharathiya Janata Party(BJP) in Kerala also had similar doubts which were made obvious by their demand to remove the Latin American revolutionary's picture from the villages of Kerala in 2017. According to A. N Radhakrishnan, the then general secretary of BJP's Kerala unit,

Che is an evil influence who would inspire the youths of the communist party to engage in violence. Mr Radhakrishnan also opined that the Cuban revolutionary icon's place in history is alongside dictators like Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. However, the demand was met with much hostility and was condemned by left leaders of the state as an attempt by the BJP to censure those cultural icons who do not come under the purview of right-wing ideology.

Translated into numerous visual representations through its insertion into miscellaneous values, critiques and ideas, the image of Che has metamorphosed from a mere memory to a mnemonic symbol that is easily perceived and accommodated by popular culture. The history of Che was thus replaced by the iconic symbolism, the image adopted through the ideals he stood for, which includes revolution, rebellion and adventure. Today anyone could collectively participate in commemorating these ideals or flaunt their inner flare for rebellion by donning a Che T-shirt. Thus "yesterday's revolution is today's coffee cup, last week's guerrilla fighter becomes this week's cell-phone cover"(Cruikshan 148).But these acts in no way trivialise the idea of revolution or the history of Che, on the contrary, it makes revolution a palpable, tangible reality, a quotidian affair, part of the individual's daily life by bringing "revolution" to one's doorstep.

Hinduism

The West's fascination with Hindu imagery dates back to the Transcendentalist movement of the nineteenth century, which expressed an interest in Indian spirituality. This interest however became more pronounced during the counter-cultural period, whereby India transformed into a haven for spiritual seekers, who took back with them the ideals of the religion which they would later translate through diverse modes of visual representation. With the emergence of hippie culture in the 1970s, Hinduism along with its spiritual aspect was widely appropriated for its iconography and imagery both of which imparted an exotic aura to the religion. Popular culture also invested in this misconception by launching

products which transposed the icons and deities of the religion into material and consumeristic contexts removed from the spiritual environs. Regarded as glamorous and fashionable, these symbols were adopted by the fashion houses of Delhi and Mumbai and they began to appear on tote bags, T-shirts, lunch boxes, tattoos, key chains and the like. The consumers of these products are not confined to the Hindu community but also include people from different religions and cultures. Secured mostly as accessory, decor or art, these appropriations displace the religion from its sacred pedestal, its exalted aura, to an essentially material context.

Om tattoo   A Hindu psychedelic t-shirt available
                             for sale in Amazon

Mandala painting used as a bohemian wall decor

Most of the religious objects merchandised have no spiritual content whatsoever and are consumed or appreciated primarily for their appealing aesthetics. Accessories and decor bearing the symbol Om are available today in a setting divorced from the spiritual; Om printed clothes, accessories and tapestries in psychedelic shades are all examples of such appropriation. In a spiritual sense, Om has an assortment of meanings that spans over various Southeast Asian religions including Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. Each of these cultures has a distinctive myth and belief concerning the icon. For example, in Hinduism, it is associated with the creation of the universe which was facilitated by the vibration of Om. Not all consumers are aware of such spiritual or cultural connotations, but purchase the symbol anyway owing to its aesthetic allure. Like Che T-shirts conveying the spirit of rebellion, these objects are also used by those few who want to appear as spiritual by emanating an aura of their existent or non-existent spiritual life. They need not necessarily comprehend the true meaning or religious significance of the symbol but could illustrate a flair for the spiritual by possessing such a product or artefact.

Though we have innumerable varieties of appropriations and visual representations of Hinduism in popular culture today, the inception of the phenomenon could be traced back to the works of Raja Ravi Varma. An aristocrat turned painter from Kerala, who used European styles of oil painting to depict Indian religious and mythological figures, Ravi Varma played a significant role as the "Father of Indian Calendar Art". He single-handily launched a "deluge of Hindu 'bazaar' art – which included both calendars and framing pictures - manufactured at lithography and, later, offset printing presses around the country - which 'vernacularized capitalism' and harnessed mass culture and mass production"(qtd. in Sarkar 4).

Woodward's Cripe Water calendar, 1928; Bal Krishna adorned with a bejeweled peacocdk feather

There have been also other adaptations of Hindu iconography into several contexts which were considered as inappropriate by certain clusters in the religion. An instance would be exotic dancers masking as Hindu deities in a strip club of Chicago named "Karma". However, the practice came to an end following widespread criticism and mass protests, from an organisation named American Hindus against Defamation (AHAD). Another appropriation that met a similar end was the videogame SMITE developed by Hi-Rez Studios. A multiplayer game, where the players assume control of deities from different pantheons and participate in team-based combats, the game was regarded as blasphemous and demeaning towards the Hindu Gods by many. The disapprobation expressed by many followers towards over-sexualisation of Goddess Kali had also instigated the makers to call-off the game. Anyhow despite these signs of disapproval and discontent, appropriations continue in forms hitherto unseen and Gods of late seem busy being made into a meme, poster cover, T-shirt print and the like. The dynamic era of

contemporary visual representation has transformed them into chic, consumable and palpable entities of everyday life.

Bob Marley

An array of Bob Marley t-shirts

One of the best-dressed musicians of the 70s, Bob Marley, the dreadlocked King of Reggae continuous to be a sensation even decades after his death for single-handedly popularising Jamaican culture to the world. With the emergence of a technologically enhanced popular culture which is constantly reinventing the icons of the world, Marley too was subjected to several reproductions that essentially removed him from the ideals he espoused. As Walter Benjamin famously remarked, reproduction heavily influences how an image is perceived, whereby an image is likely to disengage from the meaning or ideology it hitherto associated with. Same was the plight of Marley, who despite creating numerous songs on love, peace and harmony got etched into immortality as an advocate of marijuana.

A scene from rickshaw race that was held at Fort Kochi

Like Che, Marley too had become an inevitable component of student dorms, chic cafes and clothing lines. For them, he's a symbol which emanates a bizarre yet perfect blend of anarchy, aesthetics and worldliness. Marley's appropriation was not a singular affair detached from the culture that enfolds him. The visual culture that imbibed his image also disseminated the Rastafarian culture to which he belongs, particularly through the usage of rasta colours and cannabis prints. Knick-knacks, t-shirts and posters with a dreadlocked Marley superimposed on a cannabis leaf on a red, yellow and green backdrop, became popular especially among the youth. These illustrations had quite a reputation among its consumers as well as the keepers of law and order if one is to consider the fiasco that ensued between Kerala police and "Bob Marley".

In the year of 2014, Kerala police had initiated an anti-narcotics drive across the state confiscating goods indented with Marley's image or Rasta colours on the pretext that the mascot had been used by many to sell drugs and spur youth into using them. According to police officer N.G Suhruth, it was Bob Marley songs and iconography that lured

youngsters into using drugs. Cases were registered against shopkeepers under Section 3 (1) Young Persons (Harmful Publication) Act 1956 for promoting material that is 'harmful' to youngsters. The State Youth Commission had also concurred with the decision of Kerala police by calling for a complete ban of Bob Marley T-shirts, key chains, bracelets and other accessories. Despite the unfavourable actions from authorities', reggae music, colours and dreadlocks continue to thrive among the youth of Kerala and other communities. However, this process of democratisation is also a process of corruption and dilution. Most consumers of Marley merchandise are unaware of its symbolic or spiritual connotations and have reduced the King of Reggae to a mere addict, a junkie with a remarkable sense of fashion.

Man wearing a hat made of Rasta colours

Bracelet in Rasta colours

Adopted as the colours of the Rastafarian movement, red, yellow, and green bear a meaning that is primarily political than artistic. Also associated with the Jamaican flag and Marcus Garvy, a publisher and orator who was considered as a prophet by Rastas, each colour has a specific cultural meaning whereby; Red symbolises the blood of black martyrs from around the world, who strived for equal rights, liberation and justice, yellow symbolises the wealth of Africa especially the gold, and green stands for the beauty and vegetation of the promised land Ethiopia. One could observe large-scale appropriation of these colours in merchandise where an example would be the simultaneous appropriation of Christianity and Rastafarianism through rosaries in Rasta colours. These rosaries are available in the market in a scenario completely divorced from the religious. They are mainly purchased for its aesthetics and more often than not are used as an accessory than a spiritual symbol.

Rasta colour rosary available for sale in Amazon

Dreadlocks and cannabis, on the other hand, constitute the spiritual aspects of Rastafarianism which Marley rigidly observed.

Articulating their spiritual life, dreadlocks were worn by Rastas to keep their bodies in a state of wholeness. They abstained from using scissors, razors or comb to sustain this state of physical integrity However, this is conceived in an entirely different light by those who appropriate Marley and considered only the aesthetic aspect of the hairstyle. This very much evokes the idea propounded by Fredric Jameson in his work *Reification of Utopia* whereby the experiences and cultural practices of a community are airbrushed, trimmed and appropriated to echo the likings of the market. This profit-oriented endeavour that reduces human experiences to consumable products only serves to spread misconceptions about the community. Rastas smoking of cannabis for entheogenic or religious reasons was thus subject to such misinterpretations whereby it was misinterpreted as a lifestyle by those who ignorantly appropriated the culture. The same misapprehension is what plagued the Kerala police into conducting drug busts around Marley loving youth.

Appropriations and reproductions have been excluded for long, condemned and at times considered as blasphemous. They are devoured by some; rejected by few; but more often than not remains within the core of popular culture to be rediscovered and remodelled. With an ever-evolving visual culture that contributes to the dynamic nature of the emergent popular culture, appropriations and adaptations will continue to flourish, new meanings endlessly derived, and at the end, they may leave no trace of the original meaning or ideology. However, these representations are necessary as they democratise both the distant and the familiar by embedding them into the palpable realities of the masses, to create a culturally enriched society, vital to the evolution of all civilisations.

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YOUNG ADULTS, SERIOUS FICTION:
EFFECTS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF SUICIDE
AND MENTAL ILLNESS IN *13 REASONS WHY*

ANASWARA RAMACHANDRAN

The portrayal of suicide and mental illness in popular culture can be extremely problematic at times, especially when it comes to media that is aimed at a younger audience. Unlike in media meant for adult consumers, graphic scenes involving mental illness, death, suicide etc. are frowned upon in young adult fiction. At the same time, it is necessary to address these issues in a responsible and respectful way in order to help raise awareness and eradicate some of the stigma around mental health issues. This may help anyone experiencing mental illness to realise that they are not alone in their pain and that they can flourish just as well as their peers. The recent effort in children's and young adult's fiction to include more diverse characters and stories is partly responsible for the emergence of several books that talk about such issues. While these stories of young people affected by various mental issues are necessary, it is also important to examine what kind of impact these stories often have on their readers and whether their portrayal of these issues is helpful. This paper examines the popular young adult novel *13 Reasons Why* and its television adaptation of the same name for the positive and negative impacts of the portrayal of suicide and mental illness in them.

Jay Asher's *13 Reasons Why* is a work that deals with the issue of teen suicide and depression. The novel was published in 2007 and adapted into a successful television series in 2017 by Netflix. Both the novel and its adaptation faced criticism on the one side and praise on the other. It was praised for its portrayal of a difficult issue that is often silenced and for its portrayal of other issues such as bullying, sexual assault, underage alcohol consumption and depression. There are, however, many who argue that the book neglects to provide its main characters with any kind of coping mechanism and seems to imply thatsuicide is the only logical choice in certain situations. The television series, especially, was extremely popular among adolescents and sparked controversy among viewers partly because it explicitly violates some of the recommendations given to media persons on reporting suicides like making sure the incident is not glamorised in any way (Reporting on Suicide). These are the two main arguments that raged about the novel: There are two schools of thought on the impact these novels have on young readers; those who believe they may spark copycat behaviour and those who believe information and emotional insight will help readers develop coping skills. Reading novels dealing with social and personal problems is a safe way to bring these issues into focus and give adolescents a chance to talk about their own experiences or relate their own lives to what others have gone through (Hodge). Conversations surrounding mental health are rare and for teenagers to be armed with the knowledge and self-awareness regarding mental health issues will help them deal with any crises in a healthier manner.

At the same time, there is ample evidence that constant exposure to graphic depictions of suicide as well as romanticising suicide can lead to self-harm and suicide attempts in adolescents. Responsible media coverage is key to suicide prevention by providing the public information on mental disorders and their treatment, and ways of identifying persons at risk. Glorification and dramatisation of a suicidal act can be followed by a series of suicides, especially among adolescents ("contagion"), thus it is important to stress that the person who lost his life to suicide is ill and not in any way a hero (Schwartz-Lifshitz). This shows how problematic it can be to represent suicide in popular media.

13 Reasons Why is the story of a young high school girl, Hannah Baker, who commits suicide and leaves behind audio tapes as suicide notes to the people she believed were responsible for her death. The narrator, Clay Jensen, receives the tapes and the story takes place as he listens to the tapes and visits the different parts of the town Baker describes in the tapes. The intention behind Baker leaving behind tapes to the people responsible, according to the author, was to show that no suicide is ever the result of just one person or problem and is instead "a snowball" (Asher) that gets overwhelming until the person suffering feels as if he/she has no control over anything.

> …we do affect each other. When we do or say things, we can never know exactly how another person is going to take it because we don't know what they've already dealt with. But that doesn't apply only to the bad things we do or say. We also don't know how massive a simple kind word or action can be to someone. (Asher)

This message of being kinder and being aware of the consequences of one's actions is reiterated in the novel. Most of the thirteen people named in the tapes are innocent of extreme malice. But a seemingly harmless rumour spread by Justin Foley that Baker is promiscuous turns into something she is bullied for by the entire student body. A former friend of Baker's, Jessica Davis, lashes out in a jealous rage at one point which causes Baker to feel isolated. Another instance is when Alex Standall writes Baker's name in a list which categorised the female students' body parts according to attractiveness and thereby objectifies the girls. This results in Baker feeling uncomfortable in her own body as another boy sexually harasses her, referring to the list which rated her as having "best ass". These characters are eventually seen being haunted by their past actions. Clay Jensen, the narrator, is told that he is the only one whose name is on the tapes who is innocent

of any wrong-doing towards Baker. Towards the end, another girl who shows similar behavioural patterns as Baker did, is approached by Jensen. His guilt at not recognising the signs of depression in Baker before her death is probably what motivated him to help. This shows a refreshing break in the cycle of suicidal thought.

However, the idea that being kind could have saved Baker is also perpetuated in the story and that could badly impact those readers with any loved ones who have committed or attempted suicide. "The signs were all there, all over, for anyone willing to notice". "We all could have stopped it" (Asher 125-131). In fact, it is not very likely that one person could have "stopped it" as research shows that expert intervention is necessary. The signs of a person at risk of committing suicide is not always straightforward either.

> Suicide prevention requires strategies that encompass work at the individual, systems and community level. Policy directed at means restriction and public awareness campaigns can be used in combination with strategies directed at the individual, including identification, proper diagnosis and effective treatments. Given the complexity of identifying and managing suicide risk, a combination of interventions at several levels will be required in order to implement an efficacious, comprehensive prevention program. (Schwartz-Lifshitz)

Suicide prevention is rarely as simple as one person being kind. In the same vein, a suicide is rarely as straightforward as bullying and isolation leading a person to consider death as the easier option. In the case of Hannah Baker, who did not have much of a support system, who had been showing signs of depression for months, and who planned and recorded her suicide notes, the belief on the part of Jensen and others that they could have done something by themselves, that any bit of

kindness might have prevented it, is harmful. Expert help from those qualified to give it are absolutely necessary and yet there is no mention of professional psychiatrists or counsellors in either the book or the television series. The only trained professional in the story is Mr. Porter, their English teacher and occasional guidance counsellor. But Baker's interaction with him is portrayed as largely unhelpful. He comes across as ineffectual and he asks Baker to move on when she tries to talk about her sexual assault. He is the thirteenth person on her list of tapes. She approaches him to seek help but it is portrayed more as her challenging him to change her mind about suicide. "Mr. Porter, let's see how you do", she says (Asher 143). Mr. Porter is ultimately considered to have failed at his job with the narrative implying that he could have saved her somehow. But experts say that Baker's interaction with the guidance counsellor is inappropriate.

> How the guidance counselor in 13RW responds to Hannah's thoughts of suicide is not appropriate and not typical of most counselors. School counselors are professionals and a trustworthy source for help. If your experience with a school counselor is unhelpful, seek other sources of support such as a crisis line. (Jed Foundation)

The portrayal of persons and resources that could be of help to a suicidal person as useless in media aimed at raising awareness of bullying and suicide among adolescents is extremely dangerous. It could cause someone to lose trust in therapists and counsellors and close off even further.

The way in which the act of suicide itself is depicted is also a factor to be carefully considered when it comes to media aimed at a younger audience. The novel is not graphic about the details of Hannah Baker's death. However, one of the main criticisms that the television series faced was for how it showed the suicide on screen. In the novel, Baker overdoses. In the series she is shown acquiring razor blades,

filling the bathtub and then using them on her wrists. This was the final episode and like some of the other more violent episodes of the show, it came with a content warning for sensitive viewers. The book has a brief discussion about the different methods of suicide Hannah Baker considers which is something of a pros and cons list of suicide techniques.

> A gun? No. We never owned one. And I wouldn't know where to get one. What about hanging? Well, what would I use? Where would I do it?... It became a sick sort of game, imagining ways to kill myself. And there are some pretty weird and creative ways. (Asher 135)

One of the writers for the television series, Nic Sheff, defended the graphic depiction of suicide in the series. "It seemed to me the perfect opportunity to show what an actual suicide really looks like—to dispel the myth of the quiet drifting off…" (Sheff).

But professionals do not recommend graphic depictions of self-harm or suicide in a fictional setting as it can lead to suicide contagion or copycat suicides (Devitt). Suicide contagion is when the suicide of one person in a community leads to a spate of others. If they all use similar methods, then they are called copycat suicides. The benefits of graphic depictions are also discussed :

> It is difficult to see how the fictional portrayal of suicide in an explicit manner could have a positive effect in any way unless, of course, the downsides of suicide in terms of its effect on relatives and friends are also strongly portrayed. From a deterrent perspective, the gruesome nature of the suicide itself may be a positive feature, and the same could be said of the adverse effects on the survivors. However, the message that suicide can have simple, or a simple set, of causes, or that suicide represents some type of solution, is unfortunate. There is never one reason why, or even thirteen. (Devitt)

"Up to 90% of the people who commit suicide, and a similar rate of those who attempt suicide, suffer from a psychiatric disorder" (Schwartz-Lifshitz). Depression, anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorders are all common among people who attempt suicide. Traumatic events, such as Baker goes through, can contribute to and exacerbate these conditions. Therefore, it is unfortunate that 13 *Reasons Why* in book or series form neglects mental illness as a factor that may have contributed to Baker's suicide. It is blamed almost entirely on the actions or inactions of those around her. The book, however, was useful in more or less accurately portraying the adolescent attitude towards depression and depressed people in general which mainly tends to be one of disdain. By holding up a mirror to teenagers and portraying their lives accurately, it is possible to show them what not to do. But it also reinforces the stigma around depression by implying that depression makes one a loner and a loser. It only mentions depression by name twice. Once is when Clay Jensen thinks about Holden Caulfield, the narrator in J.D Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. "Holden. What a horrible first date that depressed loner would make" (Asher 64). The next instance is when Baker talks about the people in a poetry group she had joined who only wrote about sad things. She describes them as "depression-loving group of miserable poets" (Asher 98).

To argue that every book, movie or television series aimed at a younger audience must be didactic and give a lesson in morality is pointless. Entertainment does not have to be educational all the time. But it is necessary to ensure that media that specifically discusses extremely serious issues should do so with respect, accuracy and with the intention of deterring negative thoughts. Young people are not passive consumers of media; however, media can have messages that may be interpreted as reinforcement of negative behaviour by already vulnerable groups.

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BIO-NOTE OF CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Arunlal K is an author, translator and speaker. He currently works as an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Govt. College Mokeri. He finished his Ph.D in Cultural Studies from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, and has worked with the faculty of Humanities at NIT Warangal before shifting to Kerala in 2010. He has worked with the International Shakespearean Desk, Dublin, on Localising Shakespeare. Dr. Arunlal has written and published widely on issues concerning culture, philosophy and literature. His latest publications include "The Cult of Aliteracy, New Media Contexts and the Challenges to Intellectualism" (in *Post-theory and the Discourses of the New*, 2019) 'A Study of Millennial Short-fiction' (*The Literary Criterion*, 2018) "Spatial Logics in Poetry," the cover article of *The International Journal of European Studies* (Sage, London, 2017) and a translation of Akbar Kakkattil's stories (Luminous Books, 2017).

Dr. Sunitha Srinivas C is a recipient of the UGC Research Award in 2016. She has several international and national publications to her credit. She is presently a faculty at the PG dept. of English and Center for Research, Govt. College Mokeri, Kozhikode.

Dr. Mohamed Shafeeq Karinkurayil is an Assistant Professor at Manipal Centre for Humanities, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE). His research interests include popular culture, film and visual culture, migration studies, postcolonial studies, and memory studies.

Dr. Kavya Krishna K R is working as an Assistant Professor at Dept of Humanistic Studies, IIT (BHU) Varanasi. She did her Ph.D from Dept of Cultural Studies, EFL-University Hyderabad on the topic Dance and Gender Performativity: Mohiniyattam and the Making of Malayalee Femininity. Her research interests are in the areas of Gender Studies, Cultural Studies and Regional Indian Literatures.

Roshni P. is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Malabar Christian College, Kozhikode. Her research interests are in Gender Studies, Film Studies and Popular Culture. She is keenly interested in Theatre and is currently pursuing doctoral studies at St Joseph's College, Kozhikode. **Anuradha P.R** is also working as an Assistant Professor at Malabar Christian College, Kozhikode. She gained experience in the teaching field by working as a guest faculty for nine years. She is interested in translating works from Malayalam to English.

Priyadarshini Panchapakesan has completed her master's in Comparative Literature from the University of Hyderabad. She likes to research on caste, gender and folk culture. She is also a Sahapedia research fellow, and is currently working on Oppari songs as a means of resistance.

Abhirami Ranjith completed her BA in English Language and Literature from Vimala College, Thrissur and MA in English and Comparative Literature from Central University of Kerala, Kasargode. She is currently pursuing M.phil from Institute of English, Kerala University. Her areas of interest include Gender Studies, Colonial India, Marginalities and Popular Culture.

Arathy Asok is working as an Assistant Professor of English at Government College, Chittur. Her Ph.D was on South African Literature and her research interests are gender and culture studies.

Mariyumma VK is a research scholar in the Department of English, University of Calicut, Kerala. Her research area is culture studies.

Anagha Anil is currently doing her Ph.D in Cultural Studies at Manipal Academy of Higher Education. Her research interests include cultural studies, visual culture, gender and women's studies and contemporary literature.

Anaswara Ramachandran is an independent scholar based in Kozhikode. Her areas of research interest include popular culture and popular fiction.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Department of English, Providence Women's College, Kozhikode invites papers for the 2020 issue of its annual journal, Diotima's: A Journal of New Readings, on Life Narratives. We welcome well-researched and theoretically grounded research papers from academicians and research schol-ars from departments of English, Women Studies, Philosophy, Social Sciences and other interdisciplinary areas pertaining to the broad area of Life Narratives.

The act of people writing about what they know best- their own lives- is considered to be simple to understand. But this seemingly simple act is anything but simple, for the writer becomes, in the act of writing, both the observing subject and the object of investigation. In the amazingly complex genre called the life narratives the past is interpreted in the present and the process is not passive but the meaning of the past is actively created in the act of remembering. These memories are histo-ryspecific and also situated or contextual as acts of remembering take place at particular sites and in particular circumstances. The very act of remembering is also political. What is remembered and what is forgotten and why, change over time. What is recollected and what is obscured are central to the cultural production of knowledge about the past, and thus to the terms of an individual's self-knowledge.

Life-narrators use multiple ways of accessing memory, multiple systems of remembering, into their narratives. Some of these sources are personal (diaries, dreams, family albums, photos, objects, family stories, genealogy). Some are public (documents, historical events, collective rituals). Be-sides memory, identity plays a crucial role in autobiographical

writing as writers make themselves known by acts of identification, and by implication differentiation. Identities are marked in terms of many categories: gender, caste, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, generation, dis-ability, religious and political ideologies. Identities can also be intersectional and the fluidity of identities exists across political and geographical spaces.

Autobiographical narratives are proofs of human agency relating to actions in which people exercise free choice over the interpretation of their lives and express their "true" selves even though the issue of how subjects claim, exercise, and narrate agency is far more complicated.

Autobiography is normally thought of as a narrative in written form. However, it is possible to enact self-presentation in many media like short feature and documentary films, social media posts, theatre pieces, art installations, performance art in music, dance, paintings, sculptures, body art, comics and cyber art.

The profoundly complex genre of life narratives demands critical academic deliberation especially in the light of its ever-increasing socio-political relevance. Academic interventions and contributions in the area are a need of the hour to address which this issue of Diotima's invites research arti-cles on Life Narratives.

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