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WOMEN'S INITIATIVES

Editorial Borad

G. S. Jayasree

Chief Editor | gsjayasree@samyuktaresearchfoundation.org

Former Professor and Head, Institute of English, University of Kerala

Contact Address - Krishnapurathu House, Kesavadasapuram, Pattom P. O.

Thiruvananthapuram, Pin Code-695 004

<http://gsjayasree.com/>

Sreedevi K. Nair

Managing Editor | sreedevi@samyuktaresearchfoundation.org Former

Associate Professor and Head, Dept. of English, NSS College for Women,

Neeramankara, Thiruvananthapuram

<https://sreedeviknair.net/>

S. Devika

Editor | devika@nsscollege4women.edu.in Principal, NSS College for

Women, Neeramankara, Thiruvananthapuram. Contact Address-

E 34, Sastri Nagar, Karamana, Thiruvananthapuram- 695002. <https://nss-college4women.edu.in>

P. M. Arathi

Editor | devika@nsscollege4women.edu.in

Assistant Professor, School of Indian Legal Thought, Mahatma Gandhi

University, Kottayam.

<https://silt.mgu.ac.in/dr-arathi-p-m/>

Shalini M.

Editor | shalinim@cukerala.ac.in

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Central University of Kerala

<https://cukerala.edu.in-shalini-moolechalil-assistant-professor&catid>

Bini B.Sajil

Associate Editor | bini.bs@nirmauni.ac.in Asst. Professor of English, Institute of Law, Nirma University, Gujarat.

Contact Address- A3 202, Springwood Residency, O P Road,

Baroda, Gujarat- 390020

<https://law.nirmauni.ac.in/author/binibs/>

Arya Aiyappan

Associate Editor | arya.aiyappan@christuniversity.in

Assistant Professor, Department of English, English and Cultural Studies,
Bangalore Central Campus

<https://christuniversity.in/english/faculty-details/MTIxMA==/OTA=>

Divya S

Assistant Editor | divyasravindranathan@samyuktaresearchfoundation.org

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bishop Moore College,
Mavelikara, Alappuzha Dist, Kerala-690 110

<http://bishopmoorecollege.org/dr-divya-s/>

Lakshmi Sukumar

Assistant Editor | drlakshmisukumar@keralauniversity.ac.in

lakshmisukumarsept22@gmail.com

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Institute of English,
Kerala University

<https://keralauniversity.ac.in/dept/staff-Details>

Rajasree R

Assistant Editor | rajasree.r@sdcollege.in

Assistant Professor, Department of English, S D College, Alappuzha

<https://sdcollege.ac.in/academic-staff/ms-rajasree-r/>

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Editorial

In this number of *Samyukta*, with its focus on Literature and Popular Culture, we have included papers on the unsung heroes battered by the bigotry of mainstream culture, A Ludo-Narrative Analysis of The Construction of the Cyborg Player in *Transistor*, and the Representation of Cannabis in Selected Hindi Film Songs.

However, the highlight of this issue is a hermeneutical analysis of the art and craft of photography. As a medium of representation, photographs capture our attention and constantly confront us at emotional, rational, physical and interpersonal levels. The paper *Pause, Click: Photography*, an Introductory Reading by Farah Zachariah primarily sees photographs as visual texts and looks into how readers or viewers negotiate meanings from them. It analyses a set of photographs on conditions of violence and trauma by engaging the principles of critical hermeneutics to interpret and give scope for multiple readings. As mentioned in the paper, “Photography can be treated as a language, acquiring meaning through the cultural conventions, and conscious and unconscious processes, which cannot be merely reduced to subject matter, visual style and authorial intentions”.

Any discussion of popular culture, at present, would appear incomplete without looking into *Harry Potter* both as a fictional text and cinema. We have included in this number two papers on the ‘magic’ of the *Harry Potter* narratives, *House-Elves in Harry Potter: Slaves by Themselves* by Annu Sabu Palathingal and *Locating the Grotesque: A Meta-theoretical Reading* by Prasida P. The objective of Annu Sabu Palathingal’s paper is to understand and examine why the house-elves remain as slaves to wizards even though they have superior magical capabilities. The article by Prasida P. seeks to comprehend the multidimensional understanding of the term ‘grotesque’ with reference to the different ideologies, disciplines, thought practices and representations in sync with the spirit of the age it is associated with. For such representations, the ‘grotesque’ is artfully brought to fore as an adept tool by authors and artists, as the most efficacious artistic weapon for mirroring the intricate reality and inherent contradictions in human life.

G. S. Jayasree
Chief Editor
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A Culinary Voyage to St. Andrews

Lakshmi B

Abstract: Culinary landscapes are forms of communication rich with meanings and represent our attitudes, practices, symbols and rituals. A study of foodways often constitutes and is inclusive of how we obtain, prepare, and consume food. The methods by which food shapes and is shaped by social constructs are crucial to the examination of food ways. Since consumption of food is socially constructed, it is an integral part of culture and an expression of our cultural identity. St Andrews is bequeathed with a multicultural food heritage. It has over the centuries managed to beautifully absorb and blend with the traditional culinary practices there by enriching and enhancing the native cuisine. But the difference lies in the fact that it has in no way diminished the essential colonial flavour.

Keywords: Culinary Landscapes, St. Andrews, Foodways, Kerala, Colonial

Culinary landscapes are illustrative of cultural boundaries and often reflect our most basic beliefs about the world and ourselves. It is a form of communication rich with meaning and it represents our attitudes, practices, symbols and rituals. A study of foodways often constitutes and is inclusive of how we obtain, prepare, and consume food. Although all humans need food to survive, people's food habits are the result of learned behaviours. Most often we tend to associate certain foods with specific places. These collective memories and behaviours, as well as the values and attitudes they seem to reflect usually constitute a group's popular culture. The methods in which food shapes and is shaped by social constructs are crucial to examination of food ways. Since consumption of food is socially constructed, it is an integral part of culture and an expression of our cultural identity. A study of food ways is essential to our understanding of social identity. It tries to comprehend what belongs within a particular kind of cuisine and in doing so define what does not. They tie food to a place and in doing so analyses the intersection of food in culture, traditions, and history. Food is very much a part of popular culture. The beliefs, practices, and trends in a culture has its effect on the eating practices also. But these stereotypes start to blur as cultures borrow, appropriate, re-

create and re-consume. But what gets eaten, by whom, on whose terms and when? Which regimes of knowledge are at play in the matter of these exchanges?

Among the major historical processes that have altered various culinary practices, food ways and systems of production, in the last few centuries, colonialism stands out as one that raises many of these questions. There is a lot more to colonisation than just establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. It leads to the intermingling of cultures, traditions and even cuisines and has a distinct influence on the foodscape of a place. European powers in India left a lasting impression on our culinary heritage. They came to India for trade and brought their techniques of cooking with them. Over the course of many years they made India their home but craved home food. They had to make do with what was available in India. This gradual assimilation was also a way of preserving their traditional food culture. This gradually led to an imbibing of native food culture, resulting in a culinary heritage which went deep beyond sustenance, recipes or taste. Food habits and food consumption are affected by acculturation on different levels. Traditional food habits often tend to be discreet and changes which eventually occur tend to be a relatively slow process. Introduction of new food recipes is affected by various factors like religion, the availability of native ingredients, convenience and cost. Therefore, an immediate change is very unlikely to occur. Different cultures have different ways in which they prepare, serve, preserve and eat their food. When exposed to another culture for an extended period of time, individuals tend to take aspects of the host culture's food customs and implement them with their own. In cases such as these, acculturation is heavily influenced by general food knowledge, or knowing the unique kinds of food different cultures traditionally have and by social interaction. It allows for different cultures to be exposed to one another, causing some aspects to intertwine and also become more acceptable.

European powers left an enduring effect on our culinary landscape. The first among the Europeans to establish a colony in India at the beginning of the 16th century were the Portuguese. Among the first Portuguese settlements in India were Cochin and Goa. Over the next four centuries, Portuguese control spread to various parts of India, mostly along the west coast of the country, but also in the northeast, particularly in Bengal. The Portuguese influence left an indelible impression on the culinary heritage of India. They introduced new ingredients to India, including certain spices, vegetables and fruits which are now an integral part of Indian cuisine. They also introduced Portuguese dishes which were gradually adapted and integrated to Indian culinary techniques and tastes. The most impressive Portuguese influence was of course in Goa, which Portugal ruled until 1961. In particular, Goan catholic food is marked by a distinct Portuguese flavour. Further down the coast from Goa is the city of Mangalore, and similarities are there in Goan and Mangalorean Catholic cuisine. Moving to the other side of India, some Portuguese influence can be seen in Bengali cuisine as well. Portuguese influence further south is evident in Kerala and particularly in Fort Kochi, one of the earliest Portuguese settlements in India. The mingling of Portuguese and traditional Kerala cuisine saw the introduction of exceptional culinary techniques and practices

which remain unparalleled even today. For example, the Portuguese introduced steaming and baking, with ovens heated with coal, techniques never before known in Kerala. 'Puttu' is considered to be a result of Portuguese experimentation done with powdered rice. They steamed the rice powder and found it to be an easy food to make on long ship voyages from Kerala. They introduced red chillies and vinegar as cooking ingredients and used to pickle dried meats in vinegar and paprika which eventually found their way in traditional Kerala cuisine. Thus, it is only natural that already existing traditions take upon new avatars with an intermingling of different culinary practices. When we deconstruct an ingredient, we become fully aware of the many many stories attached to it. Food memories are a wonderful way to document a family's or community's history as culture is definitely shared through food. As food is intrinsically connected with identity, a culinary journey inevitably churns out submerged narratives, hidden and unacknowledged from mainstream culture.

St. Andrews, a relatively unknown sea side hamlet just fifteen kilometres away from the capital city of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram is a landscape steeped in history and culture with untold narratives of colonial encounters. The scenic coast lined with coconut trees and a golden sandy pristine beach is the last place one expects to encounter a robust and flavoursome Portuguese legacy. History attest to the fact that this was a sizeable Portuguese settlement, though relatively secluded. The name St. Andrews itself is derived from the Portuguese "Sandandarae" or "Santo Andarae" which means Saint Andrew. Apart from the mesmerising beach, what attracts the first-time visitor is of course the beautiful church facing the sea, named after St. Andrew, the patron saint of fishermen and singers. The church remains a unique landmark in the tapestry of the village as it has the rare distinction of having the place name and church name as one. The church belongs to the Latin Catholic Christian community and has a rich heritage dating back to the Portuguese with its exquisite stained-glass windows radiating the vintage charm of the place. The Church was built entirely of Rosewood by the Portuguese, but as years passed the structure has taken on a modern form. The Church and the surroundings still retain its unmistakable European heritage. Even the cemetery shaded by ancient trees and the graves marked by strange Portuguese names adds to the allure of its fascinating past. The fishing hamlet comes alive with a lot of festivities during the Christmas-New Year season and also on St. Andrews day which is celebrated with much fanfare on November 30. Apart from its obvious European heritage it also has a noticeable Tamil influence as people from Tamil Nadu settled here in the past mainly for the purpose of trade. Traces of Tamil culture can be discerned from the church songs which are a curious mixture of Portuguese and Tamil. The Portuguese influence has lent a distinctiveness to the culture of the place which finds its clear manifestation, especially in the aspect of language and cuisine. The Portuguese legacy has deeply enriched and enhanced the culinary heritage of St Andrews and has led to the amalgamation of different cultures. The vast and intricate layers of food culture are often overlooked and tend to become obscure over the years. In order to explore and further understand the culture and history of a place it is often observed that the study can be made more engrossing and fascinating by examining the culinary practices of that particular region.

Taking into consideration the historical and cultural impact of food on the heritage of St Andrews, it is very much evident that the most singular and distinctive influence on St. Andrews without doubt remains the Portuguese legacy. The colonial food influence is steeped into the very fabric of the community that it is almost impossible to separate it from regional influences. This was indeed a natural metamorphosis that took place when different cultures came into contact with each other. Because of the Portuguese influence, the food prepared in many households in St Andrews bear an uncanny resemblance to Goan cuisine. They have an unique taste, flavour, and even quaint names attached to them which are very different from that of traditional Kerala cuisine. The dishes which have a clear Portuguese origin and which enjoys popularity in St Andrews includes: Pork Vindaloo, Baked Chicken Mince, Scone, *Tharidosi*, *Orappam*, Churl Appam and Plum Cake. The distinctive food habits of St Andrews have indeed led to some interesting culinary observations. For instance, Pork Vindaloo, which is often identified with Anglo Indian and Goan cuisine is a popular dish in St Andrews. The name Vindaloo is derived from the Portuguese dish ‘Carne de Vinha d’Alhos’, which is pork with wine and garlic. In the St Andrews version of vindaloo recipe, wine is substituted by vinegar and chilies. Along with pork vindaloo, fish vindaloo also finds its place in the cuisine of St Andrew. It is considered very much different from that of the Goan Vindaloo recipe although it shares some basic ingredients. Though the taste of each vindaloo curry differs, all the dishes have a common tangy taste. It is quite strange and incredible that people are unaware of such a thriving Portuguese culinary tradition at a seaside village very much near to the capital city. Another snack which finds a special place in St Andrews cuisine is the Scone, a baked good, which has a distinct European origin, to be more precise Scottish. Surprisingly Scone is an everyday evening snack quite popular with the folks of this remote seaside village. But the most sought-after delicacy of St. Andrews is the Milk halwa which remains exclusive to this region. The chance of hearing about this halwa is remote even if you are a native of Thiruvananthapuram, as only a few are aware about its existence. Moreover only a few persons remain who possess the knowledge to make this delicious sweet. The origin of this unique recipe is attributed to the various culinary influences over the centuries. The basic ingredients that go into the making of this delicious Milk Halwa are milk, maida, sugar and butter. Although it is named as Milk Halwa it has a very pronounced Portuguese influence. It finds no similarities with the traditional halwas with which we are familiar and its creamy texture and flavour has more in common with European sweets. The process of making this delicacy is tedious as it takes more than eight hours of preparation time. It used to have a special place in weddings of yore but now it is made by only one family residing at St Andrews. Another recipe which has a distinct Portuguese history is *Tharidosi*. It is usually prepared during Christmas and New Year celebrations. Several members of the community of St Andrews have immigrated to countries like Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia over the past few years. This migration has further added to the diversity of its food practices and introduced without doubt a new set of culinary practices. St Andrews remains an interesting potpourri of various culinary influences including Portuguese, Sri Lankan, Singaporean, Malaysian and of course the regional Kerala flavour. Distinctive cooking

styles have evolved in St. Andrews from the intermingling of colonial influences and local ingredients. A thread, however, runs through the food recipes of all these communities and people living in St Andrew, which of course is distinctly Portuguese in flavour. The culinary legacy of St Andrews finds its significance in the fact that it has remained almost intact all through all these years, maintaining its distinct European heritage. It also calls attention to the importance of examining in detail untold and silenced colonial narratives.

St Andrews is indeed bequeathed with a multicultural food heritage. It has over the centuries managed to beautifully absorb and blend with the traditional culinary practices there by enriching and enhancing the native cuisine. But the difference lies in the fact that it has in no way diminished the essential colonial flavour. There is a delightful medley of food everywhere, rich in history and high on taste, the recipes serving effectively as a documentation, a proof of colonial legacy, assimilation and diversity of our food culture. Over the centuries, cuisines in India have imbibed a variety of colonial influences revealing how deep and fascinating the history of food can be. It is this plurality of cultures and the food heritage which makes St Andrews an alluring mix of unique flavours. St. Andrews has the enviable position of a remote and relatively obscure coastal village with an interesting melting pot of several cultures and traditions. But it also serves as a reminder that the distinct Luso Indian heritage of St Andrews remains largely unmapped, undiscovered and submerged in comparison with mainstream narratives. While tracing the lineages of these dishes may prove both fascinating and arduous, the fact remains that a delectable legacy continues to endure unacknowledged.

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The Construction of the Cyborg Player in *Transistor*: A Ludo-Narrative Analysis

Andrew George Korah

Abstract: The paper intends to study the ludo-narrative structures of the game *Transistor*¹ to examine how, through the engagement of the player into the game's ludic structures (i.e. those structures that make it a game) constructs the cyborg body. The aim is to examine how the narrative of a game can contextualise its mechanics, and generate meaning. It understands video games, or even games in general not merely through its representational features, but in recognition that a game constitutes essential structures that make it a game, and enable the possibility of play. The cyborg body is understood in terms of how the player engages with the game in both the ludic and the narrative forms.

Keywords: Cyborg, Simulation, Videogame, Ludology, Science Fiction.

Ludology and Play

The paper is situated within the field of study that refers to itself as 'Ludology', as defined by Gonzalo Frasca in his paper "Ludology meets Narratology". Frasca proposed "the term *ludology* (from *ludus*, the Latin word for "game"), to refer to the yet non-existent discipline that studies game and play activities" (Frasca). Just like narratology, *ludology* should also be

¹ From here on, *Transistor* (*in italics*) refers to the name of the videogame; while Transistor (without italics) refers to the sword that is within the videogame.

independent from the medium that supports the activity” (Frasca). The way this paper understands video games, or even games in general is therefore not merely through its representational features, but in recognition that a game constitutes essential structures that make it a game, and enable the possibility of play.

To arrive at what formal games are, we must first recognise what ‘play’ is. Johan Huizinga suggests, “Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner” (Huizinga 13). To elaborate, play is an activity that occurs within certain limits, or boundaries, where the ‘real world’ loses relevance for the sake of engaging in play. It is necessary to trust these momentarily drawn boundaries for play to be taken ‘seriously’, to be enjoyed or for meaning to be made. This is the act that absorbs the player ‘intensely and utterly’. The space of play can be referred to as the ‘possibility space’, recognising its capacity for meaning making that is distinct from the way meaning is made in the ‘real world’, or as Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman would call it in their book, ‘Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals’, ‘the magic circle’ (Salen and Zimmerman).

Formal games constitute play, but distinguish themselves in the character of their formally defined rules that create this magic circle. The rules create a system that not merely provides the possibility space, but adds the motivational factors of ‘win states’ and ‘lose states’. Play lacks this structure, and its persistence is in its capability to hold meaning in and of itself and not for an ultimate aim. What win states and lose states also suggest is that there is a goal to be achieved in engaging with the system of rules that make the game, and can thus either

‘win’ or ‘lose’ the game depending on whether the aim is achieved. It also suggests that the player has the capacity to fail to achieve the aim, or lose. This implies that there is a degree of ‘difficulty’ faced when engaging with the system of rules, and that there is a ‘challenge’ that has to be overcome to acquire the win state.

The ‘game’ or system of rules provide meaning to particular actions. For example a ‘ball’ and the act of ‘kicking’ have no relation except when contextualised in the act of play. In a game they are further contextualised by providing an aim, or win state: you kick the ball into a ‘goal’, and to make that difficult you have eleven opponents trying to stop you. Meaningful actions will thus be referred to as the ‘mechanics’ of a game, and the systems that contextualise these meaningful actions will be referred to as ‘mechanical systems’.

Videogames and Understanding Narrative in Terms of Ludology

Video games provide an added layer of complexity because its ludic (i.e. game) structures are constituted of mechanical systems in combination with a visual or graphic representation of mechanical actions. These representations are distinct and abstracted from the mechanical actions themselves. For example, pressing the ‘B’ button on a controller makes a computer-generated character on-screen animatedly ‘kick’. These are often further contextualised within a narrative, making these ‘actions’ meaningful not merely in terms of play, but also in terms of metaphor: it acquires the capacity to be literary through engagement. By this I mean that a football game is only a game, though it can be ‘written’ or ‘talked’ about. A videogame can be the story or a narrative itself, by making you ‘play’ as the ‘character’ who plays football. However, this refers to narrative driven videogames in contrast to purely mechanical video games that also very much exist. The focus of this paper will be on a narrative driven

videogame, and will examine how these structures together make meaning. In other words, this paper will analyse a videogame through its ‘ludo-narrative’ quality.

The aim of this paper is to examine how the narrative of a game can contextualise its mechanics, and generate meaning. The narrative also self reflexively examines its mechanical structures to generate meaning and ideas regarding the player themselves and their relationship with the game within larger discourses of identity and technology, as is explored under the notion of the ‘cyborg’.

Science Fiction and the Cyborg

Science Fiction has provided a space where the notion of the ‘cyborg’ can be discussed. The cyborg thematically situates itself in discussions of social and political relations, and questions about identity and embodiment.

To Haraway the cyborg is a “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism” (Haraway 34). The cyborg’s hybrid nature blurs and rejects the binary divisions of patriarchal capitalism by being “resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence” (Haraway 35) enabling it to be used as rhetoric to argue socio-political situations. The cyborg therefore serves as a point of “temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (Bell 116).

The cyborg has enabled the discussion of the mind-body split, which can be traced back to William Gibson’s ‘Neuromancer’ where the body is seen as ‘meat’ susceptible to injury or pain (Lupton 425). However, the ‘meat’ can be “discarded and the unconstrained consciousness flowing free in (and as) data” (Bell 140) by ‘jacking in’ to cyberspace to become “distilled in a clean, pure, uncontaminated relationship with computer technology” (Lupton 424).

The cyborg came to embody the discussion of posthuman identities as well, albeit in a hopeful manner. Technological augmentation of the physical body is ‘prostheticization’ where the physical limitations of the body, such as sickness or natural capability can be overcome. This hope constructs a utopic future, free of disease and of a form of evolution that is unlimited as “technology evolves exponentially” (Bell 144).

Through these discourses the cyborg does both “keep the body in view, while also raising vital questions about the boundaries of the body” (Bell 150). The cyborg therefore suggests fragmentation of identities, which are fluid and almost always confused. As a “boundary figure” (Bell 150), it blurs and disturbs established worldviews.

“The fluid fragmented late-modern or postmodern self has the new capacity to make itself over, to reshape and restyle elements of identity – or at least to make choices about which aspects of itself to privilege at any point” (Bell 116). It is these ‘capacities’ that are opened up when the ‘player’ chooses to turn on a ‘video game’. Videogames can be thought of as a kind of simulation the player ‘jacks into’. A video game simulates an environment and a social structure. It however differentiates itself from other forms of narrative by not only being representational but also experiential. “Simulations offer the player the opportunity to engage with a dynamic system from an *experiential* perspective and a significant amount of this direct involvement is provided by the freedom to interact with, and have control over, the simulated system” (Woods). Video games, however, are not merely simulation, but also *games*. Being so, they provide an experience, not merely through interaction with an environment, but through ‘play’.

A way to understand this experiential quality of video games is to see it in terms of what I will refer to as kinesthetics. Kinesthetics is literally the ‘sense of motion’. Since video

games tend to place players in a largely stationary position, it is necessary to communicate the visual movement that occurs on-screen to the player through their interactive device to simulate the movement that occurs in the game world. An example, as given before, is when the player pushes the 'B' button, the on-screen player-character performs a 'kick', or to rephrase it, an animation of the player-character is shown kicking. Things like how quickly the visuals respond to the actions of the player, the fluidity of the animation, the visual feedback to complex actions that act as a reward are all a part of the kinesthetics of a game. In a sense they are an integral part to making a game enjoyable, that they are so 'sensory' oriented, and have the tendency to create muscle memory. A simple example to illustrate would be the very first game 'Pong', where there were two flat things on opposite ends of a screen and a bouncing pixel between them. People quickly figure out that if you turn the 'knob' placed in front of the screen the flat board on one end would move, corresponding to the appropriate knob. If one moved the knob correctly, the pixel or 'ball' would strike against the board with a satisfyingly resounding 'ping' sound, and bounce away to the other end. If one 'missed' the ball, the other side would gain a 'point'. In almost no time people had figured out the mechanical system and were already attempting to master it, perhaps even in the same way people master any other physical sport. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why videogames are so captivating and experiential. Kinesthetics are a vital part to the thesis of this paper as it contributes to understanding the player's relationship with technology, and the processes through which the player enters into the simulation of the game, willing to interact and engage with it, and even enjoy the experience that such processes provide.

The video game *Transistor* developed by the game designer 'Supergiant Games' is such a game. This game has been chosen as a text to explore the given concepts because of its self-reflexive nature that brings the player's attention to their position as a player of this game, by

narratively contextualising its mechanical systems. The playing of the game therefore also becomes a sense-making process for the player to understand what it means to play the game. It contributes to understanding how the player behaves as a cyborg by such an interaction with technology, but also makes it part of the thought process of the player — generating discourse of their cyborg relationship with the game.

For this paper, I will analyse *Transistor* using the ludo-narrative method. The ludo-narrative method assumes that a videogame cannot be analysed by separating its ludic elements from its narrative ones. Therefore, any meaning that emerges from the experience of playing the game is understood only in terms of the relationship between the ludic elements and the narrative elements, and how through one the other is understood. It is also important to note that the researcher situates themselves as the “player” of the videogame and not an observer and has used a computer and keyboard and mouse to play the game, not a console or a controller.

Transistor: An Analysis

Ludic Engagement: Understanding How a Player Makes Sense of a Game through its Ludic Systems



Fig. 1: Start up.

Transistor begins with what James Newman would call ‘Off-Line’ engagement. This is distinct from On-Line engagement which in the common-sense manner is thought to be “playing the game” (Newman), when input from the user is provided through the control interface to cause non-trivial (in the sense that it changes the way a game is played) action. Off-Line engagement is thus where no ‘play’ occurs, but engagement does, by providing the player with information about the game through a visual aesthetic, setting and sound. In *Transistor* the convention of displaying a ‘press any key to start’ button prompt is abandoned; and nothing on screen suggests that the player must do anything but wait expectantly for the button prompt, and meanwhile absorb the information that the game provides, of a single frame of narrative context as seen in Fig. 2.



Fig. 2: Opening frame.

Off-Line engagement cannot be confused with passivity (Newman) as cognitive engagement occurs. When the realisation by the player occurs, and ‘any key’ is pressed (this being a trivial action), the opening ‘cut-scene’ begins to play out. The cut scene tells us a number of things, one of them is that the ‘sword’ can speak, and its red centre blinks to the wave of its speech, the other is that the sword appears to have a symbol akin to that of the ‘USB stick’ upon it, suggesting that the ‘sword’ is somehow a piece of technology and within it is contained an intelligence. This makes the ‘sword’ a completely technological body that serves its intelligence, suggesting not merely a cyborg, but a ‘perfect one’, without its ‘meat’, which is “the dead flesh that surrounds the active mind which constitutes the ‘authentic’ self” (Lupton 425). Through the game’s narrative, one comes to learn that the ‘sword’, called the Transistor (henceforth referred to as such) is a piece of technology capable of absorbing the intelligences/souls of people it comes in contact with, such as the man in the Fig. 2, who now speaks through the Transistor.

The next thing the opening frame of the cut-scene suggests is that the player is likely to be ‘playing’ or ‘role-playing’ as the character, named Red, in the centre of the screen, which is what happens when the player begins On-Line engagement. The Sword is the “Transistor” after which the game is named. The moment the player engages with the keyboard and mouse they become the functional intelligence of Red, and is now “role-playing”; in other words, the engagement is now On-Line. The player engages with the keyboard and mouse, using the conventional commands for movement, that is W, A, S, D as up, left, down, right, respectively. This action is reflected in the movement of the onscreen character, Red and the Transistor that she holds in her hands. The mouse is then discovered to function as a pointer, and on using the right mouse button an ‘attacking’ move is performed. Not all ‘moves’ are ‘attacking’ and can be ‘defensive’ or even ‘passive’, but the very first instance of striking the right mouse button provides a move that will later be discovered as an attack. It is in this instance that the embodiment of the player into the simulation that is the game occurs. That a videogame, by being a videogame can embody the player within a simulation is the first step to conceptualising how the player becomes a ‘cyborg’.

At this point the player can assume two things. Either that when the player uses the mouse buttons the player is performing as Red performing the attacking action. On the other hand, considering that the Transistor seems to have its own voice and an intelligence, we can consider that when moving using the WASD keys the player roleplays as Red, and when performing an attacking action the player roleplays as the Transistor. This proves to be interesting because we can read this as the player roleplaying as two distinct identities, but functioning as one cohesive unit that is known as the player character.

The thing that most constitutes the definition of a ‘game’ is the ‘challenge’ (Karhulahti). Karhulahti provides a theory of kinesthetics to examine the nature and form of the challenge:

it is “a rhetoric with no claims, arguments or extractable thematic meaning”, it is a ‘rheme’. A kinesthetic challenge is therefore one that requires non-trivial (in that it “does make the success of performance uncertain” (Karhulahti)) psychomotor effort to overcome it, and a non-kinesthetic challenge is one which requires only trivial (“does not make the success of the performance uncertain” (Karhulahti)) psychomotor effort.

In *Transistor* the ‘challenge’ of the game is presented as combat. One has to defeat regular groups or ‘waves’ of ‘robots’, narratively named ‘The Process’, that appear as the player moves across the topography of the game-world. The rhetoric of this challenge is to effectively combine, manipulate and use moves or ‘functions’ while keeping in mind the weaknesses and abilities of the different kinds of ‘Processes’. The complex combat system combines real-time combat and a pause and play mechanic that allows the player to plan their moves. Each action that the Sword makes is represented as a function, where you have the name of the move, followed by two brackets: “()”. When the “Turn()” function is initiated, the game pauses and the player must select the actions that they can perform. The number of actions is limited by an energy bar. Different actions use up different quantities of energy, creating one of the fundamental challenges of the game: to efficiently manage your energy resources. After executing the Turn(), the player needs to wait for the action bar to recharge before another move can be performed, with the exception of a few abilities. If the Turn() has not been executed or planned properly the player character may be put in danger of taking damage from enemy characters.

Planning for each Turn() serves as the cognitive aspect of the kinesthetic challenge. Red must also navigate the topography of the battlefield, move quickly to protect herself and dodge incoming attacks. This serves as the physical aspect of the kinesthetic challenge. ‘Physical’ in the sense that the input device and system of the game translates the mundane real

world action of pressing keyboard keys and pushing mouse buttons into the actions of the character on screen within the world that the character inhabits. To these actions a feedback is provided, in the form of rewards or punishments. If a series of moves is well executed, the player receives the satisfaction of quickly overcoming the foe, and at the end of the battle gaining ‘experience points’ and ‘levelling up’. If not, the character on screen ‘dies’, the player is defeated and forced to retry till success is achieved. This makes victory all the more satisfying due the increase in the stakes; the stakes being the idea that the strength of the opponent is greater than your own. Feedback is also provided in terms of the on-screen visuals and sounds in the form of exploding robots, moves with a great deal of impact and damage, and the sounds of these explosions. This feedback provides a visual and aural experience that is satisfying, providing what is called ‘game feel’ (Swink). The mundane real-world input translates to a series of actions and reactions to a host of stimuli that affects the on-screen character in a serious way. The player, when controlling the on-screen character’s actions, therefore chooses to take responsibility for these actions and attempts to avoid ill consequence as much as possible and ultimately gain ‘victory’, as determined by the game's win-states.

The challenge of overcoming The Process also comprises non-kinesthetic engagement, in that it is purely cognitive. At particular “Access Points” the player can access the code of the Transistor.

The code comprises four “Active Slots”, two “Supplementary Slots” that are connected to each Active Slot and two “Passive Slots”. One can place abilities within these slots. The abilities in the active slots will be directly reflected in combat when performed. The abilities in the supplementary slots augments or modifies the active slots by providing additional statistics, such as “damage” or “distance”. The abilities in the passive slot passively effect the player, such as boosting health or providing a shield or increasing the chances for a “critical

strike” or “Kill()”. All abilities can be placed in any slot in multiple combinations. As incentive to experiment more with multiple combinations, the reward for placing and using abilities in all three kinds of slots is narrative, furthering the idea that this very much requires cognitive engagement. The placing of abilities in the slots requires a great deal of planning, and in a way represents progress through the game. As you move from challenge to challenge the player experiments more and grows comfortable with particular combinations after growing accustomed to the combat system. This sort of growth represents an accustomization with the simulated world, further embodying the player into the simulation. The embodying of the player runs parallel to the character development of Red and the Transistor furthering the role-play, now embodying the player not just within a simulation but also within the character/characters.

The physical and cognitive nature of game feel, Karhulahti refers to as the ‘vicarious’ experience. To achieve this, some aspects of the player’s body are made trivial and the others not. For example, whether the player can lift a great deal of weight is trivial, but whether the player has great hand-eye coordination is non-trivial to acquiring a satisfying game feel. The input capability of the player is translated into the game as the movement of the on-screen character, the decision making capability of the player is translated into the decisions and choices the on-screen character makes and the feedback that the game provides. This gives the player an ‘experience’ of the game-world or simulation. This form of experiencing the simulation, I suggest, constitutes the embodiment of the player within the simulation. This notion emerges from thinking about the game as a vicarious experience; and not merely a narrative where characters are ‘relatable’, but where on-screen characters are “embodied as sets of available capabilities and capacities” (Newman). The player can manipulate and possess these as if they were her own, where players “role-play” as characters within a simulated

environment, and where the player's playing self is embodied. The technology of the PC and the keyboard and mouse that put the player 'On-Line' allow the player to 'jack into' a simulation. However, unlike Gibson's 'Neuromancer', the player is not rid of the meat, but rather, some aspects of the 'meat' are used non-trivially in combination with technology to create a novel experience of playing a video game, providing an "extended embodied awareness" (Bell 143). The 'meat' is "integrated with a variety of artificial and prostheses" (Bell 143), that is the keyboard and mouse. This provides an extended embodied awareness of constructed realities (in the sense that actions in that 'reality' or simulation have consequences that the player can care about), constructing the cyborg player. 'Reality' is not abandoned but augmented.

Transistor, as a game, however, will not let you stop there. By constantly bringing attention to itself, it forces the player to pay attention to and acknowledge the form and nature of the construction and simulation.

Interpreting the Narrative of Transistor in Light of its Ludic Structures

Transistor's narrative is non-expository, so to gain the necessary information about the narrative the player has to recognise a great number of subtleties that function as thematic ideas and story-telling mechanisms.

Throughout the game world are various clues that the world is itself a simulation. For example, the naming of places like the 'Port' or 'Junction Jan's' and the 'access points' littered everywhere seem to employ jargon used for naming computer hardware. The abilities and moves that Red can perform with the *Transistor* are labelled 'functions()', such as 'crash()' and 'breach()', which seem to refer to computer software and coding. All these serve as suggestions that the game world is a simulation. However these are gleaned merely through Off-Line

engagement. One important feature of On-Line engagement is the ‘Turn()’ ability in combat. The Turn() functions as a pause and play mechanism that allows the player to pause the game and without the pressure of limited time, can plan a limited number of upcoming moves by setting them onto an action bar. What the context, and by ‘context’ I mean the ‘naming’ of particular actions or mechanics to provide narrative meaning, provides to a fairly common pause and play game mechanic is to suggest that the character Red has some sort of ‘super user access’ to that world, where time can be stopped and decisions taken at the expense of some resources in the same way that any person can pause a game (and thereby the entire world of the game) to perhaps go for a toilet break.



Fig. 3: Planning



Fig. 4: Execution

This suggests the notion of layered realities and simulations within simulations, across which the player's body is embodied. Cyborgs function as "boundary figures" (Bell 150), and in the same way that they disturb "neatly ordered worldviews" (Bell 150), they disturb the borders between realities. Engaging with this video game then becomes the very existential experience of disturbing those boundaries. "The cyborg then can be heroized or romanticized as a liminal, troubling metaphor for instability, fluidity and hybridity" (Bell 150). In a manner of speaking, *Transistor* does exactly that: it heroizes the player, regardless of gender, by embodying the player into a female character - Red.

Red further represents this fluidity through her, and therefore the player's, relationship, with the Transistor, the massive 'sword' that she carries. As shown in figure 1, the game begins with the scene of the death of Red's lover. We see that he has been stabbed by the Transistor. However, we find out that the Transistor seems to hold the disembodied consciousness of Red's lover. In other words, her lover has been embodied into a new, technological body. As Red progresses through the world, she comes across people who have been 'processed' (killed by

the Process). She is able to absorb their remaining essences of those people that were killed by The Process into the Transistor. Each person that has been absorbed into the Transistor provides her with more ‘moves’ and ‘attacks’.

The Transistor therefore appears to be a piece of technology that has the ability to absorb the essence of dead persons (so to speak), and speaks in the voice of Red’s lover, who seems to be the dominant consciousness within the mixture of consciousnesses that co-exist within the Transistor. The absorption of such persons modifies the capabilities and provides more ‘functions()’ to the Transistor. The abilities (as understood in terms of the combat) are the very people absorbed into the sword. What this implies is that the technology of the Transistor provides a space where disembodied entities can exist, suggesting the notion of the cyborg body completely free of the ‘meat’. The functions() the Transistor contains, being combinable and modifiable with relative ease, actually constitute the essence of people, shows how fluid a disembodied self is within the cyborg body, easily crossing over and modifying personalities and human identities.

This is seen particularly in the development of a personalised combination of abilities, which being ‘people’ can suddenly be interpreted in terms of relationships that develop into firm attachments. This is specifically seen in the penalty for poor combat performance where one’s most favoured ability is lost at the loss of a health bar. In light of the narrative backstory that rewards the experimentation with the functions() in varied combinations, the use of these functions() is intertwined with the understanding of the character of whom the ability is (within the video game simulation) the real world embodiment of themselves. This suggests that relationships can persist and develop regardless of the state of embodiment, which may well be understood as a sort of ideal that prevails through the simulated world of the videogame.

The same notion of fluidity is seen in the relationship between Red and her lover which persists even after the loss of the lover's physical body.

As Red progresses through the world her reliance in the Transistor to overcome difficulties can be reflective of a need for that kind of technology. The ability to overcome difficulty through technology again suggests the idea of technological augmentation for "inanimate objects, when touched or on the body for long enough, become extensions of the body image sensation" (Lupton 423). In a flashback to when Red's lover was killed, the players discover themselves robbed of all ability, kinesthetically a very jarring thing to happen in the middle of the game, as it breaks the flow of power the player establishes through Red and the Transistor.

The player then has to move a sobbing Red. However, the moment Red picks up the Transistor, she seems transformed and strengthened, as though the presence of her lover has given her some force of will. This sudden, non-kinesthetic section of the game, where Red's movement is far slower than what the player is accustomed to, provides a feedback that disturbs the flow of the game, metaphorically representing the difficulty that Red herself is going through in attempting to deal with the death of a loved one. This shows the player that without the Transistor not much can be done to survive this world. It points out the importance of the relationship between Red and her lover: that one cannot do without the other. Red needs her lover for moral support, and her lover needs her to be carried around. To be embodied as Red therefore embodies the player in a highly liminal space where identities morph into functions(), and where relationships flow between bodies jumbling the embodied self with other selves highly dependent on each other to be able to function.

The game *Transistor* is designed as an action game, which pits the player against a series of antagonistic characters in the game world. In *Transistor* it is The Process, or robots who are seen as an uncanny version of human beings, that are the antagonists. In some ways they represent a sort of perfection, “representing the ideal body as that which is invulnerable to illness” (Lupton 425). They symbolise a technology that will replace the “worn-out organic elements” (Bell 144) of the flesh body or meat, which is seen as “being far more permeable, fluid and subject to ‘leakage’” (Lupton 425). The play of the game that pits the player, a cyborg, against the Process then represents conflict.

The game chooses to represent this conflict as one between the human desire to survive and protect one’s loved ones against robots that are emotionless and lacking in intent, but simply being, an out of control code. The robots, the player finds out, are only following orders, but the humans who were in charge have lost control over them, leaving the Process to proliferate, replicate and even evolve.

As one progresses through the game, the naming of the different kinds of The Process is done by Red’s lover, as “Creeps” or “Jerks”. This naming forces a perspective that contextualizes the robots as antagonists, regardless of whether the robots did indeed have such antagonistic intentions or not. As one grows in experience, levels up and gains new abilities, your evolution is reflected in the evolution of The Process as well. In terms of the kinaesthetic challenge this is the development of new challenges which will require new strategies. The different kinds of Processes regularly upgrade themselves, but also seemingly evolve as newer ones emerge with narrative and temporal progression. The robots seem to grow increasingly humanoid. When The Process encounters humans it ‘processes’ them and apparently assimilates them. When you encounter the first antagonistic ‘processed’ human, a woman, it takes on the label ‘Lady’, and its physical form engenders it as female. And later on, a ‘Man’

is encountered. The Process seems to be apparently not just intent on assimilating the humans they process, but subverting and interpreting particular human quirks in an uncanny parody as well. The Lady is extremely aggressive creating multiple bodies that attack the player, while the Man is passive. The Man's only mode of attack is to grow 'hair' and 'cut' the hair after which the 'hair' acts like a homing device and follows the player around, exploding on contact. The rest of the time the Man stays invisible, and can't be attacked until it is provoked to 'cut' its growing hair.

These structures that the robotic Process seems to embody, churning out replica after replica of its different instances, juxtapose themselves with the fluid experience of the cyborg body that the player embodies when engaging in the simulation and the play of the game. In such a sense, the Process seems to represent not antagonists that one has to engage in combat with, but the embodiment of a philosophical conflict that the cyborg body instigates, that is one which represents the anxieties about the takeover of human life by technology.

The Process disturbs the constructed identities of the self by becoming the uncanny perfection of the human body, homogenised and consistent, quite unlike the emotional upheaval that Red goes through. As David Bell says of this anxiety, "as intelligent robots design successive generations of successors, technical evolution will go into overdrive. Biological humans can either adopt the fabulous mechanisms of robots, thus becoming robots themselves, or can they retire into obscurity" (144). The combat mechanic of the game that pits the player, with a technologically augmented meat body and the character identity of humans persevering through difficulty, against the completely technological, unemotional robot represent this conflict about the cyborg body. The only way to win the game is to engage in its play, and the only way to engage in play is to come in conflict with The Process. This seems to suggest that conflict between humans and technology, though both need the other to exist, is inevitable.

Thus *Transistor* simulates the experience of being a cyborg: a self that is fluid across technologies into simulations and game systems, but is grounded in the sensory experience of the player's physical body that interacts with hardware. Thus it transforms how the notion of cyborg is understood, to an understanding that comes from performing as a cyborg. However, upon benefiting from this technology that allows an extended embodied awareness, it seems inevitable that an anxiety about the relationship between humans and technology will remain.

The game ends narratively with Red 'killing' herself with the Transistor, and the final frame shows her standing beside her still unnamed lover, in what seems to be another world, which the player might interpret is within the Transistor itself. Considering the Transistor is a store for these disembodied people, this other world is in perhaps a different sort of embodiment within yet another layer of simulation. What this ending seems to suggest as the thematic resolution of conflict that human ideas of things like love, attachment and physicality persist are translated from the real world into the simulated world. Similarly, the experience of this narrative and the cyborg body, with its conflict and emotional upheaval, is provided for the player through the technologically augmented body.

It is from this experiential position that a thinking about the cyborg body and identity can occur. The cyborg represents forms of "differential or oppositional consciousness, and both suggest new ways of thinking, acting and living together" (Bell 154). The form of the videogame, as differentiated from other media, allows this discourse to take place in this form. *Transistor*, in recognising where and how the player is situated within its mechanics, was able to use its modes of engagement and play to communicate these ideas, and create a complex intermingling of relationships that recognises that these ideas and anxieties cannot be understood simplistically.

Stewart Woods points out that “the purpose of the simulation is to evoke the reality of the simulated system so effectively that participants feel ‘realistic emotions which naturally arise in the situation being simulated’” (Woods). *Transistor* simulates the experience of being a cyborg, a self that is fluid across technologies into simulations and game systems but grounded in the sensory experience of the player’s physical body that interacts with hardware. It transforms how the notion of cyborg is understood, not simply by addressing or representing the idea, but by forcing the player to be embodied as a cyborg. From that embodiment the player acts out their embodiment into the game-world, where they must face the conflicts and challenges that are the result of the acting out.

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Locating the Grotesque: A Meta-theoretical Reading

Prasida P

Abstract: Authors and artists have progressively tried to capture the crisis of human life in their works. For such representations an adept tool is required and the ‘*grotesque*’ is artfully brought to fore by authors and artists as the most efficacious artistic weapon for mirroring the intricate reality and inherent contradictions in human life. The *grotesque* has become the most coveted and the, “the most genuine style” of modern art. The word ‘grotesque’ has been received differently across the changing times. The article seeks to understand the multifaceted understanding of the term ‘grotesque’ with reference to the different ideologies, disciplines, thought practices and representations in sync with the spirit of the age it is associated with.

Keywords: Grotesque, Literature, Arts, Paintings, Movements

The revolutionary advancement in science and technology over the past few centuries has created drastic changes in the life of human beings. It has redesigned human life and has reinvigorated the way one acts and perceives things. The internet, social media, mobile phones, artificial intelligence, virtual currency and banking, wearable technologies, nuclear power, innovations in genetic engineering, organ transplant and such, has made human life effortless but it has also on the one hand made life more complex. *Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter* and other social media devices are fearlessly infiltrating the media centred life of the human, causing a threat to privacy, in addition to creating psychological pressures. On the other hand, genetic engineering, synthetic biology, nanotechnology and the like, evolve as an ancillary, to the cumulative uneasiness over the apocalyptic concern for the “essence “of humanity as Jacques Derrida elucidates in his essay “The Aforementioned So-Called Human Genome”. He posits:

One has the impression ...that the risk that is run at this unique moment in the history of humanity is the risk of new crimes being committed against humanity and not only... against millions of real human beings as was [previously] the case, but a crime such that a sorcerer’s apprentice who was very cunning, the author of potential genetic manipulations, might in the future commit or supply the means for committing... against man, against the

very humanity of man, no longer against millions of representatives of real humanity but against the essence itself of humanity, against an idea, an essence, a figure of the human race, represented this time by a countless number of beings and generations to come.(207-8)

Apart from these challenges, people lurch and stumble in a web of noxious strings like terrorism, racism, genocide, gender issues, rape, economic crisis, warfare, environmental threat and other predicaments of the time. Thus the rapid changes in social, cultural, economic, environmental, scientific and technical terrain has inevitably fostered uncertainties and contradictions in the human mind. The fact that it has affected and altered one's perception and life in the postmodern world seems to be an absurd and ambiguous one. Man is secluded and alienated within him and with his surroundings. Bernard Mc Elroy's notion of the twentieth century man can be gathered from his work the *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque* where he explicates on the plight of man as he comments on the issues reflected in twentieth century literature. He says that man of the twentieth century lives in an "indifferent, meaningless universe" (17). According to him man is surrounded "On every side with violence and brutalisation, offering him values that have lost their credibility, manipulating and dehumanising him through vast faceless institutions, the most ominous of which are science, technology, and the socio economic organisation" (17).

Authors and artists have progressively tried to capture this paradox, this crisis of human life in their works and the representation of such has become an integral element in art forms and literature. For such representations an adept tool is required and the 'grotesque' is then artfully brought to fore by authors and artists as the most efficacious artistic weapon for mirroring the intricate reality and inherent contradictions in human life. The *grotesque* then is the most coveted and the, "the most genuine style" of modern art as Thomas Mann propounds in "Conrad's Secret Agent" (qtd. in Aisenberg 148). As such Friedrich Durrenmatt in his work *Problems of the Theatre: an Essay* rightly articulates that "Our world has led to the grotesque as well as to the atom bomb" (255). The *grotesque*, in the present era, is hailed as a vital literary genre, that provides the author who chooses it, as an unbound space to express his thoughts and in turn helps deepen one's consciousness of the world around him.

The term *grotesque* at its outset brings to mind an assortment of terms like absurd, eerie, fantastic, baroque, freakish, monstrous, whimsical and such. But the term initially had its origin as a noun from the Italian word *grottesco* which literally meant 'of a cave'. The term came into existence with the vast excavations that were conducted in Rome at the end of the fifteenth century, which unearthed caves or *grottos* that had paintings which defied the aesthetic norms of the time. Geoffrey Harpham in "The Grotesque: First Principles" observes that, "These excavations unearthed murals dating from the Roman Decadence in which human and animal figures are intertwined with foliage in ways which violate not only the laws of statics and gravity, but common sense and plain observation as well" (461). The unnatural coupling of the human and

animal forms with the foliage that were found inside the caves laid the grounding for the juxtaposition of discordant items that *grotesque* epitomizes. But the *grotesque* drastically evolved with time moving from visual arts to literature, spreading from Rome to other European countries, Italy, France, and to practically every other country, gathering new meanings in its trail. As such, scholars now have an arduous job, in providing a concrete definition for the term. In a humorous vein Mc Elroy says that the term *grotesque* is now “routinely applied to everything from necktie to a relationship” (1). In line with Mc Elroy, Harpham in “The Grotesque First Principles” says that “The grotesque is the slipperiest of the aesthetic categories” (461). He elucidates:

Perhaps the germ, the secret of the grotesque, lies not in the origins or derivations of the word, but in the conditions of a particular cultural climate, a particular artist, a particular audience. Perhaps we should approach the grotesque not as a fixed thing.... because it is an aesthetic orphan, wandering from form to form, era to era. (461)

Harping on how the *grotesque* was received at various stages of time, it can be seen that the sixteenth century Renaissance era was sceptical of the *grotesque* as an artistic genre and considered it an “unreasonable fashion” and a “monstrous form” and as “something ominous and sinister” as Wolfgang Kayser notes in his work *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*” (20). The eighteenth century Neo Classical age did not glean any substantial change in its attitude towards *grotesque* from its previous eras as it was an age of wisdom, reason, control and decorum, and *grotesque* was something that challenged these. The *grotesque* at the time was relegated as mere caricature. The *grotesque* of the age, as Arthur Clayborough points out in *The Grotesque in English Literature* was synonymous with the unnatural, ridiculous and bizarre. He exemplifies:

The word grotesque thus comes to be applied in a more general fashion during the Age of Reason and of Neo-Classicism--when the characteristics of the grotesque style of art—extravagance, fantasy, individual taste, and the rejection of the natural conditions of organization' are the object of ridicule and disapproval. The most general sense which it has developed by the early eighteenth century is therefore that of ridiculous, distorted, unnatural' (adj); 'an absurdity, a distortion of nature' (noun). (6)

The eighteenth century notion of the *grotesque* gradually changed with the rise of Romanticism in the early nineteenth century. Romanticism was a post enlightenment age, a fertile period for art and literature with emphasis on freedom, wonder, imagination, and creativity. The preoccupation of the age with the fantastic and ominous ushered an acceptance of the *grotesque* as an aesthetic category. Clayborough in analysing the *grotesque* in the nineteenth century comments on Coleridge's work that “Coleridge employs the *grotesque*, in the form of the strange, the exotic, the preternatural, approvingly, as an echo of the infinite” (233). The *grotesque* provided the artist a freedom to imagination and expression and thereby the derogatory assumptions concerning the

term from earlier periods were largely diluted. Then the nineteenth century Victorian era with its advancement in commerce, industrial revolution, and impatience with new ideas in science, religion and the resultant confusion turned the *grotesque* into a forceful and an effective tool for the representation of the darker side of human life. In turn the twentieth century was a world of paradoxical existence with rigid class systems and liberal socialism that challenged the boundaries of norms. These contradictory and paradoxical feelings of the time were rightly expressed through the use of *grotesque*. The avant garde movements in art and literature like Surrealism, Dadaism, Futurism, Expressionism and others found rightful expression through *grotesque* at the time. As in the previous century, the present twenty first century world is also a world of paradoxes and contradictions, as is explicated in the opening paragraphs of this section. It is a world of the 'atom bomb' as Durrenmatt says and explaining the notion of *grotesque* in the present condition he notes:

The grotesque is a way of expressing in a tangible manner, of making us perceive physically the paradoxical: it is the form of the unformed, the visage of a faceless world. And just as our thinking today seems to be unable to do without the concept of paradox, so also art and our world, which still exists because the atom bomb exists: out of fear of the bomb. (12)

In addition to tracing the historical trajectory of the term *grotesque*, it is also pertinent that one should look into critical genealogies that shaped and gave the *grotesque* an aesthetic form. Wolfgang Kayser's *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* is an influential work on the *grotesque*. It offers a deep study of the term as he traverses from Renaissance to nineteenth century realism and from poetry to dream narration and painting. He has based his opinions on the analysis of the works of Martin Wieland, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and other prominent figures of the time as they provided materials for the better understanding of the nature of *grotesque*. He says that in Wieland's view there exists three types of caricature; the true caricature where the painter paints the distortions as it is seen, the exaggerated caricature, where the monstrosity of the object is highlighted while retaining its original form, and the purely fantastic caricature where the painter disregards the true form of the object and gives into an unchecked fancy. Of the three forms, Wieland recognised the purely fantastic caricature as the true form of *grotesque*, because such caricatures provided the artist an unconditional freedom with which they can freely evoke varied emotions. In his view, the *grotesque* was a form that was capable of arousing contradictory feelings. This notion of the *grotesque* is important, as it has helped Kayser to formulate his own theory of the *grotesque*. According to him the *grotesque*, like the purely fantastic caricature refutes the very canons one abides in his accustomed world. He states that when one encounters the *grotesque*, his primary feeling is one of awe and apprehension brought about by the demolition of the normative structures he once embraced and is now foreign and unreachable. For Wieland the *grotesque* was something that was completely detached from its reality, but for Kayser, the presence of the horrible and the monstrous never makes a person detached from his

reality. On the other hand, he says that, when one confronts the *grotesque* he is horrified by its presence but is soon able to see beyond the horrid situation as he recognises a reality, a truth which he can relate with himself and his world. In short, he recognises a hidden truth beneath all the *grotesqueness* that is projected. To affirm his point he quotes Mann who says in his *Reflection of an Unpolitical Man* that the *grotesque* is that “which is excessively true and excessively real, not that which is arbitrary, false, unreal and absurd” (qtd. in Kayser 158).

Kayser in discussing Pieter Bruegel the Elder's paintings, adds another perspective to the *grotesque* that of the anxiety which the abysmal forces of *grotesque* may embolden in a person. A *grotesque* painting such as Bruegel's can turn a person's normal daily life into an estranged one and evoke inexplicable and incomprehensible fear. He says that other than the ridiculousness that the absurdity and distortion of *grotesque* creates, one may also be steeped into a fear propelled by the acceptance that the life of a man is insecure and ambiguous in the world in which he lives. Kayser stresses that the *grotesque* may evoke varied emotions like horror and humour and thus while annotating the fundamental facets of the *grotesque*; it is pertinent that one should pay attention to its reception, which cannot be ignored under any circumstances.

Further, on deliberating about the absurdities of human life, Kayser says that “Man is a blind creature” whose life is the “dream of an absurd being” (142). He enlists certain themes which a *grotesque* writer may employ to create grotesqueness in the modern world. One of them is that the instruments of technology may be closely blended with the organic such as plants, animals and humans to create a feeling of weirdness. Such bizarreness in turn will effectively help the writer to convey portentous evil in the world around him. In his view, in blending the animate with the inanimate, the animate will be estranged of its essence by the infiltration of the inanimate and the inanimate in turn will become equally strange and ominous by being granted a life. As such Kayser says that in the most persistent motif of *grotesque*, one finds the human beings “reduced to puppets, marionettes, and automata, and their faces frozen into masks” (182). In such an atmosphere one finds the world to be an apocalyptic one where the *grotesque* thrives amiably.

Kayser, in another attempt to define the *grotesque* proposes that the *grotesque* is a “structure”, the essence of which could be summed up in the phrase “The Grotesque Is The Estranged World” (184). To explicate his statement he brings to fore the world of the fairy tale. He says that a world of fairy tale when seen from outside may at times strike the readers to be an extrinsic and absurd one but in truth it is not an outlandish but an agreeable world, as it has natural and familiar elements in it which the readers can easily connect with. The familiar elements in the tale do not suddenly turn the world to be an alienated and bizarre one. The world of the fairy tale is therefore not an estranged but an engaging one. In this regard he states that it is not the fictional world but the world in which one survives that has to be changed.

Kayser asserts that “Suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque” (184). According to him the *grotesque* should create a sudden change from surprise to awe and fear in a moment of time to evoke a situation filled with foreboding consternation. Recalling Kafka, He affirms that one is strongly affected by the sudden estrangement that *grotesque* creates because he starts seeing his estranged world to be an undependable and deceptive one. His unimpeachable trust is lost and he fears that his life in an altered world will be an unreliable one. He goes on to state that the *grotesque*, rather than making one dread death, often makes him anxious about his life and his living. In his view, the *grotesque* structurally presupposes a world view which is extraneous under normal circumstances. He professes that the *grotesque* alienates people from their world by “The fusion of realms which we know to be separated, the abolition of the law of statics, the loss of identity, the distortion of the natural size and shape, the suspension of the category of objects, the destruction of personality and the fragmentation of historical order.”(184-5).

Kayser goes on to say that the people fail to orient themselves with the alienated world because such a world is an absurd one. According to him the creator of the *grotesque* must not and cannot offer any meaning. He argues that the *grotesque* consists of “an unimpassioned view of life on earth as an empty, meaningless puppet play or a caricatural marionette theatre (186). He avows that “The Grotesque Is A Play With The Absurd” (187). He says that the *grotesque* may begin in an animated and buoyant manner. But the person who experiences the *grotesque* may soon be carried away and be deprived of his freedom. It instilled in him a fear which he had tenuously called upon. Thus when one confronts the *grotesque*, he laughs, but it is not a laughter that is free. It will be laughter that is stringent or suffused with distress. He observes that the *grotesque* has the power to call upon and bring under control the infernal elements that wander around the world. He explains:

In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal affects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged. And thus we arrive at a final interpretation of the grotesque: AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD. (188)

His analysis of the *grotesque* as a structural principle and its expression and reception in literature offers a better understanding of the term but is not comprehensive enough as he has focused more on the ‘terrifying aspect’ of the *grotesque* not elaborating on the comic. As a term in constant evolution, the *grotesque* has gathered varied meanings from numerous critics.

Arthur Clayborough, is another notable critic on the *grotesque* who has laid valuable insights on the term. He in his work *Grotesque in English Literature* states that the *grotesque* is

obvious in anything that contests normality to evoke emotions. According to him the *grotesque* works in a psychologically inclined way. Clayborough's perspective of the *grotesque* from a psychological standpoint is widely accepted among the major practitioners of *grotesque*. He has tried to define the term from Carl Jung's concepts of progression and regression concerning the conscious and unconscious mind. Clayborough says that one of the characteristics of the progressive aspect of mind is that it should either reject the deliberate juxtapositions, which are central to *grotesque*, as pointless or they should try to find a logical connection in them. On the other hand, he deliberates that the regressive aspect of mind wallows in things beyond comprehension projected by the *grotesque* juxtapositions. Clayborough then finds different manifestations of the *grotesque* in the progressive and regressive aspects and in accordance classifies them into four types of *grotesque* that is the progressive positive, the progressive negative, the regressive positive and the regressive negative. Of these he finds the progressive negative and regressive negative states as the most appropriate forms for the *grotesque*. In progressive negative *grotesque* there is a distortion of reality but one can still relate it to the real world. He cites satire as a model for this form. He explains the regressive negative *grotesque* in relation to the regressive positive one. According to him both may hint at each other and both can devise a perfunctory response in the reader. He says that the regressive positive *grotesque* is voluntary but impulsive in nature. On the other hand, the regressive negative *grotesque* is intentional and is more refined than the regressive positive *grotesque*. Irene Rima Makaryk in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms* neatly sums up Clayborough's notion of the *grotesque* that it is "most usually produced from a 'progressive negative' or 'regressive negative' state of mind, that is, from the artists conscious or unconscious conflicts between his religious sense of the eternal and his perception of the real world" (87).

The *grotesque* from its psychological standpoint has also been analysed by Michael Steig in his "Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis". According to him the *grotesque* arouses anxiety by giving expression to the "infantile fears, fantasies and impulses", but it also at the same time is liberating as the "threatening material is distorted in the direction of the harmlessness" (258). He explains that the threatening infantile material is often diminished of its threat by using comic techniques such as caricature and ridicule. The *grotesque* in his view is ironic. While it attempts at liberation from fear and anxiety, there is still a vacillating tension brought into existence by internal psychological conflicts that remains unresolved. He argues that the "grotesque involves the managing of the uncanny by the comic" (259).

Lily. B.Campbell in *The Grotesque in the Poetry of Robert Browning*, on studying the history of *grotesque*, detects several tendencies in the nature of *grotesque* which she assumes is important. Firstly she notes the *grotesque* to be closely connected with caricature as both give priority to aberration of things. Secondly she considers the *grotesque* to be the ugly in that it espouses the characteristics of the abhorrent and the humorous. Finally she says that the pagan symbols in Christian beliefs which tended to be demonic produced much of the material for the

grotesque. According to Campbell the *grotesque* adopts the peculiarities of both the ugly and the comic elements. She then classifies the *grotesque* into three; the great *grotesque*, which is produced through the imagination, the fanciful *grotesque*, which is conceived through fancy and the purely artificial *grotesque*, which is created through the intentional muddling of the facts. Explaining the three forms she says that the artist attempts the great *grotesque* when he tries to portray the incomprehensible. He attempts the fanciful *grotesque* when he uses the ugly to arouse *grotesque* and the artificial *grotesque* is produced by him when he “knowingly constructs incongruities”, grotesque rhymes” and “absolutely incoherent” matter (15).

The varied conceptions and perceptions of the term *grotesque* have also been explored by Frances. K. Barasch in *The Grotesque: A Study of Meanings*. She affirms that the meaning of the *grotesque* is so diverse that it is almost impossible to decipher its implications. But she recognises that many of the varied meanings acquired by the *grotesque* in the course of the past five centuries shifted in the present century.. Attempting to generate an all inclusive meaning for the *grotesque*, she says that “for the artists of different ages, instinctively or consciously, expressed in fantasies of mixed humor and fear, the common perception that the total human experience is beyond logical ordering” (164). For her the *grotesque* has become a characteristic element in expressing the distortions and inexplicable realities of life. In her view, the grotesqueness in literature and art are expressed through “the grotesque mingling of the ludicrous and the terrible, the use of incongruities, the juxtapositions of low comedy, sordid reality, and the noble delusions of the inner man” (161). She stresses that the world of the *grotesque* is an indefinite one. In her view a writer of the *grotesque* who portrays life from the point of view of the absurd should occupy a discreet position. In adopting such a stand he will experience a synchronic feeling of delight and terror by what he perceives. Recalling Karl Guthke, who made a differentiation between tragicomedy and the *grotesque* absurd, Barasch, in her work divides the *grotesque* into two types: the tragicomic-*grotesque* and the *grotesque* absurd. She asserts that, in the *grotesque* absurd, “the philosophic view and the medium coincide” and that in the tragicomedy grotesque “the real literary worlds suggest absurd meanings” (163). In her view, the *grotesque* is the most appropriate means to identify and understand strife and disorientation in art and literature. To her the modern *grotesque* is an “eternal device to protest against and to shield man from the deep inner anguish of his human condition in a world turned upside down” (164).

Geoffrey Galt Harpham, an influential critic of the *grotesque*, as mentioned in the initial section, in his work *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* offers his readers a more positive view, unlike Kayser, who thought the *grotesque* to be an estranged one. For him, the *grotesque* is something that has a soul of its own, whose presence is always felt in the world around. According to him the *grotesque* is infused with an energy which aborts any other energy which it cannot tolerate, alternatively aiding in the creation of ambivalent reactions. In his view the *grotesque* works on the model of metaphorical imagination, “perceiving similarity in dissimilar things”, catering on a mind that is able to see the “far and the near, the concrete and the

abstract” and the “sacred and the unclean on the same plane” (126). He stresses on the contradiction that operates in a *grotesque* and says that while the *grotesque* prevents the reader from understanding its meaning, it alternatively invites them into it. He postulates that the *grotesque* operates by a charter that is unique and restricted to itself. As a bottom line, he notes that the “Grotesque is a word for the paralysis of language” (6).

Unlike most critics of the *grotesque* who were focussed on defining the term, Philip Thomson in his work *The Grotesque* charts out the different functions and purposes of the *grotesque* in art and literature. He enlists them as; aggressiveness and alienation, the psychological effect, tension and unresolvability, playfulness and unintentional *grotesque*. He says that the *grotesque*, in most literature, appears as an aggressive weapon to shock the readers, “to bewilder and disorient, to bring the reader up short, jolt him out of accustomed ways of perceiving the world and confront him with a radically different, disturbing perspective” (58). He argues that the sum effect of the use of such an aggressive weapon is alienation as things which are familiar are suddenly made strange and disturbing to the reader. He says that such a technique is often found in satiric and burlesque contexts. Moving on, Thomson finds the effect of the *grotesque* at the psychological level to be problematic. Stressing on Michael Steig’s notion of *grotesque*, he says that the *grotesque* has both liberating and inhibiting effects on the reader. He says that one laughs at the *grotesque*, but it is not an unrestrained one, but a restrained one. The horrifying aspects may turn the burst of laughter into a frown. But the horrifying experience may be cut down by the appreciation of the comic element in the *grotesque*. Discussing tension and unresolvability in *grotesque*, he asserts that the *grotesque* is the battle of variances. He explains this through the *grotesque* fusion of tragedy and comedy in plays. He argues that the “vale of tears and the circus are one, that tragedy is in some ways comic and all comedy in some way tragic and pathetic” (63). He postulates the playfulness in *grotesque* or the experimental *grotesque* to be a strong element in literature. In his view, the purely playful *grotesque*, while disorienting the readers, will frequently give them second thoughts about the frivolousness projected. He then goes on to say that the *grotesque* may also be ‘unintentional’ or ‘purposeless’. It may be created by mistake by the author and he says that such lapses are more prominent in poetry.

An essay on the various expressions of *grotesque* from such a critical stance also calls for a discussion of the same from a theoretical frame purported by major writers like Mikhail Bakhtin, John Ruskin, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva. Bakhtin is a Russian philosopher well known for his theories on the *grotesque* and carnivalesque. The *grotesque* and carnivalesque, which were initially part of his doctoral dissertation, later gained acclaim with the publication of his work *Rabelais and His World*. Philip Thomson rightly avers that for Bakhtin, “the grotesque is essentially physical”, for Bakhtin’s work is focussed more on the *grotesque* body in his analysis of the grotesque (56). Speaking of the *grotesque* body, he emphasises on the open apertures in a body, the interstices that link the body to the outside world. For him the *grotesque* body is open to and linked with the rest of the world. It is an incomplete unit that outgrows and infringes its

boundaries. This is because, the various apertures of the body like the “open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose” asserts the body as a “principle of growth” when it eats, drinks, defecates and copulates (26). For him the people are caught in a constant process of being evolved and renewed. Thus Bakhtin argues that:

The bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egoistic form, severed from other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people. As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretence to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body. (19)

Thus the *grotesque* bodily element has a universal quality, a character that can be attributed to all people.

Bakhtin argues that the “essence of grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double faced fullness of life” (62). Analysing the destructive and regenerative aspects of *grotesque realism*, he says that death is inseparable from birth. He argues that the *grotesque* lower sections of the body such as the genital organs is intensely positive in its nature as it is linked to notions of birth and life. For him, degradation is steadily fastened with regeneration as degradation being concerned with the lower section of the body, is linked with procreation, pregnancy and birth. He contends, “Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth” (21). By asserting that the body engulfs both the destructive and regenerative aspects, he says that the *grotesque* is a fertile earth which always creates. For him, the perpetually contriving body of the *grotesque* that devours and defecates cyclically, demolishes hierarchies and brings down boundaries between life and death. The *grotesque* thus, for him is a celebration of the cyclical nature of life and death and for him, *grotesque realism*, by degrading, actively bring about the “lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract” to the material level, “to the sphere of the earth and body” (21).

In analysing *grotesque*, it is hard to exclude John Ruskin’s writings on the concept. In *Stones of Venice Volume 111: The Fall*, Ruskin while examining the nature of *grotesque*, finds that in most cases the *grotesque* is composed of two elements, the ludicrous and the fearful. Based on the dominance of either one of them, in a particular *grotesque*, he classifies them into the sportive *grotesque* and the terrible *grotesque*. But he in the same breath also warns against legitimizing such classification because in most cases strict distinctions are not found. Ruskin then works on the kinds of *grotesque* that are produced when the instinct of playfulness in *grotesque* is indulged or repressed in mankind. He says that the man who plays wisely produces the most adequate form of *grotesque*. For Ruskin, those who play inordinately often produce *grotesque* that is refined, feeble and sensual. Those who play necessarily may create *grotesque* through his imprudent and arid fancy and on the other hand, those who do not play at all will find expression in “bitterness and mockery” and the *grotesque* will belong “to the class of terrible, rather than of

playful grotesque” (136). Further, He brings in a classification that addresses the ongoing disagreement in assessing the *grotesque* as a base form and *grotesque* as the highest artistic expression. He brings in a clear distinction by distinguishing between the noble and the ignoble form of the *grotesque*. The noble or the true *grotesque*, being an expression of a serious mind, evokes in one a genuine horror but he at the same time is also led to experience the true recognition of beauty. The ignoble or the false *grotesque* is on the other hand opposed to the noble *grotesque* and never creates a genuine terror. It is a frivolous and unrealistic one according to Ruskin.

Ruskin then grazing on various levels of *grotesque* has also explored the *symbolic grotesque* as a representational form of *grotesque* and discusses it in the third volume of *Modern Painters*. He argues that:

A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or over-leaped by the haste of the imagination, forming the grotesque character. (97-98)

The symbolical *grotesque*, thus, in Ruskin’s view helps set forth an “otherwise less expressible truth” (98). Ruskin considers the artists to be prophets whose revelations often appear to man in the nature of symbolic *grotesque*. The symbolic *grotesque* helps them to convey the truths that are not normally grasped by humans and Ruskin contends that most truths appear to man in some form of *grotesque*.

If Ruskin treats his notion of *grotesque* from a symbolic domain, Julia Kristeva locates hers in the realm of the abject. Her notion of the ‘abject *grotesque*’ is for the most part, consolidated in her work *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. The abject for Kristeva is something which is “radically excluded” and jettisoned outside of the subject, something that “disturbs identity, system, order” (4). It does not respect the borders, positions and rules. It constantly challenges the superego. The abject she notes; is “something that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me” (11). The abject is a place where all meaning collapses.

Abjection marks the phase in an individual when he separates himself from his mother. In order to create an identity for himself, the child rejects or expels the maternal, and creates an imaginary border between the self and the mother. He enters the social order by tearing himself away from things connected to his mother like the placenta, blood and so on and the mother thereby in the act is abjected. Abjection therefore, Kristeva says, creates a fear of the maternal, for maternal posits a hazard of re-inclusion into the body from which the subject has separated itself.

In her view the disgrace, a compromise, a re-inclusion may elicit is the primal reason for rejecting things that are not part of one's self. She then in her essay delineates the aversion for food as the most rudimentary form of abjection and explains this through absurd images.

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck . . . I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. (12)

Abjection thus detaches anything inseparably bound to the subject. She notes: "I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it" (12). She reiterates that; "I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself" (12). In her view the corpse represents another sickening abject for it represents the most sickening wastes. It is abject, because it reminds one of those wastes which he firmly detaches himself from in order to survive.

The abject, then again, for Kristeva is perverse as it denies rules, laws, "turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them" (24). Corruption, she says, is therefore the most common and most socialised appearance of the abject. Speaking of the abject in relation to literature, she alleges that the writer of the contemporary age is fascinated by the abject in that he perverts the language, style and content to cast himself into it. The literature produced in such a manner crosses over the classifications between the pure and the impure, and sin, morality and immorality. Writing, then, for Kristeva, "implies an ability to imagine the abject, that is, to see oneself in its place and to thrust it aside only by means of the displacements of verbal play. It is only after his death, eventually, that the writer of abjection will escape his condition of waste, reject, abject" (25).

While Kristeva's exploration of the power of abject offers significant insights in analysing the *grotesque*, Michel Foucault's writings on the 'abnormal' and 'monstrous' grants the scholars of *grotesque* yet another cache on the term. In the *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France (1974-1975)*. Foucault, tracing the genealogy of the abnormal individual speculates that the abnormal individual had evolved from three ancestors, that is, the human monster, the incorrigible man and the masturbating child. For Foucault, the abnormal individual is created when a regular network of knowledge and power brings in these three ancestors together. The monster, says Foucault falls under the framework, and was transformed in accordance with the "politico judicial powers"; the incorrigible man was developed under the "functions of family and the development of disciplinary techniques" and the masturbator emerged with the "redistribution of powers that

surround the individual's body" (61). The abnormal individual according to Foucault is thus constituted by the linking of these three powers and knowledge structures. The dominant figure among the three is the monster that challenged both the medical and judicial systems of the time. The monster was the central figure, for it was around the figure of the monster that the knowledge and power structures were appropriated and reconstructed. He argues that the monster violated the rules and the laws of classification. Foucault, who was always focussed on institutions that wield power to maintain normalisation, further contends that a monster is created when the rules of normalisation are defied. In his view the monstrosity comes into force when there is a chaotic topsy-turvy and disruption of the religious and civil canons projected by the society. Alternatively, he also argues that the monstrosity often "calls law into question and disables it" (64).

Speaking of the forms of monster that existed at various periods of time he says that the earlier forms of monsters were either a mixture of species or of sexes. The middle ages privileged the bestial man, the Renaissance the Siamese twins and the Classical age the hermaphrodites. Foucault then finds the mixing of the sexes to be absent with the dawn of the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, the notion of monstrosity, he argues was based on eccentricities, on different kinds of imperfections, and errors of nature. This was evident in incest and cannibalism and the monstrosity was increasingly suspected of being behind all criminality. He remarks, "Every criminal could well be a monster, just as previously it was possible that the monster was a criminal" (81-2). He also finds a shift in the nature of monstrosity whereby monstrosity was not recognised by its nature, but by its conduct. Thus there is the "attribution of a monstrosity that is not juridico-natural but juridico moral" (73). He also recognises two forms of monsters. The political monster who "prefers his own interest to the laws governing the society" and the juridical monster who misuses power (92).

Through Foucault one learns that monstrosity is no longer bound to the bodily irregularities alone. It may appear in any non normative account, in any form of deviation, of the mind, body or nature. His analysis of the monster in relation to the abnormal individual is significant. He argues that "the abnormal individual is essentially an everyday monster, a monster that has become commonplace" (57). The abnormal individual contends the normative and in short is *grotesque*.

Thus the various manifestations the *grotesque* conceives in diverse criticism and theory grants it a significant place as an aesthetic form in vogue in contemporary literature. It assumes a compelling position in literature because the writers, with the strategic use of *grotesque* can easily gain the reader's attention and can emphatically convey their thoughts without being overtly sententious. Commenting on why the writer of the *grotesque* used the *grotesque* in their fiction, Joseph R. Millichap in "Distorted Matter and Disjunctive Forms: The Grotesque as Modernist Genre" notes that the "Modernist writer discerned disjunctive forms capable of reflecting the fragmentation and alienation of the modern world" (339). Authors like Franz Kafka, William

Faulkner, James Joyce, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, Martin Amis, Stephen King and other writers of *grotesque* often resorted to the use of stream of consciousness, disjointed narration, isolated chapters, multiple narrators, and the creation of abnormal individuals, freaks, misfits, terrifying and comic characters, queer characters, supernatural events, horrific and ludicrous situations, and other such *grotesque* devices to create "alienation and fragmentation" (Millichap 339). Thomson rightly notes that the writer of the *grotesque* by employing *grotesque* devices brings "the horrifying and disgusting aspects of existence to the surface" (59). The use of *grotesque* shocks the readers, arouses them out of their stupor, and urges them to view things from a fresh perspective. Flannery O'Connor aptly consolidates the function and purpose of using the *grotesque* in her fiction:

In these grotesque works, we find that the writer has made alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life. We find that connections which we would expect in the customary kind of realism have been ignored, that there are strange skips and gaps which anyone trying to describe manners and customs would certainly not have left. Yet the characters have an inner coherence, if not always a coherence to their social framework. Their fictional qualities lean away from typical social patterns, toward mystery and the unexpected. It is this kind of realism that I want to consider. (40)

Like O'Connor, J. K. Rowling is a writer who has deftly made use of the *grotesque* in her works to make alive experiences that have been largely ignored or have been systematically desensitised due to its constant representation in art, literature and other social mediums. She is one of the most successful and compelling writers of the contemporary era who has received many honorary degrees and numerous awards for her writings. She is best known for her *Harry Potter* series published between 1997 and 2007. The work gained wide recognition and international acclaim and its abounding popularity resulted in the work to be translated into seventy three different languages. Her other works that followed also gained immense popularity like the previous one. *The Casual Vacancy* published in 2012, *The Cuckoos Calling* in 2013, *The Silkworm* in 2014, *The Career of Evil* in 2015, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* in 2016 remain to date among the most widely read pieces of literature. Other than these works she has written a prequel and several supplementary works to the *Harry Potter* series. Apart from the print medium, she also publishes digitally in her website *Pottermore*. Her writings in the website primarily explore the wizarding world, offering explanations on various situations and characters in her fictional world.

Rowling being a writer sensitive to the social, political and cultural issues of the time often voices her concern through her writings in *Twitter*. Her 'tweets' supporting LGBT community and those against misogyny and racism are few instances that validate that she is a writer deeply concerned with the issues of her time. An advocate of humanity, a defender of equal justice for all, Rowling educates and inspires her reader to stand up against atrocities and cling on to and

rehabilitate one's lost humaneness. In a world of confusion and disorientation, she teaches one to have faith in oneself. As a poor, jobless and a single mother who rose from her struggles and depression to abysmal popularity and riches, her life administers that failures are imminent for a successful life and Rowling exhorts this precept to her readers through her works.

Rowling's works have psychologically, socially and culturally affected and have brought about changes in the lives of a whole generation of the reading community. A study published in 2015 in *The Journal of Applied Social Psychology* titled "The Greatest Magic of Harry Potter: Reducing Prejudice" says that reading *Harry Potter* considerably reduced the prejudiced attitudes of people towards the stigmatised groups. This study led by Loris Vezzali proved that *Harry Potter* created a positive attitude towards the homosexuals and the refugees by not associating with the evil characters such as Voldemort (1). In a similar study, Antony Gierzynski and Kathryn Eddy found that:

Harry Potter fans tend to be more accepting of those who are different, to be more politically tolerant, to be more supportive of equality, to be less authoritarian, to be more opposed to the use of violence and torture, to be less cynical, and to evince a higher level of political efficacy.(6)

Rowling through her works, without doubt, moulds people into better human beings by tutoring them on ethics and other humane values. She finds a dire need to project such values because she is dreadfully aware of the alarming way in which the essence of humanity is fast deteriorating and vanishing from the world. She accentuates the need for values that devise one as humans by projecting the crisis one is caught in, his existence in a world of strife, anxiety, confusion and unknown horrors. The disquieting concerns of the time are thus keenly articulated and are acutely felt in her works of fiction. And Rowling does this through an ingenious use of the *grotesque* which in turn deeply probes and arouses one to the concerns of the time.

The *grotesque* in Rowling's works, one finds, works not merely as a stylistic device. It assumes a force and power, a credibility and rigour, by which it works as an aggressive weapon to foreground experiences and convey her thoughts emphatically. By mirroring man's existence, the *grotesque* in her hands becomes an expression of life. At the same time by imperatively exploiting it to powerfully grasp and grip one's emotion she transmutes the *grotesque* into an experience, as a panacea to bring about a propitious change in the society and the self. The immediate effect of the *grotesque* then in Rowling's works may be that of awe and horror but the ultimate effect will be a discovery of a truth, a truth that has been concealed or has been evaded by the normative structure of the society. The *grotesque* is thus for Rowling a part of her social aesthetic that forces her readers to re-evaluate and open up discussions on the problems that surround one's self and society and thereby bring about a difference for a more peaceful, psychologically healthy and harmonious living.

In Rowling's fiction, the *grotesque* is seen manifested at disparate levels. It appears at the physical level in the form of physically *grotesque* characters. These *grotesque* characters have a deformed body that is at odds with the conceived normalcy of the body the society gleans. They terrify, amuse and often haunt the readers to a large extent in her novels. Such physically aberrant characters are explored in detail in most of her works. Other than the physically *grotesque* characters, she has focussed her attention on the characters that are psychologically aberrant in her works. They are *grotesque* because they often manifest an anomaly that is daunting and repelling. By exploring the *grotesque* at the psychological level, Rowling grazes the yet unexplored meadows of the psychological *grotesque* in fiction and exhibits the various forms of distortions like perversion, obsession, abject and behavioural abnormality as *grotesque* forms that are created with a purpose. Rowling has also used the *grotesque* to her advantage at the language level in her fiction whereby the grotesqueness in conversations, dialogues, repetition of words, verbal structuring and the like enables her to convey her thoughts forcefully. Apart from these, Rowling researches into yet another area of the *grotesque* whereby it evolves as a potent theme in her fiction to depict the world as a Gothic abode. Using the *grotesque* she lays bare before her readers a world that is a dwelling place of inconceivable violence, trauma and unknown horrors. By creating a *grotesque* portrait of the world she makes her readers confront, explore, express and resolve the crises of the age.

Such surveillance from a *grotesque* vantage point, channels a fresh perspective, as Rowling's works, which due to its immense popularity; especially the *Harry Potter* series have mostly exhausted itself as a critical source by being subject to varied critical scrutiny. While helping one to discern the unresolved contradictions felt in the world around, the *grotesque* in her works evolves as a representational mode to depict the paradoxical nature of man's life. It has evolved as the most relevant and dominant literary mode of the contemporary era and Rowling is now one of the central practitioners of *grotesque* who uses it as a social aesthetic and as an ethical and virtuous tool to chronicle the discordant post-postmodern era. The general milieu of the action is concerned with Rowling's *grotesque* characters, situations, incidents, themes and so on, which is actually a microcosm of the world around.

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House-Elves in *Harry Potter*: Slaves by Themselves

Annu Sabu Palathingal

Abstract: The research examines the behaviour of house-elves in the *Harry Potter* books. The objective is to understand and examine why the house-elves remain as slaves to wizards even though they have superior magical capabilities. Using the Marxian theory of false consciousness, the theory of Obedience according to the research experiment conducted by Milgram and Durkheim's Theory of Mechanical and Organic Solidarity, the research identifies behavioral elements in the House-elves that played a role in their oppression. This will throw light on social issues like dominance and violence of communities and its perpetuation through centuries and generations

Keywords: House-elves, False consciousness, *Harry Potter*, Slavery, Wizards.

The *Harry Potter* books by JK Rowling have carved a whole generation of magic loving fans worldwide since its first release in 1997. The book explores a world of magic that is enshrouded within Britain in the '90s. The ability to use magic and the presence of magical creatures is what separates the two worlds. JK Rowling, in her books, draws many parallels between the social and economic conditions of the real (muggle) world and the magical world, highlighting many social injustices. The social class hierarchy and slavery within the wizarding world is one such issue that the *Harry Potter* books illuminate.

The existence of slavery has been dated back to pre-historic times. The word 'slavery', immediately brings to mind a vivid picture of a cruel master punishing his slave, who is trembling with fear, helplessly yearning for his freedom. In *Harry Potter*, a house-elf is a magical being that is enslaved by old wealthy wizard families and works in their vast mansions. The house-elves in the *Harry Potter* world are considered inferior races by the wizards and are forced to slave away for a wizarding family their whole life.

The social hierarchy in the magical world is not the same as its counterpart. Unlike the human versus animal hierarchy of the muggle world, the wizarding world encompasses non-humanspecies that have intelligence similar to or beyond the wizards. House-elves like many other magical beings in the wizarding world – like Goblins and Centaurs – possess the ability to think, reason, introspect, and comprehend their emotions. This makes them different from the other magical creatures that are analogous to what the non-magic humans call ‘animals’.

Therefore, the wizarding society’s treatment of the house-elves cannot be misinterpreted as mere domestication of animals in lieu of slavery. Social dominance is substituted for willing enslavement, and the house-elves are acculturated into being pawns for their masters.

Every discourse of slavery starts with the imbalance of power. The dominant group overpowers the weaker section through physical, economical, political, or scientific strength, thus emerging as the ‘Master’. However, in the wizarding world, the ability to do magic determines one's social power. Thus, those with superior magical abilities dominate the others. What is surprising in the wizard-elf domination is that unlike the other discourses of slavery, here the oppressed is the ‘magically superior’ group in the equation. The magical superiority of the house-elves is explicitly stated throughout the novel series.

The study aims to examine the enslavement of the race that has superior magical powers, the role of house-elves in their enslavement, and the elves’ perception of freedom and happiness in the *Harry Potter* books, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. This way the research attempts to understand the psychological effects of dominance and violence on those who are suppressed and exploited in society.

Various studies on *Harry Potter* talk about the slavery of the house-elves and their plight. Peter Dendle talks about deep human and animal relationships in the world of *Harry Potter*, which is very exploitative for the animals. Susan Howard looks at the series as a postcolonial narrative, while Kellner reads the series in a feminist light. But, there seems to be a gap in understanding the role of the elves in enslaving themselves into the system and its perpetuation for generations.

Using the Marxian theory of false consciousness, the theory of obedience, with reference to Milgram's experiment on Obedience and the theory of Mechanical and Organic Solidarity by Durkheim this research will focus on how the elves are enslaving themselves along with the wizards.

The house-elves in *Harry Potter* are in a state of false consciousness where they believe that their only goal in life is to serve their master. This slave identity is so deeply ingrained in them that they begin to take pride in their status.

False consciousness is a term originally used by Marxists to show how the bourgeoisie hides the true relations between the classes and societies that mislead the proletariats to believe in the oppressive system. This resonates with the ignorance of the house-elves about their state and the wizards misleading them about their status in society due to which they fail to recognize their worth and despise anyone who tries to liberate them from slavery.

The books clearly establish the position of the house-elves as the ‘inferior other’ starting from their appearance. Rowling introduces the elves in the second book, *The Chamber of Secrets* as a little creature with bat-like ears, huge bulging green eyes, and wearing something that seemed to be a ragged old pillowcase (Rowling, *The Chamber of Secrets* 12).

Harry, as someone who grew up in the muggle world, is not familiar with the magical creatures and the social hierarchy in his new world of magic. When Harry asked Dobby the house-elf to sit down, the elf’s reaction was pure horror. The elf was not used to being recognized as a being worth respect and attention.

The house-elves are considered as lower beings and were reduced to the status of slaves by the wizards. The house-elves are required to do anything their master orders them to do. Many old wealthy wizard families kept a house-elf to do their domestic chores. Even the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where Harry goes to school, has house-elves working in its kitchen. This is clear when the Nearly Headless Nick (the house of Gryffindor) replies to Hermione’s inquiry about house-elves in Hogwarts as, “Certainly, the largest number in any dwelling place in Britain, I believe. Over a hundred” (Rowling, *The Goblet of Fire* 161). She is very surprised to learn that there were house-elves in the school, as she had never seen one. Nearly Headless Nick tells her that, Well, they hardly ever leave the kitchen by day, do they? ... They come out at night to do a bit of cleaning ... I mean you are not supposed to see them, are you? That’s the mark of a good house-elf, isn’t it, that you don’t know it’s there. (Rowling, *The Goblet of Fire* 182)

In the books, Hogwarts stands as a symbol of social inclusiveness and harmony. Hence it is quite unexpected to see elves treated as slaves in the school. They work their entire life with nothing received in return for their services. They are not paid any money nor given any favor. Even though the elves are not mistreated by the school, the fact that they remain, slaves, highlights how insignificant their enslavement is within the magical community. The elves’ identity is nearly non-existent to the extent that being invisible to the other members of society is considered as the mark of their efficiency as a house-elf.

The house-elves are beings that possess magic beyond the knowledge of the wizards. Wizards are limited to their ability to perform magic using a wand. Though they can perform a few spells without the aid of a wand it is limited to a handful of skilled and powerful wizards. The house-elves on the other hand are not dependent on a wand to do magic.

Dobby stood up to his former master, Mr. Malfoy to save Harry’s life. In the events that happened after Harry tricked Mr Malfoy into freeing Dobby, he attempts to attack Harry:

There was a loud bang, and Mr. Malfoy was thrown backwards...He got up, his face livid, and pulled out his wand, but Dobby raised a long threatening finger... Lucious Malfoy had no choice...and (Mr Malfoy) hurried out of sight. (Rowling, *The Chamber of Secrets* 357)

This establishes that Dobby was magically powerful that his master all along, but simply refused to stand up for his own freedom and rights.

To further demonstrate the house-elves magical superiority, the books mention that they can easily apparate and disapparate (the magical ability to disappear and reappear almost instantly at another place) within the grounds of Hogwarts while Wizards cannot, as Hogwarts is protected by various enchantments to ensure the students' safety (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows* 161). This restriction on apparating within the grounds is not just limited to students and other ordinary wizards. Even Dumbledore (the headmaster of Hogwarts) and Voldermort (most feared dark wizard) who are said to be among the greatest wizards ever lived did not have the power to break the protective charms of the school and apparate within the property. This indicates that the elves' magic is different and more powerful from the magic of the wizards. Their magical powers give them the agency to break away from the hegemony of the wizards. So why did the elves remain slaves for centuries?

The elves in *Harry Potter* are not happy with the idea of getting freedom. They prefer to remain faithful slaves to their masters than to be freed. According to the books, the only way the house-elves can get freedom is when their master presents them with clothes; which is something that hardly happens in the wizarding world. Nowhere in the series is it mentioned that the house-elves are bound to their masters by any form of magical contract. Therefore, it is solely the house-elves' own law that binds them to eternal slavery.

When Kreacher (the house-elf that served the upper-class family of the Black) said, "The house-elf's highest law is his master's bidding" (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows* 161) it indicated how much they have internalized their slavery and their position as a slave. They have forbidden themselves from using their own power of magic against their masters out of loyalty. Their obedience has transferred their community to mere puppets in their masters' hands.

The house-elves in *the Harry Potter* series have internalized the wizard's idea of inferiority and therefore adhere to the system. The elves are in a state of false consciousness, where they believe that their only purpose in life is to serve their master. They have internalized it so much that getting freedom was associated with dishonour and an insult.

The elf community is in 'love' with their work as slaves to do household chores. In the *Goblet of Fire* Dobby says, "Dobby likes freedom Miss, but he isn't wanting too much, miss, he likes work better" (331). Dobby, even as a free elf is unable to think beyond identity as a house-elf. Even though he was free from his masters, the Malfoys, he again took a job as a house-elf in Hogwarts with the only difference being that he now wanted to be paid for his work. This is because more than his physical self, it was his mind that was enslaved by wizards. The elves are handicapping themselves by self-categorizing their community as the 'inferior other'. They are then self-fulfilling this idea that their circle of work identity is restricted to being a house help.

With the kind of magical qualities Dobby has, he is perfectly capable of doing almost any other magical job, but the idea of his destiny to be a house-elf has been so deeply ingrained in him that he is unable to think of doing anything else. The job of a house-elf does not require the use of special magic except for the basic magic that is required to dwell in the wizarding world. Dobby's idea of freedom is very different from the slaves we see in the muggle world.

Dobby's idea of freedom was restricted to his freedom to choose his new master and get paid for his work. He was ready to serve his 'new master' in Hogwarts in the best way possible. Even though this can also be attributed to their sincerity towards their job, the house-elves are going overboard with their submission to the wizards paving the way to complete servitude.

In one of Frederic Engel's letter to Franz Mehring dated 14 July 1893, he writes, "He works with mere thought material which he accepts without examination ...he does not investigate further for a more remote process independent of thought; indeed its origin seems obvious to him because as all action is produced through the medium of thought it also appears to him to be ultimately based upon thought" (Engels). Here Engels is referring to the proletariat who believes that the situation he is in right now is the way things should be and accepts such ideologies without any thought. This lack of thought and complete surrender to such imposed ideologies is what is meant by 'false consciousness' in the paper. The house-elves here can be equated to the proletariat who are unable to question the Bourgeoisie and their dominance in the society, as they have very well ingrained this hierarchy.

In the *Goblet of Fire*, the house-elf Winky is ashamed of her freedom as she considers this to be a marker of her inability. "Winky is not getting paid... Winky is not sunk so low as that! Winky is properly ashamed of being freed!"(Rowling, The Goblet of Fire 331). This is what makes the slaves in Harry Potter different from the other slave narratives. The slave narrative revolves around the injustice of the institution and the yearning for freedom and free will. But, here the idea of being freed by their master is equated with an insult to their identity

and existence. This makes us think that here, it's not the wizards that have enslaved the elves, but it is an institution upheld by the oppressed with great fervor.

The elves are not the only human-like creatures in the wizarding world. But are the only ones to be enslaved by the wizards. The Goblins and Centaurs are aware of their magical powers. The centaurs especially consider themselves to be superior to the wizards with their ancient wisdom. While a Centaur and Goblin consider it a disgrace to serve the wizards, the house-elves seem to raise the pillars of house-elf slavery higher. Not only do they consider their freedom to be an insult, but they despise anyone who tries to free their minds from the clutches of the wizards.

Those who stand for the elves' liberation are viewed as evil and heartless individuals as opposed to the common idea of freedom giving happiness. When Hermione asks the elves in the Hogwarts kitchen to stand up for their rights, instead of being cheered as a hero she is thrown out of the kitchen. "The cheery smiles had vanished from the faces of the house-elves around the kitchen. They were suddenly looking at Hermione as though she was mad and dangerous" (Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* 468).

The house-elves in Hogwarts enjoy working every day of their life. Their masters' happiness is their satisfaction. But this satisfaction is the result of false consciousness about their freedom. No individual who is completely aware of his/her rights to live a free life will be happy being a slave. For some other elves like Kreacher, the servitude mentality is very strongly rooted in him that he is willing to offer his life for his master. Kreacher's life ambition is to be beheaded and hung on the walls of his mistress's house just like his ancestors (Rowling, *Deathly Hallows* 72).

They consider this to be an honour rather than an act of violence. Such violence against their community is viewed with reverence and respect by the house-elves. Engels again in his letter to Mehring in 1893 writes, "Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors" (Engels).

Here Kreacher is very rigidly abiding by the strong ideologies that he inherits from his ancestors. He is incapable of questioning this ideology. Even though he is aware of the status of his community as menial creatures, the problem lies in the fact he refuses to even try to uncover the cause and origin of this practice and break free.

In the book, *The Order of the Phoenix* Sirius Black threatens Kreacher with clothes as a form of punishment. Cloth, the symbol of liberation is seen as a threat by the elves. When Hermione suggests that Sirius set Kreacher free he says, "the shock would kill him" (Rowling, *Order of the Phoenix* 103). They like their state of misery and ill-treatment. They fail to realize

that their enslavement by the wizards is a direct result of the wizards' hegemony and not because of their inferiority.

Later, in the *Order of the Phoenix*, when Hermione started hiding clothes around the common room hoping to liberate unsuspecting house-elves, Dobby informs Harry that "none of the other house-elves in Hogwarts will clean the Gryffindor Tower, with all the socks and hats hidden everywhere" (342), as they consider it to be an act of insulting and not liberation.

The article "*Biopolitics, dominance and critical theory*" says, "According to the critical theory, people are dominated by a false consciousness created and perpetuated by capitalism in order to preserve the hegemony of those in power" (Meyer; Emerick 1). Therefore the elves are kept in their false consciousness so that the dominance of the wizards will never be questioned. A few people like Hermione want the elves to be freed and try various means to give them the freedom they deserve. But, instead of joining her and fighting for their freedom and their dignity, the elves chose to support the system.

This sort of behaviour is not new. Such behaviour is often seen in women who are treated inferior and have been oppressed by men and those stuck in the vicious cycle of the Caste System in India. Even though there is no need to stay in such an oppressive system, many choose to remain on their own accord because they believe that it's their destiny. Over the years, such oppression craves an idea of servitude that creates a self-fulfilled vicious cycle that goes on forever.

The idea that Kreacher's ancestors' heads were hung on the walls of his master's home suggests that their whole existence including their physical reproduction is controlled by their masters. All these do not seem to bother the elf community at all. This behaviour could be attributed to their ignorance but more than that, it should be looked at as internalizing the idea of being an inferior race.

It is not that the elves are not aware of their situation. They are aware of what is happening to them but are unable to respond to it due to their own beliefs that bind them. They believe that they are fulfilling their life's destiny, while in reality, the wizards are exploiting them. The elves can do as they wish and the wizards will be helpless if the whole elf community rebelled against them. Therefore, the wizards, keep the elves in false consciousness and ensure that the elves will forever be loyal to them.

The previously mentioned custom in the Black family, to which Kreacher belongs, of beheading the house elves who were too aged to even carry a plate, and displaying it on the walls as a decorative piece reinforces the idea that an elf is only worth living if he is physically able to serve his master. By making it look like an honour to be serving the family the Blacks

assured the loyalty of their house-elves thereby ensuring no upheaval by the elves. This form of complete servitude induced by a false consciousness produces absolute obedience in the house-elves. According to Milgram, "...obedience is a deeply ingrained behavioural tendency, indeed a potent impulse overriding training in ethics, sympathy and moral conduct" (169). Therefore, in the process of blind obedience, the elves are losing their morale and have nosympathy for anyone or anything; even themselves. An elf has to obey everything his master orders him to do, even if he does not want to.

At the beginning of the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, after Sirius's death, Kreacher is passed on to Harry as per Sirius's will. But Kreacher does not like it and constantly rebels; however, he is forced to serve Harry against his own will because he 'belongs' to Harry. Such blind obedience can be spotted in every house-elves in the books. On another occasion, Harry sends Kreacher and Dobby to spy on Draco Malfoy. Even though Kreacher does not want to do it, he is forced to obey him. During the reign of Lord Voldemort, Regulus, Kreacher's beloved master orders him to go with Voldemort and he simply obeys. He uses Kreacher to test the security of his Horcrux (usually an object in which a wizard hides a part of his soul through dark magic). He makes Kreacher drink a very unpleasant and painful potion, which induces an intense feeling of thirst. After finding out that his traps and safety measures are successful he leaves Kreacher behind. Kreacher drags himself to the water body next to him to drink water, which is filled with inferi. The Inferi are dead bodies who are enchanted to do things for a wizard through dark magic. Even while he is drowning in the inferi the only thing in his mind is not his safety but his master's command to return to him. Kreacher returns to Regulus only because he orders him to come back after his task. If Regulus had not given such an order the elf would have simply died in the inferi. "Kreacher was told to come home, so Kreacher came home..." (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows* 161). As mentioned earlier house-elves possess magic unknown to wizards and therefore Kreacher was able to apparate in the cave and save himself from the inferi, whereas a wizard would not have been able to do so. Later Regulus orders Kreacher to take him to that same cave and escape if anything bad happens and orders not to tell anyone about it. This time Regulus drank the potion and drowned in the inferi. But since his master's order was to leave him behind and go home safely, the elf had to obey. Kreacher could have easily gotten hold of his master and apparated home safely, ensuring his master's safe return. Nevertheless, the elf did not use his rationality to perform such an act. Even if it is for the good, he could not disobey his master and did not take a stand of his own. This kind of obedience to authority is found in Milgram's study of obedience where in an experimental set up he studied the extent of obedience in normal American citizens in the presence of an authority. The result was that when ordered by an authoritative figure, people are willing to commit acts that are against their morality and will not have done otherwise. In the experiment, 65% of the participants administered severe shocks to people when ordered by the experimenter. The same theory can be applied here as

well. Kreacher wants to save his master, but his orders to go home safely prevents him from doing what is right,

And he ordered- Kreacher to leave- without him. And he told Kreacher- to go home- and never to tell my mistress- what he had done ... And watched..as Master Regulus... was dragged beneath the water... (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows* 162)

Helplessly, Kreacher has to watch his master drown. If there is nothing magical binding the elf to his master's orders, then what binds the elves to blind obedience to their own ideology. Kreacher in this situation is so blinded by obedience and his loyalty towards his master that he loses his power of judgment and rational thinking. Besides, Milgram's experiment shows how ordinary people are willing to go to any extent to hurt others just to avoid disobedience; Kreacher is hurting himself willingly at Voldemort's command. Instead of inflicting pain on another human being like studied in the experiment, here, the question is of self-destruction due to obedience.

The house-elves are living in a false consciousness about their servitude towards the wizards. They fail to realise that if they had the will, they can defy their masters and get away with it, especially if it was for saving his master's life. Since Regulus had ordered him not to tell anyone, Kreacher could not tell anyone the truth about his master's disappearance. He is forced to tell Harry the truth now only because Kreacher is ordered by his new master to do so.

In the case of Dobby, even though Dobby claims to be a free elf, he still finds it hard to talk harshly of his old masters or disobey what his new master says. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Dobby coming to rescue Harry from the Malfoy's house is, again, on the orders of Dumbledore. The house-elf obeys the command without any delay. Even though he knows it is dangerous and will bring back unpleasant memories if he were to meet the Malfoys again, he still goes. He could have chosen not to go, as he is a free elf now. And this finally leads to his death when Bellatrix (Voldemort's ally) stabs him with a knife. Even though this act can also be attributed to his love for Harry, his love for Harry is so much so that he is ready to do anything that Harry asks him to do and is even willing to give up his life for him. Here, Harry is given the status of an unofficial master. Even if the elf feels that his or her master is evil or devoted to dark magic, they still serve them with all respect. According to Milgram, "The subjects do not derive satisfaction from inflicting pain, but they often like the feeling they get from pleasing the experimenter" (178). Dobby knows that his previous owners are pure evil but he cannot or to be more precise 'will not', do anything but obey them. Even though he does not like what he was told to do, nevertheless he is satisfied that he pleased his master.

Even though the majority of the elves are complacent about their situation, Dobby does defy his masters many times to warn Harry of some looming danger. He believes that a house-

elf should be set free at one point in time. He wishes to be freed and live a life of his own as he is not happy with his then masters the Malfoys. However, he does not want to revolutionize it. When Hermione tries to project Dobby as an example to others he is scared he says “Miss will please keep Dobby out of this” (Rowling, *The Goblet of fire* 468). Even though he wants to be free, he still wants to fit in society and does not want to be ostracised. Durkheim in his theory of mechanical solidarity talks about how in primitive societies there existed mechanical solidarity which was derived from kinship ties or through similar work and lifestyle. Everyone in that society moreover did the same job. Likewise, the elves are all domestic workers and nothing else. They feel a kind of closeness through mechanical solidarity. Therefore, even though Dobby achieves his freedom he does not want many others to follow his lead and be ostracised for it. Even though he is a deviant, he remains within the boundaries of the system. He always wants to fit in. This is exactly why all the other elves are also unwilling to be freed. They do not want to do anything or go anywhere that is unfamiliar. They are happy being comfortable where they are and do not wish to move from this comfort zone. Revolting against the system also means moving away from one's comfort zone. Dobby's idea of freedom was never to be free of his social identity as a slave but to have a kind master that did not mistreat him.

In the *Harry Potter* series, the house-elves themselves play a major role in their enslavement. The liberation of the house-elves is never possible as long as they are apathetic towards the exploitations they face. The elves in the series are not concerned about their condition and rather take pride in squandering their lives serving their masters. They are held in a state of false consciousness where they believe that they are inferior beings and they must remain a slave. This also gives the wizards the freedom to justify their cruel and inhuman behavior towards the elf community. They claim that their acts are well justified as the elves are happy being enslaved and so they are doing a favour by enslaving them. The elves should break out of the false consciousness they are in and demand their freedom to be free. They fail to realise that the wizards are degrading their community by making them slave workers. The enslavement is not just within the houses but also in the mind. It is the minds of the house-elves that are enslaved and not their body. Their minds are chained by the ideas induced by the wizards and are unable to think any further. Even though it is normal to like to do a particular job, it is strange that they are also okay with being enslaved and thrashed about. Dobby is the only elf who wants freedom but his idea of freedom is limited to being paid and being called a free elf. He too does not want to do anything that angers his master or defy him in any sense, not because he is afraid of being fired but fearing not being a loyal servant. He does not want to go against the system and ask for a revolution. As long as the elves cherish the idea of being a slave, their condition cannot be altered. They are the masters of their enslavement.

Years of dominance and violence in certain communities like the elves create a sense of psychological inferiority in them. Gradually this idea of oppression gets deeply ingrained in them that it breaks their will and colonises their mind. This changes their ability to break free of the system and they start to accept their fate and associate their oppression with great value. Thus, creating a self sustaining system of oppression that would be perpetuated by the oppressed themselves.

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***Bhang ya Bong?* Representation of Cannabis in Selected Hindi Film Songs**

Sahil Rathod

Abstract: The lack of discourse on different uses of cannabis in visual media has resulted in a unidimensional understanding of different forms and methods in which cannabis is consumed. To understand how visual representation often dictates and reinforces hegemonic notions of culturally ambiguous objects such as cannabis, this paper looks at selected film songs from across different eras of Hindi Cinema, and probes the manner in which politics and discourse operate in constructing meaning at the level of production of such texts. It uses theories connecting representation and discourse, adopting the lens of 'symbolic frameworks' as suggested by Paul Manning to make a textual and discourse analysis of the selected texts. The paper argues that songs depicting consumption of *bhang* attach images of festivity and religiosity to normalise its consumption in certain contexts, while songs where consumption happens in the form of smoking marijuana and/or *charas* images of dysfunction and social alienation are invoked. This paper concerns itself primarily with semiotics and does not look at the caste and gender dimensions of visual representation surrounding cannabis in the selected texts. Those approaches can become a full-length study in themselves and bring a much sharper focus to the politics of representation affecting a more balanced discourse on cannabis.

Keywords: Cannabis, Politics of Representation, Discourse and Ideology, Hindi Film Songs, and Visual media.

Cannabis as a 'social reality' in India is unique in the way in which it weaves religion, medicine (both traditional and modern), and cultural discourses together, creating the perfect fabric for a socio-political dialectic. Historically, the consumption of cannabis has been traditional in many parts of the country. Being a part of the socio-religious ethos in some regions, the cultivation and consumption of cannabis had remained non-criminalised for a long time even after Independence, until 1985 when India succumbed to the pressure of the Nixon 'War on Drugs' that finally caught up with the Rajiv Gandhi administration (Wikipedia Contributors). The changed legal framework, however, remained lenient towards the consumption of *bhang*; a

drinkable preparation of cannabis popularly consumed during the Hindu festivals of *Holi* and *Mahashivratri*, allowing states to cultivate and sell cannabis through Government regulated shops.

Popular culture like cinema and soap operas have constantly reflected the shifts in cultural practices in their narratives. Films are popularly considered to be reflections of the social, political, and ideological realities of the society. However, recent theories in semiotics and ideology have argued that instead of being a mere passive reflection of the society, texts (movies) actively construct meaning based on political and ideological inclinations, and thus have the power to influence the realities of the society. In the context of Hindi cinema, songs are an important tool for the narrative advancement of the plot and create a unique space for representation of culture (Morcom 1). The consumption of cannabis in its various forms and cultural contexts have been represented in several songs over the years. While narcotics such as opium, cocaine, and other psychotropic drugs have been depicted as objects of criminal enterprises (in accordance with the law and societal values), the representation of cannabis consumption, however, is largely influenced by the manner in which it is consumed; as edibles or being smoked.

Representation in media helps to both create and inform discourses on various 'objects' that are embedded in a given socio-cultural space. The discourse generated by such representation, in turn, informs future ideas on the objects in visual media. The representation of cannabis in visual media constructs a very particular worldview which largely ignores the dynamic nature of the cannabis culture in India. At once, it conveniently ignores the traditional use of cannabis for its recreational and medicinal value. The medical discourse on cannabis available in the society is sacrificed to the hegemonic representation of different forms of cannabis that reflect certain popular notions about them, which are also constructions of ideologically charged representations (Höijer 5). The lack of other realities on cannabis produces a delimiting effect in understanding the cannabis culture in India. The growing demand for the legalisation of medical cannabis and the subsequent resistance to such demand by some sections of the society reflects the lack of media discourse available on other patterns of cannabis usage. Visual media representations have a strong impact in creating ways of perceiving the social realities. Indulging only in selective or negative representations of cannabis is very problematic as it hinders its discourse in the society and caters only to a single ideological belief about its cultural relevance, intoxicating properties, and other reasons of consumption.

This paper aims to explore the manner in which cannabis is represented in its various forms of consumption in selected Hindi film songs and look at the ways in which such representations work in providing a dominant worldview that limits the scope of deriving further meaning of the 'objects' represented. Songs in Indian Cinema are unique in how they are simultaneously a part of the narrative, and yet create ruptures in the universe in which they are

set. This ambiguity opens up an interesting space for representing cultural practices such as festivals and weddings, apart from being dominated by romance and heartbreaks. Over the years, cannabis has also found a space in these songs, where in some contexts it has worked as a continuation of the narrative, and in some as an eventful rupture. How do these representations then construct meaning to either accommodate or reject certain values associated with cannabis? What are the images invoked to effect the selective discourse? How do the ideas of omission and negative representation work in sanctioning certain meanings associated with certain images and identities located within the context of cannabis consumption? The paper aims to look into these questions through the representation of cannabis in a few selected Hindi film songs. Most representations of cannabis in its various forms have occurred in film songs as they provide both acceptance and space for representations of cultural practices and values (Anna Morcom 1). The songs chosen for the study: "Zara Si Aur Pila Do Bhang" (*Kaajal*, 1964), "Dum Maro Dum" (*Hare Rama Hare Krishna*, 1971), "Ye Dhua" (*Charas: A Joint Operation*, 2004), and "Balam Pichkari" (*Ye Jawaani Hai Deewani*, 2012) will lend an understanding in the ways in which cannabis has been represented before and after the landmark act on narcotics passed in the year 1984. The paper will explore the effects of politics in representation in these songs by focusing on the symbolic construction of meanings.

II

Jason Toynbee in his article "The Politics of Representation" gives a detailed understanding of media texts and the manner in which meaning is constructed through them. The concept of representations and the ideology and politics behind them are explored in this article (Toynbee 162). The articles "Production and Consumption of Media Culture" by Tony Purvis and "Media Texts" by Graeme Burton establishes the importance of looking at every representation as an ideological representation of a selective world view. Purvis looks at the construction of meaning and semiotics at the level of production of media texts, which is crucial to the research as it primarily looks at the construction of representations, whereas Burton looks at the ideas of negative credentials and omissions as an important tool in representations in media texts (Purvis 90-98, Burton 45-66). Paul Manning in his book *Drug and Popular Culture in the Age of New Media* provides arguments towards the construction of cultures through 'symbolic' frameworks' and the meaning embedded in them (Manning 1-60). David Hesmondhalgh reflects on the manner in which the U.K linguist Norman Fairclough subsumes different ideas on discourse and ideology to look at representations, identities and relations (Hesmondhalgh 37). *Drugs and Popular Culture* provides a range of work done in the field of drugs and their position in media and contemporary society. Birgitta Höijer looks at the idea of hegemonic representation in representation which may help in looking at the concept of representation in a different light (Höijer 5). Although the Literature review is contextualised for Western media and cultures, the commonality of the dominant narrative against certain aspects

of cannabis, and the modern history of its criminalisation allows for some cross-application to the Indian context as well.

The research will use the theoretical framework of politics and ideology of representation as used in media research by focusing on the construction of semiotics at the level of production of the songs. The use of 'discourse analysis' and 'textual analysis' will serve as the methods through which the analysis of the texts will be effected. The textual analysis will look at the texts through the lens of 'symbolic frameworks' such as locations, behaviours and identities, substance images, and cause and consequence to understand the symbolic representation and the cultural practices associated with them (Paul Manning 30). The concept of hegemonic representation, a part of social representation theory, will provide a different understanding of the ways in which representations work. This, however, will only be used to make a passing inference of the texts and will not be a part of the theoretical framework. The research does not look into the construction of meaning at the level of consumption by the audience and does not take into account the manner in which texts are consumed in relation to the manners in which they are produced. This can become a subject for study in itself which engages with the ideas on production and consumption of media and culture (Purvis 90)

Anna Morcom in her book, *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema* looks at the musical format and its integration in Hindi films (Morcom 1-2). One of the major criticisms against the manner in which songs are used in Hindi cinema is that they are extra-terrestrial and occur outside the ambit of the progress of the narrative. In This notion is debunked by K. Ravi Srinivas in his article "Popular Culture and Pop Sociology" where Srinivas argues:

Film songs have been creatively used in films in a variety of ways. The same song has been used in the same film to portray different moods/emotions like pleasure and anguish. A song is used to underscore an idea, to reinforce a view to explore the predicament of a character and to express feelings which cannot otherwise be conveyed easily in ordinary conversation (Srinivas 1763-1764).

The wide acceptance and mass consumption of songs in Hindi cinema also makes it indispensable in the space that it provides for the cultural transmission of social values and ideas. Being a part of the popular culture, they also represent popular culture. Songs become a site for talking, writing and singing about cultural practices (Manning 4). The celebrations of festivals, social practices, and coming of age of emotions; all find a representational space. Important social issues such as drugs, intoxication, gender roles, and sexuality have been touched upon to a certain extent. This meshing of popular songs and culture provides an avenue to look at the manner in which such representations of cultural phenomena and identities take place. These representations are either 'celebratory' or 'disciplinary' (Manning 42.)

III

Traditional consumption of cannabis for spiritual, medical, and recreational purposes dates back to 2000 B.C and still continues in some parts of the country with significant volumes of licit and illicit cultivation (Tandon 1). In fact, cannabis was legally sold and consumed in India till 1985. The subsequent law banning the cultivation, consumption and sale of cannabis and other narcotics was largely a result of the pressure mounted by the U.S.A through the agency of U.N convention on narcotics in 1961. Despite the law on Cannabis, certain patterns of intoxication through cannabis continue to be celebrated in the society in certain contexts. The consumption of *bhanga* (made from the leaves of the cannabis plant) during Hindu festivals like Holi and Mahashivratri continues unabated in most parts of the country. The law, surprisingly, does not categorize the leaves and seeds of the Cannabis plant as narcotic substances and leaves a huge hole in its grip over psychotropic substances. The practice of *bhanga* consumption has been covertly defended (in both religious and legal discourses) against the onslaught of the American understanding of cannabis while its other forms such as marijuana and *charas* have been left to the mercy of representations which reflect only the dominant discourse on the 'object'.

Early ideas on representation considered popular media like films and songs to be reflective of the social reality in their portrayal of characters, emotions, cultures and rituals (Manning 7). This notion was later challenged by many critics and theorists who argued that visual media was not a site for representation alone but a place where reality itself was actively constructed (Burton). Songs (and other visual media) do not merely represent the societal reality of cannabis intoxication but also participate in ascribing certain visuals to certain identities which generates a specific way of making meaning. There is often a competition over the correct way of presenting objects and events in the midst of a vast number of possibilities. This politically charged representation of objects happens through discourse which attempts to establish a hierarchy, in which one mode of representation of the world (its objects, events, people etc.) gains primacy over others (Mehan 56).

IV

The primary texts chosen for this research paper show that while the consumption of and intoxication from *bhanga* has been normalised by its association with innocence, religion, festivity, and as a culturally sanctioned effective remedy for inhibitions and suppressed desires, the consumption of Marijuana and *charas* have been constructed as anti-social activities by attaching images of debauchery, cultural subversion, and societal alienation.

The visual representations of Bhang and its consumption patterns have been contextualized in a jubilant and celebratory atmosphere. These songs majorly engage the involvement of the society in its representations which works towards establishing this particular form of intoxication as a normal cultural activity during festivities. In the song "Zara Si Aur Pila Do Bhang" from the movie *Kaajal*, the male protagonist played by Mehmood drinks a pot full of Bhang in an innocent reaction to witnessing something unpleasant. The rendition of this emotion occurs in tandem with the festive atmosphere accompanied with dance and up-beat music. The invocation of such images presents the consumption of bhang as a catalyst to cultural merry making instead of looking at it as with the same lens used for representation of alcohol consumption. The word catalyst in this context is used to highlight the manner in which bhang is understood to add more colours to the spirit of festivity. There is hardly a song which represents the consumption of bhang as a lonesome and stress relieving activity. Even in the song "Balam Pichkari" from the movie *Ye Jawani Hai Deewani*, the context in which intoxication from Bhang happens is the colourful and euphoric festival of Holi. The catalytic function of bhang is clear in the opening lines of the song where the female protagonist played by Deepika Padukone attributes the reason for the sudden spike in fun to intoxication from bhang:

*"Itna maza, kyun aa raga hain
Tune hawa mein bhang milaya"*

So much fun! why do I feel it?
You have laced the air with Bhang.
(Balam Pichkari, *Ye Jawaani Hai Deewani*)

The substance images drawn to reflect the fun inducing quality of bhang works in providing a safe position for the representation in terms of negotiating with the larger understanding of the intoxicant. (Manning 157). This 'social accommodation' provided by the discourse and representation of bhang enables a strong base for its ideological appropriation:

In that the meanings of discourse are about dominant beliefs and values, it follows that discourse are, as it were, ideology in communicative action (Burton 53).

The cause and consequence of intoxication from bhang tends to project it as an outlet for suppressed desires which do not transgress the socially acceptable ways of expression. The character of Naina Talwaar played by Deepika Padukone in *Ye Jawani Hai Deewani* is shy and introverted. She is unable to express her feelings for the male protagonist she meets in the course of a trip. This inhibition, however, dissolves when she consumes bhang during the song sequence on Holi celebration. The immediate effect is visible where she is shown to be carefree and uninhibited in her expression of enjoyment. There is a second consequence that is represented as well. After the episode of intoxication the protagonist assumes a new set of characteristics which

makes her self-confident and free from the shackles of introversion. This culturally sanctioned remedy to express hidden desires is equally prevalent in the consequences that follow intoxication in the song "Zara Si Aur Pila Do Bhang" where he claims to have renounced his meditative state only to be enamored by the beauty of the female lead in the song played by Mumtaz. The intoxication enables the male protagonist to come to terms with his baser emotions:

*"Tere roop ka jhataka khake
Meri soyi jawaaani jagi"*

The hit from your beauty
Has resurfaced my latent desires.
(Zara Si Aur Pila Do Bhang, *Kaaajal*)

The character has been enabled to do things he could not do in sobriety. This intoxication has helped him overcome his shy and inhibited self. The context of the song, its tone, and rhythm all come together to influence the construction of bhang culture and the representation of its substance images at the level of production of the song (Purvis 96).

This section explored the association of bhang culture with religion and innocence. The characterisation of Mehmood in the song is to be focused here. The saffron Dhoti, the Rudraksh around his neck, and the Tilaka on his forehead are all denotative of the popular representation of Hindu religious symbolism. Bhang has a rich history in its association with lord Shiva. The use of the word 'bhola' repetitively through the song serves the dual purpose of associating bhang culture with lord Shiva and innocence at the same time:

*"Zara si aur pila do bhang
Main aaya dekh ke aisa rang
Ke dil mera dola
O jai bam-bhola"*

Let me drink a little more bhang
For I have seen such colours
That make my heart tremble,
O! praise the innocent lord Shiva.
(Zara Si Aur Pila Do Bhang, *Kaaajal*)

The invocation of Lord Shiva tries to establish a historical and traditional acceptance of bhang intoxication in the society.

The word 'Bhola'(Hindi) means –naïve and simple minded. Lord Shiva is called 'Bholenath' because he believes the words of his devotees immediately and grants their wishes without any second thought (Wikipedia contributors).

Another manner in which the association of religion and bhang culture come together is by tracing the practice of drinking bhang in the Hindu festival of Holi. This ideological representation of bhang provides persuasive formulations of preconceived ways of thinking about its social relevance and acceptance.(Macdonald 41). Thus, the normalisation of bhang as a culturally acceptable practice of intoxication occurs at various levels. In the book *Drugs and Popular Culture*, Paul Manning writes an introduction to the debate on drug normalisation through representation in media. He argues : If 'normalisation' is occurring, this is happening within and through popular cultures (Manning 54). According to him, this normalisation occurs through a range of discourse made available by different forms of popular culture which attach a specific set of images to provide that acceptability in culture. (Manning 49). The context in which Manning made those comments was the larger debate on the use of cannabis as a recreational drug in the Britain and American societies. In India, however, in the context of bhang, this happens to avoid the clubbing of bhang with other derivatives of cannabis such as marijuana and charas. There is no song which depicts both drinking and smoking of cannabis in the same frame. The religious history of bhang and the ideology working behind its preservation as a cultural practice attempts to construct a non-negative, acceptable, and normalised image of bhang. The word 'non-negative' is important as the representations do not overtly claim the glory of intoxication from bhang. This happens at the level of the symbolic framework that is invoked in the representation of bhang and its patterns of consumption in the society (Manning 30). The careful segregation of bhang from the other forms of cannabis, which have been made illegal by the law, helps in misrepresenting the origin of the intoxicating substance used in the preparation of bhang.

V

The representation of marijuana and charas in Hindi film songs in their various contexts is distinctly separate and more conscious of the legal and social framework surrounding them. Intoxication as a result of smoking marijuana or *charas* is interpolated in the narrative of deviance and immorality. The movie *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* is probably one of the first Hindi films to use the narrative of drug consumption and social alienation as an integral part of its story line. Although there are many instances of drug consumption throughout the movie, its representation in the song "Dum Maro Dum" is essential as it provides a more open space to explore popular ideas associated with marijuana and the consequences of its consumption. The notion that marijuana induces a need to disassociate from the society is reflected in the song in several ways. The Character of "Jasbir Jaiswal", played by Zeenat Aman, is found by her long separated brother in the company of hipsters drinking alcohol and consuming narcotics. The

context of hippy culture and seclusion from the rest of the world pervade the construction of the song. The lyrics of the song reflect attitudes of disassociation from the world:

"Duniyaa ne hum ko diyaa kyaa?
Sab ne humaaraa kiya kya?
Hum sab ki parwah kare kyu?
Duniyaa se hum ne liyaa kyaa?"

What has the world given us?
What have we taken from the world?
Why should we worry about anyone?
What has anyone done for us?
(Dum Maro Dum, *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*).

The rhetoric challenges the conventional forms of social integration. Simon Cross in one of her works probes the media discourse about drug takers in Britain and identifies a pattern which constructs the drug takers as the deviant class not belonging to the society. (Cross 137). A similar pattern emerges in the movie *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*, exemplified in the song, where the character of Jasbir Jaiswal rejects society for its inability to accept their identity and practices into the cultural mainstream. Although there is rejection on both sides, the representation vilifies the drug culture by attributing the suicide of the character as a result of the moving away from her family and social values. Paul Manning presents his understanding of the construction of this social alienation in its cultural context:

In employing the concept of subculture, Cloward and Ohlin imply that drug consumption may be embedded within shared cultural practices that are in some ways set apart from the values and practices of mainstream society (Manning 15).

Sub-cultural contexts have been constructed in the representation of marijuana and charas. The phrase 'sub-culture' does not necessarily have a negative connotation. However, in the songs "Ye Dhua" from the movie *Charas: A Joint Mission* and "Dum Maro Dum", from the movie *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*, the sub-cultural context and the images associated with them evokes a negative understanding of the cultures along with their practices. Both song sequences appear to occur in environments secluded from the society where a large group of people, mostly youth, are indulging in the consumption of charas and marijuana which are presented along with images of physical intimacy and raving. The picturisation of the song "Ye Dhua" provides a peak into the enormous reach of the 'illegal' drug culture. An association is also made with the illegal drug deals and the constant pursuit of law to convict the peddlers and junkies. It is important to look at the construction of the 'criminal subcultures' as an important tool of representation of drug consumption in media (Manning 14). In such a representation the drug cultures become the cause

for moral degradation and the subsequent legal crackdown. There is an attempt to label the drug consumer in the public through arrest, exposure and association with deviance (Manning 17).

The presence of the 'foreigner' in both the films at the level of narrative and representation in songs is particularly charged with the ideological distancing of the drug culture from the mainstream culture of the society. The presence of foreigners in the representation attempts to thrust the responsibility of the subcultures (both hipster and criminal) on them. The lyrics from the song: *Dum maaro dum mit jaaye gham* (Take another hit, all your worries will disappear) / *Bolo subah shaam hare krishna hare raam* (From morning until night chant, "Hare Krishna Hare Ram) reflect the blend of two popular movements started in the west: The International Hare Krishna movement that emerged in the 1970's, garnered a huge support base amongst several western (predominantly white) population, and the hipster culture that emerged as a reaction to the horrors of the second World War (Wikipedia contributors). The location of the song "Dum Maro Dum" and the most part of the movie occurs in Katmandu, Nepal. This is a clear case of pushing the history of cannabis in India to the northernmost fringes. Even the song "Ye Dhua" uses the stereotypical representation of the 'Italians' as the instigators of the illegal flourish of the anti-social drug culture. The song is constructed as a means to continue the larger narrative of the film which represents the production of drugs at the local level and their transit to the 'Italian mafia' through a well established network of middlemen. Both the songs have a heavy presence of foreigners as background artists which works to reinforce the association of drug culture and its criminalisation to the foreigner, who is the 'other'. According to Graeme Burton: Representations are negative when they emphasize the given group is composed of 'others'. They are not like 'us' (Burton 140). He argues,

...in terms of social groups and images of people, its significance is not simply about appearance. It's about the substance of ideas invoked about that group (Burton 62).

The characters in the movie *Charas: A Joint Operation* also serve only to either facilitate the illegal business run by the Italian mafia or become the crusaders who bring the guilty to the book. Thus, the importance of linking the representation of the foreigner with the alien nature of the drug culture is very much valid in the context of the chosen texts.

Images of smoke, haze, disorientation and confusion are attached to marijuana and charas to reflect the mental degeneration caused by their consumption. The image of smoke and haze appear not merely at the level of representation of substance images but also at the level of semiotics. The repetitive use of the word *dhua* in the beginning of the song "Ye Dhua" imposes a heavy presence of smoke in the environment. The rest of the song describes the effects of the consumption of this '*dhua*' (charas) and its manifestation in the immediate atmosphere. The far reaching effects of the intoxicating smoke are represented in the lyrics:

*"Husn bhi ishq bhi sab hain bahke yaha
Har taraf har jagah cha raha hain dhua"*

Beauty and love are both in daze
In this all pervading haze
(Ye Dhua, *Charas: A Joint Operation*).

The intoxicated smoker is not only alienated from the society but is also removed from the reality of his own surroundings. The high induced in this state of consciousness is experienced more at an individual level despite being in the presence of a group. The disorientation is represented in the smokers inability to make sense of his surroundings:

*"Na yaha roshni hain na andhera
Na ab shyam hogi na sawera"*

There is now neither light nor darkness
Nor will there be dusk or dawn.
(Ye Dhua, *Charas: A Joint Operation*)

The smoke from the consumption of marijuana and charas is projected onto the symbolic representation of the effects of cannabis smoking. (Cross 142-143) The association of the semiotics with the images of smoke, haze, and confusion together construct the individual's inability to function normally:

This is counter to conventional common sense: illegal drug use is usually associated with dysfunctions, manifested in family or communal breakdown and the impairment of the individual's ability to fulfill social expectations (Manning 12).

The cause and consequence of this supposedly 'anti-social' practice in the song constructs a negative representation of marijuana and charas. The constant threat of legal crackdown and the ideas of dysfunction are glaringly obvious in the song "Ye Dhua". The suicide of Jasbir Jaiswal in the movie *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* extends the larger discourse on the fatal consequences of marijuana culture.

In the representations of *bhang*, marijuana, and *charas* in the songs and the narrative of the films, an important aspect is under work. The representation of *bhang* as a culturally acceptable mode of cannabis intoxication and the representations of charas and marijuana as agents of dysfunction and alienation occurs at the cost of omitting several other contexts and

consequences of the consumption of the drugs. The discourse on the medical benefits of cannabis, or as a substance for recreation has hardly been represented in songs. The songs "Balam Pichkari" and "Zara Si Aur Pila Do Bhang" add to the already prevalent discourse on bhang while also reinforcing them. This has a normalising effect on the consumption of bhang in the society under certain contexts. On the other hand, the songs "Dum Maro Dum" and "Ye Dhua" in their attempt to reflect the legal and social reality of marijuana and charas only constructs images, identities, and context which represent the stereotypical understanding of cannabis culture, which in turn is used by legal agencies to justify their crackdown on those who use the substance (Burton 133). Cannabis has had a rich history of medical and recreational use in India which is deliberately ignored in the guise of reflecting the reality of the society. Representation is not merely the reflection of reality but also an active ideological construction of a particular way of looking at the society and its cultural practices. Jason Toynbee in one of his articles on representations titled "Politics of Representation" argues that representations are politically and ideologically charged misrepresentations. Thus, it becomes important to look at each media representation not as a reflection of reality but as an ideologically charged construction of socio-cultural 'objects' (Jason Toynbee 178). Representation acts as an agent which gives substance to ideology and the ideas of omission, negative credentials, and misrepresentations. This is what Graeme Burton famously referred to as 'meaning by omission' (Burton 64). The close relation of *bhang* culture and the Hindu rituals and practices provides a framework for the possible ways in which bhang can be represented. The discourse created on bhang limits the understanding of its different patterns of consumption and purposes. The same ideology works behind the representation of marijuana and charas, most of which are stereotypical. As Burton argues in the context of representation for women in television:

Representations also reveal the negative ideological credentials...and how they are shown.... The contradiction between the world on screen and the world as we experience it reveal ideology at work, display a partial view of social reactions and disposition of power (Burton 63).

VI

This paper hopes to provide some understanding in the ways in which discourse operates in media, especially songs, and ways in which meaning is constructed at a semiotic level. It will also provide a base for further inquiry into different contexts in which such discourses are presented. This paper does not overtly focus on the legality of cannabis in India. The implications on the legal framework on the representations of cannabis in the selected songs has not been looked into. The context of regional, national, and international laws on cannabis and its representation in visual media can become a study in itself. Further, the paper does not approach the politics of caste and gender operating at the level of representation around the discourse of cannabis consumption. An undertaking with caste and gender as the primary focus have the

potential to bring a more nuanced understanding of the intertwining of the social, the political, and the religious in understanding the politics in representation, especially that of the *bhang* culture in India. A look into the cultural evolution of different practices of cannabis usage and consumption may provide explanations for the accommodation of *bhang* in certain cultural contexts, but such an inquiry will necessarily have to take into consideration the influences of caste and privilege.

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Women's History: An Overview of Early Malayalam Periodicals for Women

Teena Antony

Abstract: '*Pennezhuthu*' (feminist writing or *écriture féminine*) entered common parlance in Kerala from the introduction written by the Malayalam poet cum critic Satchidanandan for a collection of short stories by writer and activist, Sarah Joseph. The term came to be used to condemn feminist writings in general. The original term, *écriture féminine*, was used by Helene Cixous suggesting that writings by women writers tend to show up the differences in women's world that undermine the phallogocentric logic and utilise free and flowing styles like the stream of consciousness. It was a means of escape for women or an antithesis to masculine writing. However, *pennezhuthu* does not differentiate among different types of women's writing, like feminine writing, feminist writing, or *écriture féminine*. The world we are allowed to see through women's periodicals in Malayalam is vivacious, fascinating and fraught with tensions. The article undertakes an in-depth historical reading of early Malayalam periodicals for women in tandem with the socio-cultural changes in Kerala society and women's history.

Keywords: Pennezhuthu, Kerala, Malayalam Literature, Malayalam Periodicals, Women's history, *Vanitha*

Pennezhuthu

Those of us who grew up in the 1990s would be familiar with and shaped by the term, '*pennezhuthu*' (feminist writing or *écriture féminine*). The term entered common parlance from the introduction written by the Malayalam poet and critic Satchidanandan for a collection of short stories by well-known writer and activist, Sarah Joseph. (Devika 2013). He further

mentions that writings by women are criticised by conservative thinkers in Kerala. Thereafter, the term *pennezhuthu* came to be used to condemn feminist writings in general. Among the common people, the term is/was not exactly one laden with praise – both feminism and women-writing are demeaning, derogatory and abusive terms. The original term, *écriture féminine*, was used by Helene Cixous suggesting that writings by women writers tend to show up the differences in women's world that undermine the phallogocentric logic and utilise free and flowing styles like the stream of consciousness. It was a means of escape for women or an antithesis to masculine writing. However, *pennezhuthu* does not differentiate among different types of women's writing, like feminine writing, feminist writing, or *écriture féminine*.

If one looks at the canon of Malayalam literature, there is a definite dearth of women's work. Except for Mary John Thottam (1901-1985), Lalithambika Antharjanam (1909-1987), Balamani Amma (1909-2004), and K. Saraswathi Amma (1919-1975), most other writers from the period before Indian Independence is not known to the public in present-day Kerala. Works by these women generally find a place in textbooks put together for schools, not others. It is not that there were no other women writers from this period. Tharavathu Ammalu Amma (1873-1936), B. Bhageerathy Amma (year unavailable), K. Chinnamma (1882-1930), B. Kalyani Amma (1884-1959), Mary Poonen Lukose (1886-1976), Muthukulam Parvathi Amma (1904-1971), Anna Chandy (1905-1996), Halima Beevi (1918-2000), K. Kalyanikutty Amma (1920-1996), and so on are just a few of the writers and activists of the time (though many of them would not have labelled themselves as such since the category of writer, activists, etc. were in the nascent stages). They were employed in government jobs, were teachers, school inspectresses, social workers, professors, principals, public speakers, members of Sri Mulam Praja Sabha (First Legislative Council of Travancore constituted by the Travancore Maharaja in 1904), doctors, well-known authors and even members of the early political parties in existence in Malayalam-speaking regions. They published extensively, though not exclusively, in the women's magazines of the time. *Lakshmibai*, one of the women's magazines, published from Thrissur every month was estimated to have had 221 women writers at various times (E.K. 2001). Yet, neither these women nor their writings are recognised or present in the canon of Malayalam literature. They do not appear to have made it into the 'high' literature that Satchidanandan mentions. The essays, articles or treatises written by these women have been lost in time. There have been moves to re-claim and study some of these writers and their work in the past few decades through various media and at various levels (Velayudhan 1994, E.K.

2001, Devika 2005, Pradeep 2016, Antony 2013a, Jayasree 2015, Muringatheri 2019, Vinayan & Raj 2019) including unpublished theses at the various universities in Kerala (Satish 1990, Antony 2005, Padiyara 2013, Rekha 2016, Verma 2017).¹

Books that deal with the history of Malayalam literature tend to overlook magazine writers. Magazines have always been located lower on the social ladder because they cater to the general public. They would have professional writers, but the writers may or may not have expertise on the subject being discussed. The articles would rarely have citations, bibliography or footnotes to back up the research. Both in contemporary times and colonial times, female and male writers would often publish their literary works in serialised form in magazines before compiling them into book form. This then adds weight to the fact that magazines were an accessible medium and stepping stones to the more concrete form of the book. A few of the early Malayalam women writers' works were later compiled and published as books. Hence, it is safe to assume that the articles of these writers did have some kind of readership, even though the figures are not available now. Academic writing, in the present, has been trying to throw light on the vibrant world of the women's periodicals (a publication that is published regularly or occasionally), both within Kerala and in other parts of India.

Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha in their seminal work *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the early Twentieth Century* outlines some of the important theories on women's writing. They espouse in the "Introduction",

Women articulate and respond to ideologies from complexly constituted and decentred positions ...Familial ideologies, for instance, clearly constitute male and female subjectivities in different ways, as do ideologies of nation or of empire. Further, ideologies are not experienced – or contested – in the same way from different subject positions. What may appear just and rational from a male or upper-class point of view may seem exploitative and contradictory from a working-class woman's point of view. If we restrain ourselves from enthusiastically recovering women's writing to perform the same services to society and nation that mainstream literature over the last hundred years has been called upon to do, we might learn to read compositions that emerge from these eccentric locations in a new way; we might indeed learn to read them not for the moments in which they collude with or

¹ This is not an exhaustive list, but indicative of the relatively well-known or accessible records.

reinforce dominant ideologies of gender, class, nation or empire, but for the gestures of defiance or subversion implicit in them (1991, 35).

This anthology was put together nearly three decades ago. Yet, the framework it provides is still useful, especially in my work that looks at women's writings that have been forgotten or obscured intentionally or unintentionally. They provide a different standpoint to mainstream narratives of cultural history. Since this article is based on historical materials, any of the ideas that have been tentatively put forward is subject to change if and when new materials come to light. Additionally, my location within a middle-class, middle-caste position in society is the lens through which I read these materials located in the past. So, my reading of the materials and milieu of early twentieth century Malayalam-speaking regions is subjective even when I try to take an objective position.

The print medium

Robin Jeffrey, speaking about the history and influence of the print media in Kerala in "Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800-2009", says, "The authority of ordered type and the sobriety of the printed page legitimize challenges that would be difficult to articulate or take seriously if merely spoken. In its scarce form, partly by its specialness, print acquires its own authority and a certain magic" (2009, 478). This "scarce form" that Jeffrey mentions is the second stage of the growth of the print medium in a place or state where it had more reach and influence over the people and simultaneously created problems for authority than it did in the initial stages of the development of the medium. During this period, newspapers and magazines with low circulation were produced almost like "small handicraft business" (Jeffrey quoting Habermas, 181). The stage before this he calls "rare", when printing presses existed but were exclusive and rare. The third stage is "mass" when print becomes a mass medium. Historically, Kerala had a large number of publications including magazines and newspapers. As per the Information and Public Relations Department of Kerala, there were 76 newspapers and 560 periodicals registered in Kerala as of 2010 (*Proceedings of the Twelfth Kerala Legislative Assembly*). Compare this to the number of periodicals being published from Travancore at 92 with an estimated circulation of 82,000, from Cochin at 23 with an estimated circulation of 15,000 and from Malabar at 28 with an estimated circulation

of 23,017 in 1921.² From the 1900s, Malayalam-speaking regions saw the second stage of the development of print media.

The first Malayalam magazine was published in 1847, while the earliest women's magazine, *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini* (making Kerala women aware or educating them on good qualities to be attained) started publication in the 1880s.³ Several magazines were published specifically for women in Malayalam-speaking regions. *Sharada* (1904), *Lakshmibai* (1905), *Maryrani* (1913), *Bhashasharada* (1915), *Sumangala* (1916), *Mahilaratnam* (1916), *(Christava) Mahilamani* (1920), *Sanghamithra* (1920), *Mahila* (1921), *Sevini* (1924), *Sahodari* (1925), *Muslim Vanitha* (1926), *Vanithakusumam* (1927), *Shrimathi* (1929-30), *Mahilamandiram* (1927), *Malayalamasika* (1929), *Sthree* (1933), *Vanitharamam* (1942), and *Vanithamithram* (1944) are some of the periodicals found in the various archives and mentioned in the administrative reports from Malayalam-speaking regions.⁴ From the time the first women's magazine was published to the time of Indian Independence, there were around 20 Malayalam women's magazines being published at different times (E.K. 2001). Some of them were published for short periods, while others like *Mahila* which went on to run for 20 years was the longest-running women's periodical in pre-independent Kerala.

In the 1900s, magazines moved from a merely commercial venture into a literary venture in Malayalam-speaking regions. The aim or vision was to influence public opinion with the commercial aspect, if at all it existed, receding into the background (Jeffrey 2009). In the first issue of *Malayalamasika*, published in 1929, the opening essay titled "Swantham Karyam", which could be roughly translated as 'our purpose', the editor(s) wrote:

We have heard it being mockingly said that there are too many newspapers and magazines in Malayalam. Whether this be true or not, since our journey is with a specific purpose, we hope that our venture would not be mocked at.

² A decade later, in 1930, 63 newspapers and 95 periodicals were being published from Travancore. Similarly, the number of newspapers decreased in Malabar to 21 with a slight increase in circulation to 24,800. From, "Travancore Administration Report 1105 M.E./1929-1930: Seventy Fourth Annual Report" and "Census of India, 1931, Vol XIV, Madras, Part I, Report."

³ G. Priyadarshanan (1974) has done an extensive study of the early Malayalam magazines. However, the exact year of the publication of *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini* is mentioned as various years in the book, and other locations, possibly because the publication was stopped at various times and restarted after months or years.

⁴ For more details on these magazines and writers see, Priyadarshanan (1974), E.K. (2001), Devika (2005), Antony (2013a, 2013b) and Rekha (2016).

This magazine is specifically for discussing matters pertaining to women's education and other issues related to women alone. We have not heard of any newspapers or other news medium being published in Malabar specifically for this purpose. There is a magazine called *Lakshmibai* that is being published from Thrissur in Cochin state from about two dozen years. Though it is for women, it is not run by women. There is a magazine and newspaper called *Mahila* and *Shrimathi* being brought out from Travancore with this same aim. They are both being run by capable women. However, it is doubtful if these magazines have sufficient popularity in Malabar. Whatsoever, if our understanding about the situation in Malabar is right, then starting a magazine here for women, run by women, would not be undesirable. Now even if there is another such publication, we believe there is nothing wrong in wishing for such a magazine for ourselves (1-2).

It is clear from the editorial note quoted here that the editors envisaged *Malayalamasika* as more than a commercial venture. It simultaneously gives one the feel of a handicraft business that Habermas mentions, i.e. independent editorship taking over from the printer-publisher. Critical/rational reflections become more important than monetary advantage in this phase. It is noteworthy that the editors thought that Malabar needed a separate magazine despite the concurrent presence of three other women's periodicals. Unlike Travancore and Cochin, Malabar was under direct British rule and the state of education, schooling and other social indicators were different for the region. This would be an added impetus to start a separate magazine in the region. Moreover, though people in the three regions spoke the same language and there seems to have been some amount of exchange of ideologies happening among the regions, the geographical divide did pose problems in terms of circulation and access. Furthermore, B. Kalyani Amma, one of the main writers (and possibly editor) of *Malayalamasika*, was the wife of Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai. He had been banished from Travancore in 1910. They moved to Malabar and Kalyani Amma was working as a teacher and headmistress in Malabar at the time this magazine was started. Earlier, she had been part of the editorial team and a writer of *Sharada* (published from Thripunithura) which stopped publication in 1924 (Priyadarsanan 1974). So, it would seem as if this magazine was a continuation of her earlier work, but located in Malabar.

Interestingly, the editor of *Mahila*, B. Bhageerathi Amma, was the elder sister of Kalyani Amma (Awaya 2003). And K. Chinnamma, who started *Mahilamandiram* was a close

friend of Kalyani Amma. Even though magazines were being published from specific locations within pre-Independent Kerala and had limited circulation (in most cases), there was an overlap among the writers of the magazines. Additionally, it was not just women who wrote in the women's periodicals, there were men, some of whom were known literary figures and educationists like Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, Puthezhathu Raman Menon, Kodungallur Kunjikuttan Thampuran, Kuttipuzha Krishna Pilla, R. Eshwarapilla, etc. Similarly, a few of the women writers contributed their articles, poetry and fictional writings to the general magazines from the period.

Magazines mobilised people around social, cultural and political issues indirectly. Therefore, print media and the government had quite the contentious relationship, especially in Travancore. In 1910, *Swadeshabhimani* was banned by the Travancore government. Jeffrey mentions that all the governments in Malayalam-speaking regions kept a close watch on newspapers by the 1920s. *Malayala Manorama*, the newspaper, was banned in 1938 because it was seen as inciting people to disobey the law. The *Dheenabandu* (from Thrissur), *Deshabhimani* (Kozhikode), *Malabar Mail* (Ernakulam), *Al-Ameen* (Kozhikode), and *Prabhatam* (Shoranur) were some of the other newspapers that had their licence cancelled, staff jailed or banned by the various governments in colonial Kerala in the first half of the twentieth century ("History of Media in Kerala").

It is probably because of this, women's magazines were careful to distance themselves from anything that could be constructed as anti-British, anti-national or thorny political issues. There was a hegemonic sense of private/domestic/religious vs public/political divide (Devika 2007, Antony 2013b). It was assumed that women had only ornamental roles to play in the political sphere and their domain was the private/domestic/religious. For instance, *Mahilamandiram* edited by G. Parukutti Amma and published from Tiruvella (with an estimated circulation figure of 1400 copies in 1930) was noted as a social and religious publication in government record (*The Statistics of Travancore: Eleventh Issue: 1105/1929-1930*). The "tone and position of the journal" *Lakshmibai* (circulation figure of 1000 copies in 1911) was noted as being of literary and social nature in the *Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year 1086 ME/1910-11*. The magazine with the highest circulation figures was *Vanithakusumam* (with 2000 copies being printed in 1930, edited by V.C. John). It is noted as "advocating the progress and welfare of women" (*The Statistics of Travancore*). The role

played by women and women's periodicals were assumed to be a non-threatening one. Or to put it differently, the role had to be a non-threatening one if the periodical had to escape government notice. It was not that none of the articles was political in nature. There were write-ups on the use of Khadi cloth, starting with small-scale industries influenced by M.K. Gandhi, the Home Rule movement, Temple Entry Proclamation, etc. But, the tone in which the idea or ideology was presented was different from that one would expect in isochronous general magazines and newspapers. One could even state tentatively that the early women's periodicals seem to have set the tone for contemporary women's magazines by distancing overtly political matters from them. The paradox here is that many of the women writers were part of nationalist movements and the daughters, wives and siblings of social, political and community reformers. Despite the presence of these women who were active in the political movements and community reform movements from the colonial period, and the continued presence of women in such movements, the hegemonic assumption (even in the present) is that women's sphere is not political.

Locating women's periodicals

The following section tries to place the unique position occupied by women's periodical in the social and cultural milieu of Malayalam-speaking regions in the first half of the twentieth century. The periodicals from before Indian Independence were being published during a time society was going through tremendous upheavals in the social, communal, educational, cultural and political arenas. Irony, humour, history, mythology, reason and rhetoric were used in varying levels to school women in the world view of the writers and editors. The women's periodicals were avenues where women could air their views, a public arena to voice their opinions without physically taking themselves out of their comfort zones and homes. A few of the women writers of the period were public speakers and members of women's groups called *sthreesamajams*. These public spaces were often hostile to women. The women's groups were jeered at by people and crowds were hostile at public meetings. B. Anandavalliamma mentions in her article "Sthreekallude Samuhyajeevithathinte Naveekaranathilantheerbhavikkunna Prashnangal" (issues faced by women in modern social spaces or public life) published in *Mahila* in 1939 that it was considered shameful to talk to men. Hence, these magazines opened out a new world to the women. They could read about other places, customs, reforms happening

in the social and political sphere. In a sense, this supplemented the schooling experience by providing women with the opportunity to brush up on their reading skills and to continue their education informally.

As the name suggests, *Maryrani* (Queen Mary) and *Muslim Vanitha* (the Muslim woman) were specifically for women from particular communities. *Sanghamithra* (the eldest daughter of Emperor Ashoka, who joined a Buddhist order and went to Sri Lanka for Buddhist missionary activities) and *Sevini* (one who helps, supports or serves) were purportedly aimed at the upliftment and awakening of Ezhava women (Rekha 2016), but the other magazines were supposedly for everybody. When the editor of *Christava Mahilamani* (with an estimated circulation of 1500 in 1930)⁵ realised that the magazine's name was giving the impression that it was merely for Christian women, he removed 'Christava' from the title in 1932 (Pradeep 2016).

Academics like G. Priyadarshanan (1974, 2011), Meera Velayudhan (1994), K. Saradamoni (1999), E.K. Swarna Kumari (2001), J. Devika (2002, 2005, 2007, 2013) and Toshie Awaya (2003) have done pioneering work on and deriving from print media, specifically periodicals from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Priyadarshanan's work is an exhaustive study of the magazines published in Malayalam-speaking regions in the past. He looks at the content, writers and other details of the magazines published from the late nineteenth century to (roughly) mid-twentieth century. Meera Velayudhan postulates the construction of a new gender identity by the early women writers through a thorough reading of the articles published in magazines like *Shrimati*, *Mahila*, *Sarada*, and *Yogashemam*. She states that though these women seemed to go back to earlier texts for role models, they "create a different self-image" (78) grounded in the social reform movements and women's movement of the period. K. Saradamoni's work concentrates on the feminist leanings of the early women writers. E.K. Swarna Kumari speaks about the social significance of women's magazines printed from Kerala and how they produce a discussion on issues related to women in her essay. J. Devika's wide-ranging work on the social reform period in Kerala draws from the writings of many of these magazine writers. She posits that Malayali society was structured on gender differences and one's individualism was based on or derived from this difference. She puts forward the idea of a public/domestic divide that shaped the discourse on social reform and

⁵ "The Statistics of Travancore: Eleventh Issue".

women's education in the period. Toshie Awaya has focused specifically on *Lakshmibai*, *Sharada* and *Mahila* in her essay and the emergence of a gendered citizen in colonial Kerala. She does mention that this reading is heavily influenced by the upper-caste and class positions of the writers in these magazines.

Among the periodicals published specifically for women, most of the issues of *Lakshmibai*, *Sharada* and *Mahila* are available in the various archives. As a result, theorisations on the social and cultural sphere of colonial Kerala have been largely based on these three magazines. Since magazines like *Lakshmibai*, *Bhashasharada*, *Sharada*, *Mahila*, *Mahilamandiram*, *Malayalamasika*, etc. were edited by or catered to a predominantly upper to middle caste and class Hindu women, they do not capture the social and cultural aspirations and world view of women belonging to other communities and classes. A study of the periodicals that include magazines like *Sanghamithra*, *Sevini*, *Sahodari*, *Muslim Vanitha* and *Vanithakusumam* would help to provide a more nuanced image of the lives and aspirations of women who lived in the period.

Though the general idea was that the periodicals were for women everywhere in Malayalam-speaking regions, a close reading of the articles reveal that they addressed women from Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, consciously or unconsciously, through use of terms such as 'my sisters from Travancore', 'women of Cochin', and so on. Today, one tends to think of Kerala as a unified unit, forgetting that less than a hundred years ago, the land was ruled by different entities. However, these phrases peppering the early magazines show one of the fissures along which Malayali women (and men) were divided during the colonial period. Moreover, even when the women's periodicals stated that they were meant for women in general, there would be articles addressing women from specific castes and communities, especially Nair women, in magazines like *Sharada*, *Mahila* and *Lakshmibai*. Nevertheless, these magazines were read by women from diverse communities. *Vanitharamam*, for example, carried articles on language and literature studies and catered to high school and college girls (Rekha 2016). Consequently, many colleges in Kerala had copies of it in their libraries and would have been read by women from different communities. Similarly, *Mahila* was subscribed in government schools. Many of the early magazines published their subscription list (Antony 2013a). These show the diversity of their readership in terms of caste and community. Besides, it reinforces the educational purpose of the periodicals.

In numerous articles in the various periodicals, one would come across the term Malayali woman being used to denote women from the Nair caste alone. There was a close identification of the Nair identity with the newly emerging Malayali identity (Kumar 2007) in the first half of the twentieth century. The community/religion/caste of the other women would be pre-fixed to the term *sthreekal* or *vanithakal* when referring to them (for example, *ezhavasthreekal*, *christianvanithakal*). The magazine writers from the Nair sub-castes seem to conflate Nair women with Malayali women and citizenship non-problematically. There is a sense of entitlement attached to religion and caste that is blind to the presence of this biased entitlement. While these magazines run by Nair women did deal with issues pertinent to the community there was also a kind of prejudice or reserve against women's magazines started by (wo)men belonging to other communities (Awaya 2003). This could also explain why *Malayalamasika* mentions only three magazines when at least three other magazines were being published concurrently in Malayalam, of which *Vanithakusumam* was the most popular (going by the subscription figures). Of course, these magazines were owned by men, which would have been why they do not count as proper women's magazines according to the editors of *Malayalamasika*.

In magazines like *Vanithakusumam*, there is a broader definition of the term 'Malayali woman'. A perusal of the articles published in *Vanithakusumam* shows that there were fewer articles in the magazine on matriliney and issues related to Nair reformism. When women models from the Puranas and mythology, like Sita, Damayanti, Savitri, etc. could be found abundantly in *Mahila* and *Lakshmibai*, other periodicals like *Vanithakusumam* and (*Christava*) *Mahilamani* had quotes, stories and examples from the Bible. *Vanithakusumam* especially had references to socio-cultural customs from Israel, Egypt, Rome and the Arab world (Antony 2013a).

Parallel to religious and mythological characters, Malayali women were introduced to national and international women and their lifestyles. Case in point, in one of the articles written by someone called K.L.P. ("Sthreekallude Vimochanam" [Women's emancipation or freedom]), there is a reference to Russian women who work alongside their husband. They are shown as having financial security and resultant freedom. Russian women used to serve in the army and the author mentions that Malayali women who ask for 'freedom' should be similarly ready to serve in the army as this was an important aspect of being a responsible citizen. One

would frequently come across articles on women from Western countries like Austria, Australia, Belgium, England, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and U.S.A in the periodicals. Some articles touched upon the lives of women in Asian countries like Burma, China and Japan. Chinese and Japanese women were always models worth emulating (Aandipilla 1909, Manjja 1928, Bhageerathamma 1932). The perceived soft nature of these women and their hardworking nature were appreciated. They were also seen as less disruptive and competitive compared to Western women. Though Western women's lifestyle and customs were not always presented as something to be imitated or followed in the Indian milieu, not all Western women were presented as being a bad influence on Malayali women. Florence Nightingale and Queen Victoria were offered as good role models to imitate time and again in the magazines. Occasionally one would also come across an article that spoke about Suffragettes like Christabel Harriette Pankhurst. However, it was difficult to find women who had a history of perpetrating violence against any kind of authority, particularly the British. In addition to the foreign models, there were also references to women and their lifestyles from other parts of India – these included Bengali, Parsi and Tamil women. At one point there was so much criticism of Malayali women imitating the dress and jewellery of Bengali and Parsi women that one of the writers was forced to state that though people spoke about imitating Parsi styles, most Malayalis would not have seen Parsis in reality to imitate their dressing styles (Kalyaniamma 1915).

Women's periodicals were an avenue for the writers, editors and publishers to 'educate' women. Not just in terms of schooling, which is to do with going to school and everything connected to that, but also in terms of women being taught to be better and ideal 'women'. They had to be educated on comportment, dressing, behaviour, moral values, ethical values, being a wife and mother, living in the conjugal unit of the nuclear family as opposed to the joint-family, taking up crafts and skills, cooking skills, physical well-being, hygiene, health, contraception, developing nationalist feelings, religious and caste affinity, modernity, dowry, child marriage, and so on. There were literary pieces based on mythology, religious texts, short stories, poems, novels and criticism; information on agriculture, Ayurveda, science and medicine; articles on art, music, historical figures, artists, and history; and general-purpose topics like economics, home economics, national news, astrology, lifestyle, and general knowledge.

Within the women's periodicals published before the Indian Independence, there is a general shift in ideology that one can perceive towards the 1920s. Until the 1920s most of the articles were on the need for women's education, training women in appropriate forms of domesticity (Antony 2013b), their duties, possible role models for women to emulate and so on. From the 1920s onwards the articles take on social and political issues – child marriage, Home Rule, contraception, dowry, marriage bills, suicides, educational curriculum, nationalism, Gandhian ideology and so on. Women's education, *sthreedharmam* (women's duties), *sthreeswathandryam* (women's freedom), and modernity⁶ are the main concepts that are found repeatedly in a majority of the articles. Periodicals published from the late 1920s, like *Shrimati* and *Vanithakusumam* were more assertive and radical in the positions they espoused as opposed to an earlier *Sharada* and *Lakshmibai*.

By this time, it becomes a taken-for-granted idea that women need modern education. Education would not only make the women fitting partners for the menfolk, but instil qualities that would make them better women, and mothers. Until the 1920s there was a perceived difference among career-oriented women and married women. But, after this period, with the increase in the number of married, career women, that difference disappears. In the 1920s and 1930s, many women were entering jobs previously reserved for men and new avenues were opening up for them in the public sphere. The joint-families was giving way to nuclear families and matrilineal groups were moving towards patrilineal customs. Lifestyles and dressing styles of both women and men were changing as a result of colonialism, community reforms and the

⁶ Kerala Modernity was different from the Western definition of the term. This was ushered in by the advent of modern English education and institutions and influenced the social, literary, cultural, and political spheres of Kerala from the nineteenth century. In literature, it was a movement away from dependence on Sanskrit works. For more details read, Bose & Varghese, *Kerala Modernity: Ideas, Spaces, and Practices in Transition* (2015); Osella, Caroline & Osella, *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict* (2000); Choukroune & Bhandari, *Exploring Indian Modernities: Ideas and Practices* (2018), P. Govinda Pillai, *Kerala Navodhanam Oru Marxist Veekshanam – Onnam Sanchika* (2004).

Western modernity arose out of Renaissance and Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It refers to specific socio-cultural ethos, practices, attitudes and norms that followed from these two moments in history in Europe. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's work on modernity is a useful starting point to know more about the Western understanding of modernity.

emerging nationalism. New ideas on health, hygiene, medicine and exercise had been ushered in different from the existing health practices. Following from these and other changes happening in the social sphere, there was the general perception that women were getting disconnected from their traditional roles. The fear was they would lose their *sthreetwam* (the essence of being a woman connected to her *sthreedharmam*). So, education had the double and opposing burden (1) of educating them in modern ways and (2) teaching them to become women (and men) firmly rooted in traditional values and morals. Among the various magazines and newspapers from this period in Malayalam-speaking regions, there are hundreds of articles dealing specifically with education (Antony 2013, 36, footnote 1) that shows how important the educational project was in colonial Kerala.

Women became more enmeshed within domestic structures than before in early twentieth-century Kerala. Many of the modern public institutions like the schools, hospitals and even the modern community were seen as working better with discretionary sense, persuasion, patience and the power of words (Devika 2007). It was suggested that women's feminine qualities or natural capacities made them naturally inclined to such spaces and jobs. Further, their natural capacities were needed for the functioning of these spaces. Education, the writers put forward, was critical to this process. By the 1920s, the debates were on what should be the content of this education. Since women had different roles to take on at home and in society, it was suggested by a few writers that there needed to be a differentiation in the curriculum for girls and boys. Women needed to be able to nurture the new generation and guide the men. They needed to run the household and be a moral disciplinarian and loving nurturer. The education of the mother would improve the household and the larger nation. However, writers or the common people from Malayalam-speaking areas were not particularly keen on an education that was dominated by the fine arts and domestic sciences (like it was suggested in Bengali magazines. Bengali women were quite frequently the 'other' to Malayali women [Antony 2013b]). Government reports from the period mention that they were hardly any takers for courses like Domestic Science instituted in government-run schools, and women and their families were more interested in acquiring skills that led to modern jobs (Antony 2013b). The socially acceptable industry or employment for women were ones that did not take her away from her duties at home and maintained her womanly qualities (*sthreetwam*).

Streeswathandryam and modernity were interrelated in the colonial Malayali psyche. Both these terms had multiple meanings and could connote negative or positive values depending on who was using it and in what situation. *Streeswathandryam* that developed into individualism which degenerated into egoism, self-interest, and the placement of one's own desires above that of one's family and community was looked down upon. Therefore, in the debates, education was charged with ushering in the right attitude within the women. *Swathandryam* that led to financial autonomy and ability to run the house and hearth autonomously were welcomed.

Various communities were in the process of reforming their dressing styles for women and men in the early twentieth century which was related to caste reforms and the emergence of nationalism. Therefore, *streeswathandryam* was, according to its critics, leading educated women to adopt styles from that of other communities/castes. Those supporting the dress reform went on to give examples of women from other communities wearing the blouse (Brahmins and Christians) or the sari (Parsis and north Indians) for years without falling into immorality or dissolution (Lakshmiamma 1906, R.P. 1921). These debates should also be read in the background of the Dress reform movement or Breast-cloth movement that shook colonial Kerala in the nineteenth century. While then, it was a movement that was seen as imitating European or upper caste women, here the imitation of other Indian women bears the brunt of traditionalists' ire (Any kind of dress reform involving women seems to draw intense debate in present-day Kerala as was seen in the debate on wearing Salwar-Kameezs to temples and educational institutions).

Modernity or *adhunikatha*, often conflated with *parishkaram*, was delineated into various strands – moral, intellectual and external/physical. Moral *parishkaram* was acceptable if women retained their womanly qualities. Morality was also seen as the forte of Indian culture as opposed to the worldliness of Western culture. Intellectual *parishkaram* was related to science, literature and arts and was acceptable. External *parishkaram* imagined as being related to customs, lifestyles, dressing, food habits, etc. were a complicated terrain. The progressive or radical thinkers had to defend any kind of change labelled *parishkaram*. *Parishkaram* had different meanings: it could mean change, progress, imitation, culture, and so on. In "Sthreejanangallude Abhyunnathi" (women's progress), written by Kochukrishnapilla in Sharada (1918), *parishkaram* takes on meanings like culture and civilization:

There is evidence that in olden times women had a talent for the arts, and also that they were not without *parishkaaram*. Like in the 20th century there were music experts, writers, fighters, experts in rulership at various stages of our history. But these women were not idealized as model women. Women like Sheelavathy, Satyavathy, Damayanthi and Sita were neither literati nor famous for their ability to rule. Mrs Annie Besant, Mrs Sarojini Naidu, Miss. Sathyabala Devi and Miss. Tarabai are known today not only in India but all over parishkrithalokham (civilized world). (Kochukrishnapilla, 1918: 269).

What is to be noted in all the discussions about education, *swathandryam*, or *parishkaram* is that there were several positions and meanings to these terms. A writer who would appear to be taking a liberal position regarding women's education would oppose modernity in another article.

Women from different communities were coming together in the space of the printed medium, and in physical spaces like schools, meetings, libraries, hospitals, and various kinds of jobs, different from an earlier time. There was the contradictory pull of wanting to and having to carve a space for women as a singular entity and as women belonging to separate communities in this new public sphere. The world we are allowed to see through women's periodicals in Malayalam is vivacious, fascinating and fraught with tensions.

In the present day, the Indian magazine with the second-highest number of readers is a Malayalam fortnightly, *Vanitha* (Audit Bureau of Circulations) with a sales figure of 3.4 lakhs. The online site of *Vanitha* mentions, "If Malayali women have broken through gender barriers and glass ceilings, a bit of the credit goes to *Vanitha*" (*Vanitha*, "Feminine Grace & Substance"). Launched in 1975, countless Malayali girls and women grew up reading *Vanitha*, which included articles on behaviour, etiquette, health (general & sexual), pregnancy and care, contraception, childcare, cooking recipes and tips, columns written by doctors, psychologists, academics, public figures, articles on actresses/actors, important events in the social and cultural sphere, housing and related issues and much more. It is not just women who read *Vanitha*, but also men. Catering to the aspirations of a middle-class woman and family, the magazine usually espouses hegemonic trend(s).

Periodicals published in the decades before Indian Independence had a sense of urgency and purpose that is no longer seen in contemporary Malayalam magazines for women. This

could be due to the change from a scarce medium that Jeffrey mentions to a mass medium. The focus of a magazine like *Vanitha* is entertainment. Information, education, reform, community issues and the other aspects that were extremely important for the early women's periodicals are secondary to entertainment. This is not to say that *Vanitha* does not do any of these. The very popularity of the magazine shows that it accommodates the desires and ambitions of contemporary society. Moreover, there is no doubt that the magazine has been instrumental in subtly influencing the worldview of generations of Malayali women. From a very Christian standpoint in the initial stages, the magazine now makes an effort to include content for women belonging to different communities (though possibly upwardly mobile lower-class and middle-class groups) in Kerala. There have been anecdotal references to Christian families beginning to cook the Onam *sadya* as a result of the plethora of Onam recipes in the magazine and the influence of other mass media (Until two to three decades ago, Onam was not celebrated in many Christian households, especially those that were located in predominantly Christian belts).

Vanitha is published in a post-feminist world. Women's education, freedom or modernity are not ideals to aspire for but have already been achieved or appear to have been achieved. If the writers in the first half of the twentieth century were trying to put together a coherent, utilitarian, nationalist, steeped in tradition but looking forward to the future image of the woman, for the writers of *Vanitha* now that the difficult war has been won, it is only the smaller battles that need to be faced.

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Pause, Click: Photography, an Introductory Reading

Farah Zachariah

The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.

John Berger

Abstract: Photographs are one of the most celebrated kinds of images. As a medium of representation, they arrest our attention and constantly confront us at different levels: emotional, cognitive, physical and interpersonal. The article primarily focuses on photographs as visual texts and how readers or viewers negotiate meanings from them. It attempts to analyze a set of photographs by employing the principles of critical hermeneutics. The task of hermeneutics is a continuous process to fundamentally interpret the photographs and give scope for different readings. Photography can be treated as a language, acquiring meaning through the cultural conventions, and conscious and unconscious processes, which cannot be merely reduced to subject matter, visual style and authorial intentions.

Keywords: Photography, Hermeneutics, Images, Photographs, Visual Texts

A human being's pursuit to seek and comprehend the world around him is defined by his senses and rationality, which actively contributes to his understanding of the lived and unlived experiences. He is influenced by a wide array of political, historical, socio-economic and cultural assumptions. Apart from these defining influences, there is a sense of "visual-logo-centrism" that sets ground for a better realization of one's selves. People see and they understand. By "visual-logo-centrism", I mean people give primacy to the act of seeing whereby they construct knowledge about individuals, institutions, practices, and events. How a person sees the world around him is instrumental in exploring his relation to one another and his role in the

greater web of life. It may be seen that the sense of sight connects man to the world around him in this manner. Chris Jenks observes, “looking, seeing and knowing have become perilously intertwined” (1). Seeing as channelized through various forms enables the viewer to share knowledge of what is happening in the world.

Either by directly observing what is happening around him or by garnering information from different sources, a person perceives the world. “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside of it, for it lay in our language and language deemed to repeat itself to us inexorably” (Wittgenstein 115). To a great extent, pictures have satiated man’s hunger for seeing and knowing which is instrumental in his quest. Pictures are images that are the primary manifestation of sight. Images have been in circulation for a long time and they help man to construct an understanding of the reality around him. Images can be any visual code from drawings to mechanical productions which appeal to our sense of sight. The basic visual expressions that an observer can recognize give a sense of transparency to images. Images represent a world to its observer and leave him with a perception of the represented idea. Its resemblance to an idea makes it different from a symbol or a word. Emmanuel Levinas observes, “An image, we can say, is an allegory of being” (121). When an observer studies an image, he grasps it as a picture and analyses it.

Photographs are one of the most celebrated kinds of images. The basic process of creating pictures by recording reflected light patterns has undergone changes with time. This art of photography as it is known helps in addressing the linguistic deficiencies of describing man’s state of existence. It underpins a knowledge foundation to the network of experience at the level of the real and the represented. As Wittgenstein observes, “...deep truths about the nature of reality and representation cannot properly be said but only shown” (qtd. in Craig 933). In due course of time, photographs opened new vistas of understanding.

The art of image writing with light, photo-graphy as it is known has gone through varied stages of growth from its early days of Camera Lucida to the heydays of digital technology. Nicephore Niepce is credited with the first permanent photographic image in 1826. It developed through the ages, but its perfection in printing

was not achieved till the 1900s. It was towards the last decades of 1800s that publication of photographs in exhibitions and other platforms found light among the photographers. Scientific progress led to the development of lasting photographs and science made the technology of photography easier. The use of celluloid films and George Eastman's Kodak revolutionized the production of photographs. The Leica Camera became popular in 1925 as it was smaller and less costlier than the Speed Graphic camera which was a favourite till then. The last decade of the 20th century saw one of the biggest leaps in photography: digitization. Films and rolls gave way to digital photographs, and darkrooms gave way to cozy comfortable workspace. In the one hundred and sixty odd years of its existence, photographs have recorded innumerable shots. Daily on an average, an ordinary person sees over ten thousand images clicked by cameras and the information is cognitively processed as he sees these images.

Photographs as a medium of representation arrest our attention and constantly confront us at different levels: emotional, cognitive, physical and interpersonal. They leave their impact on the personal and the public front through their ability to capture their surroundings and affect the sensibility of the observer. Photographs play a remarkable role in shaping world events and man's understanding of those events. "The political structure of the world would be quite different if photography had not been invented. Indeed, the very social fabric of our lives would be altered if light-sensitive film had never been put to use," observes Alma Davenport (xiii). Though their humble origins can be traced to the early pictographic drawings on the rock caves and later day images in Ancient Greece, the present day approval of photographs can be credited to the popularity of Visual Culture. This popularity stems from man's everyday preoccupation with Cultural Studies.

Cultural Studies as an academic discipline developed in the 1960s and '70s in the West. It draws upon theoretical approaches from contemporary political, social and economic forces. Culture operates through a medium which is easily available to people, that is as texts, which consists of literature, other art works and everything that is comprehended under the umbrella of expressions of a way of life. In cultural studies, a tension between theory and practice is evident since both are undergoing transformation with the times. It is a live and expanding area of study. Simon During

observes that “cultural studies is, of course, the study of culture, or, more particularly, the study of contemporary culture” (1). From its early seeds sown in the 1950s in Great Britain, it bloomed through decades of pruning and sprouting. Cultural Studies enriched the understanding of lived experiences by absorbing its nutrients from the ‘whole way of life’ lived and expressed through the different cultural forms. Richard Hoggart’s Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies promoted research in this field and was a landmark institute in the growth of Cultural Studies.

Cultural Studies imbibed the changing scenario of the last decades of the twentieth century and moved away from power relations to identity and value systems. Globalization changed the trajectory and with mass production and appeal, Cultural Studies became all encompassing. In contemporary Cultural Studies, the study of Visual Culture adapts an interdisciplinary approach and comprises all media that has the ability to capture our visual potential. According to Nicholas Mirzoeff, Visual Culture contains “visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology” (3). It covers ordinary and digital sources, such as images, signs, pictures, drawings, paintings, photographs, comics, films, artistic media, video games, graphics, advertising, Internet and any other source that has a visual element. Media culture affords different viewpoints, varied audiences and multiplicities. The versatility of this study spans over disciplines like cultural studies, anthropology, critical theory, philosophy etc where the prime focus is on understanding the idea of culture as expressed in the visual medium. The predominance of this phase where the visual gains significance guarantees the development of fresh paradigms for understanding photographs, what they communicate and the information they hold in the 21st century.

The focus of study in academic circles has always been streamlined towards the production, reception and effects of the texts. As Grossberg observes, these studies are “so engaging because they address people, not only intellectuals and academics.”(qtd. in Hammer x) We live in a world where technology is radically changing the way things function. It has also permeated into the nuances of visual culture. Martin Jay observes, “insofar as we live in a culture whose technological advances abet the production and dissemination of such images at hitherto unimagined level, it is necessary to focus on

how they work and what they do, rather than move past them too quickly to the ideas they represent or the reality they purport to depict. In doing so, we necessarily have to ask questions about...technological mediations and extensions of visual experience” (sic) (qtd. in Smith 183). Keeping this in mind, the present day study of visual culture takes into account the codes of cross-mediation and the scope of manipulation. The intervention of media, both print and electronic, and digital has made tremendous advancement in structuring and interpreting the visual content.

The article primarily focuses on photographs as visual texts and how readers or viewers negotiate meanings from them. Photographs help us to form a frame of reference through which one can interpret the world one sees and thereby understand and evaluate ourselves in relation to the world. It attempts to analyze a set of photographs by employing the principles of critical hermeneutics. Critical hermeneutics understood as “the art of interpretation as transformation” (Ferraris 9) affords a space for the observer to understand the text, in this context, photographs in their multiple significations. It requires a retrospective consciousness that offers opportunities for different readings of the photograph. Critical hermeneutics attempts a critiquing of the reading of photographs. “Critique is a form of political responsibility that must precede and follow any form of praxis if such praxis is not to become rigidified into purely ideological categories” (McGee 16). It can be applied to photographs at the philosophical level, drawing inputs from epistemological, aesthetic and ethical angles. In this qualitative research, understanding and interpretation holds the key as opposed to substantiation and elucidation.

Photographs act as discourse and the complexity in interpreting them lies in applying “it to ourselves” (Mc Gee 310). This critical intervention seeks to interpret meanings and the observer naturally experiences responses that range from the emotional to the intellectual, depending on his way of analysis and interpretation as it involves a human dimension. There is no single theoretical position that can explain all the ideas conveyed through a photograph. It prompts one to consider several perspectives to arrive at a better understanding and reach a consensus. With the mass penetration of photographs on various platforms, we come across many photographs, but we see only those photographs we choose to see. More than just ‘seeing’ we try to

analyze them and draw a relation between what we see on the photographs and ourselves. The task of hermeneutics is a continuous process to fundamentally interpret the photographs and give scope for different readings.

Berger writes, “our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are” (Cover page). Thus our interpretation is based on what we understand of the sight seen. A photograph translates an event for its viewers and becomes a proof of how observers have viewed the frame. The concept of provenance has been fundamental to the reading of photographs. It implies that contextual analysis is important to understand the meaning of texts. In Cultural studies, art holds values that transcend all contexts. The universality of art makes it an important resource for understanding ourselves in relation to the world. It is important to place a photograph in a particular context to decipher it, but its frames are never limited by its context. “While art should never be read as it were divorced from the social context, it also should not be reduced to that context as if content were something that determines the work from outside,” notes Patrick McGee (21). The mechanical eye gives a scope for the observer to see beyond his physical field of vision. “The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera,” observes Dorothea Lange (qtd. in Meltzer vii). It becomes essential to go beyond the visible and understand the totality of what is represented and not represented in the frame of reference. This necessitates combining both the theory of critical hermeneutics and practice of reading photographs to understand how it uncovers the unconscious, emotional, logical and strategic relevance of photographs as effective tools of communication. This will facilitate a proper analysis of photographs.

Though hermeneutics as a methodology was primarily used for theological interpretation, textual analysis also became a part of it in later years. A preliminary enquiry in international bibliographic details shows that with time, it was applied to diverse modern day branches like architecture, psychology, archaeology etc. Interpretation of photographs bears similarities and differences with interpretation of texts. Similarities arise from the fact that they “can be interpreted only by relating a particular text to discourse that gives it significance, weight as a symbol and intensity value as language-in other words, meaning” (Miles29). The point of view of the

spectator or reader or interpreter is also of primary concern. Unlike interpretation of theological books, where interpretations tend to be definitive, the visual signs give the viewer a certain level of freedom to interpret.

The universality of image accounts for the different meanings that the photographs acquire. The universality of the image rests on "...the capacity of the viewer to grasp in the concrete particularity of the image a universal affectivity. The image defines a particular constellation of affective energy that is not foreign to the viewer but that has not, until her encounter with this image, been formulated in quite this way. The universality of the image thus depends on an act of recognition by each viewer. The universality of an image lies in its potential affective availability to everyone who contemplates it with generosity and self-reflection." (Miles³⁰) At times depending on the interpreter's bias, the universal approach can be limiting. The image throws possibilities for multiple interpretations, but the spectator unconsciously picks on the interpretation according to his choice.

A photograph always has a dominant function. It acts as a code that is channeled between the sender and receiver in a particular context. The function, as pointed out by Roman Jakobson in another context can be borrowed here and termed as referential, aesthetic, emotive, connotative, phatic or metalingual. In order to understand photographs we need to make an "intergraphic" analysis, meaning, analyzing what is at the intersections of the graphic, semiotic, metaphysical and ethical interpretations. Thus re-phrasing Jakobson, we can say that there is principle of convergence of several axes and a simultaneous dispersal of these axes from the photograph. In developing this notion, we have two operations that work on photographs - condensation and displacement that manifest the contents of the photograph. Every photograph stands for several associations and ideas, thus serving as a condensed text, open to convergence of different readings. There also exists a simultaneous displacement into several axes, separating the emotional, ethical, metaphysical and political significance from its real content.

The life-world of photographs affords a more comprehensive understanding of its dimensions, incorporating the event, its representation and a moral standing. The

representation might be the nearest approximation and the moment captured in the photograph is just a gateway to the event. Broadly classifying, there are two major entry points for reading photographs, at the formal and ethical level. The formal approach includes the new mode of analysis called “intergraphics” that I have arrived at. This can be combined with an ethical reading of the photographs.

This study proposes to analyse the photographs using the methodology of critical hermeneutics by extending the explanatory paradigms of epistemology, aesthetics and ethics: epistemologically, in the choice of its mode of representation; aesthetically, in the choice of a narrative strategy; and ethically, in the choice of ideological implication so as to comprehend the current social problems.

Photographs have been read and re-read based on the insights gained from major theorists of culture and representation. Different angles of analyzing photographs have been dealt by them in different contexts. But a study based on a single theorist would prove to be reductive. Roland Barthes elaborates on the semiotics of visual images which can be used in the analysis of photographs. In *Camera Lucida*, he writes about the essence of the photographic image. He raises an important question, are photographs communicating impressions of reality? Barthes observes, “the photograph’s immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value, but by shifting this reality to the past (this-has-been) the photograph suggests that it is already dead (79). Photographs bear testimony to the event when they serve as evidence, familiarizing and defamiliarizing the event at the same time.

Judith Butler takes forward Susan Sontag’s analysis when she brings in the concept of ethical representation and perceptible reality. The question of interpretation in the light of art and politics gain significance from an ‘emancipated’ spectator’s point of view, trying to analyze the aesthetics of photographs, conveying trauma. Moving from Jacques Ranciere, the ‘how’ of seeing becomes equally important as put forward

by John Berger. John Tagg's analysis suits the concept of total view of reality getting substituted and the cultural representation of photographs.

The camera as an ideological construct can be contrasted in a philosophical interpretation of Vilem Flusser and Walter Benjamin. Flusser identifies three players: the Apparatus-the camera, the functionary-the photographer and the technical image-the photographic surface, which work in a complementary way to cultivate the observer's understanding. In Walter Benjamin's writings, he contended that images of public events merit attention because they offer a compact moral guide for future reference. If we fail to recognize the image as one of our own concerns of the present times, "it threatens to disappear irretrievably" (Illuminations 257). The idea of photographic image as a strip frozen in time and space has been abandoned long ago; adopting far more complicated concepts of what the image is, taking into account the many orders of magnitude.

At the level of epistemology, photographs are comprehended in terms of nature and scope of knowledge they afford. There are larger forces at play in the increasingly technical and automated world. We have reached a stage where seeing photographs is not just believing. The spectator must be aware of the different arms at work in production of an image: the photographer, the photograph, the spectator, an overt and covert ideology. Only a detached view will give a clear understanding of the event

In an age before photography, people were resistant "to believing in the past, in History, except in the form of myth." However photography put an end to this resistance; "henceforth the past is as certain as the present, what we see on paper is as certain as what we touch" (*Camera Lucida* 87-8), observes Barthes. This has been the basis of understanding the epistemological point of view of photographs for a long while. What is photographed and saved for eternity reaches out to the observer. As Barthes believes, the power of the photograph rests in the emanation of a referent: "from a real body, which was there, proceeds radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here" (qtd. in Wallach 212). The moment captured into the photographic image becomes a relic of both the presence and absence of the moment.

It follows that ways of seeing are more important than seeing the photograph. Fellow mortals are culturally represented in photographs. John Berger elucidates the ways of seeing these impressions in his *Ways of Seeing*. The representations of men and women in this medium of visual culture entice different “gazes” from the spectator. Beyond this, every photograph is in fact a means of testing, confirming and constructing a total view of reality. Rather than being a guarantor of realism, the camera is itself a production.

Cameras become an ideal arm of consciousness of the photographer and photographs subsequently produced become knowledge and power. There is always a possibility of resistance created by any system of power and knowledge. It makes the critic ponder if the deconstruction of prevalent assumptions of traumatic photographs helps him to identify those photographs as embodying the possibility of resistance. The myriad availability of images helps us to construct the whole world in our mind. But its mass production makes it available to all those who have means to attain them which familiarizes the victims and removes the shock of such traumatic photographs. At times, over exposure benumbs the audience and slowly move the trajectory from being more real to less real. But at the same time, as Sontag notes, through representation, they “usurp reality”(“The Image World” 80) and hence cut out an important understanding of the event.

Understanding a photograph becomes more important than the photograph itself in the ideological struggle. Where does one pledge their support after seeing politically active photographs? The observer establishes his stand based on his ‘environment’. An analysis of the traumatic photographs for questions like who possessed the means to represent and who has been represented reveal its immense implications in the issues of political, cultural, social and sexual domination. Ranciere argues against the idea that a revolutionary act is located within the artwork itself, instead he argues that revolution exists prior to the work of art. Any photographs from politically turbulent justify this statement. Moreover, at one level, the revolutionary impetus exists with the observer, in his or her chance to view a work of art versus the work as such in itself. The whole point lies in the spectator’s way of interpretation where each and every observer

emerges as an “emancipated spectator.” This insists upon the creativity of the spectator which provides him or her with the capability to interpret.

Nowadays, the creation of photographs refers to the creation of ideas. Previously, ideas were interpreted by written documents. Accepting these photographs and assuming them to be true, and not bothering about its possibility of endless replication, is positive on one side as it accepts its worldwide presence. But at the same time it warns us of a rising case of visual illiteracy as a result of uncritical trust in photographic “reality”. So it is important to ask ourselves where we place ourselves as observers of traumatic photographs.

An alternate point of analysis is the aesthetics of traumatic photographs, where technical aspects of photographs are important. Traumatic photographs become factual photographs with an aura of realism attached to it. As tools of documentation produced by different photographers, they do not vary much in depiction unlike ordinary photographs where the characteristics solely depend on technicalities. The change in camera position, camera angle, focal length of the lens, light and length of exposure which usually adds a signature to photographs may be lacking in traumatic photographs which are clicked under severe conditions of pain and horror. These somewhat identical images (in terms of technical differences) vary slightly only in certain respects like distance, focus, exposure and perspective. The portrayal of trauma depends on compositional practice which is heightened by factors like number, gaze and placement.

An image is directly caused by the light reflected off it and it attains a special value because of the features of personalities or events or the moment it represents. One of the most appealing formulations of the quality of photograph as visual semiotics was elaborated by Roland Barthes. He took off from Charles Sanders Pierce’s identification of the three fundamental types of meaning. Every photograph acts at 3 levels: the index, the icon, and the symbol. The traumatic photographs taken here also have an indexical meaning, iconic status and a symbolic standing.

There is agony in front of the camera and the photograph captures the act at the moment of its execution. But in *The Future of the Image*, Ranciere elaborates that art and politics have always been intrinsically linked. This is very evident in representation

of the agent and agency in photographs of political unrest, conflict zones and war. The passive spectator who observes these traumatic photographs ignore their production and the reality these photographs conceal is supposed to represent the betrayal of art's political efficacy. Were these photographs staged? Thus aesthetics cannot be seen as a Utopian principle that articulates the sensuous with the conceptual, but as a process of 'dis-identification' developed by the photographer and the observer. The aesthetic becomes political in that it allows the individuals a divorce from their prescribed functions. In this light, analyzing traumatic photographs will be different for different people.

Photographs as an experience add another dimension to the interpretation of photography. It is an experience captured where reality is interpreted selectively by the photographer. The perpetrators of the crime might not be seen in a photograph. It will be the victims or the agents or agencies who are covered. It is just one side of the picture. Knowing the other side is also equally important. This understanding is essential in reaching a consensus in reading the photographs.

Another concern is the present day proliferation of these images that has established a "new visual code." It establishes within people, what Sontag calls "chronic voyeuristic relation" to the world around them. It fosters an attitude of "anti-intervention", that is, the individual who records cannot intervene and the one who intervenes cannot then faithfully record (Kennedy 79). Every traumatic photograph needs to address this issue and the way in which they have de-sensitized the audience as well.

In a similar light, one needs to analyze what it means to be ethically responsive to such traumatic photographs. It makes us conceptualize how the frames of representation affect the spectator's responsiveness. The question is not only how effective we are in responding to suffering at a distance but also in formulating a set of percepts that might work to safeguard lives. We can formulate our articulation on these photographs based on a field of 'perceptible reality'. Butler asserts that traumatic photographs are not just visual images awaiting interpretation, but such photographs are actively interpreting themselves. It opens the restrictions on interpreting reality to

critical scrutiny. But are we interpreting these photographs on lines that have been imposed upon us? The ethics of perception is essential in identifying the field of representability, that is what can be represented and what cannot. In a sense, these photographs construct an identity that needs to be studied.

Taking this study to another level makes us analyse the role played by these photographs. In the first place, why are we discussing them? Has it become a part and parcel of the event, calling our attention to it? How do we respond to such traumatic photographs? Can we stay desensitized? We can answer these questions one by one. The role of photographs as historical markers makes their discussion essential. They become points of reference and evidence to which we often focus our attention. Photographs continue to keep discussion forums alive because they generate an interpretation, pave way for memory and become a narrative. Miriam Hansen observes that no historical moment will ever again escape its simultaneous role as an event and image, memory and potential arena for debate. (*With Skin and Hair: Kracauer's Theory of Film* n. pag.). Photographs become a medium for interpreting the events. Joel Snyder in "Picturing Vision" develops the idea about conception of image as an integral and strategic respondent and creator of historical discourses. What we understand of the event is how we interpret the photograph. We make a reading based on our political, social and cultural making. At the same time, we are also viewing the event through the photographer's eye which is working through the camera's eye. The photographer sets the angle for representation and decides what to contain in the frame and what not to. As Butler observes, it is this frame that takes part in the "active interpretation" of the event. But to echo Slavoj Zizek, are photographs inadequate in explaining reality as they become merely the approximate of the 'real'. It is on these grounds that photographs need to be shown as markers of the event.

Generally, ethics is an innate understanding of how things should be done. It is formulated by understanding the lived experience of real people in context. The guiding principles attempt to be coherent and self-explanatory. From Aristotle to the postmodernists, from natural law to virtue theory, there have been separate bodies of ethics, often not encompassing a whole truth but rather a general totality. This ethical grounding is a way of perceiving the response to traumatic photographs.

The response to these photographs becomes more critical than the photograph itself. What is expected is not an observation alone. There is not only a “way of seeing” but also a “way it should affect”. The ethical dimension cannot be ignored in such traumatic photographs. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy is of the opinion that observers gain a mental, physical and real strength from these photographs (qtd. in Burnett 13). The strength lies in our urge to respond to a situation beyond our control and reach. The depiction of horror forces us to react. To Edelman, from a neurobiological perspective, they are ‘never free of affect’ (170). They make the world united in sentiments, but divided in action. The initial rage is often watered by its frequent display in other media sources. One should learn to move beyond a ‘sadistic voyeurism’ and to construct an emotional bonding that calls for action. “As the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas claims, it is the face of the other that demands from us an ethical response...” observes Butler (“The Torture and Ethics of Photography” 77). The question is where the observer places himself/herself in response to the image. If we place ourselves in the victim’s position and try to understand the “suffering body”, each image becomes an instrument of alertness. The nameless and unknown victims make a silent plea through these photographs. It strikes a chord with the observer, calling for action.

Sara Ahmed observes that the sentiment of compassion ‘sticks’ to the individuals and converts them into ‘objects of feeling and sentiment’ (89). Our relationship to the victims has been ‘sentimentalised’ in these photographs. The embodiment of suffering in these photographs establishes its mission when the message is conveyed to the spectator. Pramod K. Nayar suggests that such traumatic events are capable of initiating a response in the observer as it affects them. His concept of ‘Scar Culture’ addresses how the observer responds with specific emotions to such visual inputs of suffering. Our response should not be mis-directed by sheer ‘commodification of suffering’ which is quite marketable. As Bataille suggests, we grasp a point of life in these photographs. To stay de-sensitized and stop responding is to become inhuman. Life moves on. If we fail to act or at least stay alert, we fail as fellow beings. As Sontag puts it, photographs act as an invitation “to pay attention, reflect...examine the rationalizations for mass suffering observed by established powers” (117).

Thus interpretations of a photograph can be examined through different angles in association with critiques of realism. Photography can be treated as a language, acquiring meaning through the cultural conventions, and conscious and unconscious processes, which cannot be merely reduced to subject matter, visual style and authorial intentions. “With photography a new language has been created. Now for the first time it is possible to express reality by reality,” (qtd. in Chapnick 257) comments Ernst Haas in *Truth Needs No Ally*. Photographic meaning is not natural, universal or intrinsic to the image, but socially produced, not only at the point of production, but also of reception. Photographs, which are basically images should not be ‘theorized’ in the abstract, but rather investigated as part of specific material culture. Truly, traumatic photographs will have more to say. Aesthetic, epistemological and ethical approaches to the study of traumatic photographs serve as a foundation for critically interpreting the text in its differences. A critical hermeneutics guarantees the economy of the photographs. The positioning of a stand pertains to the publication of the photograph and its marketing agency. But, there is nothing like an immovable and obstinate point of view. Likewise, each traumatic photograph is open to variegated interpretations.

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Performing Spaces: Staging Resistance, Gendered Cartographies and Self

Preeti Kalra

Abstract: The paper aims to explore the self in different performative spaces, which includes theatre, dance, music, and posters. In doing so it tends to analyze how the “spaces” are being refilled by defining the “hidden narratives” of the self through performances. The performances are not just for entertainment rather the aim is to expose the hidden spaces of the society where bodies with pride are produced. The spaces are liberating and empowering in nature through which multiple narratives are perceived, conceived and lived. Considering performative space as a space where gender binaries can be unsettled, the work reveals how certain performances bolster one to rethink about the social conventions of gender. The performative body becomes a medium through which the idea of self, sexuality, space, gender, and culture can be looked upon. The body experiencing the sense of ‘homelessness’ within its own being goes into the quest for the discovery of the self, which is underlined with an expression of anger against the pseudo codifications of systems, thus authenticating change. The paper provides discourse on how performative spaces have become a product of change. To this end, the paper unravels how performances “fill in the blanks” and explores the wider dynamics of space including public, private, and mental spaces and how the outer spaces influence inner spaces.

Keywords: Performance, Space, Self, Dance, Music, Theatre, Visual arts, Gender

The contemporary feminine discourse expressing discontent with the autonomous masculine discourse as the dominant one has raised pertinent questions in the context of self, selfhood,

identity, and consciousness. Women, dismantling the gendered concepts of self, which has portrayed the self of a woman as diseased or defected are creating alternative narratives where they define themselves. Space and Self, in this context, becomes an important arena of analysis as it gives place to women to feminize their self and identity. To account for the feminine self that has been relegated to selflessness, invisibility, and passivity one needs to look beyond the already constructed masculine notions of self. It is imperative to redefine self not on the frameworks created by society or men but through one's own individuation and selfhood. As Elaine Showalter in *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* asserts, "the feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing, or even attacking male critical theory keeps us dependent upon it and retards our progress in solving our own theoretical problems." She further adds that "In the process of redefining androcentric models we are learning nothing new." (Showalter, 183). Even in the performative space, the notions behind women's self and identity have been blurred, reducing them to a cultural product, embodied with ornaments for male gaze and pleasure. Thus, it becomes imperative to desexualize spaces and unlearn the gender binaries in performative spaces so as to give space to the feminine self.

According to many theoreticians, the self, as well as identities in women's performances, are not fixed but fluid and continuously in flux. In order to break the definitional propositions and established boundaries, it becomes indispensable to stretch the boundaries by women performers and acclaim spaces. The notions around identity and self are to be contextualized differently. Identity, like gender, is a social construction and the fluidity depends upon the changing social frameworks. The dual consciousness that a woman inherits in the dominant culture forms her self and identity. Thus one can allude that the duality is the result of one's own consciousness built from patriarchal prescriptions and from one's own resistance to such prescriptions. As Sheila Rowbotham says- "But always we were split into two, straddling in silence.....From this dislocation, comes the experience of one part of ourselves as strong, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity." (Rowbotham, p. 29). The self as culturally defined and the self as different from culture germinates from the society and has to erupt in the society, thus giving rise to "new self".

Reclaiming the self and space through performances "projects an image of a WOMAN, a category which is supposed to define an individual woman's identity." (Rowbotham, p. 29). Until now, even the mirror reflection of women was not her own individual 'self' but was rather

a product of cultural and social categories. Women have now started reclaiming the spaces and expressing multiple selves as compared to the earlier times when they were always seen jostling for space and articulation. The difficulty that women faced in performing or speaking about one's own self is well expressed by Mary Eagleton in *Working with Feminist Criticism* (1996) (Eagleton, 146):

The difficulty of saying 'I'

Finding the courage to say 'I'

The intimacy of 'We' Saying 'We'

when really mean 'I'

The False unity of 'We'.

The impulse to speak opened ways for women and initiated them to take the 'U' turn; to speak from their marginalized position; to speak from their bodies about their vulnerabilities and desires. This initiated an end to the advocacy of 'anti-men' feeling and focus on 'women-centered' feelings.

The social movements through the act of solidarity and oneness aims to end the hegemonic discourse and power structures. It motivates women to create an alternative self, which is disconnected from the social, cultural or to say patriarchal referentiality. The "alternate self" is the collective self of women, which tends to shatter the mirror of expected silence through performative spaces and movements. As Rowbotham says:

"In order to create an alternative, an oppressed group must at once shatter the self reflecting world which encircles it and, at the same time, project its own image onto history. In order to discover its own identity as distinct from that of the oppressor, it has to become visible to itself..... People who are without names, who do not know themselves, who have no culture, experience a kind of paralysis of consciousness. The first step is to connect and learn to trust one another..... Solidarity has to be collective consciousness which at once comes through individual self- consciousness and transforms it." (Rowbotham, Sheila, 27)

The (un)codified visual performative vocabulary records the intimate thoughts and ideologies, the elatedness and conflicts, and the anger and silence. Art in representing reality

and self through the creative vision of one's mind tends to reconstruct a world with some sense of distortion. This distortion is a mark of protest against the envisioned reality and artist through one's immense fecundity uses art as a rebellion. As Alber Camus asserts, "Art is an impossible demand given expression and form. When the most agonizing protest finds its most resolute form of expression, rebellion satisfies its real aspirations and derives creative energy from this fidelity to itself. Despite the fact that this runs counter to the prejudices of the times, the greatest style in art is the expression of the most passionate rebellion."¹ It is this passionate rebellion that finds voice in different performative forms (theatre, dance, music, painting) that creates a space public and private space of one's own.

Formation of Theatrical Space by Blurring the Gender Boundaries

Social protest theatre is different from the political theatre in its approach to criticize and awake the individuals for neglecting the taboos prevailing in society. Social theatre aims to raise the individual consciousness so that collective action can be initiated. The attack on political authority and power structures that operate outside the society are secondary sources of targets. The primary concern is to attack the inner demons prevailing in society such as patriarchy, class and caste biases and gender inequality. Women were no less affected by the changing scenario. Even after Gandhi's self feminization, women were considered ancillary in a society that was constructed on the pseudo ideologies of male beliefs and dominations. The situation worsened as the rights assured by the constitution were far fetched from reality. Social monstrosity in the garb of Child Marriage, Sati, Female Infanticide and Dowry deaths still prevailed.² The question that left women perplexed was who would come for their savior when the so-called saviors of the nation (men) were the one stripping their humanity away? This resulted in women's joining hands in revolution and occupying the streets in order to protest.

The women's movement of the 1970s and 80s centered on the disillusionment with the world; exposing the injustice, exploitation, and violence against women through street protests, campaigns, slogans, and songs. The cry for helplessness and vulnerability gave birth to a new woman who is fierce and equally emotional. The realization of one's vulnerability became a

¹ Camus, Albert. "Rebellion and Art (excerpts)." *The Rebel*. 1956. p. 7.

² Kang, Neelu. "Using theatre for Consciousness Raising." *The Tribune*. February 10, 2002.

tool to raise consciousness through an active protest against deadening issues. The mobilization which began with custodial rape cases to dowry deaths brought women onto the streets displaying great creativity, activism and revolutionary fervor of change. The question pertaining to the politics of social change questioned the culture for its patriarchal practices, as Uma Chakravarti maintains, “It was impossible to pretend that culture and tradition did not have a role to play in sanctioning the extraordinary violence to which these women were subjected. Culture itself has to be subjected to scrutiny with an urgency not felt since the nineteenth century’s social reforms.”³

Women organizations such as Progressive Organisation of Women in Hyderabad(1975), Stree Sangharsh(1979), Mahila Samiti chafed against the atrocities and defilement of women through social, economic, cultural and political principles. They protested against dowry deaths, rape cases in their street plays, *Om Swaha* (against dowry deaths), *Mulgi Zali Ho*(A girl is born) and used posters depicting gravity of the issues faced. Some of the posters read: ‘From the darkness of the womb to the silence of the grave’, ‘Down with dowry’, ‘Women are not for burning and ‘Break the silence.’⁴ Women occupying spaces and performing was the only medium to put into question the silent fate of women sufferers. In the play *Om Swaha*, a woman is seen roaming in streets carrying matrimonial advertisements. Through humor and taunts, she restates the marriage mantras that are predominant in the Hindu marriage ceremony and tells the audience what ‘glorious state of marriage means’ for a woman. Thus the ‘Swaha’ in the title is a sharp critique of culture where marriage is not full of bliss and happiness(as culture espouses it to be) but is rather a state of self-denial, suffocation, sacrifice, drudgery, and victimization.⁵

Victim blaming has been a common parlance in a country where women are stuffed with a patriarchal dictionary containing do’s and don’ts. A satirical play, *Mahaul Badalna Hai*, by Saheli, addresses the issue of sexual harassment while talking about stereotypes attached to it and how women are blamed for their own harassment. While talking about popular stereotypes- what women should do, how they should walk, dress and talk and what would happen if a woman turns out to be careless in a so-called careful society, the play initiates a

³ Chakravarti, Uma. “The Women’s Movement as Performance.” 2012. p. 62.

⁴ Kumar, Radha. “The Campaign Against Dowry.” *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women’s Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*. 1993. p. 122.

⁵ Chakravarti, Uma. “The Women’s Movement as Performance.” 2012. p. 63.

parallel story of a man who has lost his wallet in a bus. The moment the man makes a noise, he is piled up with criticism for keeping the wallet in an inappropriate position to a 'deliberate invitation' to the pickpocket (tyrant). The play thus delivers a message of putting the blame on the victim (mostly women) by placing men at the position of being robbed. Thus, it is "turning the allegation of provocative behaviour, voice mostly by men, on its head."⁶

Protest theatre as a whole includes characteristics of political as well as social theatre. Apart from similarities that coincide with social and political theatres, the protest theatre differs from them on one ground that it does not stop only at the exploration and questioning the social and political inequalities but it tends to bring a change in the mindsets, beliefs, and opinions of the audience. It creates a link between theatre and audience where the performer is the medium through which consciousness is raised. Once the consciousness is raised through theatrical performances, it paves the way towards political and social action based on the demands. For instance, the play *Om Swaha* raised the social consciousness of people and they began to understand the gravity of the situation. Soon, the social theatre along with other protest mediums turned into raising political demand, which compelled the government to consider the matter with utmost importance. Thus, the social pressure changed legal attitudes with passing laws such as the Criminal Law Act. The introduction of section 498A and Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code and section 113A of the Evidence Act proved to be stepping stones in the history of social protests.⁷

In the present scenario, theatrical groups such as Asmita Theatre headed by Arvind Gaur, Sukmanch Theatre by Shilpi Marwaha and street play organizations in various universities and colleges are being the active agents in raising social consciousness through theatrical means. Considering protest as a voice that can put an end to socio-political injustice prevailing in society, theatrical artists raise their voice in order to reclaim the lost or never gained spaces. Arvind Gaur blatantly asserts that his theatre will stand up against social injustice and protest on themes like caste, rape, violence, and corruption without inclining towards any political party or ideology. The theatrical space and boundary tend to break the

⁶ Ibid. p. 66.

⁷ Kumar, Radha. "The Campaign Against Dowry." *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*. 1993. p.124.

fourth wall of intolerance, as he says; Asmita is about checking the system, not becoming a part of it."⁸

The protest songs used in theatres express their desire to change the world. As the song goes⁹

*ruke na jo jhuke na jo
mite na jo dabe na jo
hum wo inkalab hai
hum wo inkalab hai
julm ka jawab hai
julm ka jawab hai
har garib har shahid
ka hum hi to khwab hai
ruke na jo*

The dream of a casteless, unbiased and borderless society is articulated through the song in the protest, such as-

*hum mita ke hi rahenge majhabo ke raaj ko
takht aur taaj ko kal ke liye aaj ko
kal ke liye aaj ko
kal ke liye aaj ko
jisme unch nich ho aise har samaj ko
hum badalte hi rahe hai waqt ke mijaj ko
waqt ke mijaj ko
waqt ke mijaj ko
kranti ke
kranti ke raag hai junglo ki aag hai
samne jo aayega jalayenge mitayenge
ruke na jo*

It also sings about humanity and oneness-

⁸ Sukant, Deepak. "Arwind Gaur explains how Asmita checks the system by not becoming a part of it". *India Today*. September 08, 2017.

⁹ Kapoor Mahendra. "Jai Bangladesh." Hindi geet mala. 1971.

*jante nahi hai fark hindu musalman ka
mante hai rishta hum insaan se insaan ka*

To end pathetic conditions of poor one can go against anyone and anything:

*garib ko jagayenge garibi ko hatayenge
ekta ke jor pe kisi se bhi lad jayenge*

Art as an act of portent subversion, eminent theatre artist and activist, Shilpi Marwaha uses her voice to the outcry against the injustice done to the disadvantaged sections of the society. An ardent practitioner of Brechtian theatre, she has been an active agent in dismantling the system through her theatrical performances. The activism in theatre implied more energetic intervention of people as it engages with different segments of a society in order to raise consciousness and their own voice per se. Theatre, considered as the form of expression which has the power to blend and have a dialogue between drama and activism so as to propagate the change has been used to put an end to the legacy of silence and suppression of voices. In her theatrical performances like “A Woman Alone”, “The Death of an Anarchist”, “Ramkali” and protest during Nirbhaya rape case and any another issue, which are affecting society, she has also used her activism to break the fourth wall of barriers and hypocrisy. Through the belief in the power of art and her own voice, she has left no stone untouched when it comes to raging a fight against injustice and atrocities. Performing street plays in colleges to theatre performances in auditoriums, she has raised issues such as homosexuality, caste biases, women's emancipation, and illiteracy.

Shilpi Marwaha in her street theatre raises voice against issues such as corruption, illiteracy, homosexuality, and violence against women. The expressive behaviours in the plays such as *Purity*, *Kaash*, *Rangmanch*, *Bebak Ismat*, *Lakdi Ki Kathi* (showcasing dynamic human emotions and intolerant abuses prevailing in society), and street plays such as *Dastak*, *Wajood* (based on working women's struggle in society) reflects her intensity and desire to bring a change in society.¹⁰ After Nirbhaya rape case, she performed a street play wherein she questioned; who were responsible for such behaviours? Police? Government? Or an individual? The question left the public to critically scrutinize one's own place and

¹⁰ Bhati, Vini. “Theatre with Shilpi Marwah.” *Litgleam*. July 2018

responsibility in society. A social theatre raises issues and leaves the audience to think and rethink about the society one is creating and the heinous crimes taking place in that society.

What one sees in the aforementioned acts is not a performance or the performance of a performance but the expressions in the performance that records a legacy of violence, silence, anger, and injustice. These are expressed through a legitimate or fixed gesture and posture. One can also see how stereotypes and judgments created around women shape one's ideology and thus reflect the self that is created by the ideologies. In performance, these ideologies are recreated so that the absolute authority can be questioned.

The body on stage speaks through gestures and postures; it becomes an object of the gaze and desire if it is a female body. The above discussion illustrates that performance art is an expressive medium to reflect the political and social unrest creating space and opportunities for people to reflect the unreflected or express the unexpressed. In such space for free expression; nudity also becomes a medium to protest against the atrocities done against women so that the audience can encapsulate their own despotic behaviour.

India has witnessed extreme anger and shock in the wake of Nirbhaya gang rape in the form of different mediums of performance art such as music, theatre, poetry, and dance. Ranging from street protest solo (one woman) performances by Maya Krishna Rao and Mallika Taneja, theatre ushered new paths to search and represent the self. Mallika Taneja, a Delhi based theatre artiste staged a feminist satire show, *Thoda Dhyam Se* exposing India's naked truth through a naked stage performance. The performance is a burlesque of a society that people live in; beginning with the naked body looking at the audience and asking questions without uttering a word.¹¹ The naked body, in the words of Gayatri Spivak, becomes a "terrifying super object" gazing at the audience and asking them, who is responsible for sexual harassment? After minutes of silence, she starts donning clothes one over the other and talking hurriedly and carelessly about 'to-do things' for women which include careful attention to their (women's) talking, walking and looking. Towards the end of the performance, she ends up putting fifty different types of clothes over her body including jabs, and helmet on her head. Covering almost each and every part of her body she fills the atmosphere with her unasked question to what extent women are safe in this society even after veiling her full body and being careful? Thus in a single act, she raised questions on issues such as gaze, blame game,

¹¹ Parikh, Runa Mukherjee. "Thoda Dhyam Se" This Woman tears down victim blaming, Act by Act. *The Quint*. July 27, 2018.

adornment, body politics, freedom, sexual harassment, and violence. In her solo act, she becomes a 'body of evidence',¹² revealing ways in which women are visualized as the site of pleasure and lust. The performance can thus be considered as an act of reclaiming the battered body as Critic Jeanie Forte asserts "women performance artists expose their bodies to reclaim them, to assert their own pleasure and sexuality, thus denying the fetishist pursuit to the point of creating a genuine threat to male hegemonic structures of women."¹³

The performance can be analyzed as creating a public and mental space within the performative domain. In this space, one can experience, relive, recreate, retell, reconstruct and refashion our society and culture. In this way, the 'staged reality' is constructive and constitutive in nature. The reality represented through naked body compels one to question the intriguing ways in which it fits into the larger dynamics of arousing social change. The body here gives one a vision but what is problematic is the change in the mindset of the audience. What change can a naked body bring through a stage performance addressing the elite crowd? The act which tends to criticize the lecherous male gaze turns repressive in a repressive society as such acts become an "act of pleasure" in some cases. Also at some point, the performer questions one's own expressive behaviour, as Mallika Taneja says, initially one swing between the 'voyeur's gaze' and 'guilt gaze', questioning oneself: what if one is sexualizing the space(stage).¹⁴



Source: Times of India.

Picture 1: Mallika Taneja: Donning clothes during a stage performance.

¹² Striff, Erin. "Bodies of Evidence: Feminist Performance Art." *Critical Survey*. 1997. p. 2.

¹³ Jeanie, Forte. "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism." *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case Baltimore. 1990. p. 263/

¹⁴ Nair, Malini. "'I was tired of hiding': Delhi based actor Mallika Taneja turns onstage nudity into act of protest." *Scroll.in*. March 20,2017

What one sees from such outrageous acts is different kinds of reactions ranging from utter shock and disgust to being bold and revolutionary. Apart from this, it becomes imperative to analyze the state of mind and self of a performer. Performing artist in the act is trying to regain one's space and sexuality through the expression of fragmented 'self'. Nudity comes from an urge to express the self; the female body enters the performative domain of protest in order to express the 'self', which is not something given to her by society(here) rather it is her 'own' construction. The unbearable pain that the body has gone through reverberates in the performance; thus making it an act of transgression done through "speaking" and "expressing" the body. As Maurice Merleau Ponty puts in:

"Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space..... For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions. Even our most secret affective movements, those most deeply tied to the humoral infrastructure, help to shape our perception of things."¹⁵

Dance as a medium of protest

The protest to claim the public spaces through public dancing cannot be unnumbered when it comes to women's movement as a performance. The discourse around the dancing body ranges from nationalist agenda of reclaiming the lost culture during the colonial period to the representation of gendered self to reclaim the lost and fragmented self in contemporary times. The fire within the self has triggered the consciousness of women, which initiated a move from light to darkness, from lies to truths and has opened wide space for change. The years of vulnerability, injustice hidden under the highly decorated clouds of patriarchy and power has been attacked by the most powerful medium of art. The body, which is the first sight of tolerance, has been used as a weapon to claim spaces. Dancing has allowed women to break the cages of dehumanization declaring the death of the gender binaries.

The contribution of acknowledged performers Mrinalini and Mallika Sarabhai cannot be sidelined while discussing art as a medium to occupy spaces for social change and distort gender binaries. The pioneer for intertwining dance for social change and to venture beyond the fixed boundaries of dance, the Sarabhai's created a space for performers; a space with a vision to look beyond the societal menaces. Dance, as a medium to break boundaries of gender,

¹⁵ Ponty, Maurice Merleau. *Maurice Merleau Ponty: Basic Writing*. Edited by Thomas Baldwin, 2004, p.36

initiated a shift from stories of exploitation to empowerment and from subjugation to liberation. Mallika Sarabhai, through her dance activism, created space for change and development by not bowing to the social norms. Dancing per se is a viable alternative for women to craft, recraft, and deconstruct their identities in the new light of liberation. The new light is not the one given to them by the so-called conceptualized society but has been crafted by one's own true selves through solidarity. Her dancing body created a space on stage and in society, which transgresses the image of a woman constructed by patriarchy.¹⁶

In a world where the notion of gender equality and gender equity are just the political and social strategy to subjugate women, transcending boundaries and subverting the patriarchal spaces reiterate the desire to recodify the constructed narratives. Mallika's journey from being an interpreter of art to the creator of art, which pines to bring change into the lives of the marginalized sections of the society, has helped expand the role of art in marking space for women's issues in India. As she believes that "the performing arts can play a vital role in reaching out to people, especially those who are deprived of social and educational privileges." Her first solo performance, *Shakti: the power of women* (1989) marked an initiation of her own contemporary dance vocabulary. Distorting the age-old belief that women are deemed to be under the shadows of patriarchy, holding an inferior status in myths and dharma's, she criticized the hegemonic discourse through her projection of "*Stri Shakti- In Search of the Goddesses*". The performance through her expressions and movements reflected a society that is socially constructed. Divulging herself and the audience into the portrayal of the goddess (who is a woman in a society) in the so-called 'goddess worshipping' society she created space for women to question the age old perpetuation and create new identity and space. From showcasing Laxmi, Saraswati, Ganga, and Kali as the all-powerful goddesses from the prism of patriarchy to the powerful portrayal of Draupadi and Sati, the performance reiterates the fact that the narratives are chains binding women to the darkness of the demon called patriarchy.¹⁷ Decoding Savitri's myth and valorizing her act, she says Savitri needs to be eulogized not for the patriarchal reasons but for her wit and intelligence as she defeated Yama, the god of death. She further added, "No where does Savitri say, 'I refuse to live if my husband dies. Instead, she says, 'I refuse to let my husband die.'"¹⁸

¹⁶ Grau, Andree. "Political Activism and South Asian Dance: The Case of Mallika Sarabhai." April 2007. p. 49.

¹⁷ Roy, Meghna. "Heels in Search of Goddess." *Wordpress*. February 11, 2016.

¹⁸ Roy, Sandip. "The importance of being Mallika Sarabhai." *FirstPost*. September 19, 2011.



Picture 2: Mallika Sarabhai performing Stri Shakti- In Search of the Goddess

The performance thus challenged the male supremacy in the mythological narratives thereby contextualizing the contemporary situation of women where mythological narratives still hold importance. The tales narrated visualized how sufferings of women are deified, which is the plot of patriarchy to defile women while adoring them. Art thus becomes a space to negotiate the gender binaries; space wherein the reality can be brought into the purview of people. Space becomes a ground for revolutionary change and if art cannot instigate or challenge the suffocating norms that are stifling lives of women then it is “as futile as the ornamentation of a naturally beautiful body.”¹⁹ The women-centric works of Mallika Sarabhai that position her as an ‘artist’ are *Draupadi*; *Sita’s Daughter*; *V is for Violence*; and *Colours of the Heart*. The *Colours of the Heart* is centered on how the lives of women overburdened by customs and traditions mark the end of innocence.²⁰

Contemporary dance, which includes public dancing as well, tends to end the dark black space of terror and disgrace. The tattered body, which refuses to accept itself after the violation through sexual harassment, is transmogrified through dancing. Bodies, which are not identified under the fixed gender binaries, also create their own vocabulary through dancing. For instance, Mandeep Raikhy used performance art to challenge the sexist anti-gay laws in India.²¹ The performance displays sexual positions and intimacy between the two male

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Grau, Andree. “Political Activism and South Asian Dance: The Case of Mallika Sarabhai.” April 2007. p. 47.

bodies in a bedroom-like setting. The idea is to make people comfortable with the discomfort or to say 'naturalize' the 'unnatural'. The sexually moving bodies in the performance powerfully convey the sexual desires of gays in India, which remain subdued under the rigid norms. The movements and expression of a performer display elements of protest against laws which 'criminalizes' one's sexuality and identity. As the performer himself believes that having one's own sexuality 'criminalized' by law plays an important role in perceiving and shaping one's self image. Performance is one such medium through which one can endeavor to bring change in the mindsets.



Source: Msn News

Picture 3: The performing body of Mandeep Raikhy depicting gay sexual positions and intimacy between gay partners.

The spaces thus claimed symbolically speak; they narrate the history of marginalization and subordination. They also tend to create new spaces by redefining the old or neglected ones. For instance, the story of Sita's marginalization is re-enacted through Sita's perspective by different women performers. Even the so-called grand narratives of Partition, which were occupied by men, are being redefined to include personal narratives of women. Women's movement from the beginning has used performance as the sole medium to speak for them. The contemporary *One Billion Rising Revolution (OBR)* has been inclined towards performances, considering it the only domain where change through celebration and solidarity can be attained. As they

believe, “Art provokes thought, stirs the heart and imagination, and has the power to incite people into action.”²²

The act to claim spaces tends one to break the gender norms even in the remotest part of the country. The fire of change has stirred the desire for change and freedom. For instance, the Dalit women from the Musahar community, Bihar deconstructed the space by breaking the age-old myth that only men can play drums. They persisted and initiated their own band named, *Nari Gunjan* band, thus acclaiming their space. Music provides them freedom and livelihood as they perform at weddings, ceremonies and during festivals and community gatherings.²³



Figure 4: Performance by the Nari Gunjan band

Source: One Billion Rising Newsletter, January 2020

The relationship between gender and space is palpable in the society; a society where gender relations are established through the different practices in order to produce a space for one's own individuality. Through art, the peripersonal spaces are expanded thus compressing the interspaces between people. The space between male and female are also transposed to a different domain through art. The performative space has the capacity to perturb the gender binaries and create space for women in public space where they can be ‘who they are’(true self). Women’s body that has long been the object of the gaze, speak in performance; the body writes, performs, discards and recreates new narratives. Thus, one can see that in order to take a move from alienated and isolated being to inclusiveness not only in the society but also towards one’s own self and identity has built up spaces where women can breathe the air of freedom, but still one cannot assert that full freedom has been achieved as there are miles to go before one sleeps.

Printing a Revolution through Posters

The anatomy of protests has lingered upon the conflicted zone prevalent in the nation, which includes grievances and curtailed freedom of expression. The protest, seen as a collective voice and conscience of the nation, questions the unequal status and biases prevailing

²² Eve Ensler. “One Billion Rising Revolution.” *webpage*.

²³ Badhwar, Natasha. “The rhythm of women who beat their own drums.” *Livemint*. October 31, 2016.

in the society. The protest movements in India have used art as a medium to articulate the collective conscience and raise the consciousness of its people. Posters are one such art form that has a voice of its own; a visualized voice representing narratives of anger, trauma, and injustice thereby critiquing the uneven ideologies. It is an “ephemeral form of art and communication”²⁴, which is used as an embodiment of solidarity, support and a tool to confront opposition. Different metaphors, symbols, and archetypes are used through posters to claim back the spaces that are highly gendered, leaving an immediate and deep impression upon the spectator. In order to re-establish a gender identity construction through posters, it becomes imperative to understand how the symbolic and metaphorical space in a poster is an effective tool to bring change and blur the highly gendered shadow lines?

Women’s movement from the beginning has campaigned for the amelioration of women’s condition through art. The malaise that the country suffers from exhibits stark reality of a society where women are considered as the disadvantaged section, the categorical ‘other’ in the society. The deconstruction of such constructed gender identity and binaries bring into purview the need to break the shackles and occupy spaces that are taken away from women under the garb of patriarchy and domination. Protest through posters is like printing a revolution on the colorful, eye-catching placards. The concern of women’s movement has been mapped through the symbolic images in the posters, which created space to locate the multilayered issues such as violence, injustice, and discrimination. What makes posters an effective tool of protest is not just the valuable and aesthetic documentation it provides but the larger problems it addresses along with the anger of the person involved in the making. It is through this act of individual or group activity that the collective voice finds graphic representation.

Women’s movement from the early days has been preoccupied with various forms of violence that are pertinent enough to put into consideration. The violence (public and private) includes different forms such as rape, dowry, widow immolation, acid attacks, wife battering, and child sexual abuse. Beginning from the Mathura rape case (1972) to the Nirbhaya rape case (2012), the vulnerable position of women in the sexist society remains intact. The battle initiated long ago has covered miles but the victory is yet to be achieved. In this swing between the fight and victory the seething anger, silence, traumas can only be minimized by talking

²⁴ *Poster Women: A visual history of Women’s Movement in India*. 2006. p. 4.

about violence and pain. Since silence allows violence, so it becomes imperative for the one being suppressed to speak about the suppression. Women, living through the trauma develop different insights, which the one who has never lived in a trauma can hardly understand.²⁵ Precisely this is the reason why different genders have different perspectives on violence and sexual harassment. Analyzing poster as a text reveals various issues that are being addressed through posters. The visual representation of some of the issues tackled in order to create space for one's gender and self includes Violence, Health, Literacy, Marginalization, Religion, Environment, and Politics. Some of the posters speaking about injustice are discussed below.²⁶

The poster covers different facets of violence that women in a society are attuned to. The violence hidden within the caged four walls of the home to the violence at public places, the poster highlights the vulnerability of women living in a patriarchal society. Ranging from the voices of domination and subordination to domestic violence and wife battering and to sexual harassment, marital rape, and police brutality the poster is a visual vocabulary narrating the story of women negotiating for her own identity. It insists one to question the universality of male domination and subsequent ways to end violence against women.

Literacy campaigns, which initiated in the nineties, saw a number of women coming forward and expressing their desire to learn. It gave them the literal and metaphorical space to articulate the self; to talk about their issues of concern and most importantly to move out of the four walls. The initiative actually helped them to talk about the violence they face at their respective homes; the mutual stories about violence in literary circles provided them space wherein different 'hidden selves' merged into one.

Along with the fight mounted by women's movement at different levels, posters served the need to articulate the self of young girls and women who expressed their need and right to learn. Posters thus added colours to their imagination and the self-efficacy, which education can furnish. Some of the posters read as "I am learning to read so that I can read my life" and "Reading and writing help to know oneself." The poster picturizes the urge of a woman who is learning to write so that she can write her own destiny. The picture shows that women who are forced to work in fields by society want to learn and in the process, she throws away the

²⁵ Rajaram, Sneha. "Understanding mental illness: When Psychology fails to politicize, socialize its understanding of trauma". *FirstPost*. November 11, 2018.

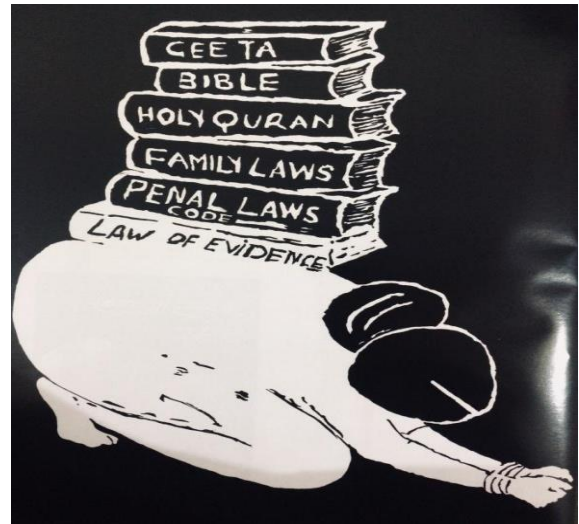
²⁶ The posters in the work have been collected from *Poster Women (2006)*, which is an archive of over 1500 posters from Indian Women's Movement. The collection covers different subjects, themes and areas that were important to the movement. The diverse collection has been sourced from over 200 groups all over the country.

axes and takes up the pen through which she can write about her victory. Nature is also seen in harmony with the women's desire to learn.



Picture 5: Poster addressing women's response to literacy.
Source: Poster Women, Zubaan

Identity politics has been one of the most important and difficult territories that the women's movement has been dealing with. The question that has spurred most of the Women's movement is the highly gendered creation of identity and roles. "Who" and "Why" behind the creation of identity has raised innumerable debates ranging from religious and cultural grounds to a moral one. The social and cultural institution defined the identity of a woman in religious terms where she is deemed to have an inferior status. Religion plays a precarious role in shaping one's social, cultural and personal identity. Thus, to deconstruct and dismantle the regressive structure became the foremost concern of women's movement. In order to defile the core belief, women's movement ventured on a journey to create their own narratives to assert that 'one is not born a woman but



becomes one'. In this process of being and becoming socialization through religious scriptures plays a pertinent role. The skepticism is seen in the anger against all religions through posters and vocalization. The poster depicts how women are burdened and crushed under the weight of religious texts. The identity of women is repressed by religious fundamentalism whose intolerance has led to her subversion.

‘Women’s rights are human rights’ has been a slogan of the women’s movement but the actual right has not been given to women. The stories of continuous negotiation and marginalization speak eloquently how her rights have been snatched away. One can imagine living in a country where even one’s right to live has been taken away. This instigates an urge to protest and to raise voice for oneself. The years of silence has made women’s life more vulnerable as the silence won’t let people live, if one wants to live then one has to raise one’s voice. The voice of an individual can also turn into a collective voice, which can bring the desired spaces back and put an end to gender binaries. The posters drawn in *Madhubani* style of *Mithila* painting beautifully and artistically use storytelling as a technique to articulate the presence of women in

all spheres of life. From public spaces such as streets and courts to the owners of public transport and working in fields and households, they question that when they are present everywhere, then why are they not given equal rights and freedom? Why do women still remain unequal?

Gender has been an analytical category that propels one towards analyzing how identities are being negotiated by claiming performative spaces such as dancing, theatre, and poster-making. It traces the journey of a performer in the making of a performance and sees how a performer transcends the boundaries of space in order to represent his/her own self.

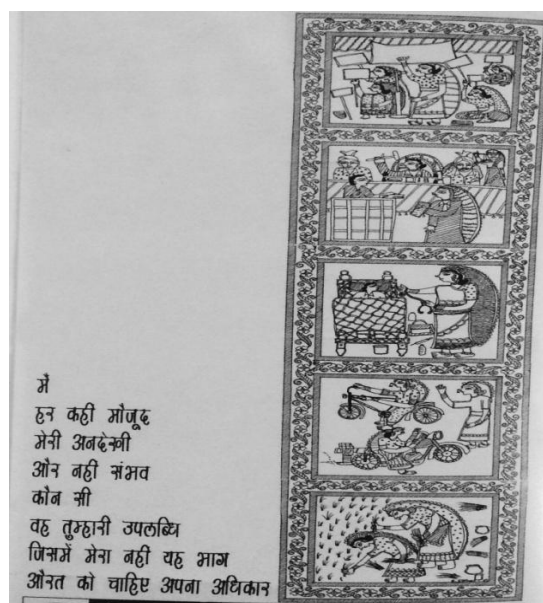


Figure 7: Posters expressing women's desire to claim spaces. Created by Mahila Jagran Kendra, Patna

The theatrical space tends to break the unprecedented norms challenging the patriarchal codes of gender and sexuality. What one sees through the subversive act of nude body on stage is the nudity of the values and norms, thus critiquing and asking for what reason women are supposed to don the clothes when the patriarchy and male gaze is buck naked. The agenda is to break the shackles of suppression and suffocation; to heal the broken wings and infuse subjectivity to women through the performance of the self. Thus the use of postmodernist deconstructive methodology, according to Jeanie Forte, “has led to the use of the body as an embodied presence, which by being the carrier of the accoutrements of signifiers and ideologies, could become a subversion of these very contexts.”²⁷

Dance as an expressive medium of protest communicate the expressions through the body and facial movements. The protesting body in a dance represents a body that is not the repertoire of religious and cultural conducts, but a body narrating stories of social and cultural injustice. The stage becomes a place of the explosion of the self of a performer producing a language which can neither be expressed through the words of mouth nor can be written. Analyzing dance from three different perspectives, which is - artistic, aesthetic and, cathartic and therapeutic brings into purview of the redefined notions of dance as a protest performance. Usually overpowered by beauty and adornment one tends to overlook the other elements of ‘*Rasas*.’ The ‘*Rasas*’ pertaining to aestheticism not only circumscribe the elements contemplating the mind through the fixed notions of beauty but also accommodates the elements arousing grotesque and ugliness within its purview. In protest performance, the body representing the ugliness in the society through the similar appearance has the tendency to evoke the senses.

The artistic creation has the propensity to present and represent ‘what’ and ‘how’ of a society and dance as an artistic medium can transcend the barriers of time and space. For instance, performances of Mrinalini Sarabhai performed decades ago still hold relevance. Thus one can allude that ‘artist and the art’ never dies. Dance is therapeutic in nature as it tends to make an individual feel one with the body and space; it has allowed breaking the cages of dehumanization declaring the death of the gender binaries.

Protest posters form an image in one’s mind that the mind cannot shake off. The use of pictures, slogans, and themes in posters express the color (self) of an individual. Posters as

²⁷ Forte, Jeanie. “Women’s Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism.” *Theatre Journal*. 1988. p. 220.

symbols of protest use a visual vocabulary to convey a socially conscious message. As an art expressing different shades of the self, posters tend to reclaim spaces and open up closed minds. It can visually record campaigns, map histories and memorialize events. While visualizing a poster one is inclined to dig deep down and think about the meaning that the art is trying to convey. For instance, a poster depicting tattered shoes immersed in red blood will convey a more provocative message of the revolution than simply drawing people lamenting upon the bloodshed that revolution has brought. Thus, posters gravitate the viewer and the artist to come in terms with different perceptions and masked realities prevailing in the society.

The mode of expression of the self and opening up spaces in a performance began from people coming forward to share their personal stories of marginalization but ended up as a collective struggle. In a world where the notion of equality and equity are just the political and social strategy to subjugate people, transcending boundaries and subverting the suffocating spaces reiterate the desire to recodify the constructed narratives. The conjoint involvement of art and the society is akin to thunder and lightning. The thunder in society will always be lightened in art and vice-versa. Thus it is imperative to grasp the inextricable intertwining of the two in order to explore the self that is constructed in the society and reflected in art.

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Appy Hippie: The Unsung Hero Battered by the Bigotry of Mainstream Culture

Basil Thomas & Dr. Krishnan Namboothiri

Abstract: Cartoonist Toms' mischievous characters Boban and Molly are two domestic names in the households of Keralam for over 50 years, chiefly through the pages of the *Malayala Manorama Weekly*. He introduced the character Appy Hippie for the first time in "Bobanum Mollyum" in the *Malayala Manorama Weekly* in 1971. Appy Hippie is a village hippie portrayed as a jobless youth who is quite obsessed with the 'company of women'. Hippies distinguish themselves in their appearance from social etiquettes of attire and grooming. Consequently, a binary opposition is created between the hippie and the mainstream society. Toms portrays Appy Hippie by keeping the norms of moralism intact and projects him as a laughing stock. This portrayal is problematic because as a hippie, he is reduced to a womanizer, pickpocket and kidnapper. This paper attempts to claim that in the trajectory of Toms' cartoons, Appy Hippie is the scapegoat of mainstream bigotry and usually considered as a person with no more significance than as a comic character. As such, it attempts to see the character from the perspective of a liberal minded one-man army standing against the norms of an orthodox society.

Keywords: *Bobanum Mollyum*, Bigotry, Body shaming, Counterculture, Dominant culture, Hippie

Cartoonist Toms' mischievous characters Boban and Molly are two domestic names in the households of Keralam for over 50 years, chiefly through the pages of the *Malayala Manorama Weekly*. The cartoon characters were named eponymously after two children in his neighbourhood, Boban and Molly, who asked him one day to draw their picture. When he left *Malayala Manorama*, Toms commenced publishing *Bobanum Mollyum* in *Kalakaumudi*, to which *Malayala Manorama* objected legally. After a controversial legal battle between *Malayala Manorama* and Toms, *Bobanum Mollyum* began to appear as a comic magazine called *Tom's Magazine*.



The character, Appy Hippie, appeared for the first time in “Bobanum Mollyyum” in the *Malayala Manorama Weekly* in 1971. Appy, a hippie, is introduced as the son of a village verger (‘Kapyar’ in Malayalam) named Thomachettan of Marappil Family. On returning to his native village Keezhkamthooku Panchayath from Bangalore after his studies, he claimed that he is not Appy, but ‘Hippie’. When the villagers say that he is the son of ‘Kapyar Thomachettan’, he corrects them that it is not ‘Kapyar’ but ‘Hipyar’. Appy Hippie is a village hippie portrayed as a jobless youth who is quite obsessed with the ‘company of women’. The portrayal, however, consummates the nature of a typical womanizer. Apparently, his ‘hippieness’ happens to be a license to lead a bohemian life free from all sorts of worldly bondages. Appy Hippie, who is ‘twice removed’ from real hippie, brings to light the idea of the original Hippie culture.



Hippie culture is almost a counterculture, particularly a youth movement which has its origin in mid twentieth century America. The etymology of the word brings nuances of meaning from the African American slang as "sophisticated; currently fashionable; fully up-to-date". When the so-called "sophisticated; currently fashionable; fully up-to-date" found its real manifestation, it challenged the orthodox way of thinking and being. Hippies created their own communities, listened to psychedelic music, embraced the sexual revolution, and used drugs such as cannabis, LSD, and psilocybin mushrooms to explore altered states of consciousness.

1970s in the west witnessed the decline of Hippie Culture, but cartoonist Toms started celebrating the hippie culture in Keralam through his cartoons in the 1970s.

According to Malcolm X's 1964 autobiography, the word 'hippie' in 1940s Harlem had been used to describe a specific type of white man who "acted more Negro than Negroes". It brings the notion of what hippies ought to be. The concept of 'other' makes it clear that a hippie is someone who doesn't have the polished qualities of a white man. This binary opposition catches the attention of the mass public. The concept of 'outlaw' emerges here. The grotesque appearance of our village hippie, Appy Hippie makes it clear that Toms followed the ideology of Malcom X. The society tamed and groomed by the unwritten rules and laws treat him as an alien and attributes the ill-names of 'rapist' and 'pickpocket', and Appy Hippie becomes a victim just because of his appearance.



Hippies sought to free themselves from societal restrictions, choose their own way, and find new meaning in life. An expression of hippie independence from societal norms was found in their standard of dress and grooming, which made hippies instantly recognizable to one another, and served as a visual symbol of their respect for individual rights. Through their appearance, hippies declared their willingness to question authority, and distanced themselves from the 'straight' and 'square' (i.e., conformist) segments of society. Appy Hippie deliberately chooses the attire of a nomad, and keeps himself away from the rest of the village. This unorthodox dressing style and appearance makes him a prey to the moralistic and duplicitous society. Once he tries to save an abandoned kid, and he gets the reward from its mother in the form of slaps and verbal abuse as she mistook him as a kidnapper because of his appearance.



The common stereotype on the issues of love and sex had it that the hippies were licentious, having wild sex orgies, seducing innocent teenagers and exhibiting every manner of sexual perversion. The hippie movement appeared concurrently in the midst of a rising Sexual Revolution, in which many views of the status quo on this subject were being challenged. When Toms brought this idea to the microcosmic level of a village, he moulded Appy Hippie as a village cupid, a universal sarcasm on voyeurism. The recreational or 'fun' side of sexual behavior is celebrated here within the cartoon column. The orthodox society couldn't digest the idea of free sex and they force Appy Hippie to settle with a marriage. They bring marriage proposals for him to domesticate him to the traditional setting of a family. The character is so broad minded that he gives consent to those proposals. The moral policing of the society becomes the villain in every marriage proposal.



The hippies inherited various countercultural views and practices regarding sex and love from the Beat Generation which encouraged spontaneous sexual activity and experimentation like group sex, public sex and homosexuality. So open relationship became an accepted part of the hippy lifestyle and its metamorphosis can be seen in the contemporary concept of 'living together'. Following this, the village Casanova in question here tries not to involve in a permanent relationship. For instance, the experimental life of Appy Hippie urges him to commit to an inter-caste marriage. The marriage, however, is short-lived because of his sincere revelation to the bride that he had actually committed to the inter-caste marriage for the benefit of a reward of thousand rupees.



The hippies were heirs to a long line of bohemians that includes William Blake, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Hesse, Arthur Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde, Aldous Huxley et al. For the historian of the anarchist movement Ronald Creagh, the hippie movement could be considered as the spectacular revival of utopian socialism. Toms, it is true, skillfully created a ‘nowhere land’ in the background of Keralam and placed a hippie in connection with all the social and political confrontations occurring in the milieu.

The creation of Appy Hippie laughs at the so-called counterculture and adds colour to the evergreen mischievous siblings, Boban and Molly. Yet, the character also demands the theoretical framework for the erudite group to go for a detailed pedantic analysis. Existentialism might have made the village hippie to live in the present and worry about nothing other than being amidst female folk, ie., as a soft womanizer. Like the Epicureans, he eats, drinks, and is merry; for tomorrow, he knows, he will die. The close connection of music and hippie culture as that of Beats and Blues is obvious in the portrayal of Appy Hippie with a guitar and Tabla. But as in the case of every slapstick comedy, it serves the purpose of a weapon for others to ‘beat’ the hippie and bring ‘blues’.



The dominant mainstream culture in the cartoons, represented by the village community, is hostile to the counterculture, represented in deeds and appearance by Appy Hippie. This hostility is visible in the public campaigning organized by the villagers against the hippie culture with banners. Youngsters with long hair and outgrown beards are all haunted by the orthodox public, who go to the extreme of hunting them down and shaving their heads.



An instance of body shaming Appy is subjected to is the heartbreaking reply he receives regarding a photograph sent for a marriage proposal. The response of the bride's party is an enquiry about his 'species'. Such belittling incidents should not be ticked off as comic but they are pointers to the ways in which the hostile villagers, the representatives of the dominant culture, use their muscle power to dominate the divergent thoughts of liberal minded people like Appy. The act of the public forcefully catching him and shaving his head is the clear example for intolerance to his queer appearance which cannot be accommodated by the moralistic mass culture. On closer analysis of the cartoons featuring Appy Hippie, it can be seen that the physical abuse and the entailing mental torture never stops. Even Boban and Molly, the apparently 'naïve' little children, get an upper hand to lead the prank on the young man because they are backed by the support of the mass conscience.



Slowly, as Appy Hippie becomes concerned about his physique, the intentions of the mainstream culture represented by the cartoonist himself, the characters and the reading public materialize the goal of making him a victim of body shaming. He, a human being with emotions and feelings, asks others whether he is acceptable to others because of his thin physique. This diffidence and inferiority imposed on Appy warns, in a humorous but brutal manner, any liberal minded reader to confine his counter cultural traits for fear of facing a similar destiny.



In a nutshell, it can be said that Appy Hippie ought to be given more focus than as a hippie but as a revolutionary character in constant conflict with the dominating moralistic and orthodox culture of the 1970s Keralam. As a liberal countercultural, his lifestyle and ways of presenting himself was not accommodated in the mainstream culture. He should be appreciated as a one man army against the prevailing norms. This paper attempted to claim that in the trajectory of Toms' cartoons, he was slowly 'becoming' the scapegoat of mainstream bigotry and was used as a warning for those who attempt to lead a life of freewill and joy. As such, he deserves special attention more than as a comic character, but as an unsung hero battered by the intolerance of the highly orthodox mainstream culture.

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