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Women's Initiatives

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Editorial

The focus of this number is on poetry which are representations of resistance. Samra Fuad's paper "Mulligatawny Dreams: Encountering the No-Man's Land Between the Mother Tongue and Post-Colonial Language" views the rejection of colonial rules of language as one of the most obvious manifestations of deliberate anti-colonial actions in the battle to reclaim a national identity post colonisation. In a multicultural state like Keralam, this becomes a difficult exercise. We celebrate bi-lingual writers like Kamala Das who wrote in their mother tongues as well as English. Swetha Antony's paper "A Journey with no Return": Kamala Das and the Poetic Manifesto of Flânerie" engages with the evolution in the critical approaches towards understanding the poetry of Kamala Das in English, beginning with how her poetry was perceived as an epitome of Modernism within the discourse of postcolonialism. The focus of this paper is on redefining her literary identity by imbibing the nuances associated with the notion of flânerie.

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"A Journey with no Return": Kamala Das and the Poetic Manifesto of Flânerie

SWETHA ANTONY

Abstract: Kamala Das has carved a unique space for herself within Indian Writings in English with a career spanning almost six decades. By the time her first collection of poetry Summer in Calcutta (1965) was published she was already a name to reckon with. Being nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984 did catapult her to fame on the global front and consequently her oeuvre has further gone on to impact the polemics surrounding the understanding of what constitutes world/contemporary literature. This paper engages with the evolution in the critical approaches towards understanding her poetry in English beginning with how her poetry was perceived as an epitome of Modernism within the discourse of Postcolonialism and going on to contextualise the potential of her poetry to engage with the evolving critical discourses of Geocriticism. The focus will be on redefining her literary identity by imbibing the nuances associated with the notion of flânerie. Etymologically, it implies aimless wandering, but as a critical theoretical concept it engages with the contours of belonging by questioning the discursive practices of gender that comes into play in the accessibility of spaces.

Keywords: Kamala Das, Indian Writings in English, Poetry, Cosmopolitanism, Flânerie, Flaneuse

Introduction

Poets are edible

material, even one at

death's door can provide

a research scholar

a memorable feast.

-Kamala Das[i]

Kamala, Kamala Das, Madhavikutty and Kamala Surraiyya[ii], the writer, the persona or the enigmatic literal presence known to us through these names, is predicated within the academic and to a great extent, within the non-academic space also, as a flaneuse — a passionate observer, who is at ease within multiplicities, who feels at home everywhere, who is at the centre of everything yet remains elusive. This paper engages with the legacy of hers within the ambit of a vibrant area like Indian Literatures in English, particularly poetry, which she wrote under the pseudonym- Kamala Das (hence this becomes the referent for this paper). As far as this category goes, Indian poets have deftly manoeuvred language and the need to discern their multiple ways of engagement with words particularly in their engagement with its essential feature — within the universal space there is a prominent role for the particular, the local. Thus, in effect, this paper tries to contextualise Kamala Das' poetry within the discourse of Indian Literatures in English and World/ Contemporary Literature by foregrounding two parameters, language and location, even when it is not limited by these.

Kamala Das has a literary lineage going back to the roots of the Malayalam literary tradition as her mother, Balamani Amma and her maternal uncle Nalapatt Narayan Menon were prominent Malayalam literary figures and so was Das under the 'nom de plume', Madhavikutty. Equally important is her role in the comparatively new, yet equally vivid tradition of Indian Literatures in English. She was among the harbingers of Modernism and had a substantial formative influence on the younger poets, directly, through Bahutantrika[iii] – an informal literary gathering she held at her home in Bombay in the 1960s and indirectly through her verse. Running parallel to these traditions are the legacies of women's writing in India[iv] and women's writing[v] at large. Furthermore, as Devika Nair concludes in her article, "Kamala Das: many selves, many tongues":

Perhaps the greatest "work" of hers is the alter self whom she

created, this mysterious and puzzling, ambiguous and sphinx-like

"persona" that is Kamala Das, who emerges from her writings taking

Protean forms – to fascinate and charm, to tease and torment, to hold

and enthral, and to reveal her world anew with each new reading.[vi]

Her situatedness[vii] within these various traditions and her engagement with them from the point of language and location, as a nomad[viii], is problematized in this paper, by focusing on the ambivalence in her verse. A critical overview of her oeuvre is given, followed by a detailed engagement with her poem "An Introduction" as a means of understanding how far the discourse surrounding flânerie with modern/ postmodern identity is reflected in her works on various levels.

Palimpsestous Kamala Das

Today let this paper receive my dripping blood. Let me write like one not in the least burdened by the thoughts about the future, turning each word into a negotiation with my life lived so far. I like to call this poetry. I like to call this poetry even if my words lose their music when, after raising in my innards a beautiful liquid turbulence, they come to surface in the relatively solid contours of prose. I had always longed for the strength necessary to write this. But poetry does not grow ripe for us; we have to grow ripe enough for poetry[ix]

As is the case with a significant majority of writers in the tradition of Indian Literatures in English, Kamala Das was a bilingual writer – writing in English and Malayalam – her mother tongue; experimenting with literary genres such as poetry, short story, novels, plays and autobiography. Evidently, she made her presence felt across languages and genres. Even though my research focuses on her poetry in English, the entire gamut of her works is taken into consideration in order to understand her poetry, mainly because there is an acknowledged interchange between genres and languages in her case. Critics[x] have pointed to her poetic prose and prosaic poetry and also to subtle presence of Malayalam in her writings in English and vice versa.

Though my research accounts for these and many more reverberations within the works of Kamala Das, the major works that are critically examined include eight poetry collections of Kamala Das published between 1965 and 2009. They are Summer in Calcutta (1965), The Descendants (1967), The Old Playhouse and other Poems (1973), Tonight, this

Savage Rite (1979) – a collection in collaboration with Pritish Nandy, Collected Poems Vol.1 (1984), The Best of Kamala Das (1991) edited by P. P. Raveendran, Only the Soul Knows how to Sing (1996) and Closure: Some Poems and a Conversation (2009) – a collaborated work with Suresh Kohli. Other than these, her short story collections, novels, and autobiography can offer insights to understand her craft. Wages of Love (2013), a posthumous collection of her unpublished works edited by Suresh Kohli and her biography The Love Queen of Malabar: Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das (2010) by Merrily Weisbord too become crucial texts to understand the many patterns that have gone into the palimpsest that she creates. Adding to these is the latest collection, Kamala Das: Selected Poems (2014) edited with an insightful introduction by Devindra Kohli, a close friend of hers and a prominent scholar on her work.

There are certain aspects that gain prominence while examining the poetry of Kamala Das – how words and/or languages are manipulated to aid in comprehending the many apprehensions arising out of lived experiences; methods of narration that are relied on to achieve this and the consequent creation of an exclusive niche. Moreover, the evocation of the metaphor of palimpsest and the implications of the act of erasure are pertinent as far as Kamala Das is concerned. It becomes one of the ways in which the paradox, contradictions and multifariousness within her and their consequent immanence onto the ambivalence in her verse, can be approached, which will be reflected in the next section through the analysis of "An Introduction".

The thematic concerns of her poetry testifies to the openness that she practised towards the many experiences in her life. They range from nostalgia for her lost childhood, land and ancestral home to her personal engagement with dualisms, arising out of her encounters with various places, people and religions, establishing her as a migrant in space and time. Moreover, her seemingly unconventional style of writing filled with "vernacular oddities"[xi], where the voice operates between ideolect and dialect, stresses a claim over her roots, on the notion of locality. It can be conjectured that the confessional mode of writing that she utilised gave her the much needed dispensations for working within these apparent inconsistencies and/or paradoxes, though she tapped the immense possibilities that arose from these and at times moved beyond "the politically correct anguish of writing in English" as indicated by Eunice de Souza.[xii]

Still, she brings in elements that move beyond the local realm in her poetry, highlighting a pan—Indian, and on some level, a cosmopolitan world beyond the notion of a globalised or universalised world. The apparent vacillant position of hers can be understood as her

attempt at creating a dialogue between the socio-political milieu in which she was living and the evolving linguistic milieu within it, thereby linking it to the shades of cosmopolitanism. An understanding of the panorama painted by Das through her life and writing and her gradual yet informed acceptance of the diversity of self opens the evolving frontiers of the discourse of Cosmopolitanism, which on many levels still continues to engage with the aftermaths of colonialism and a post-colonial society in transition. Incidentally, this is also an aspect that played a poignant part in establishing Das as a strong poetic voice.

It becomes imperative here to state that my attempt is not merely to establish Kamala Das as a cosmopolitan poet but to place her poetry within the framework of the evolving discourses of cosmopolitanism which has moved beyond the initial polemics as an expression associated with geographical space[xiii]. The choice of cosmopolitanism as a theoretical base also arises from the need for a refreshingly new approach towards poetry in English written by Indian writers, as is explicated by Anisur Rahman and Ameena Kazi Ansari in their essay "Indian English Women Poets: Some reflections on Language, Location, Ideology":

It is not enough to say that our women poets reflect and share the major concerns of the broader post colonial condition. In fact, this would be a gross misreading for the simple reason that our post coloniality is of a different make and mix, and needs to be read keeping a different parameter in mind. Such a reading would hold value not only for us but also for others who inappropriately nurture the notion of universalistic postcolonial paradigms of reading, making it amount to yet another hegemonic/colonialist move to create essentialist paradigms of reading.

In my analysis of Kamala Das' entire oeuvre, it is been observed that if it is at all possible to posit a stage-wise evolution going by the chronology of her publication, three possible stages that can be identified. However, it has to be explicitly stated here that there are many of her poems that refuse to be tied down to a chronology. Thus, to posit a division, first stage comprises of the works published between 1965 and 1984. This stage is characterised by poems arising out of the liminal space created by an intense nostalgia and the need to understand her self within the various displacements to places such as Kolakata, Mumbai and Pune. The underlying sense that is communicated is a sense of ambivalence regarding the assertion of a self, leading to a crisis, where she is not sure which self to assert- the private self or the public vocational self. 1985- 1996, forms the second stage, which is characterised by a sense of an awakened social consciousness, characterised by a journey

from interior to exterior with intense self-reflection on both, and an assertion of self. Third stage can be identified in the period from 1997 to 2009, where the dominant aspect is a sense of ennui and the notion that gaining closure, as far as self and identity are concerned, is a myth.

There is an inconsistency in the themes if the chronology of her published poems are taken into account. Since there is a need to address this, her poems are grouped under different heads by identifying a point of liminality. However the poems listed under each head are not bound by the chronological idea of time as implied earlier. She started publishing in 1965, but P.P. Raveendran's research suggests that she started writing earlier. So, when her entire oeuvre is taken into consideration there are about seven decades of writing that have to be accounted for. This aspect poses as a challenge to any kind of classification of her poetry. Hence this classification tries to move beyond it and tries to understand the evolution of her poetic theme and style in conjunction with her life.

Poetry and more importantly creativity for Kamala Das originates from a point of liminality. For instance, a majority of her oeuvre include the poems that seem to have developed from a liminal space which she occupied while she longed for her Tharavadu, her Grandmother and her ancestral land and folktales inherent within, from her displaced locations. We could also read this into her childhood in Kolkata too. The liminal space that she straddled due to her physical displacement creates a sense of nostalgia within her. Another such space could be the one initiated by her psychological displacement created by a domesticated life and this stage is characterised by a sense of being experienced as opposed to the possible stage of innocence in her. There is also a phase characterised by a sense of ennui.

Since spatial dynamics takes on a new meaning when approaching her from the concept of flânerie, it is pertinent to note that her poems seems to be evoking a sense of aimless wandering, yet going onto find new areas for exploration. For instance, poems evoking nostalgia such as " My Grandmother's House", " A Hot Noon in Malabar", "Nani", to name a few, are representations or re- interpretation of a memory and it reflects a sense of timelessness and such poems, pertaining to a longing for past are found throughout her career.

Another major theme that her poetry takes up is a certain kind of self reflexiveness about creativity and sea becomes a recurring symbol in many of the poems, evoking a sense of transition. It can be posited these poems represent the liminal space from which the creative

person called Kamala Das came into being. The most prominent examples of such poems are "Words", "Loudposters", "Someone Else's Songs", " Composition", " Annamalai Poems", "The Munafique" etc…

Another major chunkk would be her City Poems such as "The Dance of the Eunuchs", "The Freaks", "The Wild Bougainvilla" among others. These poems encapsulate a large corpus of her poems which engages with a sense of dialectics between binaries/ dualities such as love and lust, body and soul, physical and spiritual. There is also an evident note of hatred or a critique of misogynistic tendencies in these poems which could also refer to the transitions from an apparent sense of innocence to that of experience, transition within herself into a stereotype and the simultaneous need to break away from it.

Another significant intervention comes in through her Hospital Poems such as "After the Illness", " My November", "The Lunatic Asylum£, " Fathima" etc and the ones on Old age such as "At Chiangi Airport", "Life's Obscure Parallell", "Old Cattle", "On Ageing", "End of Youth" etc. These poems also evoke a sense of nostalgia, a looking back, but there is a slight difference here as it comes with the realisation that it is not possible to gain closure. Interestingly, if we consider her poems from the 1990s onwards there are some significant deviations. During this phase she wrote very little and from the themes of the poems in this period it can be understood that most of them might be written from the notes she might have had for poems from earlier times, before she took ill. Incidentally, most of the poems dwell upon the journeys abroad particularly her stay in Canada with her biographer Emily Weisebord. Most of the poems included in this group are contemplation on her life and more poignantly offers a retrospective look at her lived reality. For instance, there are poems that intensely question her conversion to Islam. It could also be noted here that this is the phase in which she wrote her only collection of poetry in Malayalam "Yaa Allah".

Intervening through "An Introduction"

"An Introduction", one of Kamala Das'oft- quoted and anthologised poems was first published in her 1965 collection Summer in Calcutta, has come to be understood as the poem that defines and defies her. The choice of this poem as an entry point into Kamala Das is legitimised by the words of the critic K Satchidhanandhan, " 'An Introduction' is itself a polyphonic text with several of the poet's voices seeking articulation in a single verbal construct. […] she situates herself more specifically using nationality, complexion, place of birth and the languages known, an ironic filling up of an ungiven form." He viewed this poem as a comprehensive articulation of the different individual and social components

that go into the making of women's writing, which also contextualises this paper. (Das 1996: 11) Evoking the image of palimpsest and the idea of tracing out the apparent layers also get a push from the above words which poignantly highlight the irony at the centre of "I" in the universe of Das. "I" as stated above, becomes an ironic filling up of a non-existing "I" – a presence which has at its centre a discernable absence — a black hole to put it metaphorically– and powerfully evokes the Derridean trace.

On the other hand, the engagement with 'I' on multiple levels in the poem points to the inevitability of it being qualified as a palimpsest. The pattern discerned on the surface, — the "I"— is not composed of a single layer, but there are multiple layers that go into it, enriching it— 'I' — as a whole. This section goes on to unveil each layer and interrogates the possibility of other layers which makes their presence felt even in their absence. The poem by touching upon many aspects that define a person also problematizes 'I' starting off with the lines: "I don't know politics, but I know the names/Of those in power, and can repeat them like/Days of week, or names of months, beginning with /Nehru. I am Indian… (1965: 62)[xiv]

These lines consciously link 'I', the idea of self, to the inevitability of a political awareness or consciousness, ironically positioned from an apparent vantage position of ignorance. Clearly, the tinge of sarcasm has to be understood here as she alludes to the fact that the only fact needed to assert the identity of 'I' as an Indian, is to merely by heart the names of those in power. Thus, the first 'I' that is encountered— highlighting a political consciousness linked to the self— is, in itself, a paradox playing with the ideas of knowledge and ignorance and at the outset, situates the whole poem as an outcome of an inevitable power play.

This particular idea of the self becomes pertinent while engaging with the idea of cosmopolitanism too, particularly if its roots to the early Greco- Roman engagements with the idea of citizenship are considered. The debates around the aspect of universality in being a citizen of a nation, such as India, given the notion of unity in diversity that is upheld and the implications of an apparent proclamation of locality, which is in itself beset with problems, is problematized by Das, as is evident from the lines that follow: "I am Indian, very brown, born in/Malabar,…" (1965:62)

Clearly, this 'I' linked to the initial 'I' and among the many 'I's to be encountered, engages with a physical situatedness— 'I', here is an entity defined by geographical space, and on a broader plane looks into the political subtexts of a self— 'I'being a citizen of

India, ironically, called a dark skinned Malabari[xv]. It is a conscious act here evoking the paradox of existence – yoking together a universalist discourse and a regional one— a pertinent part of the discourse of postcolonialism, popularly known as postcolonial paradox[xvi]— while engaging with the notion of a nation or national identity. Interestingly, her play with locality within the nationalistic paradigm points to those skeins of cosmopolitan thought which, in effect, critiques the notion of homogenisation at the centre of postcolonial discourse. This is along the lines of what Robert Spenser saw as cosmopolitanism – self-awareness imbibing within it the broader sense of moral and political responsibility. [xvii]

The subtle implication of the presence of traces or subtexts that go into the creation of 'I', in these lines alludes to the motif of palimpsest. 'I' that is encountered is not just limited to the same 'I', it enters into a play with the absent 'I'— effecting a trace of 'I' to allude to Derrida. This oft-quoted poem of hers is an epitome of how her words move beyond superficiality, creating an effect similar to ripples in a still pond, ripples which carry reverberations from the depths of the pond and can go on to manifest itself to the very ends and circumference of the pond. Interestingly, the next 'I' to be encountered is linked to the linguistic domain powerfully forcing our attention to the role played by language in locating the self, as Octavio Paz proclaims in Alternating Current:

Literature is the expression of a feeling of deprivation, a recourse against a sense of something missing. But the contrary is also true: Language is what makes us human. It is a recourse against the meaningless noise and silence of nature and history. Living implies speaking, and without speech man cannot have a full life. Poetry, which is the perfection of speech —language speaking to itself—is an invitation to enjoy the whole of life (172)

These lines allude to Das' preoccupation with language, one of the themes that she deals with throughout her poetic career. She rightly proclaims:

I speak three languages, write in

Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,

English is not your mother- tongue. Why not leave

Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? (1965: 62)

At the outset, the reference to more than one language here evokes a new set of problems and simultaneously evokes a sense of ambiguity and ambivalence.

She does not spell out explicitly which are the languages that she refers to in these lines. It can be assumed that the three languages here could refer to Malayalam- her mother tongue, English- the tongue she adopted and/ or Bengali with which she might have had close encounters as she spent a considerable part of her childhood in Calcutta. However, as it was Bengali that she was not competent in, it could be posited as the reason why the three slowly diminished into two. The two could very easily be posited as English and Malayalam as she refers to it as the languages she writes in. Yet, the move towards one is still a matter of contention as it could be either of the two or a unique language of her imaginary realm.

Underlying all these is her reference to a language in which she dreams – the presence of the third language, beset with ambiguities could imply a kind of prototypical language shared by all and which for her radiates from somewhere within. This aspect becomes crucial in implying a going back to a consciousness, an oneness with nature as is also implied in the aboriginal tradition of dreamtime[xviii] or a female language as outlined by the theories of Luce Irigaray.[xix]

While engaging with her negotiations with language, the journey from three to two and finally to one has to be scrutinised. However, it is also possible to see her slow migration from a dialectics arising out of the encounters between the three to a sort of a binary relation in the two, moving onto a continuum, establishing an emanating merging of the two into each other forming a single language. Hence, the trajectory from three to two to one need not be seen reductively as a shrinking down of languages but could be seen as a means of the three converging into one which gains relevance as the poem progresses.

However, apart from the polemics surrounding the use of languages she is also acknowledging the very dominant presence of dualisms that privilege the act of speaking over writing and in the dynamics and the dialectics involving these two acts the act of dreaming is somehow sidelined. She emphasises on this third language as a language

without any barriers as such. But she does powerfully evoke the need to endorse this quintessential language within and tap its many resources. However, it has to be noted that she does privilege Indian English, (which makes one wonder if this is the one that she talks about) as is evident from the following lines from the same poem: "The language I speak/ Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness/ All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half/ Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest," (1965:62)

On the other hand, another pertinent aspect here is the privilege of choice when it comes to a language which gets contextualised in the polemics surrounding the same in postcolonial discourses. This aspect of choice, thus, becomes a pertinent issue not just in the case of Kamala Das but also with the whole oeuvre of postcolonial literature. As is evident, from the lines quoted above, she is vehemently advised against using the language of her choice, against writing in English, as it is not her 'mother tongue'. This is an issue that she will be revisiting throughout her career and on many levels too and she rightly reasserts and reiterates her choice when she proclaims: "It is as human as I am human, don't/ You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my/ Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing/ Is to crows or roaring to the lions," (1965:62)

Inadvertently, if these lines are scrutinised, there is an added layer of contradiction, where, at one point, she talks about English as the language she writes in, against which she is warned, as it is an alien tongue, — an'other' tongue— and not her mother tongue. But, then, she moves on from the language she writes in to the language she speaks, but here she is referring to it as "half English, half Indian" which is the most honest and is claimed by her as the speech of her mind. It is interesting to see the evolution in the play with language in her universe. The journey from three to one runs parallel to the journey of English as the other to "half English, half Indian", from a language she writes in to the language she speaks. The view of Pritish Nandy on the same has to be used in this context: "She never wrote the English that others expected her to. She wrote it as it came to her. It was an unlearnt, unkempt language which turned into magic in her hands. It was the true language of poetry and it made Kamala Das what she was, one of the finest and truest poets of her generation."(103)[xx]

These lines also points to the polemics of language that was central to the intellectual debates in India at that time. It is a fact attested to by history that when the constitution was framed in the year 1950, it was proposed that English as a language will be phased out by 1965 and Hindi will be reinstated as the only language. However, following the protest against the eradication of English as such there was an "Official Languages Act of 1964",

[xxi] which added English as "one of the official languages of India". The protest against the continuance of English in its official capacity was at its height in mid 1960s when Kamala Das published this work. So her engagement with language here gains an added relevance.

Another substantial insight into her play with languages can be intervened through "interlingual", an idea proposed by K.Satchidhanadhan to comprehend the language created by Das, while talking about 'Kamala Das and the tradition of bilingual creativity'[xxii]: "Her works in English look like a translation of Malayalam and her works in Malayalam are like a translation from English. Her language gave a kind of peculiar quality to her works. She was more interlingual than bilingual. Lack of formal education in both languages forced her to create her own language. She was not obsessed with grammar. That made her language different from that used by other writers"[xxiii]

There could be one more dimension to this. As a bilingual writer, equally proficient in Malayalam and English, she does not really have to question the use of her mother tongue, Malayalam, as it is natural for her to use it. She does not have to really question her choice or to ponder on the limits of liberty to waddle in it. But while writing in English— an apparent alien language— she has to be conscious about it and probe into why such a language suits her purpose. Ironically, she designates this half and half language as "honest" and "as human as I am human." It is the real self, as she goes on to explicate. However, she claims that it is a language that is unique. A language that is her niche, a language that differentiates her from others, which is, "Not the deaf, blind speech/ Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the/Incoherent mutterings of the blazing/ Funeral pyre." (1965:62)

The ambivalence that she finds herself in when it comes to her language, the language she speaks in, with its distortions and which implies a sense of fragmentation as evident from her description of it as 'half and half', powerfully evokes the dividedness that she senses in the essence of her self. This fragmentation is, in a way, something that reiterates the impossibility of the process of meaning making or of properly putting across a message even with the resources of languages at hand. The various implications of her verse, particularly, those arguments on language, in a way, alludes to Jacques Lacan's thesis[xxiv] that language essentially takes us away from a realisation of self. This leads to the possible conclusion that she was a translingual rather than interlingual, as she, through the language she used communicated a sense of ambivalence and the impossibility of gaining closure.

Needless to argue then, that the concerns of Kamala Das dwell upon notions of identity and its articulation, with language playing a crucial role in it. The 'I' here is a post-colonial Indian, plagued by questions such as — "Who am I?", "Am I an Indian?" "If yes, then why am I marked out because of my skin colour or my domicile?" — "Which language do I speak in and why?", "What is it that defines my choice of a language?" "What are the problems evoked if I speak in an 'other' tongue?"— "Where do I belong as a person in all of these discourses?" The questions that surge up are numerous and it is her engagement with these kernels that added a touch of contradictory hues to her poetry, simple image continuing into a narrative of complexities. Each of these questions goes onto create layers onto the patterns on the surface of the 'I' and she seems to be traversing all these spaces simultaneously, evoking the image of a flaneuse who dares to go into the unexplored trajectories, unlike a flaneur. As highlighted by Rituparna Pal in her article, "Women & Flânerie: Daring To Wander & Own The Streets Of A City Off-Limits":

Flânerie becomes even more interesting when you successfully manage to get lost. You chalk out a virtual map of the locality from your memory, draw imaginary lines, get excited about finally realising the utility of learning Geometry in school, take the left that, your calculations tell, should bring you back to familiarity – lo and behold, you find yourself in another parallel universe.

The 'I' constituted by an in- betweenness— a différance, "a contradictory coherence"[xxv]— is relevant to understand Kamala Das. The notion of the national subject that she evokes right at the outset governed by a set of knowledge about political leaders, the founding fathers of the idea called nation, does not hinge on a notion of homogeneity. On the other hand, a heterogeneous existence comes into the picture as the poem progresses. For instance, her self, the self she calls 'I' in her poem is encompassed by notions of political identity, personal identity, regional identity and linguistic identity The ambivalence in her is connected to these aspects. Clearly, all these entities come into play in determining the human in her, a sense of the essential being, a being which taps the natural self as the real subjectivity; transcending all other entities created by the externalities –stressing a psychological or archetypical engagement with the self . As Honey Sethi observes, "In the twilight zone in which the creative mind dwells, there is the natural feminine ability to turn inwards, to accept intuition and tenderness as values along with the gentle sensitivity to one's natural environment and to the latent human communications among human beings which mobilize the feelings and imageries and bring forth the new feminine voices creating new terrains."[xxvi]

It becomes imperative here to see the new terrain she created as a palimpsest, into which she transposes her multifariousness and the only way to grab at those many layers of scripts is to understand her life and the complexities that eventually got superimposed into the earlier layers. A propos to this are certain layers which make their presence felt even in their absence and the 'other' layers evident in the poem – those layers that engage with her gendered identity, a paradoxical persona which gains significant coherence through the image of a flaneuse.

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[i] See Das, Kamala, "Researchers" Closure: Some Poems and a Conversation

[ii] Kamala is her given name and Kamala Das is the penname she chose while writing in English. Madhavikutty is her pseudonym when writing in Malayalam. Kamala Surraiyya is the name she took after her conversion to Islam in 1999.

[iii] See Kohli, Devindra "Introduction", Kamala Das: Selected Poems. This insightful essay on Das is useful to gain an understanding of the general intellectual climate in India from the 1960's till the declaration of emergency in the early 1970's

[iv] See Tharu, Susie and K. Lalitha, "Madhavikutty". Women's Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present, vol. 2

[v] Kamala Das' "An Introduction" is the only Asian poem included in The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

[vi] Nair, Devika, "Kamala Das: many selves, many tongues". Friday Review: The Hindu Thiruvanathapuram, April 2, 2015 <<http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/kdas-many-selves-many-tongues/article7056859.ece>> April 2, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2015.

[vii] At the outset, Situatedness is used here to signify the act of embeddedness within a culture. However, it has to be stated here that situatedness as a concept is also linked to the location of subject /subjectivity in feminist discourses especially in the theory of Julia Kristeva. The idea is delineated in her essay "The System and the Speaking Subject" and the notion of situatedness focuses on the recognition of a subject's location and is seen as crucial in understanding the subject/ subjectivity. Dona Haraway too maintains that location and situation – – environments one inhabits – – lend a great deal to one's subjectivity specially technological, literary, cultural, political, economic and social situatedness.

[viii] Nomad is used here literally and metaphorically. Common meaning of a wanderer as well as the idea evoked by Giles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari as a figure which represents appropriately the post – modern subject who had to shift between contexts or spaces gains relevance here. Nomad and the related idea of planes of consistency could be engaged with at length to understand Kamala Das' oeuvre.

[ix] See Das, Kamala. My Story

[x] Though many critics have engaged with this aspect, the reference here has largely to do with the excerpts from the lecture delivered by Prof. Udaya Kumar. He referred to the intermixing of language and genre in Kamala Das in his paper "Choosing a Tongue, choosing a Form: Kamala Das's Writing and the Parsing of Perception" which he delivered at the Symposium on "Kamala Das and the Tradition of Bilingual Creativity" held at the Institute of English, University of Kerala in collaboration with Sahitya Academy on 24th March 2015. His paper engaged more with the idea that Das's poetry in English displays a directness and fluency usually associated with prose, while her early prose fiction draws on arrangements of language that is largely poetic thus moving beyond the politics of choice of a language.

[xi] See Rumens, Carol, "Dislocated Carnality". Poetry Review

[xii] See De Souza, Eunice. "Kamala Das", Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology.

[xiii] Initially, the debate surrounding the use of the idea, citizen of the world entailed within it the inevitable question as to which world is he/she a citizen of, implying the need to assert the location of any individual. Diogenes himself was faced with the same question implying the need of a geographical location to understand the concept.

[xiv] See Das, Kamala. "An Introduction", Summer in Calcutta

[xv] Malabar was a part of the Madras presidency till the division of India into States on the basis of the regional languages in 1956. The derogatory reference to a South Indian as madrasi is subtly hinted at here.

[xvi] Postcolonial paradox refers to the ambivalence that is often associated with the conflicts between the roots and routes, between the one's own culture and that of the adopted culture which becomes pertinent in the formation of identity. The most prominent example is that of a rooted rootlessness.

[xvii] Spencer, Robert. Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Literature

[xviii] The Australian Aboriginal belief in the phenomenon called dreaming and dreamtime has its roots in the indigenous Arandic (language of the Aranda people of Central Australia) word Alcheringa, which subtlety alludes to the possible meanings such as "eternal, uncreated", "time out of time" or "everywhen". The animist mythology of these indigenous people dreamtime refers to the sacred era in which the ancestral totemic beings created the world. It also stems from the belief that an individual's entire ancestry exists as one, thus leading to the idea that all worldly knowledge is accumulated through one's ancestors. In conjunction with this concept is the idea of dreaming, which refers to an individual's or a group's sets of beliefs or spirituality. For instance, a native indigenous person might say that he has a Kangaroo Dreaming – which implies that s/he has the spirit of that animal within the self. Thus, dreaming existed before the life of the individual began and continues to exist when the life of the individual ends.

[xix] See Irigaray, Lucy. Speculum of the Other Woman

[xx] See Nandy, Pritish. "Remembering Kamala" Tonight this Savage rite: The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy.

[xxi] Continuance of English language for official purposes of the Union and for use in Parliament.-(l)Notwithstanding the expiration of the period of fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution the English language may, as from the appointed day, continue to be used, in addition to Hindi:- (a) for all official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before that day, and (b) for the transaction of business in Parliament; Provided that the English language shall be used for purposes of communication between the Union and a State which has not adopted Hindi as its Official Language.

[xxii] K Satchidhandhan's keynote address at the Symposium 'Kamala Das and the tradition of bilingual creativity' jointly organized by the Sahitya Akademi and University of Kerala at the Institute of English on March 25th 2015.

[xxiii] See "Kamala's concerns were beyond feminism: Satchidanandan" http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/Kamalas-concerns-were-beyond-feminism-Satchidanandan/articleshow/46685275.cms

[xxiv] Jacques Lacan posits three stages – the first, Imaginary refers to the first 6 months in the life of an infant when it feels itself to be complete and in harmony with the world at large, where its incomprehensible talk is taken to mean something significant by others around it, the second stage, the symbolic starts when the child is initiated into a language as well as a process of unlearning where it is asked to give up on the words it had used as an infant and is encouraged to use the 'real' words and hence ironically here the child gets confused as the process of meaning making or identification of self is many times removed from reality and the third stage Real is in fact an imaginary stage where there is the possibility of the signifier and the signified colliding which could be a reference to those moments of epiphany or ultimate self-realisation which is a next to impossible task according to Jacques Lacan.

[xxv] See note vii

[xxvi] See Sethi, Honey, "A Feminist Wisdom in the Poetry of Kamala Das", International Journal of Technical Research (IJTR) Vol. 2Issue 1. Mar-Apr 2013

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Poetry for The People: The Counter-Cultural Significance of Malayalam Rap

AKSHAY A S

Abstract: Rap music, a sub-genre of Hip-Hop music, that evolved out of the African American community in The United States of America during the late 1970s, is a musical genre that has spread its influence across the globe, including India and specifically in the State of Kerala. But how does such a complex and youthfully vigorous art form fit into the specific socio-political and cultural contexts of Kerala? This dissertation attempts to trace the comparatively short but bustling history of the rise of Malayalam Rap, in order establish the place it occupies today, with regards to both the wider context of Hip-Hop culture, as well as the narrower but equally important contexts of its birthplace, Kerala.

Essentially, going against the grain of conventional art, Malayalam rap and its practitioners have ushered in an independent art form, adopted from the West and reshaped to fit the needs of Kerala's culture.The focus is on the literary, artistic and technical aspects of Malayalam rap, in an attempt to legitimize it as a modern, radical form of poetry and to refute certain misconceptions about rap and Hip-hop as a culture that has infamously garnered a bad reputation. The dissertation argues that Malayalam Rap music is a more accessible form of poetry, which has become apopular platform thatvoices the voiceless, the historically silenced classes, and flourishes as an independent counter-culture that opposes and does not fear the threats of commercialization.

Key Words: Rap, Hip-Hop, Malayalam Rap, Counterculture, Poetry, Music

Music is functional in nature as it promotes human well-being through disposition, and by socially propagating ideas, information and emotions. We came quite easily, one might surmise, to the cephalic state of enjoying music for itself, its endless diverse expression of sound, and to realizing that it was within our power to self-generate it. On his many

voyages, Charles Darwin spent quite a bit of time studying the phenomenon of song, specifically because of its evolutionary and historical significance. Evolutionary evidence over a wide range of cultural groups reveals diversity of song and instrument, yet gaps and speculative considerations still remain: some cultures sing a lot, some sing a little less, but most do sing. Music's ties to our ancestry are undeniable and evident.

The impassioned orator, bard, or musician, when with his varied tones and cadences he excites the strongest emotions in his hearers, little suspects that he uses the same means by which, at an extremely remote period, his half-human ancestors aroused each other's ardent passions, during their mutual courtship and rivalry. (Darwin 337)

However, in order totrace the roots of a specific genre of music better, it is best to begin within the bounds of the socio-cultural factors that provided the stimuli for its inception and growth, rather than travel back to the beginning of man itself. While music itself has a long, complex and intertwined history, the beginnings of modern genres of music are heavily contextualized within their identifiably precise time periods and cultural prerequisites.

On August 11, 1973, a back-to-school party raged on in Sedgwick Avenue, in the Bronx, New York City. Clive Campbell, alias DJ Kool Herc noticed that the dancers seemed to love the percussive breaks in the funk and soul music he was playing and decided to experiment. Using two turn tables, he isolated and extended that small drum break in the record. Owing to his Jamaican ancestry, Campbell knew the common practice in Dub music of speaking over a record and he used his mic to urge dancers on during the repeating beats, a practice that was already in vogue at the time. This, they say, is how the seeds of Hip-Hop were sown. The extended beat became The Break, and the boys and girls who danced to those beats became Break dancers, the B-boys and B-girls of today. And of course, the rhythmic talking over the beat became rap. Soon, these "hip-hoppers" – the Disk Jockeys, rappers or the Emcees/MCs (Master of Ceremonies), dancers and graffiti artists – became the forerunners of a cultural and artistic revolution that would spread across the globe. This is the story of how a backstreet party changed the world.

Those who gave Hip-Hop life were predominantly, if not completely African-Americans who, at the time, found themselves bankrupt, unemployed and exposed to a worsening drug problem and extreme cases of violence. Hip-Hop guided people and showed them a new way of life.But when more and more people began to be drawn into it, Hip-Hop was quickly consumed into mainstream culture, rapidly gaining audiences and then spreading its

influence to other nations. With commercial success on radio and television, inner city Hip-Hop music in America began to lose the "counter-culture" tag.Today, Rap Music and Hip-Hop culture have become an irrefutable part of Western cultural history and flourishes as a billion-dollar industry, spreading its wings of influence and inspiration across the globe.

Rapping, also known variously as Rhyming, Spitting, Emceeing or MCing is a musical form of vocal delivery that incorporates rhythmic speech, and street vernacular. It is usually performed or delivered over a backing beat produced by a DJ or turntablist. As an art form, rap stylistically occupies the gray areabetween speech, prose, poetry, and singing and is much more musically complex than meets the eye. It is a complex assortment where the content or what is being said, is as significant as how it is said, using rhymes, rhythmic patterns, delivery styles, cadences and tones.The earliest precursor to the modern rap can be traced to the West African griot tradition. Griots are "oral historians", or "praise-singers", who served as respected advisors to rulers, as tutors for princes, and as diplomats in delicate negotiations (Hale 250). They would disseminate oral traditions and genealogies, or use their formidable rhetorical techniques for gossip or to praise or critique individuals.

Hence, rap music, a term used interchangeably with Hip-Hop music today has its roots firmly set into West African history, which also incidentally, inspired Blues and Jazz music, to the evolution of which rap bears a striking resemblance, both stylistically and formally. This warrants the question of how and why rap music, so intrinsically connected to a culture and its people, found far reaching resonance in the diverse cultures of the world. The primary objective of this dissertation then, is to trace how rap, as an art form and a cultural phenomenon, translates to music in other languages, specifically Malayalam and to understand why young men and women from India and particularly the state of Kerala have seemingly found their voice in a thoroughly Western musical form. The study also looks at how Malayalam rap music upholds the authentic counter-cultural values professed by the 'OGs', the original artists, creators and practitioners of Hip-Hop in the Bronx, at two distinct levels– what is said and how it is being said.

Hip-Hop originated as a tale of youth expression in the inner-city ghettos of the Bronx that went ahead to gain widespread commercial success. In India, Hip-Hop has put itself in reverse gear – from the commercial to the streets. A new era of Underground rappers in India, from various cultures, singing in multiple vernaculars, trying to make Hip-Hop their own, has revolutionized the way we look at Hip-Hop. From the gullies of Mumbai to the foothills of Kashmir, rapping has broken ground in India in fine fashion. They talk about

their own lives – who they are, where they come from and what they are about.What's more, they are making Hip-Hop their own. Hip-Hop is finally going 'Desi' and it seems for the best. Underground rappers sing about pride, family, sustenance, survival, poverty, violence, social inequalities and injustices but they do so in their own vernaculars – Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Khasi, Malayalam and more.

The first authentic voices in the history of Malayalam rap were heard in 1999, and came from a ragtag crew of young men from different walks of Kerala, RJV "Pakarcha Vyadhi" Ernesto, Haris "Mappla" Salim, Amjad "Azuran" Nadeem and Abhimanyu "Earthgrime" Raman. Initially drawing inspiration from and experimenting with Spoken Word and Slam poetry, the group quickly found a mutual passion in Rap music. Along with a couple of music producers like Vivek "V3K" Radhakrishnan, who directly adopted music from Western Hip-Hop to create 'Alternative' styled Hip-Hop beats that blended folk, ambient, glitch, bass, R&B, jazz, grime and soul music, they formed what would become the first Hip-Hop collective from Kerala, 'Street Academics'.

From making pause-tapes with cassettes, scissors, blades & cello tapes, to producing studio quality music with synthesizers, turntables and orchestral instruments, Street Academics is still going strong today, decades later with the same dynamic energy and social awareness that inspired countless artists who followed in their footsteps. Moreover, they are leading the avant-garde of Malayalam rap, showing how rap can be used as a tool to inspire critical thinking, about social issues that profoundly affects life in Kerala. Known for using a mix of Malayalam, Tamil and English lyrics, Street Academics was responsible for creating the blueprint of Malayalam rap and they continue to reinvent themselves through experimentation and calculated risks.

An experimental genre at the time of its inception, and the decade that followed, quite obviously no music producer working in the film industry would seriously have considered Hip-Hop as having any popular appeal. The lyrics, usually a blend of Malayalam and English, that often were meant to sound either intimidating or by contrast, comical, would hardly be readily welcomed by the average listener. The need of the hour was platforms that would give artists the opportunity to showcase their music and slowly, but surely gain an audience that would appreciate and take their art seriously. Cue the rise of the internet, followed by people with similar interests finding each other on social media; much like how Street Academics initially shared their music on platforms like Myspace and Orkut and surely many other lesser known artists who had only happened upon the world of Hip-Hop at the time.

Perhaps the biggest internet event that would shape the future of independent music in Kerala, and in fact around the world, was the launch of YouTube in 2005, which would go on to become the single largest video-sharing platform on the internet. Followed by audio-sharing and streaming services like SoundCloud, YouTube became the perfect space for new Hip-Hop artists to publish their music, not only because it was free and didn't require the backing or production of a music label, but also due to the fact that certain features of the platform like self-embedding and recommendation of similar videos allowed audiences to find their work easily; no-cost accessibility was the order of the day.

The present decade has undoubtedly been the most fruitful for Underground Malayalam rap music. "Underground' can have a number of contextual meanings, but generally any non-commercial rap song, music video, album, EP (Extended Play), LP (Long Play), Rap Cypher or Mixtape by a Malayali artist that stays true to its Western roots by 'keeping it real' is considered a part of the Kerala Hip-Hop Underground.Malayalam rap today, even though still finding its footing, seems to have established itself as a growing industry of countless possibilities, with talented artists worthy of national and international recognition.As even a surface level analysis of songs and lyrics would show, rappers from Kerala have succeeded in molding the Malayalam language, infamous for its rigidness and semantic complexity, in order to completely adopt rap techniques to fit their expressive requirements.

One such Malayalam rapper, one of the first to 'go viral' on YouTube and hit the radar of the general public, is Febin 'Fejo' Joseph, a native of Vytilla , Kochi. Fejo has had a long and tedious journey in rap, from his first music video appearing on his YouTube Channel on July 2nd, 2011.Fejo, however, is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Malayalam rap today. Perhaps the most interesting detail is the diversity of rappers from Kerala, each of whom has established their own style of rapping, their unique identity, that visibly sets them apart from the rest. So while Fejo sticks to compact, precise lyrics and catchy melodies that often address personal struggles and social conflicts that he has witnessed first-hand, Vishnu 'ThirumaLi' M. S. is all about lyrical word play and a mixture of harsh criticism for the worst of Kerala and a unerring nostalgia for its best. When Street Academics goes symbolic and surreal with their music, Rameez 'RZee' Musthafa is grounded but quick with his words, flowing through rhymes with the ease of a master. Non-Resident Indian rappers from Kerala like Abhijith 'A.B.I' Gopinath and Sarath 'Nomadic Voice' Sasidharan give voice to the struggles of the common Malayali, with motivational and strongly phrased lyrics and their own experiences of leaving home in search of purpose

and profession, using a blend of Malayalam with other languages that they have encountered outside Kerala. While their foreign accents become part of their storytelling and their narratives, others like the well-experienced Marthyan colors their music with various local accents, sticking to pure Malayalam to get their message across. And then there are the clarion calls, the call-to-actions, the definitive statements of truth and the expressions of freedom that become staples of their music for many other revolutionary rappers. As interesting as the stage names and personas they adopt, are the complex narrative yarns that they thread through Hip-Hop, which seems to be poised perfectly to meet the aesthetic needs of a starving Kerala audience, and in the process, open their eyes to 'the real'.

Richard Shusterman's article, "The Fine Art of Rap", from a 1991 edition of the New Literary History journal begins thus – "in the view of both the culturally elite and the so-called general public, rap music lurks in the underworld of aesthetic respectability" (613). It accurately captures the mainstream attitudes that one might find towards rap lyricism. Even the ardent listeners of rap might be inclined to hold the same opinion, often seeing such music as just something to blast at full volume. Much of this is owed to the bland, diluted and commercialized forms of the art that is culturally encouraged and popularized. Rap music is either deemed unworthy of literary analysis by academic aestheticians or even worse, seen as some random conglomeration of raunchy, repetitive, crude and simple-minded ideas, intended simply for entertaining the general public. Yet rap is a postmodern popular art which challenges some of our most deeply entrenched aesthetic conventions, conventions which are common to the artistic style and ideology of modernity, that haunts artistic expression, even today.

The same holds true for Malayalam rap, perhaps even more so because it is a new genre, trying to establish itself in an extremely conventional society that finds it necessary to question anything out of the ordinary. The struggle faced by rap music seems to be against traditionally accepted standards of music and poetry, that by all accounts bears the mark of the elite. But informed and sympathetic close reading will reveal in many rap songs, not only the cleverly potent vernacular expression of keen insights but also forms of linguistic subtlety and multiple levels of meaning that can sometimes rival this so-called "high-art". Its insistent breaking of conventions itself becomes its identity. Hence, turning that into a reason for disregarding its lyrical quality destroys all reason as to how it came to be in the first place. Rap was born as poetry, and remains to stay so, but only to those who actively open themselves up to it.

Figurative language and poetic devices have found a new home in rap lyrics. Over the past forty years, no other genre of popular lyric has done more to explore this figurative imperative than the language of Rap. By lifting what Shelley calls "the veil of familiarity" from the world, poetry renders the familiar unfamiliar, newly charged with wonder and mystery. Rhetorical figures and forms are perhaps the poet's most potent tools for awakening and enlarging the mind. When it comes to theatrics and humor, there is never a dull moment. Irony and puns flourish, and so do sly jabs and explicit jokes. But such direct use of language and dry humor is as much a part of rap lyricism as the more heartfelt personal expressions and cultural commentary. Many such examples abound, but reading lyrics as poetry can create some familiar limitations. The melody is often privileged over the poetics of the line or stanza, repetition is often employed for musical concerns rather than poetic concerns, and rhymes are often designed to be memorable after one listen rather than to be complex. Certainly there are song lyrics that may not hold up under the microscope of scansion and close reading, but in general, Malayalam rap lyrics and songwriters are better off under the rigor of literary analysis than most other musical genres.

A 2014 study conducted by Musixmatch looked at 25 different genres to identify which boasted the largest vocabulary in music. Unsurprisingly, Hip-Hop rap topped the charts with 478 unique words per song, with the next in line being Pop music with only 302 words. Rap songs are lyrically dense, averaging a vocabulary size of 1963 words per song (Jewalikar, Verma). Our primary means of communication is the word and it is rap's efficiency with words that allows it to be the perfect vehicle for addressing a varied range of subjects through its unique storytelling capabilities. When it comes to socio-political, cultural and even religious commentary, Malayalam rap leaves no stone unturned. Artists make no attempt to hold back their feelings, which is part of what makes it so compelling. Rap originated as a form of resistance and rebellion through art. This open-hearted voicing of personal and public opinions, symbolic of the demographics that they represent places an unprecedented responsibility on these artists.

For instance, the influence of the radical lyricism of Street Academics has found a place in the socially-aware and religiously toned projects of the collective, Mappila Lahala. In collaboration with Haris Salim of Street Academics and popular Malayalam Actor Mammukoya, they produced two songs, "Native Bapa" and a sequel, "Funeral of a Native Son". Rendering a specifically local prose dialect into rap lyricism, blended with English lyrics, both songs verge on the thin line between spoken word and rap. In order to understand the narratives of the project, the historical and contemporary constructions of

Muslim identity in Malabar region of Kerala needs to be understood.Overall, the journey of Mappila Muslims from colonial history to the present is a journey from a clearly subaltern position to that of a more powerful community, experiencing considerable educational and economic progress and political empowerment. Although the Muslims of Malabar are no more a subaltern community, stereotypes and stigmas surrounding their religious identity continue to persist in the public sphere even today, often in new forms.

The musical movement Mappila Lahala, even in their title, invokes the collective memory of the Mappila Rebellion of 1921, in an attempt to reclaim the historical misattribution of the term 'Lahala' that came to mean fanatic, lawless riots, as opposed to peasant revolts against the British rule and upper caste feudalism, which was a movement for independence. The songs attempt a semiotic reconstruction of the lasting stereotypes that constructs the 'Muslim' as a 'terrorist', which can be observed to have lineage in global Islamophobia.Layered with historical material the song is a temporal movement between the rebellious Muslim past signified in the very title of the musical movement, the nationalist past of the Muslim community, the nationwide crisis of secularism and state terror that stereotypes the Muslim community. In this sense, Mappila Lahala moves out of the realm of music into diverse forms of cultural and political speech and articulation.

Hip-Hop in the West, in the last two decades, has followed the path of commercialization. With the "discovery" of Hip-Hop artists by corporate record labels, rap music was stolen from its community, repackaged by money-minded businesspeople looking to create a wider appeal by erasing Hip-Hop's historic function, and sold back to the streets through marketing ploys such as music videos and Top-40 charts. By the end of the 20th century, Hip-Hop had become a business and rap music was a valuable commodity. Rap's commodification has not only alienated it from its roots, but also disenfranchised it as a form of resistance. If the condition of rap music in the West is any indication of the future of Malayalam rap, matters would seem grim. But authentic rap storytelling still survives in the inner-cities of America, as well as in many of its off-shoots across the world like Malayalam rap. This 'Underground' counter-cultural tendency of rap, though overshadowed by its mainstream counterpart, still thrives and has proved difficult to be written off.

Though rap music began in resistance to dominant ideology, the music industry has long since assimilated it. Mainstream Western rap, today, sadly has become one such factory line, churning out similar sounding, formulaic songs that mean nothing, and imply even less. Malayalam rap, however, still has hope.This hope lies in the spirit of rap embodied

by Malayali MCs. The music they make and the lyrics they so passionately pen and perform does not carry the ideology of an outsider, a music label or Multi-national companies. They are not aligned to political parties or socio-economic classes, because their aggression and frustration is taken out on injustice, irrespective of its source. There is no hidden agenda because they wear their hearts on their sleeves and their lyrics reveal everything they wish to say. It is made clear that what they rap about is their subjective feelings, opinions and emotions. Even though they might represent a certain community and voice their concerns, rap never instructs or preaches, but reveals things as they are. Ambiguity becomes, at best, a lyrical tool to showcase their talent but never veers into vague political speech. While some would argue that true Battle rap, where two MCs would go head to head, is a dying art, its principles that preach direct addressal, confrontation through the mightiest weapon – the word, and forbids withholding of both emotions and truth, is still alive in Malayalam rap.

Istvan Molnar-Szakacs, a research neuroscientist at the University of California, has explored how music "creates the sense of social belonging," as he writes in a 2015 paper, "Please Don't Stop the Music", a fitting title to the circumstances we find ourselves in. As authoritarian politics gain footholds across the world, with intolerance, discrimination and violence in the name of religion, gender, race and class becoming too stark a reality, we are in need, now more than ever, of movements like Malayalam rap that uphold liberal inclusion and critical thinking. It becomes an avenue of art that while reaching millions of people, for once does not include corporate agenda or compromises on quality in the name of marketability, but instead becomes the voice of the voiceless, singing stories that matter.

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Mulligatawny Dreams: Encountering the No-Man's Land Between the Mother Tongue and Post-Colonial Language

Y SAMRA FUAD

Abstract: Decolonization does not end with the colonizing power being physically removed from the colonized nation. Centuries of cultural hegemony wreaks havoc on the fabric of a state to the point of being unrecognizable from its previous state of existence. The battle to reclaim a national identity post colonization is not an easy one, especially when it concerns a multicultural, multilingual, state like India. One of the most obvious manifestations of deliberate anti-colonial actions is the rejection of colonial rules of language. This becomes especially interesting when the said language is now the global lingua franca, inevitable to functioning in an increasingly globalized world.

Post-colonial writers offer much in the activism against colonial dictates of language. This paper looks at how a colonial language, one that is dominant in a post-colonial society, is encountered by writers. The paper focuses on the poetry of Meena Kandasamy in general as an anti-colonial , language-specific , dynamic narrative tool and specifically on the poem "Mulligatawny Dreams" . Her language deliberately subverts English language rules; often foregoing punctuation, using words from her native Tamil without a footnote or an appendix, culturally specific references etc. All of these deliberate actions making a statement inviting the reader to research and make the effort to learn and understand the poetry and its references, much like the rest of the world and especially Indians have been taught through the centuries to understand British cultural references and history forsaking our own.

Keywords: Post-colonial, language, cultural hegemony, decolonizing, appropriation, mother-tongue, narrative, activism, Tamil, English , ambiguity

The English language has been the linear tongue of the colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names, the simulation of tribal cultures, manifest manners, and the unheard literature of dominance in tribal communities; at the same time, this mother tongue of para-colonialism has been a language of invincible imagination and liberation for many people of the post-indian worlds. English … has carried some of the best stories of endurance, the shadows of tribal creative literature, and now that same language of dominance bears the creative literature of distinguished post-indian authors in cities … The shadows and language of tribal poets and novelists could be the new ghost dance literature, the shadow literature of liberation that enlivens tribal survivance. (Manifest Manners105-6)

Seventy years down the line from independence of the nation, Decolonization is still a dynamic process. One that writers, activists and most people still actively, albeit sometimes unconsciously perform everyday.Remnants of colonial cultural superiority is a stain that refuses to completely vanish. It emerges in fashion, food, language, and everything else under the broader perspective of culture. One cannot talk about overcoming colonial cultural influences without primarily considering language. As a sociological phenomenon, language is something that permeates all of human community, what distinguishes societies and groups and even gives expression and definition to the features and functions of each group. The most predominant colonial reminder that the British left in India must also arguably be that of the English language. The dichotomy of the English language is also that even when it is a constant reminder of colonial history, rooted in supremacy and oppression, it is also inevitable in todays world. So as most of the population unconsciously struggles withthis ambiguous play, linguists, sociologists and writers do recognize the deeper connotations of using the language of your historical oppressor. Itbecomes even more evident with this realization that this act is a conscious, performative action whereby the subaltern claims the use of the language that was often forcibly thrust on them, to now use it in their own way. Kenyan post-colonial writer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o elucidates in detail on this ambiguity faced by post-colonial peoples while using English. In his 1986 work Decolonising the Mind Ngugi writes that language not only helps to describe the world, but that it is fundamentally how people understand themselves in relation to their socio-historical context. He believes that therefore adapting the colonial foreign language completely will result in erasing of histories.

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world … Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a

specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.(Thiong'o ,15)

Writers, activists, philosophers and theorists who have taken upon the anti-colonial examination lens have been performing a careful deconstruction of language and its colonial signifiers. Post-colonial theory has language adaptation and colonial linguistics as one of its main areas of discussion. This literary exercise of scrutinizing the capacities of language and utilizing its potential to rewrite histories, reveal conveniently glossed over truths, to reshape words and create new expressions to fit the anti-colonial narrative, is employed by many modern Indian poets and writers. It includes everything from clarifying wrongly assumed cultural practices to using words from native languages that have no corresponding signifier in the English language. Salman Rushdie, in his 1992 work Imaginary Homelands asserts that post-colonial writers writing in English is a conscious act of resistance, confronting post-colonial realities and renovating ideals instead of completely disposing and neglecting centuries of lived experiences and consequences.

I hope all of us share the opinion that we can't simply use the language the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free".(Rushdie,17)

Mulligatawny Dreams – Using the ColonialLanguage as an Anti-colonial Tool

Meena Kandasamy is one such author and poet whose works contain a powerfully strong examination of all things colonial, linguistic, feminist and most predominantly, cast-related.Rather than a spiritual,intangible journey , her poetry is very much rooted in concrete sociological realities around her. Even though the main focus of this paper will be on exploring the linguistic aspect of anti-colonial ideas in Kandasamys's poetry, one cannot discuss her poetry without acknowledging into the prominent and often the focal matter of most of her works, voicing the overarching presence of caste and gender in the social fabric of the country. In an interview with John Rufo in 2015, the author talks about how language serves dual functions of reinforcement as well as revolution.

I do believe that languages are biased, fucked-up structures, clearly reflecting a lot of the status quo, reflecting the inequalities and very often reinforcing them. This does not mean that language does not contain the potential for revolution, or to serve as a call to arms. I think language can be used to mask grave crimes (the language of United Nations reports, for instance), or to send across stereotypes, or even sometimes to denude us of all feeling, all outrage. Capitalism does this successfully—using happiness and beauty to sell—and to extend its interests without worrying about the imbalance and inequality. I think this one reason why the role of a poet becomes important—you are not only saying things but you are also digging out the weapons in the arsenal of language, you are reclaiming love, you are celebrating beauty.

In this country, proficient use of English will give you access tobetter socio-economic advancement. As part of a colonial hangover, English has obviously been accorded superior status and thus a language of power. For a person to change the power dynamics of existing structures, and to access the public systems, at least a basic fluency in the language is almost inevitable. This is also where the caste element is very valid. Dr B. R. Ambedkar stressed on the need for Dalits to get English education and strongly felt that this was one of the main ways along with affirmative action for social advancement of Dalits, the subaltern speaking in English is thus considered a breaking away from the constraints of caste and class. in her poetry Meena Kandasamy uses the language to move away and assert dominance over the astonishingly outdated practices of caste that is till very prevalent in India .In fact, her first volume of poetry is titled Touch(2006), a reference to the practice of untouchability and social and physical distancing in the hegemonical caste structure.

But, you will never have known

that touch—the taboo

to your transcendence,

when crystallized in caste

was a paraphernalia of

undeserving hate.

Poetry is the medium that Meena Kandasamy found best suited to express herself as she started out. She says that the reason was that "poetry is not caught up within larger structures that pressure you to adopt a certain setof practices while you present your ideas in the way that academic language is. Despitebeing an academic myself, I dread academia's ultra-intellectualizing". The reason forher dislike of academic discourse is mainly because it is not "the languageto speak of the oppressed […] the language in which any victim would speak".

Often levelled as an allegation of exclusivity is the highbrow nature of discussions of anti-caste struggle and other subaltern , anti-power struggles, one that speaks in a language of academic elite, not working closely with the ground realities. Kandasamy is an activist as well as a poet, a strong voice of resistance against existing power structures and social inequalities, making them a subject of her poetry as well. Thus, bending activism and poetry, her literary profile speaks of inclusivity and equity, unsurprisingly shaped by the influential social movements led by activists like Periyar in her home state of Tamil Nadu.

As universally understood and accepted, much is lost in translation, even when the existing power dynamics between the languages is not taken into consideration. So when a historically dominating language becomes the primary means of expression for a historically dominated people, contradictions in sentiments and performance arise. As expressed by poets like Kamala Das, who confesses her feelings about being made to feel guilty about preferring to write in English over her native Malayalam, even though she is a celebrated writer in Malayalam. So when it comes to English and any other Indian language, there exists a power structure inequity that forces an inferiority complex in the larger population. Writers and poets who poses ideas against the imagined superiority of English however describe it in terms of thelacking of English language rather than the mother tongue. They often describe English as incapable of holding the fullness of the other languages and English having no corresponding words for a lot of essential ideas and connotations of the Indian cultural context.

Meena Kandasamy's celebrated poem "Mulligatawny Dreams" speak brilliantly about this inability of English to truly contain the multitudes of Tamil lives. Since languages are very much influenced by geographical and obviously, socio-cultural contexts, it is understandable that a traditional English would be imperfect in communicating a truly Indian or Tamil experience. However, centuries of insistence of the cultural superiority of the English language would have us believe that it could transcend all those lackings. Kandasamy proves that assumption wrong. she wishes for an improved English, one that

does not have to cater to European standards of beauty, one that would accommodate the sounds of her language and not alter the sounds to easily fit their palate.

“anenglish where small children practice with smooth round

pebbles in their mouth to the spell the right zha”

Kandasamy talks about how English feels severely lacking; in words that existed in her Tamil language but didn’t have a corresponding one in the apparently superior English. Words that carry the sentimentality, an attachment to the material things of her culture: the food, the scents, the landscapes. She also brings in the problematic celebration of Eurocentric ideals of beauty. The very features that have been and still are taught to children from kindergarten; of blonde eyes and blue hair and the unfairness associated with putting fair skinned people on a pedestal. She wants her idealized improved version of English to celebrate beauty from her part of the world; brown skin and dark eyes.

“an english where the magic of black eyes and brown bodies

replaces the glamour of eyes in dishwater blue shades

and the airbrush romance of pink white cherry blossom skins”

Even as an Indian audience who are increasingly aware of the ramifications of this toxic glorification of one kind of beauty standard over all others , we still have not moved away from this portrayal and play small and large parts in the continuation of these beauty myths .

The poem occupies the gap between Tamil and English that the poet wants to bridge by somehow modifying the foreign language to fit perfectly into the recesses of her linguistic map. She places the languages next to each other and wills English to be more like Tamil, to grow itself to accommodate more of her sensibilities. She does not want capitalized letters , she wants a more emotionally charged language that will blend with the land and culture around her ,. She finds English to be too dull and lacking in feeling. The fact that English has the same words to describe the liking a man has for his car and the feelings he has towards his beloved is not something that sits well with the author.

The nuances of Tamil (and by extension, post-colonial) culture is quite often lost when using English language. English , the poet feels, does not take into account terms of endearment and respect that are important for the Tamil culture. The eccentricities and whims of the mother tongue is somehow misplaced, its people neglected.

" an english with more than thirty six words to call the sea

an english that doesn't belittle brown or black men and women

an english of tasting with five fingers

an english of talking love with eyes alone"

The poem ends with a wish for an altered English language , because the original one feels harsh and cold- " that spiky, crunchy tongue" . She wishes that the men of this language would indulge in something sensual, beautiful and whimsical as buying jasmine garlands for their beloved before a night of whispered wordless passion. The language of loving too does not escape the poet's scrutiny because emotions and feelings are invariably expressed best and most effectively in one's native tongue, rendering the foreign language cold and materialistic.

Meena Kandasamy in this particular poem not only wishes to rewrite the rules and cemented structures of the English language by urging it to develop and be inclusive of the cultural subtleties of the Other, but actually does so. The poem does employ capitalization even when referring to proper nouns – the names of the two languages. It poem begins by the speaker listing off words that seem random but on closer inspection all have a common etymological root- Tamil words that made their way into English. It is well known that English is a language that has built itself by loaning words from all over the globe, and extensively so because of the colonial ambitions of the empire. English has adopted hundreds of words from various Indian languages over the course of more than two centuries. Most of them have been so completely assimilated into the language that their origins are unknown even to a vast majority of Indians.

In the seminal work on Post-colonial literature, The Empire Writes Back(1989) Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explores the different ways in which writers deal with and react to the "superior" , dominant , colonial language in a post-colonial setting. Very often a conscious, anti-colonial struggle than a passive decolonizing one, the

usage of the colonial language is laden with deeper connotations. The above authors describe different processes by which writers deal with these issues. The writers replace a the prescribed version of the colonial language with a local variation that is not diminished in any way but does not ascribe to the superiority complex of the original colonial language. The writers abrogate the colonial language and reject its imperial undertones. Its strict rules of "correct usage " and its aesthetics. The elucidate, "Appropriation is the process by which the language is made to "bear the burden" of one's own cultural experience … Language is adopted as a tool and utilized to express widely differing cultural experiences."(38-39)

Which perfectly underlines what Meena Kandasamy brilliantly evokes in her poem 'Mulligatawny Dreams'. Rejection of aesthetics, blasé about correctness of usage, a deliberate disregard for rules and a disappointment in the many shortcomings of the language, while offering suggestions of how to replace and amend the language to better suit her purposes, claiming superiority over it. Her poetry thus exists as a quintessential testament for a post-colonial treatment of a colonial language.

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The Aesthetics of Human Body:A Reading of Selected Poems of Tishani Doshi

SHIMI S

Abstract: The poetry of Tishani Doshi seems to speak upon a lot of themes. The specific paper in consideration discusses the use of human body as a metaphor in the selected poems of Doshi. The paper focuses on the intriguing ways upon which the poet has interwoven the bodily aspects into the otherwise mundane themes ofsurvival, consummation, resistance, civilization and death.

Keywords: human body, metaphor, civilization, survival, resistance,death.

"The human body is an instrument for the production of art in the life of the human soul."

Alfred NorthWhitehead

Tishani Doshi's poetry is different in its theme, structure and treatment. Doshi is of Welsh-Gujarati origin and henceforth her works have undertones of immigrant angst and urge to find her roots. However, her poems are noticeable for a variety of themes that Doshi highlights. The poems taken into consideration in the paper actually project human body as a metaphor and use its functional features to delineate the intended idea.

Over the few decades studies on human body has gained a lot of popularity. "……..the study of social mobility, of racism, the formation of the 'underclass ', social inequalities in health and schooling and globalization, are all concerned implicitly with the movement, location, care and education of bodies. In different ways, all these areas of study are interested in how and why the social opportunities and life expectancies of people are shaped by the classification and treatment of their bodies as belonging to a particular 'race', sex, class or nationality (Shilling, 18).

The poem "What the Body Knows" published in her first poetry collection titled "Countries of the Body" (2006) speaks about the survival of an individual in the world. The journey to move away from oblivion to embrace light is embodied in the poem. The poet uses human body as a metaphor to delineate the survival instinct in an individual. The poem begins with the phrase "the body " instead of using any names or pronouns as body stands for all human beings. The burden of failure, loss and stress in a fast moving world gets reflected:

"The body dances in a darkened room

Turning itself inside out

So that skin can face the light in

fractures

Slip like shadow through skeleton

Walls

Begin to cry- really- to scream

About the tarnished weight of dreams". (1-8)

The poem refers to body as being in a dark room in search of light. It is the very same body that searches its origin, looks out for new dreams and gets tangled within the trap of memories. The human desire to explore new paths and avenues of knowledge is explicit in the line, "Flying from this dream to the next" (17).The body looks for its roots or more specifically its origin:

"Searches for remain of bark,

Hints of what it used to be.

Perhaps an ocean framed in bone,

A pair of birds in early white," (13-16)

Undoubtedly, the most beautiful lines in the poem are:

"This has been a drift after all.

The body returns to its original place,

Moves from one to the other – creeps

Tries to flee itself, lone trunk, " (9-12)

The lines portray the very essence of human life – the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Interestingly, Doshi often talks about the religious beliefs of afterlife and rebirth in her poems as it is evident in another poem, "The Art of Losing" (Everything Begins Elsewhere, 23).

"Ode to the Walking Woman" (Everything Begins Elsewhere, 14) has historical nuances attached to it. The poem brings in the factual elements of the Indus Valley civilization. Being one of the oldest known civilizations of the world Indus Valley civilization has made a mark for itself in the world. The poem has references to the cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro where the remnants of the civilization has been discovered initially. The expressions like "bronzed rib", " Mohenjodaro's brassy girls", " turbaned Harappan mothers", " terracotta legs" and "dancing underneath " are all direct references to Indus Valley lifestyle. The people of the Indus are experts in pottery andusebronze, as iron was discovered only later. The baked earthern statue of a dancing girl made out of bronze discovered at the site of Indus Valley garenered a lot of praise. The poem can be treated as an ode to the entire human race not to get weary or tired. Henceforth, the poem begins as "Sit –you must be tired of walking" (1-3).

The references to the goddesses like Inana, Istharof Mesopotamia and Cybele of Anatolia reinforce the belief that these early civilizations had trade relations with Indus. The poem speaks of human civilization in relation to human body, more precisely female body. Indus is considered to be matriarchal as the society is believed to have worshipped mother goddess associated with fertility. Inana, Isthar, Cybele, Artemis are associated with fertility and vegetation. Thus, woman becomes the centre of human civilization:

"Mohenjodaro' brassy girls

with bangled wrists

and cinnabar lips;

turbaned Harappan mothers

standing wide

on terracotta legs;" (31-36)

The cry of the goddesses symbolizes their pain and agony as they are worried about the humankind. The present plight of corruption and unrest in the human world might have pushed them into grave pits of unpleasant thoughts.

"egg- breasted Artemis-

Inana, Isthar, Cybele, clutching their

bounteous hearts.

in the unrepentant dark,

Crying: 'Daughter,

Where has the granaries

And great baths disappeared?"(37-43)

"……the development of civilized bodies involves a progressive socialization of the body. As used here, the socialization of bodies involves two main features. First, from being closely associated with the rhythms and dictates of nature, natural functions are socially managed and organized…….Second as the body becomes subject to ever expanding taboos, it is transformed into a location for and an expression of codes of behaviour" (Shilling, 136). It is made clear that the power of leading the human civilization has to be passed on to the "daughters ". It calls forth the next generation to take ahead the

civilization and build on what has been created by the ancestors. The power of regeneration of female body is referred to:

"Won't you resurrect yourself,

make love to the sky,

reclaim the world." (44-46)

Being an ardent feminist, Doshi's "The River of Girls" (Everything Begins Elsewhere, 13) speaks about women's resistance against injustice. The poem can be read as a song of celebrating womanhood that can break away any form of hurdles. The opening line, "i.m India's missing girls" is remarkable as it sets the tone of the poem. The plurality of the line portrays the harsh reality of Indian girls who fall prey to the cruel world. The implication mightbe towards those girls who might have been forgotten by their own families, society and denied the right to attain justice. The agonizing condition of hundreds of mothers who have lost their daughters to the devilish society is outlined in the lines:

"……this mother

laying down the bloody offerings

of birth". (10-12)

Doshi uses female body as a means of resistance in the poem. The discussions about female body has always been a taboo in the Indian society. Doshi makes references to vagina and breasts in her poem and thereby tries to project female body as a medium of resistance. The reference to vagina and breastswould help to normalize the talks on female body and sexuality. In a sense, Doshi asks women to make her body a weapon, that is to say, the very same body which has been subjected to torture and shame for centuries would become the site of confrontation and battle.

"This coin – thin vagina

…….

their golden breasts held high

like weapons to the sky" (7…21-22)

Women have often been reduced to be a sexualized object intended to satiate the lust. As Laura Mulvey observes in her essay Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1973), an object for voyeuristic and fetishisticpleasure. Doshi has projected woman as a fierce being as opposed to the universal image of submissive, naive and self – effacing woman.

"when they were born with tigers

breathing between their thighs;

when they set out for battle

with all three eyes on fire" (17-20)

"Ode to Drowning" (Everything Begins Elsewhere, 2) is written as a passionate song about the act of love – making, "a song to be sung at the latest hour of night" (8-10). The longing for the lover and the angst of the beloved form the theme of the poem. Interestingly, rain forms a prime image in the poem. Doshi equates the act of intercourse with the rain drops falling on the earth's surface. Just as how the earth eagerly waits for rain, the beloved too waits for her lover anxiously. The human body becomes a metaphor for consummation:

"It's that old idea

of drowning

in another to find the self". (63-65)

Further in the poem:

"When the hymen

of the earth

is torn into".(87-89)

There has been a paradigm shift in the confrontation of death as a communal phenomenon to a more personal loss. "These processes of individualization and privatization in the organization of death have important implications for the strength of boundaries between the bodies of the living and the dead" (Shilling, 164). Doshi too tries to normalize "death " as a phenomenon, an unavoidable one in her poem, The Art of Losing (Everything Begins Elsewhere,23). Doshi's casual way of referring to death as a mundane affair gives a new dimension to the meaning of death itself. The most striking trait of the poem is the fact that it talks about how death always surrounds one all through one's life starting from one's childhood. The beginning line"It begins with the death of the childhood pet" (1-2) reinforces this idea.

Death, though a physiological phenomenon has a lot of religious beliefs intertwined. The concept of heaven and hell, reincarnation and rebirth are still prevalent. In a sense, the people left behind wailing and sobbing for the dead feel disheartened as they will never be able to see their loved ones again. Thus, it is believed that the soul leaves one human body to take upon another.

" People around you grow old

and die, and its explained

as a kind of going away-

to God, or rot, or to return

as an ant".(30-34)

The callous tone of the lines actually sheds light on the need to be more accepting and being someone who would understand the fact that death is inevitable for the mortal beings. The line "you'll be called aside" (65) reinstates the idea.

But one day your parents

will sneak into the garden

to stand under the stars,

and fade, like the lawn,

into a mossy kind of grey.

And you must let them.(56-61)

The poem touches the readers in a different way for someone who has lost a very dear one, it simply asks to be more 'accommodating' to the fact of losing the person. Doshi discusses losing somebody very close as an art where success comes only to those who could stand strong. Of all the poems discussed so far , "The Art of Losing" is special in the sense that it talks about the inevitability of death in human life and also stresses on the need to accept it. Death is not something outside of life, it is always around the people. The poem is unique as it does not brood on the images of decay and destruction.

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The Bovine and The Divine: Arun Kolatkar and the Pandu-Poetry and God in a Just-So Universe

SONYA J. NAIR

Abstract: The paper examines the many facets of Arun Kolatkar's spiritual philosophy. The ideas of worship, the world, the powers that run it- make for some of Kolatkar's finest verses. The focus is also on the ways that Kolatkar visualized Time and Poetry as exemplified by his line drawings in The Policeman. Troubadour, ascetic, narrator of uncomfortable truths and histories- Kolatkar is this and much more as he slices through the webs of artifice and banality and brings narratives from the everydays in voices that are usually relegated to the margins. In an increasingly xenophobic world, Kolatkar's brand of sub-cultural bliss can lend some much-needed relief.

Keywords: Arun Kolatkar, The Policeman, Jejuri, Indian Poetry in English, Khandoba

There is a Bombay that lives and breathes, in the memories of certain residents and claimed spaces that spoke many languages, saw and befriended many terrains of lives- and at some unwitting point, became the people themselves and the polished table tops and sepia windows of Irani restaurants. There is considerable nostalgia about the pace of the city that was fast enough to be exciting, but graceful enough to be able to dawdle at the Flora Fountain. It was such and similar spaces, people and times that wrote themselves into the heart of Indian poetry in English during the fifties right down to the early decades of the twenty-first century.

After the rather imitative phase of the early Indian English poetry in English, there was a definite trajectory of thought that tried to fashion an Indian ethos of poetry. Most poets of the developmental phase of Indian poetry in English tried to infuse British poetic structures and conventions with Indian themes, chronicle of lives or geographies. The result was a rather stilted attempt involving language that did not seem comfortable in its own shell. The fifties, however, proved to be a pivotal decade, fueling a search for the many selves of

the poets themselves. There was an intense awareness of their surroundings, the milieu, a sharp eye that peered into the core of an identity, leaving out nothing. The private aspects of thought, of ideas, of interiority itself were discussed without hesitation. The subsequent decades, especially the sixties presented various facets of Indian life in a register that was familiar- and yet unfamiliar. The everydays that the poems of Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra, A K Ramanujan discussed were refreshing in that the local was centralized and signaled an unselfconsciousness, ironic tone that was emblematic of a nation that was learning to speak for itself on the world stage. Opines Ranjit Hoskote,

Dom Moraes… belonged, with Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawala and A.K Ramanujan, to the first generation of postcolonial Anglophone poets in India. Their advent, in the literary universe of the 1950s and 1960s, marked a definitive break with the Victorian sentimentality, mellifluous Edwardian cadences and mystical sonority of many Indians who had written English verse before them. these four poets brought an acute and self-critical attentiveness to their art: they knew it to be a contemporary project, an exploration of a complex present rather than an evocation of vanished pasts. As such, they approached their work in the awareness that poetry was a serious career in itself, a sacramental commitment. (ix)

The anxieties of modernity found an expression in the blended tone of Indian poetry English as did the national aspiration towards decolonization.

Families, people, places, customs, festivals, livelihoods, cattle, market places, farewell parties became subject matters for poetry and with these came a vast cultural capital that indicated the need for broader horizons and the urgency to look with greater specificity- the idea of 'Indianness'. Satire found a footing and poems bringing home the peculiarities of Indian English and the notions of progress being linked to the pathways of colonial modernity worked to make Indian poetry in English, truly representative and political. For instance, Ezekiel's The Professor

By God's grace, all my children

Are well settled in life.

One is Sales Manager, One is Bank Manager,

Both have cars. Other also doing well, though not so well.

Every family must have black sheep.

Sarala and Tarala are married,

Their husbands are very nice boys. (Panorama, 141)

Or The Patriot by the same poet:

How one goonda fellow

Threw stone at Indirabehn.

Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking.

Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I am saying (to myself)

Lend me the ears.

Everything is coming –

Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception.

Be patiently, brothers and sisters.

(Panorama, 89)

The common man and his concerns began to be aligned alongside the verses of personal discoveries. The readings of locales, places of historical importance, personas of yore, concerns of cultural legacies and metaphysical themes began to make their presence felt. A new breed of poets, eager to experiment with form and subject began to write with intensity about personal experiences and fused the same with philosophical or social musings. Their coming of age in a nation that was in transition was reflected in their poems that dealt with identity, the body and a sense of confusion resulting from growing up simultaneously in two worlds. These were the main concerns of poets such as Santan Rodrigues, Melanie Silgardo Saleem Peeradina and Eunice de Souza among others. The agency offered by publishing collectives such as Clearing House, Newground or the

literary magazines of the time such as damn you, created a sense of excitement in terms of providing spaces for young or upcoming poets to publish their work. It also helped create the market needed for indie publishing and groups of poets to get together on ventures that went on to set the tone for the poetic sensibilities of the coming times. Poets such as Ranjit Hoskote, Arundhathi Subramaniam and Menka Shivdasani have credited the poetry circles of Bombay for being the first places where they were heard and, more importantly, where they heard some of the most energetic discussions by established poets.

Meanwhile, there was the vast, uncharted space that was regional poetry- poetry in the vernaculars of India that despite being rich in form and experiment, remained confined to the languages it was written in. What Indian poetry in English once lacked in terms of having a clearly visible critical space and theory of poetics, was found in Bhasha literatures.

Poets such as K. Ayyappa Panikar in Malayalam, M G Adiga, V.K Gokak, Gopala Krishna Adiga in Kannada- who brought about the transformative Navya or modernist movement in Kannada- the Virasam poets in Telugu, B. S Mardhekar in Marathi, Muktibodh and Agyeya in Hindi are torch bearers of a very vibrant poetic scene some of these regions. The nation and its (dis) contents being narrativized often called for reimagining the tried and tired metaphors and symbols that hope, joy and other such phenomena were associated with.

शिशिर का भोर Dawn in winter

उतना-सा प्रकाश Just enough light

कि अंधेरा दिखने लगे, for darkness to show.

उतनी-सी वर्षा Just enough rain

कि सन्नाटा सुनाई दे जाए for silence to sound

उतना-सा दर्द कि याद आये Just enough pain to remember

कि भूल गया हूँ, that I have forgotten,

भूल गया हूँ… I have forgotten…

(Nayi Kavita, 12)

Further expanding this ongoing discourse of 'subalternised' poetry, the critic E V Ramakrishnan points out,

The Dalit writer and the woman writer have understood that mainstream literary language excludes them. they have to purge the existing language of its associations and sub-texts before it can be deployed in their defence. The politics of speech has never been so central to the reading of poetry in Indian languages. What is 'regional' about language becomes a sedimentary layer of cultural memory to be invoked and rediscovered in the struggle against spurious versions of identity fostered from above. The search for a new language and the theme of resistance become inseparable in poets as diverse in themes and styles as Dilip Chitre, K. G Sankara Pillai, Vasant A. Dahake, Sitanshu Yashaschandra and Kedarnath Singh. (xxi)

While the worlds of Indian poetry in English and Bhasha poetry seem like they move in different orbits and share an unequal power relation, they do bring the role of the bi-lingual poet into greater prominence. The bilingual poet, who writes in more than one language is a person who is interestingly placed at the intersections of two distinct or eventually colliding worlds. His modernities are many and his views hybrid. The idea of mutual exclusivity is hard to maintain as the poet brings the semantics of one language into other, invites the spaces, nuances, absences from one tongue to make a home in the other. Often poets translate themselves into these other languages, one of which, more often than not, is- English.

There is also the artist-poet as Amit Chaudhuri points out- one who sees poetry on canvas and sees paintings in verse. There were a good number of such poets, especially out of Bombay, A K Mehrotra, Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawala and Arun Kolatkar, to name a few.

Amit Chaudhuri observes in his Introduction to Jejuri,

That this liaison between a dormant, semi-visible literary culture and a semi-visible tradition of modern art has a parallel in the now publicized liaison between similar worlds in Fifties and Sixties New York is indisputable; so is the fact of the richness of the

interaction…. The literary history that might describe, in serious terms, the significance of what happened in that context in Bombay is still to be written, perhaps because the writer in English was, in India, till Rushdie came along accompanied by Booker-inspired fanfare, a sort of elite pariah, a "missing person," in Jussawala's words, a figure marginal to the larger, and solemn, task of nation building. (xi)

Arun Kolatkar is the most interesting and intriguing of the names mentioned so far in this paper, on account of not just his poetry or his artistic mettle, but also due to the power of his vision and his ability to transcend beyond language and pen the worlds that live in that beyond. His persona of a reclusive, reluctant-to publish poet also added to his value as did his towering presence in Marathi poetry. The fact that he opened a small printing press with his friend so as to not have to deal with publishing contracts, is read as more than mere shyness, rather as a rejection of established norms and indeed of establishment itself. The fondness and dedication of his fellow poets, who celebrated his poetry even after he passed on is testimony to the force of his personality and the stamp his particular brand of poetry left on those who came in contact with it.

Kolatkar is fast emerging as a cult figure in Indian poetry in English as his poems have taken on a fresh relevance in the country that we now occupy. Amidst the rigidity and ossification that comes on due to excessive thrust on religion today, Kolatkar's acid observations on God, Divinity and religion in Jejuri finds a renewed resonance. This collection that was met with considerable excitement and critical acclaim, and won the 1977 Commonwealth Prize for Poetry, was based on a trip taken by Kolatkar to Jejuri- a pilgrimage town near Pune, Maharashtra. Jejuri is like any other temple town in India. It is crowded, all roads and all existences point to the temple, there could be a number of stalls, residential complexes, restaurants, private buses that carry the name of the deity. Touts, guides, holy men, temple officials, priests- all claim to show the way to paradise or to help you gain special blessings.

These and many other sights were what Kolatkar wrote about in Jejuri. He takes one on a literal tour of the town as he starts from the bus ride that takes pilgrims into the town and then he embarks on a journey of the sights and sounds. He doesn't see what the others have come to see- Khandoba- the reigning deity of the town- who is

…is a martial god who is the guardian of the Kunbi group of castes in Western Maharashtra. Beginning as a local deity of the dhangars, the nomadic shepherds, he has become adopted as the incarnation of Lord Shiva and is more widely worshiped now. In

the image on Jejuri, he is pictured in his traditional figuration with a sword in hand and astride his horse. Mhalsa is one of the several wives of the martial god and the one most often pictured in the songs of Khandoba. (Nerlekar, 255)

But more than the shrine or its attendant air of piousness, it is the peripherals that interest Kolatkar. He talks of the journey of a water pipe:

a conduit pipe

runs with the plinth

turns a corner of the house

stops dead in its tracks

shoots straight up

keeps close to the wall

doubles back

twists around

and conies to an abrupt halt

a brass mouse with a broken neck (A Water Pipe, 8)

or an old woman looking to survive

An old woman grabs

hold of your sleeve

and tags along.

She wants a fifty paise coin.

She says she will take you

to the horseshoe shrine.

….

When you hear her say,

'What else can an old woman do

on hills as wretched as these?' (An Old Woman, 15)

In Jejuri, Kolatkar trains an observer's eye upon the life of and in Jejuri- the town. Assuming the mantle of a wandering sage- not a minstrel- for his tone is not so cheerful or light, he speaks aloud of the scenes he witnesses or the people he meets. His angle of vision may vary, at times, he is a witness as it unfolds, at other times, a participant. He might well be an object or a shadow in the corner. Which is why he knows what the door feels as it stands its panels unhinged, ripped from their holds-

Hell with the hinge and damn the jamb.

The door would have walked out

long long ago

if it weren't for

that pair of shorts

left to dry upon its shoulders. (The Door, 9)

The light from this poem spills over from it being the mere idea of the agency of the door standing to mean the main reason most people stay in relationships that they know are no longer viable, the excuses one makes for the powerlessness or the cowardice one shows when faced with big decisions is a very potent theme here. It is this ability to mutate that Laetitia Zecchini referred to as the "transformative traffics between travelling cultures, literatures, forms and idioms, the many resonances of Kolatkar's poetry with world poetry

and of Bombay modernism with other modernisms across the world." (xvi) Along with Dilip Chitre, Kolatkar created geographies of the mind and gave voice to a process that was able to transform the ordinary, the everyday into a deeply spiritual endeavour. What helped rise Kolatkar's poetry above being just plentiful, full- throated spirituality bordering on the banal, was his flexibility with irony, to be able to think up the absurd as an afterthought.

The door was open.

Manohar thought

it was one more temple.

He looked inside.

Wondering

which god he was going to find.

He quickly turned away

when a wide eyed calf

looked back at him.

It isn't another temple,

he said,

it's just a cowshed. (Manohar, 14)

In Jejuri, where everywhere is a temple, Kolatkar brings the haste of the pilgrim, the eye that just doesn't understand what it sees- all into the last line of the poem. The juxtaposition of the bovine and the divine brings this contrast out beautifully.

This position makes it worthwhile to explore the idea of God for Kolatkar. In an interview Kolatkar replies when asked if he believed in God- "I leave the question alone. I don't think I take a position about God one way or the other." (Correspondence, 142)

In fact, this irreverence is a running theme in Kolatkar as he uses irony to great effect to carry out conversations that uproot the great banyan trees of established faith. There is a crushing disdain towards the assuredness of the Divine Right of Gods and an irrepressible urge to question them- or call out their decisions, which when seen through Kolatkar's eyes, seem cruel, unjustifiable and altogether bad ideas. In Sarpa Satra, where he re-reads the sacrificial fire of Janamejaya, his eye spares no one or nothing. In an engaging conversation, he asks Takshak- the snake god who bit Parikshit and set the whole cycle of revenge in motion- where he was when Arjuna and Krishna, on a whim and to test the newly gifted divine weapons, burnt the Khandava forest to ashes, which

…contained five thousand

Different kinds of butterflies alone

And a golden squirrel found nowhere else.

And the fire also decimated the people of the forest

They've gone without a trace.

With their language

that sounded like the burbling of a brook, (CPE, 196)

He writes of the consequences of anger and the futility of revenge in Janamejaya as the protagonist speaks of the manner of the death of his father, the futility of trying to prevent an inevitability. The philosophy of being alive and celebrating the same instead of obsessing over the dynamics of power, the politics of revenge and the need to acquire or possess things that come with a definitive shelf-life is what one generally observes Kolatkar advocating. There is no over-arching narrative of the brave, eternally testosterone charged warrior, seeking to write his legacy in blood. Instead, there are the everyday people- the prostitute, the loutish friend, the street-smart guy offering unsolicited advice and going

about the tasking of living with the same air of busy-ness that any CEO might have. From his Collected Poems in English, (CPE):

Fuck your cap.

If it's gone, it's gone.

You've still got your head on, right?

Hold on to it tight.

(The Wind Song, 242)

Or even his much celebrated Three Cups of Tea-written in the idiom of Bombaiyya Hindi that reads not as beautifully when translated into English- a poem that celebrates the cadences of just living life in the moment. There is a carnivalesque abandon to the lives he presents, the people he populates his world with- their philosophy and point of view making them flaneurs of the post-modern kind. They are people who sing not of the beauty of the sunset or of the rooftops where birds come home to roost in a beloved city, quite the contrary-

Shit city, he thunders;

the lion of Bombay thunders,

Shit City!

(CPE 148, The Shit Sermon)

These truths mixed with a shot of rum (or lack thereof) or the heat and dust of the sprawling metropolis, assume the nature of a spiritual journey, not unlike the one poet undertook as he wrote Jejuri. The troubadour, the wandering poet, the Mast ascetic- these are some of the capes the poet dons with great flair. The nature of his devotion is not quite unlike the Bhakti saints, as he addresses God as his equal, his friend or just another human. The lover connotation or God as king image is, thankfully, missing from his works. Kolatkar's spirituality seems to have been fashioned from the bohemian air that swept through the

world in the Sixties and Seventies- the sort of spirituality that comes from deep within the soul and is answered by the Beatles or Elton John on a hazy evening.

God for Kolatkar is everyone and yet no one. the sheer ordinariness and vulnerability that he attributes to this symbol makes it disarmingly charming and appealing. The all-provider who thinks of everything and yet is made of basalt- one of the most common rocks found in Jejuri.

In The Shit Sermon, he makes the drunk sing his version of thanks to God

God is great, he says.

He has given all his creatures,

great and small,

two holes:

a feedhole and a shithole,

and He will provide.

Usne sabko diyela hai

—khaneko muh,

hugneko gaand.

God is great, he says,

shouting,

I shall not want. (CPE, 146)

And in Jejuri he presents another deity, a "second class god." (38) He is Yeshwant Rao, in whom the populace has immense faith, unlike Khandoba, he has no extensive mythology attached to him, no brave deeds- meaning he is unclaimed as yet by the co-opting forces

seeking to add more and more deities to the ever-expanding mainstream pantheon. He is an immense god though, people come to him to seek blessings for their children and to be healed. Interestingly, he is made of basalt- which makes him rather ordinary and local to Jejuri. He is a god who doesn't offer salvation, but will set broken bones to heal- and as Kolatkar points out, as he is a god with no arms and feet, he might understand the prayers of the supplicants, a bit better. A god who identifies with his devotees seems to be the sort of God whom Kolatkar imagines presiding over the Universe. A God who is himself at the mercy of the elements, who is perhaps, appointed a God by mere chance or an accident of fate. The sort of God that a prostitute takes a picture with, standing between him and his wife. The God who is fondly called Vitthoo by his consort Rakhmabai, and a devotee and who, knowing that his wife's peripheral vision is bad, goes wandering from her side instead of being in the temple or worse still, was never even there.

These gods walk in and out of Kolatkar's verses, speaking in the first person or wondering at the genesis of their divinity. But it is in his brilliant work of non-verbal poetry- a series of line drawings called The Policeman that Kolatkar narrates an endearing vision of the chaos that reigns in the name of order in this world and the way that his version of God runs about trying to make sense of it all. The figure of the police constable is one of the most discussed images in Marathi culture. He is not your usual station in-charge or the man who bashes up goons or kills smugglers in 'encounters'. He is not the saviour who angrily stands up to his superiors and politicians and delivers dialogues that earn whistles from the fifty rupee- ticket crowd in the cinema halls. He is the Pandu- the constable- found at traffic signals, at railway stations, at entrances to temples, always directing traffic or asking people to get a move on. The Pandu, along with the yellow and black taxis of Bombay remain one of the city's most identifiable symbols.

Drawn in 1969, the original sketches are now lost and the current copies of the book in circulation are from one of the first versions of the book. The cover of the book is indicative of what is to come as it shows the figure of the God/ Policeman nailed to a cross and accompanied by the various directions he could have taken as an alternative. Designed by Kolatkar himself, the cover serves as a takeoff point for the choices that God himself seems to make in the guise of granting free will to the world. The complete title of the work is, The Policeman: A Wordless Play in Thirteen Scenes. Zecchini describes the opening sequence of the book thus:

The Policeman: A Wordless Play in Thirteen Scenes, which is the only book of the poet's graphic work published to date, encapsulates the spirit of Kolatkar's world, which

constantly reforms and renews itself, gesture after gesture, line after line, image after image. It is composed of a series of line drawings where the poet's sense of humour, tenderness, playful irreverence and extraordinary visual imagination are given free rein. It also opens on a remarkable self-portrait of the poet, although the clean-cut mouth and drooping mustache are the only traits immediately discernible. The mouth is closed on a cigarette, and the smoke curling up from the cigarette outlines the contours of a nose, an eye, the hint of a forehead and an elongated eyebrow. It is a portrait between the lines, as it were, the moving, malleable, provisional portrait of an artist who slipped through the hands of fixed identities and who treasured impermanence. (xvii)

In the thirteen segments that Kolatkar sketches, one can discern the patterns of life of a God who is the eternal traffic policeman situated in an open field, arms windmilling to direct the course of time, to send along snakes and snails, to let bees build a hive in the crook of an outstretched arm. The Policeman is an entity who seems to trying to cope on the best of days. And on the bad days, he runs away, only to come back to his pedestal almost immediately. In this seemingly lonely and utterly wordless universe that he occupies, his friends are the various creatures of Nature- he dances in ecstasy, grabbing a half moon, stands upside down on his pedestal- a mad God whose only nemesis is the Lightning. The Lightning approaches him at various times, at interludes, roaring, bringing rain, depriving him of his umbrella- making him install a badly made stone God in his place- so as to fool the Lightning. The next panel shows the lightning pointed dangerously at the exposed genitals of the now naked God. He then resumes his post, fully clothed, in a swiftly intensifying downpour- the idea of the supreme being and His will prevailing- all smashed to smithereens. Arun Khopkar discusses this supreme being who straddles cultures, belief systems and geographies:

The Policeman is Arun's dance-drama in thirteen scenes. Its hero is the dancing cop-God and its heroine is Arun's dancing line, Maya. She shifts the scenes in time, covering the cycle of days and seasons. We go into mythical times, with the cop-God dancing on the hood of the multi-headed serpent holding a prize fish in his raised hand. We see our ever-vigilant hero in prehistoric times, conducting the traffic, making a dinosaur wait for millennia for his hand to come down, to be finally carried as a fossil by a crane…. We are privileged to see a mermaid-Madonna- Yashoda nurse the cop-God, secure in the womb of a whale. (124)

The clarity of faith that shines through these panels conveys Kolatkar's deep and abiding spirituality. It is more of a sense of reassurance that the noise and thunder and confusion

on earth is not entirely ignored, it is possibly the result of a bumbling God who is keeping watch- the most important part of the idea being that of a God who knows and understands.

The idea of time is of significant interest in the book, as it is presented as an entity that is circular, which the God then makes leap through a hoop, in the process creating infinite channels of TIME which is then presented in the panel in the font of the TIME Magazine with the Policeman featuring on the cover. This tongue-in-cheek illustration is characterized as God's reply to the 1966 April issue of TIME magazine's cover page that carried no photo- only the caption, Is God Dead? At a time when the presence of a white, male, monolithic God was being challenged by the perception of a gentle, spiritual and sentient energy, Kolatkar's presentation is in many ways, an affirmation of this idea, as well a rebuttal to the question by TIME. It also indicated the multiple interpretations of the idea of death or being dead- that through the mention of his death, God remains alive. The philosophical implications of that illustration and its original in TIME were quite symptomatic of that age of skepticism and urgent calls for reorienting the imagination to think of a new sort of God. Like one who goes about his work as though directing traffic perhaps.

The last two segments of the book are especially relevant- the first is where the sun is shining overhead and the shadow of the policeman is to his left. He moves the shadow to his right, while the sun still remains overhead. In the last panel of the narrative, the sun is overhead, the shadow is still to the right, the policeman, however, is gone. We are to understand that it is his shadow that creates night on earth. Power conveyed very subtly.

The last segment features the return of the lightning, which grows more ominous and dragon-like with every panel, until the policeman opens his mouth and yells at the lightning which then is reduced to a mere weakened presence.

These panels convey the immenseness of the God of Kolatkar's imagination- a God who keeps his power for when it matters, who is like the common man, going about his business of living, encountering difficulties, finding his way out of them through that most Indian of methods, the jugaad, until one day, when the occasion demands it, he steps into the role of God and restores peace.

It makes one wonder if this God is at all divine or is it just the tolerance and sense of control that rests within each one of us that makes us want to protect our worlds that makes Gods

of us all. It contextualizes Vitthoo (Vithala), Rakhmabai, Yeshwant Rao and the drunk delivering the Shit Sermon.

The Policeman is an extraordinary work of poetry, though it does not have a single line of written poetry in it. But that is what the work stands for. A radical re-imagination of what constitutes God, poetry and the world as we imagine it. The idea being that weighty words such fate, destiny, karma be consigned to flames and instead, the focus be placed on living with the beautiful knowledge that the world is a very transient place, occupied by leaves, ants, whales and bees – who have every right to live alongside us and that in this ephemeral world where one day, Gods on pedestals are garlanded, while on other days, they stand stark naked as their clothes are strung out to dry, there is a traffic of organisms, times, seasons and snails. And humans, who consider themselves the most important beings on the planet, are not even featured in a book that is synonymous with the Universe. So, we must learn to not attach so much importance to our lives that we spend on this earth as non-entities. The biggest lesson of it all is that this entire world, God, traffic- everything could just the smoke induced fantasy of a man with a droopy moustache smoking a cigarette who appears on the first page.

God?

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