DESIRE IN DISCOURSE: RECONFIGURING SEXUAL PURITY NORMS IN SELECT POST-MILLENNIUM MALAYALAM SHORT STORIES

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the corrections and suggestions recommended by the adjudicators have been incorporated in the thesis entitled **"Desire in Discourse: Reconfiguring Sexual Purity Norms in Select Post- Millennium Malayalam Short Stories"** submitted by Sheniya Jose P.

It has also been certified that the thesis and the soft copy are the same.

Her thesis is submitted as such to the University of Calicut with reference to the letter No. No. 159211/RESEARCH-C-ASST-3/2025/Admn dtd 27.11.2025

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled **"Desire in Discourse: Reconfiguring Sexual Purity Norms in Select Post- Millennium Malayalam Short Stories"** is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Abida Farooqui and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of the thesis have undergone a plagiarism check using iThenticate software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index was found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI-generated content.

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Contents

Abstract

Desire in Discourse: Reconfiguring Sexual Purity Norms in Select Post-Millennium Malayalam Short Stories

This research foregrounds the complex interface between sexuality, morality and culture which has dominated the debates on postmodernism, globalization and women after the millennium. The aim of the research is to draw a synchronic study of the representation of desire and the purity norms in relation to 'deviant' sexuality, especially non-conjugal and socially unacceptable 'illicit' relationships, in select post-millennium short stories in Malayalam.

The thesis uses purity as an umbrella term with extensive connotations of sexual fidelity and the related concepts of physical and moral purity, impurity and dirt, sexual contamination, pollution and defilement resulting from contact with impure bodies, and tries to elucidate how such norms become socially, culturally and historically constructed and defined, assuming varied forms through different periods of time.The research argues that desire and sexual purity norms are constructed and get reconfigured along the gastro-political, spatial and discursive contours of culture. The research also attempts to bring to light the fluidity of and social fragility of such terms and how politically situated they are. It also examines how caste and chastity overlap and permeate into each other's signification having the same etymological and cultural roots.

The research thesis consists of three core chapters apart from an introductory chapter, concluding chapter and a chapter titled "Recommendations and Findings". The study substantiates the arguments drawing upon insights provided by a number of Western and Indian cultural theorists.

The conceptual theme of research has been identified in the select short fiction of the writers S. Hareesh, Santhosh Echikkanam, Subhash Chandran, K. Rekha, S. Sithara, Unni R., Arshad Bathery, V. Shinilal, Sreelatha, Pramod Raman, Abin Joseph, Vinoy Thomas, E.K. Shahina and Yama.

Key Words: Desire, Sexual Purity Norms, Gastropolitics, Eroticized Topographies, Discourse, Post-Millennium Malayalam Short Stories.

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കാമനാവ്യവഹാരങ്ങളും ലൈംഗികശുദ്ധിസങ്കല്പങ്ങളുടെ പുനർവിന്യാസവും – രണ്ടായിരത്തിനുശേഷമുള്ള തെരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത മലയാള ചെറുകഥകളെ മുൻനിർത്തിയുള്ള പഠനം

രണ്ടായിരത്തിന് ശേഷമുള്ള ഉത്തരാധുനികത, ആഗോളവൽക്കരണം, സ്ത്രീ എന്നിവയുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട് ഉയർന്ന സംവാദങ്ങളിൽ ആധിപത്യം സ്ഥാപിച്ച ലൈംഗികത, സദാചാരം, സംസ്കാരം, എന്നിവ തമ്മിലുള്ള സങ്കീർണമായ സമ്പർക്കമാണ് ഈ ഗവേഷണം ഊന്നിപ്പറയുന്നത്. തെരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത, പുതിയ മലയാള ചെറുകഥകളിലെ കാമനകളുടെ വെളിപ്പെടലുകളും വിശുദ്ധിയുടെ മാനദണ്ഡങ്ങളും സാമൂഹ്യ സമ്മതിയില്ലാത്ത, അവിഹിതമായബന്ധങ്ങളിൽ വ്യതിരിക്തലൈംഗികതയുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ട് എങ്ങനെ സമന്വയിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് ചിത്രീകരിക്കുകയാണ് ഈ പഠനത്തിന്റെ ലക്ഷ്യം .

ലൈംഗികമായ സദാചാര സങ്കല്പം അതിനോട് ചേർത്ത് പറയാവുന്ന ശാരീരികവും മാനസികവുമായ വിശുദ്ധിസങ്കല്പങ്ങൾ, അശുദ്ധിയും മലിനതയും, മലീമസലൈംഗികത, അഴുക്ക്,കളങ്കപ്പെടൽ ഇവയെയെല്ലാം ഒരു കുടക്കീഴിൽ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളിക്കാവുന്ന ഒരു താക്കോൽ വാക്കായാണ് ഈ പ്രബന്ധത്തിൽ വിശുദ്ധി എന്ന പദം ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നത്. ഇവയെല്ലാം വിവിധ കാലഘട്ടങ്ങളിൽ ,വിവിധരൂപങ്ങളിൽ സാമൂഹികമായും സാംസ്കാരികമായും ചരിത്രപരമായും നിർമ്മിക്കപ്പെടുന്നതും വിശകലനം ചെയ്യപ്പെടുന്നതും എങ്ങനെയെന്ന് ഈ പ്രബന്ധം വിശദീകരിക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു.

കാമനയും ലൈംഗിക വിശുദ്ധിയുടെ മാനദണ്ഡങ്ങളും സംസ്കാരത്തിന്റെ വ്യത്യസ്ത അടരുകളായ ഭക്ഷണരാഷ്ട്രീയത്തിലൂടെയും രതിസ്ഥലികളിലൂടെയും വ്യവഹാരങ്ങളിലൂടെയും ആകൃതിപ്പെടുന്നതാണെന്നും വിവിധ രൂപങ്ങളിലൂടെ നിർമ്മിക്കപ്പെടുകയും പുനക്രമീകരിക്കപ്പെടുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നുവെന്നും ഈ ഗവേഷണം സമർത്ഥിക്കുന്നു.അവ സാമൂഹ്യമായ ദുർബലതയുടെ ദ്രവീകൃതസ്വഭാവം പ്രകാശിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിന്റെ രാഷ്ട്രീയം ഈ പഠനം ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുന്നുണ്ട്. അതോടൊപ്പം ജാതിയും ചാരിത്ര്യവും എങ്ങനെയാണ് ജൈവികമായി,സാംസ്കാരികമായ അടിപ്പാതകളിലൂടെ ഒന്നിനൊന്ന് കെട്ടുപിണഞ്ഞു കിടക്കുന്നതെന്ന് ഈ ഗവേഷണം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു.

ആമുഖം, ഉപസംഹാരം എന്നിവയ്ക്കു പുറമെ മൂന്ന് അധ്യായങ്ങളാണ് ഈ പ്രബന്ധത്തിൽ ഉള്ളത്. കൂടാതെ നിർദ്ദേശങ്ങളും കണ്ടെത്തലുകളും പ്രത്യേകമായി അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്.പാശ്ചാത്യ - ഇന്ത്യൻ സൈദ്ധാന്തികരുടെ ആശയങ്ങൾ ഉപയോഗിച്ച് സ്വന്തം വാദമുഖങ്ങളെ സാധൂകരിക്കാൻ ശ്രമിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

എസ് ഹരീഷ്, സന്തോഷ് ഏച്ചിക്കാനം ,സുദാഷ് ചന്ദ്രൻ കെ.രേഖ ,സിതാര എസ്, ഉണ്ണി ആർ, അർഷാദ് ബത്തേരി, വി ഷിനിലാൽ , ശ്രീലത, പ്രമോദ് രാമൻ, അബിൻ ജോസഫ്, വിനോയ് തോമസ്, ഷാഹിന ഇകെ, യമ എന്നീ കഥാകൃത്തുക്കളുടെ തെരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത കഥകളെ മുൻനിർത്തിയാണ് ഈ പഠനം നിർവഹിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്.

താക്കോൽ വാക്കുകൾ:

കാമന, ലൈംഗികശുദ്ധിയുടെ മാനദണ്ഡങ്ങൾ, ഭക്ഷണരാഷ്ട്രീയം, രതി പ്രകൃതികൾ, വ്യവഹാരം, രണ്ടായിരത്തിനുശേഷമുള്ള മലയാള ചെറുകഥ.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Representation and narration are fundamental categories in the entire process of signification because we make sense of our social and cultural world with their mediation and help. As the process of representation is entangled with language, it consequently gets mired in social struggles. As Brian Longhurst and others state: "Language has become increasingly politicized and implicated in social struggles. Consequently, argument has moved from seeing language as a neutral instrument for objectively representing and communicating the views of a uniform grouping to seeing language as a politically and culturally charged medium over which groups wrestle for control" (44).

Lisa Blackman also underscores the importance language as a site where subjects construct themselves and are constructed. The wholeness of culture is created with a series of texts and narratives through which individuals navigate the social world of meanings (32). Hence, individual specimens of narratives and texts carry a lot of weightage as they point to the formation of the web of culture. Thus, being connected to the production of knowledge and the exercise of power, representation necessarily becomes a political act. Literature is a form of cultural production and is a political act in itself. Literature produced from a particular region can capture the contours of cultural changes which in turn are ensnared in the Foucauldian trio of knowledge, power and discourse.

This research aims at foregrounding the complex interface between sexuality, morality and culture which has dominated the debates on postmodernism, globalization and women after the millennium in the light of select Malayalam short stories which deal with adulterous, deviant or socially unacceptable sexual relationships and sexuality as the central theme. The study also highlights the evolution of the concept of purity associated with 'chaste sex' and how it came to be conjugalized historically. There is also an emphasis on exploring the ways how the selected post-millennial writers show 'cultural resistance' by negotiating the 'fissures' in patriarchal society to express themselves in unexpected ways. The thesis uses purity as an umbrella term with extensive connotations of sexual fidelity and the related concepts of physical and moral purity, impurity and dirt, sexual contamination, pollution and defilement resulting from contact with impure bodies, and tries to elucidate how such norms become socially, culturally and historically constructed and defined, assuming varied forms through different periods of time. The research also examines how caste and chastity overlap and permeate into each other's signification having the same etymological and cultural roots.

Adultery, a common motif in literature, is often represented as a sinful act, especially in the literature of the Christianized West. Those who commit adultery, especially the women characters, are often represented as either getting 'punished' or ending up in destruction. For example, in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Anna's extra marital relationship invites her own destruction whereas her brother Stiva Oblonsky, who is guilty of the same 'sin', escapes such a punishment. Most of the European

authors are seen to be led by the Christian concept of sin for passing their judgments on characters who err morally.

In Christianity, adultery is defined as a carnal connection between a married person and one unmarried, or between a married person and the spouse of another. It is seen to differ from fornication in that it presupposes the marriage of one or both of the agents (Melody 446). “The elementary underlying archetype upon which the universe is assembled is wisdom. The insight into this basic design upon which the world rests is essential to lead a fruitful life. Christianity believes that a factor bringing insight into this design is watchful protection of sex within the sanctity of matrimony” (Das and Rao 21).

Adultery is often associated with repressed sexuality. Sexuality encompasses sexual identity, attraction and experiences which may or may not correspond with sex and gender. Jeffrey Weeks says that sexuality is not a ‘natural’ phenomenon but rather a product of social and historical forces. Sexuality is a “fictional unity that once did not exist” (Weeks 15). Michel Foucault in his attempt to show how sex is historically subordinate to sexuality in the *History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction* says: “We must not place sex on the side of reality, and sexuality on that of confused ideas and illusions; Sexuality is a very real historical formation; it is what gave rise to the notion of sex, as a speculative element necessary to its operation” (157). According to Anthony Giddens today sexuality has been found out, broadened and made available in accordance with the development of various lifestyles. It is no longer a predetermined state of affairs, but something that an individual has or cultivates. In its flexibility in relation to the self and in its existence

as a binding factor between body, self-identity and social norms, sexuality has some scope for further exploration (15).

During the first century A.D., there was a growing disapproval of 'mollities' (sex indulged in purely for pleasure) in the West. The Church later accepted the view that the purpose of sex was reproduction. So, sex outside marriage was obviously for pleasure and hence a sin (Weeks 32). Foucault calls this historical process of limiting the boundaries of sexuality to the confines of marriage as "conjugalization" in *The Care of the Self*, Volume 3 of *The History of Sexuality*. He states:

> Now in the ethics of strict marriage that we see being formulated in the first centuries of our era, it is easy to ascertain something that might be called a "conjugalization' of sexual relations- a conjugalization at once direct and reciprocal. Direct: it is the nature of sexual intercourse that must prevent one from resorting to it outside marriage. Reciprocal, for it is the nature of marriage and of the bond formed between the spouses that must rule out the sexual pleasures one might find elsewhere. The state of marriage and sexual activity must therefore coincide, and for good reasons, rather than for the sole aim of a legitimate progeny. This coincidence-or rather than the movement that tends to make them coincide, not without a certain number of possible gaps and margins-is manifested in the elaboration of two principles. First, given its nature, sexual pleasure cannot be allowed outside marriage, which implies practically that it should not even be tolerated in an unmarried individual. Second, the marriage bond is such that the wife risks being hurt

> not just by the loss of her status but by the fact that her husband might take his pleasure with someone other than her. (166)

Foucault also broods over the "new problematization of adultery and the incipient requirement of double sexual fidelity" among the early Greeks:

> We know that adultery was juridically condemned and morally reproved on account of the injustice done by a man to the one whose wife he led astray. What constituted adultery in an extra marital sexual relation was the fact that the woman was married and that fact alone: the marital status of the man was not relevant. The deceit and injury were a matter between the two men-the one who had possessed himself of the woman and the one who had the legitimate rights to her. (171)

When narratives from different parts of the world, in and outside the European Continent are analyzed, it is obvious that the value ascribed to chastity of sex which is conjugalized, and the erotic lawlessness of extramarital sex, was not uniquely associated with the West. Anthony Giddens tries to prove this point when he says that the moral rupture between 'chaste' sex within marriage and extramarital affairs was not exclusive to Christianized Europe alone. He says aristocracies outside Europe also identified the difference between the passionately erotic nature of extra marital affairs and the "chaste sexuality of marriage." Norms and notions of love closely linked to the Christian morals were the only specific contribution of Europe (39).

A close analysis of sexuality norms prevalent in nineteenth century Europe and later spread to other parts of the world due to colonialism, would bring to light

the intriguing element of extra marital sex, that it does not rest solely on its social unacceptability and element of forbidden pleasures it provides. On the other hand, it was used to set off the glory of conjugalized sex. Conjugal sex and non-conjugal sex were binarized and thus the cultural signification process was executed. The purity associated with marital sex was highlighted against the dirt and impurity associated with sex outside marriage, and the norms of pollution and contamination relating sexuality were gradually ascribed to certain social classes of women, especially in the nineteenth century Europe.

Gemma Commane grows vocal about the process of ostracizing some classes in the name of alleged filth related to their sexuality in her book *Bad Girls, Dirty Bodies: Sex, Performance and Safe Femininity.* She says the nineteenth century had a fixation on dirt which augmented the value of purity in contrast. The 'social pollutants' were the targeted groups for correction and purification who were primarily spotted as working-class women, prostitutes and other "loose" women who exhibited loud sexuality (30). Women's sexualities and bodies are more prone to policing, despite the identity of sexual consumers acquiescently given to women in the modern times. Filth and the social stigma the dirty bodies entail are used as means to impose social conformity and norms of the abject. The way certain bodies occupy social space is described as dirty. Such stigmas are attached to autonomous, self-willed, violently loud and sexual women, by external agencies, to silence their voices. Such notions of purity are circulated to underscore the dominant ideological positions and to punish and to sanitize those who violate the societal cleanliness. Apart from the punitive purpose, it helps the individuals and groups who value and

validate purity to feel secure about their own identity. Hence defining what is socially undesirable also defines what is desirable, by default. Such groups or agencies can keep a safe and healthy distance from dirty bodies, define and create their own identity by contrastive distribution, and thus prevent themselves from getting contaminated.

Ironically, the switching between the conditions of dirt and cleanliness is accessible and affordable only to the pure whereas the impure cannot aspire purity in the same manner. This smooth switching is very evident in the Sambandha system of marriage prevalent among Namboodiri men and Nair women of Kerala, which will be discussed later. This gradual yet ongoing dynamics results in the eternal marginalization of certain groups. Such discourses offer a particular framework for the perception, assessment and expression of gender in wider cultural scenarios, since they are historically grounded (30-32).

Anthony Giddens points out the double standards prevalent in purity norms where women are usually classified as either loose or wicked, and wicked women have always existed on the periphery of the society. A woman's resistance of sexual temptation has long been considered as a mark of virtue. This resistance is reinforced by a number of institutional safeguards like shotgun weddings and chaperoned courtship. While men were traditionally thought to be in need of sexual variety for their physical well-being, and even their multiple sexual encounters before marriage enjoy social acceptability, women were denied of that freedom, and even after marriage the double standard persists (7).

Lawrence Stone notes that an obvious double standard prevails as far as the sexual conduct of men and women are concerned, in his research about the divorce history in England. A single act of infidelity from a wife considered an unforgivable violation of property rights and the concept of inheritance and its discovery incurred harsh penalties. On the contrary, when husbands committed adultery, it was considered to be a regrettable yet understandable act (7).

Mary John and Janaki Nair point out five significant milestones in the thematization of sexuality in the West. The work of Sigmund Freud; the Women's Movements of the 1960s and 70s and the radical sexual politics emerged from it; the French feminist theory and the contributions of Jacques Lacan; the publication of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*; and finally, the recent classification of sexuality as sexual preference (2-3). In the Indian subcontinent, on the other hand sexuality as a distinct category has evolved within three major discourses: in the demographic discourses as an implicit foundation of it; in the realm of social reforms through legislation and court room proceedings, present as the focal point of contentious deliberations; and in anthropological studies about diverse forms of marriage and family structures (18). One can assume that while the European theorization of sexuality had more or less an academic background, the Indian one was premised upon discourses of colonization, nationalism and social reforms. Hence the Western theories cannot be used a priori for a synchronic analysis of diverse sites of sexuality existing in India.

The Academic Background of the Study and Review of Literature

While zeroing in on the context of sexuality in the Indian Subcontinent, we can understand that all the Western concepts of sexuality, morality, marriage and sinfulness differ in the Indian context at large and the Kerala context in particular. The extreme paradigm shifts faced by the Indian conceptualization of sexuality from Bronze age Civilizations to the present are explored by Keya Das and Satyanarayana Rao. They contend that views on moral uprightness with regard to sexuality were upheld by ancient texts of Buddhism and Hinduism, especially the Vedic scripts, dated even two millennia before Christ. As exemplified by the epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, sex was considered a reciprocal obligation within matrimony. The monarchs enjoyed the freedom to enter into polyandrous and polygamous marriages to secure rights of succession. At the same time, the common public maintained monogamous relationships (20-21).

They also elaborate upon Vatsyayana's Kamasutra, the sixth century aphorisms on love and sex. In this text *kama* or sexual desire is treated as a science, art and discipline of love. This treatise on love served as a guide to sexual gratification within the bounds of matrimony and desire outside marriage. Khajuraho temples illustrate the prevalent ideals of sexual desire from nineth to twelfth centuries. Vachaspati's *Smritiratnavali* and *Kamathantra* written in the fourteenth century also deal with love and sex. *The Perfumed Garden* by Sheikh Nefzaoui is quite intriguing in its illustrations of sexual knowledge. Das and Rao try to elaborate on India's borrowal of the British moral values throughout the Age of Discovery and the subsequent vulnerability to Victorian values. The comparatively

liberal and pluralistic attitude towards sexuality which prevailed in India were misinterpreted as an example of the oriental other which is inferior and exotic at the same time (21).

Many researchers in the present century have pointed out that the establishment of reformist movements like the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj were really aimed at propagating sexual Puritanism and conjugalization of sexuality, under the cover of progressive reforms related to women's right to education and widow remarriage. Women's sexuality has always been a debatable concept in India as elsewhere in the world. The prevalence of sexual liberalism from the Vedic age itself was not always inclusive of women. According to Swapna Banerjee's research on women's domesticity in late colonial India, women were often excluded from the discourses of sexual liberalism that existed from the Vedic age itself. The shift from nomadism to settled agriculture and the consequent burgeoning of markets and towns beginning in the eighth century BCE, reinforced caste and class divisions and strengthened the attempts at the regulation of women's sexuality by Indian men. The ritual purity of the Brahminical practices was the buttress upon which the caste system was maintained and hence the so called 'impure' sexual practices of women were always under surveillance (456). In that manner, slowly the vectors of caste, class and gender have been placed at crossroads in determining the sexual identity of a woman.

In India discourses on sexuality cannot proceed without considering the intersectional roles played by caste and gender. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's works throw some light on the intricate working of them. He blames endogamy as the major

sociocultural element that sustains the caste system. This is achieved by outrageous disciplining of women's body and sexuality at various levels through observances like Sati and widowhood, to abort potential transgressions. The structural hierarchy of the caste economy is maintained and practised at two reciprocal levels; while safeguarding the chastity of upper caste women, the upper caste men unleash their sexual violence against lower caste women (3-21).

The irrational emphasis given to the purity of women can be traced back to the Vedic age. *The Ramayana* is not only the story of Rama being the ideal king, it is also the story of Sita, being forced to prove her chastity through a fire ordeal and being abandoned for spending sometime in the land of an admiring king. Her chastity equals the purity of the nation and the king serves as the custodian of both. Another character is Shilavati, who is often cited the epitome of chastity in Hindu mythology. She fulfils her role of a 'chaste' woman by a complete servility and dedication to her husband, who is a leper, which goes to the extent of carrying him to a courtesan. Thus, the Indian concept of an ideal wife, as represented by the ancient texts, has been that of someone who has to surrender her sexuality and identity in the attempt of being subservient to her husband, satisfying his sexual needs.

Quoting the Bengali literary critic Dinesh Chandra Sen, who was a curator of precolonial Bengali literature, Swapna Banerjee says that most of the Indian literature is about eulogizing the sexual purity of women and the influence it carries on the individual and social development of men (457). This zest in upholding the physical purity of women is more or less buttressed on the caste-wise untouchability

norms prevailed in India where physical touch itself was counted to be defiling. Thus, the most ambivalent aspect about the history of Indian concept of sexuality is that, a nation which was extolling the art of desire on the one hand was denigrating physical touch from a lower caste, on the other. One can even state without any sense of exaggeration, that as far as touch was concerned, married women had to consider all other men except her husband as belonging to a different caste.

This fixation with the physical purity of women rose to new dimensions during the Nationalist movement where the nation itself was metaphorically conceived into a 'holy mother'. Partha Chatterjee in his essay "The Nationalist Resolution of the Woman's Question" argues that in the late nineteenth century the private space of the home was rearticulated by the Nationalists as a niche of Indian culture undefiled from colonial control over the public sphere (236). The Nationalists were indoctrinated by the ideal which they felt essential to the creation of the new nation, and consequently, women and their sexualities were exalted to the position of the repository of Indian culture. Women were supposed to be the custodians and curators of tradition and indirectly were forced to bear the brunt of accidental disruptions, if any. The traditional womanly virtues like 'chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience and labors of love were extolled and deployed as the guards against the infiltration of colonial values (237). With the introduction of the concept of Bharat Matha, the country attained the metonymical prestige of the pure female body, whose honor had to be safeguarded by the nationalists. Consequently, the dichotomy between the home and the nation

emerged. Thus, women's bodies and sexualities were gradually transforming into a site for the articulation of Indian culture.

Many political historians have eloquently tried to illuminate the obscure aspects of Gandhian politics with regard to the women's question. For example, many political philosophers as well as feminists have observed the special attention given to male celibacy by Gandhi suspiciously. Despite acknowledging the sexually promiscuous nature of men, he called upon them to observe sexual abstinence. This gesture was equal to compelling men to become "eunuchs for the nation" which in turn helped the nation not to be contaminated by foreign occupation. Mary John and Janaki Nair argue that it was actually like identifying male genital sex as a perennial problem to be discussed obsessively, in a Foucauldian understanding of it. The very rejection of sexual desire, in turn, attracted more attention to it as something to be actively policed in everyday life. This desire was psychologically displaced to other behaviours (like modesty in dressing), eating habits, (like following vegetarianism and an austere life) and other relationships. This was the "technology of the self", which was the unique weapon formulated by Gandhi in defence of the purity of the nation (16). Thus, indulgence gradually achieved the derogatory status of a sin against the nation.

There was a wide disparity in the sexual freedom enjoyed by men and women. In many parts of colonial India during the nationalist period men from respectable classes enjoyed impunity as far as adulterous relationships are considered. Male adultery was socially acceptable and considered to be a trait of masculinity. On the contrary, among Bengali women if an adulterous relationship

became public, she was viewed as a prostitute and an outcaste. Prostitutes belonged to the lowest social stratum, though they were professionally established. Some of the prostitutes were ready to accept Gandhian ideals and transform themselves, though Gandhi declined to accept them publicly (John and Nair 13).

There was an active role played by the European rulers in making caste, class and gender-based sexuality a pivotal point of the colonial politics. By thwarting sexuality as a threat to the nation, Gandhi was unintentionally echoing the colonial, patriarchal politics. Mary John and Janaki Nair also argue that many feminist narratives fail to recognize the complicity of patriarchy in making the wife and the non-wife as mutually exclusive categories, one nullifying the other (12). Womanhood and nationhood were deliberately deployed on metaphoric and metonymic planes in India by the nationalist patriarchy. In that way, Nationalism in India, in a devious way, was catering to masculine desires and sublimating them in the name of the nation and her freedom. Anne Mc Clintock states that nationalism is bult upon male desires and the very idea of the nation is constructed around gender differences. When womanhood is conceived as the embodiment of tradition and the conservative outlook that defend changes, men symbolize progress, agency and dynamism that welcome changes. Womanhood is represented to be static and retrogressive, whereas manhood is always shown to be dynamic and progressive (92).

In colonial India even the legislation regarding social reforms were centred around the menacing sexuality of the non- mother and the treatment of women only as reproductive beings and the moral need for the sanctification of such urges with

marriage and family (John and Nair 8). Thus, the ties between Hindu conjugality and nationalism were forged with the concept of chastity. Tanika Sarkar opines that Hindu conjugality was at the core of the formation of militant nationalism in Bengal and the nationalists went to such an extreme of sustaining the institution of child marriage as a way of proclaiming autonomy from the colonial law (210-242).

Many researchers throw light into the peculiar disciplining method of adopted in the Indian sub-continent regarding the horrifying aspects of female sexuality. Whereas in the European continent virginity was upheld as an ideal to be aspired by women using the icon of Mother Mary and her immaculate virginity, in India the image of the chaste wife was installed as the central figure of purity. The frightening sides of women's sexual appetite were smoothened and tamed by the recurring motif of the chaste wife (Kearns 204-05). As a result, the cultural transformation in India during the colonial period was taking place along the lines of enhanced domesticity of women and the hyperbolic attention given to the family as an institution to breed values of moral purity. The family was celebrated as a safe haven from the colonial rule where the bond between the father, mother and the child was cemented with principles of fidelity and trust. The discourses on an ideal family were in the forefront of colonial and nationalist discourses. The hybrid sensibility of the Western educated nationalists was moulded borrowing ideals of sexuality selectively from the Hindu tradition and Victorian morality (Banerjee 459). Home was used to mirror the power relations of the external world, where the power thirst of the Indian men, which was denied to them under colonial rule could be satiated. Consequently, the private space of home replicated the colonial hierarchy

where men roleplayed the colonial master assertively imposing power and civilizing the colonial subjects, who were the domesticated women. Thus, the home became a political space with active power relations (Banerjee 461).

It is very difficult to find some 'unity in diversity' in respect of sexuality and sexual practices as far as regional contexts are concerned, despite being placed in the wide spectrum of national discourses on sexuality. In the case of Kerala, historians suggest that there were no hard and fast rules regarding sexuality and marriage until the first decades of twentieth century. Polygamy, fraternal polyandry, polygyny and Sambandha systems were prevalent among various castes. Patriliny was practiced by Kerala Brahmins and Syrian Catholics. Some Ezhava families followed a mixed pattern of matriliny and patriliny. Muslims followed both. For e.g., the Arakkal Dynasty in north Malabar followed the matrilineal system. Even among the matrilineal families, different marriage practices were prevalent having regional varieties (Balakrishnan 314-320). Christian missionaries, foreign visitors and the colonizers interpreted this sexual liberalism as immorality. William Logan mentions about the Sambandha system prevalent among the Nair community. He says that it is a system where several men can have sexual contact with a woman taking their turns (164). The Sambandha system was adopted by the Namboodiri community from the Nair community when their formal same caste marriage and property rights became limited to the eldest son in the family (Balakrishnan 312- 320). Historians have come to various theories about the persistence of various forms of polygamy and polyandry within the joint family system in Kerala till recently. Quoting the social scientists Morgan and Engels, B. Rajeevan says that the variety of socially approved

man-woman relationships existed in Kerala are different transitional forms of group marriage evolving into pairing marriage (3).

But there were differences in such practices where region, religion and most prominently caste played a significant role. For example, the cultural existence of the Kerala Brahmins was at two levels and they developed a two-sided cultural identity which is reflected in and sometimes repressed by all the cultural institutions of Kerala Brahmins or Namboodiris. The first aspect of this duality is the customs and traditions, rituals, forms of worship and norms of man-woman relationship shared by Brahmins all over India. The second aspect is related to the norms absorbed by the Kerala brahmins from tribal culture which are followed by all caste Hindus in Kerala. They followed the old joint family system which was patriarchal.

As Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* has observed, the increase of men's power in family was proportional to the increase in wealth. This even led to overturn the established form of inheritance in favor of his own children and consequently, the wife's sexual fidelity became of utmost importance to ensure the paternity of children. Elsewhere he also mentions that in monogamous families the marriage bond is stronger than that of pairing marriage and the freedom for marital infidelity is the monopoly of the husband. Accordingly, the Kerala Brahmins emphatically advocated and practiced chastity norms for women and asserted on the father's right and lineage to become a Brahmin in a rigorous ritualistic method. The implementation of father's right in the family required modifications in the man-woman relationship so that the father would be able to identify his own children. Hence, strict monogamy was prescribed

for women by Namboodiri caste while the menfolk still followed polygamy and the elements of group marriage practices assimilated from other castes. They became the priestly class like other Vedic Brahmins. The cruel ordeal to prove the loss of chastity of a Namboodiri woman known as *Smarthavicharam* point to the double standards maintained by the Kerala Brahmins regarding marriage and sexuality.

This rigorously maintained practice points to the functional importance given to the chastity of women rather than being followed merely as a moral concept. But as Kerala's cultural history is scrutinized, one comes to understand how a functional concept attained a moral status. It also explains why chastity had to be maintained with such disciplinary rituals where the society was still carrying traces of polygamy and group marriages (Rajeevan 4). Hence, Robin Jeffrey has aptly pointed out that the conflict between the dissolution of matrilineal families and the evolution of patrilineal families has formed the new Kerala into the twentieth century (17).

J. Devika brings to light the impact of Marriage Acts on institutions like matrilineal families in Kerala in her *Kulasthreeyum Chanthappennum Undayathengane*. According to her, divorce, remarriage and polygamy were possible and common for women among the communities which followed matriliny. The Malabar Marriage Act of 1896, which put forward a provision for registering marriages, was the first blow to this freedom of marriage of women. The Nair Act in Travancore of the year 1925, the Nair Regulation Act in Kochi of 1920 and the Mappila Succession Act of 1918 encouraged monogamy indirectly, though they were aimed at securing the inheritance rights of a man to his wife and children. Later, polygamy among women came to be treated as shameful and was considered

to be a challenge to masculinity. In the nineteenth century the dowry system was prevalent only among patrilineal communities like the Kerala Brahmins and Syrian Christians. Under the matrilineal system women had property rights in her own home and there was even a custom of giving 'bridal money' to her at the time of marriage. Gradually this gave way to the dowry system under the influence of modern education and the activities of the missionaries. The missionaries propagated that customs like 'bridal money' did not fit in a 'civilized society'. The subaltern people were also forced to imitate this later. The prevalence of dowry system as another factor which hindered the freedom of marriage of women. It prevented women from second marriage and divorce. With the growth of the dowry system, family as an institution came under the diktats of capitalism (100-102).

She further states that until the nineteenth century there were no common concepts regarding womanhood and femininity in Kerala. The laws regarding sexuality were dictated by castes. This was known as the 'Janmabheda System'. Under this system, 'the ideal woman' concept prevalent among Kerala Brahmins was not applicable for Nair women or the subaltern women. There were caste specific moral codes. Quoting texts like *Kerala Mahatmyam* people used to argue that the Nair women as well as Shudra women did not have to be chaste (Devika 31).

Cultural historians have always made attempts to trace the transformation of Kerala from a caste-ridden society to a class-ridden society along the lines of the Kerala Renaissance and the emergence of a newly formed elite class. Devika substantiates how their pragmatic moral codes were developed to suit their political

ends making a pastiche of Victorian values of prudery and the capitalist values of property. She tracks down how during the last decades of the nineteenth century, there were changes in the socio-economic scenario, especially in central and southern Kerala. Colonialism, modern education and the resultant employment opportunities created a new populace consisting of entrepreneurs, teachers and government employees who constituted the neo-elite class. They were the first to raise questions regarding social reformation. At the onset of Kerala Modernity in the last decades of nineteenth century, this group of neo-elites substituted the upper caste domination in the socio-cultural scenario. Though these people seemed to embrace the Renaissance values they were not ready to abandon certain old values. Their moral code was built on the selected old values which were reformed accordingly to suit their ends. They supported the capitalist values regarding the ownership of property, individualism etc. which came from the West and neglected the socialist values like liberty, equality and fraternity. These neo-elites had their own values regarding female sexuality and thus a new social dignity based on gender differences was gradually evolving in Kerala in the early twentieth century. They did not support complete gender equality and considered women as secondary citizens.

Both the people who were influenced by the missionaries and those influenced by the Western ideals firmly believed in biological determinism regarding gender roles. It is the belief that men and women are always physically different and women have been endowed with feminine values naturally. She is ‘naturally’ responsible for

the household chores, rearing children and emotionally influencing the morality of the family members (71).

The slow evolution of the private space of home in modern Kerala during the Renaissance period, as the cradle of moral values and women as custodians of them, took place similar to the formation of the private space of the home in Bengal. The nomenclature of the *Bhadramahila* in Bengal was comparable to the concept of the *Kulina* in Kerala. J. Devika throws further light on the development of the strong dichotomy between the private and public life in Kerala, especially in the case of women and how the image of the ideal Kerala woman came to be formed as one who is strictly bound to the limits of the domestic life. She also sketches how the trespassers of such domestic fences came to be known as "women of the market" or the "bazar women". Thus, market becomes a metaphor for the public aspects of life which were strongly recommended as something not suitable for the 'ideal *Malayali* woman'.

She goes into details about how even female education was designed so as to enhance the feminine values of motherly love, patience, kindness, chastity etc. These social reform movements began to naturalize the belief that the female space was confined to home and her social affiliation had to be via her husband. Gradually, home began to be defined as a place unaffected by the ruptures and the conflicts of the outer world, where eternal values like peace, virtue and peace prevailed. Thus, a strong dichotomy between home and the outer world came to exist in our culture and women were made the custodians of home. Gradually, in a society envisaged to be free from caste hierarchies, a new gender hierarchy was encouraged and naturalized.

The image of the ‘ideal woman’ was constructed with self-imposed restrictions upon her emotions and sexuality. An unwritten moral code prevailed for women that reconstructed womanhood into polarities like the ‘Kulina’ and the ‘Kulada’ (Devika 70-75). And thus, the *Malayali* woman started to bear the brunt of this pseudo-morality and responsibility for keeping the sanctity of home.

Sudra communities like Nair, who had become the dominant community in the post-independent state, practised matriliny, which gave them mobility and the freedom to deviate from the strict endogamous relationship pattern of upper-caste communities. In the colonial reformist narrative, Nair women were painted as sexually promiscuous and did not fulfil the requirements for the ideal womanhood. But there are scholarly articles relating to the slow reformation of the Nair community, welcoming changes by embracing colonial modernity. Many scholars like Jenny Rowena point out the paradox in the Nair womanhood, getting elevated to the status of the ideal *Savarna* woman in Kerala modernity later, by borrowing the Hindu morality upheld by the reformists and nationalists, which was strictly built around the chastity of upper caste women (31).

The Nair community’s shift from joint matrilineal families to nuclear families was made feasible by their assimilating the domestic moral values of chastity and monogamy which in a way marked the protest against the oppressive Brahmin supremacy. While signifying the transition to modernity on the one hand, it also indicated the end of mobility and agency for Nair women, confining them within endogamy and monogamy, on the other. The Nair community, along with some other groups gradually gained power appropriating the values of the dominant

ideology. They attained an easier access to modernity by internalizing the Hindu moral norms of the ideal woman. Though the prevailing norms of the ideal womanhood were exclusively related to the upper- caste women, Nair people were not without some privileges. However, the Dalit women were the absolute losers in these reformist cultural negotiations as they came to be outcast from such discourses, being not even considered as rightful women subjects (Raj 61).

Many writers on Kerala Modernity and the consequent cultural transition outline how the Renaissance in Kerala has brought about cultural changes of unprecedented proportions. Some of them also delineate the formation of a public sphere in Kerala as a bye product of the emergence of the so-called 'print modernity.' Along with the propagation of Christian moral values, the development of Malayalam prose played a crucial role in Kerala Renaissance by introducing new knowledge forms to the general public. Modern Malayalam prose was developed in an inclusive way, addressing even those who lay outside the folds of the Hindu caste hierarchy. The conflict between the ideals of two diametrically opposed worlds in *Indulekha* is a clear reflection of the struggle between old ideals and the colonial ones (Rajeevan 12).

Political philosopher Jurgen Habermas mentions that any public forum like teashops or the representational spaces like media where people can freely express and discuss their opinions can ultimately benefit the populace as an interactive space for forming public opinions and conducting democratic cultural transactions. Habermas' formulation of the concept of the public sphere was igniting discussions on "people's participation in collective deliberation about political action"(Calouhan

1). Kerala had a strong public sphere which was mostly formed by reading practices. It also had a teashop culture where the general public discussed politics and formed opinions about democracy and the state. For example, Robin Jeffrey mentions the Kerala visit of the journalist D.R. Mankekar in 1965. Witnessing the way teashops becoming platforms for the public to gather and express information and opinions related to contemporary political events, he called them 'coffee houses' reminding the ones of Queen Anne's England. He commented that every teashop is an institution where public opinion is shaped. Teashops serve as the focal points of the rural culture and even a humble looking teashop in Kerala, according to him, subscribed to half a dozen newspapers at least (210). But quoting feminists like Fraser, Carmel Christie grows doubtful whether such a public sphere in Kerala was inclusive of and equally accessible to the marginalized classes including women and children (27).

Benedict Anderson states how the historical emergence of national consciousness is catalyzed by print capitalism when he elaborates on the evolution of the nation as an imagined community. He argues: "These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (44). In *Sexual Figures of Kerala, Cultural Practices*, *Regionality and the Politics of Sexuality*, Navneetha Mokkil argues that among the *Malayali* people the cultural practices like reading newspapers and fiction, watching movies and performing arts are the binding factors that provide the backdrop for the ever evolving and contested public imagination (5-6). She states: "This place of privilege given to print in Kerala is one

of the primary reasons why it becomes such an important medium to track the specificities of discourses of sexuality in Kerala and its links to the regional imagination" (41).

However, many scholars have come up with arguments against the formation of a homogeneous identity by print capitalism. Rather than unifying people by standardizing opinions, media now a days function as a part of culture where endless interactions, encounters and exchanges lead to the formation of multiple meanings.

Nevertheless, the early Malayalam magazines played a crucial role in generating the discourses on morality and disciplining the body, especially the female body. While discussing and giving an overview of *Keraleeya Suguna Bodhini* Priyadarshan talks about the inaugural edition of the magazine, which underlaid its founding principles as for the total improvement and growth of both women and society at large. The magazine dealt with topics like science of the body, guidance on moral principles, women's responsibilities, culinary science, the biography of noble women etc (14-15). Instead of directly addressing social evils like the caste system the magazine was solely concerned with disciplining women and instructing moral codes to them as the name of the magazine itself indicates. *Suguna Bodhini* literally means something that educates one on good qualities.

The construction and evolution of the image of the ideal *Malayali* woman can be read parallel to the image of the *Bhadramahila* in Bengali public sphere and the role played by the journals and instruction manuals in the making of the ideal Bengali woman.According to Borthwick, at the end of the nineteenth century the educated Bengali middle class adopted a new sophisticated image of women,

exemplifying the qualities of the ideal Hindu woman, which was modelled upon the Victorian concept of the “perfect lady”. They were supposed to support their husband’s careers and enlighten their kids. Such a new model of *Bhadramahila* was forged with the ideological support from an increasing number of magazines and instruction manuals written for and by women. This image of the *Bhadramahila* catered to the elitist agenda of the upper middle- class patriarchy, being beneficial in making them stand out, by implementing class boundaries where caste boundaries were slowly vanishing (5–59).

Paradoxically, at the same time, in Kerala, the subaltern women had more freedom at least within the structure of the family as far as matrimonial laws were concerned. They could have an easy divorce and a second marriage. They had their voice in family matters. But most of them were laborers and were away from home most of their time. At the workplace, most of the masters expected sexual favors from the subaltern women (Lindberg 144).

This double standard in morality is very evident in the history of the Channar Revolt or the Breast Cloth Revolt from 1813 to 1859. It is the first organized protest against caste hierarchy in the history of the Kerala Renaissance. In Kerala no Hindu woman was allowed to cover her breasts in the presence of upper caste people. Muslim and Christian women wore their traditional blouses. According to the custom the Dalit women had to expose their breasts to all other castes which meant they were expected to yield to any upper caste man. K. M. Sheeba states the history of the revolt suggests that in Kerala, the female body is not a private experience. It

signifies identity at various levels. Furthermore, the assault on female body is validated under the cover of the maintenance of institutions (88).

The assumptions on our absorption and complete assimilation of Victorian morality become problematic when the private life of women in Renaissance Kerala comes to light through multiple researches. As argued by Mary John and Janaki Nair, quoting Udayakumar, the coordinates of our Victorian period have to be re valued, citing the example of the scandalous pleasures the bare breasted women in Kerala had, in secretly wearing a blouse (14).

Kumaramkandath also surveys the way in which bodies really came to matter in the Kerala Renaissance scenario. According to him, all the reform attempts were a continuation of the body disciplining process initiated by the colonizer. He expands the idea of how the subjecting of individual body to such moral codes was done under the label of inaugurating an era of progress. He also argues that an intense campaign to raise awareness about civilizing the society was an integral part of the modernization process in Early Modern Kerala. Regularizing the body and physical practices, gendering of identity and disciplining the body came under this propaganda. The early civilizing mission of the colonizer resulted in an introspective assessment done by the entire society and it propped the entire reformation debate. By the end of the nineteenth century the so- called retrogressive elements had been removed, resolved or renovated by the reformation discourses which selectively identified certain customs as unprogressive within a contemporary framework of rationality. Such practices included polyandry, *sambandham* and *marumakkathayam* or matriliny. Although in a hegemonic language, the reform discourse suggested new

conditions to usher in a period of progress, in addition to disowning the native cultural practices as retrogressive and primitive. Such new recommendations which aimed at moralizing the individual body were prescribed in the language of Victorian morality (118).

Accordingly, the discourses on reformation gradually came to center around the body. Hence, it can be strongly argued that the human subject in the early twentieth century Kerala had been created through the deliberations upon the body. According to Lisa Blackman this way of social processes getting communicated through people and their bodies is known as “cultural inscription”. This process is revealed in a deceptively natural and instinctive way in the ideas, behaviors, physical traits and habits of the subject. Therefore, the body becomes crucial to the functioning and understanding of ideology and power (21-22). The body becomes a marker of class, caste, ethnicity and region. It always bears the marks of the dominant ideology and functions as a site. Hence, not only the traces of the biological evolution, but those of the cultural evolution as well, can be read from the human body. Skeggs has rightly argued: “the body is the most indisputable materialization of class tastes” (82). Bodies exist as artifacts at both physical and symbolic levels. They are generated naturally and culturally and they are anchored firmly in a historical moment (Scheper Hughes and Lock 7).

Owing to the increased engagement of feminists with the rights of women to their bodies, sexuality and lives, sexuality has become a prominent topic in academic circles and political discussions. The elaborate rules of honor etched on the bodies of women were more at risk when compared to their sexualities for too

long. The bodies of women are forced bear the stamps of caste, ethnicity and nationalism, that too in violent ways. In addition to serving as the foundation for the about modernity and tradition, the upper caste, middle class women in India represent the border between the permissible and forbidden sexual behavior, and forcibly serve as the defense wall of morality in the country (John and Nair 8).

Culture is "power aestheticized" (Bandhopadhyay 16). Ironically, it was the neo-elitist gender values which became synonymous with the so called 'Kerala culture' and the subaltern women were always excluded from the definition of the '*Malayali* Woman'. Culture is a problematic term as cultures are seldom monolithic and sometimes have fractures. Culture comprises the very beliefs and practices by which power is perpetuated in society. Greenblatt has emphasized the relationship between culture and history in terms of opposite pulls of constraint and mobility. He argues that culture enforces boundaries by exercising constraint working as a 'technology of control' in society. Yet there are also forces of mobility that push at the very boundaries of culture and forcing it into 'improvisation, experiment and exchange' ever as it reinforces new boundaries (Greenblatt 227). These contrary pulls of constraint and mobility provide an understanding of the workings of bourgeois patriarchal power in the case of female sexuality as well as subalternity in the reform discourses in Kerala. The concept of modernity had started to seep down to the lower strata of society as early as the 1930s.The so far hidden sections of society started to enter the public life strongly demanding visibility and it saw the emergence of a strong class consciousness which consequently led to a clamoring for rights.

Kerala witnessed unprecedented changes in the cultural scenario in the concluding years of the 1930s.The democratic, nationalist, anti-feudal, anti-imperialist movements had gained momentum by that time. Modern values had started to seep down to the lower echelons of the society. A number of people hailing from lower class and other sections deliberately gained access to the public life. Owing to such changes, the cultural and political spheres developed a democratic nature and gained popularity. The emergence of the new class, yet to develop a distinctive political identity was an important aspect that set this period off from the past. However, the working class established itself as a considerable power in the socio-political movements. The left wing of the nationalist movement gained power and their ideology became the steering force of the working-class movement. Consequently, the working class gathered power and prominence among the peasantry and other marginalized groups in the Kerala society (Rajeevan 14). The emergence of the working-class movements resulted in a Progressive Literature movement in Kerala in 1937. Social realist literature produced during the period was in a way a deliberate attempt to undo the pseudo morality of the neo elitist reformation discourses. In the paper titled “Dictions of Desire: Representation and Reformation in mid Twentieth Century Keralam” Rajeev Kumaramkandath gives a detailed analysis of it.

The mid-thirties initiated new ways of representation in Malayalam literature backed up by deliberate attempts to thwart the casteist, classist and moralist traditions followed so far. This was an era of social realism which was informed and stoked by the leftist ideologies. This literature had a political agenda of upholding

humanistic values and had an edifying nature. The presiding tone of morality in the earlier narratives gave way to social realism and the language of the reformation narratives were deconstructed and replaced with a more life-like language and tone which was morally neutral and non-judgmental. The public sphere of Kerala witnessed the reverberations and ripples created by that language which further led to the polarization of it (106). He elucidates this 'counter progressive waves' that happened within the realm of the discourses of the Kerala Renaissance with the advent of the Progressive Literature Movement with the instance of *Anchu Cheetha Kathakal* published under its banner in 1946.

The publication of *Anchu Cheetha Kathakal* (*Five Bad Stories)* in 1946 broke all stereotypes of the metanarratives of reformation and upturned their moral fervor. The hegemonic structure of such narratives was brought to light by the groundbreaking anthology. The stories dealt with prevalent problems in heterosexual relationships such as prostitution, deceit in marriage and mutual mistrust, and chastity and they were set against the background of the marginalized lives. The author and the publishers were challenging the moral double standards of the established authors and gave the readers the choice to go for it or not, by obviously entitling the book's subject matter as 'bad 'as far as the prudish hypocritical societal morality was concerned (107).

The 1930s also saw pioneering attempts in the field of film production in Kerala. Navaneetha Mokkil explains how such innovative cultural practices had a role in the creation of a strong public sphere in Kerala and sexuality is formed through various discourses conducted in the public sphere. Watching movies plays a

major role in the formation of the public sphere in Kerala, in addition to reading. Sexuality which is shaped and constructed in the public sphere is indirectly related to these activities. Sexuality plays a pivotal role in the formation of Kerala as a region, functioning through political movements, mass cultural production and the procedures of the government. The politics of sexuality is closely related to the formation of the subject in the Kerala culture (Mokkil 3).

How norms about sexuality become very critical in cultural and literary representation is further highlighted by a number of researchers as well. In Kerala the fabric of the sexual norms was woven along the warp of the reformist discourses. But almost all of the discourses were centered upon heterosexual relations. The controlling of literature and other representational mediums was done in postcolonial Kerala by the discursive web of heterosexuality, reformation and development. The connections between a heterosexual moral structure and a progressive economy were normalized by the regulated representations of sexuality in literature. Therefore, a remarkable departure from the earlier discussions, which were centered around indigenous marital bodily practices, also marks this period (Kumaramkandath 116).

The paradigm shift in the cultural discourses in India that took place by the 1990s have been highlighted by many political philosophers and cultural critics alike. There was a stagnation after the sweeping changes in the cultural scenario of Kerala consequent to the reformation movements and the Progressive Literature movement. Kerala was shaken out of this lethargy, moving along with the entire nation as tumultuous changes were taking place in our political economy through

liberalization. The ‘Ram Janmabhoomi and Babri Masjid’ controversies and the anti-Mandal commission movements led to the hardening of lines between communities and castes. Women bore the brunt of these changes and conflicts. Anxieties about globalization and the consequent westernization were harnessed by a right wing claiming of culture for political gains all over India. Women saw themselves caught between a reactionary construction of ‘Hindu’ cultural tradition with its norms of ideal femininity and a market which promised sexual freedom and new cultural roles. Hence, there was capitalist exploitation of women on the one hand and fundamentalist appropriation on the other (Panjabi and Chakravarthy xv).

How paradoxical was the nature of the cultural and political movements in the 1990s has been noted by many scholars. Ghosh notes that the proliferation of the debates on sexuality on the one hand was accompanied by the violent repression of sexuality, especially by the Hindu Right wing, by way of moral policing, on the other (ix-xiii). Tharu and Niranjana speak about the complex nature of articulation of the gender rights paradigm by citing cases like the Tsunduru. They grow vocal about how the emergence of the woman subject in the 1990s took place by obscuring the Dalit woman, especially in the anti-mandal and Tsunduru debates (232-260).

There have also been discussions on the flow of non-material goods like global cultural movements, apart from consumer goods, made easier by the Liberalization policies adopted by the Indian government in 1991.The acceptance of gender as a category in many discussions was a by-product of this cultural flow. Such discussions prompt the thoughts about the polarisation, accumulation and

dispersal of power since most societies are built around power generated and sustained with the regulation of sexuality through multiple methods (Christy 2-3).

By the 1990s, Indian feminism had to face issues raised by Dalit *bahujan*, minority women activists, LGBT activists and others. These movements were dubious about the universalization of the topic of feminism as 'woman', when she was invariably the Hindu middle class upper caste woman. This centralization of a specific subjecthood for the feminist action and activism was really negating the subjectivities of non-middle class, non-Hindu, and non-heterosexual women, and several issues faced by them in navigating their subjectivities. This caste-neutral nature of the woman subject of Indian feminism was able to induce thoughts of inadequacy for Dalit, lower caste and other marginalized women (Christy19).

Nithya Vasudevan grows eloquent on the 'excesses' of globalization and how it has produced a desire for, and a knowledge of sexuality. Thus, sexuality becomes a pivotal concept in all discourses of globalization. She has aptly remarked that the era from the 1990s till date has been considered as an age of excesses and proliferation, including a desire for achieving sexual freedom, right wing mobilizations clamoring for a respectable Indian culture, changes in the pattern of consumption, technological engagement, and mobility. The present moment is juxtaposed with an ill-defined past that includes colonial times, the Nehruvian Socialism, the days of expansion of the Hindutva ideology along with the denial of sexual liberty to women. Liberation and freedom began to be counted more in association with an aspiration for and an understanding of sexuality as well as a room for the free articulation of it.

The way Globalization narratives and the consequent flow of culture have influenced the life of the *Malayali* people has to undergo a scrutiny in order to understand the multifaceted construction of sexuality and related norms in Kerala in the post-millennial scenario. If we look closely into the genealogy of sexuality and morality in Kerala, we can understand that it was always formed within some metanarratives like that of coloniality and Victorian morality, of reformation and progress and more recently that of Globalization. Quoting Ashley Tellis, Navneetha Mokkil elaborates on the multiple ways in which globalization has been instrumental in framing sexuality. Every aspect of sexuality is impacted by it, like sexual practices, social work on sex and sexuality, sexual identities and sexual health which came to the limelight due to the global discourses on AIDS, sexual rights and academic research on sexuality (37).

At the same time, Kerala culture is Janus -faced when it comes to questions of morality and purity. What is preached as the ideal is often violated at many instances in private life. There is hypocrisy and double standards as far as sexuality and related morality are concerned and most of the people are sexually intrusive and voyeuristic about the private lives of others. Sharmila Sreekumar brings out the paradoxical nature of the developmental discourses in Kerala as far as the lives of women are considered. Although the scenarios of education and health show a high statistical index, Kerala has been regimented as a dystopian state, in terms of women's prospects. She cites examples of discussions about unemployment among educated women and scarce means of livelihood for women, and the rampancy of sex crimes against women in the 1990s (145). She also mentions the dystopic

domesticity of Kerala women where “women’s agency and mobilities in the normative familial get coded as transgressive (203).

Such contradictions and paradoxes present in the realm of sexuality discourses in Kerala are highlighted in this research. It also makes an attempt at tracing and reconfiguring the ever- evolving cultural concepts of chastity, morality and desire in Kerala, in the light of post-millennium Malayalam short stories.

As a genre, short story has a long history in Malayalam literature which dates back to 1891. But it became a strong influence in the cultural scenario only by the 1920s with the second generation of short story writers. Most of them including S. K. Pottekkatt, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, P. Kesavadev, Ponkunnam Varkey and Vaikom Muhammed Basheer were brought up under the influence of the Nationalist Independence Movement and the Kerala Renaissance. The stories published during this period truly reflected the Renaissance values (Chandrasekaran 43). There were also early advocates of feminism and women empowerment like Lalithambika Antharjanam and K. Saraswathi Amma, Karoor Neelakanda Pillai and P. C. Kuttikrishnan who wrote stories which were artistically perfect (“The Golden Era - Malayalam Short Story”).

The modernist trend in Malayalam short-stories was initiated by the third generation of writers in the 1960s, like M. T. Vasudevan Nair, T. Padmanabhan, and Kamala Surayya. This was further perfected by writers such as O.V. Vijayan, M.P. Narayana Pillai, Pattathuvila Karunakaran, Kakkanadan, M. Mukundan, Zachariah, and M. Sukumaran (“The Golden Era - Malayalam Short Story”).

In Malayalam Literature the decades after the 1990s can be truly marked as the golden era of short stories. There was a boom in the realm of short stories and as a genre it became vigilant in reflecting the intricacies of experiences and assuming novelties of narration. At the end of the 1970s the Modernist phase in Malayalam short stories came to an end. The 1980s were relatively unproductive in terms of new writers as well as novelty in subject matter and techniques. The best writings of that era could still be attributed to established writers such as M.T. Vasudevan Nair, T. Padmanabhan, O.V. Vijayan, Sethu, C.V. Sreeraman, Zacharia, Punathil Kunhabdulla, Madhavikutty etc. The 1980s have been marked both for its continuation and voices of dissent with the Modernist Movement.

At the end of the 80s a new perspective was gathering strength which emphasized political, social and historical commitment in stories. Stories assumed an implicitly political nature during this period. This political vigilance gathered momentum with the disintegration of the USSR, the demolition of Babri Masjid, the Pokhran Nuclear Test, the arrival of communal politics and the advent of globalisation. N.S. Madhavan's "*Nalam Lokam*", M. Sukumaran's "*Pithrutharpanam*", M. Mukundan's "*Apanirmanam*", K. P. Ramanunni's "Pokhran" are examples. The word '*pennezhuthu*' (i.e. *ecriture feminine*) was newly coined by the poet – critic Satchidanandan in his attempt to describe a new genre of short stories written by Sarah Joseph in her collection *Papathara* published in 1990 (21-22). This year thus marked a big leap in the history of Feminist literature in Malayalam.

The Feminist Movement in Malayalam Literature which flourished in the 1990s came of age in the millennium. During the initial decades of this movement when women wrote about their subjectivity and experiences they had been placed in opposition to the male experience. There had always been a predator/victim relationship between men and women and a self-conscious resistance against it was expressed in short stories, which becomes most evident in Sarah Joseph's short stories that form a part of her activism. (e.g.,"*Muditheyyamurayumbol*"). The same self-consciousness was there when women wrote about their bodies and sexualities. There were also writers who represented the female body as a 'fetishistic object' to satisfy the scopophilic male. Hence, the subject of female body and sexuality was always an 'either/or' phenomenon.

But the post-millennial women writers transcend such limitations enforced by the 'feminist perspective'. Instead, they seek to express a new feminist subjectivity in their stories and assume agency as strong female subjects. The writers like K.R. Meera, Indu Menon, S. Sithara, K. Rekha and Yama belong to this category of women writers. They focus on the female body as the breeding ground of agency, sexuality and the multiplicity of identities. In their writing the female body sheds its monolithic character to embrace multiple identities like that of the Dalit woman, The Brahmin woman, the Muslim woman, the nun, the virgin, the whore, the adulteress, the lesbian, the transgender and the wife. Their stories substantiate that identity is not constant and but it is a socio-political construct that undergoes evolution.

The emergence of a new language of sexuality in the post globalization era has been noted by Nivedita Menon and other feminist scholars, which, according to them, has taken place in connection with the economic liberalization and the opening of the global market. Since the 1950s Kerala has produced texts of obvious sexual content, through a variety of cultural production outlets like popular magazines, pornography, literature and most importantly films. But The 1990s mark a visible shift in the method of the articulation of sexuality. A more refined vocabulary of sexual identity politics has been coined recently and assimilated by the public sphere of Kerala after that (Mokkil 148).

A group of young writers who started their writing career in the middle of the 1990s became mature after the millennium. Writers like B. Murali, Subhash Chandran, Santhosh Echikkanam, R. Meera, K. Rekha, S. Sithara, S. Hareesh, Vinoy Thomas, Pramod Raman, Unni.R, Yama Arshad Bathery, Abin Joseph etc. are some among them. They employ multiple techniques like parody, magic realism, hyper realism, inter textuality etc. Consequently, the subject matter of short stories got shifted to the so far hidden and neglected aspects such as the lives of Dalits, women and LGBTIQ. Ecological disharmony and exploitation were other topics of central concern. A new search for identity came to be lighted up in the genre of short stories.

After the millennium, the cyber culture and the hyperreal existence associated with it catered to a lifestyle which was superficial, exhibitionist, epicurean and consumerist. The media with its visual culture played its own role in alienating humans from the realities of life. Robert Samuels' concept of 'Auto Modernity' becomes relevant here. He says how after postmodernism we are unable

to base our analysis of culture, identity and technology on the traditional conflicts between the private and the public, the subject and the object and the human and the machine. He expounds how this 'auto-modern' generation imposes its autonomy through technological automation. This generation is disinterested in social relationships (219).

These post-millennial writers, irrespective of their gender, bring to light the slow disintegration of family as an institution. Most of their stories focus on 'orgies' which is a feature of the globalized world. Extra marital sex becomes a recurring theme which points towards superficial social bonds lacking in intensity. Going through these stories one is constantly reminded of Frederic Jameson's concept of 'Waning of the Affect' where he claims the emergence of a new character type in the postmodernist fiction and reality (in the form of the celebrity artist). He substantiates that the impact of this new character cannot be assessed in terms of its 'affect'. Its impact on us has to be thought in terms of intensity rather than 'affect' because we cannot reconstruct the individual life or life-world which could serve as its point of reference. Its surface and its meaning are one and the same (10-16). Considering all these qualities related to the metamodern existence in the post-millennial cultural scenario of Kerala, Malayalam short stories were selected as the primary material for the research, being a genre perceiving, closely recording and reflecting the minute and momentous cultural changes.

The research addresses the research gap of studies on desire and sexual purity norms represented in Malayalam short stories, focusing on the complementary and contrastive distribution of these terms, and how they reciprocally construct,

define and transform each other. The research problem is how the ever-evolving norms of desire and sexual purity play a decisive role in marking the cultural reality and everyday existence of the people of Kerala and how these concepts get subversively represented in post- millennium Malayalam short fiction. The research focuses on desire and the related concepts of chastity, purity, impurity and dirt, sexual contamination, pollution and defilement associated with the contact with impure bodies, and sexual fidelity represented in select post-millennium Malayalam short stories and tries to elucidate how such norms become socially, culturally and historically constructed and defined, assuming varied forms through different periods of time. The research argues that desire and sexual purity norms are constructed and get reconfigured along the gastro-political, spatial and discursive contours of culture. The research also attempts to bring to light the fluidity of and social fragility of such terms and how politically situated they are.

Research Questions

The research addresses the following research questions at large:

1. How desire and sexual purity norms are represented in post-millennium Malayalam short stories?

2. How do sexual purity norms become socially, culturally and historically constructed and defined, assuming varied forms through different periods of time?

3. How the norms of desire and sexual purity are simultaneously reciprocal and mutually exclusive when they construct, define and transform each other?

4. How fragile, fluid, politically situated and discursively constructed are these cultural norms?

The aim of the research is to draw a synchronic study of the representation of desire and the purity norms in relation to 'deviant' sexuality, especially non-conjugal and 'illicit' relationships, in select post-millennial short stories in Malayalam.

Objectives of the Study

1. To elucidate how food politics engages with sexual politics to upturn the conventionalities of sex and sexuality.

2. To probe into how the post-millennium Malayalam short stories bring to light the spatiality of desire through the portrayal of eroticized topographies.

3. To bring to light how these stories elucidate the role of discourse in the construction of desire sexual purity norms.

4. To trace how the socially unacceptable deviancies are used as a subversive tool to mark the assumption of agency by the sexually vulnerable and to show their cultural resistance, undermining the concepts of language, power, subjectivity and morality.

5. To find out how the post-millennium writers simultaneously mark and rework on culture, representing the transformation of women and the sexually vulnerable from the status of passive bearers of meaning to active signifiers or producers of a counter culture.

6. To look into how globalization has affected the institution of marriage and family.

7. To investigate how the notion of deviant sexuality and queerness creates vulnerable masculinities as 'the semiotic other' and how the performative nature of sexuality is highlighted in the select stories to counter a homophobic culture.

8. To explore how extramarital and 'socially deviant' affairs come to be treated as a challenge to the institution of family in particular and the patriarchal norms of 'masculinity' in general in the Kerala context.

9. To look into the pre-occupation of patriarchy with endogamous marriages, securing class strata and thus ensuring that certain modes or desiring are prohibited, particularly for women.

10. To show the ways in which the post-millennial writers negotiate the fissures in the cultural continuum of patriarchy.

11. To probe into the denaturalization of heteronormativity in the Kerala context by these writers.

12. To investigate how animals become allegorical tools to parallelly represent and subvert norms of sexuality and desire.

13. How caste entangles with purity norms and how the intersectionality of caste, chastity, desire, sex, sexuality, gender and class constitutes the cultural identity of the *Malayali* people in the post-millennial scenario.

The research questions are applied in select Malayalam short stories written after the millennium. The conceptual theme of research has been identified in the select short fiction of the writers S. Hareesh, Santhosh Echikkanam, Subhash Chandran, K. Rekha, S. Sithara, Unni R., Arshad Bathery, V. Shinilal, Sreelatha, Pramod Raman, Abin Joseph, Vinoy Thomas, E.K. Shahina, Yama et al. Most of the short stories of these writers address questions of repressed sexuality and changing codes of morality in a politically engaging way.

Methodology and Chapterization

The methodology adopted for the research at large incorporates qualitative analysis, content analysis, close textual analysis and comparative analysis of the selected short stories adopting theoretical frameworks provided by recent developments in Cultural Studies. The first two chapters particularly employ close reading while the third chapter adopts discourse analysis as analytical tools. The application of Discourse Analysis is limited to the the third chapter because of the spatial constraints of the thesis, and is used only as a specimen where the discourse of the select stories is discussed in order to bring out the entwined relationship between culture, power and language. The research adopts various literary and cultural theories related to concepts on sexuality, morality, sin and religion, including insights provided by Queer studies, Dalit Studies, theories on Space, Gastropolitics, Discourse, Marginality and Subalternity, Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology. Various sociological and historical studies related to legality, morality, Kerala Modernity etc. are also referred to. Intersectionality is used an analytical framework to explore how the ever- crossing vectors of class, caste,

gender, ethnicity, desire, religion, food habits and mental and social well-being constitute the construction of sexual purity norms at their cross roads.

The research thesis consists of three core chapters apart from an introductory chapter, concluding chapter and a chapter titled “Recommendations and Findings”. The first core chapter titled “Reimagining the Sexual Animal: The Carnal, Carnivorous and the Carnivalesque” discusses five short stories which are “Adam” and “Pied Piper” by S. Hareesh, *“Udamasthan*” (The Owner”) by Vinoy Thomas, “*Hidumban*” by Arshad Batheri, and “*Varal*” (“The Mudfish”) by V. Shinilal. The exploration of sensuality in contemporary short stories as well as the nexus between body, sexuality and gender are explored and indicated by the word carnal in the title. The food politics involved in the construction and depiction of sexuality and the use of animal imagery to imply the predatory and self-consuming nature of human sexuality are suggested by the ‘carnivorous’ in the title. The explicitly political nature of these stories and how they subvert existing power norms related to sexuality is also investigated here using Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of “the Carnivalesque”. The analytical structure of ‘intersectionality’ is adopted in the chapter which draws upon theoretical concepts provided by Barthes, Deleuze and Guattari, Mikhail Bakhtin, Kimberle Crenshaw, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol Adams, Gopal Guru, Louis Althusser, R.W. Connell, Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, Foucault, Elspeth Probyn etc.

The second core chapter titled “Liminal Spaces and (Un)chaste Desires” highlights the entwined relationship between the spatial and the sexual and traces the formation of sexualized bodies along the lines of liminal spaces. It also tries to bring

about the social construction of desire and sexuality. How sexual bodies are created and politicized in space is exposed by this chapter. The landscape of desire is traced in a cartographic way. The stories analyzed are "Isla De San Valentin" by Santhosh Echikkanam, "*Ramachi*" by Vinoy Thomas, *"Palam kadakkumbol pennungal mathram kanunnathu*" ("What Women Only Happen to See While Crossing Bridges") by Yama, "Encyclopedia" by Sreelatha, "*Ozhivukalam*" (The Vacation") by K. Rekha and "*Anandamargam*" ("The Path of Bliss") by Unni R. The theorists quoted in the chapter include Stephen Pfohl, Victor Turner, Van Gennep, Paul Stenner, Eva Illouiz, Bjørn Thomassen, Brady Wagoner and Tania Zittoun, Doreen Massey, Manuel Castells, Hazel *Andrews, Les Roberts,* Benedict Anderson, Michel Foucault and Wendy Mc Kenna, Deleuze and Guattari et al.

Core chapter three, "Desire in Discourse" delineates how sexuality and chastity norms are constructed in/with discourse following a phenomenological perspective. The discursive strategies to represent, distort, mediate and to constitute cultural realities are analyzed here. The implicit way in which dominant power controls language is brought to light in this chapter. The stories discussed are "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" ("A Terrific Lover") by Unni R., "*Rathinirvedam"*(*"*Sexual Disenchantment") by Sithara S., "*Vihitham*" ("The Legitimate Share") by Subhash Chandran, "*Ente laingikanweshana pareekshnangal*" ("My Experiments with Sexuality") by Abin Joseph, "*Napumsakarude pathu padavukal*" (The Ten Steps of Eunuchs") by Pramod Raman, "*Olinottam*" ("The Peek") and "*Puthumazha choorulla chumbanangal*" (" Kisses Smelling of the First Rain") by E.K. Shahina. Theorists like Janis Hunter Jenkins, Robert John Barret, Delueze and Guattari, Mark

Seem, Zamora and Faris, R.D Laing, Norman Fairclough, Lisa Blackman, Bill Brown, Merleau Ponty, Katherina Boehm, Victoria Mills, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler among many others are referred to in this chapter.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Though the research has explored multiple aspects of the discursive construction of desire and purity norms in detail, it has some limitations. The scope and boundaries of the of the study have been intentionally limited to the selected genre and the number of resources, and the findings are arrived at depending on them exclusively, without examining diverse cultural texts. The research has been delimited to the analysis of the select data because of the constraints of time and space. Owing to the lack of English translations of most stories selected for the research, the researcher has made use of her own translation for quoting from the sources which is duly documented following MLA handbook edition 9.

The research has laid more stress on sexual purity norms and contamination and only hinted at the purity norms of caste as the invisible foundation upon which the entire discourse of sexuality norms is built around in the cultural scenario of Kerala. The mired relationship between class and caste in the Indian society is only partially explored in order to delimit the study. Digital intimacies and moral policing on the digital space are not explored in the research due to spatial constraints and hence stories dealing with such themes have been intentionally omitted.

The discursive nature of the construction of desire and sexual purity norms is brought about closely analyzing the discourse of only six short stories again due to spatial restrictions, whereas eighteen short stories have been selected in total as the

primary sources. The researcher has opted for word-by-word translation in the third core chapter titled “Desire in Discourse” in order to bring to light the role of language and discourse in constructing and sustaining norms of desire and sexual purity.

The primary sources have again been delimited to “post-millennium” Malayalam short stories not only because of the extensive quantity of resources available in the genre, but also to focus on the specific period both as a time marker and a cultural marker. Certain writers and stories were included, while excluding others intentionally, to maintain authorial diversity, as far as gender, visibility and social approval is concerned. Stories dealimg with sexuality implicitly or explicitly have been hand-picked to delineate the evolving nature of the related norms in Malayalam short-fiction of the present century.

Chapter 2

Reimagining the Sexual Animal:

The Carnal, Carnivorous and the Carnivalesque

In this chapter several short stories are closely examined with a view to bringing out how the animal imagery is recurrently used in them to mark various aspects of human sexuality and to show how apart from the aesthetic effects such images produce, they help the story to make powerful political statements. The sensual element in physical relationships and how it is explored in select contemporary short stories are meant by the word 'carnal' in the title. It also signifies how far sexuality is celebrated by the post-millennial writers as being flesh-bound and how far the construction of the so-called carnal elements of sexuality is done along the lines of gender. The 'carnivorous' in the title relates to the food politics involved in the construction and depiction of sexuality. According to Barthes "food has a constant tendency to transform itself into situation". Food is inherently "bound to values of power", which indicates that "a representation of contemporary existence is implied in the consciousness we have of the function of food" (171).

In this section, eating practices and concepts like commensality, vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism, consuming cooked food, raw food, stale food and left over food and the purity norms associated with it etc. are discussed in the context of the construction of sexuality and the sexualized bodies. "What regulates the obligatory, necessary, or permitted intermingling of bodies is above all an

alimentary regime and a sexual regime" (Deleuze and Guattari 90). In other words, sexual and food regimes construct bodies in different states of interactions: producing and regulating "all the attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relations to one another"(90). How appetite and predatoriness get entangled with sexual appetite and domination, and the gastro political relevance of the same in the caste ridden society of India have been explored in this part. The analytical framework of intersectionality is used to bring out how the construction of sexuality and the related norms of purity happens at the cross roads of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, desire, religion, food habits etc.

The term intersectionality as originally coined by Kimberle Crenshaw stressed the need for an analytic framework that challenged the tendency in critical social theorizing and social justice movements "to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis". Crenshaw was trying to bring out the problems of a "single axis analysis when considering the "multi dimensionality" of black women's experience (140). In an essay titled "Rethinking Intersectionality," black feminist scholar Jennifer Nash defines intersectionality as "the idea that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality"(2). She proposes a more nuanced theory of identity, questioning the binary distinctions between race and gender.

The chapter also gives attention to how the formation of sexual subjectivity and related norms identity takes place at interlocking and intercrossing vectors of caste, class, postcoloniality, gender, ethnicity, religious identity etc. The question of

the carnivorous predatoriness of sexuality is all the more pertinent in that all of the short stories analyzed in this chapter use animal imagery of one kind or the other to imply the nexus between the food politics and the construction of normative sexuality. Two short stories use canine images which obviously bring out the so-called non-legitimized liaison between carnivorous eating habits and deviant sexuality and libido.

The third aspect of the stories dealt with by the chapter is the portrayal of the carnivalesque elements. The explicitly political nature of these stories is unraveled here using Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the Carnivalesque. Bakhtin talks about the suspension of all kinds of hierarchy in terms of position, privileges, norms and restrictions in the Carnival. It celebrates a temporary release from the dominant truth and the established order. It is a representative feast of transformation, rebirth and becoming. It is against everything final and eternal (10). The upturning of the normative elements in the construction of sexuality and chastity is highlighted in this section. The performative nature of gender and sexuality is focused upon. The subversion of power dynamics and the prominence given by the select writers to the constructed nature of desire and sexuality is also explored.

"Adam" by S. Hareesh is an allegory where the story of two generations of pedigree dogs goes parallel with the lives of two generations of people displaying the intersection between class, caste, gender and sexuality sometimes intricately and sometimes loudly. The story is narrated in third person where the narrator becomes the silent witness of seemingly banal incidents in the lives of people and animals which actually become a powerful political statement at the end.

The story is set in the 1970s where a new pedigree puppy which belongs to the breed Belgian Malinois is brought home by the character N.K. Kurup as he is in a rush to see his newly born son who was born long after his marriage.The voyeuristic and jealous gaze of the low-class public at Kurup and the pedigree puppy in his car is pitted against his caste and class and gender-based superiority which is self-consciously imposed by him. They think about his virility and masculinity, which come to be hegemonically imposed, whenever they see his speeding car. His status of an ex-serviceman adds color to their imagination. In Kerala the sexuality of army people and their lonely wives at home has always been a recurrent motif in pop culture.

The class hierarchies existing in a caste ridden society and the entailing inaccessibility of the high-class life to the common people are quite evident in the way commonplace incidents taking place in the lives of the upper class acquiring an intriguing quality for the low-class public in the story. The double standards of morality and sexual repression come to the fore in the way one of the youths staring at Kurup's car and the pedigree dog in it, is described as secretly rejoicing in his wish fulfillment of having been able to inscribe a graffiti on the walls of the school urinal at night. He writes, "Let a hundred flowers bloom" (Hareesh, "Adam" 61). It is also mentioned that he was finally able to execute it having planned it for the past six months. The people hypnotically follow Kurup's car seeing the pedigree puppy in it because they are unable to believe that Kurup is able to love anyone, be it a baby or a puppy. There are traces of his hegemonic masculinity throughout the story which prevent him from showing love openly to his new born baby or his wife.

The eugenically created breed of the dog Noor metonymically and metaphorically becomes a symbol of the caste, feudalistic class and racial supremacy of Kurup, its owner. The other ex-servicemen in the village propagate rumors relating to Kurup's self-glorified army past and picturize him instead as a canteen runner there because he was quite superior to them in terms of an aristocratic ancestry and a strong well-built masculine body. He spoke English and Hindi fluently and was able to make relations with the affluent people. He was careful to keep up his taciturnity with the common people and even when he spoke it was with sneer and anger. Fury was his fixed temperament (Hareesh, "Adam" 62). The mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence related to postcolonial life are clearly reflected in Kurup in a distorted way which intersect with class, caste and masculinity to create his identity. He assumes the position of the colonial master and is engaged in the 'othering' of the low-class common people in a colonial way using his language and manners. The postcolonial ambivalence is truly represented in the reaction of the common men to his self-asserted superiority.

> In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth, not to subject its representations to a moralizing judgment. Only then does it become possible to understand the productive 'ambivalence' of the subject of the colonial discourse - that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity. What such a reading reveals are the boundaries of the colonial discourse and it enables a transgression of these limits from the space of that otherness. (Bhabha 67)

This gaze of desire and derision which the low-class public and Kurup, who endorses his superiority with the class and caste where he belongs to, his hybridized manners and the mastery over English language, share with each other makes the web of intersectionality more entangled and complicated. Postcolonial subjectivity acts as a powerful vector, in deciding the identity of the colonial subject, when it intersects with other vectors like class, caste, ethnicity etc. Kurup again reveals his ambivalent colonial self when he quips to Pauly Mathew's derisive comment that she was confused when she picked Noor to be brought up in India, "a land of beggars" where the sibling of the dog is going to live in America. In a quick repartee Kurup adds that India is a land of "strong men" as well (Hareesh, "Adam" 64). His belief in the strength of men in India throws light both upon his concept of hegemonic masculinity and his ambivalent colonial identity.

When an urchin in the neighborhood calls the puppy "dog", Kurup gets irritated and threateningly corrects the boy (Hareesh, "Adam" 62). There are strong semiotic indicators to prove that Noor is not an ordinary dog, (or an underdog as such) but something more than a dog. It is used to showcase his class, caste and social status. Even the relatives who come to pay a visit to Kurup's new born son are more attracted to the puppy Noor who was royally taking rest in the kennel. Kurup is so proud of being the owner of such a rare breed and the fact that there is only one more dog of the same species in India (Hareesh, "Adam" 62-63).

Food adds to the semiotic order in the story where sometimes it stands for appetite, both sexual and physical, sometimes as a marker of class and caste and some other times signifying sexual liberation. There are multiple carnivorous images

related to human appetite and predatory nature in the story. Such carnivorous images provide a double layered signification where the appetite is both physical, sexual and social where the access to basic amenities becomes limited in terms of caste and class. It is important to consider how scholarly research in the field has traced the intersections between food and sexual regimes in literature and culture at large. The intersection between food and sexual regimes has been the subject of recent scholarly research regarding sexuality studies. In a seminal work subtitled *Food Sex Identities,* Elspeth Probyn opines that if sex has dominated a lot of cultural thinking in the past ten years as something which safeguards identity, the sensual quality of food currently serves as a privileged lens through which to view how identities and the dynamics of power, sex, and gender are being renegotiated (6-7).

Mutton specially brought to feed the dog everyday ignites jealousy among the neighbors (Hareesh, "Adam" 63). It is also juxtaposed with the stale food of the stray dog at the liquor shop. The difference in class between the pedigree dog and the stray dog is quite evident from the way the stray dog feeds on stale tapioca and sardine curry placing its foot in the vessel without minding proper food etiquette. The ways in which norms of masculinity are constructed along the line of carnivorous food habits is explained by Carol J. Adams in *The Sexual Politics of Meat.* According to her the sexual politics of meat is the assumption that "men need, meat, have the right to meat, and that meat eating is a male activity associated with virility" (Adams 4). Hence the jealous neighbors who cannot afford to have meat on a daily basis take it as question of 'lack', as if they are deficient in masculinity as they don't eat meat. That is why the carpenter who goes to make a kennel for Noor

is expressing his wish only if he had been born as the dog of Kurup. The object of jealousy is not only the dog, but its food, its kennel which would have half the size of a bedroom, its owner and his access to hegemonic masculinity. Hence masculinity becomes a commodity which can only be afforded by the socially affluent.

The Muslim man who brings mutton to the dog himself is entrusted with the task of cooking the meat from the peripheries of the kitchen which denies entry both to him and the meat he brings. Kurup's mother prepares some wheat porridge to the dog with milk which is again a food item having strong caste connotations. Though the woman prepares food for the dog, she dislikes dogs anyway (Hareesh, "Adam" 63). With reference to the 'tri-guna' concept where food is divided into three categories called *Sathvika*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* on the basis of their prominent quality, Devdutt Pattanaik states: "In India, food laws, traceable to Bhagavad Gita, refer to a three-fold (*tri-guna*) division of food that creates the four-fold caste division of society (chatur-varna)". Noor who obeys only Kurup, taking food only from him, stands for the womenfolk who have naturalized the colonial, patriarchal and casteist concepts of masculinity and domesticated femininity.

In the article titled "Food as a Metaphor for Cultural Hierarchies" Gopal Guru brings out the variety of food metaphors used by middle class and low-class Dalits and how such metaphors point to the ontological shift within the Dalit people themselves. The middle-class Dalits describe the philosophy of Ambedkar using the metaphor of sweets which are consumed after food as a "pacifier" or a neutralizer whereas the low-class Dalits compare it to millet bread and chilly, the metaphors suggesting their subversive power. Thus, he argues that once food and taste

metaphors form part of one's the cultural imagination, they transit into the intellectual imagination as well.

> However, within the Dalit cultural universe, one finds differential use of metaphors that are related to food. The difference has to be understood in terms of the ontological shift within the Dalit community itself. Those who have been able to achieve some material success and stabilized their food recipe could become the part of the cultural aspiration of the upper-caste/upper-class and would use the metaphor according to their new cultural taste. And those who have not been "fortunate" enough to change their material condition would naturally use the metaphor which is closer to their existential condition. (Guru 6-7)

The "ontological shift" expressed in terms of food that Guru refers to is taking place at various places of the story. It is suggested at the way what cultural role the meat plays in the imagination of the low-class public and the high caste and high-class people. For the low class/ low caste non vegetarian public, meat, especially mutton becomes the object of craving and jealousy because of its unaffordability and the class specific luxury it stands for. But in the cultural imagination of the high-class vegetarian Savarna people, meat, irrespective of its variety, stands for impurity and untouchability. Kurup occupies a slot somewhere in the middle of this hierarchical ladder. His exposure to the modernized outer world and the experience in army has equipped him to overcome the dietary principles prescribed by his caste but still he is not ready to shed his class-based superiority.

The healthiest puppy named Arthur who is brought up by Kurup himself is stolen by Kuttayi, his own unacknowledged half-brother; the illegitimate son of Kurup's debaucherous father. In a fit of revenge, Arthur is named Adam by Kuttayi which was the nickname of Kurup's father who had sexual relationships with many women like a stray dog (Hareesh, "Adam" 66). The later developments in the life of Adam makes him an anthropomorphized dog, which, breaking the borders of patriarchal norms like hegemonic and toxic masculinity, enters into a fluidly constructed and liberated world of gender and sexuality norms. The food symbolism plays a strong role here, lighting up how from an aristocratic purity based dietary plan he moves to the scrap and stale fish thrown to him by the villagers. Food imagery which has strong sexual connotation is used all over.

> Throughout cultures and epochs, metaphors of consumption act as a major symbolic vehicle to both convey and shape concepts of sexuality, agency, and gender identity. In literary and popular contexts, appetite often stands for sexual desire, descriptions of eating mask language of possession, and representations of cooking express both enslavement and empowerment. (Andrievskikh 137)

Arthur who has been fed on specially ordered food and medicines for him by Kurup is getting transformed into a stray dog acquiring agency. The dog which disagrees to eat dried tapioca given to him by Kuttayi for his inability to identify it as edible stuff, is brutally punished by Kuttayi. He beats him hanging him in the air in a rope and punishes him with forced starvation (Hareesh, "Adam" 66). Kuttayi is projecting his social insecurities of having been born as a bastard of Adam Sankara Pillai into

the eponymous dog and brutalizes him. His revenge is double edged as it is both personal and social and is aimed at Kurup who denies him the rightful social acceptability and class status being a bastard and gives the same to the dog instead. From the power that his privileged social position has granted him, Kurup can give an anthropomorphizing treatment to a pedigree dog and a dehumanizing zoomorphized treatment to his bastardly step brother. Social acceptability again becomes more of a matter of class and the norms of sexual purity than one of blood.

Adam starts to take uncooked stale fish which is thrown to him by the sympathetic anglers and his digestive system adapts to uncooked food slowly (Hareesh, "Adam" 69. The hunting for food done by him is predatorial, which results in the unleashing all carnivorous appetites.

The eating of uncooked food and developing 'taste' as such, is a strong caste marker and defines one's slot in the hierarchical power ladder of society. There is a tacit representation of caste-based morality and scope for fluidity. The constricted system getting loose slowly is implied with the relative freedom Adam gains once he becomes a stray dog. The choice of food is semiotically related to the choice of gender and sexuality as well. Here a person's identity is formed by the meeting of different vectors like caste, class, food habits, gender and sexuality, all of which seeming to be at cross roads.

> Adam was compensating the deficiency of food that he had to face during childhood. He pushed open the weak kitchen doors and ate to his heart's content. He frightened down chickens from the trees of their perching and fed on them. He came in like a strong predator to wrench domestic lambs,

rabbits and ducks. People got scared to confront Adam who had grown into a giant within a short while revealing the true traits of his race. (my trans.; 75)

Cheruppathil vendathra vibhavangal kittathathinte kuravu nikathuka ayirunnu Adam. Durbalamaya adukkala vathilukal thalli thurannu avan venduvolam thinnu. Kozhikal chekkerunna marangalude chottil ninnu avaye pedippichu thezhekku parathi aharichu. Sakthanaya oru vanya mrugathe pole cheriya attinkuttikaleyum valarthu muyalukaleyum tharavukaleyum ranchikkondupoyi. Ethanum nalukal kondu olippichu vecha vamsa gunam puratheduthu bheemakaranayi valarnna avane neridan alukal bhayappettu. (Hareesh, "Adam" 75)

Gopal Guru argues that the Dalits stopped to consume stale and uncooked food because it was used to mark their "savage identity". He goes on to claim that cooked food is connected more to one's cultural identity than merely to taste and hunger. Prepared food and eating customs serve as cultural markers for defining a group's cultural identity (10). Here one can argue that Adam is taking a detour to embrace a savage identity and to build up a more fluid sexuality free from the constraints of accepted social codes and patterns of behavior. His hybrid identity, which is predatorial, savage and liberated at the same time, is the result of his pedigree past and bohemian present. He carries the carnivalesque elements when he becomes the lover of so many dogs in the village, and leaves a non –pedigree tradition of so many mahagony colored puppies throughout the village and saves a

child from drowning. Racial and class purity is subverted by Adam who gets a heroic death befitting a stray dog.

It is not accidental that Kurup's next tryst with his Anglo-Indian girl friend who has gifted the dog to him happens together with the dog's breeding (Hareesh, "Adam" 64). Kurup's relationship with two women, one within marriage and one outside is hinted at in the short story. His relationship with his wife is patriarchal and toxically masculine and feudalistic. He does not touch her with love after delivery and hesitates from pampering his own child. He keeps away from talking to his wife freely in the presence of others and considers such endearing gestures to be self-deprecating. On the contrary, his adulterous relationship with his English speaking, Anglo-Indian girlfriend is based on equality, friendship, mutual attraction and respect. He chats with her freely and helps her in cooking omelette.

In her article on politics of identification and the liberal bargain in postcolonial feminist scenario, Amalia Sa'ar opines that the oppressed communities sometimes come to identify with the hegemonic system by a process known as the liberal bargain. Some people who face exclusion appear to assume that they will benefit in some way in spite of the selective hierarchical nature of the liberal order. Actually a few people who face exclusion owing to demographic factors (namely their ethnic and racial heritage and gender in the case of women) may enjoy some benefits as a result of their education, employment or some other less stigmatized factors. Therefore, it is not coincidental if they adopt a liberal epistemology (681). For women this susceptibility to the false hopes of liberation from primordial

oppressions offered by the liberal ideologies are doubly ensnaring as actual liberal regimes perpetuate their subordination in a hidden way.

Viewing through the optic of the so called 'liberal bargain' in the postcolonial context, both Noor and Pauly Mathew can be seen to be victims of it. Both of them hypnotically become unaware of their marginalized racial and gender identity (both are hybrid and have western genes) and seem to revel in the comparatively superior social status which is condescendingly granted to them by the victimizer. Here Kurup stands for the oppressor in disguise who claims to belong to a liberal epistemological order. It is also noteworthy that apart from Noor and Pauly Mathew, both of whom are only two dimensionally portrayed, there are no other women characters in the story, making it purely a male saga.

The two dogs Candy and Jordan are symbols of vulnerable and fragile masculinity. Both of them have quite uneventful lives of which their naming is indicative. Candy is adopted by a bachelor doctor who gives him the first name he sees on the newspaper the next day. When the doctor marries later and has kids Candy is quite neglected and is entrusted with a vet who kills him injecting poison. Jordan is adopted by Roy, an NRI working in Jordan and hence the name (Hareesh, "Adam" 64). His freedom and biological instincts are confined within the four walls of his master's huge property and his repressed sexuality runs parallel to that of Roy's wife and daughter. Every year during the mating season of dogs, Jordan makes huge holes along the compound wall in an aborted attempt at liberation. Finally, he attains the long-cherished freedom by running away from the master when he is taken away to a hill station during the holidays.

The predatoriness of masculine sexuality and power is exhibited both in Kurup and the police dog Victor. Victor grows into a one master dog who never obeys inferior officers. He gets interpellated into patriarchal ideology and hegemonic masculinity with the training for police dogs that he receives at Thekkanappur BSF Academy.

To quote the words of Louis Althusser "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (115). Ideology makes all the difference between ideological State Apparatus and Repressive State Apparatus which are the tools for interpellation employed by the state. "The Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence' whereas the Ideological State Apparatus functions by ideology" (97).

It is remarkable that Victor naturalizes the system with The Ideological State Apparatus and enforces the system with the Repressive State Apparatus being a police dog. He is subjected to and subjectified by ideology systematically and being a masculine subject, he exerts his power over others both hegemonically and with force. He is seen to be alternatively representing the citizen and the state.

The way inspector Janardhanan proves political cases is an example for how the hegemonic sexuality works. He unleashes the dog to naked detainees with their hands bound, and make them disclose conspiracies of which they never have been a part of, in fear of castration. Many of them have later lost their ability of having sexual arousal ((Hareesh, "Adam" 74).

Timothy C. Baker elaborates on the use of animal representations in fiction. He says animals are the others upon which mankind evaluates itself whatever way

they are represented in literature. Be the representation an anthropomorphized one, as a familiar whose shared identity is human or framing it in an individual or collective identity, the animal throws light upon the human (1). Here the dog is masculinized and anthropomorphized whereas the powerless men belonging to the lowest social stratum around him are emasculated and zoomorphized. Tacitly it is explained that people who do not have access to power in terms of their caste, class and gender are effeminate, feeble, tame and animal like whereas men wielding power in terms of the aforementioned parameters are predatorial, virile and masculine in a hegemonic way. This hegemonic masculinity addresses and communicates only to other hegemonic masculinities and suppresses all other non-normative bodies.

Another example from the story of how this hegemony functions is the way police officers in charge of feeding the dog approach his kennel with fear and respect because it was believed that his displeasure would bring in official disfavor. The second incident which further throws light on his predatorial instinct is the way he saves the IG from the unexpected attack of a fragile starving prisoner.

"Victor pounced at the trivial creature (the prisoner) and made him fall to the ground by biting on his neck. He scratched and raked its back and dragged it into the cell" ("*Victor ottachattathinu a nissahaya jeeviyude kazhuthil kadichu thazhe ittu. Puram manthippolicha sesham ayale valichu muriyilekku kondu poyi*"; my trans.; 76). Here, the animal exhibits strong toxic and hegemonic masculinity whereas the human becomes fragile and vulnerable as a prey. The story also highlights a situation where the policemen feel powerless and less masculine in his presence. It is

said that when Victor came in to the hall where helpless masculinities were exhibited some people rose up from their seats in a gesture of respect

(Hareesh, "Adam" 74). Here the masculinities are not positively vulnerable and but lacking in agency and power.

Tacitly it is explained that people who do not have access to power in terms of their caste, class and gender are effeminate, feeble, tame and animal like whereas men wielding power in terms of the aforementioned parameters are predatorial, virile and masculine in a hegemonic way. This hegemonic masculinity addresses and communicates only to other hegemonic masculinities and suppresses all other non-normative bodies. This treatment can be further explicated with white men's brutalization of Afro-American men in the United States in the words of R.W. Connell:

> White men's masculinities are constructed not only in relation to white women, but also in relation to black men. White fears of black men's violence have a long history in colonial and postcolonial situations. Black fears of white men's terrorism, founded in the history of colonialism have a continuing basis in white men's control of police, courts and prisons in metropolitan countries. African -American men are over represented in American prisons as Aboriginal men are in Australian prisons. The situation is strikingly condensed in the American black expression 'The Man' fusing white masculinity and institutional power. (75)

As the story does not have any important female characters except the objectified Noor and Pauly Mathew, consequently, the anthropomorphized Victor's

masculinity is constructed along the lines of other men who play subservient roles to him in terms of power, which is assured and assumed in the name of his breed; something that stands for ethnicity and caste and his position which entails both. He is sketched against a foil of contrasting and eventually discredited masculinities. There are multiple techniques employed by the writer which function at various symbolic levels to suggest the workings of dispersive power in society. Victor plays the role of "The Man" here who wields institutional power of the police force.

When Victor is killed in a vengefully brutal way by the policemen after the retirement of inspector Janardhanan, a heroic death befitting an iconoclastic stray dog awaits Adam (Hareesh, "Adam" 77). He is run over by a vehicle on the road and merges into the earth like a lump of mud. One can see in Adam a person navigating his way from an identity of toxic and hegemonic masculinity into a fluid one.

The person who comes for killing all stray dogs, when the prodigal Adam wreaks havoc in the village, is a carnivalesque subversion of the stereotyped dog catcher. Whereas the people expect a dwarfish stocky and hairy middle-aged man, who comes instead, is a very handsome "Prem Nazir" like youth (Hareesh, "Adam" 75). Even the profession of a "dog catcher" seems to suggest a person who is in charge of sustaining and implementing societal moral codes. Semiotically, he becomes a sign for hegemonic patriarchal surveillance. Adam becomes a revolutionary hero when he and some fellow dogs attack the dog catcher and his team who were sleeping in a school verandah at night. The dog catcher loses his nose forever in this rebellion. The symbolic relevance of the attack is doubled when

the school verandah is considered to be space for the propagation of normative ideologies.

The conclusion of the story becomes a celebration of carnivalesque elements when it describes the deviant life led by Akhilesh, Kurup's prodigal son who comes back to the homeland having resigned a high-profile job in Delhi. The education he is said to have from England is suggestive of his aristocratic and colonial ancestry. Akhilesh leads a life of loose morals which is very much epicurean. He sells his father's ancestral property for having orgies, which last till morning. He even picks and rears a stray dog from the roadside and calls it Adam. He subverts all ideologies preached and practiced by his father, the climactic one being the way he quips to a well-wisher who warns him against squandering the ancestral wealth: "I want to live the life of the destitute at least for a single day before my death"

(Hareesh, "Adam" 77). The life of the destitute becomes synonymous with the liberated life that Adam led; one that is free from conventional moral codes regarding masculinity, sexuality, race, class and caste. The story functions at multiple semiotic levels to signify how sexuality and masculinity are changing phenomena, "how it is fluid and how it morphs and how we can think about it and study it as something ever changing, and in the movement" (Reeser 4).

The political relevance of the names used in the story is worthy of a probe. The puppy who is brought from Philippines by Pauly Mathew is given a Muslim name Noor, whereas all her four puppies are given Christan names in the colonial tradition. Arthur alias Adam, Victor, Candy and Judy. Pauly Mathew bears a Christan name suggestive of her liberal sexuality due to her mixed descent. Kurup is

a Hindu Savarna caste tag and it is suggestive of how the surname can even replace the first name of men belonging to high caste in even in the post-Renaissance Kerala scenario. Kuttayi bears a secular no-caste name due to his illegitimate birth. Adam Sankara Pillai is given a mixed name, the first nick name 'Adam' indicating his debaucherous nature. Kurup's son Akhilesh bears a seemingly secular modern name without any caste tags. In short, the story gives a glimpse of the changing cultural landscape of Kerala in terms of caste, class, gender and sexuality over a span of four decades starting from 1970 and lasting till 2011, when the American marines undertake a military operation to capture Osama Bin Laden. Paradoxically enough, Noor's twin sibling who takes part in this military operation is given a name Cairo that has strong geo-political connotations.

The story "*Udamasthan*" ("The Owner*"*) by Vinoy Thomas which begins with a quote from Genesis where God gives man dominion over the earth and every other creature on the earth seemingly poses the pertinent philosophical questions like who is the owner and who is the owned, but actually hinges on the mores and norms of sexuality implicitly to arrive at the concluding riddle. The Saffron colored sari of Margarita who reads the Bible and the philosophical temperament of Amichan, a dog brought by Pappachan from the monastery of the Tibetan monks in Kushalnagar, go together to create a false sense of spirituality which smokescreens the underlying questions of sexual hypocrisy and masculine ownership and patronage of female sexuality. Amichan's spiritual temperament and weird habits like vegetarianism, meditation, compassion etc. infuriates Pappachan who believes that dogs are supposed to bark and bite. He chastises his daughters who love

Amichan by saying that domestic animals are expected to behave according to the wishes of the owner (Thomas, "*Udamasthan*" 376).

Pappachan upbrings each daughter with a religious mission. The eldest one Jesintha's life is dedicated to the devotion to the Holy Rosary; Margarita's to the reading of the Bible and Ansia's life was given in offering to St. Antony. Like true domesticated animals they lived to fulfill the wishes of their owner.

The predatory elements signifying the hegemonic and toxic masculinity of Pappachan is revealed in the way he subjects each dog to the capital punishment for various 'disciplinary' reasons. Foucault elaborates on how torture was used by sovereigns in western penal systems in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before the advent of modern disciplinary techniques and prisons in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. He says that by torture the sovereign was trying to recreate and manifest the gravity of the crime on the criminal's body. It further made the body of the condemned man into a site where the vengeance, authority and the unequal power of the sovereign can be inscribed.

> It (torture) assured the articulation of the written on the oral, the secret on the public, the procedure of investigation on the operation of the confession; it made it possible to reproduce the crime on the visible body of the criminal; in the same horror, the crime had to be manifested and annulled. It also made the body of the condemned man the place where the vengeance of the sovereign was applied, the anchoring point for a manifestation of power, an opportunity of affirming the dissymmetry of forces. (55)

Chemban, who was an ideal domestic dog in terms of his obedience, food habits and keenness at safeguarding the property boundaries from tress passers, is killed because of his urge to "manifest himself." He howls during the prayers and holy sounds resonating from the church and even barks at Pappachan who tries to correct him with corporal punishment. "Chemban who was tied to the youngest coconut tree of the grove realized his fate. He held his head high and gathering all his strength started to howl all the more loudly, as if mocking someone. His howl sounded like a slogan to Pappachan" ("*A parambile ettavum ilaya thenginte chuvattil kurukki kettiyidappetta Chembanu thante vidhi enthanennu bodhyam vannu. Avan thante sarva prananum eduthu thala uyarthi areyo parihasichu kookan thudangi. Chembante kookal oru mudravakyam pole aanu Pappachanu anubhavappettathu*"; my trans.; 379).

Ideologies and politics of gender, sexuality and ethnicity are superscribed on institutionalized religion and secularism and thus they become the sites of the disciplining of bodily practices. But innovative and non-normative bodily practices that rebuff, challenge and traverse such ideologies can still be discerned closely observing the way people live and interact with their bodies (Denberg et al. 181). Thus, Chemban is trying to cross the boundaries set in by institutionalized Christianity in his own way. He becomes a martyr for the sake of bodily practices and impulses which are constrained by religion. Such bodily practices are considered to be ideologically non-normative in spite of their asexual nature.

The death sentence awarded to the dogs serves the intended end of setting an example for the pious daughters. The ancestral hammer in rust free cast iron, with

inscriptions of the name of a glorious patriarch on it, is the weapon of execution. This weapon becomes the baton of patriarchy to punish the trespassers, which is endorsed by religion. The writer says that when Pappachan touches the weapon, the power-ridden patriarchal history of his ancestry flew into him like electric current and he gets possessed with it (Thomas, "*Udamasthan*" 379).

Rani meets with her punishment for having mated with a stray dog even in a state of imprisonment, or rather for tarnishing the premises of the household with such an 'obscene' act. The punishment awarded for her is not only because of the lack of constraints over her own body and sexual impulses but also for traversing the boundaries of class and ethnicity as such. Her body becomes the semiotic object where the repressed sexuality of Pappachan's spinster daughters is inscribed upon. Alternately, Pappachan's fears about his own repressed sexuality, being a religiously chaste widower, and about the sexuality of his spinster virgins are 'projected' onto Rani who is in heat. J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis in their book *The Language of Psychoanalysis* define projection:

> (Projection is the) operations whereby qualities, wishes, feelings or even objects which the subject refuses to recognize or rejects in himself are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing. Projection so understood is a defense of very primitive origin which may be seen at work especially in paranoia, but also in normal modes of thought such as superstition. (349)

Pappachan's refusal to recognize and acknowledge his own sexuality as well as the sexuality of his daughters can be attributed to the fear of stigma imposed by a

dogmatic religion (Christianity) and his patriarchal hegemonic masculinity. The weird way how a stray dog mates with the caged female dog Rani and Jesintha's voyeuristic gaze at that 'dirty' scene contradicts the Puritan gaze of the "owner" Pappachan and makes him declare death sentence for Rani. Here the intersection of patriarchy, religion and normative sexuality makes Pappachan a predatorial executioner.

Channan is given death penalty for not complying with the food habits of the family. Pappachan is quite surprised when he comes to know that the food kept for him in the dented aluminium vessel in the kitchen verandah remains untouched for days on end. He never took food from the family but had secretive nocturnal visits to a distant butcher's place for his food leaving the borders of Pappachan's land property and the chaste bodies of his daughters unguarded. What infuriates Pappachan is the way Channan counters the relationship between the owner and the owned. The owned becomes the domesticated property of the owner through the fodder and negating the fodder equates to negating the power of the owner. The story has an overwhelming presence of biblical imagery related to the tasting of the forbidden fruit and the consequent punishment. The habit of having food from home and outside home has strong sexual connotations and the act enrages the owner who is also the custodian of the moral codes prescribed for the owned.

Kyla Wazana Tompkins says that the mouth is a site of "queer alimentarity", "a space with a cultural and erotic history of its own, one that …offers glimpses of a pre-sexological mapping of desire, appetite and vice" (5). Appetite and desire conflate in the mouth and it becomes a locus of non-normative cravings.

Paradoxically enough, Channan's audacious queering of food habits becomes an ideological cold war he wages with the owner.

The mouth, as it incorporates the external, becomes the most vulnerable orifice of the body. The other becomes a part of the self, changing the self in the process, through crossing over the mouth (Shahani 11-12).

Channan is able to embrace the other with food that he takes, not from the generosity of the owner but as a vagabond challenging all norms of ownership and resisting boundaries set by caste and creed. He is not chained by food and is hanged to death by the dictatorial owner for his inclusiveness. Channan is chained to the rails of the window of the virgins' bedroom as a punishment, still he is indifferent to the trespassers and refrains from keeping watch on the borders of the property. Moreover, he forgoes the food offered to him by the owner and goes on a hunger strike. His independent and rebellious spirit is interpreted as pride by Pappachan and he is awarded death sentence for it. Pride is considered to be first one among the Seven Deadly Sins enlisted by the Church and the action is interpreted as something done against established religion. Pappachan decides to hang Channan to death when his realizes that his aged body has become too weak to raise the hammer to kill the dog. He sheds tears not over his aged body but over his vulnerably disabled body that goes against the norms of culturally dominant masculinity.

Channan's peripheral existence as a watchman over the property of the owner underscores his sense of non-belongingness and exclusion from the ideals of the owner about power, sexuality, food, family and property. His unchainable gypsy nature adds to the elements of the carnivalesque. His agency stands outside the

realm of hegemony and the ideology of ownership and resists his own subjectification.

Chanthu, the hunter dog was the ideal one for the owner in terms of keenness in his guarding the boundaries of the property, his eating habits and above all, his hunting skills. Hunting always addresses prowess and skill and is considered to be a masculine kind of an activity. All hunting narratives always focus on the prey. All features of hunt, especially who engages in it, is part of the gendered structure of the society (Kulchyski 331). Chanthu's hunting skills are attributed to his lineage to Kurichya tribes who are famous hunters and he is named after Arackal Chanthu, the loyal fighter and aide of Pazhassi Raja. He hunts rabbits, squirrels, anteaters and mongooses who frequent Pappachan's land during daytime and presents the kill to the owner loyally. Pappachan's daughters collect the scrapped bone pieces from his dining table with disgust. In such a way, the hunter dog becomes a metonymy for the ideal masculine hunter in Pappachan.

Chanthu chases a tree cat at night which was the speediest animal he had ever followed. Then he coincidentally meets and gets enlightened from a mystic anteater. The anteater enlightens him about the absurdity of all ownership and the absurdity of hunting undertaken for a person who 'claims' to own him. The anteater's advice to him that nobody has the right to possess other's life and no living being has true owners in that sense adds to the element of mysticism. The anteater adds that only dead bodies can be owned by someone which implies all outdated religious moral codes advocated by Pappachan are dead. After this transforming experience, Chandu turns out to be a disinterested dog and gets

ideologically alienated from his master, just like Amichan. He too is hanged to death.

Each animal becomes a sign for various phases of repressed sexuality and they are killed when they show the carnivalesque elements at subverting the existing power structure which is based on hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality. The death sentence given to Amichan has Biblical echoes: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it will be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18.6).

The relationship between the elderly widower of a father and the spinster daughters on the verge of middle age is one based on power and a sense of ownership. This masculine ownership metaphorically covers a wide variety of areas: the female body, their sexuality, the land, the lives of pet dogs etc. The physical boundaries of the possessions are very important in the context of the story. Pappachan, the Christian settler farmer wields power not only over the boundaries of his fenced property, but the boundaries of the female body as a property and the bodies of his pet dogs too. When the dogs question or challenge the ideals of ownership, they are given a death penalty in a Fascist way. By setting powerful examples with the dogs, he is silencing the sexual urges of his spinster daughters. The story is also mired in intricate intersections of religious moral codes and gender norms which consider sexual urges outside marriage as taboo, and the dogs are appointed as the custodians of the carnal corporeal property.

Sublimation is a process proposed by Freud to explain why certain human activities which don’t have any obvious connection with sexuality are thought to be

driven by strong sexual inclinations. Freud classified artistic production and intellectual investigation as the primary categories of sublimation. In so far as the instinct is redirected towards achieving a socially accepted goal it is supposed to be sublimated (Laplanche and Pontalis 431).

There are elements of sublimation in the characterization of the dog Amichan, but sometimes the portrayal serves as a critique of sublimation. Amichan's spiritual indifference to the worldly matters is guising his true sexuality which is very emotional, soft and vulnerable. It is comparable to the mask of religiousness that the spinster virgins put on. Their silent indifference and withdrawal from social life is a kind of silent protest. It becomes a critique of sublimation in that non normative urges and impulses are still forced to be hidden under a system of constant moral surveillance.

The food symbolism points to the nexus made by predatoriness and hunter instincts, sensuality and appetite. Even Amichan, the philosopher dog, gets bound to Ansia whose blood from the fingertip is dripped to his mouth by the 'owner' Pappachan, in a witchcraftly attempt at arousing his 'masculine ferocity' as a dog. When Pappachan releases him from chains when the Bengali immigrant laborers are returning from their work, to test his newly acquired 'masculinity', he runs back to Ansia, and instead of barking at her and attacking, Amichan, the dog, kisses her fingers softly which makes her wonder about the sweetness of the virgin kiss she gets during her 39 years of spinsterhood and put her hands across his shoulders in reciprocation. Both these acts infuriate Pappachan and make him take a decision regarding the death penalty to be given to Amichan. He is saved by Ansia who

releases him from the chain without her father's knowledge. The audacity Pappachan shows to unleash the dog at the immigrant laborers and how he trifles with their lives give concrete examples for his inability to accept or respect the vulnerable other.

The characterization of the philosopher dog Amichan and the enlightenment of Chanthu contains some carnivalesque elements. The gendering of the dogs borders on fluidity as all of them seem to be non-normative and resistant in one way or another. Amichan subverts normativity and hierarchy with his gentle effeminate vulnerability, Chemban with his profanity, Channan with his food habits, Rani with her promiscuity and Chanthu with his epiphanic mysticism. The element of dry black humor adds to the Carnivalesque. It culminates at the end when the constricting moral codes imposed by the 'owner' naturally get subverted.

The story "Pied Piper" by S.Hareesh is a retelling or rather 'remythification' of "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" and explores the potential of folk tales to talk about socially unacceptable truths. The story is a celebration of the carnivalesque at multiple levels.

Onachan who represents the Pied Piper in this story lures the young adults with his fluid sexuality and queerness. The magic spell he casts on the young adults with his effeminate fragile body is intriguing and it instills a mysterious fear in the mind of the parents. The story runs parallel to the European folk tale in multiple ways. The Pied Piper comes to the rescue of Hamelin city which is infested with rats and he lures the rats away with his music and drowns them in the river. When he was not given the promised reward by the mayor, he takes revenge by luring the

children away into a mysterious mountain crack which closes forever once the last kid enters.

Parallelly, Onachan saves the village from a strange bird flu infecting ducks and saves them with his homoeo medicine. He is also denied of the payment he was promised. He settles down in the village as an alien settler, always ostracized by the mainstream society because of his ‘queerness’, and in a vengeful fashion lures the young adults with his charm.

Ducks and the mother mudfish whose hide out is searched by Onachan are very much symbolic of fluid sexuality. The adaptability of duck both to water and land is suggestive of the changing nature of human sexuality. Hence, Onachan symbolically becomes the savior of queerness. The stealthy search Onachan makes to find out the hide out of the mother mudfish is also symbolic owing to the slippery character and the adaptability of the mudfish.

The story holds the carnivalesque elements in multiple ways. The playfulness of Onachan which persists throughout the story is a form of the carnivalesque. He jeers at every attempt made by Chandran to impose his normative hegemonic masculinity and hypocritical morality. He makes fun of Chandran when he starts a school for Karate and distracts students with his funny mocking gestures and comments. Karate as a form of martial arts can be seen as imposing hegemonic normative concepts regarding the body; the ways of disciplining and taming the body and mind normatively, in a homogeneous fashion. Chandran, the Karate master tests the patience of the candidates who seek to learn Karate by making them sit idly and observe things in the class for two days. If they do not drop out after the

ordeal, he asks them why they have sought to learn Karate. He himself would provide the answer saying that Karate is not for attracting women or to outsmart others by picking unnecessary fights. It is for abstaining from selfishness and bad thoughts. It helps one to become a 'complete man' (Hareesh, "Pied Piper" 282).

Foucault's concept of bio power and the role it plays in subjugating bodies is relevant here. Biopower is "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (140). In his lecture series *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* Foucault chalks out the difference between discipline and biopolitics. Biopolitics is the technology used to manage a whole population so that they will provide a healthy workforce, whereas discipline is the technology used to make people behave and be effective and productive as workers (245-246). Hence, the former is applied at the group level, and the latter at the individual level.

Chandran duplicates the state in that he molds uniformly disciplined bodies and makes them contribute to the bio power through self-disciplinary mechanisms like Karate. Karate is a form of schooling which provides interpellated 'subjects' to the hegemonic ideology; in this context, that of heteronormativity. Chandran tries to resist Onachan's mockery by saying that those people who make fun of everything are lazy loafers, not knowing to do things perfectly, in a "straight forward normal" way (285). He is digging at Onachan's sexuality which is not so "straight forward" or normative and normal as such. However, Onachan's crooked ways are potentially subversive as it is proved at the end.

Masculinity is bound to power whether in the military, the government or the home. Masculinity sometimes assumes hidden forms to exist indomitably. It can operate in subtle round about ways, such as not openly discussing about it and instead talking about those people against whom it is posited, such as gay men. Masculinity is not always about exerting force on a weaker person. The tacit techniques how hegemonic masculinity is sustained is more or less about understanding about the working of power and the tools of oppression (Reeser 7-8).

Chandran's seemingly normal ways are contrasted with Onachan's abnormal ways for their semiotic relevance. They function like binary opposites, each signifying the other with their opposing nature. Chandran's attempt at taming the body implies taming of the sexual urges too and every jibe that Onachan makes against it, including his reverberating laughter are attempts at a carnivalesque subversion. When one wants to tame and curtail, the other wants to unleash and celebrate. When one prefers to have a black and white uniformity, the other advocates pluralistic, queer and heterogeneous 'piedness'.

Chandran's daily routine of waking up early in the morning, going to a couple of temples, coming back to his Karate school and engaging in rigorous work out, and making a brisk walk back home in his white Karate uniform was a kind of self-publicity he was giving to his chosen way of life (Hareesh, "Pied Piper" 285). The day he uses the flying front kick against Onachan who was angling and was not ready for a fight, Chandran cannot sleep because he has been violating the basic rules of Karate. Firstly, he was attacking a fragile unarmed man and secondly, it was a kick to be used only during duals. "Rules are made to be violated secretively and

the world belongs to such people", the narrator consoles Chandran" (Hareesh, "Pied Piper" 286).

Chandran is irritated at Onachan's non- belongingness to social norms. He criticizes the name Onachan which doesn't carry a tail signifying affiliation to any caste or religion. If one needs to be a human being he should have the tags like Christian, Chekavan, Pulayan etc., according to Chandran. So Onachan is an alien in every sense (Hareesh, "Pied Piper" 288).

When Chandran is locked in the house by Onachan and his illegitimate relationship with Sindhu is caught red handedly, he tries to legitimize this relationship by marrying her and earning social approval by it. This hide and seek game between the hegemonic normativity of Chandran and the vulnerable non-normativity of Onachan makes the warp and woof of the story.

What agency as resistance could mean is comprehensively explained by Judith Butler in her seminal work on the performativity of gender. She underscores the inherently reiterative nature of the structure of gender norms and which gives the scope both for their social entrenchment and the potential revolt against them. Gender norms are systematically manifested in people's bodies as deceptively natural identities of heterosexual masculinity and femininity because of this reiterative nature. However, the importance given by civilizations to reinforce these norms shows how fragile they are and how heterosexuality is not natural or essential. It is the result of customarily imposed actions which need to be elicited from the bodies of people with difficulty. This fundamental unreliability of the reiterative nature of the gender framework gives the chance for internal subversion.

Exemplifying her argument, Judith Butler interprets gay drag as a subversion of the givenness of the heterosexual identity by exaggerating satire of the multiple forms of repressed identification and desire. The sex of the performer, the sexuality of the performer and the performed identity etc. get upturned and go awry in the gay drag. According to her, being an imitation without an original, the drag highlights the contingent and performative nature of all identities (124-126).

Onachan asserts his resistant agency via counter hegemonic performativity of sexuality. He is performing his sexuality and gender in multiple ways; sometimes as mockery, sometimes as melodrama and frequently through the display of his feminine body and vulnerability. The performativity and theatricality of the actions of Onachan have carnivalesque elements in them. Balachandran, is bewitched by his soulful flute music. A number of young adults flock together in his courtyard to see his acrobatic performances with a non-muscular fragile feminine body (Hareesh, "Pied Piper" 291). He is purposely challenging socially accepted behavior and implicitly edifying the public how loosely held such norms around sexuality are; how overlapping the borders are. Adolescence is an age where the norms of sexuality seem to be most fluid and with blurred boundaries. The liminality and fluidity of that age is explored and made visible by Onachan whose actions seem to be satirical and aimed at challenging the existing power structures. The camaraderie Onachan seems to share with the young adults despite the age gap in between them, is another element of the carnivalesque. Together they form a resistant community challenging normative social behavior. The suggestion of variegation in the title "Pied Piper" is doubly relevant in that it refers both to the queerness and the enchanting nature of Onachan's non-normative sexuality.

The slippery fluid nature of human sexuality is suggested in the story *"Varal*" ("The Mudfish") by V. Shinilal with the powerful animal imagery of the mudfish which is one of the most difficult fishes to catch. The story revolves around an adulterous relationship the narrator has with a woman and a magic realistic experience they have on the beach. The mudfish in the story appears twice; first, as a part of a narration made by a fisherwoman whom the adulterous couple, who are in love with each other, and who are on the verge of separation, meet on the beach and secondly, as a part of a dream narration made by the female lover. In both the events it has an agency of its own and it contributes to the meaning making process.

Aaron Moe introduces the theory Zoopoetics by saying that Zoopoetics acknowledges that nonhuman animals or *Zoion* also take part in the creative process in literature and they too have agency. When writers create their poiesis a multispecies event happens in unison with the actions and vocalizations of nonhuman animals. It is a collaborative venture (2).

The couple who are in an extra marital relationship drive to the sea side and remain in the car for some time when a fisherwoman from the beach comes and peeps into the car and asks them what they are doing. "We are writing a story together", the male lover replies and then she asks if she too can be a part of that story. They agree and she gets into the back seat and starts to narrate her own story that happened when she was younger and youthful. In this magic realistic experience, a black ambassador car pulls over by her side as she was selling fish on the seashore and two people get down and approach a fish monger nearby who was selling freshwater fish. Meanwhile the woman notices two intensive eyes which

belong to another young man watching her curiously from the car. The men buy a lot of fish in a basket when a huge alive mudfish slips from their basket to the ground. The woman runs and catches it but it tricks her as well and slips to the salt water in the sea again. She wonders if it had died or got transformed into a salt water fish (Shinilal 55).

Here the fish equates to the possibility of a potential sexual encounter that could have taken place between the woman and the young man in the car. Though the infatuation they feel for each other is very transient in nature, it makes her dream of surpassing class boundaries. Bodies addressing each other cannot exist as themselves for long as the slippery trickster of a mudfish reminds her of. They are defined and constructed by class and caste and is demarcated by their habitat and its spatiality, that is, whether they belong to fresh water or salt water. Even if such a relationship fulfills in a physical encounter, it will come to have an untimely death like a fresh water fish jumping into saltwater.

In the second part of the story, the female lover narrates her experience of having dreamt of her male partner, who is a writer, writing a story titled *"Varal*" ("The Mudfish") in a weekly. It is again suggestive of the fact that the possibility of overcoming norms prescribed by society will remain fictional in the present scenario. Adulterous relationships are compared to an adventurous off-road drive and the attempt at catching the mudfish which will slip off from one's hands.

The story within the story mode of narration and the magic realistic episodes add to the carnivalesque in this story which resists established ways and conventional thinking. An inter play of reality and dream like elements enhances the

effectiveness of the narrative technique which presents a fusion of form and content. The impossibility of fulfilling repressed sexual desires due to the denial of social approval is curtly expressed with such a technique. There is also an innuendo that they journey will be continued even if the partners hide their faces like ostriches.

The story "*Hidumban*" tries to juxtapose the spontaneous biological instincts which make up animal sexuality with the constructed cultural nature of human sexuality. There is an attempt at taxonomic break down and the blurring of the human and animal identities when Mercy, the pet cat of an emotionally frustrated protagonist Tessa is ascribed human qualities by her in an attempt to get emotionally detached from every human presence surrounding her; her dominating and harassing husband who emanates toxic masculinity and from whom she lives separated; her jealous sister-in-law and her kid; her mother who seems to find fault with her independent nature and imminent divorce etc.

There is no concrete male presence in the story except that of Hidumban who trespasses into the boundaries of a nunnery like home which is built around concept of purity, chastity and fidelity. Tessa's obsessive love for the pet cat 'Mercy' seems to be abnormal and even verges on zoophilia, but as one delves deeper into the story the relationship comes to have another deeper semiotic as well as psychological relevance. She is transferring all the human kindness and love she is denied of, into the cat and even expresses her sexual frustration using it as a tool. The cat 'Mercy' is an "objective correlative" in Eliotian terms and evokes all the sexual frustrations its owner undergoes. It fills her emotional emptiness in terms of a lover, child and a friend.

She gets abnormally anxious when Mercy goes missing for a second and catches her having been hypnotized by the gaze of the Tom cat 'Hidumban' on her. There are so many instances in the story where Tessa's possessiveness for the cat evolves into sexual jealousy. When she repeatedly gets harassed by her toxic husband over the phone, she comforts herself by viewing the pictures of Mercy on the gallery of the phone. The way her mother and sister-in-law team up together against her shows the patriarchal treatment given to the 'prodigal' daughters who are married off and on the verge of a divorce. Her mother finds fault with her unnatural love for the cat by saying that she does not even bother to pamper her nephew and is showering all her affection upon a cat instead (Bathery 251-263).

The story progresses at the pace of the cat and mouse game Tessa plays with her sister-in-law and Mercy's amorous advances at Hidumban. Tessa's sister in law's sexual frustration which is tacitly suggested with the absence of her husband in the story is normative as it does not resist the bounds of the family, and hence becomes socially accepted. Tessa, on the other hand, expresses it very obviously and is trying to question normativity in multiple ways. Her paraphilic love for the cat, her impending divorce, her telephone romance with a lover, and her access to the public space suggested by her work place and the park, are pitted against the familial space occupied by her mother and sister-in-law.

The sisters-in-law project their jealous and sexually frustrated selves on the cats and the deceptively playful ways in which they tap and tease the cats actually point towards two ways of reactions to the same situation. In a step-sisterly

eagerness to taunt Tessa, Lisy encourages Hidumban who makes stealthy encroachments into the household.

The way she accepts the male lover of Mercy, the cat, into the family is symbolic of the way she is trying to reinforce the foundations of family which is challenged by Tessa. Lisy is also supporting heteronormativity and challenges the woman- woman relationship that Tessa seems to uphold. Tessa gets uncontrollably irritated and possessive over the first romantic encounter between Hidumban and Mercy that she chances to witness. It seems to be an event that has always been anticipated by her and something she always wanted to prevent from happening. The romantic relationship seems to pose an ideological challenge before Tessa. The lesbian kind of sisterhood Tessa shares with Mercy and her every possible attempt to thwart a heterosexual union of Mercy and Hidumban goes along with her resistance to a sexual relationship that is bound to marriage and family in a conventional way.

Though the story centers around Tessa, all the three women seem to be sexually frustrated. Both the mother and Lisy try to trap sexual pleasure within the confines of hetero sexuality, marriage and family whereas Tessa tries to pave her way into a liberated non-normative life. She even projects the sexual excitement she has talking to her lover over phone to the cat and repeats the name of the pet cat in mad excitement.

Food plays an important role in this story too. The disciplining and taming of the cats are done with food. The practices of commensality are caste specific and gender specific in the Indian scenario. Sitting together at the dining table together shows social acceptability which is granted to Mercy and denied to Hidumban at

first. There are also strong implications of class and caste as the name Hidumban indicates. He seems to be a stray cat, having no labels to attach to himself.

While commenting on the role played by race and class dynamics in the commensal politics of inclusion and exclusion, David B. Goldstein makes a mention of the Kosher laws of the Jews and the Hindu caste system both of which follow strict dining rules. The purpose of the Kosher laws is to differentiate between who observe the laws and who do not (47).

"Hidumban left the kitchen with the head of the fish. He kept it aside for Mercy who was following him. Tessa who opened the door when they were sharing the food with each other gets struck on the scene" ("*Meen thalayumayi Hidumban adukkala vittu. Puarake chenna Mercikkayi avan meenthala neekki vechu. Avar marimari athu kadichu kondirikke vathil thurannu vanna Tessa a kazhchayil tharakkappettu ninnu*"; my trans.; 260). Here the sharing of food becomes a symbol of sexual appetite, physical union and family. Earlier Mercy was fed by Tessa only and now that right has been robbed of by Hidumban. The climactic moment takes place when Hidumban comes in search of Mercy who is lying with Tessa under the blanket which happens almost synchronically with Joe's calling Tessa and fighting with her over the phone. Mercy gets tempted to reciprocate Hidumban's romantic signals but she unwillingly obeys Tessa. After a moment's confusion, Tessa invites Hidumban to the bed, to sleep with Mercy, and in a vengeful pretence of affection strangles him to death (Bathery 263).

The narration goes like this: "While she was being pestered by Joe's repeated calls and swearing messages, while she was being burnt by vengeance and sorrow,

Tessa pressed her right foot on Hidumban's neck. As she was caressing Mercy's face and flanks with the right hand, she pressed Hidumban's neck under her feet strangling him forever" ("*Joe yude nirantharamaya vilikalum thuruthura vannu veezhunna theri messagekalum Tessaye akramichu kondirikke pakayum sankadavum avale chuttu pazhuppikkunna a neram Tessa valathu kalinal Hidumbante kazhuthilamarthi. Valathu kayyinal Merciyude kazhuthilum minusameriya pallayilum thadavum thorum thante idathu kalinidayil vechu Hidumbante kazhuthine amarthiyamarthi*"; my trans.; 263).

The strangling that happens at the end is symbolic not only because it marks the revolts against the strangling system of marriage, family and sexuality but also the strangling of that system itself. The repressed sexuality of the four women characters, including Mercy the cat, is expressed in four different ways in the story. When Tessa projects all her fantasies onto the cat, Lisy is expressing her sexual frustration and jealousy by playing a cat and mouse game using Hidumban and Mercy as pawns. The mother is silencing her own desires by trying to silence Tessa, and Mercy is the only character who is able to express her sexuality freely.

All these stories politically use animal imagery and gastropolitics as liberative mechanisms pronouncing the changing norms in sexual freedom, fluidity and chastity. They exemplify at large how normative purity is subversively unsettled by the corporeal grotesque by the writers. These stories also throw some light on the ever-evolving fluid contours of sexual purity norms and how they are deployed on the gastro-political planes of culture.

Chapter 3

Liminal Spaces and (Un)Chaste Desires

This chapter makes an attempt at establishing the formation of sexualized bodies and their performance along 'liminal' spaces. It also tries to elaborate on the social construction of desire and sexuality substantiating the same with a few short stories. It delves into questions like the geographical and spatial dimensions of desire and tries to trace the politicization of the sexual body in space. How far the sexual and the spatial constitute each other is highlighted here and in order to substantiate it, sexuality is mapped along its performative existence in space. Sexuality is identified in its socially contingent nature and a cartographic representation of the landscape of desire or the eroticized topographies is also undertaken in this chapter. Philosophizing and theorizing about the ways in which the spatial and the sexual constitute each other gain gravity in the cultural landscape of Kerala in that, quoting the words of Carmel Christie*, "*it is through the imagination around the sexual subject in the public space that the ideology around a 'legitimate' life is constituted" (3). Hence the chapter would be dealing with the "vernacular erotic topographies" (Pfohl 192) or the local spaces of sexuality to trace where and when it undergoes evolution.

The term liminality is not used limiting it to its strict anthropological sense but as a loose umbrella term for the fluid space for all the revolutionary experiences that happen on the 'threshold' of social changes. Liminality can refer to multiple spaces: the geographical, domestic, cultural, political, topographical, temporal and

psychological, as far as the application of the term in the chapter is concerned. Encyclopedia of Social Theory defines liminality as follows:

> The technical meaning of liminality derives from anthropological studies of ritual passages in small-scale societies. Ritual passages (such as the transition from boyhood to manhood) were conceptualized by Arnold van Gennep ([1909] 1960) as made up of three steps: (1) separation; (2) liminality; and (3) reintegration. During liminality, the initiands live outside their normal environment and are brought to question their self and the existing social order through a series of rituals that often involve acts of pain: the initiands come to feel nameless, spatiotemporally dislocated and socially unstructured. (322)

The intervening phase of 'social limbo' when the neophytes pass through a state of ambiguity is called "margin" or "limen" by Gennep (Turner 56-57). In a looser psychological sense Paul Stenner defines liminal experiences as "an experience in the process of *becoming*. We might say that it is an experience that is happening but has not yet happened. This, in fact, is what the word experience really means: it is a 'going through', a passage" (6).

Turner in his *Ritual Process* elaborates upon the potential of liminal areas of time and space to generate new models replacing the force- backed ongoing jural and political models. He suggests the power of artistic forms like drama and films to generate new models owing to their close association with fantasy. Such "liminal areas of time and space" according to him can bring about social changes in the long

run (vii). Modern day Malayalam short stories are an amalgamation of the filmic and dramatic elements and consequently can take part in such social transformation.

Whether it is conceived in terms of a system of symbols and meanings or social structural relations, society is a process rather than an abstract structure. Society becomes a process also in terms of the constant shifting that cohesive human community experiences between fixed worlds and floating worlds. Our attempts at preventing chaos with verbal and nonverbal classification happen at the expense of opportunities for discoveries and inventions and progress; hence not all subversions of the normative can be considered to be abnormal or illegal. However, human beings have had to construct—by structural means—spaces and times in an attempt to produce novelty. Rituals, carnivals, dramas, and more recently, films belong to such liminal spaces which permit the free expression of ideas, emotions, and willpower. They hold the power to create fantastic models some of which having even the power to displace the forcefully supported political and legal models that govern the core activities of a society (Turner vii).

The role of liminal periods in subverting social hierarchies has been emphasized by a number of sociologists. The post-millennial era can be considered as a liminal period in that it marks a cultural passage from one millennium to the next. The cultural changes brought about by the advent of that temporal liminality is reflected culturally as well and duly represented in literature. As Agnes Horvath et.al. suggest in the article "Introduction: Liminality and Cultures of Change", the continuity of tradition and the taken for granted future outcomes can be challenged

and suspected during all kinds of liminal periods as they result in the reversal and temporary suspension of social hierarchies (3-4).

The question of individual agency and the embodied nature of that agency in bringing about changes in the social structure becomes pivotal as it centers on the role of seemingly personal actions that happen in the private life of individuals which gather a collective momentum and impact on the social structure. Revolutions of all sorts can be considered as liminal considering their social impact.

> The idea is that historical moments or whole epochs can be understood as liminal. During such periods, characterized by a wholesale collapse of order and a loss of background, agency is pushed to the forefront and reorientations in modes of conduct and thought are produced within larger populations. Thus, the concept of liminality may add a temporal and spatial dimension to the structure/agency debate. In this vein, political or social revolutions, or other crisis periods, may be thought of as liminal, which has consequences for theorizing social change. (Encyclopedia of Social Theory 322-323)

In the stories discussed here, one can find how the individual merges and evolves into the social; how the sexual becomes the political; how the private becomes the public; and how the affective evolves into the ideological.

In a book aptly subtitled “Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism” Eva Illouz elaborates on and distinguishes the concept of the “liminoid” as conceived by Turner. She mentions that Turner later coined the idea of "Iiminoid" rituals for such ‘passage’ events that occur in the secular world. They are

distinguished from liminal rituals in three key ways: (1) The liminoid ceremony takes place in industrial societies that are secular. Thus, the concept of liminality has moved from religious rites, which break and invert conventional symbols, to popular culture, art, and leisure activities, which take on the role of engrossing the performer in the ludic liminal activity. (2) Liminoid rituals do not have the collective and anonymous nature of liminal rituals because they are mostly created or embodied by recognizable persons like pop stars and actresses. (3) Liminoid rituals occur on the political and economic periphery of contemporary societies, whereas liminal rituals are bound with the social structure in which they occur (142). The stories dealt with in this chapter are full of such liminoid events which occur in the lives of individuals who are on the fringes of a structured cultural order.

The very title of the story by Santhosh Echikkanam “Isla De San Valentin” is suggestive of an imaginary virgin island untrodden by human beings, a fictional space beyond the jurisdiction of man-made laws regarding love, body and sexuality. It is an imaginary space that the female protagonist creates where the normative ideals about sexuality can be upturned. The story is actually a cartographic journey conducted through liminal spaces, some of which are real and concrete and some others metaphorical and abstract. The narration in the story is mediated by a journalistic vlogger who claims to be a writer feeding on the scopophilic imagination of the general public to pry into the sexual private life of others. Thus, he approaches the sky-scraping luxurious flat situated on the premises of Technopark in Kochi (Echikkanam 16). The well-maintained ambience of the flat with its security personnel from North-East India checking the identity card of a

Malayali writer and permitting entry creates a symbolic multicultural metropolitan space where region specific moral codes and norms of behavior can go topsy turvy. The entry into this utopian fantasy world is restricted for outsiders and the only outsiders who have access to this space are journalists and writers who deal with fictionalized truths.

The entry and the gateway are symbolic of liminality, thresholds where crossing and transformations of multiple dimensions can take place. The person who exits is not the same as the person who enters. There is a complete transformation in terms of identity, subjectivity, perceptions and so on. The advertisements posted on the walls of the elevator reminds the narrator of the affluent life of the residents that he is unable to afford, but they make him happy about those people who can lead life the way they want it to be, occupying such spaces. The elevator too functions as a liminal space which operates as a negotiation between/ betwixt the outer space and the inner space. The inner space is more or less anarchic and bohemian, an assemblage of multiple subjectivities, as opposite to the outer world.

Turner says that ‘rites of passage’ signify and make happen changes in “states”. Here, state refers to "a relatively fixed or stable condition," and according to him, social constancies like legal status, profession, office or vocation, rank, or degree would fall under this definition. It also indicates a person's state as defined by their culturally accepted stage of development, much like "the married or single state" or "the state of infancy." The term "state" can also refer to some ecological conditions apart from referring to a person or group's physical, mental, or emotional

state at a given moment. State is thus a broadly inclusive
term that encompasses any kind of steady or recurring condition that is accepted by s ociety than position or office. He further suggests that rites of passage are something more than a state of transition, and they are states of transformation. Here, boiling water or a pupa transforming from grub to moth are good analogies (Turner 93-94).

The vlogger enters the luxurious flat named Glacier on the fourteenth floor, without knocking justifying his action by saying that writers are metaphoric trespassers and housebreakers (Echikkanam 16). This narrative technique providing the mediation of an omnipresent but not omniscient narrator who witnesses certain things with the permission of the characters is suggestive of the intervention of media even into the private life and the resultant fictionalization of truths which are only partially available to the readers/ viewers. This media - mediated post truth subjectivity leaves many blanks to be filled in by the imagination of the reader. Hence the process of writing itself takes place at a symbolic space where the writer, readers and characters interact with each other and form multiple subjectivities and the process becomes very much self-reflexive as well. This self-reflexivity of meta fiction can be extended to the formation of sexual subjectivity as well, in the story. It makes us think about the formation of a sexual self and how it would have been differently constituted had it happened in a different space.

The white interior of the apartment resembles a glacier not only in color but also in the Air Conditioner induced “winter” that persists inside. The ambience is compared to that of a Scandinavian country in winter (Echikkanam 16). This is also a quasi-imaginary space symbolic of the mindscape of the occupants. It is not

accidental that the first space that the writer visits in the apartment is its bathroom. It is like the sanctum sanctorum of the house itself, representing 'the spatial unconscious' of the entire building or the surrounding outer space as such. The narrator anticipates the intrusive scopophilic imagination of the reader about the occupant of the bathroom, 'her' sex, gender and sexuality and deconstructs it with an anticlimactic introduction of a woman in sari, weeping, facing herself in the mirror.

The easily evoked equation between the spatiality of the bathroom with the sensually exciting nudity of a young beautiful woman is directly connected to the fetishistic and paraphilic imagination of a morally hypocritical society whose repressed sexual desires get erupted not only in Freudian slips, dreams and jokes but also in the collective imagination of the public. Similar reference to the public imagination is there in the story "Adam" which is discussed in chapter one. The hushed-up weeping that the woman makes in the bathroom is suggestive of the repressive space that the house offers. "She is forcibly arresting an irresistible cry in her throat without letting it out" ("*Ocha purathekku vidatha vannam aniyanthrithamaya oru nilaviliye thondayil pidichu ketti vechirikkuvanaval*"; my trans.; 17). Later, we come to know that the crying is caused by the missing of her father-in-law who is an elderly widower. He is a retired history teacher who has an interest in visiting places of historical importance. The love letters written by him to his wife who lived with him only for five years and the way he cherishes her memories with those letters bridges and transforms the formal relationship that existed between the morally conscious and chaste father-in-law and Vineetha Koshy, a woman in her thirties and also an educated and deadly bored housewife of an IT

professional. Having been pestered with Vineetha's continuous requests to read out the letters for her, Saviour Master takes her to the dam site at dusk and both of them sit on the spillway facing the forest and the mountains in the twilight (18).

The liminality of the dam signifies a before and after moment. Water which is blocked from its natural fluidity is potentially powerful and that which is given a constricted movement through a spillway evokes the repressed sexuality both the characters represent. The liminality of the space liberates both of their sexuality which had been previously bound to the institution of the monogamous family and laws of kinship.

The cyberspace where her IT professional of a husband dwells in is one of emptiness and cold and is equated with Edinburgh, where the couple lives for many years after marriage. Her husband is seen to be occupying only the cyber space, be it in Scotland or in Kochi. He has a cyborg like existence and even the sexual act he engages once in a while with his wife is compared to the harnessing and riding of a horse like a chivalrous explorer, leading an expedition to conquer the unknown lands of algorithms. In other words, even the sexual union is done in an abstract virtual space by him, completely erasing and ignoring her human selfhood. "One can only lie before him like an open laptop. When I yield, thinking of the possibility of conceiving a child, he will move all over the body, piercing like a cursor" ("*Thurannu vecha laptop pole kidannu kodukkukaye nivruthiyulloo. Enthu kunthamenkilum ayikkotte, a chelaviloru kochine enkilum kittiya mathiyayirunnu ennalochichu chumma vazhangi kodukkumbol oru cursor pole sareeramasakalam kuthikkeeri ayal panju nadakkum*"; my trans.; 19).

The indifference to human emotions that exists in the creative space made by writing and the cyber space of technological intervention is compared to each other. The invention of new algorithms is as creative as writing fiction, it is said. Somewhere the writer addresses the readers like this: "I want to tell my story. It is not only my case, but also true about all writers. They are obsessed with their target only. In between, the writer does not bother himself with the mental state of people who lives in the story. How cruel it seems on closer analysis" ("*Enikku ente katha parayanam. Njan mathramalla, ella ezhuthukarum angane anu. Avarkku avarude lakshyam mathram. Athinidayil a kathayil jeevikkendi vannavarude manasaikavastha onnum ezhuthukaran chinthikkunnatheyilla. Onnalochichal enthoru krooratha anithu*"; my trans.; 23).

Elsewhere, Vineetha utters similar words referring to her physical surrender to the weird sexual experiments of her husband: "You might blame me for yielding to such acts like this. Friend, developing an AI engine and writing a story are similar acts. Once you get trapped into it, we don't even realize the way we cease to exist, just like ants falling into honey. An IT professional is as creative as a writer" ("*Njan enthinanu ithinokke ninnu kodukkunnathu ennu ningal enne kuttappeduthiyekkam. Suhruthe, oru AI engine develop cheyyunnathum oru katha ezhuthunnathum ethandu oru pole anu*"; my trans.; 19). Vineetha's sexuality is degraded into something like a union between an Artificial Intelligence cyborg and a flesh and blood human. "When almost two years had passed after landing up in Edinburgh, some kind of severe loneliness and cold began to pervade my life. Noel used to spend the whole time in his room trying to find a substitute for a dysfunctional algorithm, even after

office hours" ("*Edinburgh il ethi randu kollam kazhinjappozhekkum aviduthe kalavastha pole jeevithathilakamanam kadutha oru tharam thanuppum ekanthathayumokke vannu kerithudangi. Office vittu vanna Noel chilappol pularum vare pravarthana kshamamallatha algorithathinu pakaram mattonnu kandupidikkanulla vyagrathayumayi thante muriyil thane chelavazhikkum*"; my trans.; 18).

The only companion Vineetha gets in Edinburgh is a Spanish neighbor who was getting ready to live with a Greek lover having divorced seven husbands before (Echikkanam 19). Still, she opines that all men are good and innocent which shocks Vineetha whose slot in the self-constructed 'sexual space' is somewhere in the intersections of the extremes offered by her conventionally chaste yet romantic father-in-law and the Spanish neighbor. The physical and symbolic liminal space that she occupies is somewhere between the geographical, topographical and cultural divide between Kerala and Edinburgh and is potentially subversive and experimental in nature. The only memories Vineetha cherishes of Edinburgh are about walking along the Royal Mile streets in a cold evening holding the hands of her father-in-law who is almost thirty-five years older than her. The Scottish landscape with the background of St. Giles Cathedral, the fort and the cobbled sidewalk with the music of the bagpipe playing in the background creates an ethereal limbo space which is liberating. In her intoxication, she even hallucinates two heather flowers walking along the streets after tricking the gardener (Echikkanam 20), an obvious symbol of the custodian of moral codes, and sees people cheering them up clapping.

The concept of "moral geography" would be apt to explain the varying behavioral patterns that show the shifting moral codes of Vineetha which seem to be space dependent. "A moral geography, simply put, is the idea that certain things and practices belong in certain spaces, places and landscape not in others" (Cresswell 128). Erin O'Brien, Sharon Hayes and Belinda Carpenter in their book *The Politics of Sex Trafficking: A Moral Geography* state that the concept of moral geography refers to the governing of morality according to space and place (13-14).

The space for the sexual union between these people who are otherwise divided by a wide chasm of age and kinship is set in the tomb and museum of Sir Walter Scott who wrote historical fiction. This liminal space naturally catalyzes the amalgamation of facts and fantasy, truths and falsehood, repression and freedom. In the essay "Of Other Spaces", while describing different principles upon which heterotopias function, Foucault describes heterochronies which are "slices in time". Traditional concept of time comes to a standstill at heterochronies. They are heterotopias of time accumulation like museums and libraries. Foucault states in this regard:

> Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit, whereas in the seventeenth century, even at the end of the century, museums and libraries were the expression of an individual choice. By contrast, the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project

> of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. (26)

Vineetha and her father-in-law land upon such a place, a literal museum which is a "place of all times that is itself outside of time" (Foucault 26) for a seemingly accidental sexual union which is revolutionary enough to question the stagnant nature of time inside the library. Vineetha finds out a white birthmark shaped like an island stretching over her father in law's genitals to his thighs and calls it 'Isla de San Valentin'. She tells Saviour master: "We are right now in this continent. And we are the first human beings to land upon this island. It is the most beautiful and peaceful island in the world. We will not move to anywhere else from here. We originate from here and we end up here itself" ("*Ee bhookhandathil ivideyanu nammal ippol. Ivide adyamayi kalu kuthiyathum nammal anu. It is the most beautiful and peaceful island in the world. Ini nammal ivide ninnu engottumilla. Ivide thudangunnu. Ivide thane avasanikkunnu*"; my trans.; 24).

When Vineetha reiterates to her father-in- law that body is in no way accountable for the love laws, she is trying to find a new definition to sexuality which is free from the bounds of body, age and other cultural norms like kinship and sexual purity. Whereas Vineetha finds a liberating moment in that physical union, her father-in- law remains guilt stricken, of violating the matrimonial promise of fidelity both in his life and in his son's life. His norms of sexuality remain bound to conjugality and he considers it as a sexual act of incest. Vineetha understands: "Once a lover gets trapped into the laws of the body like guilt, which is very outdated and unreformed as well, he/she will never be able to take any other penalty

than death" ("*Annathode Vineethakku oru karyam manassilayi. Oru kamukan kuttabodham polulla kalaharanappettathum ennal iniyum parishkarikkathathumaya sareerathinte niyamavalikalil akappettu poyal pinne maranathil kuranja oru sikshayum sweekarikkukayilla*"; my trans.; 25).

In her heterotopic space of free sexuality, where unreformed laws regarding the corporeality of love have no place, guilt is an outdated emotion. Vineetha's literal and metaphorical "romantic travel enacts the three stages that characterize liminality: separation, marginalization, and reaggregation" as described by Eva Illouiz. Her sexually marginalized self is sloughing off the old norms of chastity, sexual purity and fidelity, which are inextricably bound to the socio-cultural norms of gender, age, kinship and incest and reaggregating herself into new norms customized to suit her emotional and sexual needs.

The final depiction of the liminality of space is done in the story with the morgue where Vineetha and Noel wait to identify the dead body of the drowned father-in-law. The morgue signifies a transitional phase between life and death. The story pronounces its political statement when Vineetha takes the risk to identify the otherwise unidentifiable dead body resorting to the birthmark on the genitals, her "Isla de San Valentin", where her intersectionally made sexual identity can be suspended for some time. Bjørn Thomassen mentions how the initiands come to feel nameless, spatio-temporally dislocated and socially unstructured in a rite of passage that involves some change to the social status of participants in a liminal setting, where the initiands live outside their normal environment and are brought to question their self and the existing social order through a series of rituals. He

describes the formative experiences during liminality as both destructive and constructive in that they help shed the old social status and assume a new one instead (322-323). The morgue assumes the role of a formative space for Vineetha where she undergoes a metaphorical 'rite of passage' and assumes a challenging position as far as her social role as a chaste wife is concerned.

The very title of Yama's story "*Palam kadakkumbol pennungal mathram kanunnathu*" ("What Women Only Happen to See While Crossing Bridges") echoes of liminality in spatial and temporal experiences. The story is set against four spaces. The first one, the urban space of a cosmopolitan city like Bangalore, the second, the rural landscape of an estate bungalow near the forest, the third, the cyber space the characters dwell in most of the time, and the fourth, the liminal space of transformation that lies across the bridge and river. The IT professionals coming to the estate bungalow of one of their colleagues to celebrate Christmas are the characters of the story.

The overlapping of the borders between fantasy and reality in the story results in an "uncanny effect" as mentioned by Sigmund Freud. "An uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes and so forth." (150-151). Alexander Diel and Michael Lewis in their essay titled "Structural Deviations Drive an Uncanny Valley of Physical Places" explain the concept of 'uncanny valley', "a phenomenon describing the negative appeal (usually eeriness or creepiness) of stimuli that deviate from familiar categories. The negative

emotional experience has been described as eeriness, creepiness, or uncanniness" (1). They suggest that atypicality in the structure of built environments or structural or architectural deviations bring about such negative emotional appeal. They appropriate the term 'liminality' as something referring "exclusively to such ambiguous, distressing, or "off" physical places, distinct from other definitions of liminal spaces or liminality. They also argue that owing to the absence of a proper academic investigation of liminal spaces all ambiguous and eerie places may also be described as liminal as they deviate from the norm (Diel and Lewis 1-2).

The bungalow is an "uncanny valley" in that it is a deviation from the usual experiences of these characters and serves the purpose of a space in transit. The mist blanketing the farmland, the meandering road crossing over the land like a snake, the river bordering the property, the moving heights of areca nut trees in the wind, the deserted bungalow etc. are the 'uncanny' sites serving as the harbingers of change, in terms of the expression of repressed sexuality and desire. "The moment they landed upon this place, their body and mind gave in to the vast stretch of land without any sense of the past or future" ("*Vannirangiyappol thanne bhaviyo bhoothamo illatha vidham avarude manassum sareeravum nokketha dooratholam parannu kidanna a bhoomikku keezhadangi*"; my trans.; 13-14).

Even before the arrival of the guests, provisions have been made by the host's father for an unlimited supply of liquor and food. The availability of liquor both to men and women alike and the normalized drunkenness of the relatives of Lisa, enhance the eeriness of the ambience and convert it into a carnival space. "The beautiful bungalow built in granite and wood stood among the well-tended flowering

plants" ("*Kruthya samayathinu vellavum valavum ittu valarthiya kadum niramulla poochedikalkkullil karinkallum marathadikalum kondu theertha manoharamaya kettidamanu a bungalow*"; my trans.; 14). The uncanny atmosphere puts all of them in a transformative space and intoxicates even the abstainers without drinking alcohol. The lines from "Imagine" a famous song by John Lennon "You may say I am a dreamer, but I am not the only one", which is sung chorally by everyone sitting on the riverbank, proclaim that they are already in a trance.

Eva Illouiz states that the experience of liminality characterizes the new postmodern romantic sensibility. It is expressed in various cultural manifestations of it that reinforce and echo each other. These include romanticism in a utopia provided by the pastoral landscape where lovers withdraw into nature and disregard social norms; travel and the consumption of other leisure products, where lovers let go of their daily routines and release emotions freely, and finally experiencing love affairs or stories where the present occupies the center rather than proceeding in a straight line into the future. The romantic partners enter the actual romantic utopia through the emotional mode of liminality. The mutual access to leisure, the suspension of responsibilities and a merger with nature help in reducing and negating the gender divisions, social identities, and class disparities in this utopian mode. The painful difficulties that all relationships are mired in are erased with an organic bond. The seclusion of the partners in love gives rise to many cultural meanings because it inverts and suspends the space of production and reproduction in addition to the inversion of societal norms and rules. The horizontal linear time of labor, effort and routine is suspended and neutralized by the vertical temporality of liminality (181).

Consequently, the drunkenness and the liminality of the space together result in an orgy where the couples in live-in relationships swap partners, in an intoxicated dream like state. “How naturally the physical and mental boundaries get drowned in intoxication…Intoxication is the paradise of repetition; of whatever kind it is. It is the forbidden fruit which makes people audacious enough to move and live without any meaning or future. Though forbidden, it is pregnant with wisdom” (“*Lahariyil sareerathinteyum manassinteyum athirthikal mungippokunnathu ethra swabhavikamayi anu… lahari avarthanangalude parudeesa anu. Athenthu lahari ayalum. Arthamillathe, bhaviyillathe chalikkanum jeevikkanum dhairyam kodukkunna vilakkappetta kaniyanu athu. Vilakkappettathu enkilum arivu perunnathu*”; my trans.; 16). How intoxication constitutes liminality is evident from these lines.

> Those who swapped their mates in retaliation tried to sedate the frightened cells in the brain with liquor, afraid to face reality... They were like cattle in heat made free from the folds to the vastness of the land. Ultimately, liberty has settled accounts with the short living love relationships, born as if to console the asexualized biological instincts in the office. (my trans.; 16)
>
> *Pakarathinu pakaram ennonam inamari sangamichavar yatharthyathe neridan bhayannu thalachorile bhayanna kosangale madyam koduthu mayakkiyittu…kayaru kurukki kettiyirunna thozhuthil ninnum purambokkilekku thurannu vitta kalikkoottangalude madamanu ivideyethiyappol avare nayichathu. Officinullile alaingeekareekkappedunna jaivikathaye santhwanappeduthanennonam dayaneeyamayi pirannu*

veezhunna snehabandhangalude mel swathanthryam kanakku theerthirikkunnu. (Yama 16)

Deleuze and Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* emphasize the segregation of the spaces into 'smooth' and 'striated'. Striated spaces are homogeneous. They are metrically designed and aligned within the power system. They are inherently hierarchical as the space represents a specific identity. These gridded, metric and linear spaces in cities are static and are under the jurisdiction and authority of the State. Meanwhile Deleuze and Guattari write about the smooth space as, "smooth space is filled by events of haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is an intensive rather than an extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties" (479). The office space neutralizes or blunts the sexuality of the staff and treat them as homogeneous humanoids without sex, gender or sexuality. It is a striated space that fits well into the power system enhancing the homogeneity of the occupants. The uniformity of the subjects makes the hegemonic management of them easier. The absence of such social constructs like sex, gender or sexuality shows the lack of agency from the incumbents. Meanwhile, the uniformity and the homogenizing nature of city life as well as the anonymity provided by it makes cities the ideal space for experimentation and evolution. This deceptive liberalism provided by the striated city spaces is actually done under the surveillance of the state. This pseudo liberal trait of cities is revealed in the following passage:

> Cities have a special skill in picking singles and uniting them. People who are trapped in the deployment of materialistic objects have to seek their own

help to behave and mark themselves. The color of things that you eat and dress up in, the intense taste of food freezing your tongue, the body that gets as cool as the food in the dim yellow light of AC restaurants, the invisible thread of necessity that binds acquaintances to each other even when you are shoving up against each other in the crowd, the deployment of the dim stars which get visible through the smoggy sky of the city. The city seems to attain the quality of a liberal space with the trait of such uniting experiences. The freedom of limited and monotonous experiences. (my trans.;18)

Ottakale thiranjeduthu bandhippikkunnathil nagarangalkku prathyeka chathuratha undu. Vasthukkalude vinyasathil pettupoya manushyarkku swayam adayalappeduthanum perumaranum avaye thanne koottupidikkendi varunnu. Kazhikkunna, dharikkunna vasthukkalude nirangal, navine maravippikkunna theekshnamaya swadukal, AC restaurant kalile mangiya manja velichathil bhakshanatholam thanukkunna sareeram, alkkoottathinidayil thikkithirakki nadakkumbolum parichayakkare thammil bandhippikkunna anivaryathayude oru adrishyamaya charadu, nagarathinu mukalile pukapadalangalkkulliloode kanunna mangiya akasathile thilakkam kuranja nakshathrangal. Inganeyulla anubhavangaliloode evareyum samanarakkunna nagarathinte swabhavamanu athine oru liberal idam ennu thonnikkunnathu. Parimithamaya, ekathanamaya anubhavangalude swathathryam. (Yama 18)

The story refers to both temporal and spatial liminality. The limitations and possibilities of the cyber space and time is elucidated with these lines: “She had got

bored moving along with the squarish numerals in the digital clock. Still the possibilities of that boredom are unlimited. The body with its ebbs and flows of blood according to the emotions reminded of life at times. It made one crave for death" (*"Rapakal digital clock ile chathura vadivile akkangalkkoppam irikkukayum nilkkukayum kidakkukayum cheythu avalkku maduthirunnu. Enkilum a maduppile sadhyathakal aparamanu. Vikarangalkku anusarichu rakthayottam koodukayum kurayukayum cheyyunna sareeram chilappozhenkilum jeevithathekkurichu ormippichu. Maranam undennu kothippichu*"; my trans.; 16-17). The passage also throws light upon how identities themselves are liminal, unstable and constantly in flux. Thus, such clashes between the real time and cyber time, the real space and cyberspace create spaces of liminality that "are informal sites of play, innovation and creativity that can transform ordered structures and formal hierarchies" (x).

The boredom created by the work in the cyberspace and the escape into a utopian fantasy world of eternal leisure and epicurean pleasure is a hallmark of Capitalism. When the search for individual pleasure clashes with the demand of the society to maintain its disciplinary structure based on morality, there arises liminal spaces of creative, yet disruptive changes and revolution. The romantic ideal of a world of endless leisure goes hand in hand with the utopian ideals of Capitalism. Liminal rituals are very powerful in that everything that defines the production sector, including labor, effort, profit, self-interest, and money are omitted by them. Physical relationships during vacation are a symbolic denial of job and childrearing, thus they mark the productive and reproductive meaning of love (Eva Illouz 143). This is well explained by the IT professionals taking resort to sex in order to avoid

the boredom induced by monotonous labor. "They enjoyed each mating like death… They always woke up into a room constricted by the ever- dynamic city" ("*Oro vezhchayum avar maranam pole aghoshichu…Sada chalikkunna oru nagarathinullil njerungikkidanna pravachanatheethamayi onnumillatha oru muriyilekku avar eppolum unarnnu*"; my trans.; 18).

The story turns into a deviant heterotopic space when Amuda, the central character facing an existential struggle in the homogeneity of the urban space as well as the cyber space, witnesses a tribal woman crossing the river bordering the estate on a frail bridge made of two bamboo poles. The woman carries a huge bundle of grass on her head which partially blocks her vision, still she crosses it with ease without bothering the least about the risk of a broken splinter that might be lying ahead. "Sometimes it will be a childish thought that tragedies hide up in the bridge. What is more tragic than the bridge itself which binds two split up lands? Even Nature cannot resist the human desire to bind and unite things" ("*Chilappol palathil duranthangal pathiyirikkunnu ennathu balisamaya oru chinthayakum. Vibhajichu kidakkunna randu bhoomiye bandhippikkunna palathekkal valiya mattu durantham enthundu?Vyathyasthamaya ellathineyum bandhippichu onnakkanulla manushyante agrahathe cheruthu nilkkan prakruthikku koode kazhiyunnillallo*"; my trans.; 19).

The following passage is a strong indicator of the role of liminal spaces in bringing about cultural transformation: "Everything humans find beauty bears explosive motion…The bridge which is vacant now, pulls her mind strongly towards it. This is the case with every human construct. Whatever human beings make cannot exist without a purpose. The two poles of the bridge will remind of a

binding...so as the length of it will remind us of a ferry" ("*Manushyan soundaryam darshikkunna oronnum sphotanathmakamaya chalanam perunnava anu… Ippol ozhinju kidakkunna a palam avalude manassine athilekku valichaduppikkukayanu. Manushyante oro nirmithiyudeyum prashnamanathu. Manushyan undakkunna onninum lakshya rahithamayi nilanilkkan kazhiyilla. Palathinte randattangal bandhippikkaline kurichum palathinte nedunkan neelam oru kadathine kurichum ormippichu kondeyirikkum*"; my trans.; 19).

Overcoming a surge of indecisiveness, she crosses the bridge, watching her own reflection upon the water of the river and making philosophical deliberations upon the action of crossing. If she retreats from crossing, her past life waits at the other end staring. She thinks about the city, the kind of luxuries she is going to leave behind. She realizes that she is thinking about the past so indifferently. By the time she reaches the end of the bridge, she had died a number of times. When she steps into the yellow earth, she wonders… "Have I crossed the bridge or the river?" ("*Kadannathu puzhayo atho palamo?*"; my trans.; 20).

Van Gennep has shown that all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*), and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a "state"); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more and, by

virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and “structural" type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards (Turner 94). Amuda crosses the river into the organic life waiting ahead; life far away from the city where a dog’s bite is interpreted as something done in defense of its puppies. A place where sheer survival instincts and the rule of nature prevail. “When she looked into the other side of the river, she felt herself to be a snake that has sloughed off its skin. This body of mine is new. A tender skinned body that is able to mature itself into another crossing of a different bridge” (“*Puzhakkoru bhagathu ninnu marukara nokkiyappo urayooriya oru sarppamanu than ennu avalkku thonni. Puthiyathanu thante ee deham. Ini mattoru palam kadakkum varekkum muthirnnu muttan pakathinu lolamaya tholiyulla deham*”; my trans.; 22). Hence, there is the suggestion that so many transformations are still kept in store.

The story “Encyclopedia” by Sreelatha is about a silenced lesbian relationship between women belonging to two castes, classes and other power hierarchies. The narrator gets physically and emotionally close to a girl belonging to a family of tenants in their feudal ancestral property in her teenage. The tenant girl who is older than her turns out to be an encyclopedia of “biological knowledge that no textbooks could provide” (“*Padha pusthakangal pakarnnu tharatha jeevasasthraparamaya arivinte oru nidhiyayirunnu aval*”; my trans.; 56). The story is set in two topographical spaces: the rural landscape which narrates the past and the urban landscape which narrates the present. The story traces the evolution of their sexuality from their childhood through adolescence and adulthood. Different

phases of their evolving relationship are shown in flashes. The five year old narrator and the eight year old friend roleplaying ‘ father and mother’ in childhood; the knowledge of menstruation given to her by the older friend to the chagrin of her mother; the way both of them witness an illicit physical relationship between a house maid and an anonymous man; The way the friend tattoos her body with love bites; how both them are caught with a red hand by the grandmother and get beaten with broomstick and so on. The evolution of sexuality happens in the rural geographical space which is marked by the swing hung on the mango tree, the shed where they keep the firewood, the cashew nut grove, the bushes of the siam weed etc.

The girls witness the illicit affair of the maid servant of the neighboring house and later her orphaned dead body in the cashew nut plantation with a swollen belly (59). The rural space is portrayed as one censoring and imposing strict hegemonic moral codes regarding sexuality and those who violate such moral codes end up in an orphaned death like that of the maid servant. On closer observation, one can understand that such codes are class and gender specific.

Doreen Massey says in *Space, Place and Gender* states that social relations constitute both social phenomena and space, and the spatial can be defined as social relations 'stretched out'. Hence the spatial is socially constructed and is directly related to the economy and society. She explicates how class relations acquire a spatial form thus:

> The geography of social structure is a geography of class relations, not just a map of social classes; just as the geography of the economy should be a map

> of economic relations stretched over space, and not just, for instance, a map of different types of jobs. Most generally, 'the spatial' is constituted by the interlocking of 'stretched-out' social relations. (21)

Accordingly, the grandfather of the narrator can have an ‘illicit’ physical relationship with Sulu’s beautiful grandmother who is inferior class wise and caste wise. They reside on the fringes of the narrator’s feudal ancestral property as tenants. A female tenant is physically liable to the landlord; both in terms of her labor and sexuality. This liability and servility are one-directional and lopsided. It is determined by one’s caste, class, gender and most importantly in this case, spatiality. The spatial relationship is mutual and reciprocative; in other words, it is a two-way relationship. The more a person is spatially disoriented or placed along the fringes, the more is their chance of being socially/sexually servile and vulnerable; the more is a person socially/sexually vulnerable, the more is their chance of deployed spatially along the fringes. Here, the sexual becomes substituted by the social in that it is defined by one’s class, gender and caste. These are intersectional vectors which decide one’s hierarchical position in sexuality and the free expression of it. In the story, the feudal aristocratic background of the narrator prevents her from furthering the romantic relationship with Sulu. She class-consciously outgrows it. But at the same time, her sexual freedom is limited when compared to that of Sulu. The gender specific nature of that sexual freedom is further evident from the way the narrator’s grandmother tacitly hints at the physical relationship her husband used to have with Sulu’s grandmother: the physical affair devoid of any romance that a feudal landlord

might have had with his tenant. The internalization of class specific moral codes by the narrator is described like this:

> The ladder from the fifteenth year to twenty was climbed in opposite dyads. Each rung of the ladder took me beyond the access of Sulu. The luxuries and fragrances of my college life on one hand; the stink of stale coconut oil and lifebuoy soap on the other. Fashionable and trendy clothes on one hand; faded skirts and patched *dhavani* on the other. The moment I used to see her occasionally, someone in me banged the doors against her. (my trans.; 57)
>
> *Vipareetha dvanthangalkkidayiloodeyanu pathinanjil ninnu irupathilekkulla govani kayariyathu. Oro padi kayarumthorum avalkku aprapyamaya uyarangalikkanu ethiyathu. College jeevithathinte arbhadangalum puthugandhangalum oru vasathu. Kariya velichennayudeyum Lifebuoy soap nteyum nattam maru vasathu. Naracha pavadayum thunnikkoottalulla dhavaniyum oru vasathu. Puthu fashion vasthrangal maru vasathu. Suluvine kanumbozhekkum ulliloral nirakaranathinte kotta vathilukal cherthadachu.* (Sreelatha 57)

Sulu enjoys more sexual freedom than the narrator which seems to be class and caste specific. She is expected to "break fences in the same fashion of her mother and grandmother", as the warning from the narrator's relatives goes. The narrator comes to know about her multiple affairs from the rumors spreading in the village. She elopes with a 'Muslim' bill collector first and gets converted into Islam. Then she abandons him, gets converted into Hinduism again and takes another Hindu husband. She is said to have gone to Bombay with her third husband who is a

Visa agent and goes to jail on some allegedly fraudulent business. Sulu's escapades and the daring experiments with her own life seem to have sprouted from the branding she was given from childhood onwards as someone who will "leap across fences and walls." Her chastity or the lack of it is decided by her caste and class.

Carmel Christy says that many groups, including Dalit, lower-caste, minority women, and LGBTQIA have started to challenge and contest the idea that the middle-class, upper-caste woman is the universal representation of womanhood in the Indian setting (4). Sulu's chastity is defined against the purity norms instituted by the norms of the narrators' caste, class and gender. Sulu's sexual identity becomes a shadow set against the narrator's towering personality constructed with caste specific purity norms. The narrator as a "*kulina*" (chaste and noble woman) becomes the touchstone against which the purity of Sulu is rubbed and decided.

Sulu's comparative sexual freedom paradoxically allows for traversing religious boundaries but not class boundaries. In the Kerala scenario class is caste specific and more difficult to get negotiated in terms of matrimonial alliances. The debates around sexuality and caste that took momentum in the 1990s did not fundamentally alter Kerala's public space, Carmel Christie argues. On the contrary, caste has simply been camouflaged and presented in the public space in several forms and this presence has only been helpful in sustaining the absence of the sexual politics of caste in Kerala's public place. Hence the women in Kerala are disciplined and tamed by the absently present disguises of caste and its lived experiences as they navigate their life in the public space (9).

"Like a Train Ticket Examiner, who expels the passengers without valid tickets from the train, I ousted her from my mind" ("*Ticket edukkatha yathrakkariye vandiyil ninnirakki vidunna TTR ne pole suluvine manassil ninnu thanne padiyirakki*"; my trans.; 58). Obviously, Sulu is not a ticket holder to high class travels and her existence and sexual identity are validated on the basis of caste. Interestingly, it is not accidental that the reunion of the old partners after many decades, is set to take place in an urban landscape. The moral geography of the city is different from that of the village and permits deviations and digressions from the linear mode of morality which exists in a rural landscape. Moreover, the anonymity provided by the city gives hide outs to sexually deviant people. Sulu's reunion with the narrator happens only when the narrator condescendingly yields to forget caste and class for a while giving priority to desire. Her consent is supported with the anonymity guaranteed by the urban geography which erases hierarchies though temporarily.

Manuel Castells notes in his book *The City and the Grassroots* about the presence of geographies of gay men and the absence of the same for Lesbians. He says "The absence of similar territorially based lesbian communities reflects the fact that women are poorer than gay men and have less choice in terms of work and location" (140). Lesbians along with heterosexual women suffer from the lack of economic resources and consequently their right and access to public and private spaces are minimal when compared to homosexual and heterosexual men's. Castells also suggests that men and women relate to spaces differently and gender differences also play a crucial role in the lack of space for lesbian communities. He

argues that men achieve spatial superiority through domination while women give more importance to personal and social relationships than territorial ownership (140).

Sulu's lack of access to the territorial as well as social space has divided her from the narrator forever. Now Sulu intrudes into the apartment of the narrator where she lives alone after some decades of an unhappy marital life. Both of them have become matured middle-aged women. She presses the calling bell of the apartment at midnight tricking the watchman. "The deserted and dimly lit corridor where the gaze stretches till the end. The red bulb of the one-eyed elevator seemed ominously mysterious" ("*Aranda velicham pada pole veenu kidakkunna soonyamaya idanazhi. Attam vare nottam poyi. Lift nte chuvanna ottakkannan bulb etho nigoodathaye olippikkunnundennu veruthe thonnunnathano*?"; my trans.; 54). This is how the corridor symbolically appears when she knocks on the door at midnight. The lesbian union of these middle-aged women at midnight without fearing the beatings with brooms on the back can only be set against an urban landscape. The story ends with the scene of the vacant bathroom with the tap dripping water and the disappearance of Sulu, indicating another liminal space and pointing towards the impossibility of a permanent union of two different classes in the cultural landscape of Kerala.

The story *"Ramachi*" by Vinoy Thomas erases the binaries of Man/ Animal, Nature/ Culture, Masculine/ Feminine etc. and traces the organic blooming of sexuality among tribals which goes in tune with Nature. The relation between geography and performance of sexual identities, focusing on the way such identities

are inscribed on the body as well as the landscape, is exemplified by the story which progresses at multiple lines of narration intersecting each other at times. The question of the sexuality of the tribals which follows the survival instincts of nature and blooms in tune with the flora and fauna of the forest is set in a geographically and ecologically marginalized space facing the risk of complete erasure by the constant 'civilizing' process of mainstreaming. The nomadic nature of such tribals constantly moving from one settlement to the next seasonally seems to result in the fluid nature of their sexual instincts which follow the rhythm of nature. Van Gennep has suggested that passage from one place to another is one among the four major categories of rites of passage universally prevalent among many ethnographic populations (131-137).

The organically fluid nature of their sexuality is affected when they are forced to settle down by the state, along the peripheries of a civilized space which limits cultural freedom and imposes alien values. The story is a critique on the constricted space of 'family' of the main stream society which is painted in sharp contrast with the fluid wall less nature of the tribal family whose interest is submerged within the interest of the tribal community.

Bell and Valentine substantiate the confined nature of the divided space of the heterosexual family home where it is portrayed not only as a place of walls and of separation but also as a place of surveillance and discipline. The 'pretended family home' of the gay and lesbian couples is very different where their bodies themselves constitute the home, with only a wall-less roof is drawn above to offer shelter (1). In "*Ramachi*" the tribals having a nomadic subjectivity build homes

around their bodies. The way how topographical space affects cultural space is well evident in the story.

The story portrays human sexuality juxtaposing it with the sexuality of elephants, and seems to highlight the biological nature of sexuality at the peripheral level. But on closer analysis the rich undertones of the constructed nature of human sexuality comes to the fore. The mired cultural nature of gender and sexuality is implied with changes that take place, like the intrusion of patriarchal values, for example, in men as part of the process of mainstreaming. The story also underscores female sexuality and the upper hand women have in fixing what they desire and how they desire in matriarchal cultures. The story is set in a rural landscape and begins with the introduction of the 'kumki' elephant 'Pramukhan' who is brought to frighten the herd of wild elephants back to the forest who have come to the village. Anticlimactically Pramukhan follows the she elephants in the herd, hypnotized by and responding to the 'call of the wild' and goes back to the forest, never to return, to the disappointment of the waiting mahout and the roaring crowd. The herd of wild elephants comprises she elephants, calves and an elderly female head of the herd. The lady head sights the arrival of Pramukhan and instead of signalling others to hide, she gives a different signal so that two she elephants in heat come out from behind the bushes.

"From there the wind started. Then it thickened itself with the old smell of the forest, visiting the cracks in stones, the ripples in mud and the holes in trees. Then two she elephants in bloom came out from behind the palm trees. When the wind that touched their petals and wetness reached near Pramukhan his speed got

ameliorated as if he was ensnared by something" ("*Avide ninnum kattu thudangi. Athu pinne kallidakalilum chaliyilakkangalilum marappothukalilum kayariyirangi. Kadinte pazhakiya manam kondu kozhuthu. Appol panamkootangalkkidayil ninnum poothu nilkkunna randu pidiyanakal purathekkirangi. Avarude ithalulaklilum eerppangalilum thotta kattu Pramukhanaduthu ethiyappol oru valayil kurungiya pole avante vegam kuranju vannu*"; my trans.; 18). One of the she elephants offers a tender palm bud to him and he accepts it wholeheartedly. There are many parallels that can be drawn between the lives of the herd of wild elephants and the group of nomadic tribals in the story. Both of them are matriarchally led by a lady head, they protect the interests of women and children, they give weightage to the sexuality of women, and they live in harmony with nature.

The same organic blooming of sexuality as a biological instinct takes place in Mallika also. Her first sexual experience happens when the nomadic tribal group who led by a lady chieftain called 'Manjamuthi' (the yellow grandma) comes to their temporary halt at the riverside, after the ritualistic festival at the sacred grove at Valliyoor. The procession of the clan is led by the grandmother who is immediately followed by women and kids in the middle and men at the tail end. Kattan Ravi from another clan follows them courting Mallika. He sleeps with Mallika for a few times with the silent approval of the elders. But when his people come to seek her hand in marriage with a sack of paddy, Mallika boldly asks her people not to accept that sack of paddy revealing her lack of consent. Mallika rejects him because of his poor love making skills which could not satisfy her sexual needs. Mallika's discretion in

choosing the mate is appreciated by Manjamuthi, the chieftain (Thomas, "Ramachi" 21).

The story also screens multiple episodes of the organic sexual union that happens between Mallika and Pradeepan where female sexuality is portrayed in bold shades. Mallika meets Pradeepan who is "shown to her by the forest as an industrious forest man" (Thomas, "*Ramachi*" 23) when she goes to pick edible wild mushrooms before the sunrise to a mysterious nook of the forest where they religiously sprout every year. The place is secretively held and only a few tribals share the knowledge and as Mallika is collecting the half-bloomed mushrooms the shape of it reminds her of the male sexual organ. The very moment she sights him climbing down from a tall tree after picking a rare orchid from the top for a scientist. Mallika's sexual attraction for Pradeepan is sprouting as organically as the mushrooms and is based on the survival instincts which makes her choose the best mate from a pool of competitors.

Their first sexual union happens when both of them are making "bamboo flowers" to sell at the festival at Kottiyoor. Mallika takes the initiative and they make love on the bundle of bamboo sticks. She chooses him because he does it according to her taste (Thomas, "*Ramachi*" 26). Another episode that further exemplifies her sexual prowess takes place when both of them are sitting on the branch of a tree in the forest when Pradeepan shows her the rare sight of elephants mating. They elephants make love without even disturbing the leaves of the surrounding bushes. Seeing this, Mallika instinctively makes love to Pradeepan on the branch of the tree itself (Thomas, "*Ramachi*" 21).

The blossoming of female sexuality on the socio politically peripheral and ecologically central space is delineated in detail. The tribal norm of sexual purity and chastity is fluid and unaffected by the mainstream construction of gender and sexuality norms. At the same time, the changes that take place due to the process of mainstreaming and acculturation are subtly traced. The gypsy tribes are forcefully asked to settle down by the government and are ousted from their natural habitat of the forest by giving them an acre each on the farm. After the settlement, the mainstream culture encroaches into their life in multiple ways, affecting their norms of sexuality and gender in particular. The exploitation of the tribals by the village folk is exemplified by the behavior of 'Suma Promoter' who buys things that Pradeepan collects from the forest and never pays for it. The grocer Thankachan also does not like the interference of Mallika in the business of forest goods that he does with Pradeepan, often cheating him. He tries to shy her away by saying that it is purely a "male business where women have no role to play." "Don't your menfolk have any worth in your society?", he provocatively asks Pradeepan. "Now that you people have your own land and house, you menfolk have to be assertive (and masculine) taking the upper hand in everything" ("*Ithu anangal thammilulla idapadanu…Pradeepa, ningade anungalkku oru velayillaloda. Ningalkkippo swanthamayittu sthalavum veedumokke ayille. Ini anungalu venam karyangalu nokkan*"; my trans.; 23), he advises Pradeepan, maliciously trying to introduce patriarchy into the tribal life.

Another instance of the intrusion of mainstream values into their life is the way Chappili Soman quarrels with his wife using swearing words against her. "My

land. My name is in the deed. You are landless… powerless as well" ("*Ente parambu. Kadalasilu ente peru. Ninakku poomiyilla. Nee kalikkanda*..."; my trans.; 19). Mallika observes that Soman has started to raise his voice against his wife once they have settled on the farm. Another event that shows the slow waning of the power of women after the settlement is the vulgar comment made by Kattan Ravi as he passes by Mallika's courtyard after getting drunk. ("Your belly is swollen. Otherwise, I would have given a try" ("*Ninte vayaru beert hu poyi. Illenkil kereettu pornnu*"; my trans.; 27), he insolently says. The mainstreaming is also hinted at by the interference of 'sisters' from the Primary Health Centre who advise Mallika to get admitted to a Government Hospital for her delivery (Thomas, "*Ramachi*" 22).

Bjørn Thomassen in his essay "Thinking with Liminality**:** To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept" states:

> Originally referring to the ubiquitous rites of passage as a category of cultural experience, liminality captures in-between situations and conditions characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty about the continuity of tradition and future outcomes… As a fundamental human experience, liminality transmits cultural practices, codes, rituals, and meanings in-between aggregate structures and uncertain outcomes. (2-3)

The dislocation of established structures and the uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition are well represented by the liminality of the tribal life in the story.

K. Rekha's story "*Ozhivukalam"* ("The Vacation") obviously discusses the theme of the free expression of repressed sexuality at carnival spaces. The conversion of ordinary spaces into carnival ones as they change into venues like that of the International Film Festival of Kerala and the social acceptability that the free expression of sexuality attains all of a sudden within that restricted space is worthy of a close analysis. The story is set against the IFFK which is conducted at Thiruvanathapuram every year and is religiously attended by cine buffs, writers, journalists and other intellectuals of Kerala. The participation of delegates from all over the world, most of them directly or indirectly related to the film world, the uncensored screening of both art house movies and the mainstream ones, the cinematic space which permits a free discussion of the otherwise hushed up political and sexual themes, the sudden transmission of the liberated cinematic space into the audience etc. converts the capital city of Kerala into a heterotopic space. The space becomes a haven for the flocking of likeminded people who want to celebrate a temporary release from the repressive social norms of the outside world.

While defining heterotopias as counter sites where "all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (24) Foucault describes different varieties of such spaces. The space offered by the IFFK carries most of such traits and can aptly be described as a heterotopic space. Foucault says that heterotopia can club several spaces which are "in themselves incompatible" into a single real place and as an example he cites the case of the theatre and the cinema where "on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space" (25). He also describes a different type of

heterotopic space where people go to take a break with their traditional time. Some such spaces like museums and libraries accumulate time whereas some others like festivals, fairgrounds and vacation villages which deal with time in its fleeting precarious nature. They are “chroniques” according to Foucault, or they are absolutely temporal in nature. Another principle upon which some heterotopic spaces function is the system of opening and closing or entry and exit where one needs permission, or certain privileges or has to undergo several purification rites for access. Finally, Foucault elaborates on the heterotopias of illusion and compensation which have a function in relation to the real space that remains. The heterotopias of illusion like brothels expose the more illusory nature of every real space. Heterotopias of compensation like certain imperial colonies on the other hand serve as spaces of compensation by constituting another real space which is more perfect, idealistic and meticulous (25-27).

Benedict Anderson while formulating the concept of ‘community’ as an imagined but discursive reality asserts on the role of print capitalism in the formation of national consciousness. He remarks, “These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (44). Here, films serve as catalyzers in creating the feeling of ‘communion’ among the viewers who are like-minded but are total strangers to one another.

The sexual liberalism which takes place on screen and off screen is limited to the heterotopic space and once the viewers exit this space they return to their conventional norms regarding sexual purity and chastity. On closer analysis one

comes to understand that film festivals carry many traits and principles used by Foucault to describe and to define heterotopic spaces.

Again, in the essay "Of Other Spaces", he describes festival cities and fairgrounds as heterotopias which are linked to time in its fleeting transitory nature. Their temporal nature is quite opposite to that of museums and libraries (26). Film Festivals also fall under the third principle where a single space reflects several sites which are incompatible with each other. Foucault gives the example of the theatre and the cinema where "on a two-dimensional screen one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space" (25). The festival sites also bear the example for the fifth principle of Foucault's heterotopic spaces where the space functions under a system of entry and exit which contradictorily isolates them and makes them penetrable. "To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures" (26). Finally, film festival sites function under the sixth principle as well when they create an illusory space that can expose "every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" (27).

The story progresses in the point of view of Sumitha, a journalist who works with an unprofitable magazine titled "*Kannadikazhcha*" ("The Mirror View") and describes how she as a woman belonging to the fringes as far as her profession, class, age, gender and family background are concerned, experiences this carnival space of sexuality. Each experience is set against the screening of a certain movie which indirectly echoes the experience.

"Getting down at Thambanoor, Sumitha searched for familiar faces around. Intellectuals everywhere. Long bearded ones. The clean-shaven ones with round

specs and round gazes. Beauties in cotton saris wearing jute necklaces and carrying jute bags…One can easily pass ten days simply by looking at these guys who bear the weight of their intellect in their looks" ("*Thambanooringiyappol parichayamulla mughangalkkayi Sumitha chuttilum kannodichu. Ellayidathum budhijeevikal. Thadi vechavar, vattakkannadayum urunda nottavumulla clean shavukar, jute malayum bagumitta cotton sariyudutha sundarikal…Nottangalil budhiyude bharam vahikkunna avare ororuthareyum nokkithanne pathunal kazhikkam*"; my trans.; 34). Since the hotels would be full; Sumitha decides to seek haven at the rented residence of her old classmate and when she reaches there, she learns that it is a place where men and women stay together and share rooms. Sumitha's friend is very much unwelcoming and she claims most of these so-called male intellectuals lose their decency once they get drunk. Her colleagues at the office suspiciously stare at her everyday as if "assessing her chastity". She also informs Sumitha that she has her own secretive plans for the film festival which she does not want to share with her (Rekha 35). Hence it can be assumed that each one comes to the festival with their own secretive plans and personal agendas.

Watching the film *Rosa E Cornelia* Sumitha is repeatedly stamped by a middle-aged man who sat next to her and still she does not react. This underscores the commonality of such phenomena during the festival and how it has been naturalized and taken for granted. He takes it as an encouraging signal and starts caressing her shoulders and hands and again she sits indifferently. Ironically enough the movie shows a carnival site in Venice and how Cornelia is trapped and seduced by an anonymous man and gets pregnant. When there was power failure in between

Sumitha looks back and finds two lovers in a deep kiss. She moves out even without completing watching the movie because of the constant staring of the middle-aged man as well as hunger. She is dead sure that he would follow her. He chases her into the restaurant as well and sits opposite to her and continues his stamping. Sumitha makes him pay her bills and slips away (Rekha 36).

Sumitha's changing attitude to female sexuality is well evident from her attitude to her mother. She has deserted her home at the age of twenty-one having had doubts about her mother's romantic feelings for her colleague and aide. She now repentantly thinks about her mother's short lived marital life which lasted only for ten years and now she is able to understand her better (Rekha 36).

She catches sight of Jayesh, her romantic partner in the previous film festival. His class is well evident from his branded shirt and jeans. She spent the whole of the ten days during the previous year's festival with him. On the last day, at the railway station, he comes to know that she is a poor employer at the office of an unestablished magazine and she has left her home years ago. He did not even face her after that but utters an incomplete sentence like "seeing the way you dressed and behaved, I had the impression…" (Rekha 37).

The mixed emotions of self-hatred and hushed up passion Sumitha has when she sights her past love Jayesh are represented against the background of the film *With Love Lily* which depicts the romantic dreams of Lily who is working at a poultry farm. Watching Lily's romantic imagination on the screen, she feels self-hatred when she unknowingly glances at Jayesh. Jayesh takes great effort not to face her. The middle-aged man again approaches Sumitha when she is watching *The Soul*

Keeper narrating Carl Yung's intense love for a nineteen-year-old patient Spielreen. She takes lunch with the middle-aged man and he reveals that he had noted her during the previous festival itself and he would kiss her before she returns this time. Someone calls him out and asks him if she is his daughter. She is watching the movie *La Captive* which tells the story of Ariane who is captivated by Simon's huge Parisian Mansion, always responding to his desires and never-ending questions, when she realizes that she is followed by the middle-aged man here as well. When he teases her about her jilted love for Jayesh, she answers. "Your generation has this tendency to dig at people you like about their past love life. But the new generation does not have such bad habits. The life we live today belongs to this day only. Tomorrow another curtain arises. Another life awaits. Your generation lives and dies in the past" (Rekha 41). The way Sumitha swings between short lived relationships can be seen as a typical trait of postmodern culture as Eva Illouz explains, "Postmodern culture has seen the collapse of overarching, lifelong romantic narratives, which it has compressed into the briefer and repeatable form of the affair" (Eva Illouz 173).

Sumitha gets acquainted with Shameer, an orphan who has made several suicide attempts. She feels compassionate to him sharing his existential dilemma but develops no romantic feelings for him. When he playfully asks her if she bothers about chastity, she answers that it has been there with her for the past 28 years and she does not want to lose it uselessly. Both of them watch *Madam Brout* together which narrates the story of a divorcee Madam Brout alias Matty who lives independently leading the life of a street hawker. Matty decides to have a life

without men but gets close to a policeman named Nago. On a fine morning Matty sees the dead body of Nago who has been shot dead by somebody when the curtain falls. Sumitha cries identifying herself with Matty and goes to the middle-aged Harishchandran Nair's place with Shameer as he has not been there at the festival that day. When she enters his house, he says that he somehow knew that she would turn up and she goes to the kitchen and cooks rice for the three of them. Before she returns, she kisses on his bald head softly. When the three of them meet again during the last day of the festival she feels the security provided by a complete home despite her ambivalent feelings for Harishchandran Nair and Shameer. Together they watch the Italian movie *But Forever in my Mind.* It is the story of the sixteen-year-old Silvio who gets involved in a strike against the headmaster and gets trapped in a record room with Valentina during the commotion. Silvio kisses Valentina and Sumitha gets disturbed by the intense glance of Harishchandran Nair. She playfully promises him that if she gets another birth of a human being, having led the life of a dog and a worm right now, she would live it with him (47). When Harishchandran Nair enquires if she is going to spend this life with Shameer, he interferes and says that he wants to check if he can stop all his bad habits and needs to wait for a year and see. Sumitha also needs some time, to get settled, she says. Then Sumitha gets dissolved in the crowd.

The story implies the depthlessness of relationships mired in desire and existential dilemma and sets the unleashing of such repressed desire against the carnivalesque space of the film festival which serves to be a liminal space permitting transformation for a limited time. Sumitha is able to see through the hypocrisy of an

imposed morality which results in a sense of deprivation in middle aged people like Harishchandran Nair. She is able to draw the distinction between the past generation and the present one in concrete terms and can be compassionate to the sexual repression of people who belonged to the past generation. They are only the victims of a society with pseudo moral codes. Though the moral norms have changed for the present generation, the role of class in fixing the context of socially permissible relationships is highlighted with the character Jayesh and Sumitha's aborted love for him. It is further underscored with the worthless life of the orphan Shameer who does not get social acceptability in spite of his government job. The respect and cordiality that Deepika and Swetha get among the friends are indicative of their class begotten power. Harishchandran Nair's caste showing surname also implies the hidden role of caste among such circles of so-called intellectuals.

Paul Stenner uses the term "liminal affective technologies" for the various means that have been created to enhance and to nourish emotional and imaginative cultural processes and to connect them with the actual processes of psychosocial transformation. The theatre, the novel and the fine arts belong to such liminal affective technologies which have succeeded rituals. Both rituals and arts share the quality of being a 'world within a world' (18-20). The genre of films being an offshoot of fine arts and literature also has the quality of serving a world within world which helps in bringing about real psychosocial transformation.

The story also hints at the very constructed nature of human desire and how certain pleasures become more desirable only because of the forbidden nature of them. Wendy Mc Kenna elaborates on this:

> To see sexual desire in these terms is to see it as socially tied to a culture which severely limits that which is permissible, which severely limits, in ways depending on class, gender, race and ethnicity, the expression of individual power and competence, and which severely limits the boundaries which it is allowable to cross. In a world where categories were less rigid, where desire was not constructed as "naughty" and forbidden, where sexuality was treated in the same way eating (for example) is treated now, it is possible that there would be less sexual excitement, although there would still be sexual pleasure. (3)

The story "*Anandamargam"* ("The Path of Bliss") by Unni R. discusses the sense of worthlessness faced by a group of lady college lecturers at the onset of their menopause. Menopause is a liminal space, where a woman's fertility comes to a stop and the story throws some light on female sexuality and disproves the societal myth about female sexuality which is supposed to be closely linked to the reproductive function. One of the middle-aged male staff who comments that they cannot even be counted as women, but should be addressed as hags instead shows the typical patriarchal attitude where a woman's source of sexuality is considered to be her uterus and productivity (Unni, "*Anandamargam*" 52). It also shows a capitalist attitude where one's value in society is counted in terms of their productivity. The story also raises serious concerns about the construction and the consumption of female body and the disposal of it, as a consumerist commodity, the value measured in terms of its utility and the ability to generate pleasure.

Menopause can be considered as a liminal period that lies in between two stages in a woman's reproductive life. Victor Turner notes that the structural "invisibility of liminal *personae"* has a twofold character in that they are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. When they are considered as no longer classified, in many societies, they are represented with symbols taken from the biology of death, decomposition and such negative physical processes. In so far as a neophyte is structurally "dead, he or she may be treated, for a long or short period, as a corpse is customarily treated in his or her society (96). Women in menopause are no longer classified in most societies and treated as structurally dead because of their lack of productivity both in terms of young ones and in terms of their sexuality.

It is not accidental that the women's only picnic that the lady lecturers plan to undertake, turns out to be one consisting of fifteen middle-aged women who are above forty-five and they guess the withdrawal of five of the younger women was because of their husbands' fear about their 'security' (Unni, "*Anandamargam*" 53). This fear is a psychological insecurity regarding the potential nature of female sexuality as well as a social pressure to chain their chaste bodies back to the security of home. During travels people move away both geographically and symbolically from the normal course of their lives, opines Eva Illouz (142). This picnic releases the pent-up desires and the neglect these women face as they metaphorically conduct a time travel back to their youthful days taking them across boundaries which they were once afraid to cross. Power relations are displayed and negotiated on the site of women's sexuality which is considered to be inseparable from her body.

The dirty jokes made by Devaki teacher and her urge to expose her body in modern outfits have to be read as an attempt to break the confines of conventional morality and does not point towards the release of sexual frustration of the middle-aged women, as the popular belief goes. Even the soft spoken Malathi teacher comes out of her shell and sings old Malayalam melodies. Ancy Ummen, who is the wife of a priest sadly confesses that her husband hardly touches her as she is infertile. Subaida says her husband had commented that she has become waste once he came to know about her menopause. Ushadevi surprises everyone by showing her heavy gold waist band and telling them that her miserly husband who commented the money spent on sanitary napkins can be saved on her menopause does not even know about this gold ornament. Lalitha's husband lost his interest on her once her uterus had been removed after the first delivery. Lakshmidevi says her husband had blamed that she had excessive libido when she demanded for a second child. She had been gifted with the Ramayana and the Bhagavat Geeta by him once she had her menopause. How the societal norms about sexuality go contrary to the expectations of women and their desire is well exemplified when everyone agrees on the luck of Subaida's grandmother who had a lover even at the age of seventy (Unni, "*Anandamargam*" 58-59).

Wendy Mc Kenna comments on how certain behaviors, objects and types of persons are constructed as erotic objects of desire emphasizing that the content of sexual fantasy across class, gender and sexual categories involves power play. Thus, "The social construction of desire and eroticism is clearly tied to history, gender, ethnicity, class, and race" (3).

When they drink together at the bungalow at Kuttikkanam at night, they wonder aloud if women are fated to commit suicide at middle age; if menopause should be treated as the sudden stopping of a river's flow and their bodies be abandoned after that. The story ends when the meek and soft spoken Malathi teacher shouts aloud that they too need and will have something afterwards.

Theda Rede makes a comparison between the subversive spaces envisaged by the theorists Foucault, Lefebvre and Edward Soja. Foucault's concept of heterotopias disintegrates hierarchies and binaries in space and topples forms of knowledge and meaning which are reinforcing power structures. Unlike utopias which are purely fictional in nature, heterotopias are set apart from everyday life and also form a part of the everyday at the same time and they can be distinguished from each other according to their relationship with other spaces. Lefebvre and Soja conceptualize space in tryads. Lefebvre's 'perceived space' relates to a society's spatial practice and 'representations of space' describes the spatial discourse that brings order and stability upon space through maps and plans controlling knowledge and signs. His concept of 'representational space' is a site of resistance, destabilizing the codes of the dominant discourse of space, and appropriating and redefining the meaning of space. Similarly, Soja's 'third space 'is a remapped cultural space celebrating alterity, multiplicity, heterogeneity, difference and contradictions of various kind. Heterotopias, representational spaces and third spaces are counter-hegemonic in nature, freezing all binaries (12-13).

In the stories discussed above, the conventional norms and forms of sexuality undergo a transformation at the subversive spaces which can be described as liminal,

heterotopic, representational and third spaces according to the specific contexts. Sexuality and sexualized bodies can be said to have a geo-spatial existence whose contours can be remapped according to the changing cultural norms in liminal ages. Further, these stories are eloquent about the formation of threshold identities and discuss the ambiguities of transgression.

Chapter 4

Desire in Discourse

This chapter makes an attempt at analyzing how the nuances of sexuality are constructed, maintained and exchanged in discourse. The common patterns, meanings, conflicts and motivations found in discourse are brought out keeping a phenomenological perspective. The implicit power dynamics and the inherent dominance of ideologies in discourse are underscored in this analysis. The focus is on the ultimate power of language to constitute, distort and to represent realities and the discursive strategies used for the same. The chapter also highlights how discourse gives room for the voices of resistance related to the production and consumption of the cultural codes of sexuality. The narrative techniques used for evolving the plot and the ways of constructing the subjectivity and agency of the characters through/by the modes of narration are also revealed, with a view to understanding how the dualities of vulnerability and dominance are formed in the discourse of sexuality.

The first story analyzed is "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" ("A Terrific Lover") by Unni R. where one can meet the intertwining of the Discourses of Medicine, Art, Religion and Sexuality on the narrative plane. As the story unfolds, the culturally embedded nature of schizophrenia and its relationship with repressed sexuality is brought to light. The narration brings to light how schizophrenia is symptomatic of a diseased and repressive culture. The story is remarkably intertextual in nature where various cultural texts like art, sculpture, narrations of mental illness, sexuality etc.

are seen to be overlapping into each other. The resources of Magic Realism as a narrative strategy for representing a schizophrenic psyche is well explored by the writer. The narrator's 'diseased' imagination runs parallel to the repressive structure of the society in creating hyper-sexualized beings like Mathamappila and Chunkam Kuttiyamma whose real existence is in the social imaginary.

The story that progresses through the schizophrenic imagination of the narrator who is a Fine Arts graduate, serves as a good example for the entangled relationship between Art, schizophrenia, sexual repression and culture. The story uses the narrative paradigm of schizophrenia to point at the nexus between schizophrenia and culture. It also highlights how madness becomes "a radical break from power in the form of a disconnection" (Seem xxiii). The multidimensional scope of the story also explores the effectiveness of Magic Realism as a literary tool for expressing a schizoid mental state, the consequent rupture between the desires and expectations of individuals and culture, and the mediation of Art to reinstate the disconnection between the two.

In the introduction given to the book *Schizophrenia, Culture, and Subjectivity,* Janis Hunter Jenkins and Robert John Barret bring about the nexus between schizophrenia and culture. They highlight the dynamics of social interaction as the locus of both. They view schizophrenia as an example of deviation that happens at the fringes of culture, at the boundaries of meaningful experience (5). Somewhere else they also elaborate upon the nature of this disease where it can even be signified as a cultural category full of cultural tropes. They state:

> On the other hand, schizophrenia itself is a cultural category, replete with cultural tropes. It is sometimes construed as a primitive state in which archaic sources of violent energy erupt through surface layers of control; or a state of confusion and alienation that mirrors the complex modern society in which we live; or a form of creative power akin to artistic genius. Such images are not only invoked by psychiatrists, but also by people so diagnosed when representing schizophrenia to themselves. (11)

Delueze and Guattari introduce schizoanalysis as a radical alternative to the grand narrative of psychoanalysis where they suggest the power of schizophrenia metaphorically to subvert and to break free from forms of power and repression. "A schizoanalysis schizophrenizes in order to break the holds of power and institute research into a new collective subjectivity and a revolutionary healing of mankind (Seem xxi).

The protagonist of the story is a Fine Arts graduate, who is unemployed at present because of his mental illness and he runs errand for others and is forced to do temporary carpentry works to make a living, in spite of his education and artistic caliber. Alcoholism, weird dreams and gibberish, these are the symptoms of his strange disease and he has been under house arrest for the past one year because of this (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 92). His thoughts start to wander around Mathamappila, the terrific lover, who has sent a message to the narrator wanting to meet him urgently. Mathamappila is a person whose subjectivity seems to be constructed around the rumors of people about his satyriasis or Don Juanism (hyper-sexuality). The popular belief is that he is in his eighties and still has immense

sexual vigor and virility. The public also believe that he is seven feet tall and can lift a five-kilogram weight on his penis and once in every year he sleeps with three virgins together. He works out every day before sunrise after consuming 30 organic eggs with saffron and sleeps with a woman daily. Such a terrific lover has sent word for the narrator (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 92).

On scrutiny we can understand that the public imagination about such hyper-sexualized figures itself is schizophrenic and it runs parallel to the psyche of the narrator. It readily sprouts from the repressive social system which prevents people from the free expression of their sexual selves. Mark Seem in the introduction given to *Anti Oedipus* states that "Oedipus is belief injected into the unconscious, it is what gives us faith as it robs us of power, it is what teaches us to desire our own repression. Everybody has been oedipalized and neuroticized at home, school, at work. Everybody wants to be a fascist" (Seem XX). The people who try to break free from the extreme repression become psychotics as they resist oedipalization or the chaining into the psychoanalytic triangle created by the norm of family consisting of the father, mother and child. Mark Seem further clarifies the difference between the psychotic and the neurotic drawing upon the insights provided by Deleuze and Guattari: "The neurotic is the one on whom the Oedipal imprints take, whereas the psychotic is the one incapable of being oedipalized, even and especially by psychoanalysis. The first task of the revolutionary, they add, is to learn from the psychotic how to shake off the Oedipal yoke and the effects of power, in order to initiate a radical politics of desire freed from all beliefs" (xxi). Obviously, the

psychotic is capable of getting rid of the impact of power and to unleash a new politics of desire instead.

The unnamed protagonist of this story can be any 'so called' psychotic who challenges power and repression in his own schizophrenic way and the artistic and sexual nature of his hallucinations becomes justifiable. In a society where sexual repression seems to be so prevalent, art itself tends to be schizoid, split in its inclinations of being true to itself and being euphemistic to a repressive culture. It is also remarkable that the narrator never feels that he is ill but quotes others who insists on his mental illness and abnormality. Deleuze and Guattari argue that "the very delirium is first of all the investment of a field that is social, economic, political, cultural, racial and racist, pedagogical, and religious…" (274), implying the culturally embedded nature of madness. The protagonist also unleashes his resistance and protest against the pseudo morality imposed by various cultural institutions like religion, education, class and caste, constricting the free flow of his desires. The gibberish he self betrayingly utters points to an inner reality that he creates as an alternative to the pseudo-outer world. He seems to suggest that Art can challenge hypocrisy beyond the confines of time and place. He has internalized Arts and lives Arts as an experience.

For example, he claims to have met European artists of the bygone era in the streets of Palayam when he studies at the Fine Arts college. He meets the English painter Francis Bacon on the third day of his seeing the painting of Bacon by Lucian Freud. He tells Bacon who he meets in front of a butcher shop in Palayam Market that his Portrait of Pope Innocent X must have shocked the painter Velazquez. He

also tells him that Celia Paul, one of the lovers of Lucian Freud was born in Thiruvananthapuram. He introduces himself as a student of sculpture and his favorite sculptor as Giacometti (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 94). He confesses to his roommate about the strange and impossible meeting he had with Francis Bacon and the next day, continuing the delusions, the *Malayali* painter A.C.K. Raja comes to his room and sends him back home, for treatment.

The "pathoplastic" nature of the hallucinations of schizophrenia is underscored by anthropologists and psychiatrists alike according to Simon Dein. They are influenced by the cultural background and expectation of the patient. The hallucinations of rural Africans might be colored by ancestor worship whereas Christians tend to hallucinate about Mary, Christ and Satan (0064). Hence, being a Fine Arts student in Kerala, the hallucinations of the protagonist is naturally about Arts and the local culture.

The next episode of schizophrenia happens when the SNDP activists in his locality entrusts him with the task of making a life size statue of Sree Narayana Guru. He undertakes the task on condition that he gets enough cash, food and alcohol. During his artistic creation he gets troubled with the doubt if liberators are really imprisoned by way of getting into statues. It is followed by his delusion of meeting Guru on his way back from the workshop. Guru has a strange figure in the delusion: the long legs of Giocometti statues and the deeply wrinkled face of Ram Kinker's statue of Tagore. He gets forcefully admitted to a mental asylum the day they unveil the statue of Guru (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 96). It is implied that instead of Guru he has cast the statue of someone else, again pointing towards

his ability to understand the absurdity of solidifying the ideas of a reformer into statues instead of practising them.

R.D Laing in his book *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* brings about a difference between a schizoid and a schizophrenic person using an existential phenomenological approach where how a person perceives the world and perceives himself in relation to this world are analyzed. The experience of a schizoid person is split in two ways. There will be a rupture in how he relates to the world and how he relates to himself. Such people will not be able to enjoy a sense of companionship with others. Nor do they feel at peace with themselves as they find difficulty in perceiving themselves as whole individuals. They feel 'split' in multiple ways. Laing focuses on the gradual shift from sanity to insanity as a schizoid person who is still sane moves from a "state of being-in-the- world" to a psychotic way of "being-in the -world" (17). This frame of analysis can be used to understand the way the narrator's diseased subjectivity is constructed through the narration where his insanity escalates from seemingly harmless hallucinations to the complete split with reality that finally leads to his murder of Mathamappila, "the terrific lover" of his schizoid imagination. He can be seen slipping from a comparatively sane schizoid state in the beginning into a psychotic state at the end.

The day he is back to college he gets a strange letter from Mathamappila, mentioning his disappointment in not having been able to see his Guru statue. Mathamappila is introduced in a very mysterious and intriguing way in a Magical Realist narration. The subversive power of Magic Realism to unravel hideous truths which cannot be expressed in any other way has been explored by many writers. But

here the author taps the potential of Magic Realism to reflect the schizophrenic mental status of the narrator and his weird dream like imagination.

Zamora and Faris have mentioned the transgressive power of Magic Realism in their introduction to *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community.* They opine, "Magical Realist texts are subversive: their in betweenness, their all at onceness (sic) encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women" (6). They further argue that "Magical Realism is a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical or generic" (5).

Mathamappila is believed to be the bastard son of a white man and Goan woman and a follower of the cult of Satan. The priest mentions him as a great sinner practicing black mass and that he was forced to abscond from Goa because of his sacrifices of virgins on the altar of Satan. In the narrator's own description, the way to Mathamappila's abode is a maze. The house that stands opposite to a deserted church, in a twenty-five-acre property is hidden from the public view with a huge wall. People congregate in the church twice a year and they are more eager to peep into the house of Mathamappila through the gate than attending the holy service. The people who climb on top of the huge Tamarind tree in the church courtyard report that in Mathamappila's compound people do not wear clothes and young naked girls are seen watering the plants and sometimes they even chance upon Mathamappila feeding doves placing grains on his penis (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 97).

The Magic Realist narration goes in tune with the schizophrenic imagination of the narrator who seems to be the alter ego of the diseased society. The relationship between social repression and schizophrenia is subtly suggested in the story. Kum Kum Sangari while elaborating on the disruption of boundaries effected by Magic Realism says that "the seamless quality of this mode, the difficulty in distinguishing between fact and invention, brings an enormous pressure to bear upon the perception of reality" (162). This aspect becomes most obvious in the following description.

> When the car stopped in front of a huge gate, the upturned shadows peeped into checking who it is. The huge iron gate with sharply pointed tips opened murmuring something in a rusty tone and closed once the car entered, repeating the same murmur in a lower voice. A couple of huge pigs crossed the way on whose dwarfish tails sat large butterflies with spread wings. Blue forked tongues came out from the flowers of the hedges bordering the road and tasted the iron body of the car. The grotesquely entangled roots which appeared in the middle of the road looked like intestines pulled out from the stomach. When the wheels of the car ran over them, I started to feel the soft stealthy movement of terror from within. All of a sudden, a cloud of locusts waylaid us like the sudden ambush attack of soldiers. The sound of the invisible language written with the beak of birds started to stifle me. Having written their language, they started to fly in the front and rear of the car. They escorted us till we reached a double storied building and then vanished suddenly among the bushes. (my trans.; 98)

Car valiya oru gate nu munnil vannu ninnappol thala keezhayi kidanna nizhalukal ullil aaranennu vannu nokki. Irumbinte koorthu kiliramulla gate thurumbicha sabdathilentho paranju kondu thurakkappettu. Ullilekku car kayattiya udan thanne athe vakkukal thelichamillathe ucharichu kondu adayukayum cheythu. Onnu randu valiya pannikal vazhi murichu odippoyi. Avarude kuriya valukalil valiya chithra salabhangal chiraku vidarthi irippundaayurunnu. Iru vasangalilum idathoornnu ninna chedikalude pookalkkullil ninnum Neela niramulla randayi pilarnna navukal carinte irumbudaline ruchichu. Udarathinullil ninnum purathitta kudal malakal pole vazhikku naduvil kidannirunna verukalil carinte chakram kayari onnadithirinju. Bhayathinte nertha oru pathummal ullil kalocha kelppichu thudangiyathu njan arinju. Pettennanu vettu kilikalude oru koottam ilakalkkidayil ninnu carinu munnilekku padayalikalude vegathil vannu vazhi thadanjathu. Ayal vandi nirthi. Chuttilum pakshikal kokku kondu ezhuthunna adrusya bhashayude sabdam ente swasamadachu kalanju. Ezhuthu kazhinja sesham avayonnake carinu munnilum pinnilumayi parannu thudangi. Pakshikal oru irunila kettidam vare koottu vannathinu sesham onnichu kattu chedikalkkullilekku thirichu poyi. (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 98)

The surrealist interior of the house resembles human psyche. The narrator states:

I had the feeling that the interior of the house was multiplying in area as my eyes were trying hard to view it wholly. The roof was becoming higher once I looked at it. A chandelier shaped like the human eye hang from the ceiling.

> A huge collection of feathers lay on the walls plastered with lime. The silence of the spiralling staircase leading to the first floor. (my trans.; 98)
>
> *Ente kannu ethippidikkan nokkum thorum a veedinte ulvasam peruke peruki varum poloru thonnalundayi. Uyarathilekku nokkumbol uyaram koodunnoru melkkoora. Avide ninnu kanninte akruthiyoloru thookku vilakku. Virinju kidakkunna kummaya* bhithikalil *thoovalinte valiyoru sekharam. Randam nilayilekkulla piriyan govaniyude nisabdatha*. (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 98)

A small dwarfish man who meets him in the house entrusts him with the task of sculpting the statue of 'Pieta', that has to be installed in front of the house facing the church. But in this strange statue Virgin Mary should not have Jesus on her lap. Instead, it should have the face and trunk of Chunkam Kuttiyamma, the courtesan. The narrator says: "Before I got enough time to feel guilty about my complicity in the ahistorical act of stripping Virgin Mary into Chunkam Kuttiyamma, my hands received the cash given as reward" ("*Mary yude udayadakal azhichu nagnayaya Kuttiyamma akkunnathile papabodham enne kooduthal kuzhakkum munpu ente kaikal a panathe sweekarichu*"; my trans.; 99).

The writer tacitly questions the role of history and religion in ascribing purity norms which rest with the garments, the body and its identity. The virginity of Mother Mary can be easily converted into the promiscuity of 'Kuttiyamma' in whose name both the mother and the child converge.

The description of Mathamappila given by the narrator to his childhood friend and partner in crime Sasankan is enough to stoke the public imagination. This

is the exaggerated discourse within discourse which the reader, writer and the narrator are aware of.

> When I reached two naked girls opened the door. They ushered me into a huge chair holding my hands and gave me huge tumbler full of milk and sweets. Smoked my body with frankincense. When I was sitting in that smoke, I saw the entry of Mathamappila, with four naked women escorting him. I was stuck on my seat with awe when he asked me simply to do a sculpture for him. (my trans.; 101)
>
> *Njan chellumbol poorna nagnaraya randu penkuttikal anu vathil thurannathu.Pathinaro pathinezho prayam. Valiyoru kaserayilekku kai pidichu kondu poyi iruthi. Madhura palaharangal thannu. Kudikkan valiya oru tumbler niraye palu. Ente sareeramake kunthirikkathinte puka nirachu. A pukakullil irikkumbozhanu oru swapnathil enna pole nalu nagnakalaya sthreekalodoppam Mathamappila varunnathu kanunnathu. Ezhunnelkkanavathe tharachirunnu poya ente arikil vannirunna sesham adheham onnu mathrame ennodu paranjulloo.Oru silpam cheyyanam.*
> (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 101)

The description takes schizophrenia as a societal disease. The narrator feeds on the wildly repressed sexual instincts and the consequent fantasies of the public. The narrator's friend Sasankan swoons listening to it. The description of Kuttiyamma is also given in a Magic Realist way. The narrator and his friend come to hear about her during the Emergency which coincided with their coming of age. The symbolic rupture between repression and sexual liberation is explicitly stated

with this coincidence. As the hearsay goes, Kuttiyamma's lovers were rich planters and film makers. Finally, Mathamappila becomes her sole lover who, according to the public imagination, owns hyper-sexualized virility. When the Emergency ended, new story tellers come up with new stories about Kuttiyamma and Mathamappila. One such story relates to a man who used to bring grocery and other provisions for Kuttiyamma. He could hand over things only through the Nepali maids at Kuttiyamma's House. But upon his repeated requests Kuttiyamma allows him to see her body only with her face covered, which is done in exchange for discounts on the price. One day when the trader expresses his desire to see her face, she asks him to twine a viper around his male organ and let her see that (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 103). Obviously, she is presented by the writer as a Medussa figure with a carnivorous kind of sexuality. When such a woman acknowledges that Mathamappila is the most terrific lover she has ever had, it adds to the hypersexuality of him too.

The main difficulty that the narrator faces during the making of the statue is that he had not ever seen Kuttiyamma. When he peeps out through the walls of the palm frond walls of the workshop onto the upper storey of Mathamappila's house, what he sees undoes him. The scenes are as unreal and exaggerated as the sexual imaginary of the public. He sees a dark dwarfish man running around the house shouldering a huge ox. Meanwhile a cock with its legs chained flies to the ox and pecks at it with its sharp bill. When the ox snorts with pain, the legs of the running man would waver. When the blood drops of the ox mixed with his sweat drip into the mud, flocks of pigs would swarm around to lick it. Then the butterflies on their

tails would rise synchronically thwarting the swarming flies tempted by the smell of blood (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 104).

When he finally starts working on the statue modeled upon the ten sketches made from the descriptions given by the dwarfish man, he falls in love with his own statue like "Loth and Brahma" desiring their own daughters. He decides the statue will be his *kutty* (child) till it gets completed and would turn into an *amma (*mother) on the day of completion. The man also instructs to put 64 moles on to her body representing 64 Arts (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 106). The narrator implicitly hints at Freudian psychoanalysis and its affiliation to family as the source of sexuality and repression where he mentions the desire for his own mother.

Kuttiyamma's death is also narrated underscoring her hyper-sexualized identity. It also throws some light on the discursive power of language in the construction of sexuality.

> Mathamappila and Kuttiyamma used to engage in sex with words in a completely dark room. It was Mathamappila who taught Kuttiyamma that words are more agile and fluent than bodies. Mathamappila used to believe that silence is the sixty fourth art form. For experimenting with that art form, he made Kuttiyamma stand naked in moonlight. After eleven continuous intercourses in a row, during the twelfth one, the entire universe fell silent and her life came out through her vagina and merged with the moonlight, this is how the scholars speak on her sex-death. (my trans.; 106)
>
> *Iruttulla muriyil poorna nagnarayi vakkukal kondu mathamappilayum Kuttiyammayum rathiyil erppedumaayirunnu. Vakkukalkku sareerathekkal*

> *vazhakkavum ozhukkum vegavumundennu Mathamappilayanu Kuttiyammaye padippichathu. Arupathanjamathe kala nisabdathayilanennu mathamappila viswasichirunnu. A kalakku vendiyulla pareekshanathinayi Kuttiyammaye nilavinu chuvattil nagnayakki nirthi. Pathinonnu bhogangalkkoduvil panthrandamathe bhogathil prapanjamake nisabdamayennum yoniyiloode Jeevan nilavilekkuyarnnu ennumanu Kuttiyammayude rathimruthiye kurichu nattile pandithar parayunnathu.* (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 106)

The writer uses the biblical imagery of sin and baptism very contradictorily throughout the story. The priest who comes to warn the narrator against installing a vulgar statue in front of the church is appeased when the narrator informs him that it is the statue of Pieta. He says, "Any sinner will have a revelation of Christ one day". "May God bless you", he prays before leaving. We nodded like two sinners" ("*Ethu papikkum oru nal karthavinte velipadundakum…Karthavu anugrahikkatte. Irangum munpu purohithan paranju. Njangal papikale pole thalayatti*"; my trans.; 105). The narrator again makes an allusion to the original sin and baptism when statue under construction is ready for casting. "The statue can be cast after some more days after which the sealing of the plaster that covers the body will have to be cut. The form getting clear at the end will have to be baptized like a life getting born" ("*Ini kurachu divasangal koodi kazhijal cast cheyyam. Pinne udaline moodi pothinja plasterinte chithambalukal ariyanam. Oduvil thelinju varunna roopathe, janichu veezhunna jeevane enna pole jalam kondu snanappeduthanam*"; my trans.; 108)

The narrator gets sexually excited washing Kuttiyamma's statue, which is his own creation. He hallucinates that someone is voyeuristically peeping into the workshop when he bathes the statue and he turns back and finds the blind old pig dripping a thick black liquid from its tongue. The narrator hides the nudity of the statue with a black cloth (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 108). The schizophrenic imagination here is aimed at the society and its ever-persistent male gaze. The climax of the story becomes a critique of all the societal preconceptions of the hyperbolic figures of sexuality. On the last day of the work, when the narrator arrives at the workshop to hand over the statue to its real owner Mathamappila, all the magic figures vanish all of a sudden. Even the laterite gravel which 'grumbles' when stepped on falls silent. The door of the workshop is kept ajar in a sudden blow of wind. The black cloth which covered the naked statue of Kuttiyamma is blown away by the wind. The narrator catches sight of the figure of a naked man hugging the statue of Kuttiyamma. In a sudden surge of jealousy and possessiveness, the narrator who claims to be the father-lover of the statue breaks the man's head with his huge hammer. He further proceeds to break the stranger's male organ which had caused to convert his adolescent lust into jealousy. The hands erected to castrate it are frozen when it sees a vagina figured like a serpent's head in the groins of the man, instead of a penis (Unni, "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" 110). Alluding strongly to Oedipal desires, the writer suggests the constructed nature of sexuality, whose very fragile and evolutionary nature points to the potential of a positive transformation.

The story "*Rathinirvedam"* ("Sexual Disenchantment") tries to unravel the knots in the cultural fabric of sexuality where sexuality as an object of investigation is considered to be irrelevant except from the "alarmed reactions to the obscenity being so assiduously nurtured by commercial cinema" (John and Nair 1). The story also problematizes the conjugality of sexual instincts and brings about different shades of love both free from and bound to sex and sexuality.

The story deals with how three adolescent girls adventurously venture into watching the 2011 remake of the classic 'Adult Only' Malayalam movie *Rathinirvedam* directed by the maestro director Bharatan in 1978, based on a novel of the same title written by P. Padmarajan, in a theatre filled only with male audience. The film remake directed by T.K. Rajeev Kumar deals with the infatuation and sexual feelings of the adolescent boy Pappu towards the girl next door Rathi who is older than him. The film ends with the tragic death of Rathi caused by a snake bite at the sacred grove for snakes, when they make love to each other. Swetha Menon does the lead role of Rathichechy (which was done by Jayabharathi in the classic version) who stokes the lustful adolescent dreams of the protagonist, Pappu. Rathi in Hindu mythology is the goddess of libido, the equivalent of Aphrodite in classical mythology.

The story that cuts across the lives of women living in the 1980s and the 2010s (the original version of the movie was released in 1978 and the remake in 2011) corroborates the finding of Robin Jeffrey that the sexual autonomy of Kerala women was declining by the 1980s, and suggests that, as far as the sexual autonomy of women is concerned, nothing worthwhile has taken place in Kerala even after

thirty years. While stating the positive changes that enhanced the 'quality of life' of the Kerala people which are acclaimed as 'the Kerala Model of Development', Robin Jeffrey grows vocal about "the ambiguous changes in the position of women" (1). He elaborates on the fluctuating autonomy of women between 1880s and 1950s while, contradictorily, a large majority of Keralites began to be aware of politics that emphasized the distribution of power and wealth. Policies affecting the well-being of people got more likely to be made democratically during this period. When the political awareness about rights increased among the general public, conversely enough, a group of Kerala's women by the 1980s, enjoyed less sexual autonomy than their grandmothers had done (9).

The story represents four sections of people in Kerala society that boasts of economic development and is still retrogressive when it comes to changing cultural norms. The first group is represented by adolescent Gen Z girls who daringly undertakes the challenging mission of watching the remake of an adult only movie meant for and targeted at adult male audience whose original version brought about a paradigm shift in the sensibility of the 80s theatre going adult population. The girls wager a bet with their male friends that they dare to watch the adult only movie at the theatre crowded by male audience and consequently watch it in a purely detached way. The very intriguing element in young girls watching an adult only movie along with male audience makes sense only in the morally hypocritical Kerala society. Moreover, the fact that the girls do not find any exciting element in the movie because they are used to more sexually explicit stuff in the cyber world and the accessibility and consumption of such visuals in private and the

inaccessibility of the same one for women audience in public, further point to the hypocrisy and double standards prevalent in our society.

The second group is made up of the boys who challenge the girls to watch such a movie in the theatre among the sexually frustrated male audience whose double standards in morality pull them to the theatre to watch such movies and make them judgmental about women who watch the same. The boys do not belong to the theatre goers' group because of their urban sensibility, access to such sexually explicit content in the cyber world and their chance of close interaction with girls owing to the comparative liberal world that urbanity has provided to them. The boys belong to the post-millennial generation who are more expressive sexually but are still supervised and dominated by adults belonging to the previous generation who have a sexually repressed past. The cyber divide causes a cultural divide which makes the concept of progress in the Kerala society very much problematic.

The male theatre goers watching such adult only movies constitute the third group. They belong to the previous generation to that of the boys' and are fated to be in a cultural limbo. They are too old and hypocritical to fit into the boys' group and too young to be wholly repressed. They want to break the shell and come out of it but are fated to fail. Their frustrated sexual selves erupt in the form of eve teasing, ogling, staring and vulgar comments.

The last group is represented by the lonely sixty-year-old lady who comes to watch movie all alone, being the victim and the remnant of the most sexually repressive generation. Mary E. John opines in an essay titled "Globalisation, Sexuality and the Visual Field: Issues and Non-issues for Cultural Critique" that

liberal positions regarding women's sexuality in India "have sought freedom for the woman by transforming her from the object to the subject of sex, urging her to break out of submission through an active, assertive sexual agency of her own" (370).

The story deals with the attempt at asserting sexual agency by women belonging to two generations. The scopophilic male gaze into women's sexuality on screen is daringly shared by women too. They narcissistically revel in the opportunity to engage with sexual content in their own way and challenge the intrusive moral stance of patriarchal morality. The way the girls enter the premises of the theatre is dramatically described. "They were keen on maintaining a careless audacity in their movements. The way they were talking nonstop seemed to be a cover for boredom. But they succeeded to an extent in reflecting a 'come what may come' attitude with their body language" ("*Alasamaya oru koosal illayma chalanangalil varuthuvan avar manapoorvam sramikkunnundayirunnu. Nirthathe ulla samsarathil maduppo avarthanamo okke ullathu poleyum thonni. Enthayalum 'Oh… enganeyo avatte' ennoru bhavam swantham sareera bhashakalil izhuki irakkunnathil oru paridhi vare avar vijayichirunnu*"; my trans.; 39).

The unexpected arrival of the girls politicizes the space and makes the menfolk vigilant. Some of them get prepared for making obscene comments. Some of them are in confusion whether staring and ogling would suffice. Some others plan to confront them on the spot and then postpone it till the tickets are issued. All the menfolk end up getting confused. As they had not faced such situations ever before, they were hesitant to take any initiative.

There is some minimum guarantee in staring at or eve teasing girls around the bus station, on the road or in train. Either they will bear everything with bent heads or they will stare back or slap on the cheek or they will pretend not to belong to that space anymore. Any of it would not make much difference. But this case is absolutely different. Girls coming to theatre to watch an adult only movie without male escort. Who knows what they are upto? (my trans.; 40)

Bus standilo vazhivakkilo trainilo ulla pennungale comment adikkunnathilum thurichu nokkunnathilum onnu kai vekkunnathilum oru minimum guarantee okke undu. Avar onnukil sankadam kadichamarthi thala thazhthi nilkkum. Allenkil thirichu thurichu nokkukayo koodiyal karanathonnu tharukayo cheyyum. Athumallenkil ee nattukariye alla enna mattil maram pole angane nilkkum. Enthayalum nammalkku kanakku thane. Pakshe, athu pole allallo oru theatre il 'A padam' kanan thanichu ethunna penkuttikal. Avalumarude line enthanennu arkkariyam? (Sithara 40)

The mutual understanding and sense of fraternity that the menfolk share are built around a sense of complicity which makes them partners of the same crime.

When they shared such things nonverbally, the menfolk in every nook and corner of the theatre felt overwhelmed. They felt like hugging each other and calling "bro" in love and endearment. Whatnot, they even felt a compassionate love for Swetha Menon smiling at them from the poster. 'We belong to the same league' – a male breeze which was clinging on to the poster thread said, kissing on her exposed belly. Swetha's belly, on the other

hand, stood as frozen as ever, without twitching even a single muscle. (my trans.; 40)

Ithrayum karyangal parasparam parayathe paranjappol a theatre nte mukkilum moolayilum ulla oro purushanum manassangu niranju. ororutharkkum ororuthareyum poyi ketti pidikkanum tholil kayyittu 'aliyo' ennu Sneha paravasarakanum thonni. Enthinu, mukalil posteril irunnu chirikkunna swethayodu vare adyamayi avarkkoru pavam ishtam thonni. 'oh, nammalokke oru kootta' poster noolil athu vare thala ittu idichirunna oru an kattu swethayude vayaril oru nishkalanka umma vechu. Swethayude vayarakatte, maram pole ninnathallathe oru pesi polum ilakkiyilla. (Sithara 40)

On the other hand, the way the girls discuss the topic of Swetha's exposed belly is intriguingly funny. "Yuck! How can these fools fall for such an unfeminine belly", one of them says. "They will only consider that your comment springs from jealousy", the second girl added. "Jealousy, my foot. Even women don't hesitate to acknowledge sexy women as sexy", the first one interferes, ("*Yuck…ithrayum feminine allatha oru pennineyum avalude vayarinem ee mandan anungal ingane pokki nadakkunnallo.."onnam penkutti paranju. "pinne… ithinu asooya enne avanmar parayoo…" Randam penkutti oravasyamilla chiri chirichu. "Jealousy…my foot" onnam penkutti idakku kayari, "sexy aya pennungale sexy ennu angeekarichu kodukkan pennungalkkum oru madiyum illa*"; my trans.; 40).

Here the discourse centers around what constitutes sexiness and it is suggested that what defines femininity and sexiness differ in the eyes of men and

women. The men in the story slowly come back to their normal selves after the initial shock. They start to ogle and to tease the girls with comments. "Though they pretended not to have been affected, the girls also became vigilant. They had to make their careful chessboard moves, which were both their necessity and liability" ("*Purame onnum kattiyillenkilum penkuttikalum jagarookarayi. Avarkku avarude chathuranga neekkangal nadathendiyirunnu. Athu avarude avasyavum badhyathayumayirunnu"*; my trans.; 41). The words "necessity" and "liability" signify how the act becomes a revolutionary move in the contemporary cultural scenario. "Delving in the dialogues which were not pre-scripted, they started to act out their roles successfully. Meaningful glances, dirty comments and other transactions got deflected from the target hitting on their impenetrable armor of body language" ("*Munne ezhuthiyundakkatha thirakkathakalil abhiramichu avar nilakkatha varthamanangalalum chiriyalum swantham bhagangal vijayakaramayi abhinayichu kondeyirunnu. Artham vecha nottangalum vruthiyilla commentukalum mattidapadukalum avarude sareerabhashayude kettippokkiyathennu thonnippikkatha kavachangalil thattitherichu poikkondum irunnu*"; my trans.; 41).

When the girls ask for the tickets, the man at the counter scornfully asks which film they want tickets for. There was a scornful vulgarity in his question (Sithara 41). When the third girl quips sharply looking at him that both parties know for sure that only *Rathinirvedam* is screened at that theatre currently, from the next queue for men, some howls and dirty comments arise like the girls too will be having desires and let them enjoy too (Sithara 42). The words 'arose' (*uyarnnu* in Malayalam) and the emphatic 'too' strongly suggest the hypocritical nature of

repressed sexuality and the grotesque ways it shows up. The third girl retorts with a soft yet severe tone, “Don’t you have to sell tickets to them too? They too are waiting eagerly to satiate desire” (Sithara 42). Here, ‘too’ suggests that in the deceptively liberal space that the menfolk occupy in Kerala culture, they too are not liberated enough when it comes to the free expression of sexuality. Even when being in the same boat, men do not want to find their women breaking norms of modesty and chastity. The liberated sexuality that they enjoy on the screen space is denied to women they interact with in real life.

They girls really get ‘exhausted’ (may be after an ideological fight) when, finally, they land up on the seat in the back row of the theatre. The physical journey to that space is less tiresome and free of hurdles when compared to the ideological journey. That is why the second girl remarks, “This is not at all an easy task…How to spend two hours here?” “I am going to watch the movie fully; to know if it is such a big deal.” “What to know?”, the first girl makes a playful yawn. “We watch greater stuff on the internet and the mobile phone daily” (“*Oh. Ithathra eluppamulla karyamalla. Randam penkutti paranju. Ini randu manikkoor entho chayyananavo? Njan irunnu cinema muzhuvan kanan pokukaya. Moonam kutty paranju. Ithenthuva sambhavam ennu onnariyatte. Enthonnariyan? Onnam kutty akkiyoru kottuvayitu. Ithilum moothathu nammalu divasom net lum mobile ilum kanunnathalle”*; my trans.; 42). Mary E. John brings about this intertexual quality of the visual media in the globalized world. “The worlds of advertising, cinema and TV feed off one another, caught up as they increasingly are in relationships of simultaneous competition and interdependency” (379).

The exhaustion the girls have is the result of the futile fight they have every day with the society for the kind of freedom of expression they want in terms of sexuality. From the words of the third girl that they are used to such stuff in the private space, it can be ascertained that what they seek is freedom of expression in the public space, not pleasure in private. The split between the private and the public which seem to contradict each other seems to be the underlying cause of the cultural dilemma. Deliberating upon the access and legitimacy Nalini Jameela's life narratives have in relation to public space, Carmel Christie states that it points to the significance of the particularities of the social embeddedness of sexuality in understanding its configurations in the Kerala context (9). So, the legitimate occupation of the public space, as far sexuality is concerned, can be negotiated only by a few people in Kerala.

The courage the menfolk gather in the anonymity guaranteed by darkness is hinted at in the story. When the lights are put out, the 'bold ones' show up their courage with swearing words and such obscenity. When the second girl gets alarmed if things would go out of control, the first girl reassures her, "when that woman appears on screen showing off her belly, all the trouble makers would fall silent, staring at her with their mouths wide open" ("*A pennu vayarum katti screenilottu onningottu vannotte. Ellavanmarum vayil eecha kayariyalum ariyathe irikkunna kanam*"; my trans.; 42). The description becomes very emotional when the elderly woman around sixty years enters the theatre: "She was walking up the aisle tripping over the seats and stumbling over the flat steps. She did not mind anyone around. She put herself in the vacant seat crossing over the girls. The girls found in her face

the rare delight of someone who finds something precious that has been lost for so long. There was darkness in her eyes too – something which was brighter than light" ("*Seatukalil thadanju veezhanorungiyum nilathe kochu padavukalil nashtappettum avar dhruthiyil mukalilekku kayari vannu. Chuttumullavare avar nokkunnathe undayirunnilla. Avasanathe nirayil penkuttikale kavachu kadanna avar ozhinju kidakkunna otta seat il poyi irunnu. Varshangalayi anweshichu kondirunna entho kandethiya santhosham avarude mughathu a iruttilum penkuttikal kandu. Iruttu avarude kannukalilum undayirunnu. Prakasathekkal thelimayeriya onnu*"; my trans.; 43).

The woman smiles shyly at the girls who were keenly observing her. She enquires f she is late for the show and if it has already started (Sithara 43). The girls feel a sudden 'tenderness' for her. This tenderness sprouts more from sympathy and compassion than from putting themselves in her position because there seems to be a huge generation gap in between them where the milieu has changed a lot. The things accessible to them were not accessible to her and that feeling of compassion and condescension pulls the girls to her.

Carmel Christie highlights the contradiction in the neologisms coined by the media discussing sexuality, women's sexuality in particular, not getting the due attention and scope for a debate. She says that the media language became a site through which the new visibility women's sexuality attained got circulated and sanitized in the public sphere. Anyway, she underscores the layered and complex nature of the sexuality discourses which makes a linear graphing of it impossible (8). Similarly, in the story, the visibility ascribed to women's sexuality by the filmic

discourses produced at a gap of thirty years creates ambivalent responses from the viewers consisting mostly of men. They deliberately cast a blind eye to women's sexuality off screen while enjoying the same on screen.

That is why seeing the elderly woman, the men sat as if they were struck by thunderbolt and lightning. What is wrong with such grandmas, they wondered getting exasperated with their moral sense. "Damn it, now we cannot even fantasize these chicks. When we stare at them, we have to see this grey faced one," someone muttered. "She must have come in the memory of some old Pappukkuttan." They howled softly, "Jayabharathichechy, the evergreen one, we are here" ("*Oh. Thulachu. Oru payyan pirupiruthu. A pieceukale ini maryadakkonnu fantasize cheyyanum pattilla. Angottu nokkumbo idayil ivarude naracha mughavum kanuvalle. Mattu chilar adakkichirichu. Pazhaya ethenkilum Pappukkuttane orthu vannathayirikkum. Avar pathukke koovi. Nithyaharitha Jayabharathichechiye, njangal ivideyunde*"; my trans.; 43).

It shows how Pappukkuttan, the protagonist of the original version of the film, whose role was done by Krishnachandran, has become an iconic character in the history of Malayalam coming of age movies. Jayabharathi, who has immortalized the role of Rathi in the movie, is known for the sexually revealing roles she has played. It is also noteworthy how the people remember the name of the male protagonist of the movie and ignores the actor whereas they still remember the actress who has done the role of the female protagonist and not the character herself. It happens because of the tendency of the public to ascribe the sexuality of the character to the actress and thus identify the actress with the character with a

sexually revealing personality. It satiates the scopophilic imagination of the public without directly getting involved in subversive and revolutionary actions. The men in the theatre sarcastically use the word "everlasting" and *chechi (elder sister)* to describe Jayabharathi to suggest that though the woman has become aged, her sexual instincts and desire have not.

The way the menfolk get irritated at the expression of the sexuality of an elderly woman is remarkable. The words switch between sarcastic and literal meanings. The intense shock of the men at the entry of the elderly woman is expressed with the word thunderbolt. The resentment they feel in the name of morality sounds true and realistic cultural landscape of Kerala. They innocently wonder if something has gone wrong with these *Ammachimar,* which is an endearing term used for elderly mothers in Kerala. If something goes astray when teenage girls and middle-aged mothers freely unveil their sexual selves, which have always been kept under cover as if they never existed, is a genuine doubt from their perspective.

Finally, when the film starts the girls go back to their affected selves. The theatre gets filled with whistles and howls which slowly subsides. The men calmed down as if they got immersed in some memories. Conversely, two of the girls get restless then and mutter that must be an art house movie. Only the third one sits looking into the screen as if in a daze. She glares at the elderly woman at the moments of shyness. She sees her body in the light and shadow of the theatre. The girl gets dumbfounded seeing her face wet in the memory of a bygone mysterious love making. Her chapped lips seemed to part in the memory of some mysterious

touches. The girl looked into her eyes with an irresistible curiosity. “Her (the girl’s) arteries got dead for a moment in shock. In her trembling lashes and the tears feverishly dripping on to her cheeks, there were the purity and impurity of consummated post-sex love” (“*Avalude dhamanikal oru nimishathekku pidanju marichu. Polli virakkunna kanpeelikalil, kavililekku panichu veezhunna kannu neeril, surathananthara pranayathinte visudhiyum avisudhiyum skhalichu kidannirunnu* ; my trans.; 44).

The carefully chosen words by the writer highlight, and bring in flashes, the thoughts about the purity and the impurity of love and premarital sex. In a society that chooses to separate love and sex and gives legitimacy only to Platonic love which is not flesh-bound, the writer proclaims the existence of both flesh- bound carnal love and sex without love, and hints at the possibility of love sprouting from sexuality. The girl, like the men, gets dumbfounded to find the surviving traces of sexuality in the elderly woman, where it is least expected.

During the intermission, the woman looks at the third girl who was intently staring at her and asks her without sharing any pleasantries if she has watched the original *Rathinirvedam* movie. Without waiting for an answer, she continues:

> I have watched it only once. Years ago. At a small theatre in my village. Unmindful of the grumbling public. He was with me. He was more scared than me. He was so weak and vulnerable that he could not defend us if need be. Still, I trusted him. We watched that film sitting close to each other sweating. No, we lived it. When Jayabharathi says that she cannot hate Pappukkuttan ever, only moments before her death due to snake bite, I

clutched his hands tightly. Fingers got entwined. My heart had not twitched with love like that ever before, or after, even when the lips touched each other's. (my trans.; 44-45)

Njan oru thavanaye kandittulloo. Varshangalkku munpu…Njangalude nattile oru kochu theatre il vechu, veettukare olichu…nattukarude murumuruppukal kandilla ennu nadichu…Koode alundayirunnu.Ennekkal pedi ayirunnu alkku. Enthenkilum prashnam vannal onnethirthu nilkkan polum thraniyillatha alayirunnu…Ennalm enikku viswasamayirunnu. Aduthaduthirunnu viyarthu viyarthu padam muzhuvan kandu… alla, jeevichu. Pambu kadichu marikkunnathinte kurachu munpu Pappukkuttane enikku ee janmam verukkan pattilla ennu Jayabharathi paranjappol njan a kayyil allippidichu… viralukalil ente viralukal pinanju…Oh...adya thavana chundukal kondu thottappol polum nenju sneham kondingane pidanjittundakilla. (Sithara 44-45)

The men coming out of the theatre are described more compassionately than they are before the starting of the movie. The description aims at throwing more light on the ideological subjectification of men and the deceptive nature of the agency that they seem to have. "The men coming out of the theatre after the film tried to look like 'men' by folding and tucking in their dhotis, by pretending to be unaffected and by placing hands at each other's shoulder, saying that it is such a damn film not even having a single clip" *("Cinema kandirangiya purushanmar madakki kuthiyum, ey onnume sambhavichillenna mattilum 'oh panna padam, oru bit polum maryadakkillennu tholil kayyittum purushanmar thanne ayirikkan*

kazhivathum sramichu"; my trans.; 45). The expressions 'tried to look like men' and 'pretending to be unaffected' very clearly indicate that they too were touched by the film but it was an ideological necessity for them to remain unaffected and to be like 'men' in a patriarchal society. "Still there was Swetha Menon standing indifferently in the poster showing off her belly. Some men looked at it saying and thinking something vulgar. However, there was some sorrow that came out from their heart lingering on that vulgarity. They did not feel like ogling at the girls now" ("*Swetha Menon vayarum kanichu kondu appolum thalakku mukalile posteril nirvikarayayi nilppundayirunnu. Chilarokke athilekku nokki ashleelam parayukayum chinthikkukayum cheythu. Ullilevideyo ninnum purathe ankattukalilekku parannu veena etho kunju sankadam a ashleelathinte mukalil ennalum patharippathari irippundayirunnu*; my trans.; 45).

This minor transformation that they seem to undergo after the film, not into pure, perfect, Platonic beings, but into better human beings is expressive of the speaker's compassionate attitude to them, being not predators but victims of an unfriendly and hypocritical morality. The elderly woman too would have been depicted as someone unchaste as far as the conventional moral codes are concerned, whereas in this story, she is elevated into the status of a pure tragic heroine who has fought against odds and yet failed.

On closer analysis, one can find the intricate use of intertextual references adds on to the argument of the story that men too are subjectified by a sexist discourse. The filmic text contests itself in the remake and suggests that nothing has changed over a period of fifty years as far the cultural fabric of Kerala is considered.

The ‘story within the story’ of the elderly woman that is entangled with the story of the film, is connected to the lives of the girls too. Her youth coincided with the original version of the movie whereas the girls’ lives go parallel to the remake. Nothing momentous has happened in between. Their liberty still remains curtailed. Swetha Menon, the actress who boldly undertakes the role of the seductress, the girls who wager the bet with their male friends, the menfolk who resort to ogling and to such films to satiate their desire, the elderly woman whose desire might have remained unfulfilled; all are victims, in one way or the other.

The very title of the story *“Vihitham*” (“The Legitimate Share”) by Subhash Chandran revolves around what is legitimate and what is illegitimate regarding sexuality and extra marital affairs. The story is analyzed focusing on four themes like the relationship between language, ideology and power, the relationship between discourse and socio-cultural change, the centrality of textual analysis to social research and the principles and practice of critical language awareness as elucidated by Norman Fairclough in *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (ix).

The word *vihitham* in Malayalam is used as a pun in the story which also means what is due and what is undue especially regarding property and inheritance. The cultural properties we inherit play an invisible role in the story which are very decisive in regulating morality and the free expression of sexual desires. The story progresses through the weekend drinking session that the narrator has with his journalist friend. They dissect and deliberate upon the contemporary cultural scenario in Kerala on such occasions. The story is built around the presupposition of

the journalist friend, "There is a silent and invisible ban instituted against glory in the life of a *Malayali*, isn't it?" ("*Mahathwathinethire adrisyavum nisabdavumaya oru nirodhanajnha malayaliyude jeevithathil nadappilayittundu alle?"*; my trans.; 303) This presupposition is cleverly deployed as the introductory sentence upon which the entire story is buttressed and it presents an opinion as a taken for granted fact. This also prevents the readers from debating that very opinion. The experience of the journalist friend which follows later is used in an assertive way to reinforce the ideology that he represents. The narrator's friend Madhavan has just completed a feature on the rampant adulterous relationships for a reputed magazine. He is writing survey-based features by conducting "desktop surveys" (Chandran 304).

The author is really using the narrator friend's story to validate his own ideas about sexuality and chastity. Madhavan's urge to disprove the results of such desktop surveys on extramarital affairs and his conservative reiteration of the solid base of the institution of family and marriage in Kerala and the nation at large is indicative of the author's own patriarchal ideology. The declarative sentences which crowd the story are obviously suggestive of the unconscious attempt made by the author to impose his opinions as facts. The desktop survey which is done by the character Madhavan in the story is actually done by the author. As Fairclough states: "Power is conceptualized both in terms of asymmetries between participants in discourse events, and in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed (and hence the shapes of texts) in particular sociocultural contexts" (1-2). Here, the authenticity of journalism as a discourse and the seemingly scientific methodology employed by the so-called desktop surveys are

used to corroborate the opinions made by the narrator's friend and to present them as facts. The journalistic discourse and the cultural discourse of patriarchal morality are ambiguously mixed together by the author to confuse the readers about what is right and wrong and there seems to be an attempt at hijacking the reader's perceptions of culture.

A scanning of the story will exemplify how social identity is created by language. The author himself stands for the writer in the story. He gives more weightage to the authenticity of the journalist friend as one dealing with facts unlike himself who deals with fiction. But the intriguing way how facts are fictionalized and mediated can be understood in a closer, critical analysis of the narrative discourse. Falguni, the central character is introduced as a beautiful and bored housewife and her absent husband as a rich adulterous business man who believes that adultery is a feather in the cap of masculinity. Madhavan's absent wife is represented as beautiful and virtuous and the teenage daughters of Falguni and Madhavan are deliberately presented as of having the same age. The use of argumentative narration in the text is deliberately done to attribute a seemingly logical appearance to it. The readers are given the deceptive feeling that they too are participating in the discussion and drawing the logical conclusion. The journalistic nature of the discourse gives an impression of verity and validity to the argument. The cohesive devices used, such as the lexical chain of alternative words and phrases, reinforce the main message of the text. The imagery is aptly employed to create the ambience for a story of adulterous sexuality. For example, the metaphor of a condom used while mentioning the tomato peel in the curry and the comparison of

the sea to a half- hidden underwear seen below an obese belly are indicative of the monotony of conjugal desire.

The story is woven along the warp of 'the Vikram and Vetal' game that the narrator and Madhavan play together, representing contradictory perceptions of the contemporary society regarding sexuality. This game is based on the dialectical method of interrogating established ideas and perspectives and trying to validate some of them and to nullify some others. This method even endows the story with a scientific outlook and persuasively induces the readers to support the opinions of the narrator as true and factual.

For example, Madhavan, the journalist friend asks aloud the question, how can the writers and media people be exceptions and excel when the public tend to decline morally? The narrator disagrees to this and says that in his opinion writers have always been the light in whose presence the public weave the cultural fabric (Chandran 304). It is quite contradictory that the story Madhavan narrates does not validate his own argument but underscores the writer's stance instead.

Madhavan's story centers around his own experience of calling on Falguni in guise of Kutabudhin, responding to her invitation, obviously for an adulterous relationship. They have got acquainted with each other only before one day and a half at an ATM counter. He compares her to a Gujarati sex icon in films. To his own surprise, within one day and a half, a house wife who is a complete stranger succumbs to him. The totality of accidents that leads to the tryst is given in a male perspective and paints the woman in dark shades. She is portrayed in the beginning as one waiting to satiate her libido, completely disregarding the identity of the lover.

The way Madhavan tests her chastity with a sub-standard joke is condemnable. “On Bank Holidays ATM counters are like infants with dead mothers. The woman who laughs on this joke tends to be unchaste. Moreover, the gap between the upper front teeth was a sign of lust” (“*Bank avadhiyil ATM kal thalla chatha kunjine pole anu. Athu kelkkumbol chirikkunna pennu kulada avananu kooduthal sadhyatha”*; my trans.; 306).

The method of assessing the chastity of a woman with a joke and a physical trait is patriarchal and retrogressive and points towards the sexist nature of moral codes which are prevalent in Kerala. Falguni says, “My husband always says that the main topics for discussion among the *Malayali* people are films and sex” (307). The family photo in her bedroom catalyzes the functioning of deep- rooted morality in both of them. It cements the familial bonds by constantly reminding each one of them of the seemingly unbreakable trio formed by the parents and the kid. He gets restless seeing the picture of the heavy jawed middle-aged husband who seemed to smile at him and the girl who stood in between her parents, like an embodiment of nobility, having the same age of his own daughter (Chandran 308).

> He crossed her feet and walked over to the other side. When the curtains made of thick green clothes were drawn aside, the naked city revealed its obesity like magic. A piece of the sea in copper sulfate blue was seen afar, like the under wear hidden under a fat protruding tummy. The aged Arabian sea sleeps snoring who has let in not only the Gujaratis but also Syphillis from the other shore. (my trans.; 308-309)

Ayal muriyude ange vasathekku avalude kal padangal kavachu kadannu. Pacha nirathil kaserathuniyolam kattiyulla janala paduthakal akattiyappol nagnamaya nagarathinte durmedassu mayajalamayi thelinju. Kudavayarinadiyil muzhuvan velippedathe kidakkunna adivasthram pole thurissinte niramulla kadalinte oru kashnam doore kandu. Gujarathikale mathramalla, ange karayil ninnu parankippunnineyum ee mannilekku kadathi vitta vrudhayaya arabikkadal ucha veyilathu koorkkam vitturangunnu. (Chandran 308-309)

The imagery with a mention of the nude obesity, syphilis and the aged sea is a spoiler which is suggestive of the deceptive glitter of extra marital affairs and the ugliness and redundancy hidden inside. Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease which is believed to be a God-given punishment given to concupiscence and promiscuity. The off-putting remarks spring from the authorial unconscious which is morally alert and he uses them unawares for a didactic purpose.

Conversely, the narrator even seeks the help of a porn movie to get aroused, obviously because of the tug of war between desire and morality in his mind. The coincidence of their mobile phones ringing simultaneously is meant to shock them back to reality, to the sheer 'absurdity' of their desire. Falguni withdraws the hand raised to touch him and asks him instead if he is thinking of his virtuous wife at that moment. Falguni talks about Mahesh Bhatt who directed the film *The Best Student of the Year.* She says that according to her husband, Mahesh Bhatt was born in the same year when Gandhiji was shot dead. A film maker born in the death year of the Father of the Nation making films to market the sexuality of his own daughter is

quite thought provoking in that it signifies a change in the concept of fatherhood. She says that such pseudo artists create a moral darkness which prompts the public to degrade their private lives imitating events on the silver screen (Chandran 311). In reality she is talking about a change in the concept of sexuality itself in the globalized post-millennial India.

Falguni asks the narrator why he has such a craving for extra marital sex even when he has a beautiful and virtuous wife. She wonders why men are capable of such adventures risky enough to harm their family life forever. This seems to be a realistic question to which a romantic, escapist answer is given by the protagonist. He says having an absolutely perfect wife can also create problems for a man. Now she feels like an extension of his own body. That is why he has a craving for all the women from the outside world (Chandran 312).

On the other hand, Falguni says that for a Gujarati woman, her husband is her life. Still women think of having another life may be because of the constant reminding of men of the sheer corporeal and carnal nature of their existence (Chandran 312). Here, the reasons presented by the man and women for having extra marital affairs are purely authorial interpretations of the complex nature of human psyche. Rather than focusing on the constructed socio-political nature of human sexuality, the author is romanticizing and simplifying experience in a purely male point of view. For example, how dignity is defined becomes very much problematic here. Falguni talks about dignified women who have slept only with one man in their life (Chandran 311). Dignity, chastity, fidelity and purity become allied concepts whose definitions rest on the concept of a monogamous patriarchal society.

She proceeds to define the dignity of women on the basis of the number of her sexual partners in the whole of her life whereas she keeps silent regarding the dignity of men. She gathers a feeling of emotional security from her faith in the presence of her husband with her even though in reality he has deserted her for another woman. She also states that her due share of human dignity was conferred on her by Madhavan (Chandran 314).

Meanwhile, Madhavan also admits that all his desktop surveys regarding the craving of present-day Indian women for extramarital affairs have been disproved by Falguni. He even proceeds to declare that the kids born out of such dignified women make up good men and women later. The final paragraph of the story deconstructs the tall claims of Madhavan when he challengingly requests his writer friend to write a story where men and women appear with all their lusts; Where women of all sorts like the chaste ones and the prostitutes in porn films would appear alike (Chandran 315). Here the journalistic discourse collaborates with art to point at a more subversive truth.

Abin Joseph's story "*Ente laingikanweshana pareekshnangal*" ("My Experiments with Sexuality") explicates how human "bodies are never singular distinct entities bounded by the skin, but rather bodies always extend and connect to other bodies, human and non-human, to practices, techniques, technologies, objects, processes, histories (human and nonhuman, molar and molecular) which produce different kinds of bodies and different ways, arguably, of enacting what it means to be human" (Blackman 2). The very title of the story "*Ente laingikanweshana pareekshnangal*" or "My Experiments with Sexuality" is an obvious echo of M.K.

Gandhi's autobiography *My Experiments with Truth.* Parodying the tone of honesty in the autobiography of one of the world's staunchest advocates of truth, the story informs the reader about the narrator's coming of age experiments with the dark aspects of his own sexuality. The story has a deceptive superficial and shallow narrative which deals with a fetishism that the narrator has with books dealing with how the mere physicality of books sexually arouses him, but on a deeper level it has rich undertones of homosociality, homosocial bibliophilia, tactile bibliophilia, biblioanthropomorphism and the fluidity of the subject/object position.

Introducing the *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth Century Literature and Culture* Katherina Boehm discusses the ways in which subjects and objects fuse, exchange each other's positions and reconstruct each other in various nineteenth century cultural texts. She introduces ways in which human body and its parts assimilate the traits of objects and vice versa where these objects assume subjective agency. Thus, bodies and things mediate between subjects and objects in a network of processual relationships (2). In Abin Joseph's story his bibliomania verges on the extent of merging with the object, here books, in such a way that the books assume the subject position and control over his sexual life.

The story is also in dialogue with Bill Browns' Thing Theory where he deals with how things "become recognizable, representable, and exchangeable to begin with" as well as "why and how we use objects to make meaning, to make or re-make ourselves, to organize our anxieties and affections, to sublimate our fears and shape our fantasies" (4). He combines psychoanalytical and phenomenological approaches to explain how things infiltrate into our identity and transform our selfhood.

Katherina Boehm deliberates upon the lived experience that connects the self with the world of objects in the light of the thoughts of Merleau Ponty and she treats the human body as an assemblage of matter, embodied perception and lived experience that help the self to connect with the world of objects. Subjects and objects hold an intertwined relationship with one another (5).

The narrator is said to have a strange fictitious psychological disorder called 'liberphilia' which makes him masturbate aroused by the smell of old used novels. The protagonist, who is the narrator himself, confesses to the reader that the smell of old used books turns him on and after masturbating aroused by the smell, he feels guilty thinking of the sleepless nights of the author in the process of creation (Joseph 59). The hybrid identity of his body and books rocks him out of his complacent existence as a reader and a lover of books. His body is turned into a site where the object merges with the subject and form "shifting alliances" and thus challenging the fixed and static nature of identities (Boehm 6).

The relationship between the narrator and the tech-savvy friend Sainul Abid has undertones of homosexuality and it is Sainul Abid who googles the strange name of the disorder and advises the narrator to consult a psychiatrist at the earliest. When the narrator admits that he has been doing it for the past one year and a half, Sainul Abid "rises shutting down the computer and tightening the strings of his Bermuda shorts" ("*Sainu computer shut down cheythu kazhinju charadu valichu ketti Bermuda murukki kondu ezhunnettu*"; my trans.; 59). Sainul Abid consciously tries to suppress his queer instincts because of his moral sense whereas the narrator expresses it in strange ways. Victoria Mills connects between the sensory

experiences and homoeroticism of bibliomania in relation to Victorian masculinity. She finds bibliomania as a corporeal discourse where the tactile experience of books arouses a homo erotic feeling. She states that book collecting legitimizes and allows for the expression of sexually marginalized masculine identities (130-135). The narrator's repressed homoerotic feelings for Sainul Abid is revealed in the form of bibliomania and his strange way of gaining sexual satiation from books.

When the narrator is in the bathroom his mind is filled with the images of the cover page of various novels that he has gone through. At one instance, when the narrator glances at the cover page of the book in hand, loving the picture of the dark palm trees in the background of the evening sun and the bent figure of the writer, obviously echoing the novel *The Legend of Khasakh,* which is a milestone of modernist fiction in Malayalam, he is gripped by an existentialist sadness like the protagonist of the novel. He opens the eighty fifth page "searching for his identity" ("*Enpathi anjam page thurannu njaan ente swathwam thiranju*"; my trans.; 60). He is seeking his sexual identity which is concealed even to himself.

Victoria Mills elaborates on the fantasy of establishing physical contact with the earlier collectors, (readers here) by touching the books. "Bibliophiles touch the binding, the skin of the book, but also – by imaginative extrapolation – the skin of other men" (136). The narrator is searching for his sexual identity in books and experiences it in reading.

The narrator accidentally finds out that his grandfather who is a communist and a rationalist keeps an old Bible in the old iron box where the deeds and titles of the land and other documents are kept. The Bible is printed in the old Malayalam

script and the black cloth binding is frayed and the white letters of the title are faded (Joseph 61). The oldness of the book as well as the dusty smell turns him on. He steals the book from the trunk box at Sunday night and goes to the bathroom to masturbate. Sunday's religious significance suggests the ceremonial nature of his physical act which has become as important as an observance to him.

> Opening the bag and taking out the Bible, I entered the bathroom. My hands were trembling like anything. The sentences stood in attention pose in the evenly stacked square boxes on the open pages. I felt that the generations old script has a mysterious beauty. I sought God. The worn-out pages started to crumple. The scrambled letters fell down on my feet in odds and evens. I started to pant but nothing happened. The Sermon on the Mount of a disappointment troubled my brain. Dejection drove nails into my heart. When I was going back to my room with a bent head, I checked the sweat drops on my forehead with my fingers to make sure it was not blood. (my trans.; 61)

> *Bag thurannu bible umaayi njaan bathroomil ethi. Kaikal vallathe virakkunnundaayirunnu. Thurannu pidicha thaalukalil kruthyamaayi adukkiya chathurakkalangalil vachakangal attention aayittirikkunnu. Thalamurakku munneyulla lipikku gooda soundaryamundennu enikku thonni.Njaan daivathe anweshichu. Pazhakkam chenna thaalukal podinju. Ottayum thettayumaayi verpetta aksharangal kalchuvattilekku uthirnnu veenu. Njaam kithachu. Pakshe onnum sambhavikkunnilla. Nirashayude giri prabhashanam thalachorine vimmittappeduthi.Vishadam hrudayathil*

> *aaniyadichu. Thala thazhthi muriyilekku nadakkumbol nettiyil thalam kettiya viyarppu thullikal viralil koriyeduthu vettathu pidichu njaan nokki; chorayalla ennu urappu varuthaan*. (Joseph 61)

When Sainul Abid calls to his landline again to inform him of another guy having the same fetish for books, his voice is described to be feminine by the narrator (Joseph 61) suggestive of repressed homosexuality. Sainul Abid informs the narrator of an American University Professor who had a similar fetishistic obsession with books. This professor dies reading a book about Amerigo Vespucci in his sixty fifth year according to the details Sainul Abid has seemingly collected from the internet. Having heard this story, the protagonist desires such a death for himself too. Falling dead upon his favorite book, suggestively after having sexual satiation from it.

While discussing on the corporeality of bibliomania Victoria Mills also speaks about biblioanthropomorphism. She says that the feminization of books is part of a gender bending strategy in which desire is displaced.

> Women are figured as book-objects in order to exclude them from participating in the homosocial discourse of books. The fetishization of books as women is a way of drawing attention away from the real centre of eroticism: that of male same-sex desire…Touch, smell, and taste, as well as sight interact, overlap, and merge as part of a discourse in which the propensity of the senses to transgress each other's boundaries is linked to male sexual transgression. The literature of bibliomania deploys the

properties of touch to explore ways in which forms of male heteroerotic and homoerotic desire might interact. (146-147)

When he gets an opportunity to be alone in the village library, he checks the register and counts the number of books attributed to his account for the past one year and a half. The number equals to the total number of bones in the human body, that is two hundred and six, he says. To his surprise, he finds out that all the books he borrowed were novels, old and shabby with repeated use. He gets aroused with their old dusty smell. He realizes two things more: that he has a flair only for old books and not even a single old novel remains in the library that is unread by him (Joseph 63). The novels which are read once by him and those which are not old, never arouse him.

Michael Hatt opines that reading as a practice can engender the visual and the verbal and it will help the readers to imagine alternate ways of inhabiting the world (167). He also thinks about the opposite possibility of the books making the readers to free from their own materiality (182).

The narrator purposely goes to Sainul Abid's room in his absence to check if he has old novels in his collection (Joseph 64). Sainul Abid's room with the scent of gulf perfumes again points to his repressed homosexual feelings and the aggressive way he reacts when he comes to know about the narrator's arrival is suggestive of his strong moral sentiments. Apart from books on computer Sainul Abid has a collection of philosophical books by Khalil Gibran, Yati and Osho, again suggestive of his temperament, a rare combination of sensuality and sublimating spirituality.

Finally, the narrator goes to a distant bookstall in search of books. “Walking in front of each shelf, I felt that I was standing in a museum where human bodies are preserved in glass shelves” (“*oro shelfinu munniloodeyum savadhanam nadannappol manushya shareerangal chillittu vechirikkunna museum thil aanu nilkkunnathu ennenikku thonni”*; my trans.;65).

He buys a book for the first time; a controversial and revolutionary novel. The story ends as he gets back home and digs a pit in the soil at night to bury the book in the earth. He is waiting to get it become old. When he walks back to the house after this ordeal, he hallucinates a writer, seemingly Basheer, the stalwart of Malayalam literature, sitting under a mango tree near the well, with a lantern hanging from it. When scornfully laughs at the protagonist, he starts crying softly, keeping his hands between his legs (Joseph 67). The gesture is strongly suggestive of his insecurity and guilt arising from a sense of the abject. Julia Kristeva says that abjection is caused by something that disturbs identity and system. “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4).

In his introduction to *Sexuality, Abjection and Queer Existence in Contemporary India*, Pushpesh Kumar suggests that the concept of ‘abjection’ is the philosophical background that can aptly represent the existential struggles and experiences of the ‘moral outcastes’ “whose sexual practices and/or identities fall below the normative and standard moral conventions” (4). Thus, the experiences of the narrator as well as his identity become the “abject” causing social disgust and

aversion as it questions the social imaginary. His identity is created by an exclusionary mechanism which is needed for the validation of the subject formation of certain other bodies. Judith butler mentions this exclusionary mechanism when she sates, "This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject" (Butler xiii).

Shahina E. K's story "*Olinottam"* ("The Peek") centers around a kid's peek into the adulterous relationship that her mother, who is the narrator has with her paramour. The peek through the small crack in the window is made by the narrator's own nine-year-old daughter and the story is remarkable for the unguilty and unemotional tone of the mother, who is the narrator, but her curiosity to know about the child's way of analyzing the situation and making judgments. "The moment the black and white of her small eyes appeared at the crack of the window we somehow sensed it…or else we could sense it because of the constant fear of the possibility of such an inquisitive presence that everyone has during such games of hide and seek" ("*Muriyude janalappazhuthil avalude kunhikannukalude karuppu veluppu prathyakshappetta a nimisham. Njangal enganeyo atharinjirunnu. ..angane allenkil ingane ulla olichu kalikalikalkkidayil ororutharum sada bhyannu kondirikkunna atharamoru sannidhyathinte sadhyatha, njangalekkondu angane okke thonnippichathaavam"*; my trans.; 15).

Even when the mother's lover slips away after dressing hastily and starting his bike, and the mother escapes into another room correcting her dress, the child

remains in the same position fixing her eyes on the small hole at the window totally indifferent to them. She even did not care to enter the house through the door opened by the paramour to slip away (Shahina, "*Olinottam*" 15-16). The narrator continues that the hole is made with the ball games of the children's gang which includes her own child. The child used to watch the June rain and hailstones from the room through this crack. She would smell rain and listen to the rough music of crickets through this hole. The very same hole has opened the possibility of a peek into this favorite private moment of the mother, though it is slightly covered with a feeling of guilt (16). Remarkably, that guilt arises from the way the scene might have affected the child, not from her act of engaging in an extra marital relationship.

The story hints at multiple gazes. On the peripheral level it deals with the outwardly gaze of the child and inwardly gaze of the mother. The mother looks at the incident again using the gaze of the child and broods over the child's way of analyzing such a scene. The mother's inward gaze is a psychological one whereas the child's gaze is a physical one with all the curiosity that only a child can have. Though the voyeuristic pleasure might be absent in the child's curious gaze, the lovers are conscious and worried of the voyeuristic intrusion of the public which can happen anytime. Foucault's adaptation of the Benthamite idea of self-discipline caused by a feeling of surveillance simulated by the panoptic gaze of the society becomes relevant here (*Discipline and Punish* 216). Foucault further states that the "disciplinary technique exercised upon the body had a double effect: a 'soul' to be known and a subjection to be maintained" (295). The subjection of the female body

and her sexuality to the societal gaze is the fundamental question posed by the story and the child's curiosity is symbolic of the intrusiveness of society.

In fact, the panoptic gaze and surveillance has become a synoptic one where the media is actively involved in this surveillance and many are watching a few, reversing the idea of the panopticon (Mathiesen 215-234). The hyper visibility of women's bodies as "the object of a vision that is implicitly masculinized" helps in the moral policing of the society (Heynen and Meulen 11) and constructs a "subjectivity that takes part in its own surveillance" (Albrechtslund, 196). Here, the mother is more or less engaged with self-surveillance as she is scared of the intrusive gaze of the society. The peek that she attributes to her child is the peek of the society into the private intimate life of its female subjects.

The nine- year old's arrival back from school is usually signaled by her energetic footsteps, shouts to her playmates in the neighborhood, the throwing thud of her school bag and the long pressing of the calling bell which were absent that day (Shahina, "*Olinottam*" 16). When she thinks about the repercussions of the gaze, the mother thinks how the girl would make a jigsaw puzzle of the past usual scenes when she would come back from school and how she would try to solve the loose ends with the newly given insight from the peek. The scenes are how the lover would sit on the sofa casually pretending that he had simply dropped in to see the kid and to give gifts to her, whereas actually he would have dressed up in a hurry, interrupted from love making hearing the child's footsteps. He would sometimes gift the child with chocolates or pat affectionately on her cheeks and take her for a short ride on the motor bike to cover up the shame of the act. On retrospective thinking,

the mother gets disturbed by the intellectual agility of the child in solving such puzzles (Shahina, "*Olinottam*" 17). After sometime, the mother gathers enough mental strength to face the child. "Even otherwise the scope of the sights provided by such a small hole had dwindled to a harmless extreme by then" ("*Athallenkil koodeyum aa kunhi thulayude kazhachakalude sadhyatha ippozhenne ottum paribhramippikkatha vidham theerthum cheruthayi theernnirunnu*"; my trans.; 17).

The story's climax centers around the tension experienced by the mother to face the child's questioning gaze afterwards and the way she wishes if only the child asked something about it. When the husband calls from abroad, it is the child who attends her father's call first thus accelerating the anxiety of the mother, as she is overhearing the child's long conversation with her father. The child's final comment looking at her mother's spread bindhi that "Amma is the ugly girl now, not me, just like the woman we saw in the film the other day" ("*njan alla, sharikkum amma anippol ugly girl, alle*"; my trans.; 18), disturbs the mother and makes her introspectively gaze into the same scene. She shockingly visualizes the child's curious gaze through the hole shedding its childish innocence and metamorphizing into a sharp, adult, intrusive, societal gaze.

Another story by the same writer titled "*Puthumazhachoorulla chumbanangal*" which can be translated as "Kisses Smelling of the First Rain" deals with another aspect of the societal gaze. The story depicts the adolescent love two Class Twelve students and how the class teacher, a nun deals with the sight of the pair kissing each other. Muhzin Ahammed, the boy, is tall, handsome, studious and the captain of the school volleyball team and the girl, Bella Rose Thattekkaran is

also studious and belonging to a good family. The nun has not ever thought of the possibility of such a relationship between them until she bumps into such a forbidden scene. The nun "feels the surging of many waves of blood red color into her brain when she thinks about the sight of them sipping each other's lips and hugging forgetting the surroundings" ("*Parasparam sareerangale punarnnu, chundukaloottikkudichu, chuttumullathineyellam marannulla avarude nilporkke, sisterinu thante thalachorinullilekku rakthachuvappulla kureyere thiramalakal irambikkayarunnathayi thonni*"; my trans.; 25).

When she sights them kissing standing in the space behind the boy's washrooms, she shouts at them badly wishing "some haunting memories drowned into the marsh-lands of the mind" ("*Ochappadil sister agrahicha kanakku aswasthyappeduthunna kure ormakal ullile chathuppandu*"; my trans. 26).) The nun wakes into her own past looking at reddish lips of the girl and then brownish lips of the boy; how she was sent to the convent as a punishment for the first act of immodesty during her teenage, her first kiss. She remembers how she was beaten up by her father, how she was sent to another school and a convent later; all because of the kiss. Then she is sent to the white immaculate purity of the convent, the numbness of the verandahs lacking in laughter. She touches him again in imagination, licking her wet lips which is said to have never slept because of memories (Shahina, "*Puthumazhachoorulla chumbanangal*" 28). Here the nun looks at the kissing of the teenagers in a scopophilic cinematic gaze which reminds her of her own repressed sexuality.

The story reveals the embodied nature of "surveillance gaze overwhelmingly falling upon the individuals occupying morally laden categories of suspicion: youth, homeless persons, street traders and black men" as Sean P. Hier, Kevin Walby, and Josh Greenberg argue (232). It progresses into a politically subversive tone revealing the petrifying Medussa gaze of the nun when she sends the girl back home and forcefully makes the boy stay back, finally forcing a kiss upon the boy with her rough lips. "Sister rose up slowly and stood before Muhzin Ahammed. Then she pressed her rough lips onto his lips which had gone dry with fear" ("*Sister pathiye eneettu Muhzin Ahammed nte munnil vannu ninnu. Pinne, pedichu varanda avante thavittu chundukalilekku valare savadhanam thante parukkan chundukalamarthi*"; my trans.; 29).

Gillian M. E. Alban describes Medusa as "possessing the powerfully castrating and debilitating gaze and the sexual threat of the phallic mother or woman" drawing upon psychoanalytical perspectives on the Medusa myth (3). Undermining the evilness of the monstrous feminine, she advocates the power for cultural subversion the Medusa myth carries. Alban argues that instead of getting objectified, the Medusa gaze gives women the power to objectify others and thus access to sexual agency over others (6). She advocates that "women embrace the double-edged Medusa gaze, in the aggressive self-assertion necessitated in societies that disempower them, causing them to become monstrous" (7). The nun becomes emblematic of such an objectifying, petrifying gaze which helps her overcome sexual repression and announce her sexual agency even if it lasts for a moment.

Pramod Raman's story "*Napumsakarude pathu padavukal"* (*"*The Ten Steps of Eunuchs") sets an illustrative example of the performative nature of sexuality. The writer who declares in the preface that for him story writing is the political expression of his individual choice, or story writing is all about the politics of individual choice, expresses in the story how the choice itself becomes more or less influenced, colored, negotiated and reinforced with performativity. The story begins with the arguments taking place between two adolescent cousins about the sex roles they are going to take up while simulating 'what takes place between a man and a woman' as narrated to them by a male servant of the household.

"I am the boy/ You are the girl", thus goes the dispute between the two boys where Nathan who is more powerful, physically, culturally and class wise, always wins. According to the nameless narrator, who is forced to take up the role of a girl always and who reflects on the attitude of Nathan, "I am" or "*njananu*" in Malayalam can also be read as "*njan anu*" or I am a boy (Raman 14). Thus, the story also throws some light on the ontological nature of gender and sexuality where they get superscribed on the very nature of being and existence. Judith Butler makes it clear in *Bodies that Matter*:

> Sex not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls. Thus, "sex" is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to

> take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, "sex" is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. (xi-xii)

This story, on the other hand, describes how sexuality complements this regulatory mechanism of sex in creating the bodies it controls. Thus, creation of bodies and the regulation of them become simultaneous processes which go hand in hand, where the performative process itself becomes the product.

The narrator enumerates many instances from their childhood vacation days spent together in the ancestral home where the city bred Nathan always outsmarts the narrator, a rustic lad. Such episodes illustrate how performative and habitual sexuality is and how each performative act becomes a precedent in the forthcoming act, thus creating a continuum.

Remarkably enough, the narration self- reflexively emphasizes the role of performativity in constituting a continuum of precedents and it is not for the critic to unravel it. For example, the narrator himself says how Nathan forcibly puts on the best clothing that the narrator has kept for himself when they go for watching 'Theyyam.' The superiority that he demands on each occasion is underscored by the relatives with discouraging comments like "You are not like him ("*one pole allelloda nee"*; my trans.; 14). When the narrator desires the three - tiered balloon at the festival market, which is the last and single piece left, Nathan gets it because of his fluent English. According to the narrator had he listed down all the concessions he had been forced to make for Nathan he would have been found at the bottom of a pit. Though he brings tooth brush and Forhans paste when he comes for vacation, he adamantly demands for the mango tree leaf, that too the bigger one, for cleaning his

teeth to belittle the narrator. The crispier dosa, the tail piece of the fish, the letter from the postman, the first turn of crossing the wooden bridge, keeping the coin for buying fish, the side seat in the bus; the priorities snatched by Nathan ignoring the narrator go on like this. During each dispute the inferiority ascribed to the narrator follows a precedent and becomes another one later. Thus, gradually their sexuality also becomes a performative game of precedents (Raman 15).

> Thus as I was doing the role of the cleaner in the bus game, I had to take the back seat in the bicycle ride; as I was occupying the back seat of the bicycle, I had to hang at the back end of the water-wheel; as I was hanging at the back end of the water-wheel, I had to become the goal keeper in the football match who would not ever get a chance of touching the ball; as I was keeping the goal post I had to keep the house as the mother at the 'family game'; as I was playing the role mother in the family game, I had to do the role of the wife in the drama.(my trans.; 16)
>
> *Angane bus kaliyil kili ayirunnathu kondu vadakakku cycle eduthappol njan pinnil irunnu.Cycle il pinnil irunnathu kondu kottadakkalil vellam koran etham valikkumbol njan pinnil thoongi. Ethathinte pinnil thoongunnavan ayathu kondu football kaliyil njan panthu thodan polum kittathe pinnil nilkkunna goliyayi. Football il goal post kathathu kondu njan veedu kalichappol veedu kakkunna ammayayi. Veetil amma ayathu kondu natakathil njan bharya ayi*. (Raman 16)

Thus, sexuality and sexual roles become a continuum of performative roles which have more to do with power dynamics than with individual choice. Butler

argues that even the materiality of one's body has to be conceived as an effect of power:

> In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate *"act," but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces* the effects that it names. What will, I hope, become clear in what follows is that the regulatory norms of "sex" work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative.
>
> In this sense, what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect. (xii)

The process of identity formation based on a lack, and the binary system of meaning making and existence is emphasized by the writer. The narrator, for example, states it was only when he was watching a romantic movie in Nathan's absence that he realized that his identity becomes next to nothing in Nathan's absence than in his presence. He was not able to share his adolescent curiosity regarding sexuality with his aunt who sat next to him in the theatre in Nathan's absence during one vacation (Raman 16). The power dynamics in the binary of sexuality is maintained where the inferior one is always defined by some absence or lack in Derridean terms. As Todd W. Reeser states: "A key aspect of power's normalizing effect is the construction of an abnormal other. For, in order to create a

norm, discourse must invent or create an anti-norm, which implies that the norm is the norm by opposition" (31).

The childish imagination of the narrator as well as the linguistic discourse that takes place in his childhood world seem to be full of metaphors denoting sex, gender and sexuality. The story works like a meta-narrative drawing attention to the constructed nature of all these concepts. To cite examples, the maternal aunt of the narrator is pregnant in his childhood memory and the doctor has prescribed scanning for her. When Nathan tells the narrator that fetal sex determination is done on a regular basis in Kochi, he wonders whether there are so many pregnancies in Kochi. The narrator is seen to brood over the names of places in Kochi like Menaka and he wonders if places also have sex and gender. Later when he is permanently fixed to the female role in love making and when he goes to Kochi to live with Nathan, he finds that Kochi has a lot of places bearing female names like Menaka, Padma, Saritha, Savitha, Sangeetha, Kavitha, Deepa, Lisy etc. "It is not without any reason that Nathan has become this much of a male…How many women. This is a female city" ("*veruthe alla Nathan ithrayum anu ayathu…ethra pennungal. Ithoru pen nagaram anu*"; my trans.; 29). Nathan's alpha male characteristics are attributed to the proximity of the female city to him. How the binary works very subtly in formation of selfhood is suggested here. Nathan's full name is Tharanathan and it is only his father Balan who calls him by his first name Thara, which is a female name in Malayalam. Obviously, Nathan does not like to be addressed so, but he does not oppose it as it is done by his father who is more powerful than him (Raman 19). Hence there is a hierarchical order in patriarchy where vulnerable masculinities are

sidelined. "*In fact, it is him who has a female in his name*" ("*Sherikkum paranjal peril pennullathu avananu*"; my trans.;19), the narrator emphatically says. "It is not for fun that uncle Balan calls him so. Precedents need not necessarily be about games only. This is a precedent that has started from the day he was named" (*Balammaman veruthe allallo angane vilikkunnathu. Kalikkunna kali thanne akanam ennilla keezhvazhakkangal. Ithu avanau peritta kalam thottulla keezhvazhakkam anallo*; my trans.; 21). It is noteworthy that the narrator remains unnamed throughout, implying his fluid self, which is forced to take the form of the vessel it is poured into.

Though the narrator is a brilliant student and an avid reader of Malayalam literature, he feels inferior and vulnerable before the English fluency of the city bred Nathan. Here language also becomes a tool of power in the formation of sexuality choices. The narrator is emotionally blackmailed into his vulnerable and submissive sexual role in the love making game by Nathan who threatens not to participate in it unless and until the narrator agrees with his terms (Raman 21). The narrator acquiescently agrees on condition that in the next turn they change roles. But the precedents never change. "Let one of the loops of precedents be with me too. Being a mark of freedom, if it is to be severed. If the decision to change sexual roles alternatively belongs to the same family of precedents, what is wrong with that" ("*Keezhvazhakkangalude kannikal onnu ente kayyilum irikkatte. Vichedikkappedan theerumanikkunnenkil athinulla swathathryam enna nilakku. Ithavana pennayal adutha thavana anu aakunnathum keezhvazhakkangalude kudumbathil piranna oru theerumanam aakunnathil entha thettu?*"; my trans.; 21).

Such dialogues very clearly indicate the imposed nature of the sexual self and the fluidity of sexuality. Later the narrator also suggests that it was a contract only for a one-time exchange of sex roles (Raman 21), but this one- time contract becomes a repetitive precedent in the chain of sex/sexuality games and role playing and becomes a permanent position. When the boys were hugging each other in a simulation of love making the narrator feels that he is hugging a rock. He also says that his first experiment with sex left only solidifying darkness and heat in him, without any scope for imagination, tactile ingredients and mysteries to explore (Raman 22). Obviously enough he too has a male self and experiences the world from a male perspective, contrary to the position and the role imposed on him. It is Nathan who attributes the female self to him. He moulds a woman out of him with his tactile imagination and hugs. "He was not hugging a rock. That made me feel ashamed of myself. But that is a possibility too. That means only if I can take the male role in the love game next time, I can have emotions. I need not have taken the female role this time as well" ("*Avan ketti pidichu nilkkunnathu oru paraye alla. Athenikku enne kurichu thane kurachil undakki. Pakshe athoru sadhyathayum anu. Adutha thavanathekku anu ayale vikaram varoo.Ithavana thanne ee pen nilppu vendiyirunnilla*"; my trans.;22).

These lines clearly point out how badly he wanted to take the performative role of a man at an early age itself because of his realization that it is all about power. The last line also shows how much unwanted is the female role imposed on him. Butler states that sex is not a "static description of what one is" but one of the norms by which a person's materiality is constructed. It "qualifies a body for life

within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (xii). She opines that such a rework on the materiality of bodies will imply a recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of power dynamics. It will also mean that performativity is that repetitive power of discourse to produce the phenomena it regulates. It includes a new understanding of sex as a cultural norm that governs the materialization of bodies. It also deals with the formation of the subject, the speaking "I", by having undergone such a process of assuming a sex. It links the act of identification with that of assuming the sex and of the discursive ways in which the enabling and disavowal of certain sexed identifications are made possible by the hetero-sexual imperative (Butler xii).

Ironically, the female sexual role imposed on him becomes his permanent role in life because of its reiterative performativity. When Nathan is aroused what he whispers in the narrator's ears is "Thara, I love you," which is his own first name. He is addressing the other half of himself which he tries to find in the narrator, completely ignoring the narrator's male identity in a narcissistic way, indicating the hierarchical nature of power play inherent in any kind of gendered sexual relationships. The female selfhood of Tharanathan, on the other hand, never gets a forceful reiteration, except by himself, when done for the purpose of highlighting his egoistic male self during love making. Hence, it remains hidden and never comes to have a material existence.

When the chickens are killed for hosting Balan uncle the boys see the slaughtered chickens defeathered and headless. The narrator ironically mentions that "the chickens exhibiting complete nudity did not have head" ("*Poorna nagnatha pradarshippichu kidanna kozhikalkku thala undayirunnilla*"; my trans.; 23). When

the narrator asks Damu which is male and female, Nathan interferes and answers "one with more softness is hen," underscoring the narrator's entitlement only to womanhood and providing yet another instance of the constructed nature of sexuality (Raman 23). When the chicken curry is ready to serve, he again establishes his right to masculinity by taking the boneless flesh pieces against the narrator's wish, scornfully saying that the "soft chic is reserved for the cock" (Raman 23) which has very strong sexual connotations.

In the second turn of the love game the narrator demands to take the male role and Nathan seems silently to agree to it. But ironically enough, the narrator gets totally confused how to confront him. I felt heavy-hearted thinking of confronting Nathan who has agreed to confer male hood on me, which was absent in our relationship so far, and was given to me for the first time" ("*njangalude bandhathil ithuvare illathirunna oru anatham enikku angeekarichu tharunna Nathane engane neridanam enna chintha enne bharamullavan aakki*"; my trans.; 24). But when the time comes Nathan uses a different strategy of begging for the male role. He silently seduces the narrator with touches and romantic hugs. "He disabled my voice…I became vulnerable to touch everywhere" ("*Avan enne onnum parayavunnavan allathakki…njaan evide venelum sparshikkappedavunnavan aayi*"; my trans.; 24). Here the speaking self becomes synonymous with men and the tactile self with women in a stereotypically performative way. The narrator is seen to be gradually getting trapped into a female self in the following passage:

> Thara, I love you. Don't you love me too? That voice became more private. It wanted to touch the first half in Thara Nathan. In the unity of the hug, I am

> that half. I need to reply to it. But I am not Thara. It is him who is Thara…Thara, tell me please. Don't you love me too? He used a compelling tone. He was repeating that as if he was trying to save me from a disaster. He became different 'Nathans' each time. (my trans.; 24)
>
> *Avante shabdam kooduthal swakaryamaayi. Athinu sparshikkendathu Tharanathanile adya pakuthiye aanu. Alinganathinte ekathayil a pakuthi njaan aanu. Njaan marupadi parayanm. Pakshe njaan Thara alla. Avan aanu Thara…* Thara, tell me please. Don't you love me too*? Avan nirbandhathinte swaram sweekarichu. Enne orapathil ninnu rakshikkan enna pole murukki pidichu avan athu aavarthichu kondirunnu. Oro thavamnayum oro Nathan aayi*. (Raman 24)

The narrator is talking about the trembling, pleading and stuttering tones used by Nathan to seduce him. At the third time, Nathan uses all his physical strength to tame the narrator and asks dominantly who wants to be the boy and the narrator vulnerably agrees that Nathan is the boy and she is the girl.

"He made a body for me by touching… The sex tissues that were not named so far were invited by Nathan's tissues for sex. Thara, you are my love. The name cannot be decided by the one who is addressed by it. The one who is led does not own the path…The one who receives has to yield. The one who yields has to be a subordinate" ("*Vili kelkkendi varunnavanu nischayikkan kazhiyathathu akunnu peru. Nayikkappedunnavantethu allathathu anu vazhi. Pakarunnavante ahladam etteduthe pankuvekkanavoo. Vangunnavanu vazhangane kazhiyoo*"; my trans.; 27-28).

All these instances throw light on the politics of domination and subordination inherent in the formulation of sex, sexuality and gender. When the narrator introspectively reviews the past at Nathan's apartment in Kochi, he realizes he has already become a 'housewife' for Nathan. The story ends with the thought-provoking question asked by the narrator rubbing the 'mustacheless face' of Nathan that who a girl is. 'Fingering the mustache' of the narrator, Nathan answers in a riddle: "The girl is a boy who yields a girl" (Raman 31). The face with mustache of the narrator and the mustache-less face of Nathan imply that the gendered physical signs showing masculinity and femininity have nothing to do with one's sexuality which is purely performative and defined by the discursive flow of power.

David Valentine discusses those desires which do not fit into the categories of heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality in his article "I Went to Bed with My Own Kind Once: The Erasure of Desire in the Name of Identity". He states that such "unintelligible desires" points to the complex nature of erotic desires whose expression in language and other practices remain beyond categorization. He also opines that "the troubling nature of desire- beyond -sexual identity" deserves further exploration (408). The desire that exists between Nathan and the narrator is not purely based on their sexual identity. The narrator insists on his male identity as well as masculine self. The decisive interplay of discursive power in defining one's sexual self and desire is reflected in the use of language used by every character in the story. The story elucidates very clearly that the vulnerable masculinity of the narrator is constructed through discourse.

The stories discussed in the chapter mark the discursive culmination of the reconfiguring norms of purity where the politics of language, narration and moral policing can be seen to be intersecting one another.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The research has made an attempt at tracing how the post-millennium Malayalam short stories represent deviant and socially unacceptable sexual behaviour, deviant and unacceptable in terms of their ability at violating the social norms, as a means of marking the assumption of agency by the sexually vulnerable groups, including women and queer people. These stories also register the cultural resistance shown by the groups mentioned above, undermining and challenging the concepts of language, power, subjectivity and morality. The select stories are also seen to be delineating the switching of their status from passive bearers of meaning to active signifiers in a counter culture. There is an attempted probe into the performative nature of sexuality and the creation of vulnerable masculinities as outlined by these stories.

Another important aspect the stories engage with in a serious way is the nexus between food politics and sexual politics and how they upturn the conventional patterns in the portrayal of sex and sexuality. Gastropolitics is also seen to be contributing to the intersectional vectors where sexuality is culturally constructed and evolved. The study also analyses the spatiality of sex and sexuality, how the spatial defines the sexual and vice versa. The topographies of eroticism and love are unravelled in a number of post-millennium stories and that is brought to light in the thesis.

The questions related to the pivotal role played by discourse in the construction of chastity and purity norms are also navigated. The changing norms of sexuality are recorded highlighting the portrayal of adulterous relationships by some authors. How the depiction of extra marital affairs topples the supremacy of monogamous families as a social institution is studied upon. Parallelly, the patriarchal norms of masculinity are also seen to be deconstructed. How the preoccupation with endogamous marriages obscures the real cultural agenda of sustaining the prevailing class/ caste strata in Kerala and how this formula results in the prohibition of certain modes of desires for the socially vulnerable are elucidated.

The politically engaged tone of the writers and the way they negotiate the fissures in the peripheries of culture are also explored. The motivated and proactive writing endeavors of these writers also contribute to the denaturalization of heteronormativity and endogamy in the Kerala context.

The introductory chapter fixes the cultural context and the political and academic relevance of the research, elaborating on the post-millennial cultural scenario of Kerala with retrospective glimpses on the formative stages of the so-called Kerala culture, starting from the colonial and the early modernity period. It also records the Review of Literature and the Methodology employed for the current research, fixes the research problem and research questions, describes the aims, objectives, limitations and delimitations of the research, and proposes the thesis statement as well as the argument.

The first core chapter titled **"**Reimagining the Sexual Animal: The Carnal, Carnivorous and the Carnivalesque" delves into the pertinent, but often overlooked

questions related to the nexus formed by food politics, carnality and the subversive carnivalesque forces inherent in them. The chapter also deals with the animal imagery used by the select post-millennial writers with political motivation, and how their parallel lives constitute powerful allegories of the multifaceted construction of human sexuality.

The sensual, flesh-bound nature of human sexuality is implied by the word 'carnal' in the title. The role of gender in the construction of carnality is also explored. The involvement of gastropolitics in the construction of sexuality and purity norms is suggested with the word 'carnivorous'. The word also carries implications of the sexual appetite and the fluid nature of it. The chapter also foregrounds the interplay of power and food and the parallel functions played by sex and food in constituting the 'sexual imaginary' of the public.

Practices and concepts related to the cultural production, distribution and consumption of food, like vegetarianism, non-vegetarianism, consuming raw food, cooked food and stale food, commensality and the purity norms associated with these practices are studied in the context of the construction of sexuality and sexualized bodies. The role of the alimentary regime and the sexual regime in the regulation of the intermingling of bodies is brought to spotlight.

The inter-connectedness of sexual predatoriness and the politics of domination and subordination, and the gastro-political relevance of the same in the caste- ridden society of India at large, and Kerala in particular are unraveled. Intersectionality is used an analytical framework to explore how the ever- crossing vectors of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, desire, religion, food habits and mental and social well-being constitute the

construction of sexual purity norms at their cross roads. The formation of sexual subjectivity and other forms of identity is investigated deeply and found to be taking place at the intercrossing and interlocking vectors.

The chapter also gives attention to how the formation of sexual subjectivity and related norms of identity takes place at intermeshing and intertwining vectors of caste, class, postcoloniality, gender, ethnicity, religious identity etc. The way these parameters function can be aptly described with the word 'interlock' rather than 'intersect' because of the entangled way in which each of them is tied to the other. The cultural detangling of such a meshed-up relationship calls for awareness and political vigilance.

The carnivorous predatoriness of sexuality is loudly conveyed by two short stories chosen for study titled "Adam" and "*Udamasthan*"("The Owner") using canine imagery to hint at the non-legitimized association between carnivorous eating habits and deviant sexuality and libido. Sexual promiscuity and canine imagery are closely linked in cultural discourse which can be exemplified by swearing words like 'bitch'.

The third keyword in the title refers to the explicitly political nature of the stories where they try to upturn the hierarchies in terms of position, privileges, norms and restrictions and hence they can be seen to be containing the carnivalesque elements. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the Carnivalesque represents a temporary suspension of the dominant truth and the established order. The carnival is also symbolic of the transition from and transformation of all hierarchies.

The overturning and destabilization of the normative elements in the construction of sexuality and sexual purity is highlighted in this section. The constructed nature of sexuality, the role of performative elements in its constitution,

and how far the power of performativity is gender specific etc., are explored in this section. The short story “Adam” allegorically represents the lives of two generations of pedigree dogs going parallel with the lives of two generations of people and the evolution of cultural norms regarding sexuality is charted along with this. The core of the story and its perspective is built around the voyeuristic gaze of the public which casts desire and disgust simultaneously towards the upper class, upper caste life, which is inaccessibly glamorous and mysterious as far as its private sexual life is concerned. The postcolonial subjectivity of people like Kuruppu results in their hybridity and ambivalent attitude towards cultural norms like that of sexuality. The story functions on its own semiotic order where as food is also used as a powerful cultural tool to mark class, caste sexual subjectivity and liberation.

The story uses multiple carnivorous images related to human appetite and predatory nature where the appetite is multilayered and corresponds to physical, sexual, social and political cravings for representation and identity where social identity is defined by class, caste and gender. The norms of masculinity, femininity, sexual virility, and purity associated with sexuality and caste are seen to be constructed along the lines of food habits as revealed by the popular adage “you are the food you eat” carrying strong caste connotations. Masculinity, or hegemonic masculinity is presented as a luxurious commodity in the story affordable by the affluent only.

How food becomes a class marker within the caste discourse and how food metaphorically differs for middle class and low-class Dalits have also been pointed

out in this chapter citing Gopal Guru. Food metaphors can traverse the boundaries of cultural imagination into intellectual imagination.

A semiotic correlation is established in this chapter between the choice of food and one's gender and sexuality. Raw food, cooked food, stale food, leftover food and eating customs are directly associated with people's cultural identity.

Another aspect the chapter discusses is how the subjects get ideologically and repressively get interpellated. Even those who use repressive apparatuses to interpellate others are not free from the ideological interpellation. In "Adam", the dog is remarkably anthropomorphized and masculinized whereas the men in the lowest social stratum, who are devoid of power are emasculated and zoomorphized.

Tacitly it is explained that people who do not have access to power in terms of their caste, class and gender are effeminate, feeble, tame and animal like whereas men wielding power in terms of the aforementioned parameters are predatorial, virile and masculine in a hegemonic way. This hegemonic masculinity addresses and communicates only to other hegemonic masculinities and suppresses all other non-normative bodies. It is implied that people who do not have power are effeminate, fragile, easy to tame and animal like, whereas the powerful men are more or less predatorial and virile. Such predatorially hegemonic masculinities address similar ones only and consciously sidelines other non-normative and vulnerable masculinities. In the story the hegemonic masculinity of the anthropomorphized dog Victor is constructed in contrast with the men who are vulnerable and subservient and they form the binary opposites complementing signification in the semiotic way.

The story "*Udmasthan*" foregrounds the questions of masculine ownership and patronage of female sexuality and bodies. Here the vectors of religion and a false sense of spiritual purity treated synonymously with physical purity contribute to the construction of sexuality norms. The capital punishment awarded to each dog in the story is meant to set an example for the virgin spinster daughters in the story. Rani, the pet dog is punished for spoiling the purity of a nunnery like house with the obscene act of mating with a stray dog. Her lack of constraints over her own sexual instincts and her inability to safeguard the boundaries of her class are also found to be punishable. Her body becomes the metonymic object where the sexuality of the spinster daughters is superscribed.

The mouth becomes a locus of non-normative cravings where appetite and desire converge. That is why the dog Channan is brutally punished for his non-normative eating habits. Eating the offal from a butcher shop he becomes a challenge to all conventions of domestication. Amichan's soft, vulnerable feminine sexuality is guised under his spiritual outlook. His silent withdrawal from the material world is as equally powerful a protest as that of the daughters'. This self-imposed social invisibility becomes a critique of the Freudian concept of sublimation in that non normative urges are forced to be obscured and masked under a system of moral surveillance. The gendering of the dogs verges on fluidity and resistance.

Onachan in the story "Pied Piper" is yet another character whose queer ways deconstruct every societal norm about gender and sexuality. Chandran's attempts at imposing hypocritical morality based on the disciplining of bodily practices with

martial arts like Karate is undermined by Onachan in a satirical way. He is against the taming as well as grooming of the body in a homogeneous muscular fashion. His identity is as fluid as that of the ducks and the mudfish and he is a pied piper who lures the adolescents with his fragile feminine body. He is indirectly against the state which taps the biopower of its subjects and hence against Chandran who duplicates the state. His gimmicks are set against the existing power structures, not against an individual.

How animals take part in the meaning making process of humans and how they are endowed with agency is exemplified the story "*Varal*" ('The Mudfish"). Bodies addressing each other are defined and constructed by class and caste and are demarcated by their habitat and spatiality. They cannot exist as they are, for long, as they undergo transformation.

The story "Hidumban" breaks down the human animal identities and exposes the constructed nature of human sexuality and the biologically instinctive animal sexuality. The pet cat Mercy is humanized by Tessa who is sexually and emotionally frustrated in an attempt to escape from every human presence surrounding her. The story underscores the caste specific nature of commensality and the way caste encroaches into sexuality related practices in India. Sitting together at the dining table is an indicator of social acceptability and Hidumban is denied it first because of his stray cat ancestry as is indicated by his name.

All these stories politically use food as well as animal metaphors as tools for liberation, capturing the changing norms in sexual freedom, fluidity and chastity. The chapter makes use of the theories and concepts developed by Barthes, Deleuze

and Guattari, Mikhail Bakhtin, Kimberle Crenshaw, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol Adams, Gopal Guru, Louis Althusser, R.W. Connell, J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, Michel Foucault, Elspeth Probyn, Thimothy C. Baker Aaron Moe etc., to validate the arguments. The short stories discussed are "Adam" and "Pied Piper" by S. Hareesh, "*Udamasthan*" ("The Owner") by Vinoy Thomas "*Hidumban*" by Arshad Batheri, and "*Varal*" ('The Mudfish") by V. Shinilal. As a whole, these stories contribute to the overarching argument of the thesis by discussing how the established norms are disrupted by embracing the bodily grotesque.

The second core chapter titled "Liminal Spaces and (Un)Chaste Desires" tries to chart the evolution of sexualized bodies and their performance in liminal spaces. A special focus is given on the social construction of desire and sexuality. It traces desire along its spatial and topographical dimensions and focuses on the politicization of the sexual body in space. The nexus between the spatial and the sexual is unraveled here, and to corroborate this, the performative existence of sexuality in space is spotlighted. A cartographic representation of the landscape of desire or the eroticized topographies is also undertaken in this chapter where sexuality is identified in its socially contingent nature. The rupture between the public and the private in the cultural landscape of Kerala and how the ideology around a legitimate life is constituted in it through the imagination around the sexual subject in the public space, are also explored.

Instead of following the strict anthropological sense of the word liminality, it is used as an umbrella term in this chapter, covering the fluid space for all groundbreaking experiences that happen on the 'threshold' of social changes.

Liminality in its multiple dimensions such as the geographical, domestic, cultural, political, topographical, temporal and psychological, is explored and applied here. At the same time, the way the initiands come to feel nameless, spatiotemporally dislocated and socially unstructured in the anthropological ritual passages is implied throughout. How the initiands live outside their normal environment and are brought to question their self and the existing social order through a series of rituals during the ritual passages in the etymological sense of liminality forms the crux of the argument.

The chapter studies about the embodied nature of individual agency in bringing about structural social changes and how seemingly personal actions gather a social significance at the collective level. In other words, the chapter explores the liminal nature of personal revolutions. The selected stories in this chapter elucidate how the individual merges with and evolves into the social; how the sexual becomes the political; how the private becomes the public; and how the affective evolves into the ideological.

The chapter discusses the stories "Isla De San Valentin" Santhosh Echikkanam, "*Ramachi*" by Vinoy Thomas, "*Palam kadakkumbol pennungal mathram kanunnathu*" ("What Women Only Happen to See While Crossing Bridges") by Yama, "Encyclopedia" by Sreelatha, "*Ozhivukalam*" ("The Vacation") by K. Rekha and "*Anandamargam*" ("The Path of Bliss") by Unni R.

Santhosh Echikkanam's story titled "Isla De San Valentin" deals with a fictional space beyond the jurisdiction of man-made laws regarding love, body and sexuality. It is an imaginary island that the female protagonist dreams of, which

permits the subversion of the normative ideals about sexuality. The story maps the contours of liminal spaces, some of which are real and concrete and some others metaphorical and abstract. The concept of "moral geography" (Cresswell 128) has been used to examine the varying behavioral patterns marking the shifting moral codes of Vineetha in Echikkanam's story. The presiding moral codes of the protagonist seem to be space dependent. A moral geography is the concept that certain things and practices belong in certain spaces, places and landscape, not in others. It is the governing morality depending on space.

The analysis of the story draws upon Foucault's concept of heterochronies ("Of Other Spaces" 26) which are "slices in time". The concept of time gets stagnant in heterochronies. Traditional concept of time comes to a standstill at heterochronies. In other words, heterochronies are heterotopias where time accumulates like museums and libraries.

The story "*Palam kadakkumbol pennungal mathram kanunnathu*" also explores the vertical temporality of liminal spaces where linear time stops to make sense. The story also explores how intoxication causes a feeling of liminality. The story also foregrounds the transformation of identity that happens to the staff in the official space, especially the way it deprives the staff of their sexuality and treat them as homogeneous humanoids without sex, gender or sexuality. In Deleuzian terms, it is a striated space (479) that enhances the homogeneity of the occupants, and hence fitting well into the power system. When the staff members are converted into homogeneous units, they function like a machinery, and thus facilitating the easy management of them by the hegemonic center.

When the staff function like humanoids, they become appendages of a huge machinery of power, devoid of any agency. At the same time, the uniformity and the resultant anonymity of urban spaces make cities the ideal space for experimentation and evolution. This liberalism provided by the striated urban spaces is peripheral and deceptive, and is actually done under the surveillance of the state.

The story refers to both temporal and spatial liminality and substantiates how identities themselves are liminal, unstable and constantly in flux. The boredom and stress created by the workspace and the escape into a utopian world of epicureanism is the typical Capitalist dream. The disruptions in the moral codes imposed by the society take place when the pleasure-seeking individual urges clash with the disciplinary mechanism of the society creating flexible liminal spaces.

The story "Encyclopedia" has been analyzed echoing space theories propounded by Doreen Massey and the spatial is conceived as stretched out class relations (21). The spatial is directly related to the economy and society and class relations always assume a social form. Though the story centers on the same sex love that existed between two adolescent girls, it also spotlights the intricate web of social relations which construct the sexual. In the story, the social, the spatial and the sexual constitute and define one another. The relationship between Sulu's beautiful grandmother and the narrator's grandfather is decided by her position as a tenant, her inferior caste and class. Their house on the fringes of the narrator's ancestral property shows how lopsided the relationship is and how the inferiority is reflected spatially. The spatial relationship is defined by the tenant-master relationship and in turn it constitutes the sexual servility. The citadel shaped spatial positioning of the

feudal household and the way the tenants are centrifuged along the peripheries diagrammatically represent how the spatial gives way to the sexual and vice versa. Sulu's chastity is defined by the moral codes set by the narrator's class specific purity norms and Sulu's impurity is consciously used to set off the narrator's purity. She defiles the 'pure' and 'chaste' narrator caste wise and sexuality wise and therefore ousted from the narrator's haptic space. The absence of strict moral codes for her caste and class allows Sulu to traverse boundaries set by religion. However, she is unable to cross caste boundaries yet. There is also an implication how in Kerala class is caste specific as far as matrimonial alliances are concerned. Another highlighted feature of the city is that the urban landscape provides a hide out for people with queer sexualities.

The story "*Ramachi"* deals with the relation between geography and the performance of sexuality as well as the organic blooming of sexuality. The story also illustrates how the landscape becomes instrumental in the inscription of sexual identities on the body. It also makes an attempt at redefining the concept of 'family' as it exists in the 'civilized' society in the light of the tribal family which is more or less fluid and flexible and whose interests are prioritized second to the interests of the larger community.

Human sexuality is remarkably juxtaposed with the sexuality of elephants to foreground the constructed nature of human sexuality against the instinctive nature of animal sexuality. The blossoming of female sexuality in an ecologically organic space is portrayed in detail. The fluid chastity norms of the tribal people struggle to remain unaffected by the mainstream values.

How the transformation of certain spaces into Carnival spaces facilitate the free expression of repressed sexuality is dealt with in detail by the story *"Ozhivukalam"* (*"*The Vacation*"*). The story also elucidates Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces ("Of Other Spaces" 24) in the light of the International Film Festival of Kerala. Films function as "liminal affective technologies", to borrow a term from Paul Stenner (18-20), mediating and facilitating imaginative and emotional cultural processes, connecting them with the actual processes of psychosocial transformation. The film festival becomes a carnivalesque space on double spatial planes, one on screen and the other off screen.

The story "*Anandamargam"* ("The Path of Bliss") by Unni R. discusses the concept of liminality in the light of menopause and reimagines female sexuality severing its societally attributed connection with fertility. The story raises serious concerns about the construction, consumption and the disposal of the female body as a consumerist commodity, where its worth is determined by its usefulness and capacity to produce pleasure. The chapter draws upon theoretical insights provided by Stephen Pfohl, Victor Turner, Van Gennep, Paul Stenner, Eva Illouz, Bjørn Thomassen, Deleuze and Guattari, Doreen Massey, Manuel Castells*, Hazel Andrews, Les Roberts,* Benedict Anderson, Michel Foucault, Brady Wagoner and Tania Zittoun, and Wendy Mc Kenna among a few others to discuss how identities are formed on the threshold of spatio-temporal transformation and how ambiguously transgressive they are.

The third core chapter titled "Desire in Discourse" elucidates how far the construction, sustenance and propagation of sexuality norms are discursive. How

dominant ideologies define discourses and the power dynamics involved in that are brought to light by analyzing the discourse of a few short stories. How language constitutes and distorts realities and the discursive strategies used for it are underscored. How the same discourse gives room for the resistant voices in relation to the production and consumption of the cultural codes of sexual morality is also probed into. Thus, the chapter is aimed at illustrating how the dichotomy of vulnerability and dominance is formed in the discourse of sexuality. The stories brought under analysis are "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" ("A Terrific Lover") by Unni R., "*Rathinirvedam*" (" Sexual Disenchantment") by S. Sithara, *"Vihitham"* ("The Legitimate Share") by Subhash Chandran, "*Ente laingikanweshana pareekshnangal*" ("My Experiments with Sexuality") by Abin Joseph, "*Napumsakarude pathu padavukal*" (The Ten Steps of Eunuchs") by Pramod Raman "*Olinottam*" ("The Peek") and "*Puthumazha choorulla chumbanangal*" ("Kisses Smelling of the First Rain") by E.K. Shahina.

The story "*Oru bhayankara kamukan*" ("A Terrific Lover") is built around the schizophrenic imagination of the narrator who is an artist and unravels the reciprocal relationship between repressed sexuality and schizophrenia. The intertextual nature of the story where various cultural texts like art, sculpture, narrations of mental illness, sexuality etc are intertwined with each other, calls attention to the culturally embedded nature of schizophrenia. Magic Realism as a narrative tool for tracing the schizophrenic imagination is well explored by the writer. The sick imagination of the writer parodies the repressive moral structure of the society which results in the existence of hyper sexualized beings like

Mathamappila and Chunkam Kuttiyamma in the social imaginary. The story tacitly gives the message that in a sexually repressive culture, art itself tends to be schizoid, split in its inclinations of being true to itself and being euphemistic to a repressive culture. Remarkably, the narrator never feels that he is ill but quotes others who insists on his mental illness and abnormality.

The story "*Rathinirvedam*" ("Sexual Disenchantment") foregrounds the non-conjugality of sexual instincts and puts on display different shades of love both free from and bound to sex and sexuality. The story that gives glimpses from the lives of women over a period of 30 years beginning from 1980 justifies the finding of Robin Jeffrey (1-9) about the decline in the sexual autonomy of Kerala women by the 1980s, and even goes to the extent of implying that, as far as the sexual autonomy of women is concerned, nothing worthwhile has taken place in Kerala even after thirty years. The way women belonging to two generations in Kerala assert their sexual agency is revealed by the story.

The story emphatically expresses the idea that what women seek is freedom of expression in the public space, not pleasure in private. In Kerala the cultural dilemma seems to be caused by the split and the wide gap between the private life and the public life. Moreover, the public space can be legitimately occupied only by a few people in Kerala. The story is extremely subversive in that in a society where only Platonic love is legitimized, the writer records the existence of both flesh-bound carnal love, sex without love and even love sprouting from sexuality. The girls as well as the men, get dumbfounded to find the surviving traces of sexuality in the elderly woman, where it is least expected.

The story lays bare the ideological subjectification of men and the deceptive nature of the agency that they seem to have. It revolves around the argument that men too are subjectified by a sexist discourse. The filmic text contests itself in the remake and exposes that, as far the cultural fabric of Kerala is concerned, nothing has changed over a period of three decades. The narrative of the elderly woman that is entangled with the story of the film, is linked to the lives of the girls too. Their youths are juxtaposed with the filmic texts and coincide with each other's.

The very title of the story "*Vihitham*" ("The Legitimate Share") is a pun in Malayalam which literally means the share, especially of land property one legitimately owns, and figuratively means what is legitimate and what is illegitimate regarding sexuality and extra marital affairs. The story is presented using both the journalistic discourse and the cultural discourse of patriarchal morality in a deliberate attempt to an attempt at hijacking the reader's cultural perceptions. The author gives more authenticity and credibility to the voice of the journalist friend, who narrates the story within the story, as the one who is dealing with facts. Thus, he renders a pseudo-objectivity to the discourse, and hence the story sets an example of how social identity is created by discourse.

The narrative illustrates how facts are fictionalized and mediated. The argumentative and dialectical nature of the narration gives the deceptive feeling to the readers that they too are participating in the discussion and drawing the logical conclusion. The writer is successful in giving an impression of verity and validity to the argument with the help of the nonfictional air of the discourse. The apt use of cohesive devices, such as the lexical chain of alternative words and phrases, subtly,

yet assertively conveys the message of the text. The imagery seems to be handpicked to suit the narrative that deals with adulterous sexuality. The author self reflexively opines that writers shed light for the public to weave the cultural fabric (304), underscoring the role of discourse in the construction of culture.

The author over simplifies the complex nature of the human psyche by presenting the reasons for the man and the woman to have extramarital affairs. The definition of dignity stands as an example. Falguni believes that those women who have slept with only one man in their life are dignified (311). The concept of a monogamous, patriarchal society becomes the paradigm through with the allied concepts of dignity, chastity, fidelity and purity are judged. The number of sexual partners in the life of men for them to keep dignity remains intentionally unexplored by the writer.

Abin Joseph's story "*Ente laingikanweshana pareekshnangal*" ("My Experiments with Sexuality") suggests how different kinds of corporeal existences are constituted when bodies connect to other bodies and things, both human and non-human. Bodies are not simply being human, but rather, they are enacting to be human, with the help of other bodies and objects used to set off, extend and elaborate their meanings.

The title of the story echoes obviously of M.K. Gandhi's autobiography *My Experiments with Truth* which attributes a sense of honesty to it. The story deals with a fetishism that the narrator has with books dealing with how the mere physicality of books sexually arouses him on the peripheral level, but on a deeper

level it has rich undertones of homosociality, homosocial bibliophilia, tactile bibliophilia, biblioanthropomorphism and the fluidity of the subject/object position.

The story deals with the overlapping boundaries of objects and subjects, how they assume the traits of each other and exchange positions and agency. In Abin Joseph's story books assume the subject position and agency and controls the sexuality of the narrator. His identity becomes hybrid and fluid when his body becomes a site where the subject merges with the object to form shifting alliances. The story also has undertones of homoeroticism when the sensory experiences of bibliomania legitimize and sublimate the homosexual masculine identities by creating the tactile impression of a fellow reader who might have gone through the same book.

E. K. Shahina's stories "*Olinottam"* ("The Peek") and "*Puthumazha choorulla chumbanagal*" ("Kisses Smelling of the First Rain") revolve around multiple gazes. The psychological nature of the mother's inward gaze is pitted against the child's gaze, which is physical and social in nature, with all the curiosity and intrusivity only a child can have. However, the fact that the lovers are conscious and worried of the voyeuristic intrusion of the public, robs the child's gaze of its innocence. Foucault's concept of self- discipline stimulated by a feeling of surveillance resulting from the panoptic gaze of the society becomes relevant here. The story problematizes the subjection of the female body and her sexuality to the societal gaze and also hints at the transformation of the panoptic gaze into a synoptic one (Mathiesen 215-234) where many are watching a few with the active involvement of media technologies.

In "*Puthumazha choorulla chumbanagal* ("Kisses Smelling of the First Rain"), the nun is trapped in a scopophilic cinematic gaze when she accidentally catches sight of the kissing of the students, which reminds her of her own repressed sexuality. The embodied nature of the surveillance gaze in the story progresses into a politically subversive Medussa gaze of the nun in the climax of the story, when she forces a kiss upon the boy with her rough lips.

Pramod Raman's story "*Napumsakarude pathu padavukal"* ("The Ten Steps of Eunuchs") expresses how far individual choices about sexuality are allowed to have their individually decided nature and how they become more or less influenced, coloured, negotiated and reinforced with forced performativity. The story also describes how sexuality complements this regulatory mechanism of sex in creating the bodies it controls. In this way, the performative process results in the production of the bodies and the sexuality regulating it. How performativity is reversely constituted by a continuum of precedents in sexual roles and orientation, and the agency that the sexual subject is denied sometimes in choosing such roles are emphasized by the narrator.

The narration also lays stress on the process of subjectivity formation which is based on a lack or absence, and the binary system of signification. It is only when he is watching a romantic movie in Nathan's absence that the narrator realizes his identity being next to nothing in Nathan's absence than in his presence. The inferior one is always defined by some absence or lack in Derridean terms and power always sustains itself by constructing an abnormal other.

The story functions as a meta narrative self-reflectively drawing attention to the constructed nature of gender, sex, sexuality and the related concepts. The linguistic discourse that takes place in the narrator's childhood world seem to be full of metaphors denoting sex, gender and sexuality. Even after he is permanently fixed into the female role in love making and lives in Kochi with Nathan, he finds that Nathan is so much of a male because Kochi is a female city bearing so many places bearing female names like Menaka, Padma, Saritha etc.

It is the proximity of the female metropolis that makes Nathan an alpha male, according to the narrator. The subtle role of the binary in the formation of selfhood is suggested here. Hence, sex is not used to describe what one is, but to construct what one is. When Nathan makes love, the narrator is called Thara by him, which is Nathan's own first name. Thus, he is seen to be addressing the other half of himself, which he tries to find in the narrator, completely ignoring the narrator's male identity in a narcissistic way. The hierarchical nature of power play inherent in any kind of gendered sexual relationships is once again underscored by the story, insisting on how language becomes a tool of power in sexuality choices.

The major theorists mentioned in this chapter are Janis Hunter Jenkins and Robert John Barret, Delueze and Guattari, Mark Seem, Zamora and Faris, R.D Laing, Norman Fairclough, Lisa Blackman, Bill Brown, Merleau Ponty, Katherina Boehm, Victoria Mills, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler. The chapter elucidates how the existing power dynamics is reinforced or challenged by language and narration. It also substatiates how both desire and purity norms are discursively constructed and reshaped.

Chapter 6

Findings, Recommendations and Scope for Further Exploration

The research tries to trace the evolution of the norms of sexual purity and fidelity and maps how such norms get reconfigured along the gastro-political, spatial and the discursive profiles of culture. The representation of 'impure' deviancies in the select stories are seen to be political in nature, deliberately asserting the assumption of agency by the sexually vulnerable /deviant groups such as women and queer people, by the so-called violation of the moral codes imposed by society. The select stories reflect how these groups undermine the sexual purity concepts constructed by discourse, power, ideology, and morality. The research also throws some light on the transition of such groups from passive bearers of meaning superscribed on them into active agents of signification in a counter culture.

The study also puts the spotlight on the nexus between gastropolitics and sexual politics as revealed by the stories. Food politics is seen to be one of the intersectional vectors contributing to the construction of the norms of sexual morality. The post-millennial writers are also seen to be making conscious use of animal imagery to bring about how their parallel lives constitute powerful allegories of human lives and sexual impulses.

The research also examines the role played by gender in the construction of carnality. The fluid nature of the sexual appetite is read along with the contours of food politics where the appetite is multilayered and corresponds to physical, sexual,

social and political cravings for representation and identity where social identity is defined by class, caste and gender, sexuality, physical and mental well-being etc. Food constitutes its own semiotic order and functions as a powerful cultural tool to mark class, caste, sexual subjectivity and liberation in most of the selected stories.The interactive way in which food, sex and power work to weave 'the sexual imaginary' of the public is laid stress upon.

The construction of sexuality and sexualized bodies are treated hand in hand with various norms and practices related to the cultural production, distribution and consumption of food, like vegetarianism, non-vegetarianism, consuming raw food, cooked food, leftover food and stale food and commensality, and the purity norms associated with these practices so that their nexus is revealed. The study discloses the obscure role of the alimentary regime and the sexual regime in the regulation of the intermingling of bodies. Sexual predatoriness and corporeal domination are read against a gastropolitical backdrop and also against the background of the caste-ridden society of Kerala.

The thesis gives priority to the way multiple parameters like caste, class, postcoloniality, gender, ethnicity, religious identity, and mental and physical wellbeing interlock to produce and reflect sexual subjectivities and related identities. The word interlock is prioritized over intersect to show the enmeshed, tangled and solid relationship between such vectors. The cultural detangling of such a meshed relationship calls for awareness and political vigilance.

The research also highlights the cultural association between canine imagery and the non-legitimized association between carnivorous eating habits and sexual

promiscuity and deviancy. The public gaze at the upper class, upper caste life, which is inaccessibly glamorous and mysterious as far as its private sexual life is concerned, is found to be marked by desire and disgust at the same time.

Even gender is found to be constructed along the lines of food politics in some of the stories. Hegemonic masculinity assumes the shape of a luxurious commodity in certain stories which can be afforded only by the affluent under the capitalist regime. How food functions as a class marker within the caste discourse and how food metaphors get branded into the intellectual imagination of the populace is emphasized.

It is also found out in the study that even those who use repressive apparatuses to interpellate others are ideologically interpellated. The study also throws some light on how the powerless and the vulnerable are emasculated and zoomorphized. To put it in a different way, those who wield power in terms of their caste, class and gender are treated to be predatorial, virile and masculine in a hegemonic way. Ironically, the hegemonic masculinity addresses other hegemonic masculinities only and subjugates all other non-normative bodies. Such masculinities are found to be defined against 'lesser' masculinities, not against femininity. It is also suggested that people who do not have power are effeminate, fragile, easy to domesticate and animal like.

Yet another important aspect the study deals with is the question of masculine ownership and patronage of female bodies. Here religion prescribes purity norms which traverse the boundaries of spirituality into the body. The female body

becomes the site, where spiritual purity rests on and even gets synonymous with sexual abstinence.

How the hypocritical moral codes act by disciplining the bodily practices is elucidated by martial arts like Karate which tames and grooms the body in a homogeneous muscular fashion. The state taps the biopower of its subjects through such taming practices, that are obscured by hegemonic rule.

The study also expounds how the sexual and the spatial mutually constitute and define each other by unravelling the erotic topographies where the evolution of sexuality norms takes place spatially. It also cartographically traces the evolution of sexualized bodies and their performance in liminal spaces. The social construction of desire and sexuality and the politicization of the sexualized body in space is explicated. How the ideology around a legitimate life is constituted in the cultural landscape of Kerala, through the imagination around the sexual subject in the public space, is also explored.

The dissertation brings to light the embodied nature of individual agency in bringing about structural social changes and how individual lives and actions gather a social significance at the collective level. It also illuminates how the sexual becomes the political; how the private becomes the public; and how the affective evolves into the ideological.To examine the varying behavioral patterns marking the shifting moral codes, the concept of “moral geography”, the space dependent nature of prevailing moral codes, has been made use of.

Foucault’s concepts of heterotopic spaces and heterochronies which are “slices in time” are also applied to reveal how sexuality transforms in various

spaces. The Deleuzian concept of striated space that fits well into the power structure by enhancing the homogeneity of the occupants is also explored. How the urban spaces become deceptively ideal for experimentation and evolution owing to their uniformity and the consequent anonymity has also been looked into. The peripheral liberalism is found to be deceptive in that it is also made available under the supervision and constant surveillance of the state. The thesis also substantiates how identities themselves are liminal, unstable and constantly in flux.

An escape into a utopian world of epicureanism from the boredom and stress created by the workspace is a dream stimulated by Capitalism. When the pleasure-seeking individual urges clash with the disciplinary mechanism of the society, flexible liminal spaces are created, providing room for disruptions.

The spatial is conceived as stretched out class relations drawing upon Doreen Massey. The study explicates how the spatial is directly related to the economy and society and how class relations always assume a social form. The mutually defining nature of the social, the spatial and the sexual is elucidated. The lopsided spatial relationship reflects inferiority and marginality and in turn it constitutes the sexual servility. The study diagrammatically represents how the citadel shaped spatial positioning of the feudal household and the way the tenants are centrifuged along the peripheries show the relationship between the spatial and the sexual.

The research also underscores how the chastity of high class/caste women are defined and set off in contrast by the impurity of low class/caste women. Certain people are ousted from the haptic space of Caste Hindus because of their potential to defile and contaminate the so-called sexual purity which goes aligned with caste

purity. It is also found that it is more difficult to traverse caste boundaries which is bound to class, in the cultural milieu of Kerala than traversing boundaries set by religious norms.

The study also illustrates the instrumental role played by the landscape in inscribing sexual identities on the body. The concept of 'family' is also reconfigured drawing comparisons and contrasts with the tribal family which is more or less fluid, flexible and wall-less and where women have agency and where their sexuality organically blossoms.

K. Rekha's story which is set against the International Film Festival of Kerala is used to elucidate how the free expression of repressed sexuality is made possible with the transformation of certain spaces into carnival spaces. It is also substantiated in the research how films function as "liminal affective technologies", mediating and facilitating imaginative and emotional cultural processes and connecting them with the actual processes of psychosocial transformation. It is found that the film festival carries the double potential of a carnivalesque space, one on screen and the other off screen.

The thesis reconfigures menopause as a liminal and productive space, severing its culturally attributed connection with female sexuality which in turn is always seen inextricably bound to fertility. Serious concerns are raised about the construction, consumption and the disposal of the female body as a consumerist commodity, whose value is determined by its capacity to generate pleasure.

The discursive nature of the construction, prevalence and propagation of sexuality norms is also explicated. How discourses themselves are modulated by

dominant ideologies and the underlying power dynamics are spelled out by the study. It also sheds light on the voices of resistance raised from the cultural gaps provided by the same discourse. It is also argued that the dichotomy of vulnerability and dominance becomes the semiotic backbone of the discourse of sexuality.

Yet another important aspect of the study is the way it unfolds the intricate relationship between discourse and purity norms, be it sexual purity, caste wise purity, the heteronormative purity or the purity related to the relationship between humans and objects. The questions of how and why monogamy and endogamy are promoted by patriarchal societies and why it becomes an ideological necessity for the caste-ridden society of India to sustain endogamy as an institution is explored in the study. The thesis also underscores how the prevalence of the system of endogamy results in the prohibition of certain modes of desires for the socially vulnerable groups.

The culturally embedded nature of mental illnesses like schizophrenia is also brought under analysis. Schizophrenia is not represented as a mental illness but rather as a symptom of a diseased sexually repressive culture. The scope of Magic Realism as a narrative tool for tracing the schizophrenic imagination is also studied. The reciprocal relationship between the existence of hyper sexualized beings like Mathamappila and Chunkam Kuttiyamma in the social imaginary and a repressive culture is brought under analysis. Art itself is found to be schizoid, in a hypocritical culture, split in its inclinations of being true to itself and being euphemistic to a repressive culture.

The non-conjugality of sexual instincts is also explored. The study also corroborates the finding of Robin Jeffrey that there is a decline in the sexual autonomy of Kerala women by the 1980s when compared to the previous decades. The cultural conundrum in Kerala is found to be caused by the split between the public and the private and moreover the legitimate space is the public life is owned by only a few people in Kerala. It is also found that what women in Kerala seek is freedom of self-expression in the public space, not pleasure in private.

The thesis also exposes the ideological subjectification of men by a sexist discourse and the deceptive nature of the agency that they seem to have. The pseudo nature of the objectivity that discourse seems to have sometimes, is aimed at an ideological as well as cultural hijack. Discourse is also seen to be functioning by ideological mediation of facts and the use of dialectical narration where the readers are given the illusory feeling that they too participate in the meaning making process and hence are able to arrive at logical conclusions.

The study also sheds light on the constitution of various corporeal existence when bodies connect to other bodies and things, both human and non-human. Bodies are seen to enacting as human with the help of other bodies and objects which are used to set off, extend and elaborate their meanings. Hence, humanness also becomes a performance rather than a state of existence, like gender and sexuality. The thesis also delves into homosociality, homosocial bibliophilia, tactile bibliophilia, biblioanthropomorphism and the fluidity of the subject/object position in the light of a fetishism that one of the characters has for books. How books assume the subject position and agency and controls the sexuality of the narrator is

elucidated. The hybrid and fluid identity of the character is the result of his body becoming a site where the subject merges with the object to form shifting alliances. The study also brings to focus homoeroticism where the tactile experiences of bibliomania legitimize and sublimates the homosexual masculine identities.

The research also analyzes the relevance of multiple gazes which circumscribe, limit and modulate the mobility of sexuality. The voyeuristic intrusive gaze of the public is aimed at generating a self- discipline stimulated by a feeling of surveillance. The panoptic gaze of the society has transformed into a synoptic one where many are watching a few with the active involvement of media technologies. The scope for countering the embodied surveillance gaze with a politically powerful Meduza gaze is also looked into.

There is also a probe into the extent of the individually decided nature of sexuality choices and it is found that the choices get more or less influenced, colored, negotiated and reinforced with performativity. Hence, choices are seen to be thrust upon vulnerable individuals sometimes, which later get reiterated and reinforced with performativity. The thesis also finds out how the regulatory mechanism of sex is complemented by sexuality in creating the bodies it controls. Therefore, the performative process gives birth to the bodies and the sexuality regulating it. The continuum of precedents in sexual roles and orientation, constituted by reiterated performativity, is laid stress upon. The formation of sexual subjectivity based upon a lack or absence, and the binaries of signification in sexuality discourses are also highlighted. Sex is seen to be constructing what one is, rather than describing a prevailing identity.

The scope for the overturning and destabilization of the normative elements in the construction of sexuality and sexual purity is highlighted. The constructed nature of sexuality, the role of performative elements in its constitution, and how far the power of performativity is gender specific etc. are also explored in the thesis.

Scope for Further Research

The study provides further scope for exploring counter cultures where the prevailing power equations and hierarchies are politically subverted. There is also a scope for research on the networking between gastropolitics and sexuality studies. The nexus between food discourses, sexual appetite, craving for power and representation, sexual predatoriness and corporeal domination and the role played by these elements in weaving the sexual imaginary of the populace can be exposed further. How the intermingling of the bodies is regulated by the convergence of the alimentary regime and the sexual regime has to be probed into in detail.

How the parallel lives of animals semiotically supplement and allegorize human sexuality can also be studied upon. How the vulnerable are zoomorphized and emasculated and how they are conceived to be easily tamable, feminine and animal like give scope for additional analysis.

The study also gives further insights into replacing the word intersect with interlock, when the solid and enmeshed relationship among multiple vectors like caste, class, postcoloniality, gender, ethnicity, religious identity, and mental and physical wellbeing, producing sexual subjectivities, in the cultural context of Kerala, is taken into consideration.

How hegemonic masculinity prevails by addressing itself and how it sets itself off by vulnerable masculinities also deserves further investigation. The commodification of hegemonic masculinity as some luxury affordable only by the affluent under the capitalist regime also can be studied.

The male ownership and patronage of female bodies is another question raised by the research. How the female body becomes a site where the purity norms regarding sexual abstinence are inscribed by religion also has some scope for further exploration.

How martial arts like Karate is aimed at disciplining of the bodily practices and grooming the body in a homogeneous fashion and thus facilitating the effective tapping of the biopower by the state should also be brought under further research.

The thesis also gives immense scope for conducting further investigation into the reciprocal and complementary constitution of the sexual and the spatial, by exploring the erotic topographies and the moral geographies of desire. How the sexualized bodies perform in liminal spaces can also be looked into. How individual actions regarding sexuality gather a collective revolutionary significance at the social level and how the affective becomes the ideological comes under the purview of related research.

How the purity norms are contrived to set off the chastity of high caste, middle class women against the impurity of low caste subaltern women also have scope to be analyzed. How the chances of contaminating caste purity go aligned with those of defiling sexual purity, in the Indian scenario, can also be studied.

The concept of family as an institution and its potential to evolve into a wall-less and fluid one where the vulnerable people have more sexual agency can also be investigated.

How certain spaces permit the free expression of sexuality by getting temporarily transformed into heterotopic and carnival spaces has to be further explored. Spaces like that of film festivals have the double potential of a carnivalesque space, one on screen and the other off screen and the way such spaces complement and contradict each other carries the prospects for a probe. There is also scope for further research on the potential of films to act as “liminal affective technologies”, arbitrating and expediting imaginative and emotional cultural processes and linking them with the actual processes of psychosocial transformation.

Menopause has to be studied in a new light, as a liminal creative space, disconnecting it from the cultural and biological traces of fertility, productivity and usefulness. Serious research has to be conducted on the construction, consumption and the disposal of the female body as a consumerist commodity, whose market value is calculated by its capacity to generate pleasure and to reproduce.

There is some scope for studying more about the discursive nature of the construction of sexuality and the dichotomy of vulnerability and dominance forming the semiotic basis of sexuality discourses.

Mental illnesses like schizophrenia can be studied laying stress upon its culturally embedded nature and can be understood more as a symptom than as a disease. This is symptomatic of a sexually repressive hypocritical culture. The narrative scope of Magic Realism as a tool for reflecting the schizophrenic

imagination and delusional thought processes can also be explored. The schizoid nature of Art under a hypocritically repressive culture can be further analyzed, when Art itself gets split in its flattering allegiance to a repressive culture and commitment in being true to itself.

The ideological subjectification of men by a sexist discourse and the deceptive nature of the agency that they seem to have has to be brought under further investigation. Being labelled as predators by a sexist discourse, they too are victimized by the same discourse.

Various corporeal existence owing to the connection and extension of bodies to objects and other bodies, both human and non-human and the fluidity of the subject/object positions can also be explicated. Further light can be shed on the very nature and status of humanness, which becomes a performance rather than a state of permanent existence.

The research also analyzes multiple gazes and their potential for prevailing moral codes and subverting them. The public gaze at the upper class, upper caste life which is marked by desire and disgust, the voyeuristic surveillance gaze, the panoptic gaze of the society aimed at generating self-discipline, the synoptic one where many are watching a few, the politically powerful Meduza gaze etc. give scope for future studies.

How the sexuality choices get more or less influenced, colored, negotiated and reinforced with performativity; how choices are imposed on vulnerable individuals sometimes; and how they get reiterated and reinforced with performativity, such questions carry seeds of further inquiry. How the regulatory

mechanism of sex is complemented by sexuality and how both of them together create the bodies they control can also be looked into in detail. Finally, the research throws open new avenues for exploration of the political destabilization of normativity, in discourses regarding sexuality and purity.

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