

Gendered Mobilities and Kerala Modernity: Relocating Malayali Women's Creative Writings in English

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by
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Under the Guidance of
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis titled **“Gendered Mobilities and Kerala Modernity: Relocating Malayali Women’s Creative Writings in English”** is an authentic record of my studies and research carried out under the guidance of Dr. Syam Sudhakar, Assistant Professor and Research Guide, Research and Postgraduate Department of English, St. Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur. I hereby certify that no part of this work has been submitted or published for the award of any other degree, diploma, title, fellowship or recognition. 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 to be within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI-generated content.

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Date: 29 July 2026



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1. Revision of the final sentence on page 132.

The above suggestion has been duly incorporated into the thesis. It is further certified that the contents in the thesis and the soft copy submitted herewith are one and the same.

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S Suthara

Abstract

This thesis explores the history of English creative writings of Malayali women, situating their works within the trajectories of migration, modernity and gendered experience in Kerala. The research problem addressed is the absence of a holistic approach to the history of female creative praxis from Kerala. The central hypothesis underlying this study is that migration as a phenomenon has been one of the primary catalysts enabling women from Kerala to venture into creative writing. Through a textual analysis of fourteen major writers—including Kamala Das, Anna Sujatha Mathai, Meena Alexander, Arundhati Roy, among others—supported by personal interviews and secondary literature, the thesis records the evolution of women's writing in English from Kerala across different migratory contexts and generations. A key contribution of this research is the categorisation of Malayali women writers into four groups based on their migratory experiences: pre-global writers who migrated or stayed within India, pre-global writers who migrated abroad, post-global writers who migrated within India and post-global writers who migrated abroad. Employing the theoretical frameworks that connect migration and gendered experience, as proposed by theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Gloria Anzaldúa and Édouard Glissant, the work analyses how these varied mobilities shape the writers' identities and literary productions.

The first chapter presents an overview of Kerala writing in English and categorises female creative writers into four major groups. Chapter two traces Kerala's migration history with focus to female mobility and presents the theoretical framework. Chapters three to six analyse the creative works of each group, examining how migration and gender intersect and manifest in their writings. The seventh chapter consolidates inferences, synthesising findings through comparative analysis, while chapters eight and nine offer recommendations and conclusion. The findings reveal that migration and modernity are deeply intertwined in the formation of a distinct female literary identity from Kerala, with creative works often reflecting autobiographical elements and negotiations of gender, displacement and belonging. This study contributes a comprehensive historical and theoretical framework for understanding Malayali women's English writings, establishing them as central to the ongoing project of Kerala modernity, and in doing so, becomes a pioneering attempt in this field.

Keywords: Kerala modernity, gender and migration, English education, Malayali women writers, creative writing in English

സംഗ്രഹം

കേരളത്തിൽ നിന്നുള്ള ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് സർഗ്ഗാത്മക എഴുത്തുകാരികളുടെ ചരിത്രം രേഖപ്പെടുത്തുകയും അവരുടെ രചനകളുടെ അവലോകനം നടത്തുകയുമാണ് ഈ പ്രബന്ധം ചെയ്യുന്നത്. കേരളത്തിന്റെ കുടിയേറ്റ ചരിത്രം, ആധുനികത, ലിംഗഭേദാനുഭവം എന്നീ ഘടകങ്ങൾ കേരളത്തിലെ ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് എഴുത്തുകളെ എപ്രകാരം സ്വാധീനിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് പഠനം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. മലയാളികളായ എഴുത്തുകാരികളുടെ ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് രചനകളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള സമഗ്രമായ ഒരു ചരിത്രത്തിന്റെ അഭാവത്തെയാണ് ഈ ഗവേഷണം പ്രശ്നവൽക്കരിക്കുന്നത്. എഴുത്തുകാരായ സ്ത്രീകളുടെ ജീവിതരേഖ പരിശോധിക്കുന്നതിലൂടെ കുടിയേറ്റമാണ് ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് സർഗ്ഗാത്മകതയിലേക്ക് ഇവരെ നയിക്കുന്ന പ്രധാന ഉത്തേജകങ്ങളിലൊന്നെന്ന് ഈ പഠനം പരികൽപ്പിക്കുന്നു. വ്യക്തിഗത അഭിമുഖങ്ങളുടേയും ദ്വിതീയസ്രോതസ്സുകളുടേയും പിന്തുണയോടെ കമല ദാസ്, അന്ന സുജാത മത്തായി, മീന അലക്സാണ്ടർ, അരുന്ധതി റോയ് തുടങ്ങിയ പതിനാല് പ്രമുഖ എഴുത്തുകാരുടെ രചനകളെ വിശകലനവിധേയമാക്കുകയാണ് ഇവിടെ.

കുടിയേറ്റത്തിന്റെ സ്വഭാവത്തേയും കാലഘട്ടത്തേയും അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കി എഴുത്തുകാരെ നാല് വിഭാഗങ്ങളായി ക്രോഡീകരിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു: ആഗോളവൽക്കരണത്തിന് മുൻപ് ഇന്ത്യയ്ക്കുള്ളിൽ കുടിയേറ്റം നടത്തിയവർ, ആഗോളവൽക്കരണത്തിന് മുൻപ് വിദേശത്തേക്ക് കുടിയേറ്റം നടത്തിയവർ, ആഗോളവൽക്കരണത്തിന് ശേഷം ഇന്ത്യയ്ക്കുള്ളിൽ കുടിയേറ്റം നടത്തിയവർ, ആഗോളവൽക്കരണത്തിന് ശേഷം വിദേശത്തേക്ക് കുടിയേറ്റം നടത്തിയവർ. കിംബർലെ ക്രെൻഷൊ, ഗ്ലോറിയ അൻസാൽദുവ, എഡ്വാർഡ് ഗ്ലിസന്റ് തുടങ്ങിയവരുടെ സൈദ്ധാന്തിക വ്യവസ്ഥകൾ ഉപയോഗിച്ചുകൊണ്ട്, കുടിയേറ്റവും അതിനോടനുബന്ധിക്കുന്ന ലിംഗഭേദാനുഭവങ്ങളും ഈ എഴുത്തുകാരുടെ സ്വത്വത്തെയും രചനാശൈലിയെയും എങ്ങനെ രൂപപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു എന്ന് പ്രബന്ധം ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുന്നു.

ഒമ്പത് അധ്യായങ്ങളിലായാണ് പ്രബന്ധം ക്രമീകരിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്. ആദ്യ അധ്യായം കേരളത്തിലെ ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് എഴുത്തുകാരുടെ ഒരു പൊതു അവലോകനം അവതരിപ്പിക്കുകയും, സ്ത്രീ എഴുത്തുകാരെ നാല് വിഭാഗങ്ങളായി തരംതിരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. രണ്ടാം അധ്യായം കേരളത്തിലെ കുടിയേറ്റചരിത്രം പരിശോധിക്കുകയും പ്രബന്ധത്തിന്റെ സൈദ്ധാന്തികമായ പശ്ചാത്തലം വ്യക്തമാക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. മൂന്ന് മുതൽ ആറ് വരെയുള്ള അധ്യായങ്ങൾ ഓരോ വിഭാഗങ്ങളായി തരംതിരിച്ച എഴുത്തുകാരുടെ പലായനചരിത്രത്തെ അവരുടെ കൃതികളെ മുൻനിർത്തി വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. ഏഴാം അധ്യായം അനുമാനങ്ങളെ ഏകീകരിക്കുകയും താരതമ്യത്തിലൂടെ ഗവേഷണത്തിന്റെ കണ്ടെത്തലുകളെ സമന്വയിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. എട്ട്, ഒമ്പത് അധ്യായങ്ങൾ തുടർഗവേഷണത്തിനുള്ള ശുപാർശകൾ മുന്നോട്ടുവയ്ക്കുകയും പ്രബന്ധത്തെ ഉപസംഹരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. കുടിയേറ്റവും ലിംഗപദവിയും തമ്മിലുള്ള സങ്കീർണ്ണമായ ബന്ധം എങ്ങനെയാണ് കേരളത്തിലെ ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് എഴുത്തുകാരികളുടെ കൃതികളിൽ ആത്മകഥാപരമായ അംശങ്ങളായും സ്വത്വപ്രതിസന്ധികളായും പ്രകടമാകുന്നത് എന്ന് ഈ പഠനം കണ്ടെത്തുന്നു. കേരളത്തിലെ ആധുനികതയുടെ പശ്ചാത്തലത്തിൽ മലയാളി എഴുത്തുകാരികളുടെ ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് രചനകളെ ഒരു തനത് സാഹിത്യവിഭാഗമായി അടയാളപ്പെടുത്തുന്നതിനും ഈ മേഖലയിൽ പുതിയ ഗവേഷണസാധ്യതകൾ തുറന്നിടുന്നതിനും ഈ പഠനം സഹായകമാകുന്നു.

മാർഗ്ഗരശകപദങ്ങൾ: കേരളത്തിലെ ആധുനികത, ലിംഗപദവിയും കുടിയേറ്റവും, ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം, മലയാളി വനിതാ എഴുത്തുകാർ, ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് സർഗ്ഗാത്മക സാഹിത്യം

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Chapter I

History and Evolution of Kerala Writing in English

Despite the existence of Kerala's literary engagements in English dating back to the 1920s and 30s, a historical identification and placement of Kerala writers in English under an umbrella categorisation has not yet taken place. K. Ayyappa Paniker urges the need to study Malayali writers of English in his preface to the series of monographs *Kerala Writers in English* (1980–1990) that he has edited, but a continuation of such an attempt has not happened in academia. Malayali women began their creative practice in English later than men, starting only in the 1960s with writers like Kamala Das leading the way. This delay and considerable time gap between males and females venturing into creative writing is further problematic, as it is closely linked with the late occurrence of women's English education and their delayed social mobility. Regardless, even Paniker's work omits a thorough focus on female writers, except for a monograph on Kamala Das, despite the presence of remarkable contemporaries. Within the not-so-vocalised categorisation of Kerala writers in English, women's names are further blurred. Here arises the major research gap that paved the way to this research: why have there not been any major studies on the history of female creative praxis from Kerala, other than dispersed and scattered studies on individual writers.

A close observation of the lives and creative ventures of Malayali writers implies that most of those who write in English have experienced some form of migration in their lives. The central hypothesis underlying this research is that migration has been a central phenomenon that has catalysed women's creative engagements from Kerala. This research aims to explore how colonial modernity, English education, and increased social mobility of women have influenced their creative production, as reflected in their lives and writings. To venture into historical documentation and placement of female creative

writers, it becomes important to look into an overview of Kerala writing in English. This chapter thereby attempts to trace an outline of Kerala's history of creative writings and underscores the late venturing of women into the field. Since writers like G. K. Chettur, S. K. Chettur and A. S. P. Ayyar ventured into creative productions during the 1920s and 1930s, it becomes important to trace the pre-independence social and cultural sensibility of Kerala that provided these early writers with an atmosphere for creative writing.

Kerala during the Indian independence movement consisted of two princely states: Travancore and Cochin, which united in the year 1949 to be known as Thiruvananthapuram. The Malabar region, formerly a part of the Madras district, was merged into the existing provinces, and Kerala as a state as it is today was formed in the year 1956. The state witnessed major rebellions that paralleled the independence struggle, such as the Malabar rebellion of 1921. Issues of caste hierarchy and malpractices such as untouchability came into the limelight of debate, which later led to the famous Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936. The outcome of the event, though slow, was extremely radical in making a theoretically egalitarian society in terms of religion over the years. A. Sreedhara Menon in *A Social and Cultural History of Kerala* (1979) evaluates the inherent evils of the caste-ridden Kerala society that functioned with the backbone of feudalism as such: "feudal anarchy of the worst type prevailed over the land. In the absence of a central power, the *Naduvazhis* or feudal chieftains exercised enormous powers. The period also saw the operation of the caste system at its worst" (52). But it is to be noted that even during that age of "moral degeneracy," rulers of Kerala gave ample relevance to the educational system and literacy rate by patronising scholars (52). This education, however, was extended only to the privileged high-caste society, leaving the lower castes and marginalised communities largely uneducated and without access to these educational opportunities. Sreedhara Menon also points out that,

by the first half of the nineteenth century, “the pioneer work done by the Christian Missionaries in introducing Western education paved the way for the active entry of the state into the educational field in a big way” (299). The age also saw a trend of first-generation migration from the people of Kerala to places such as Ceylon, Burma, Calcutta and Madras. During this period, Malayali men experienced significant social mobility, which led many to migrate to places like the U.K. for higher education, and some of these individuals turned to writing in English. The first-generation of English creative writers from Kerala, who wrote in years prior to Indian independence, as mentioned earlier, include G. K. Chettur, A. S. P. Ayyar, S. K. Chettur and Manjeri Isvaran.

The 1930s saw a scrutiny and challenge to the traditional order and dominance of the upper class. This period was followed by the rise of communism driven by the ideas of Marxism and revolution. With the leadership of E. M. S. Namboothiripad, several land reforms were implemented so as to level the fissure between the rich and the poor. Under the Nehruvian policies, which aimed to create a socialist economy by addressing its drawbacks and shortcomings, India experienced a rise in democracy across all sectors. Developmental plans aimed at modernisation, such as the five-year plans, came into action, and a new era of technological advancement began. Developmental modernity had reached its full potential by 1956 when Kerala was formed. The age showed a steady graph of upward mobility in terms of modernisation that helped in transforming the traditional and primitive setting of the country altogether. This transgression into a world of technological advancement is evident in writers who wrote during this social temperament. The advent of colonial and nationalistic discourses resulted in ‘Kerala modernity,’ which is rather a complex term used to denote rapid socio-political changes that took place in Kerala during the period.

The age without any debate was an amalgamation of tensions and struggles, both politically and socially. It can be regarded as a period of transition in which India changed rapidly from the hands of colonisers to an entirely new form of administration. Modernisation also marked the beginning of new ways of thinking, specifically in matters of gender equality and the eradication of caste injustices. The age saw the emergence of women's workspaces; issues of women and children came to be addressed more vocally. Another major trend of the age, as mentioned before, was rapid migration, which triggered economic and cultural flux. This in turn reduced poverty and gave an answer to the widespread unemployment crisis in Kerala. The overall financial support for the state increased due to this cultural movement of people, which resulted in a significant influx of capital. It is notable that the migration history of Kerala is more rapid and bulky in number than any other state in India, causing the place to be culturally rich and dynamic. Within India, cities such as Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Bangalore, and Calcutta offered promising employment opportunities that triggered mass migration during this period. John Samuel, in his article "Migration from Kerala: The end of an era?" explains that, as a result of such a phenomenon, there was a rise in the Malayali middle-class economy on a pan-Indian level. The period from the 1970s to the 1990s saw a new fashion of migration to Gulf countries, the U.S. and countries of Europe. Towards the 1960s, women began creative praxis in English as well. Writers who developed their sensibilities as a result of their Western education and/or migrant identity during this pre-global age include K. P. S. Menon, Menon Marath, Aubrey Menen, Kamala Das, Leela Devi, V. Balakrishnan, Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander.

The post-globalisation age [though globalisation as an event is usually denoted to have initiated during the 1970s, the effects of the same in India can be seen as evident only towards the 1990s, and the thesis henceforth implies years after the 1990s as the

post-global age] witnessed the rise and mass flourishing of Kerala writing in English. This group is rather an umbrella category which constitutes a wide array of a ceaseless number of writers. With the globalisation process at its zenith, Kerala's education sector excelled with the implementation of new educational policies and amendments. The fascination for migration to other places never settled for Keralites, as this age saw the movement of more technically skilled and advanced people towards other parts of the world. An overall development in all aspects of social life, including health, education, transport and finance, underwent a significant transformation in this age. The income flow from the Gulf countries from migrant workers resulted in the rise of a new group of financially efficient people, who were able to invest in local businesses and improve the overall economic landscape of Kerala.

It is notable that the age also went through women's migration to other places in search of better prospects, a positive trend to be observed in gender relations. Many of the writers belonging to this group are settled outside Kerala—the aftermath of settlement outside the state by the generation right before them. Writers whose sensibilities were developed as a result of their English education and/or migration and whose literary productions mainly happened during the post-global age include Shashi Tharoor, C. P. Surendran, Susan Visvanathan, Jeet Thayil, Usha Zacharias, Arundhati Roy, Jaishree Misra, Vijay Nambisan, Anita Nair, Anees Salim, Anand Neelakantan, Karthika Nair, Shinnie Antony, Thachom Poyil Rajeevan, Anupama Raju, Gopikrishnan Kottoor, Shreekumar Varma, Chandramohan S., Syam Sudhakar and Smitha Sehgal. Apart from these names, the post-global age has witnessed [and continues to do so] the rise of many new voices from Malayalis in creative writing in English. This includes writers with Kerala lineage with English literary productions such as Meera Nair [Kerala-based writer], Sabin Iqbal, Shaharu Nusaiba Kannanari, Aditya Shankar, Meera

Nair [U.S.-based writer], Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Tania James, Babitha Justin, Ardra Manasi, Ravi Shanker [Ra Sh], Binu Karunakaran, Arya Gopi, Meenakshi Sajeev, Sanjena Sathian, Anilkumar Payyappilly Vijayan and Jyotish Gopinathan. The research focuses solely on prominent and representative ‘creative writers’ in English from Kerala, and the list includes writers who regard themselves as creatives in English, those who have produced English literary works and whose creative works in English define their identity, life and career. By ‘creative writing,’ the thesis refers to mainstream literary productions, including novels, short fiction, plays and poems.

Prose was one of the most significant forms of expression in English used by Malayali writers even before venturing into creative practices in it. Contributions of English scholars such as P. Palpu and K. M. Panikkar are of immense value in the prosaic literature of India. N. Viswanathan, in the third volume of *Kerala Writers in English*, explores the early life and education of P. Palpu, stating that Palpu received his basic lesson from an Englishman who was his private tutor (2). Having got his higher education from Madras and later specialising in medicine from London, Palpu definitely benefited from this exposure to the English language. Palpu, during his lifetime, used his proficiency in the English language to address and write letters to the authorities against the societal evils and inequalities. Those letters serve as testimonies of an era when the English language emerged as a mode of protest. In that sense, the speeches and letters of P. Palpu are of immense cultural significance, as they voice the unheard voices of a dark age in the history of Kerala. These writings and talks are also valid historical proofs for the advent of English-based educational modernity in Kerala. Though Palpu was not a creative writer in English, he was one of the pioneers in mastering the English language and thereby requires a special mention.

Significant journalists like Pothan Joseph, who was another early scholar of the English language, also require a special mention in discussing Kerala writing, though he was not a creative writer. Joseph himself forms a continuum to the English language masters of the age, thereby catalysing the concept of Kerala modernity and initiating Kerala's creative engagements in the future. The age witnessed people who have mastered the English language moving out to cities outside Kerala in search of a bigger audience. This phenomenon can be identified as a form of resistance against the limitations of a state that possibly denied upward mobility in recognition of English language acquisition and usage. The aspiration for greater opportunities among these masters was praiseworthy, as it contributed to their personal growth and allowed them to connect with a larger English-speaking community. Sardar K. M. Panikkar is another prolific prose writer who began using the English language specifically to pen non-fiction, while he left no genres untouched in Malayalam. K. Ayyappa Paniker, in the fourth volume of *Kerala Writers in English*, stresses that it was during his Oxford times that Panikkar first published an article in English (3). He was of the belief that English not only helped the non-natives to connect with the outer, bigger world but also made intellectual growth possible (22).

This legacy of English prose writing soon delved into Malayali writers' expression through creative practices. A quick look into the Indian literary scenario since the 19th century shows that poetry enjoyed the privilege of being the genre in which most early creative literary production in English happened. A prominent literary figure of this period of Indian poetry in English from Kerala is Govinda Krishna Chettur, born in 1898 in Palakkad, Kerala. B. F. Mohammed Abdul Rahiman, in his doctoral thesis on the life and works of the poet, observes that G. K. Chettur belongs to the group of Indian poets in English who embraced the tradition set forth by Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt and

Sarojini Naidu and can be considered a predecessor to writers like Manjeri Isvaran (16). Hailing from a family of intellectuals and scholars, G. K. Chettur received higher education from Oxford, sponsored by his uncle Sir Chettur Sankaran Nair (Rahiman 2). The financial stability of a family often decided the fate of education in India during G. K. Chettur's time. Nair households in particular sought to educate the members of the family with intentions to land bureaucratic jobs in colonial India. During his years in Oxford, G. K. Chettur is known to have met and discussed his poetry with great poets of the age such as W. B. Yeats and Arthur Symons (Rahiman 2). He has written five major collections of poetry—*Sounds and Images* (1921), *Gumataraya and Other Sonnets for all Moods* (1932), *The Temple Tank and Other Poems* (1932), *The Triumph of Love* (1932) and *The Shadow of God* (1934)—along with some prose that contains short stories and essays of personal recollections.

Although G. K. Chettur was born in Kerala, much of his life was away from his birthplace. He received primary education in Madras before leaving for Oxford. His later career as an academic was based in Madras and Mangalore (Rahiman 2). Consequently, a sensibility belonging specifically to Kerala and its literature is explicitly absent in his poetry and prose. Scholar M. K. Naik in his critical work *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982) considers G. K. Chettur as belonging to a group of writers “who derive their light mainly from the sun of British Romanticism” (144).

The literary influences G. K. Chettur encountered during his time at Oxford justify his choice of English for his creative enterprise. As Rahiman describes, “Chettur writes English as if he were born to it” (111). His short stories have a flavour of his life in the South Canara region in Karnataka, but the mention is limited to the geographical landscapes. The inspiration, “seem to belong more to the English tradition than to the Indian” as they present “club life, bus and train journeys” (131), alien to pre-independent

India. His choice to write in English rather than any other regional language [Kannada, for instance, of which he had a sound knowledge] undoubtedly proves the strong influence of the English literary canon in the writings of G. K. Chettur. Apart from certain memories of his mother, seemingly no other feature of his early childhood in Kerala illuminates his writings. However, the absence of a direct representation of Kerala does not remove its culture altogether from G. K. Chettur's life. The education he received enabled him to make a mark in the Indian literary arena, embellishing and carrying forth the tradition of Indian writing in English. In that respect, the culture of Kerala and its education-based modernity and his migration abroad contributed much to the oeuvre of G. K. Chettur.

A. S. P. Ayyar was another prominent writer from Kerala who wrote in English. Born in the village of Ayilam in Palakkad in 1899, Ayyar had educational exposure from London, thereby explaining his choice of English for his creative ventures. K. P. K. Menon, in his introduction to the first volume of *Kerala Writers in English*, opines about A. S. P. Ayyar that “by a strange irony of fate, an Indian writer in English, so voluminous and versatile as A. S. Panchapakesa Ayyar, is now—in this era when the study of Indian Writing in English is ‘all the mode’—hardly talked about” (1). The work framed as a tribute of acknowledgement to the writer includes a brief yet precise biography along with an in-depth study of his creative practices. K. P. K. Menon points out that Ayyar went to England on a Tata Scholarship in the year 1919, and later in the year 1933, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom (1). Ayyar was noted for his high nationalistic views and adherence, which often affected and delayed his official entry into the High Court while India was under British rule (1). He has left his mark in various literary genres and published numerous works throughout his lifetime. Ayyar has translated Sanskrit verses, songs and sonnets

into English, but his poetry is not acclaimed as remarkable by scholars (K. P. K. Menon 2). Plays written by A. S. P. Ayyar include *Sita's Choice* (1935), *The Slave of Ideas* (1941), *A Mother's Sacrifice* (1937) and *Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* (1942). Ayyar's plays can be generally categorised on the basis of the overall progressive tone it projects toward the advancement of India in all its aspects. He minutely captures the period of transition in the history of India from the clutches of traditionalism to a modern nation. However, Ayyar's language can be seen as forced and at many points formalistic. K. P. K. Menon identifies the defects and limitations in Ayyar's English, which, according to him, is not conversational and colloquial (4). He remarks that Ayyar employs the same rigid English as the dialogue for characters belonging to various sections of the society. Ayyar himself, a representative of the rising intelligentsia, uses his language skills to exhibit and rather question the existence and prevalence of evil in pre-modern Indian society.

Ayyar's knowledge about the mythology and the folklore tradition of India is best expressed through his prolific short story writing. His use of English here can be seen as serving a universalisation effect by elevating the status of the nation's inherent traditional values, along with its darker and lesser-known aspects, to a global audience. His short stories capture issues such as the follies of humankind, social anomalies, and superstitious belief systems of religious practices in India. Ayyar's works become a microcosm of the social order and hierarchy prevalent during the times. K. P. K. Menon observes that "Ayyar is so intent on the didactic purpose of the stories that sometimes it intrudes obtrusively, to the detriment of the artistic presentation" (20). Ayyar, who is undoubtedly a scholar of English with a vast vocabulary, however, excels in his non-fiction more than in his creative writing. His sophistication of English lurks in his characters, making their conversations seem more artificial and 'Indian' at times.

Another poet and short story writer who rose into prominence during the period is Sankara Krishna Chettur, better known as S. K. Chettur, the younger brother of G. K. Chettur. S. K. Chettur was an Oxford-educated civil servant of India who took literature along with many other provisions and interests. G. S. Balarama Gupta, in his note on S. K. Chettur in the *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (1994), regards him better as a short story writer than a poet. His major short story collections include *Muffled Drums and Other Stories* (1927) and *The Cobras of Dhermashevi and Other Stories* (1937), along with the poetry collection *The Golden Stair & Other Poems* (1967). However, Gupta opines on S. K. Chettur's short stories that: "spoiled by wearisome beginnings or inept endings, frequent authorial intrusions or inane asides, and ostentatious language, most of his stories fail because they lack restraint and economy, suspense and suggestion" (224). This issue of dealing with the English language was a common flaw in the writings of first-generation English writers from India, English not being the country's native tongue. This may even be regarded as a drawback of second language acquisition, which includes problems in building sentence structure due to the intrusion of the first language. In Gupta's opinion, S. K. Chettur can also be found searching for pairs of rhyming words in his poems, a common problem of Indian writers in English trying to mimic English authors (224). S. K. Chettur carries the legacy of the trend of humour that many Malayalam writers have worked out in their writings. S. Muthiah commemorates the versatility of S. K. Chettur, a less celebrated and acknowledged writer during his times. He speaks about the memoirs of S. K. Chettur, which he thinks "many an administrator would benefit" from, because they constitute his experience as a civil servant and his connection with Nehru during the period of Indian independence. Nithya Mariam John refers to S. K. Chettur as a "bard" in her article

“Looking Back in Awe” in *The New Indian Express* and tries to identify the author as a romantic poet of pre-independence-era writers from Kerala.

Manjeri S. Isvaran, another prominent early English writer from Kerala, was born in 1910. His family migrated from Tanjore in Tamil Nadu [which was under the Madras Presidency] to Manjeri, a part of the Malabar district, several generations back. Ayyappa Paniker quotes Khasa Subba Rau’s opinion on Isvaran’s writings as: “Not only is he [Isvaran] a master of English Prose, he is fastidious and untiring in his attention to the details of type-setting and printing and in his search for more and ever more pleasing harmonies between the content of writing and its clothing in the letter-press” (qtd. in Paniker, *Manjeri S. Isvaran* 2). Paniker notes that the language Isvaran carries contains minute traces of the Muslim dialect as spoken in northern Malabar regions such as Manjeri. Isvaran also had a life outside India, a major reason for his interest in English and its usage. He nurtured the innate Kerala culture and memories he had in store through his creative exercises (5). It was a regular custom of the age for youngsters to move to Madras for their higher studies, and the same was the case with Manjeri Isvaran. This migration commonly seen in almost all English writers from Kerala was the trend of the age and denotes the reputation of Madras for educational quality. Isvaran always led solo protests against those critics who criticise Indian writings in English as being inferior. He always embraced his identity as an ‘Indo-Anglican’ with non-native capacities and faults in using the English language. In a letter written to M. Chalapati Rau, which is added at the beginning of his collection *Catguts*, Isvaran makes a bold and inflexible statement regarding his plan of using English further. He stresses that, “as for my medium, it will continue to be English till I fill my bucket full and kick it in the carnival of creation; I am an Indo-anglian among indo-anglians, and belong to Indo-anglia, perhaps the eighth of the kingdoms of the ancient octarchy” (vii).

Paniker identifies this prolonged state of identity quest and agitation prevalent in works written by Manjeri Isvaran and regards the phenomenon as a reason for his continued usage of writing in English as a form of protest (*Manjeri S. Isvaran* 21). He remarks that Indian English poetry during the time in which Isvaran wrote was following the ways of Victorian poetry with all its extravagance. He adds that Isvaran's poetry followed this trend until his last works: "Isvaran is historically the link between the pre-independence and post-independence eras in Indian poetry in English" (22). His early collections such as *Saffron and Gold* (1932) and *Altar of Flowers* (1934) are often critiqued for their mediocre selection of themes, unwanted rhyming and use of language. Then came his other collections, such as *Catguts* (1940) and *The Fourth Avatar* (1946), which reflect his growth as an English writer. It is only towards his last poems that Isvaran brings about a visible and remarkable change in his style, inclining more towards the new wave of Indian English poetry inaugurated by writers such as Nissim Ezekiel. *The Neem is a Lady and Other Poems* (1957) is often regarded as the best of Isvaran's works, which has the true essence of Isvaran's maturity as a poet.

Manjeri Isvaran and his poetry were often regarded as inferior and faulty, a common criticism that Indo-English users receive from native speakers (Paniker, *Manjeri Isvaran* 23). The problematic question of 'why would an Indian writer use English and not his native tongue?' has been raised as a criticism against writers like Isvaran who ventured into writing in English. Prominent Indian critics like Srinivasa Iyengar jointly countered, defended, and addressed such attacks. Iyengar raises the poignant question: "Was it a crime on Isvaran's part that he—an Indian—had tried to write poetry in English?" (645). In the foreword written for his poetry collection *Penumbra* (1942), the poet, in a very ironic and protesting nature, despises the criticism against his use of English by critics. His *The Neem is a Lady and Other Poems* has an

epigraph of Matthew Arnold's verse: "We become what we sing" (8). This proves the transformative confidence that the author has gained through his maturing times into a better craftsman as he advocates for expressing himself through his verse, irrespective of the criticism that he might face. Isvaran also draws inspiration from the domestic and rural settings of South India, of which he was a part, thereby weaving tales that reflect on Southern lives. In the preface of *A Madras Admiral* (1959), Isvaran hails the storytelling culture and oral tradition of India, which by itself is a land of folk tales and myth (vii). From that angle, his writings can be read as projections of the exotic tales of India into the outer world of the English reading community. Although he is a writer of the pre-independence era, he also exhibits a sensibility of the early years of the post-independence age, as seen in his works published in this period.

The age towards the second half of the twentieth century is notable for the rise of female writers in English that may be regarded as an aftermath of a new gender consciousness arising from women getting education, learning to read and write and having exposure to other places and cultures. However, there are significant Malayali men who wrote creative works in English during the time as well. Kumara Menon Padmanabha Pillai Sankara Menon, better known as K. P. S. Menon, is a distinguished writer of English from this age. N. Viswanathan, in the sixth volume of *Kerala Writers in English*, remarks on how K. P. S. Menon "established his reputation as a scholar and man of letters" (3). Born in 1898 in Travancore, Menon received his college education from Kottayam and later from Madras Christian College, and though older than writers like A. S. P. Ayyar and S. K. Chettur, K. P. S. Menon ventured into creative praxis relatively later. He went to London to pursue his education, a trend that might have ignited and catalysed Menon's use of English in writing. Menon's exposure at Oxford was a pathbreaking stage of his life, as it laid the foundation to his scholarly pursuits

(Viswanathan 4). Menon's selection into the civil service carved a life full of new places and experiences for him. It is to be inferred that Menon was fortunate enough to venture on journeys to places that have resulted in the enhancement of his writing skills. It was after fifty years of his service all across India and several parts of the world that Menon settled in Kerala, his homeland. Viswanathan strongly reinforces Menon's nationalistic identity and quest despite him working for the British government (*K. P. S. Menon* 5). Menon always had the craft of using the English language, which he fashioned and developed through years of his writing practice. Menon had a deep affection for poetry, and its influence is evident in his works (13). His writings reflect the ease and humour with which Menon navigates his own life. Menon's travelogues capture the world picture of his vision and reach, and his autobiography *Many Worlds* (1965) accounts for his experience of diversities around this world. He has also written political and travel diaries, all capturing the vistas of life that were widely spread before him.

Menon Marath is another famous writer of the age, born in 1906 in Thiruvambadi, Thrissur, who grew into a remarkable fiction writer in English writings from India. Mohammed Elias, in his introduction to the second volume of *Kerala Writers in English*, opines that, "versatility of this kind is not strange in a confirm expatriate like Marath whose creative imagination has been hybridized in a multicultural environment" (1). He adds that regardless of the boundaries of space, Marath's works became acceptable and were read widely (1). Marath, who hailed from a religious and orthodox Nair family of Kerala, got a well-grounded education from school to his higher studies abroad. Initiation to his English exposure began with his schooling at the Christian institution of C. M. S. School, Thrissur, and was later enriched by his post-graduation from King's College, London (Elias 1).

Marath often disregards his early writings and believes that his best works are his novels (Elias 2). It is notable that Marath hadn't visited India much after he left for London, except for a couple of times, and was married to an Irish lady. These factors might add to the reason for his choice and usage of English in expressing himself. Elias also remarks the unavoidable interrelation between Marath's works and Rajalakshmi's, his cousin and a well-regarded writer in Malayalam, who committed suicide at a young age. This points out his joint consciousness interlaced with family and life in Kerala, a major part of Marath's creative universe.

Menon Marath's works holistically can be identified as a microcosmic portrayal of Nair households of the times. Thereby, the major feature of his novels becomes the discussion on caste hierarchy and declining social order during the age. Marath through his novel *The Wound of Spring* (1960), projects a pen picture of a Nair *tharawad* of Kerala during his age. The work is notable since it is the first novel of the sort that is about Kerala being published by a British publishing house (Elias 17). The 'wound' in the title seems almost synonymous with the ancestral home system of Kerala, which was at the verge of deterioration and collapse. The caste system of the state was undergoing a dynamic flux at the time Menon Marath captured it through his novels. The writer also highlights the natives' fear of anglicisation, a total change in the system due to it, and even towards the English language. This resultant fear of the colonial aftermath was but a genuine shared emotion prevalent in the colonised lands. But the author seems to stand against these anglophobic and traditionalistic views by hinting at the need to accept the changing trends. Unlike A. S. P. Ayyar, who uses very formal and inflexible English, Marath's English appears more confident and stronger in every sense. Marath's *The Sale of an Island* (1968), brimming with undercurrents of the socio-economic and political climate of Kerala, is written in a highly poetical language engulfed with minute

imaginations and meanings. The novel narrates the psychological journey of the narrator who decided to fight the Englishman's war, leaving behind his wife and family (21). It becomes a social picture of the state of Kerala being framed in English, without failing to follow the principles of the language.

Janu (1987) is another novel by Marath that captures the essence of a Nair family in Kerala torn between the clashes of traditionalism and modernity. The novel opens with a clichéd scene set in a Nair house, featuring typical brass utensils and adornments. A woman character's eagerness to set up the protagonist's mother for remarriage reflects a sign of change in a society that is progressing with upward mobility (32). The novel provides ample representation of the youth's newly developed sense of adoration and hailing of Western civilisation and culture. There is also an episode where Muslims brutally burn the Nair houses, a historical reference to the infamous Mappilla Rebellion of 1922. The work in that sense aligns itself to the historical documentation in *The Decline of Nayar Dominance* by Robin Jeffrey (41). Elias provides Marath's own testimony regarding the lack of use of humour in his writing as well as from other Indian writers. This he regards as an aspect of the emotional attachment of the natives towards everything personal (40). Mohammed Elias, in his concluding remarks, opines that this recurring presence of Kerala and its alluring landscape in the works of Menon Marath, a writer who left this land far before the publication of his first work, might be a result of his nostalgia for his homeland (44). Marath himself confesses that he always chose to write in English, a slavish imitation of the British, which he could not help.

Aubrey Menen is yet another remarkable and distinguished of the English writers from the pre-globalisation era. Mohammed Elias, in his monograph on Aubrey Menen in the series *Kerala Writers in English*, denotes that Menen has always asserted his rootedness in Kerala but is, however, thoroughly anglicised both in person and in

writings (3). Menen himself establishes his innate connectivity towards his homeland and his affection towards Kerala culture in his works, opining that “all the characteristics of my writing are there” (qtd. in Elias, *Aubrey Menen* 1). He was born in the year 1912 in Punnayurkulam, a village to the south of Calicut. Unlike any other Malayali writers in English until age, Menen had a connection with England by birth. His father, born to an aristocratic Nair family, had his higher education in London and his mother is an Irish descendant. Aubrey never saw his homeland until he was twelve.

Menen always used his language to break the stereotypical depiction of India as an uncivilised dark slum by the Western world. He was a staunch defender of Indian culture despite the Western portrayal of the land as an inferior nation. For instance, in *The Duke of Gallodoro* (1952), Menen can be seen describing Rosa as being a “provocative Southern Beauty” (148), irresistible to the English—Menen’s way of countering the Western notion that Indians are ‘unfair’ and uninteresting. His writings are highly pictorial of Kerala and its landscapes and traditions, however sceptical he can be. Elias mentions how Menen, through his autobiographical essay *Dead Man in Silver Market* (1954), captures the pride and prestige as upheld by the upper-caste Nair *tharawad* and the innate cultural values they inculcate (Elias, *Aubrey Menen* 3). This work proves that Menen had a sceptical and often critical eye towards the paradoxes and religious uncouthness prevalent during the pre-modern order. He used the English language mixed with his sarcastic elements to register his disinterestedness and despise the “backwardness” of his land and people (Elias, *Aubrey Menen* 5).

Menen himself has confessed his state of cultural hybridity and confusion regarding his identity, being a half-Malayali and a half-English man. The feeling of alienation recurringly captured by Menen is common in people who have migrated or are torn between places in their lives. This has in turn resulted in Menen’s continued interest

in exploration of the meaning of life and existence as in his novel *The Fig Tree* (1959), where the writer describes the lonely yet sovereign existence of an ancient tree without being noticed, symbolically presenting the idea of life, evolution and existence (7). Regardless, Menen's exceptional proficiency in English stems from his extensive reading and interactions with writers from England. Menen also had travel exposure to other countries like France and Italy that might have been a major source for his multitude of experiences and outlooks (Elias, *Aubrey Menen* 3). Despite all these opportunities, Menen was consistently confused about his hybridity, which was mocked by the natives; this confusion is further illustrated by his decision to change his surname from Menon to Menen, an anglicised version of his caste name that reflects his duality. His other creative works include *The Abode of Love* (1956) and *Fonthill: A Comedy* (1974), among many, and travel writings and non-fiction works.

Kamala Das is a towering literary figure in English from Kerala who attained worldwide stature and recognition and is one of the pioneers in English literary production from Kerala, prior to Leela Devi during the 1960s. She is unanimously regarded as a poet who changed the prospect of female writings altogether through her extremely confessional and candid mode of writing. Though Das lacks advanced educational qualifications unlike her other contemporaries, she surpassed every one of them and still continues to be regarded as a master of English language and literature. K. Radha, in the eighth volume of *Kerala Writers in English*, reveals Das's testimony that writers such as Flaubert, Tolstoy, Oscar Wilde and Walt Whitman have had a profound impact on shaping her imaginative mind and, thereby, her literary career (3). Das's prolific contributions account for the effective and efficient use of English by a non-native who has acquired the language. She was born into the Nalapat family in 1932 as the daughter of Balamani Amma and V. M. Nair. The city of Calcutta played a

significant role in shaping her childhood and education, providing a landscape and experiences that Das extensively incorporated into her works. She has had a life outside Kerala in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi since her marriage that has resulted in the framing of a sense of nostalgia for her homeland. The longing to be at her ancestral Nalapat house forms the crux of many of her works. This very sense of belonging roots her Malayali identity, whether it be in her Malayalam or English writings. Her major works in English include poetry collections such as *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), the novel *Alphabet of Lust* (1976) and the short story collections *A Doll for the Child Prostitute* (1977) and *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (1992).

The contributions of R. Leela Devi and her husband V. Balakrishnan to Indian literature are of worth mentioning in studies on English writings from Kerala. Leela Devi is one of the women pioneers of English writings from Kerala—primarily a writer of non-fiction—who began her career by co-authoring with her husband. Born in 1932 in Pala, Kottayam, Devi was a teacher by profession; that accounts for the scholarly pursuits and academic life opted for by the author. The couple are known for their English translations of Sanskrit and Malayalam books, and their co-authorship is prolific in number. Leela Devi is known for the translation of the Malayalam novel *Indulekha* under the title *Crescent Moon* (1979). Spread across various genres and modes of writing, the couple's works carry a multitude of interests. It includes their take on various socio-political upheavals of the time, Kerala history, biographies and political commentaries on India. English as used by the authors in their fictional works is not refined and high-ordered, a denotation of the problem of second language acquisition by non-native speakers. *Blue Jasmine* (1979), a novel co-authored by V. Balakrishnan and R. Leela Devi, carries a portrait of the primordial Indian system of life where gender

stereotypes and inequalities of various sorts existed. The novel performs a close introspection into the religious belief trends in Indian society and assumes a mode of fantasy through its picturisation. Devi and Balakrishnan have adopted the Western novella form to pen *Blue Jasmine*, which captures the rich pagan past culture of India. *Blue Jasmine* is a co-authored work of fiction and one of the few creative productions by Leela Devi. It was unfortunate that the researcher could not find a copy of any other of their creative works in major libraries of Kerala.

Another female writer born around the same time, Anna Sujatha Mathai, rose to prominence through her writings and also published under the name Anna Sujatha Modayil. Born in 1934, she entered the literary field relatively late in life, yet went on to make significant and enriching contributions. She received her degree education from Miranda College and post-graduation from the University of Edinburgh and had worked in England in the field of social studies. This educational background and work experience outside the state of Kerala might have helped shape the language that she used for creative purposes. British translator William Radice considers her to be “one of India’s best poets in English” (qtd. in Mathai and Joseph). She has been awarded the ‘Best Young Poet of India’ by the All-India Poetry Society, which reflects her work and struggle to become an established writer all by herself. Anna Sujatha Mathai is also one of the early female writers of English from Kerala to have participated in several poetry readings abroad, such as at The House of Culture in Stockholm, the International Poetry Festival at Struga, Macedonia, and The Danish Writer’s Union in Copenhagen.

In an interview with P. S. Joseph, Anna Sujatha Mathai testifies that her advent into writing poetry was an attempt to overcome boredom and loneliness during the times of her stay in Mangalore after returning from England. She adds that she did not even have knowledge about Indian English poetry when her sister Manorama Mathai inspired

her to write for an avant-garde writing publication (Mathai and Joseph). About her proficiency in English, Anna Sujatha Mathai opines distinctively that she “had always had a strong sense of the English language. I had grown up with it. My father was Head of the English department at St. Stephens college ... The language was exciting and beloved to me, though I realized later I made a big mistake not learning Malayalam” (Mathai and Joseph). She attributes the credit of her love of knowledge to her teachers of English literature at Miranda College during her bachelor’s. All these revelations point out Anna Sujatha Mathai’s ardent interest in the English language and her simultaneous regret in not having learnt her mother tongue, a problem of alienation from one’s true self. Such alienation is a possible outcome of migrant writers who are distanced from their homeland. She had strong associations with her contemporaries Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Pritish Nandy and P. Lal, with whom she worked collaboratively. Though Anna Sujatha Mathai was evidently distanced from her native language, she agrees on having accurate and vivid memories about Kerala, where she, along with her sister Manorama Mathai, spent time during their childhood. Ravi Shanker N., in his Facebook post commemorating the poet Anna Sujatha Mathai, said that “though her parents hailed from Kerala, her upbringing and education were always in Universities in Delhi and abroad, so her poetry largely went unheard of in Kerala unlike Kamala Das.” Despite all these factors, her contribution to Indian writing in English remains remarkable, and it is high time to identify writers like Anna Sujatha Mathai in the outer frame of Indian literature. Her major poetry collections include *Crucifixions* (1970), *We the Unreconciled* (1972), *The Attic of Night* (1991), *Life - on My Side of the Street* (2006), *Mother’s Veena and Other Poems* (2013) and *Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* (2022).

Manorama Mathai, the younger sister of Anna Sujatha Mathai, is another female writer with Kerala roots born in 1936 in Lahore, which was then a part of India.

Manorama Mathai's creative practices are marked with the quest for belongingness that might have been a result of the subsequent partition which made Lahore a part of Pakistan. The feelings of alienation and distance from the motherland can be viewed as a migrant issue that affected Mathai's family. Manorama Mathai is a writer who writes solely in English and not in Malayalam, which might be equated to her upbringing and education abroad. Having been educated in Delhi and later in Oxford, Manorama Mathai—unlike her sister Anna Sujatha Mathai—began her creative writings at the very young age of six years (Jose). Manorama Mathai attributes the presence of Kerala in her writings rather as a result of the effective inculcation of the images of Kerala through stories told by her mother. Though both the Mathai sisters had visited Kerala only a few times during their childhood, they seemed to carry a sense of hybrid identity that was primarily grounded in the cultural landscape of Kerala. Her works include short story collection *Lilies that Fester* (1988), novels *Mulligatawny Soup* (1993), *Whispering Generations* (2004), *Love and Dr. Aiyar* (2010), and another novel *Death at the British Embassy* (2013), which is written using the pseudonym Norma Moss.

Meena Alexander is another remarkable writer who further carried forth the project of Kerala writing in English as an aftermath of having migrated abroad and attaining an English education. Born in Allahabad in 1951 to Malayali parents and later migrating to Sudan, Alexander started composition from a very young age. In an interview given to Erika Duncan in *World Literature Today*, Alexander mentions how she primarily attempted to write stories in Malayalam and have them translated to English. She testifies that it was with the inability to sketch down her thoughts in Malayalam that she chose to write direct poetry (26). Duncan also denotes how

Alexander was home-tutored until she was thirteen years old and later ventured into higher education abroad (24–26). She was a professor of English at Hunter College, New York. Alexander's frequent shifts from India, Sudan, the U.S. and England made her feel “stranded in the multiplicity” (*Poetics of Dislocation* 119), where she could not position herself as belonging to a certain geographical region. Opportunities that she got in these places made it sure that Alexander could embrace the language and sensibilities of each place, which in turn, were reflected in her writings.

The question of language always intrigued Meena Alexander, having been caught in the middle of many different cultures interacting violently within her mind. In her memoir *Fault Lines* (1993), Alexander notes that much of the construction of her characters is modelled upon her own experiences in Kerala, where she was made to deal with English, Hindi and Arabic apart from Malayalam (ch. 1). Alexander's notable poetry collections include *Stone Roots* (1981), *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988), *River and Bridge* (1996), *Illiterate Heart* (2002), *Raw Silk* (2004), *Quickly Changing River* (2008), *Birthplace with Buried Stones* (2013), *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2018) and *In Praise of Fragments* [published posthumously in 2020]. In addition to the two novels *Nampally Road* (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997), Alexander has authored several chapbooks of poetry, criticism and essays, and has also appeared in several anthologies.

Writers from Kerala in the post-globalisation era who write in English would create a substantial list that is still evolving. The English language underwent tremendous change due to the influence of Western literature and the exposure these writers received. Shashi Tharoor, an internationally acclaimed and reputed writer and political figure, is a representative of the changing face of Malayali writings in English. He has set an irreplaceable standard of excellence in English which is universally known and accepted. Born in 1956 in London to Malayali parents from Palakkad, Tharoor

received his school and college education from Mumbai, Calcutta and Delhi. He completed his honours degree from Tufts University, U.S., and pursued his master's and PhD at the same school. His birth and education abroad might have made it possible for him to carry the English language with immense tenacity and ease. In the first chapter of his work *Bookless in Baghdad* (2005), Tharoor commemorates his reading: "I read copiously, rapidly, and indiscriminately," a habit during his childhood that in turn shaped his language and affinity towards writing. He recalls his childhood, which had English usage as a major part in it: "As with other children of migratory Indians, English became the language not only of my schoolbooks but of my private life: I played with my friends in English, quarreled with my sisters in English, wrote to my relatives in English — and read for pleasure in English" (*Bookless in Baghdad*, ch. 1).

Shashi Tharoor maintained his voice and stood for India, his native land, through the instrumentation of the English language for his writings. He was pivotal in projecting the rich heritage of India to the whole world as an opposition to the Euro-centric portrayal of India as an exotic and uncouth land of magic and paganism. It may thus be inferred that Tharoor uses English, the language of the colonisers, to stand against and counter their ways and policies. Such an approach, in a way, can be seen as a vehement attack against the imperial powers using their own native language, which may result in the ambivalent state of existence for the colonial psyche. Tharoor received wide applause for his first published work, *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), which weaves Indian myth with the socio-cultural milieu of its publication. Tharoor's versatility in English is evident from the fact that the novel became a topic of discussion both at home and abroad. His other works of fiction include *The Five Dollar Smile and Other Stories* (1990), *Show Business* (1992) and *Riot* (2001).

Born in the year 1958 in Ottapalam, C. P. Surendran requires a close examination as a contemporary writer in English from Kerala. Surendran has established his identity in journalism and creative writing in English and is currently based in Thrissur, Kerala. His parents are both well-known writers, which explains the author's lineage in creative practices. Surendran received his school education from Kerala as well as from Tamil Nadu and went on to pursue his master's in English literature from Delhi. Having an innate literature background, Surendran also taught English literature for a brief period. Surendran's active life as a journalist spans various major English dailies in the country, and his poems have been featured in international anthologies. His poems carry a scent of deep human emotions and experiences and are thereby notable for their extreme personal touch. Arundathi Subramaniam opines about the intimate love poems of Surendran: "what makes these love poems distinctive is their ability to evoke, with a veteran's air of familiarity, the many ambivalences of human intimacy." This proves the effortless manner in which Surendran uses the English language to address the very subtle and minute traces of human feelings. For instance, one of his poems "Curios" captures the troubles and tribulations in modern human relationships where silence pervade and turns the room where the lovers meet "into a museum of moods." (Surendran, "Curios Poem").

C. P. Surendran gave an entirely new sensibility to Indian English poetry with his intense and at times violent verse; everything was connected to his troubled and alienated life. In Dom Moraes' opinion, Surendran is "fiery, raw and filled with loneliness, alienation and anger" (qtd. in "Surendran, C.P."). His poems showcase a modern sensibility as the poet feels disillusioned and agitated by the experience of urban life. This can be well deciphered through one of his poems, "The Family Court," through a sarcastic and witty episode of the legality of divorce, the poet indirectly mocks the

systems for being so stringent and paradoxical in the already complicated modern life (Surendran, “The Family Court Poem”). His poetry collections include *Posthumous Poems* (1999), *Canaries on the Moon* (2002), *Available Light: New and Collected Poems* (2017) and *Window With a Train Attached* (2025).

Another writer of the post-globalisation era is Susan Visvanathan, born in 1957 in New Delhi, better known as the author of *Christians in Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakuba* (2010), has written a number of literary works which have a close relation to Kerala and its culture. Her short-story collection *Nelycinda and Other Stories* (2012) is dedicated to the memories of her childhood in Niranam, Pathanamthitta. Bruce King mentions her as one of the eight major contemporary English writers from India in his book *Rewriting India: Eight Writers* (2014). Like Arundhati Roy’s *A God of Small Things*, Visvanathan is known for “short stories and novels that thematise the lives of Syrian Christian women ... engaged with the unpredictability of life and change that is registered through nature and the separation of the female protagonist from her family and community” (Keshavamurthy 308). Though spending a considerable amount of time in Kerala, Visvanathan follows a peculiar style of fiction by which she observes and reflects upon the life of her Malayali characters from an outsider’s perspective. Educated [with master’s and doctoral degrees in sociology] at JNU and the University of Delhi, Susan Visvanathan was also a Charles Wallace Fellow at the Queen’s University of Belfast. Susan Visvanathan’s fiction works include *Something Barely Remembered* (2000), *The Visiting Moon* (2002), *Phosphorus and Stone* (2007), *The Seine at Noon* (2007), *Nelycinda and Other Stories* (2012) and *Adi Sankara and Other Stories* (2017).

Jeet Thayil, born in 1959, is yet another major writer from Kerala belonging to the post-globalisation era. A major literary figure in discussions on the Indian diaspora, Thayil, though born to Malayali parents, had his education in Mumbai, Hong Kong and

later New York. Though Thayil has had a life of travel between places, his works highly revolve around the spatiality of Indian topography. Thayil began his career in writing by co-authoring a book of poetry titled *Gemini* (1992) with Vijay Nambisan. Starting his career as a poet, Thayil rose to fame as a bestselling novelist with the publication of his novel *Narcopolis* (2012) that revolves around the cityscape of Bombay. Jeet regards Bombay as his home rather than attributing that part of the identity to Kerala, his birthplace. His other major works include the poetry collections *Apocalypso* (1997), *English* (2004), and *These Errors Are Correct* (2008), and novels *The Book of Chocolate Saints* (2017), *Low* (2020), *Names of the Women* (2021), and *The Elsewhereans: A Documentary Novel* (2025).

Jeet Thayil chose to represent India in its crudest form, in contrast to writers who offered a lighter and more nostalgic portrayal. Thayil's affinity for Bombay but not for Kerala might be a result of his stay outside Kerala. This situation can finely be equated to an aftermath of migration, which was a common social process during the age. Writers from such groups commonly face issues related to spatiality, affinity towards a different city, and identity conflicts. Thayil evidently exhibits his interest in the city of Bombay, which he identifies as his city of living and of existence. All these highlight Thayil's conception about movement, life in different places, and the idea of 'writing.' However, in *Narcopolis*, as in many other of his creative works, Thayil chooses to capture the dark, or rather real face of urbanity in Indian cities. Herein, the writer vehemently states that the sea was the only thing that was good about Bombay "that did not disgust him" (119). Further, in poems like "Slumming in Bombay, Beelzebub," the writer continues this disregard for city life and for modern man's predicament in general when he writes, "that's what this city does, man, saps you" (*English: Poems* 70). This ambivalence, or rather disregard for a space, can be equated to the writer's migration and the resultant un-

belongingness that it brings along with, which is a recurring spatial confusion that lurks in his writings as well.

Usha Zacharias is yet another writer from the period alongside the lineage set by writers like Arundhati Roy and Jaishree Misra. Born in 1961, Zacharias is one of the remarkable yet often forgotten names among the list of creatives from Kerala. Having completed her schooling, graduation and post-graduation from her native place, Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, Zacharias moved to Mumbai, where she started her career as a journalist. Usha Zacharias's brother, Ajit Zacharias, confirmed in a telephone interview that she migrated to Mumbai independently for her job, following the recent increase in social mobility that the women's community experienced. Zacharias left Kerala in her early twenties and was not used to life in the cultural milieu of her homeland. Despite her remarkable non-fiction works, the author has not received much study, possibly due to the absence of creative publications during her lifetime. But her posthumously published short story collection—the only collected creative work by the writer—*Night of the Fortune Tellers* (2022), itself places the author and her creativity at a benchmark that validates her literary spatiality.

Another writer who raised the names of India and Kerala to global stature through her creative writing is the Booker Prize recipient Arundhati Roy, born in 1961 in the Kottayam district of Kerala. Either in fiction or non-fiction, Roy has been a name established for her innovative style and approach to the English language. Her novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), explicitly reveals its roots in Kerala's culture through its setting and characterisation. Although born in Shillong, Roy was raised in Ooty and Kerala since she was two when her parents got divorced. She had many memories of her tumultuous childhood in Kerala, which has crept into her fiction (Deb). The history of her family becomes the primary source of the novel in which there are “references to the

history of the Syrian-Christians [in Kerala] and their struggle to cope with the local Hinduism-based social structure” (Sarker and Rahman 138). In an interview by Taisha Abraham for *Ariel*, Roy was asked a question regarding her unconventional use of the English language in *The God of Small Things*, to which Roy responded: “All I can say about that is that language is the skin on my thought. My language is something that I find hard to analyse and dissect. It’s the way I think” (91). *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), her second novel, also employs a similar linguistic pattern that naturally engraves itself into the writer’s existence. While examining her career, it is clear that Roy has benefited from the use of English in her writings because it helped her to speak of political concerns all over the world. Inversely, language has also benefitted from Roy’s faculty, revealing nuances hitherto unrevealed in any other writer of world literature, let alone Indian writing in English.

Jaishree Misra is another poignant contemporary writer of English who hails from Kerala. She was born in New Delhi to Malayali parents in 1961 and writes that Kerala was a place she would visit scarcely in her childhood during the holidays (“My story so far”). Her major novels include *Ancient Promises* (2000), *Afterwards* (2004), *Rani* (2007) and *A Scandalous Secret* (2011), among many. Being another writer displaced from her ancestral setting on account of her parents’ professions, it is natural that Jaishree Misra attempted to connect with her legacy of Kerala existence by employing the English language, which she also used to suggest her multiple spatial realities. However, a holistic examination of the writer's topographical and thematic concerns shows that she does not confine her literary landscape to any specific geography; instead, she explores stories of modern human relationships and interconnectedness within the context of modernity and cityscapes.

Another major writer of English from Kerala is Vijay Nambisan, who was born in 1963. As mentioned earlier, Nambisan started his literary career co-authoring a collection of poetry alongside Jeet Thayil. Although he spent much of his lifetime in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bihar, Nambisan has his familial roots in Thalapilly, Kerala. His link with Kerala and its culture is evident in his translations of the Bhakthi poetry of Poonthanam and Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri (“Vijay Nambisan”). He is well-regarded as an essayist and a critic who wrote poetry, but writers like Ramachandra Guha acknowledge his distinctive style of prose as rather an advancement of his creative genius in poetry. In 1988, Nambisan became the first-ever recipient of the title ‘All India Poetry Champion’ in a programme organised by the Poetry Society of India. In his short career, he has authored a number of essays and prose pieces under the titles *Bihar is in the Eye of the Beholder* (2000) and *Language as an Ethic* (2003). Many of his poems exhibit similar traits to those of Jeet Thayil in their presentation and outlook towards cities and city lives. For instance, in one of his poems, “Words from the Dying City Came,” from the collection *These Were My Homes* (2018), the poet pessimistically uses the phrases “dying city” and “doomed city” to capture the monotony and dryness of modern life. A similar poem, “paranoia/paranoia,” also portrays the modern man’s predicament of hopelessness and insecurity while he attempts to run away from the city’s grasp (*These Were My Homes*). Meanwhile, Nambisan also exhibits a kind of affection and concern for Kerala and its landscape, as in his poem “Nila in Flood Time,” suggesting that the writer also upholds a multi-directional, or rather ambiguous, idea of spatiality (*These Were My Homes*). After 22 years since publishing his first selection of poetry, he brought out another collection titled *First Infinities* in 2015 while declaring that “poetry is the only thing that matters” (qtd. in “Book review of First Infinitie”).

Among the contemporary writers of English in India from Kerala, Anita Nair is a name known for her bestselling fiction works that have gained wide momentum and have been studied for their female-central narratives. Born in Shoranur, Palakkad, in 1966, Anita Nair derives heavily from her roots in Kerala culture. She spent her childhood in Madras but later returned to Kerala for her higher education before moving to Bangalore for employment. Much of her life, education and employment are limited in and around South India, which made it easy for her to consolidate her experiences through English—a language that eliminates the ever-so-minimal barrier of the disparity of regional languages. While many other writers find it difficult to navigate between the acquired English language and the mother tongue, Anita Nair is seen comfortably switching between the two. She has written several novels in English and has translated classic works such as *Chemmeen* by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai from Malayalam to English, and her notable novels include *The Better Man* (1999), *Mistress* (2005), *Cut like Wound* (2012), *Eating Wasps* (2018) and *Hot Stage* (2023) among others.

Anees Salim is another major Malayali writer to be discussed in contemporary Indian writings in English, who deals with the English language with great confidence and ease. Salim, born in 1970 in Varkala, through his remarkable and unique work, has raised the prospect of Indian writings in English into a universally acceptable stature. He upholds the credit of being the fourth Malayali to win the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2018 for the novel *The Blind Lady's Descendants* (2014). In an interview by Anamika Chatterjee for the *Khaleej Times*, Salim remarks about his formative years: “I grew up in Varkala, which is a small town in Kerala and has a beach, which was the only good thing about it.” He adds that he had no friends and was unhappy during his childhood, which led him to read and write in solitude. This explains Salim’s outlook toward his hometown, which he refers to in the same interview as a “hole” from which he wanted an

escape (Chatterjee). This sense of alienation and detachment from Kerala is evident in his portrayal of the place and its people, as seen in *The Blind Lady's Descendants*, wherein the writer portrays how individuals' detachments take root from families and homes. Salim, however, is a highly reclusive and reserved person who keeps away from literary festivals and such public cultural events, over which he would prefer an introverted solitude, as he frequently remarks (Bahuguna). This autobiographical and personal element of a detached state of existence is visible in his characterisation and presentation of situations without any nostalgic elements.

Notably, Anees Salim testifies to autobiographical elements in his writing, which mostly are about his place of birth, estranged familial relationships and stark realities of detached human bonds. He describes this experience as an integral part of his life, highlighting his distance from his parents and his dissatisfaction with life in Varkala (Chatterjee). He often associates the ever-pervading darkness in his novels with his isolated life experiences, of which he is a detached observer. About his novels being rejected initially by many publishers, Salim says that “I had begun to think that the world held something against me, I am not a well-educated, I don’t have a degree in creative writing from a foreign university, so probably they’re biased” (Chatterjee). Salim is a rare writer who refuses to be live on stage or go on book tours because he prefers to remain “invisible” and unseen in a crowd (Quadri). This withdrawal from the outer shell of the society is a trait exhibited by many characters in his novel which he portrays through comic sketches. Among writers who have had exposure and education abroad and from states outside Kerala, Salim is an exception. But the presentation, structure and stylistics that the novelist employs in his works are highly international in their stature, and the language that Salim uses is highly humorous and sarcastic in his descriptions of people and situations, of which he is a great silent observer.

Anand Neelakantan is another writer who has predominantly written in English during the post-globalisation period, with sixteen books to his credit in English (“About Anand Neelakandan”). Born in 1973, he came into the limelight as a writer of fiction in 2012, when his debut novel *Asura Tale of the Vanquished* became a bestseller within days of its launch (“‘Asura,’ a bestseller”). As expected of a postmodern retelling of an episode from Indian mythology, the novel is unconventionally structured, with mainly two first-person narrators—Ravana and Bhadra—sharing the narrative space (Lavanya). This strategy lets the author explore the simple ‘tyrant vs. subject’ binary from another perspective, where the common man aspires not only to justice but also to an opportunity to take over. For instance, Bhadra’s words, “The idea of owning the world was appealing. I did not even own two pieces of good clothes, let alone a brave new world ... I want my revenge ... so that I could continue to treat other common men in the same way they were treating me now – with contempt” (ch. 22) presents how power works in any discourse: the common man is not merely a victim of hierarchy but also its future agent. The axis of power vs. powerlessness thus becomes the crux of Neelakantan’s fiction, in which he focuses on gendered re-readings as well. He has since produced series of novels based on Indian mythology, especially the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, while also expanding a proto-mythical angle to properly fictional narratives, as in the case of his Bahubali series, thereby adhering his innately Indian roots. He is quite vocal about the practice of writing and publishing in English, especially in the post-global age, and he asserts that he “learned English through hard work” (Raghavan). Neelakantan exemplifies the post-global Malayali who went outside Kerala for employment, travelling to Delhi after completing his engineering. His other major novels include *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* (2013), *Ajaya: Rise of Kali* (2015), *The Rise of Sivagami* (2017) and *Many Ramayanas: Many Lessons* (2025).

Karthika Naïr, a poignant contemporary writer of English with Kerala roots, is primarily recognised as a French-Indian poet. Born in 1972 in Kottayam, Kerala, Naïr recalls having started writing poems in her early childhood and not attempting it “for nearly twenty years,” hinting at the creative side that was innately engraved in her (E-mail interview). She attributes her initial travels and migrations to her father’s job in the Indian Army in distant places and recalls how her chronic degenerative disorder disrupted normalcy during her school days (E-mail interview). Though the writer did not have an academic background in English, she was educated in the Western system of education in India—having studied sociology, journalism and art management—which accounts for her connection with the English language. Based in Paris, Naïr often opines on both France and India as her countries, explaining the duality that her identity formation has incurred caused by her migration (Zecchini 195). She predominantly writes poetry and scripts and has co-authored experimental poetry. Her poetry collections are *Bearings* (2009) and *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata* (2015).

In discussions on contemporary Indian literature in English, a personage notable for her involvement in both writing and editing famous works of fiction is Shinie Antony, born in 1971. Antony was educated in Mumbai and Delhi, and she regards her father’s career in the defence as the major reason for her migration. She worked in newspapers in cities including Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore and believes that having grown up mostly in Northern India, Hindi turned out to be the first language for her. Her major works include novels such as *Kardamom Kisses* (2005), *Mira Went Forth and Multiplied* (2011) and *The Girl Who Couldn’t Love* (2017) and short story collections such as *Barefoot and Pregnant* (2002) and *The Orphanage for Words* (2015).

Thachom Poyil Rajeevan exemplifies a very peculiar set of writers of English from Kerala who traversed boundaries as a writer of English, rather than starting to write

in English due to travel practices. Born in 1959, Rajeevan was brought up in Kozhikode with a passion for poetry, as recalled by Vinod Krishnan T. Y., who had initially translated Rajeevan's Malayalam poetry into English. His proficiency in writing English had led him to international residency programmes in countries such as the U.S., Macedonia and Italy. Chandramohan S. comments that Rajeevan was a part of a literary tradition in Indian writing in English represented by writers like Kamala Das, Jeet Thayil and Karthika Naïr, among others, and notes that he was perhaps the “only writer from Kerala who wrote both poetry and fiction in both languages [English and Malayalam]” (“T.P. Rajeevan”). Rajeevan's English writing is reputable for being direct and lucid, and as Anita Nair notes, there is a certain deceptiveness in its simplicity (“Accessible Poetry”). For instance, the poem “Cat” from his collection *He Who Was Gone Thus* (2003) demonstrates how plain and almost skeletal diction, without relying heavily on metaphor, produces intense imagery. The lines “For every stillness / a moving spotted tail. / For every silence / five sharp claws.” (qtd. in “Accessible Poetry”) presents a case where the condensation of language can heighten poetic intensity. While he started his literary career in Malayalam, the work that shot him to fame—*Paleri Manikyam: Oru Pathirakolapathakathinte Katha* (2009)—was originally written in English before being published into Malayalam. The English version came out in 2013 under the title *Undying Echoes of Silence*.

Anupama Raju is yet another post-global Malayali writer and translator from Kerala who was born, brought up and educated from outside Kerala. Holding a master's and MPhil in English and a doctoral degree in communications, Raju was also a Charles Wallace Fellow and has been to international writer-in-residencies. Raju underscores how English education was a reality and normalcy at her household, starting with her grandparents, mother and brother: “An education in English is something that just

happened” (E-mail interview). Additionally, Raju can be seen often opining that she regards Tamil Nadu as her home, as she believes Kerala is a place she migrated later into. She reposes Ayyappa Paniker as one of her early mentors who made her “a part of a poetry circle he had established, invited me [Raju] to readings and offered sensible criticism and advice” (E-mail interview). Raju’s creative productions include two poetry collections *Nine* (2015) and *Bitter Gourd* (2023), and *C: a novel* (2022). All these aspects—acquiring English education, having had migration and being a woman writer from Kerala—make her one of the remarkable names in studies on female creatives in English from Kerala.

Gopikrishnan Kottoor is another writer notable in contemporary Indian literature in English through the observations of writers like Jayanta Mahapatra and Ayyappa Paniker (“Gopi Krishnan Kottoor”). Born in 1956, he was instrumental in the sustenance of English poetry in Kerala during the 2000s, through his creative writings and significant poetry curations. Kottoor was introduced into the world of European and American poetry by Tamil poet Nakulan (Patra 4). After receiving his primary education from English schools in Thiruvananthapuram, Kottoor carried forth his fascination for the language with a bachelor’s and master’s degree in English. He became acquainted with writers like Ayyappa Paniker, Kamala Das, Keki N. Daruwalla and R. Parthasarathy during his post-graduation years (Patra 3), and started publishing his English poetry individually. Peculiar to the poetry of Kottoor is his romantic sensibility, specifically adhering to the content of the Bhakthi movement in poetry. Kottoor’s play *The Nectar of the Gods* (2015), is regarded as “a socio-historical take on the life of the palace soldier Devasahayam [Lazarus], who was executed following his conversion to Christianity, during the reign of King Marthanda Varma” (Patra 5). This reveals the overt involvement of the cultural landscape of Kerala in his creative writing, which can be

found in his poetry as well. Kottoor has translated Changapuzha Krishna Pillai's *Ramanan* into English. His other major works in English include *Victoria Terminus* (2010), *Vrindavan: The Coloured Yolk of Love* (2012), *Chilanka: The Anklet* (2017) and *Swan Lake* (2021).

Shreekumar Varma, born in 1955, is another prolific full-time writer of English who started his career in fiction with the publication of *Lament of Mohini* in 2000. Having received a master's in English language and literature, Varma also completed his course in journalism, leading him to rise as a prominent columnist in leading English dailies in India, such as *The New Indian Express* and the *Deccan Herald* ("Shreekumar Varma"). Varma was involved in creative practices and workshops from a very young age, later rising into the stature of a widely published award-winning author. He was also a Charles Wallace Fellow and Writer-in-Residence at Stirling University ("Shreekumar Varma"). Recipient of the 2015 R. K. Narayan Award for Excellence in Writing in English, Varma's work often carries an autobiographical undercurrent in it. For instance, his novel *Maria's Room* (2010) portrays a character who is a writer facing a writer's block, a situational parallel to the writer's own real life of fluctuating identities. His *Lament of Mohini* presents the tale of an aristocratic family in Kerala; though not autobiographical in a literal sense, the novel is shaped by Varma's cultural memory and collective experience as a member of the Travancore royal family, further adhering the recurring presence of Kerala in his creative writings. Being a contemporary writer in English, Varma falls aptly into the group of post-globalisation writers. His other major works include *Devil's Garden: Tales Of Pappudom* (2006), *Kipling's Daughter* (2018) and *Midnight Hotel & Other Plays* (2019).

As a Dalit writer who addresses the issues of the marginalised community of Kerala, Chandramohan S. requires a special mention in the contemporary English

writings from Kerala. Shortlisted for some of the prominent awards of the country, Chandramohan stands for a collective cause of examining and bringing into the limelight the concerns of the subaltern group. The Amazon review of his poetry collection *Warscape Verses* (2014) remarks that Chandramohan draws inspiration from writers such as K. Satchidanandan and Meena Kandaswamy, the ones who voice the struggles of the working class and the outcasts (“Warscape Verses”). The Amazon book description of his other collection of poetry, *Love After Babel and Other Poems* (2020), says that “Chandramohan’s position as a Dalit writer illuminates his treatment of caste-based oppression, while also creating a sense of radical solidarity between various marginalized identities in contemporary Indian society through his focus on other forms of oppression” (“Love After Babel”). This reinforces Chandramohan’s use of English rather as a political tool to attain an agenda of universal egalitarianism. Syam Sudhakar, in his review of Chandramohan’s *Love After Babel and Other Poems*, notably opines that “His poetry foregrounds the intersections of caste, language, translation and globalisation, offering a radically different perspective from the largely privileged voices that have dominated Kerala’s literary presence in English” (Sudhakar, “Perplexed Language”). Chandramohan’s other poetry collections include *Warscape Verses* (2014) and *Letters to Namdeo Dhasal* (2016).

Syam Sudhakar is yet another significant name in contemporary English poetry from India, born in 1983 in Vadanamkurussi, Palakkad. Writing in English and his native language Malayalam, Sudhakar has received remarkable recognitions for his poetry in English [including the Srinivas Rayaprol Poetry Prize], which makes him a prominent name in the corpus of Kerala writers in English. He has been identified as one of the postmodern practitioners of magic realism in his poetry, with the mysticism arising from his influence of myth, folklore and the cultural history of Kerala, according to critic

Anamika Chakraborty (“‘I hanged myself’” 99). Sudhakar’s use of magic realism is evident in his poems such as “Enchantress atop the potted palm,” from his collection *Drenched by the Sun* (2013), where the poet evokes the image of the mythical *yakshi*, who seeks out to enchant men with her mysterious beauty, set against a backdrop of blue light, as she beckons them “for wet lime, / hair spread out” (“Enchantress atop the potted palm”). Chakraborty also points out the nuances of Sudhakar’s use of English, laden with “Malayalam flavoured English speech,” which attributes a distinct regional essence to his poetry (*Syam Sudhakar and the Landscape of Poetry* 19). Apart from his other collections, *Slicing the Moon* (2013) and *Cat in the City* (2025), Syam Sudhakar has published much of his poetry in English in major online magazines and journals.

Another important Malayali woman writer who chose to re-venture into creative praxis only in 2022 but has made significant contributions to be regarded as a Malayali writer of English is Smitha Sehgal, hailing from Kozhikode. Sehgal speaks about the extremely volatile literary climate that her family upheld, accounting for her early interest in extensive reading of both Malayalam and English texts. She attributes her very ample household surroundings to formulating and shaping her thoughts and characters through education. She notably regards English as equivalent to her mother tongue, explaining the language as her “language of poetry” (Interview). Sehgal is yet another Malayali woman writer who chose to migrate on her own, without pressure from any familial or marital agencies, having educated and practised law from Kerala for a brief period. The writer, currently based in Delhi, moved to the city in early 2001, and marrying a non-Malayali made Delhi her “second home” (Interview). Sehgal writes poetry that reflects her identity as a Malayali English writer, using constant metaphorical shifts between the multiple geographical locations she considers her homes, including Kerala and Delhi. Her poetry collections include *How Women Become Poems in*

Malabar (2023) and *Brown God's Child* (2025), the former collection being the first runner-up recipient of the Wise Owl Old Literary Awards in 2025. Sehgal is a recurring contemporary voice in English poetry from India, and her literary production and its recognition have led to her being studied through the lens of both migratory and gendered experiences that have shaped her as a female writer.

Two other recent writers who emerged from Kerala and gained momentum are Sabin Iqbal and Shaharu Nusaiba Kannanari. Sabin Iqbal is the author of the critically acclaimed works *The Cliffhangers* (2020), *Shamal Days* (2021), and *Tales from Qabristan* (2025), and his creative works often carry the landscape of Kerala along with it. Shaharu Nusaiba Kannanari is best known for his book *Chronicle of an Hour and a Half* (2024), which was shortlisted for the JCB Prize. His works carry a political tint in both their thematic concerns and narration.

Categorising Female Writers

Creative writers in English from Kerala, through their English education and/or migration, have evidently impacted and accelerated the project of Kerala modernity through developmental engagements. It is even important to underscore how women writers, with their gendered limitations, contributed to this aspect of Kerala's literary discourse, particularly by challenging societal norms and creating narratives that reflect their unique experiences and perspectives. To trace the rise of women into creative spaces in English, it was pivotal to look into the history of English creative production from Kerala in its entirety. Most early writers in English from Kerala—beginning with G. K. Chettur, S. K. Chettur, and A. S. P. Ayyar—were products of international migration. It is also evident that women's entry into this canon was a relatively late phenomenon, emerging only during the 1960s, accounting for their lack of social mobility during the early 1900s. In the contemporary period, post-global creative writing

in English from Kerala continues to participate in the larger project of Kerala's developmental modernity, with the emergence of new writers and literary platforms. Thus, to understand contemporary literature in English from Kerala, it has been important to take a historical view of the literary developments that enabled it to reach the present moment.

To further underscore the role of English-educated and/or migrant women in carrying forward the project of Kerala modernity through their creative writings, there is a need to catalogue these writers into specific sets. Fourteen Malayali women writers of English selected for this research include Kamala Das, R. Leela Devi, Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai, Meena Alexander, Susan Visvanathan, Usha Zacharias, Arundhati Roy, Jaishree Misra, Anita Nair, Karthika Nair, Shinnie Antony, Anupama Raju and Smitha Sehgal. Since these writers span different time periods, there is a need to bring them together under a common framework. Therefore, establishing a systematic categorisation criterion becomes essential. The four major categories into which female writers of English from Kerala can be categorised are:

1. Pre-globalisation era writers (1960s–1990s) who migrated or stayed within India
2. Pre-globalisation era writers who migrated abroad
3. Post-globalisation era writers (1990s–present) who migrated within India
4. Post-globalisation era writers who migrated abroad

The first categorisation includes pre-globalisation era female creatives from Kerala who migrated [or stayed] within India, such as writers like Kamala Das and R. Leela Devi. The second categorisation includes pre-globalisation era writers who have had transnational migrant lives, including Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander. Susan Visvanathan, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Shinnie Antony, Anupama Raju and Smitha Sehgal are the select writers in the third categorisation of

post-globalisation era female writers who migrated within India. The fourth category includes post-globalisation era writers who migrated abroad, like Usha Zacharias, Jaishree Misra and Karthika Nair.

As migration emerges as a common factor connecting many of the Malayali women writers of English, chapter two of the thesis will examine the history of migration in Kerala, with particular focus on female mobility. Such a study on history would also cross-examine the post-global phenomenon of women's increased migration that is reflected in the rise of literary productions by women as well. Additionally, the chapter will outline the theoretical frameworks through which women writers of English from Kerala—shaped by the intersecting experiences of gender and migration—can be analysed. Chapters three, four, five and six analyse in detail the creative works and lives of four groups of Malayali women writers who were categorised before. Their creative works and migratory and educational patterns will be explored alongside so as to document their collective role in developing the discourse of Kerala modernity. Chapter seven of the thesis will formulate the inferences on the holistic phenomenon of Malayali women's creative engagements, and the last two chapters propose recommendations and a conclusion to the thesis, respectively.

Chapter II

Women in Transit: Locating Women's English Writing in the Context of Kerala Modernity

Malayali women's creative practices in English were a gradual process that has reached its zenith of progression in the post-global era. Unlike male writing in English from Kerala, which began in the early half of the nineteenth century, female literary history emerged only in the second half of the twentieth century, around the 1960s, as discussed in the previous chapter. This phenomenon can be understood as a direct aftermath of female scholars who received Western English education and/or have crossed the boundaries of Kerala, choosing English as their medium for expression. Dr. R. Leela Devi, one of the early scholars and writers in English, in her study *Influence of English on Malayalam Novels* (1978) affirms that it is the colonial model of English education that caused Indian literature in English to rise as an individual creative space. She opines that "the contact with the English language gave Indian writers new outlooks, they began to see and hear things in a new way—they got new eyes and ears" (5), explaining the assimilation and hike of Western trends in Kerala/Indian literature after the colonial episode.

With a steady increase in the number of female writers, contemporary Kerala writing in English comprises a rich spectrum of both canonical and emerging writers who attempt myriad experimental styles in their work, elevating them to international stature and acclaim. It is essential to trace the lineage of women's writing from Kerala, starting with the first generation of women writers like Leela Devi and the universally acclaimed Kamala Das, so as to account for the transnational popularity of contemporary writers such as Arundhati Roy, Jaishree Misra and Anita Nair. The fact that early English writing from Kerala lacked significant contributions from any female writers needs to be

problematised. This lack can be attributed to the privileged access that men had to Western education and international exposure during the pre-independence period, which facilitated a predominantly male English literary tradition from Kerala.

Regardless, there were many notable and impactful early Malayali women writers, but the medium of their expression was limited to Malayalam due to the deprivation of their access to places, language and learning. The possibilities of a rich literary tradition were further hindered, marginalised and restricted to Malayalam by regressive cultural factors that constrained gender equity. Jancy James, in her article on women's literary history in Malayalam, critiques the patriarchal monopoly in literary history, noting that female writers of Malayalam have often been overlooked and left uncategorised. She argues that the omission of women's names in the history of regional literatures is a very common yet deliberate exercise of gendered power (98). Women's writing from Kerala can, therefore, be regarded as a sociological and rational event that democratised literature from the normative hegemonic shackles led by male-dominant discourse. In her article titled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989), Kimberlé Crenshaw problematises the dominant feminist theories for neglecting and marginalising the experiences of other racial or ethnic minority women. Just as Crenshaw advocates for a distinct framework to address the experiences of Black women, Kerala's female literary discourse requires a unique theoretical approach that accounts for their specific historical and cultural contexts.

It is imperative to explore the pre-modern socio-political temperament of Kerala with respect to education so as to understand the trajectory and place of women in its history of creative practices. This intellectual conflict about female equity, enunciated in the late 1900s, has enabled a re-reading of Kerala modernity from a gender-inclusive perspective. The primary factor behind the emergence and sustenance of women's

writing in English from Kerala is women's access to English education, which, in turn, is a direct outcome of colonial modernity and the broader Western project. Another major reason that accounts for the remarkable quality of women's writing in post-independence-era Kerala is migration and cross-national interactions. This attributes a rhizomatic facet to Kerala modernity—a theory that Édouard Glissant explains in *Poetics of Relation* (1990)—transforming the society into 'the modern' with multidirectional development, which is reflected in literature as well. Women's writing from Kerala should hence be regarded as an offshoot of migratory practices, as almost all writers of the broader group have crossed borders, whether within or outside India.

Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996) argues that mass migration through cultural exchanges stimulates creativity—an idea that further needs to be explored in relation to migrant women of Kerala and their creative practices. This phenomenon raises another crucial question: why is it that only women who travelled or migrated tended to write in English, while Kerala has produced remarkable male English writers who have never crossed borders? If this pattern holds, are these women writers resisting someone/something through creativity? Do women from Kerala venture into English writing—which is intended for a double audience—only when they become exposed to foreign places? If yes, should female writing in English from Kerala be problematised with respect to greater questions on women's empowerment and freedom? What is the trajectory of female creative practices with respect to the socio-political context of Kerala during various ages? Can women's writing in English from Kerala be identified as an outcome of migration-induced modernity and colonial English education? To develop a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, it is crucial to study Kerala's migration history with a particular focus on female lived experiences.

Migration, whether internal or international, serves as a common thread connecting these writers, making it a vital aspect of this literary and cultural discourse.

A Short History of Gendered Migration from Kerala

K. V. Joseph, in *Keralites on the Move* (2006), primarily attributes two major reasons behind the migratory practices of Malayalis. First, Kerala's existence as a major seaport that has ensured international relations dating back to the sixteenth century; and second, the socio-political and cultural modernity that emerged after the colonial interaction, which instilled a new willingness among its people to migrate (Joseph i). It is crucial to trace when this transformation of Kerala into an ethnoscape and ideoscape—as formulated by Arjun Appadurai, referring to the movement of people and ideas, respectively—occurred in the region's history of migration. Joseph critiques the absence of thorough historical studies on migratory practices of Keralites in academia, despite the group being “a highly mobile class of people in the Indian sub-continent” (vii). He observes that most research focuses on the consequences and aftermath of migration rather than its historical causes. Kerala has a rich history of immigration of people from across the world, such as the Greeks and the Arabs, who arrived for trade as early as the ancient period. Besides, many communities in Kerala, including the Namboothiri Brahmins, Kongini Brahmins, and Rowther Muslims, are believed to have migrated from other parts of the subcontinent. Nevertheless, the outmigration trend that began in the last few decades of the nineteenth century marked the emergence of a new wave of travel culture among Keralites to various parts of the world, establishing Kerala as one of the leading states in terms of emigration (Joseph vii). However, Kerala's abundance of monsoon rains and favourable agricultural conditions may have contributed to the region's delayed participation in large-scale migration compared to other parts of India (Joseph 3). Joseph formulates further possible reasons that may have historically

hindered Kerala's travel culture before the nineteenth century. One key reason was the hierarchical caste and class-based stratification of society, which limited mobility and economic dynamism across different social sectors (3). Various religious/social reform movements ushered in a new era of modernity in Kerala, as a result of which the uncouth and primordial traditions were banished towards the building of a new state. The low population density of the place during the time is regarded as yet another reason for people being immobile. Besides, the topographical as well as settlement patterns in Kerala—with not a clustered system of houses but scattered and spread ones—further made the movement of people a tedious activity (Joseph 4). With the advent of structural and architectural modernity brought in by the colonial regime, this traditional settlement transformed into a new phase of urbanism. Colonial modernity and the blurring of social constraints altogether erased the rigid construction of mobility that existed within the psyche of Keralites.

It was after the end of the First World War that Keralites increasingly developed willingness towards moving to places for economic prosperity, perhaps due to the increased poverty rate caused by the war. Joseph remarks that there have been fluctuations in migration rates ever since, due to “the international developments like the Depression of the thirties, the second World War, liquidation of colonialism” (3). The fashion of crossing borders, which emerged well before this dynamic political climate, nevertheless facilitated Keralites' migration to places outside India, such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Burma, and the Middle East, as well as to major Indian cities like Bombay, Bangalore and Chennai. The nineteenth century also witnessed mass recruitment of slave labourers to work in British colonies outside India under the indenture/contract system, with regional centres of Kerala being set up in Palakkad and Tirur (Joseph 18). This “state assisted labour migration”—the only mode prevalent till the age and demeaning by

all means—slowly transformed into labourers migrating to places like Sri Lanka and South Africa of their own free will (20). The only sector of people involved in such outmigration was thus unemployed/unskilled labourers. Later, a new wave emerged, with semi-skilled workers migrating to African countries, marking the beginning of Kerala's transition into a hub of voluntary mass migration (20).

Modern values publicised by colonialism brought about revolutionary changes within the ideological foundation of Malayalis, as even the lower caste/class sector began to attain quality education that radically altered their lifestyle possibilities. Meanwhile, technological innovations and the spread of media transformed people's attitudes during the first half of the twentieth century, as they began to be aware of the possibilities of an improved lifestyle—a possibility of a mediascape or the exchange of information, as Appadurai theorises. The youth of Kerala—with their high levels of educational qualifications—found it difficult to be satiated with the limited employment opportunities available in the state, leading to a sudden surge in migration among the educated class. The 1921 census reports of migration from Travancore, Cochin and the district of Malabar reveal that there were streams of migrants spreading out to places like Madras, Mysore, Bombay, Bengal and Delhi, and to countries such as Burma, Ceylon, Singapore, Mesopotamia, the U.K. and America, among others, in a polygonal manner (Joseph 25). Joseph mentions some remarkable early migrants, such as Chempakaraman Pillai, who fought for Germany against the British during the First World War, and K. P. Kesava Menon, who went to the U.K. for education: the beginning of a greater recurring canon event of Keralites crossing borders for autonomy and freedom (25).

The Mappilla riots and agitations resulted in a significant raise in the number of Muslims moving to other parts of the country, such as to the Kolar gold mines in Mysore. These Muslim migrants mostly consisted of traders and small-scale business

merchants, and some among them were involved in railway constructions by the British. This Muslim fraternity, accumulated as a result of religious segregation, might have built a sense of shared belongingness among the community—a concept related to the making of emotional geographies, introduced by Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004). In the case of international migration, the number of migrants varied from country to country, with accessibility being a major determining factor. Within the minimal number of Indian migrants to Canada, Australia, the U.K. and the U.S., the number of Malayalis among them was even fewer. In contrast, Joseph points out that “though migration to Malaya and Sri Lanka was essentially a Tamil phenomenon, and to Burma a Bengali, or Telugu phenomenon, considerable number of Malayalees were also found in these countries” (33). Malayali settlement in Malaya consisted mostly of educated men who worked in clerical and administrative sectors (41). During the same time, around the 1920s and 1930s, labour was sought from India for the developmental schemes in Burma initiated by the British administration.

Studies on the migration history of Kerala often revolve around the oil boom of the 1970s and the sudden wave of migration to the Middle East. This nexus event, which lasted for decades, not only heralded economic prosperity for Kerala but also significantly contributed to India’s broader economic landscape, ultimately transforming Kerala’s social structure and cultural trends. Joseph remarks on the coordination of the Haj pilgrimage from India—a major link that connected the two lands—even during the British episode, despite the hostility of the Europeans towards Muslims (45). A large number of migrants from the Muslim community were allured by the emigration trend to the Gulf, but the statistics presented by Zachariah et al. in *Dynamics of Migration* (2003) prove that Muslim women in migration accompanying the male populace were relatively fewer, similar to that of Hindu Nair women (313). While Muslim men formed the largest

emigrant group, followed by Syrian Christian men, Hindu Nair men, and then Ezhavas, the proportion of female migrants remained lower in all cases. Nevertheless, among women, Syrian Christian migrants were the largest in number. Along with Latin Catholics, they made up approximately half of the total female emigrant population (Zachariah et al., *Dynamics of Migration* 313). All these factors underline that the project of Kerala modernity cannot be studied as an isolated individual occurrence; it was highly relative and proportional to the social mobility of people. The fact that remittance flow from migrants played a crucial role in constructing both the structural and conceptual modern Kerala underscores that migration was one of the most decisive factors in shaping twentieth-century Kerala society, particularly in the post-independence age. In this sense, Keralites simultaneously built both physical and metaphorical borderlands—a cultural space of ambiguity—shaped by conflicting identities and aspirations, as theorised by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987).

Joseph remarks that by 1965, the U.S. became one of the prominent destinations for Indian migration and settlement. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States of America was not a promising land for migrants, nor did its policies encourage migratory practices. Until then, the U.S. permitted only a limited number of migrants, primarily scholars and students pursuing higher education. Women's emigration rate to the U.S. during the 1990s was relatively large in number when compared to men, but male migrants outnumbered women when other migratory destinations are considered (Zachariah et al., *Dynamics of Migration* 315). The inward remittance rate from the U.S. to India during the 1980s and 1990s proves the steady increase in the number of people who prospered in America, as remarked by Joseph (57). Unlike Gulf migration, migrants to the U.S. show little inclination towards returning to their homeland, probably due to the remarkable prospects offered by the country, such as

better job opportunities, higher living standards, and access to quality education (Joseph 58). This cross-cultural aspect of migration should be given prior focus, as the growing influence of migrants in host countries [or within an international frame as a whole] is just as important in cultural discourse as the material benefits to their countries of origin. This research specifically examines the reciprocal nature of migration—a dynamic process of ‘give and take’—with a particular emphasis on its connection to female writers of English.

The rate of internal migration within India was relatively lower than the outmigration rate during the early twentieth century, possibly due to several factors. Despite advancements in transportation and the systemic dissolution of societal barriers, migration of people to different cities within India remained limited, or rather minimal, likely due to the disparity in educational qualifications between Keralites and residents of other states and the inadequate job opportunities for the labour class elsewhere. Various other minor factors, such as persistent societal constraints that prohibited the free movement of people despite the abovementioned systemic developments, are said to have influenced and regulated internal migration in Kerala. However, a few notable figures deserve recognition when examining the early scholarship and migration trends in Kerala. Joseph interestingly mentions about Dr. Palpu, one of the earliest writers of English from Kerala and a migrant to the princely state of Mysore for attaining higher medicinal education back in 1891 (96). Education sculpted the psyche of people to search for better livelihoods and to go to distant lands to confront the redundancy in Kerala. Hence, by the 1930s, the newly educated Keralites began emigrating to cities like Bombay and Madras, while a small number of labour sector migrants moved to cities that experienced a post-war industrial boom.

The economic depression of the 1930s following the First World War, however, brought about extreme poverty and famine in India, due to which the government further closed many of the industrial units (Joseph 67). It was during the same time that early migrants to other British colonies outside India returned, which further escalated the unemployment rate in the country. As the economy attempted to fight back against the adversities brought in by the First World War, the Second World War began, which altogether made prosperous life in India impossible. The British government, however, recruited youngsters to the military force, which slightly increased the migratory rate (Joseph 68). This enrolment in the army and defence forces was a breakthrough for a new group of unemployed but educated youth in Kerala. Zachariah et al. observe that “Until Kerala was formed, out-migration of Malayalis was confined to the Malabar area” (*Dynamics of Migration* 13). Since Malabar was a province of the British government, people there had relatively more mobility when compared to those from Travancore and Cochin. Other war-related demands and labour arose simultaneously, transforming Travancore and Cochin into increasingly out-migrating regions (Joseph 73).

Meanwhile, the educated youth of the Malabar district, in search of job opportunities, began favouring Madras as a destination as it served as their provincial capital (Joseph 75). This trend proves how education broadened the outlook of Keralites, which in turn influenced their migratory patterns. Besides, the provincial government recruited educated Keralites for various administrative/government jobs, mostly from Malabar, which made frequent movement to Madras possible. Joseph observes the initiation of out-migration of Keralites to Madras—an interesting phenomenon still in its continuum—as “Madras was growing as the most important industrial and business centre in the south, large numbers of Malayalees, both educated and uneducated, were attracted to Madras” (75). Madras offered new possibilities ranging from white-collar

jobs to unskilled labour, and so often, Malayalis started small-scale enterprises and businesses to later become affluent. Further, the refugee crisis that the Indian government had to tackle immediately after independence also had a dimension of migration in it [voluntary or at times pressured]. The development of industries on a massive scale in the years following 1947, the *Aikya Kerala* movement, and the subsequent reorganisation of states on a linguistic basis in 1956 also led people to actively engage in migratory practices.

Ever since the Second World War, outmigration from Kerala has been a vigorous process that never faced any setbacks. By the 1960s, Kerala had become a hub for the emigration of the educated class, with female migrants surpassing men in educational qualifications—highlighting the widespread advancement of modern education among Kerala women. The post-globalisation era emigration trend of the 1990s inclined mostly towards places such as Mumbai, Delhi, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, with Mumbai turning out to be the leading destination for Kerala migrants. Zachariah et al. underscore that during the 1980s and 1990s, the rate of female emigration to places within India did not escalate significantly compared to that of men (*Dynamics of Migration* 316). However, in the 1990s, the number of female emigrants saw a considerable hike in even international migration, exceeding the relative growth of male migrants (316). Besides, Joseph points out that in the case of intra-state migration, women's migration to neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka was higher compared to the male-female ratio in distant states (31). This trend is indicative that educated women might have joined men in transnational migrations seeking job opportunities and better livelihood conditions, whereas the migration of domestic/uneducated women accompanying men was relatively rare. The trend further suggests that mobility for

women, regardless of time, has been problematic and has to be studied in the context of various sociological dimensions.

There was also a conspicuous amount of internal migration within various parts of Kerala during the pre-independence period—a remarkable phase of relocation being the migration of peasants from Travancore to Malabar. One of the distinguished features of this emigration trend was that, while migration as a pan-Indian event was either forced, state-assisted, or recruitment-based, the process within provinces of Kerala was largely voluntary. Furthermore, Joseph observes that this pattern—where people relocated to settle on unoccupied wastelands—was rare, as most migration trends in India involved movement to already inhabited or cultivated areas (76). Peasant migrants who moved to Malabar belonged to the Syrian Christian community of Travancore and were thereby not an underprivileged sector of the society. V. J. Varghese problematises migration from Travancore to Malabar during the 1920s, referring to it as an “exodus” trend that “arguably introduced capitalist land relations and production system in the forests and ‘pristine’ tracts of Malabar” (229). Various reasons, such as the scarcity or limitation of cultivable lands in Travancore, favourable land reforms and the abundance of forestlands at cheap prices in Malabar, might be attributed to this shifting.

All these patterns of migration—whether international, interstate, or within Kerala—underscore the region’s long history of mobility driven by economic aspirations, resource availability, and socio-political factors. The evolving trajectory of migration, shaped by both historical and contemporary forces, necessitates an exploration of gendered migration, particularly the experiences of women who have traversed geographical and cultural boundaries, shaping new identities in the process. The underlying motives for migration vary by gender of emigrants, regardless of form or type. As Joseph aptly remarks, if it was in search of employment that men in Kerala

migrated, female migration was largely influenced by male agencies, such as marriage or father's job in distant lands (105). Although it is a universal phenomenon that the male sector outnumbers the female in migration, the jarring disparity in this ratio in Kerala began to fade by the 1960s due to several socio-political and cultural influences (109). The insecurity and lack of trust in the emerging networks of migration would possibly have affected female emigration negatively in the initial years. Zachariah et al. discuss the gender dimensions in migration from Kerala and opine that "women following men in migration from Kerala; men follow women in migration back to the state" (*Dynamics of Migration* 309). By the 1990s, more women became educated in fields of medical science and nursing, which significantly contributed to the sudden surge in female migration during this period. Intuitively, the number of educated women in migration overpowered the number of educated men. However, the high rate of married women living in Kerala while their husbands migrated abroad reinforces that the number of men in migration ultimately exceeded that of women (322).

Zachariah et al. further suggest a possible stagnation in the rate of migration of Keralites, both within and outside India, mostly due to the evolving immigration policies in various places. The book argues that this dip is certainly driven "from preference for the 'sons of the soil' and the policy of reservations" in host lands (*Dynamics of Migration* 49). Nevertheless, migration from Kerala in the post-globalisation era has been a stable and progressive process, with more educated people—gender inclusively—seeking better livelihoods in distant lands. In this regard, it is imperative to note that complete cultural amalgamation is unattainable, and the failure to achieve it can sometimes lead to communal/regional conflicts. Keralites across different parts of the world have experienced a similar phenomenon. However, these factors are beyond the scope of this research, as it does not probe into specific sociological issues faced by

Keralites in migration. This study is focused on gender narratives within Kerala migration and specifically on the role of English-educated migrant women in carrying forth developmental modernity through literary discourses. A significant rise in women's writing in English from Kerala began around the 1960s, notably when writers like Kamala Das—whose childhood was spent outside her native Kerala—initiated creative praxis in English. The majority of creative writers of English from Kerala since Kamala Das fall into this lineage of migratory activities, either within or outside India. Correspondingly, it is necessary to look into aspects of return migration from various parts back to Kerala, since many of the female writers in focus have undergone such a process and settled elsewhere in India.

Studies on Kerala migration unanimously agree that this post-World War II trend of crossing borders has nevertheless brought about rampant changes in the economic, political and cultural landscapes of the state. Kerala modernity—a rather complex event in its continuum—thus encapsulates the migration and travel culture of Malayalis, which has had remarkable impacts on the framework of 'modern' Kerala. Debates and thoughts on women's liberation, education, political role and individual identity initially began in Kerala society and academia as an aftermath of renaissance and reformation movements and were later carried forth by communist and nationalist causes. As V. Geetha remarks in her foreword to J. Devika's *Her-Self* (2005), male-centred dominant intelligentsia has been historically restraining women from academic discourses, claiming that such scholarly engagement would impair feminine qualities (xiii). The cultural swap inclining towards migratory life, combined with modern education, gender debates, and other favourable conditions in the literary arena, inaugurated and established women's writing in English—another poignant and epochal movement in Kerala's literary landscape.

Social Mobility of Women: Theoretical Speculations on Migration, Creativity and Modernity

G. Arunima, in her work on the structure and transformation of matriliney, problematises the primordial gender structure customary in Kerala during the pre-modern times that effectively disrupted women's social mobility by indirect interventions. She argues that institutionalised stigma and traditions like *pulappedi* and *mannappedi* restricted the presence of Namboothiri and Nair women in the public domain, as it was stipulated to cast them out if they were spotted by lower-caste men outside their *tharawad* (Arunima 67). Unrefined and evil religious/gender practices like such ensured that women became ostracised not just from within their community but from mainstream society and the public sphere as well. Another major praxis that tampered as well as tamed femininity among the upper-caste Hindus, according to Sucheta Sankar, was the immobile and stoic existence of the *antarjanams* [Namboothiri women]. She remarks how the rigid demarcations of female mobility by the patriarchal society restricted *antarjanams* from venturing “out of their houses without the cover of a cadjan umbrella to protect them from ‘public’ gaze, or without a female chaperone from an intermediary caste to engage with the ‘foreign’ terrains outside the home” (Sankar V. 121).

Another pervasive and stringent tradition that restricted the active presence of women in public was the *theendari* culture [impurity of menstruating women], which regulated them from being involved in regular affairs and activities. The privileged masculine agencies made sure that a sense of normalisation and psychic slavery was established within the construction of the feminine, condensing them into limited spaces. This retracted practice of ritualising women's physiological changes was used by the hegemonic structures to confine spatiality within the female community so as to fashion

a “mobility apartheid” (Sankar V. 123). All these restrained manners imposed on Kerala women, in accordance with societal gender whims, indicate why there was little travel discourse and practice among women before the Kerala renaissance. In general, masculinity was often equated and read in parallel with uninhibited spatial liberty that simplified men’s constant dislocations, whereas women were codified with inflexible spatial orders. Travel modernity in the pre-Renaissance Kerala was thereby predominantly associated with male discourse, as spatial freedom catalysed modernisation of this gender group in its totality. *Sancharaswathandryam*, or the freedom to travel, hence, became a poignant topic of gender discussions in the public sphere during the Kerala renaissance. Creative writing also reflected this social conflict in the moulding of characters. For instance, when Chandumenon’s *Indulekha* (1889) represented the opinionated ‘modern’ women of the Renaissance era in Kerala, there were both positive and negative reviews and discussions on that character (Suthara and Sudhakar). Travelling culture and educational status of people are highly relative and congruent to one another, and it was the rapid spread of education among women that made them aware of the possibilities of crossing borders and shifting topographies.

The primordial system of education in Kerala was mainly martial training, which was carried out in *kalaris* set up mostly by the Nair community [*madampimar*, or the nobles] and was accessible only to the Brahmin *Savarna* men. The nineteenth century witnessed activities of institutions such as the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission on a pan-Indian level that created waves of revolution among Hindus of Kerala. The religious reform movements that consequently sprouted in Kerala were from two streams: one led by Chattampi Swamikal and the other by Sri Narayana Guru. Caroline and Filippo Osella remark that “a new group identity centred on generalized ideals of ‘progress’ and ‘mobility’ was formed while new imperatives—education, respectable

employment, thrift and accumulation of wealth, and abolition of untouchability—were articulated” (573). All these were epochal to the renaissance and reformation of Kerala into a more practical and modern society, instilling democratic gender values into the collective psyche of the modern educated Keralites.

The nineteenth century saw remarkable progress in the field of education, with the implementation of the Western system of education by the Christian missionaries. The foundation to modern English education was laid during the 1810s to 1820s under Rani Lakshmi Bai and Rani Parvathi Bai. The reorganised educational system modelled upon the Western one was first implemented through an English school opened at Nagercoil in 1816 (Devi, *Influence of English* 10). This step was followed by the establishment of schools by the Church Mission Society, as in Alleppey, Kottayam and Trivandrum, by the 1830s. The role of the English missionary Benjamin Bailey in the installation of the first printing press in Kottayam and the subsequent publication of the Bible translated into Malayalam raised a new culture of reading and learning. Major Malayalam periodicals that were printed following these events include the famous *Vidyavilasini*, and the nationalist sentiments that grew rapidly towards the 1900s facilitated the circulation of newspapers. Besides, the role of major communal organisations in promoting education by setting up schools and educational institutions is indispensable in the history of modernity in Kerala, especially from a gender-inclusive perspective. In “Fashioning the Reading Woman in Colonial Kerala,” Meera C. observes that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, print culture rapidly renovated and became accessible univocally to the new intelligentsia, which consisted of neo-literate women (102). The nationalistic resistance against colonial oppression, along with the regional renaissance spirit and reformation, transformed the primitive temperaments of the state, ultimately leading to the famous *Aikya Kerala movement* of the 1940s. The

colonial modernity diffused therein was adjoined by the propagation of liberal ideas in the society. This, in turn, ushered in a new era of educational possibilities, extending access even to previously marginalised communities—including women, who formed a significant part of the gendered subaltern.

Discussions on women's education and mobility emerged as a prominent discourse in Kerala as early as in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It is interesting to note that many of the Malayalam magazines published during the time have articles and write-ups on women's education as their introductory note. For instance, the July 1894 issue of *Keraleesugunabhodhini* contains a brief poetic note titled “Sthreevidyabhyasam” [“Women's Education”], remarking on the newly opened educational institutions or *padasalas* for women (K. V. 3). The author contends that making education for women mandatory is essential for the overall well-being of humanity and societal progress. Such a holistic discussion on female education in nineteenth-century Kerala reflected the region's view and take on an issue that is still in debate—women's education. It is further stated that the motto of the magazine was to benefit the women's community by spreading reading culture among them.

These dynamic fluxes and mystifications in the societal ideologies were constantly refashioning the gender discourse of Kerala into an all-encompassing and sociable discipline. C. Rugmini Amma, in her article “Sthreejanasammelanam” [“A Gathering of Women”] published in *Lakshmi Bhai Magazine* in 1907, points out the age-old disparity between the status and awareness of men and women. She argues that while men receive education and stay informed about the world around them, women are forced to think that their existence is confined to the household (163). Rugmini Amma urges women in the community to ponder upon this societal inequality and strongly advocates for the widespread education of women (164). These public discussions and

arguments—though expressed in native Malayalam—nonetheless problematised the domesticated and immobile existence imposed on women. Through such resistance against dominant male discourse in the media, along with societal advancements following the Renaissance, social mobility became a reality in Kerala. As a result, female migration began to flourish. This newfound spatial possibility for women can be read alongside Kerala's constant engagement with its many modernities. Women's writing in English from Kerala—a canon event that collectively questions the normatively patriarchal literary discourse—is one among the non-linear aftermaths of this modernity. It is pivotal to delve into theories that connect migration and gendered experiences to better decode the sensibilities of the female writers in focus, who, in turn, are extensions of the lineage of Kerala's rich migratory history and intellectual modernity.

One such prominent theory that connects gender and migrant culture, as mentioned earlier, is the Black feminist critique of mainstream feminism, known as intersectionality theory, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. In “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” Crenshaw critiques the traditional, one-dimensional approach to female experiences, arguing that such frameworks are insufficient and, at times, unfairly reductive (155). Originally derived as a methodology to systematically address the tribulations within the Black women community of the U.S., intersectionality theory can be further expanded to any discussions on diverse identity existences where various aspects such as race, gender, ethnicity and class intersect so as to produce any sort of net impact [positive or negative].

According to Crenshaw, women of colour face double marginalisation both as women and as members of a racial minority. However, the incongruity in treating these aspects as unrelated and mutually exclusive is problematic. She challenges the predominant analytic tendency in addressing Black women's issues, which segregates

individual identities of race and gender and ultimately distorts their experiences (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 139). Crenshaw emphasises the exclusion of Black women in both feminist and anti-racist discourses, arguing that an intersectional approach is essential for understanding their position in society (140). She concisely captures this dilemma: “Black women are the same and harmed by being treated differently, or that they are different and harmed by being treated the same” (149). She explicates that subjugation does not necessarily operate along a singular categorical axis that defines individual identity; rather, it also can form systemic discrimination that works through a combination of factors, ultimately shaping one’s existence. When the domain of popular feminism is in focus, Black women get racially marginalised, and from an anti-racial perspective, their existence as women becomes blurred. Hence, disciplining racial and gender issues of Black women as two doctrines misleads the analytical praxis of their identity, as their struggles ultimately arise from the intersection of multiple affiliations.

The contradiction arises from the fact that these people do not just converge into a singular identity but are microcosms containing multiple affiliations. This aspect of multiplicity in individual identity is particularly useful in understanding female migration, where cultural assimilation, identity negotiation, and systemic gender discrimination interact in complex ways as a result of geographical swaps. The causes of assimilation or dissociation that result from differences involved in migration are not unidirectional; they emerge from a combination of personal and societal factors. The multitudes of experience involved in female migration bring about myriad accounts of diverse lives, the reflections of which can be found in female writers who transgressed borders and started writing in English. Women who migrate—especially across ethnic and racial lines—encounter layered marginalisation, similar to the way Black women

experience both racial and gender-based discrimination. The lived realities of migrant women are, therefore diverse, shaped by numerous factors such as ethnicity, class, and cultural background, making homogenisation problematic.

Crenshaw also critiques the dominant conception that “a discriminator treats all people within a race or sex category similarly” (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 150), arguing that such an integrated or collective categorisation erases individual experiences. This becomes even more nuanced and problematic in the case of migrant women, who may simultaneously belong to a different ethnicity, race or culture while still sharing the commonality of being women. Besides, migrant men of a particular ethnicity and lineage might experience an entirely different treatment compared to their female counterparts because of their gender privilege. Similarly, women of two dissimilar ethnicities in a host place might face entirely different receptions due to their inherent differences or associative factors related to the new land. When intersectionality theory is applied to studies on migration, it becomes clear that migrant women’s experiences are never uniform but shaped by an assimilation of several socio-political, economic and cultural forces.

In “Mapping the Margins” (1991), Crenshaw elaborates on her argument on the need to generalise individual/isolated experience in order to develop a systematic identity politics. She explains the problematic disposition of identity politics itself, noting that while it successfully defends differences, it often fails to address “intra-group” differences (1242). She further elaborates on the idea of structural intersectionality [how axes of identity like race, gender and ethnicity compound to affect Black women’s holistic identity and issues], political intersectionality [how popular feminism and anti-racist doctrines often neglect women of colour as their subjects], and representational intersectionality [how all factors combine to form a cultural archetype of Black women]

(1245). As female writers of English from Kerala belong to a greater tradition of various forms of migration, mere feminist theories become inadequate to analyse their identity so as to place them in a socio-cultural context. Here, intersectionality theory can be employed to examine how various aspects of their identity intersect in their lives, cultural identity and texts. Crenshaw's theory can further be expanded to include these hybrid writers in order to examine whether aspects of their identity—when facilitated by their host lands—have converged to usher in a progressive shift in their writings and life.

Another gendered reading of migration was proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa in her seminal text *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in the preface of which she identifies herself as a 'borderwoman' and observes that 'borderlands' are formed whenever different cultures [or people of various identity groups] coexist and interact. She further regards that particular state of indifference and in-betweenness—which likely affects underprivileged sectors more—as a physical site of confusion, exploitation and contradiction. In the preface to the text, she stresses that being a *mestiza* [a woman of mixed race, a term she uses for herself] is a new experience altogether—one that involves going against the tide with multiple affiliations and identities. Anzaldúa develops her own mixed language in the text and equates this compilation as an extension of her life in the borderlands. Her theory encompasses not only the physical but also the emotional, psychological and metaphorical plurality that culturally mixed lives embody. Though her discussion is firmly anchored in the physical reality of U.S.-Mexico border lives, she conceives such a space as an "open wound" where collision or merging of diverse elements occurs and where the minority hybrid becomes marginalised (2). Female writers of English from Kerala, with their migration history, inhabit similar corporeal and figurative borderlands, showing resilience and adaptability—as manifested through their creative practices. Anzaldúa envisions a third space exclusively comprising people of the borderlands, a site

of struggle and cultural mix where exploitation and sustenance coexist, the effect of which is particularly visible in the lives of women (11). Her theoretical speculations on the convergence of gender, places, education, cultural values and expectations can be universally applied to women of any ethnicity and national identity who have been subject to a plurality of cultures. Anzaldúa advocates education for women as a path to self-relevance and autonomy, offering it as a fourth choice beyond turning to “the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother” (17). This alternative option of progress is what female writers of English from Kerala appear to have chosen, allowing them to evolve into autonomous agents of individuality and self-expression. Nevertheless, the duality or, at times, multiplicity of these women’s identities must be normalised and embraced, while being treated as a solid, individuated occurrence.

Apart from all these, it is the femininity or the identity of being a woman that brings this set of writers into a collective sector, facing constraints and unsafety in a doubly layered manner. Further, Anzaldúa comments that “Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create” (73), which accounts for the elementary process of creative praxis by women of Kerala who have physically transgressed boundaries [through migration] and have psychologically alienated themselves into a borderland. The theorist suggests an alternative to dominant notions of human identity rooted in similarities and instead develops the idea of hybrid *mestiza* women (77). Migrant women [writers] can be considered under this category, with a multitude of selves and determinants congregated into one. Anzaldúa additionally problematises the concept of home, as a paradox arises when a person [especially women or other minority gender groups] has to leave their home to find their home (16). The thesis further probes whether migration or dislocation to different lands has facilitated

female writers by enhancing their creativity. Simultaneously, Anzaldúa regards this gender/cultural ambiguity, arising primarily from ‘many lands,’ as a factor that consecutively instils and disrupts creativity (74). In this context, the thesis extensively explores the extent of confusion [or stability/freedom] that migration brought into the lives of women [as a result of which they wrote] and the thematic reflection of this issue in their works.

A similar theory that focuses on the fluidity of migratory culture is expanded by Édouard Glissant in his significant text *Poetics of Relation*, associating the process with the dynamics of a globalised world. He regards identity as an ever-transforming, continuously evolving entity shaped through interactions. Accordingly, cultural purity and homogenisation are myths, as cultures and identities are in constant interface in the post-global world and thus in a state of perpetual transformation (11). Glissant relates the transmuting capability of cultures in non-linear patterns to that of the rhizomes, which spread bilaterally and multidirectionally. To quote him: “Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I [Glissant] call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (11). Glissant’s theoretical speculations can be employed to understand the identity politics of female writers of English from Kerala who would have undoubtedly developed rhizomatic characteristics resulting from their transnational or minor migrations. The rhizomatic nature of these writers would imply that their identity, while deeply rooted in their homeland, could also be non-linear. According to his perception, travel has transformed into a privileged/pleasurable act without being initiated due to peer pressure or material need, and those who do not engage in such activities may confront “internal exile” in life (Glissant 19). The reasons behind the migration of various generations of female writers

from Kerala need to be examined to validate—through a gendered lens—this post-global theorisation on migration that focuses on individual freedom and will.

Glissant further critiques the dominant conception that ‘the other,’ during heterogeneous human interaction, is either “assimilated, or else it is annihilated,” as there is no alternative to the subversion of the underprivileged (49). He vouches for such an opacity of individuals and cultures—a possibility to remain different without being questioned, understood, dominated or attacked. Accordingly, people involved in migrations should not be forced to be comprehensible by the superior community; rather, they should be allowed to exist as individual occurrences. He underscores the pressing need to accept differences so as to break hierarchies and social scaling, stating that “the right to opacity would not establish autism; it would be the real foundation of relation, in freedoms” (190). Glissant’s theory directly challenges the popular Western notion of assimilation and homogeneity that has been historically practised through their ‘regimes.’ This notion of embracing divergent cultures and multiple identities forms the crux of writings from migratory people and thus can be analysed against the backdrop of Kerala writings.

Glissant’s final formulation of the theory of the poetics of relation implies how literature or art becomes a microcosm of expression for such intricate and complex communities. Accordingly, literature becomes a catalyst to ensure opacity by interweaving assorted cultures and histories and by establishing the plurality of human nature in a global scenario. Female writings in English from Kerala can be regarded as a poetics of relation in themselves, bringing together myriad histories of female migration from Kerala and gendered experiences in ‘many lands’ through their creative works. In a globalised world, where cultural amalgamation and historical exchanges are increasingly accessible, human histories and experiences merge—fostered by processes like

migration—and such diversity gets reflected in indigenous writings. This thesis evaluates the extent to which female writers from Kerala have engulfed influences through their cross-cultural contacts and lived experience.

Another poignant concept of “affective economies” introduced by Sara Ahmed in her work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) can be employed to analyse how the collective fraternity of female writers of English from Kerala weaves an emotional geography around them—a psychological sense of belonging that enables them to combine their shared identity and write in English. Ahmed critiques the popular construct of emotions as purely pertaining to ‘the personal,’ all the while being deeply rooted in the socio-political contexts in which they are produced. This collective and contextual nature of emotion becomes decisive for the politics of inclusion and exclusion in societies (8–9). It is the idiosyncratic emotions [of belongingness or difference] that shape the collective psyche of a community and recur throughout history.

Both positive and negative affective states—such as loss, alienation, trauma, reconciliation and adaptation to the homeland—emerge from figurative topographies that are shaped by communal feelings. In Ahmed’s words, “feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation. The circulation of objects allows us to think about the ‘sociality’ of emotion” (8). Ahmed’s observation aligns with Benedict Anderson’s theory of ‘imagined communities’ and enables us to group Kerala writers of English as part of a broader imagined collective. This umbrella set becomes even more specific when framed within the emotional contours of femininity, in the case of female writers. Ahmed argues that emotions circulate within groups and get accumulated over time to pass on to generations, which she calls the “rippling effect of emotions” (45). The sense of nostalgia that English writers from Kerala have unitedly cultivated from the beginning—since most of them have lived away from their homeland—can be read in

parallel to Ahmed's idea of affective economies. These communal emotions define social power dynamics because the unconscious does not form individual subjects; instead, it evolves into the collective sensibility of the group.

Arjun Appadurai, in *Modernity at Large*, formulates the correlation between mass migration and the accumulation of human imagination as its aftermath. He ruminates on mass migration as an essential defining feature of globalisation, wherein individuals dare to disrupt conventional patterns of living and destabilise fixed notions of place and identity. Accordingly, the "work of imagination" politicises modern human life by triggering aspirations for better prospects through migration (10). This perspective on migration as a political event is particularly relevant when examining female migration from Kerala and its connection to creative practice, as it helps contextualise the underlying biographical impulses that drive these writers toward both geographical and imaginative border crossings. Migration, in this framework, is a cultural event that subverts people's singular sense of belongingness and attachment to national identity due to their flexible/multiple topographical affiliations (170). Accordingly, a migrant/expatriate identity becomes an amalgam of experiences and cultural fragments gathered across geographical transitions, highlighting the universally malleable nature of culture. In the post-globalised world, media further shapes this fluidity by constructing collective imagination and community sentiment within people. This particular idea of global cultural flow formulated by Appadurai again resonates with Anderson's 'imagined communities,' in which print capitalism aids in moulding shared identities. Female writing in English from Kerala—unified by migratory and gendered experiences—can thus be understood as an aftermath of a shared female imagination, drawing from both by extending Anderson's and Appadurai's ideas pertaining to virtual identity construction.

Besides, Appadurai's theory of scapes—five interconnected yet distinguished dimensions to evaluate global cultural flow—explains identity formation in transnational movements and the resultant formation of imagination (8). These imagined alternative worlds are ethnoscape, or the landscape[s] of people in migration; mediascape, or the flow of information across borders; financescape, or the flow of economy in migration; technoscape, or the global configuration of technology, and ideoscape, or the mixing of ideologies through migration (33). Female writers in focus, when regarded as an ethnoscape, would “constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree,” contributing to a communal imagination (33). The category of ideoscape—which focuses on the ideological exchanges and conflicts that arise from migration—can be particularly useful in examining how these writers negotiate, transform or retain belief systems across border crossings (36). Appadurai's framework, therefore, enables a deeper investigation into the ideological and imaginative shifts that female writers from Kerala undergo in their topographical swaps, as reflected in their creative works.

In relation to all these theoretical speculations, Benedict Anderson's formulations in *Imagined Communities* (1983)—particularly as a base theory to Sara Ahmed and Arjun Appadurai—can be used primarily to regard the phenomenon of female writings of English from Kerala as a facet of an ongoing imagined collective incidence. Anderson opens his conceptualisation of ‘the imagined’ by stating that “the members of ... nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). Thereby, nationalism, or a state of belongingness, is basically a metaphorical, figurative and imagined conception that unites a set of people with a communal feeling of association. In a broader sense, female writers of English from Kerala are an aftermath of an imagined community—one

shaped by the solidarity born out of travel culture, displacement and feminine experiences linked to it. These women may not be personally connected, yet they have collectively developed a sense of belonging and a shared creative ethos. This imagined commonality continues to inspire and shape the emergence of new writers currently from the region. The four attributes of this feeling of rootedness, as Anderson explains—imagined, limited, sovereign and community-sense—can also be applied in the collective identification of select writers (6–7). Anderson further explores the process of nation-building as deeply connected to the propagation of print culture, asserting that “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). His idea of print capitalism explains how mass-produced print materials helped cultivate a shared reading culture, which, in turn, fostered a sense of collective identity among dispersed individuals. Similarly, migration and modern education can be considered as catalysts that indirectly stimulated reading/writing culture among Kerala women, eventually leading them to express themselves in English. Female writing—a literary form that inherently requires a gendered lens—must, therefore, be analysed through intersecting historical and cultural dimensions such as colonialism, the development of print capitalism in Kerala, the spread of education, and patterns of migration. These forces collectively shaped the emergence and evolution of female English writing in the region, positioning it as a vital component of a larger imagined community in movement.

The next chapter of the thesis will examine the role of English-educated, travelled/migrant women of the pre-globalisation era—particularly those shaped by internal migration—in continuing this trend of female writing from the region, through a gendered re-reading of their lives and writings. With select female writers already placed in the broader history of Kerala, further explanation of this contextualisation will also be

carried out. As Caroline and Filippo Osella reinforce, modernity is adjoined by mobility, which may be a story of pleasure for migrants who participate in it by choice but one of suffering for those who are forced into it (582). This contradictory aspect of migration will be further explored and re-read, particularly through the works of female writers in focus. The attempt here is to explore how the ‘migrant Malayali’ self is configured or fashioned by history and how, in turn, history is re-fashioned by such literary discourses.

Chapter III

Routes Within: Narratives of Pre-Global Malayali Women and their Internal Migration

The history of female writing in English from Kerala—ever since its inception in the second half of the twentieth century—has grown into a significant literary event, as discussed in the previous chapter. K. Satchidanandan, in the preface to Kamala Das's *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing*, comments that Indian women writers of English have formed a “little tradition of their own” (9): a tradition that has now diverged into various literary discourses on a linguistic basis, within which Kerala women writers hold a significant position. The post-independence spread of liberal ideas that led to progressive shifts in society, educational reforms, and increased social mobility has significantly altered the gender dynamics in favour of women. This literary emergence is an egalitarian episode that inclusively challenged and liberated literature from a normatively masculine culture.

Arjun Appadurai regards mass migration as an event that stimulates, or even compels, imagination. The creativity of female writers of English from Kerala is a direct result of such migration and travel experiences, which, according to Appadurai, may not be purely emancipatory or disciplined but would be a means of expressing dispute and controversy (4). In alignment with this argument, this chapter traces the beginning of Kerala's female creative practice in English through the first generation of writers such as Kamala Das and R. Leela Devi—pre-globalisation era creatives who stayed within India or had internal migrations. The central aim here is to analyse the social mobility of first-generation female writers of English from Kerala that have emancipated them towards the intelligentsia and catalysed their creative productions. By analysing their lives and works alongside, the chapter attempts to underscore how gendered and

migratory identities, along with English educational backgrounds, combined to construct the collective idea of ‘being English writers’ within representative women writers of the age. The chapter also underscores how creative writing has inadvertently made these women writers a part of Kerala’s migration history and the larger project of Kerala modernity.

While assessing migration [internal or transnational] as a commonality among female creative writers from Kerala, it is to be noted that among the first generation of English scholars, writer and translator R. Leela Devi stands out as an exception. Though most of Devi’s scholarly and creative works were produced in collaboration with her husband V. Balakrishnan, her contributions to English education and early women’s writing remain indispensable. However, there are almost no credible sources or materials accessible to trace a comprehensive overview of the writer’s biography, and none mention any substantial migratory experience the writer has undergone. Nevertheless, she is an English scholar and a writer who lived and has supposedly stayed within Kerala/India, with unconfirmed sources suggesting she was a teacher who retired as the deputy director of the Department of Education. Devi also held master’s degrees in both Malayalam and Sanskrit and a doctoral degree in English, confirmed by her designation given in the title page of Devi’s and Balakrishnan’s compilation *108 Upanishathukal*.

Gloria Anzaldúa notably mentions that to break free from her ingenuine personality imposed upon by other agencies, she had to travel and stay away from her home (16). In contrast, when the entire spectrum of female creative practices from Kerala is considered, Leela Devi represents a deviation from this popular conception, which mirrors the ideology of ‘a room of one’s own.’ Devi was a scholar who found creative partnership and stability in co-authoring texts alongside her husband—a journey that began with their publication of a Malayalam encyclopaedia in 1967. Devi’s

collaboration with her husband in creative production subverts Anzaldúa's idea of physical disengagement from family, which she suggests for women in order to find their true nature and to nurture their creativity (16). Although she is a contemporary of prominent English and Malayalam writers and has written several academic, historic, and scholarly works, Leela Devi remains under-discussed in academia, with little research available on her life or work.

Contrary to this was the life and creative world of Kamala Das—a versatile writer who had a very significant creative background, being one of the first female English creatives from Kerala who wrote prior to Leela Devi. Born in Kerala and raised in both Calcutta and her homeland, Das carried forth the literary lineage of her great grand uncle Nalapat Narayana Menon and her mother, the renowned Malayalam poet Balamani Amma. While Kamala Das is one of the most poignant voices in Malayalam literature as well, it is worth noting that she chose to write all her poetry in English, a language she often described as the medium of her thoughts and dreams (Raveendran and Das 66). Kamala Das ventured into creative writing in the 1960s, and though R. Leela Devi, alongside V. Balakrishnan, wrote non-fiction around the time, their creative production—relatively meagre—happened only during the 1970s. Both had Western-orientated education, and in Kamala Das's case, her life was marked by internal migration during the pre-global era.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the migratory practices of Keralites witnessed a tremendous setback after the economic depression following World War II. The only driving factor that stimulated outmigration in Kerala was the relatively high education status of Malayalis and the resultant craving for better prospects during the 1930s (Joseph 44, 75). However, early women's migration from Kerala was primarily forced or rather compulsory, as in the case of Kamala Das, driven by masculine agencies

that dictated their roles and opportunities in society. A surface level exploration of the corpus of research already done on Kamala Das reveals that a majority of studies use a feminist lens and theoretical speculations to analyse her works. However, reading Kamala Das requires more than a singular lens, as evidenced by her layered identity. An intersectional approach is essential to understand writers like Kamala Das, as her experiences are shaped by her migration—an experience that was not her choice—and are multidirectional, similar to how Kimberlé Crenshaw theorised the experiences of Black women. Similarly, her contemporary and another first-generation female English writer from Kerala, R. Leela Devi, with her educational stature and creative praxis, also exemplifies a woman with multiple identity affiliations, whose life and writings should also be analysed using an intersectional lens.

Problematising Gender

Kamala Das lived the majority of her childhood years in Calcutta from her birth in 1934 until her marriage in 1949, apart from a year of stay in Thrissur and frequent visits to her ancestral home in Punnayurkulam. Colonial modernity was reaching its pinnacle towards the 1930s in Kerala, and English education was systematically made available to elite families by the time Kamala Das was born. She received her elementary education from schools in Calcutta, including St. Cecelia's School and St. Johns's Diocesan School, along with a brief period at a convent school in Thrissur (Radha 1)—evidencing her English-language upbringing and Western educational background.

Viewed through Anzaldúa's lens, Leela Devi's life and work represent a counter-narrative to institutional structures that seek to relegate women to passive roles. Anzaldúa, in her discussion on women's freedom, attacks both culture and churches [or any religious system in general] for insisting women be subservient to masculine agencies and positions education as a path to autonomy (17). Leela Devi's life as a

scholar and prolific writer is hence a direct aftermath of the educational qualifications she achieved prior to the 1970s, making her a poignant writer of the first generation of English-educated women from Kerala. Devi had chosen the fourth option of becoming an autonomous woman through education, as Anzaldúa suggests (17).

The newly induced social mobility that expanded and became accessible to women in such a scenario broke the linear codification of people's movement—a reflection of which is seen as instrumental in fostering creativity in English among women. For Kamala Das, this mobility introduced her to a pan-Indian literary culture, which seamlessly blended with her foundational Malayali identity and stature as a Malayalam writer. Das got married at the age of fifteen and moved along with her husband to Bombay and later to Calcutta and Delhi for his career (Radha 1). The post-independence age brought favourable prospects to the educated youth of Kerala, resulting in their migration to cities such as Madras, Bombay and Delhi—an era that shaped Das's own geographical trajectory. It was only in the 1980s that she began residing in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala (Radha 1). However, the persistent presence of 'other lands' and the fluidity of her spatial experience affirms her identity as a migrant.

Kamala Das published her earlier poems in English under the abbreviated name K. Das, with a belief that editors of magazines harboured prejudice towards women writers (*My Story* 131). This concern underscores the pervasive gender disparity within the academia of pre-global Kerala—a period during which women's writing in English was just beginning to gain momentum. The comment is also a subtle jab at the male-dominated discursive space of early twentieth-century Indian literature. Das recalls that writing for her was a hobby as a housewife babysitting children but soon turned out to be a means of revenue. In this light, her choice to pursue writing may be seen as a form of

resistance, emerging as a gendered rebellion—both personal and political—against patriarchal expectations of female domesticity and silence.

As K. Satchidanandan remarks, there exists a polyphony in Das's work, as she simultaneously serves or assumes multiple forms of womanhood in life (Das, *Only the Soul Knows* x). Tracing these shifting personas is essential to understanding Das and her work in the broader contexts of Kerala modernity and migration. In a majority of her plays, including "The Fourteen Days' War" and "A Week with Manasi," and in stories like "Neipayasam" and "The Fair-Skinned Babu," all of which appear in the edited collection *Wages of Love*, Das explores various dispersed female lives that revolve around the themes of mobility and freedom. These narratives serve as both literal and metaphorical journeys, underscoring the dialectic between movement and confinement, as evidenced through her autobiography. The naïve wife of a writer in "The Fourteen Days' War," whose physical and emotional movement is restricted to her husband and child, is contrasted with an old but unmarried nurse in the army who boldly travels alone. While the wife leads a sheltered, immobile life, the nurse—educated and worldly—is unafraid to transgress conventional gender expectations. Das effectively uses the character to exemplify the 'borderwoman' as Anzaldúa theorises in *Borderlands*, as she is seen both emotionally and physically traversing between her personal and professional lives/cultures. The wife's disdain for the nurse, whom she judges for being seen with a male friend yet wearing "no *mangalsutra*," reflects the general public conscience and social scrutiny faced by educated women in that era (*Wages of Love*) and adheres to Anzaldúa's formulation that being a *mestiza* is never a comfortable territory.

In alignment with Das's camaraderie with domestically entrapped women, her story, "Neipayasam," offers a poignant portrayal of the domestic entrapment of womanhood. The story centres on a rural woman confined to the physicality of her

domestic space, bound by familial duties. After her death, her husband, overwhelmed by the weight of the responsibilities she once bore, sinks into despair. In the final scene, as he abruptly rushes to the bathroom, the narrative hints at a possible suicide—another escape from domestic burden and leaving behind the responsibilities of three children that the woman in the story was ‘supposed’ to take care of: an institutionalised domestication through duties that Anzaldúa critiques. Similarly, in Devi’s *Blue Jasmine*, Granny’s folk tale of the river visiting her husband’s home dressed in bridal finery, wearing fine white clothes, allusively projects that all women are ‘supposed to be’ docile and submissive to male agencies in customary Indian society. Phrases such as “decked with flowers and ornaments” and “red tilak on her palms and feet” (7) adhere to the ritualistic codification of women’s attire, particularly post-marriage. Anzaldúa critiques precisely this cultural demand—that women must remain acceptable, viable and devoted to the value system that is coded and predetermined by patriarchy (17). The misogynistic expectations of the protagonist as well as the portrayal of women in the novel confirm this view.

“The Fair-Skinned Babu,” a semi-autobiographical short story by Kamala Das, reminisces about the author’s haunting experiences after her conversion to Islam, which added to her already marginalised position in society as a woman. Extremely conflicted and caught in the dilemma of being tortured and segregated by society, the woman in the story plans to hire a killer to take her life. Das critiques the societal hostility directed at women who assert their right to choose—especially in matters of faith and identity. Taken together, these autobiographical and fictional texts reflect a consistent narrative strategy: the use of female mobility, both literal and psychological, as a lens through which to examine the tensions of modernity, tradition and gender. Further, Anzaldúa vehemently protests against the improbability for women to ‘return home’ in stringent

societies: “To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, pushing the unacceptable parts into the shadows” (20), a rejection that Das as an individual has faced.

Anzaldúa’s opinion that “to survive the Borderlands / you must live sin fronteras [without borders] / be a crossroads” (195) is subverted in Leela Devi’s *Blue Jasmine*. Granny’s pronouncement—“child, all women will go to their husband’s house” (6)—exemplifies what Anzaldúa protests against: a closed system of roles and destinations for women, governed by heteronormative order. Upon closer observation, Das’s stories articulate a mode of travel modernity—rather than the gendered restriction portrayed by Devi—in which liberation and restriction exist in constant interplay. Her stories become a powerful site to read the emotional geography of migration, displacement and return, as experienced by women navigating borderlands, both physical and metaphorical. On the other hand, Leela Devi attempts to create a pen-portrait of Kerala society of old order, where normative restrictions limited female mobility.

Leela Devi also effortlessly captures how the personal transgresses and often converges with the communal in a rural setting of high sociological interconnectedness. The episode of the narrator’s mother giving birth to his brother, where neighbourhood women assemble to assist in the delivery (*Blue Jasmine* 31), recalls the widespread practice of home births in pre-modern Kerala when medical facilities were scarce and also highlights how women’s collective collaboration and mutual understanding work. More importantly, this communal handling of a deeply personal event is an example of effective economies that Sara Ahmed suggests. For Ahmed, cultural practices and events circulate among people, making emotions inherently social and collective (8). In this sense, Leela Devi’s depictions of the shared ritualisation of childbirth in *Blue Jasmine*

highlight how individual experiences were embedded in and mediated by communal emotional economies in pre-modern Kerala.

Many of Das's short stories further consolidate this universality of women's lived experiences. "Padmavati the Harlot," "A Doll for the Child Prostitute" and "The Princess of Avanti," present various manifestations of women's exploitation. Set in various cities in India, these stories bear witness to the structural violence women endure—physical, emotional, material and sexual—within a patriarchal system. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of structural intersectionality becomes particularly relevant in such a context. Crenshaw explains how women of colour experience domestic violence and sexual assault in ways "qualitatively different from that of white women" due to the simultaneous effects of gender, class and other identity vectors ("Mapping the Margins" 1245). Similarly, the women in Das's abovementioned stories encounter segregation on various axes: gender, age, ethnicity, race and financial instability. The description of femininity by Leela Devi through phrases like "cherubin cheeks," "those once rosy cheeks," and "beautiful dark eyes" (*Blue Jasmine* 2) serves as visual markers of the idealised Indian woman, further asserting that gendered notions, cultural expectations and stereotypes circulate in the society in the form of collective oppressive emotions. The narrator's obsessive idealisation of Madhumathy—reduced to scent, memory and absence—suggests a commodified and romanticised view of the female body. Ahmed's theory of the "rippling effect" of emotions helps explain this dynamic: sentiments like longing, nostalgia and loss circulate multidirectionally by fixating on the idea of absence (45). Leela Devi similarly attempts to reconstruct the absent woman as the site of meaning and emotional order. Madhumathy's absence becomes more powerful than her presence, anchoring the narrative in a cycle of desire and loss that underscores the gendered economy of emotions in the male protagonist.

Leela Devi thereby maintains the picturisation of Kerala with its gendered hierarchy intact, with male characters unwilling and unable to accept the inferior position, even after recurring downfalls. Sreekanta's eventual self-sacrifice in Leela Devi's *Blue Jasmine*, where he smashes his head against the broken idol to restore the goddess's sight and hearing, is celebrated by the villagers as an act of religious devotion (82). Yet through Crenshaw's critique, this sacrifice appears deeply problematic.

Crenshaw critiques the tendency to perceive rape of coloured women as the inability of Black men to protect women of their race ("Mapping the Margins" 1273). Similarly, Leela Devi presents Sreekanta's sacrifice to underscore how he perceives the goddess's violation as his own inability to safeguard her in the first place—a common masculine tendency. His final act of self-sacrifice thereby reinscribes the patriarchal logic of male guardianship—casting divine femininity as dependent on male sacrifice for restoration and survival—further exemplifying how Devi captured the male-dominant Kerala.

Further, the boy narrator's insistence: "When I play with Madhumathy, it is I who decide our play. It is I who decide if there is to be play or not, also. Her opinion never counts" (8), unveils early social conditioning in gendered power hierarchies and reveals how patriarchal authority is naturalised from early childhood. Devi directly captures how these masculine stereotypes are normalised in Kerala through the depiction of men as suppressing emotions, shouldering economic burdens, and unleashing anger and outrage as a regular reaction to societal expectations. After the father's death, responsibility falls on the male heir (43), reflecting a gendered distribution of duty that frames masculinity through stoicism and sacrifice. Yet, Devi also portrays his recurring emotional outbursts—often unjustified—in order to expose the ironic fragility of this constructed masculinity.

Leela Devi also constructs a gendered parallel in *Blue Jasmine* through her narration: “The river flowed between white sand beds. She was calm and beautiful” (1), attributing feminine identity to nature. This archetypal projection of nature as mother takes manifested forms throughout the course of the novel, resonating with Sara Ahmed’s idea of affective economies, wherein shared emotions, images and metaphors like ‘mother nature’ circulate with a motive to shape collective gendered sentiments that instil fear and reverence among people. Kamala Das also delineates how entrenched gender roles and divisions worked within her family and society to further outcast her. Anzaldúa writes that women are often tuned to the fantasies of patriarchal agencies and are “afraid of being abandoned by ... the culture ... for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged” (20). Das vehemently attacks the loveless arranged marriage system by expressing that “my mother’s timidity helped to create an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied the relatives and friends” (*My Story* 4), further enforcing Anzaldúa’s claim on female fear of rejection and the resultant obedience that supplements it. This domestic submissiveness is also reflected in their migratory decision—her mother Balamani Amma, along with her children, relocated to Calcutta for the sake of her husband’s professional life.

Married off at a young age and having become estranged from her husband, Das confronts the economic and social consequences of such premature unions. She realises that she cannot afford a life after divorce because she “did not have the educational qualifications” that would have ensured job prospects (*My Story* 97). This reflects a common patriarchal practice that prevailed [and still does] in Kerala—marrying off girls before they become educationally and financially stable—thus impeding upward mobility for women and perpetuating systemic gender-based vulnerability. In elaborating the concept of structural intersectionality, Crenshaw remarks that many women of colour

face abject poverty and scarcity of any employable skills (“Mapping of Margins” 1245), which explains the case of Kamala Das: an early marriage devoid of autonomy or higher education, compounded by societal disregard for women’s economic agency. In several of her poems, the writer critiques the hollow customary marriage system and satirises the passivity it demands from women. For instance, in “With its Quiet Tongue,” she mocks Indian brides for consenting to loveless marriages and for reducing themselves to submissive roles (*Summer in Calcutta* 32).

Kamala Das’s works have since become a rich site for scholarly engagement on themes of womanhood, vulnerability, and resistance. Like Gloria Anzaldúa—who constructs her own cultural and spiritual space when denied comfort and belonging—Das responds to alienation by shaping a feminist architecture of her own. In the poem “Spoiling the name,” she meditates on the oppressive burden of ‘names’ and titles society and familial ties insist upon her (*Summer in Calcutta* 27). The writer feels like breaking all these shackles that others have imposed upon her identity and mocks society for its pseudo-moral values.

Das can also be seen reflecting on the physical changes in her body that accompanied her puberty, marking a shift in her social identity and the abrupt withdrawal of public opportunities. She recounts how her father equated her growth to restriction of expression, dismissing her dance master, claiming she was “too old to dance” (*My Story* 59). The incident is highly indicative of a broader societal pattern—wherein girls are shoved away into corners after hitting puberty. Leela Devi, through her narrator’s repeated reflections on Madhumathy’s physical transformation—“Her cherubin cheeks have grown hollow. Those once rosy cheeks are pale now. She has changed so much” (*Blue Jasmine* 2), and “All her beauty was gone” (36), reify the patriarchal gaze, which frames female identity through aesthetic and corporeal ideals.

Male authority often curtails female mobility, both physically and socially, once girls mature, reinforcing patriarchal control over female bodies. Such segregations mirror Anzaldúa's 'borderlands'—psychic and physical spaces of conflict and unrest for women forced to live within contradictory cultural expectations. Das ridicules the entire system, exposing the silence, fear and shame surrounding female sexuality with a biting statement: "No wonder the women of the best *Nair* families never mentioned sex. It was their principal phobia" (*My Story* 23). Leela Devi represents this suppressive propensity of immobility and pseudo-ethical perception through Madhumathy's fear in *Blue Jasmine*: "somebody will see. Then everything will be wrong" (39). It evidences the panoptic gaze of moral surveillance that disciplines female agency and tames her into an amiable, socially subjugated existence. The moment Madhumathy's marriage is carried out without her consent (59), Leela Devi transforms her into what Anzaldúa calls a 'borderwoman.' Here, physical migration to a husband's home parallels psychological and cultural dislocation. Anzaldúa states that this critical and alienated existence sweeps women between cultures [her own and the other's] and is never a comfortable territory (20), as evident in Madhumathy's unhappy married life. Devi also captures how gender disparity works through Madhumathy, who herself accepts her inferior position in her relationship with the narrator. There are several instances in the novel where she cries out because of her helpless existence, further presenting women as subservient, docile and inarticulate. This mechanical behaviour of the character is again suggestive of Anzaldúa's idea of women's fear of being abandoned or rejected.

Leela Devi's approach to intersectional feminine experience is evident in the final part of *Blue Jasmine*. Following a series of spiritual rites amidst flood waters, Sreekanta sees 'Devi' dancing above the muddy water. Yet the revelation is disrupted when one hermit seeks to exploit Sreekanta, using him as bait to invoke the goddess and capture

her through the seduction spell (75–76). Though ‘Devi’ is injured heavily, becoming deaf and blind, she was strong enough to resist and evade the spells of the hermit.

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theorisation of intersecting oppressions provides a critical frame for reading this episode. She suggests that women with intersecting/multiple axes of identity are more susceptible towards male violence and “converging systems of domination” (“Mapping the Margins” 1265–66). In this light, Leela Devi figures the goddess as a lone mythical woman with immense power, making her the target of male appropriation and echoing how women’s autonomy often provokes patriarchal control. Crenshaw’s framework similarly explains Madhumathy’s multilayered subjugation—as a female subject caught in the traffic of class, tradition and gendered silence (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 149).

Kamala Das nevertheless brings to the limelight the agony, poverty and malnutrition that gender minorities are subjected to in major Indian cities, as in the poem “The Dance of the Eunuchs” (*Summer in Calcutta* 7). This resonates with Anzaldúa’s detailing about the plight of queer groups amidst homophobic and phallogocentric cultures. She elucidates her own experience of being a lesbian of colour studying at a New England college where her tribe was “Blocked, immobilized” and stratified for their sexual identity (21). Das’s poetic compassion for the eunuchs becomes an extended metaphor for non-conforming identities crushed under hegemonic systems.

Kamala Das, with her variant identities and plurality of being, suits the analogy of rhizomatic nature attributed to migrant people by Glissant. Glissant expands the idea: “The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root” (11), emphasising that writers like Kamala Das never had one main root but rather many small roots. The unilateral analysis of such a writer is significantly insufficient and leads to an inaccurate understanding of her life and creative

practices. A simple feminist reading of Das fails to underscore the racial, ethnic and migratory nuances of her identity, and a purely post-colonial approach lacks a gendered outlook. Migration and ‘many lands’ often carry with them the plurality of life and adjoining complexities. Therefore, any scholarship on Kamala Das—and similarly situated migrant writers—must move beyond fixed analytical paradigms and embrace the flux, fragmentation and multiplicity that define their subjectivities. Leela Devi presents another facet of female identity rooted in combined creative production. Though documentation of Devi’s pattern of migration [if she had] is not available, her English education has brought about multiple terrains of possibilities to her [her creative production being one], making it important to look into her notions of spatiality through an intersectional lens.

Mobilities and Transformations

Kamala Das’s family’s migration accounts for her father’s occupation as a high official at an American firm in Calcutta, exemplifying one of the arguments discussed in this study—that women often follow men in migration. This shift of a Malayali family during the early 1930s towards urbanism also indicates the beginning of the automobile and other industrial revolutions in major Indian cities and the subsequent migratory practices of families to emerging urban centres (Joseph 75). Throughout her autobiography *My Story*, Das’s description of her early childhood in Calcutta is parched and, in a way, distanced and detached, whereas her fond recollections of her intermediary life at the Nalapat House in Kerala carry warmth, intimacy and layered cultural density. The detailed depiction of the Nalapat homestead with all its intricacies and layered structure [both physical and conceptual] resonates with the traditional *tharawad* and matrilineal system that dominated the architectural and familial structure of Nair society in pre-modern Kerala.

Leela Devi chooses a Kerala-specific backdrop to *Blue Jasmine*, further adhering to her root identity. In particular, her portrayal of a rural community's spiritual dependence on the river—revered as a mother figure—reveals a distinctively pagan worldview deeply embedded in Kerala's Hindu traditions. The kids in the novel are brought up being told the religious significance of the river, which they should fear and admire, regardless of age, gender or any such determinants. This elemental reverence, inherited and perpetuated through oral tales, transcends caste, gender and age, uniting the village under a shared cosmology of awe and devotion—a common folk culture that prevailed in pre-modern Kerala. In *Blue Jasmine*, the language is not textual but oral—spoken by Granny and received by children and adults alike, resulting in the formation of cohesions, shared feelings and archetypes among villagers from a very young age. These stories function not only as entertainment or memory but also as ideological glue, generating cultural continuity and communal belonging across generations. Leela Devi—drawing upon versions of Hindu myths, legends and models of oral tales—has captured pastoral human life in India with all its naivety and essence.

Kamala Das, in her poem “Blood,” captures the extravagant cultural past of her ancestral home under deterioration, where she begs forgiveness from her ancestors for not being able to maintain their legacy (*Only the Soul Knows* 72–73), while many of her other poems are topographically placed elsewhere, in contrast to the geographical fixation in Devi's narrative. This is possibly a facet more associated with migration/travel-induced modernity—where people get multiple spatial affiliations and find it rather difficult to fixate on one locality. Das's choice of situating her tales and poems exemplifies the same. For instance, the story “Moonghphali” is highly political and narrates the anti-Sikh sentiments of the 1980s and is, therefore, set in northern states of India where such rebellions sprouted and were sustained at large (Das, *Padmavati the*

Harlot 1). The story reflects not just geographical dislocation but also Das's ethical positioning within pan-Indian conflicts. That her stories traverse cities and social groups across the country marks her as a truly cosmopolitan writer, and yet one constantly haunted by 'the regional.'

Leela Devi, on the other hand, uses specific images of rice and chilli crushed in salt to document poverty in early Kerala and that of floods to indicate how Kerala was shaken by natural calamities, fixating her literary landscape (*Blue Jasmine* 48). Devi parallelly depicts the peace and serenity prevalent in Kerala by capturing how children during the summer played river games (14), a nostalgic recurring archetype of Malayali identity. Das's poems, like "The Swamp," openly state the narrator's intensely haunting memories about Malabar, all the while lamenting that she does not possess a name of her own (*Only the Soul Knows* 29). This juxtaposition of geographical memory with personal anonymity captures the dual trauma of cultural and gendered displacement. The Nalapat household is also a site of contradictions. *My Story* unravels the deep mysteries and uncouth practices that the Nalapat families upheld; this includes various rites, customs, belief systems and ritualistic performances, all pertaining to adamant Hinduism. As Sarah Ahmed attempts to evaluate the circulation of emotions through various bodies/agents, she emphasises that they are not tied to individuals or objects but to certain common 'signs' (194). Leela Devi's *Blue Jasmine* similarly illustrates how villagers absorb and transmit religious rites peculiar to Hinduism as shared emotional practices. For instance, the description about the death of 'Granny' is accompanied by the narration of intricate death rituals specific to the Hindu religion. The images of a body laid on a mat on the floor, the lit lamp, and the cremation with piled wood signify how religion and its praxis create shared images and feelings peculiar to a region (*Blue Jasmine* 53).

Alongside these personal memories of the protagonist deeply rooted in his ancestral region, Leela Devi also implores local myths, legends, and belief systems—elements entrenched in the community’s psyche and those of which Kerala, as a locality, is made of. Devi also underscores how a place need not be physical, through the act of the protagonist retorting to memories to redeem himself and to escape from the trauma of his lost love. Here, Devi employs memories to denote the protagonist’s temporary comfort space, while he hopelessly seeks assistance from it to attain salvation. However, the dark legends and tales surrounding their conformist village and its mythical beliefs tighten their grip upon the narrator, to an extent where he finds it difficult to get off their clutches and find his other space. Devi thrusts upon the power of archetypal narratives in ordinary human life and the inescapability of its mystic grip that primordial Kerala society was entrapped in. Though Anzaldúa argues that one must leave home to discover their true identity, Devi illustrates how the strict structure of Kerala society hindered its people from escaping its influence, preventing them from exploring their true selves.

The crisis in identity and the ambiguous flux in emotions pertaining to loss and nostalgia primarily stem from the cross-cultural shifts and make Kamala Das a perfect example of a *mestiza* as Anzaldúa calls it. Anzaldúa further observes, “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry “home” on my back” (21), encapsulating the ever-persistent sense of rootedness for one’s homeland. Kamala Das, like Anzaldúa, carries a conceptual and emotional version of ‘home’ through her cross-cultural shifts, resonating with the idea of rootedness that transcends geography. In “My Grandmother’s House,” Das laments the times she had not realised the worth and peace of her ancestral home and regrets the lost days in her homeland. Her intense longing to go back to her true origin is evident in the lines: “How often I think of going / There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or / just listen to the frozen air” (*Summer in Calcutta* 13). In “A Short Trip,” she starkly

proclaims that “Even a short trip from home is / a kind of death ... ” suggesting that for individuals deeply anchored to their cultural and emotional origins, even momentary separation feels existentially distressing (*Only the Soul Knows* 105).

In poems like “Pigeons,” stark images of the rising “hot dust” in the “city of fevered / Lanes” (Das, *Summer in Calcutta* 10) are juxtaposed against the emotions of the poet seeking peace and tranquillity, implying the emotional unrest she experiences due to her migrant life. As V. C. Harris notes in his introduction to *Old Playhouse and Other Poems*, Das often reflects on past events and contrasts them with her present state (xiv). “In Love,” a poem about the callous and carnal desires of the poet’s lover, presents a contrasting image of the silence of the poet to that of the raucous haste “from behind the Burdhwani street” in Calcutta where “the corpse-bearers cry ‘Bol / Hari Bol’” (*Summer in Calcutta* 12). After attaining popularity in the 1960s, Das recounts having a significant fan base during parties while at Calcutta, all the while urging and aching to escape from the place (*My Story* 144). Such a fascination for a writer from Kerala, at a pan-Indian level, highlights what Arjun Appadurai calls a “community of sentiment,” fostered by the rise of mass media and a shared culture of reading (8). Das’s deep connection and sense of belonging to Bombay city are made explicit in the poem “A Farewell to Bombay,” where she refers to the city as a fair place—reinforcing the conflicting and ambivalent experiences of migrants in borderlands of turmoil, as described by Anzaldúa. The poet establishes her innate emotional association with the place and commemorates both its silence and sounds, which also accentuate her mixed feelings towards the host land that once offered her a shelter. While she frequently critiques the deafening and alienating nature of urban life in much of her writing, here she bids farewell to the crowded and hustling city by bidding tears (*Summer in Calcutta* 40).

However, Kamala Das launches a vehement attack on her husband in the poem “The Old Playhouse,” who is the very reason for her migrant life in a busy city (*Old Playhouse* 1). Her relocation to Delhi following her husband’s appointment in the city is another instance of female migration dictated by male agency. Despite all the years of migrant life in distant lands, Das feels she has not travelled much, unlike her husband, who was on constant tours (*My Story* 154), hinting at the stagnant existence of the writer in the cities she had moved to for the sake of her spouse. The paradox of migration and its meaning for women becomes apparent—while geographic mobility occurs, social and personal mobility often remain constrained in the case of women. Her short story “The Tattered Blanket” is relevant in this context as it juxtaposes the lives of two siblings: a son who lives in Delhi with his nuclear family, enjoying the privileges of urban, mobile life, and a daughter who remains behind in the ancestral home, caring for their aged mother (*Padmavati the Harlot* 55). Here, the son is a migrant who has the privilege and exposure outside, but the daughter becomes emblematic of the restrained social kinesis of women, deprived of the freedom associated with urban migration. The story criticises migration and its impact on families and attacks modern life altogether, where nuclear families lead a self-centred and isolated existence. Leela Devi, on the other hand, captures the pre-modern social system where mobility of people in general was restricted. For instance, she captures how it was customary for people to buy salt and other goods from merchants who crossed the river during summer and would return before the monsoon when the water in the river would become high (*Blue Jasmine* 18).

Kamala Das repeatedly counts the number of sacrifices she has made to be in a peaceful marriage, which include leaving her ancestral home behind (*Only the Soul Knows* 30). This again rejects Anzaldúa’s generalised assertion that women find home only after leaving it, as Das instead articulates a deep emotional coherence with her lost

home. The ache of the loss of Kerala is seen in the story “The Truth About Flying Saucers” as well, where the narrator explicitly states: “Punnayurkulam suddenly appears to me to be the centre of the universe ... ” (*The Kept Woman*). Written in an epistolary form, “A Letter to my Grandmother” from the same collection upholds a similar theme, where the writer laments her Bombay life. The narrator here writes an imaginary letter to her grandmother, who is dead, and commemorates their time together in their *tharawad*—which points out the level of dejection that the writer possessed about her migrant life.

Anzaldúa claims that being a ‘borderwoman’ both compels and restrains her from creativity (74), a paradox that also resonates with Kamala Das’s experience of migration. This explains the positive aspect of diaspora life and migration, which Das herself agrees to. Despite all her longings for home, she states that Calcutta has nevertheless gifted her with “beautiful sights” like that of eunuchs’ dances, gaudy prostitutes and oxcarts that inspired her to write all the desperate poems she penned during the time (*My Story* 151–52). In the poem “A New City,” the poet states that she had arrived in the city as a curious tourist eager to explore love and life in a culturally and linguistically alien environment (*Summer in Calcutta* 40). Poems like “The Wild Bougainvillea” further reflect the sense of hybridity and ambiguity that city life has brought into the life of the writer. While the poem begins with images of mundane and boring urban life, the mood of the poem takes a sharp turn when the writer begins to accept and perceive things in a positive light. When she attempted to opt for a life anew, she began to feel that “It is a good world, and / Packed with distractions” (*Summer in Calcutta* 14). Though the poem captures crude and uncouth images from the dark and newly urbanised India—which she significantly marks using the words “rot” and “rotting” multiple times—she later feels that “the city tamed” her (14). For Das, the host land becomes both a site of suffering and

a source of poetic vision, mirroring the dualities Anzaldúa describes in her theory of the borderlands.

In contrast to moments of creative inspiration found in the migrant experience, the poem “Too Early the Autumn Sights” resonates with the sense of dejection migrant lives are made of. The speaker of the poem, in utter futility, rhetorically questions whether she must accept the ‘home’ that others have imposed upon her, thus articulating a profound sense of in-betweenness and displacement (*Summer in Calcutta* 25). This ambivalence again counters Anzaldúa’s notion that women must leave home to discover their true home; for Das, leaving home leads not to discovery but to disorientation. Das expands her notions on spatiality beyond the physical in the poem “The Prisoner”—just like how Leela Devi constructs a space made of memories for her protagonist—where she compares a convict’s examination of his prison’s geography to that of herself studying her beloved’s body (*Old Playhouse* 29). This surreal comparison is metaphorical and emotional at once, as the speaker’s idea about locality or space becomes abstract, all the while dealing with themes of inescapability and freedom.

Kamala Das describes the cultural plurality within her school in Calcutta, which is further enriched by her English teacher, an Austrian refugee and a survivor who was exiled from Nazi Germany (*My Story* 54–55), which makes her spatial fixation ambiguous. Gloria Anzaldúa’s introduction of the concept of borderlands brings to the forefront the physical and metaphorical spaces that emerge when diverse cultures merge to form an amalgam in a specific territory (11). In accordance with this, regardless of the actual lexical/physical reality of Das’s existence, she is located in a borderland where uncomfortable contradictions are prior to occurring, including fear, hatred and exploitation. Further, reflections on the existence of hybrid cultures within a single geography can be seen in her poems like “The Snobs,” where the writer hears Punjabi

songs from busy streets and roads, signalling the co-existence of ethnically diverse populations in the city of Calcutta (*Summer in Calcutta* 36).

However, Das also critiques this cosmopolitanism for its superficial inclusivity and class bias. In the story “Vrinda’s Birthday Party,” the writer captures the hollowness and hypocrisy of city dwellers who alienate a family for the impoverished birthday party they host for their child, finally leading them to flee the city due to isolation (*The Kept Woman*). Here, Das exposes the city’s performative social values, revealing a deep-seated classism that favours the affluent and marginalises the poor. This aligns with Édouard Glissant’s assertion that the underprivileged ‘other’ remains perennially excluded and silenced within dominant structures (49). Das’s recollection of her days in Bombay right after her marriage further illustrates this exclusion, as she commemorates her pale, boring and tortured existence as a pregnant woman without proper and adequate care from her husband (*My Story* 86). Crenshaw explains that immigrant women are more vulnerable to the systematic violence by their spouse, as they are physically and financially trapped in specific unfamiliar localities (“Mapping of Margins” 1248). Das’s personal reflections fixate on this idea, as the writer was economically and emotionally dependent on her husband in a distant land. Yet, paradoxically, Bombay becomes the backdrop for much of Das’s creativity, as in the story “A Little Kitten.” The dust, smoke and pollution of the city can be seen ruminated upon in the story, where the newly married young woman who has moved to the city recently loses all her charm and glory to the contaminated urban life (*Padmavati the Harlot* 31–33). Across her poetry and prose, Das repeatedly condemns the isolating, artificial and toxic nature of modern urbanity, revealing her fundamental discomfort with modernisation.

Kamala Das, nevertheless, becomes vocal about the importance of places and the idea of travelling in her life, as in the poem “A Holiday For Me.” Travel, as the poet

says, assures solitude and concord for her. She dreams of embracing solitude, leaving behind all the baggage of her mundane life and setting off on her journey as seamlessly as she can (*Only the Soul Knows* 61). This further elevates the issue of rigid social structure that restricts women's social mobility by attributing gender roles and domestic intangibility, which writers like Das try to break free from through travel. Leela Devi aptly captures how women are often blamed for their fear of the social space that in turn has been institutionally implemented by the patriarchy to curtail female mobility. For instance, the male protagonist of *Blue Jasmine* critiques Madhumathy's fear of social exposure and the successive distance she maintains with him, exemplifying the misogynistic trope that valorises male emotion and delegitimises basic female survival instincts in an extremely stringent social order. Additionally, Devi positions the male narrator as totally ignorant about the societal limitations and ostracisation women face, which also highlights how Leela Devi problematises the indifference that men uphold towards women's possibilities of movement. Finally, the narrator's despair and existential angst following repeated personal losses, such as the deaths of his father and Granny, and his lost love for Madhumathy, situates him within a melancholic male tradition, unable to establish an emotional geography himself to contain his feelings. Devi emphasises how men prioritise their own social as well as emotional spaces while viciously being bothered about restricting women from having the same.

Kamala Das embodies the figure of the rebellious *mestiza* as theorised by Anzaldúa to counter this restriction posed upon women—one who negotiates and subverts the boundaries imposed by culture, gender, and geography (Anzaldúa 77–78). Travel for her, in this sense, becomes more than physical movement: it is an act of female emancipation. It offers a pathway through which women navigate their fractured identities and transform displacement into artistic possibility. Besides, in a conversation

with P. P. Raveendran, Kamala Das explicitly critiques the constrictive cultural atmosphere of Trivandrum, arguing that life in such unmalleable societies restricts the essence of freedom and leads to what she describes as mediocre or lower-standard writings. She fervently compares her life in inhibited Trivandrum to that of “an Egyptian mummy all wrapped in lint” (64), emphasising the suffocating limitations placed on her self-expression and that she chooses to not publish works she writes in such limited freedom. She laments the lack of a receptive audience for English poetry in Kerala, contrasting it with the intellectual stimulation and artistic vibrancy she experienced while living in cosmopolitan cities—places where she was “forever meeting brilliant people” (Raveendran and Das 65). This view aligns with Anzaldúa’s conceptualisation of borderlands as spaces that, while marked by tension and conflict, also serve as fertile grounds for creativity and cultural hybridity (73). For Das, her cross-cultural movements and experiences beyond the rigid sociocultural boundaries of Kerala served as liberating forces that allowed her to write with greater candour and boldness. Migration, in this sense, not only broadens geographical horizons but also becomes integral to a woman writer’s pursuit of creative emancipation—allowing for a breaking away from inherited constraints and a reimagining of voice and self.

Socio-political Consciousness Through English Writings

Leela Devi’s socio-political reflections through the novel *Blue Jasmine* are minimal and rather mythically ingrained. By presenting the novel through mythical narratives that ran through pre-modern Kerala, Devi evidently captures the political climate during the times that were not developed in terms of civilisation. Thereby, it is impossible to trace evident reflections of politics or political ideologies that the writer projects through her creativity, apart from the politics of gender inequalities that have already been discussed in the chapter.

Kamala Das, on the other hand, has been extremely vocal about the politics of her existence as well as the socio-cultural climate of her age, and the same is reflected in her creative works as well. Das begins her autobiography by recollecting her early childhood in Calcutta, a time when the British still ruled India. She notes the seemingly harmonious coexistence of British and Indian families in the region, yet her narratives reveal the undercurrents of racial and cultural dissonance. The feeling of being a South Indian brown lurks around Das's writing, where she specifically recollects how her father adopted Westernised culinary habits, using a fork and knife, while she and her brother "ate western meals with ... brown fingers"—a practice that made their cook consider them as "savages" (*My Story* 1). This state of contradiction and conflicting identity that results from the clash of distinct parallel cultures makes the author a 'borderwoman,' an identity that Anzaldúa assumes for herself in order to explain the alien identity she possesses as a woman of diaspora. Das reflects in "The Swamp" on having been born with light skin that gradually darkened to transform the speaker into the first dark-skinned child in the family (*Only the Soul Knows* 29), implying the sense of racist concern and consciousness she held. This consciousness of colour, particularly within one's own family, underscores Anzaldúa's argument that women of colour—having been doubly marginalised on the basis of sexuality and race—find it unsafe when both the dominant white culture and her own culture become critical about them (20).

Kamala Das uses various literary strategies to reimagine her suppressed migrant self and disillusionment towards colonial agencies—a recurring one being the idea and politics of silence. The repetitive presence of the word 'silence' itself in many of her poems exhibits the state of docility and numbness the author was forced into. For instance, in the poem "Someone Else's Song," the poet feels that she is "a million,

million silences” who craves to articulate candidly—highlighting the simultaneously multifarious and subjugated migrant existence (*Summer in Calcutta* 31).

Leela Devi, however, regards the colonial episode as being progressive and uplifting in her own personal life [having attained Western education] and in the case of literary production in India altogether. Her understanding of Indian literatures as having imbibed from colonial trends but having diverged into many separate authentic ones (*Influence of English* 4) stands along with Glissant’s theory of the rhizomatic/multidirectional nature of culture and grounds her politics of writing in English. This specifically happens when two cultures interact, merge and form an amalgam, where the initial form transmutes itself into various other subgroups. The idea of rhizome structure vouches for the existence of a root—in this case, the credit of the novel as a genre resides in the West—but rejects its sovereignty as a totalitarian root (Glissant 11). Importantly, Devi also recognises that the emergence of new regional literatures in English was significantly enabled by the institutionalisation of the Western educational system (*Influence of English* 4). She points out about the writers that “they got into touch with new trends in other languages also, but the link language was always English. They were influenced by English writers and also by others, but all the influence came through English” (4). This validates the major argument of this thesis—that English writing from Kerala is an aftermath of colonial modernity.

Through her writings, Kamala Das poignantly marks her rejection of colonial agencies that practised inequity without any shame, which added to her already marginalised position as a woman. Kimberlé Crenshaw claims that Black women face oppression from two divergent grounds, and their existence is, thereby, more problematic than Black men’s, who just have to face discrimination on racial grounds (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 143). The theorist criticises popular perspectives on

gender and race as being addressed by/for white women and Black men. Accordingly, “Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups” (143). As Kamala Das does not fall under these privileged sectors, she had to tackle the double jeopardy of female/racial experiences, subjected to how the rigid hegemonic structures of her Western institution functioned. In *My Story*, Das further reflects on the marginalisation she faced as a Malayali migrant in English schools, which was shaped by colonial elitism. Brown children were hidden from view during special events, as if their presence disrupted the school’s image (3). Das’s extremely tangled and miscellaneous affiliations to her identity make her and all migrants opaque, in Glissant’s terms. Glissant’s advocacy of cultural opacity—allowing difference to exist without being reduced to sameness—offers a counterpoint to such systemic exclusions (189–90), a mission which colonialism and colonial legacy are infamous for.

In contrast to the politics of decolonisation projected by Kamala Das, Leela Devi problematises the lack of acknowledgement about colonial inventions and interventions that worked towards modernising literature. In the preface to *Influence of English in Malayalam Novels*, Devi highlights the translation of many major Malayalam novels into English, which she sees as evidence of their relevance in the global context. Devi critiques the absence of comprehensive studies pertaining to the influence of English in Malayalam literature and proposes her study as the pioneering one of its kind, opining that the politics upheld by colonial institutions were not merely oppressive. Devi’s ideological position with respect to colonialism testifies to her scholarly command over English and her interest in tracing the intricate web of Western influences in Kerala’s literature—making her a genuine scholar of both English and Malayalam, a multilingual existence caused by her hybrid identity.

Leela Devi's assertion of having borrowed Western literary ideas, however, can also be read as her attempt to question colonial hegemony through adhering to an innately Indian content. Devi has written this hallucinating tale with utmost Indianness and has used it as a means to decolonise the novel as a genre from its Western structural rigidities. The image of a grandmother imparting stories and folk tales to the younger generation is a recurring narrative strategy used by Devi in the novel—as seen in the series of flashbacks and description of Granny in *Blue Jasmine* (5). The storytelling grandmother is not merely a character but a cultural symbol, representing a pre-literary oral tradition that predated written literature. This oral culture is so pivotal as it weaves the perception of the younger generations, imprinting deep primordial images, metaphors and belief systems that affect their lives in both empowering and constraining ways. The politics that Leela Devi thus projected can be equated to more of essentialist in nature, as the writer constantly roots the attempt of her writing as well as the narrative within the apolitical or rather primordial times.

The marks of the initial phases of modernity induced by colonial progressions permeate Kamala Das's poetry through references to early technological advancement and changing modes of life. Appadurai's technoscape—denoting the global flow and interchange of technology as a result of cross-cultural interactions—aptly captures this phenomenon of social change in Kerala (33). The entire colonial episode in India, the modernity that they brought forth, and the technological advancements they introduced along with it are aspects of technoscapes. For instance, Das's "The End of Spring" features the poet waiting for a phone call from her lover while observing the crowded urban street below, revealing both technological change and the alienation it brings (*Summer in Calcutta* 19). Similarly, in the poem "Loud Posters," the poet mentions the use of typewriters by writers of the age and critiques the monotonous and mechanical

rhythm of modern life through the repetition of the phrase “click-click” (*Summer in Calcutta* 22). Das also confronts the artificiality and emotional sterility of modern city life in “The Old Playhouse,” highlighting the dehumanising effects of colonial modernity (*Old Playhouse* 1).

As children, Das and her brother used to collect paper cuttings of Hitler and Mussolini—figures who, in their innocent imagination, emerged as important, largely due to the media’s overwhelming focus on them (*My Story* 8). Concurrently, the Nalapat household embraced Gandhian ideals and idolised Mahatma Gandhi, reflecting the nationalist sentiments that pervaded Kerala during the Indian independence movement (13). All these exemplify the impact of print media in India during the time in which World War II was hurling around. This transmission of knowledge across borders is an example of Appadurai’s mediascapes, or the global exchange of information through the means of media that enable audiences to imagine lives beyond their immediate surroundings. Appadurai regards mediascapes as closely associated with images and as normally disseminated through newspapers or any other audio-visual media (35). Here, Das becomes aware of global updates through such intermediaries of technology that create a sense of fluidity between cultures, as a result of advancements aided by colonial modernity.

The socio-political upheavals before, during, and after independence in India have significantly influenced Kamala Das to convert personal and collective turbulences into art. One such instance is her recollection of the Hindu-Muslim communal riots that sprouted out in Calcutta during early 1947, where rebellion and bloodshed were rampant. Kamala Das was frequently affected by the unfair social occurrences and can be regarded as highly political in that sense. This traumatic historical moment surfaces in her short story “Parboti’s Story,” where the autobiographical murder of their eye specialist by a

frenzied mob is reimagined as such. The *ayah* Parukutty from the story says “Child I am afraid to stay on in Calcutta. Let us return home” (*The Kept Woman*) testifies to the pervading fear of the age. Similarly, the poem “Delhi 1984” reflects on the Sikh massacre/anti-Sikh riots that followed Indira Gandhi’s assassination and voices opposition against the inhumane violence and genocide that ensued (*Only the Soul Knows* 36). Das transcends the personal to express her shock and condemnation for larger issues of crime, political unrest and bloodshed in post-independence India.

Contrary to the realistic depiction of the religio-political climate in India that Kamala Das attempts, Leela Devi in *Blue Jasmine* captures how Hinduism in pre-modern Kerala worked by using a mystical, folk-like narrative. The titular ‘Blue Jasmine’ appears as recurring imagery throughout the novel and is often used in association with Hinduism at the backdrop of Indian cultural traditions. According to local lore, the river—personified as the Mother—brings forth a blue jasmine each year as a sign of peace, wealth and prosperity. During their childhood, the narrator and his friend always believed that the Mother would bless them with the blue jasmine once (20). Religion and the collective belief system, therefore, form the backbone of the narrative propagated through oral tales, with the Mother invoked for fertility, harvest and prosperity but equally feared for her displeasure. Sara Ahmed, in her argument about the surfacing of emotion, suggests that it is the impression left by others that creates a collective feeling in our minds. She denotes that “emotions are psychological and social, individual and collective” (10). This dual nature of emotions—personal yet communal—explains how myths like blue jasmine embed themselves into collective consciousness, producing both cohesion and constraint. Devi strategically uses the episode where the narrator is punished by his father for tasting jaggery before offering it to the Mother in order to exemplify the pervasiveness of this religious primitivity (24). The act is interpreted as

sacrilegious, threatening agricultural failure. Sara Ahmed also “examines the spatial politics of fear” and opines that fear constrains people from social mobility (15). Devi stresses how in this instance, fear of God functions as an intangible but potent regulatory system transmitted through oral narratives and shared rituals, thus structuring the lived reality of the villagers in ‘pre-political’ Kerala.

Kamala Das’s political engagement is further evident in her poems “After July” and “A Certain Defect in the Blood” which voice the horrors of Black July—an anti-Tamil persecution that occurred in Sri Lanka in July 1983 (*Collected Poems* 15–17). The violence, initiated by the Sinhalese mob and the Sri Lankan government and armed forces, resulted in the mass plunder of wealth and massacre of Tamil civilians. She vouches for the dark-skinned Dravidian victims, comparing their extermination to the genocidal campaigns of Nazi Germany initiated by Hitler. In “Shopper at the Cornells, Colombo,” the poet adopts the voice of a victim of this brutal genocide and incorporates the emotional trauma and fear associated with being a diaspora in conflict (*Collected Poems* 16). The global Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora observes and mourns the month; it is, thereby, significant when a migrant writer like Kamala Das macrocosmically addresses the issues of the migrants at large. Her work here becomes an exemplification of Sara Ahmed’s concept of affective economies, wherein emotions acquire value through circulation and become socially impactful (Ahmed 8). The unification of the poet with the victims of such atrocities fosters a collective sense of mourning and belonging that transcends national borders, resulting from the emotional assimilation of the incidents. Das affirms this sentiment in an interview reflecting on her Colombo Poems, where she asserts that life often becomes transmuted into art. She maintains that “a writer is not merely a lyrical poet, but is a chronicler of events that happen around her” (Raveendran

and Das 69), thereby foregrounding her role not just as a confessional voice but also as a socio-political observer.

Conclusion

In order to place Kamala Das in the context of English education and migration-induced modernity, a collective analysis of her creative works published over her career has been carried out in the chapter, in addition to underscoring Leela Devi's creative sensibilities. While Leela Devi is very much a product of education-induced modernity, Kamala Das is more aptly positioned as a writer shaped by a first-generation, travel-induced modernity, wherein translocation and cultural encounters become the primary forces of creative awakening. Nevertheless, contributions of both Kamala Das and Leela Devi become crucial in the discussion of pre-global female writers of English from Kerala, as this initial phase of movement is extremely significant in relation to early women's English education and social mobility. The fact that Leela Devi chose education—the fourth option Anzaldúa identifies for women besides turning to institutions such as religion or marriage—positions her as one of the towering women scholars of her age. Just as print capitalism inadvertently gave rise to a new reading culture that helped cultivate a sense of nationalism, nation-state, or belonging among its readers, the writings of early women authors like Kamala Das and Leela Devi catalysed the spread of gendered modernity in Kerala writing in English. The tremendous rise in the number of female writers who started creative writing, aided by their migration abroad—such as Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander—was made possible by pioneering models inaugurated by writers like Kamala Das and R. Leela Devi. A detailed analysis of these pre-globalisation era writers [who migrated abroad] so as to understand their roles in carrying forth the project of Kerala's developmental modernity will be carried out in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Transgressing Boundaries: Narratives of Pre-Global Malayali Women and their Migration Abroad

Following the female literary renaissance inaugurated by early writers like Kamala Das and Leela Devi, there emerged another set of writers, who are basically categorised together [chronologically and otherwise] into a group of those who migrated abroad. This includes female English scholars/creatives who were educated, involved in migration practices, initiated creative praxis, and developed their sensibility during the pre-global age, such as Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander. This group of writers is highly relevant since they are the first Malayali women who began writing as an aftermath of their migration and life experience abroad. The chapter, while attempting to understand the sensibilities of pre-global writers who migrated abroad and place these writers in the context of Kerala history and modernity, also addresses realities of early women's social mobility in the state.

Anna Sujatha Mathai and Manorama Mathai were born to a Malayali Syrian Christian family, with their father, Samuel Mathai, being a professor of English at St. Stephen's College, New Delhi. Anna Sujatha Mathai was born outside Kerala, studied English literature at Miranda House, Delhi; obtained a master's in English literature from the University of Delhi; and a master's in social studies from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. In the short biography of her first poetry collection *Crucifixions*, Anna Sujatha Mathai mentions her six years of post-marriage life in England in 1955, which further adheres to K.V. Joseph's observation that male agencies instil migratory practices in women's lives. However, as Vivek Narayan opines in his foreword to *Lighthouse for Drowning Memories*, settling in England has been transformative and decisive for a female writer like Anna Sujatha Mathai, as travel culture and the

progressive values of Europe presented her with a sense of freedom (vi). It is the interplay of migration and human imagination, as in Arjun Appadurai's formulation, that has had an obvious expression in the creative praxis of writers like Anna Sujatha Mathai. She recollects her early hesitation in turning writing into a serious vocation, which her younger sister Manorama Mathai—an already established and published novelist—forced her into.

Vivek Narayanan regards Anna Sujatha Mathai's entry into poetry in the name Anna Sujatha Modayil through P. Lal and Writer's Workshop during the 1970s as a part of a "tectonic shift" in modern Indian writing in English—an age where the post-independence educated Indians started massive writing practices (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* vi). Anna Sujatha Mathai soon gained prominence, developing friendships with writers like Nissim Ezekiel, Gopal Honnalgare, Pritish Nandy, and P. Lal. It was Anna Sujatha Mathai who introduced Meena Alexander and her first poetry collection to P. Lal—an acquaintance that Alexander deeply commemorates and cherishes in her memoir *Fault Lines* (1993). Anna Sujatha Mathai's affectionate memory of Alexander during her days at Thiruvalla, while Meena Alexander was a little girl, reflects in her creative works as well, as in the poem "Precious Stones for the House of Memory," where the speaker recollects "little Meena" as "a Sphinx who gives away nothing" (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 64–65). P. S. Joseph notably opines that, "Though not a revolutionary poet like Kamala Das, she [Anna Sujatha Mathai] had a troubled relationship, an early divorce and single parenthood" (Mathai and Joseph). In an interview on the life and career of Anna Sujatha Mathai with the poet and curator Gopikrishnan Kottoor, he remarkably opined that he regards Anna Sujatha Mathai as "a bridge between Meena Alexander and Kamala Das" which becomes historically relevant because while academia talks more about poets like Das and Alexander, Anna Sujatha

Mathai is a name that is often missed out. Kottoor further highlights the injustice that academia and the creative world have done towards Anna Sujatha Mathai, whom he regards as perhaps a better creative than Kamala Das and Meena Alexander (Interview). Considering the period of migration, educational attainment and the age of development of creative sensibilities, Anna Sujatha Mathai is categorised as a pre-globalisation era writer from Kerala, though she has publications during and after the globalisation age.

Manorama Mathai—the two-years-younger sister of Anna Sujatha Mathai—was similarly brought up in the pre-independence/pre-partition Lahore. Having studied in Delhi and Oxford, she, unlike Anna Sujatha Mathai, who ventured into creative writing later in life, began writing from the very small age of six, a chronicle titled *Mrs. Pig's Washing Day* that did not survive (“Manorama Mathai”). Manorama Mathai’s life was similar to that of her sister’s, with multiple geo-cultural swaps and travels primarily led by their father’s job in Northern India. She describes her personal blog—where she has uploaded several of her short stories—as ‘Words from an Indian writer in London,’ adhering to her close affiliation with the U.K. As Tisha S. Mathew remarks, Manorama Mathai believed that it is inevitable for a writer’s work to carry autobiographical elements, even when the writer does not intend it (82–83).

Meena Alexander, the acclaimed Indian American writer and a widely studied writer in academia, also had a highly entwined migrant identity that can be seen vocalised in her writings. In the preface to Alexander’s memoir *Fault Lines* (2003), Ngugi wa Thiong’o notably remarks about this hybrid cultural identity: “She is a poet who contains multitudes ... She dwells in multiple places she calls home, although quite often they are temporary abodes on her way to elsewhere, crossing borders of geography, culture, and language.” Despite her Kerala roots and affiliations, Alexander was born in Allahabad, migrating to various places in life, including Sudan, the U.K. and the U.S.,

and encapsulating the essence of these ‘many lands’ in her writings. Alexander hailed from an educated Syrian Christian family of Travancore, with her maternal grandmother Kunju being the first woman member of the legislative assembly (Duncan 25), which further underscores the value of education inculcated by the family itself. Further, it was her maternal grandfather Ilya—a reputed social reformer and a controversial figure in the later editions of Alexander’s *Fault Lines*—who nurtured a reading culture in the writer (Duncan 25).

Meena Alexander explicates her dilemma of existence caused by “fragments of a broken geography” when she writes, “And what of all the cities and small towns and villages I have lived in since birth: Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozhencheri, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, all within the boundaries of India; Khartoum in the Sudan; Nottingham in Britain; and now this island of Manhattan?” (*Fault Lines*, ch. 1). In her memoir, she constantly navigates between the past and the present as a narrative technique that symbolises her eccentricity, having been uprooted from places many times. Erica Duncan remarks that multiple displacements in life had trained Alexander to come “to terms with the tapestry of border crossings” (23). Research on Meena Alexander, however, limits its scope to explaining her already diasporic self and displacement crisis through mere textual analyses. Studies often focus on aspects of trauma from exile and the negative gendered lived experiences that Meena Alexander has highlighted, while neglecting the positive influence of several boundaries in her reflections. The reception that the writer received amounts to her migrant identity and experiences, though the writer herself regards her transnational swaps as tedious and conflicting.

Problematizing Gender

Meena Alexander candidly reveals that her orthodox Syrian Christian upbringing had inculcated a feeling of guilt and sin for engaging creatively while she was a small

child. She rhetorically says, “Is my poetry blasphemy? It must be. For it is sinful for women to speak ... When I was very young this scared me so much that the only place I felt at ease writing poetry, in my father’s house was in the toilet” (Alexander and Tharu 12). She recollects her mother’s resentment against her creative engagements, as she believed it was “against a model of womanhood” (Maxey and Alexander 25). Alexander captures this public disapproval of women’s creative engagement through the twin poems titled “Lines for Dorothy Wordsworth,” wherein she addresses how women’s writings are highly censored or, for worse, not published in the mainstream (*House of a Thousand Doors* 75–78). A similar poem titled “Amrita” reimagines Gujarat religious atrocities through the lens of Amrita Sher-Gil, a twentieth-century Hungarian-Indian painter who died in the aftermath of mysterious events accused of being caused by her husband (*Raw Silk* 72). The poet evidently juxtaposes the artistic imprisonment with the talent of artists like Amrita, setting the poem against the politically ill climate of India, unfavourable to creative expressions.

Anna Sujatha Mathai, in her thoroughly autobiographical and explicit mature poems like “Books,” vehemently attacks how marriage brought an end to her love and connection with books and how she was transported to England, “torn / from all” she has ever wanted and loved (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 15)—marriage being yet another agency that tampers with women’s freedom. Another of her autobiographical poems, “Light,” also deals with how young girls are uprooted from their families for marriage, with their dreams looted away (28). “A Twist in the Fairy Tale” contrasts the fairytale life that the poet envisioned with that of the boring, repetitious city life. The poet from her balcony looks “At the world rushing by indifferently below” (*Mother’s Veena* 25), making it evident that she has not lost touch with her origins, or in Anzaldúa’s notion, she has carried her ‘home’ on her back like a turtle (Anzaldúa 21). In

these poems, the poet radically revolts against the Indian marriage system and vouches for freedom, education and autonomy for women, all the while lamenting about her academic and creative losses. Meena Alexander, on the other hand, commemorates the role of her father in her education as well as creative endeavours, while fixing on her point that women writers in general would have a father who inspired them to write (Maxey and Alexander 25).

Similar to Anna Sujatha Mathai's stance, Manorama Mathai in *Love and Dr. Aiyar* underscores Dr. Aiyar's less formally educated wife, Sita, as a representative of a naïve village girl subject to child marriage, who later intellectually evolves during a trip to the U.S. with her husband. The typical sacrifices and adjustments that Sita had to make as a post-marriage reality, along with those later faced by her American daughter-in-law Sandy, are indicative of how female experiences are universal regardless of time and place. Manorama Mathai uses two of the representative women, who are "very willing both to learn and to adapt" (39), to illustrate how the welfare of kinship relations is prioritised over individual well-being, as Anzaldúa notes (18). Sita's passive and unopinionated existence is juxtaposed with Aiyar's English friend from the university, Beryl, whose vigorous and ambitious life is caricatured by Manorama Mathai to present the opposing and contrasting lives of educated/travelled women and the others.

Anna Sujatha Mathai implores this aspect of emancipation through her mobility when she says it was her husband's decision to return to India and her subsequent settlement into the solitude of Mangalore during the late 1960s that prompted her towards poetry writing—not for fame but "to prove the existence of an internal will" (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* vi). Meena Alexander herself explains her contradictory thoughts and opines that America is a spatial catalyst for her creative practices. This conflict experienced by female migrants is directly represented in

Alexander's novel *Manhattan Music*, where she explores how immigrant lives are doomed to be hybrid, fluttering between places. The novel mirrors the autobiographical background of the author—whose identity itself is a product of multiple geo-cultural dislocations—and aims to foreground the existence of multiplicity over homogeneity and opacity over transparency in migrants. The female characters of the novel, like Sandhya and Draupadi, become representatives of American immigrants attempting hard but in vain to conform to the culture of the host country. Meena Alexander uses various strategies to depict how these women in migration uphold a hybrid sense of belongingness that escalates with respect to their gendered experiences. For instance, in *Nampally Road*, Mira's deceased mother comes as a recurring motif through Mira's memories, representing how attached she is to her land. Mira's imbedded belongingness exemplifies Glissant's notion of a rhizome that digresses from the totalitarian root, but exhibits multiple rootedness (Glissant 11). Durgabai—Mira's landlady—explains the special case of women in any society being othered several times: "It's terrible, the fate of some of our young girls" (16). Alexander utilises the character to express her stance that women are physically, emotionally, politically and psychologically oppressed and are in a "constant state of mental nepantilism," in cases of being multi-cultural, as Anzaldúa remarks (78).

Anna Sujatha Mathai's conciliation into poetry writing for survival should be considered a vehement protest against the patriarchal agencies that rooted and uprooted her multiple times in her life. The speaker from her poem "My Lost Language" captures the contrary life of her grandmother, who was uneducated and led an unhappy life, and the enthusiastic and literate life of her grandfather (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 43–44), reinforcing her stance and vouching for women's education and freedom. Meena Alexander similarly expresses her existential angst and childhood fear of inarticulation—

that resulted from her familial pressure and restrictions—in poems like “Sometimes I’m in a Garden,” where the speaker in a dream-like trance expresses how she “slowly taste the blade / scraping my heart’s blood / into poetry” (*Stone Roots* 8). The redirection of repressed emotions into artistic creations, as Alexander writes in “Song of the Crooked Seventies,” that “Poetry comes from a grey room / in a crooked hour when we can / no longer live ...” (*Stone Roots* 37), again highlights how women used English poetry as a tool of resistance. This censorship and regulation that the poets faced from the family contradicts the writers from the previous generation, like Leela Devi and Kamala Das, and even Anna Sujatha Mathai and Manorama Mathai.

Meena Alexander recollects that her mother wanted her to be a domestic wife who cooks and takes care of her husband and family, with only a little education, again highlighting Anzaldúa’s argument that culture expects women to be domestic creatures, “made to feel total failures if they don’t marry and have children” (17). In poems like “Pond at Giverny,” Alexander further explores this domesticity associated with womanhood, wherein a girl ritually and voicelessly cleanses a pond (*Quickly Changing River* 24). The physical act of cleaning becomes closely associated with gendered ritualisation, and the girl’s quiet abidance and inherent slavery make her a *mestiza* caught in the figurative borderland of the pond and its neighbourhood. The unopinionated and docile existence that was enforced upon these women writers reinforces Gloria Anzaldúa’s statement that “culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them” (16).

Manorama Mathai similarly voices against how female lives after marriage and maturity are subverted in pre-modern and ‘modern’ Kerala in novels like *Whispering Generations*. Though Kerala’s matrilineal system exhibited outward supremacy to women, the writer, through the narrator of the novel, Elishuba—a daughter from the

fourth generation of the Big House—remarks that “I have followed mother and grandmother” (ix), making the character’s matriarchal family line evident. Tisha S. Mathew, however, observes that the novel “does not have a matrifocal set up as it is the women who shift to their marital homes and not men. Marriage for the women in the novel is an expectation of attaining a new identity through their husbands” (93). But the tradition upholds the wife of the youngest son of the family as the mistress of the house, who heads it, thereby making the setup matriarchal. However, similar to how Gloria Anzaldúa remarks, the cultural politics and transactions of the family are decided and prompted by men: “Males make the rules; women transmit them” (16). Though the Big House follows the custom of matriarchy, the existence of women under the so-called women-favourable system also falls subservient to men, as it does in any patriarchal society. Meena Alexander’s extremely crude and orthodox family background, wherein her grandmother would infuse racial prejudices into her mind, warning Alexander to not go out in the sun like boys and become further dark-coloured (*Fault Lines*, ch. 4), itself suggests the colonial residue prevalent in the place, in addition to the quest of the society to meet patriarchal demands. Nevertheless, the stringent and inflexible familial settings have created an additional challenge for the female writer, resulting in an intersectional oppressive situation.

The poetry of Anna Sujatha Mathai encapsulates diverse versions of womanhood experiences that are at once personal and universal. Her poem “Waiting” itself exemplifies the same, as the poet senses a shared identity and rootedness with fellow women (*Crucifixions* 1). Here, the poet begins the poem with a common identification to her female community as “We,” and captures the suffering, tolerance and resilience of women regardless of spatiality (1). The crux of the poem aligns with Sara Ahmed’s critique of the personalisation of emotions, arguing that emotions transmit through social

channels and can shape the collective psyche of a community. She “suggest[s] that it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotion as such” (Ahmed 11). In the poem, it is the collective identification as women that triggers feelings of commonality in the poet, further macrocosmically constructing an ‘imagined community’ like Anderson suggests. Gender thereby becomes a carrier object that spreads emotions of rootedness and existence within the poet and her community.

Manorama Mathai also explores a similar kind of shared femininity in *Whispering Generations*. Elishuba’s statement, “Young Mistress merges with Old Mistress and becomes almost indistinguishable” (ix), reflects both the generational inheritance of matrilineal culture running in the family and the absence of relevance and identity these women truly uphold. The novel underscores the systematic circulation of power and wealth within the women of the Syrian Christian household, who, during those times, were married off young and uneducated, paying a high dowry to an affluent, well-known, and equal family. Elishuba asserts that her story encompasses not only her own experiences but also those of her mother Maria and her paternal grandmother Kunjam, including the details of her “bizarre death” (ix). The fraternity, interconnectedness and invariability that the protagonist and the narrator Elishuba feel, aligning with her women predecessors, are indicative of Sara Ahmed’s theorisation of shared emotions. According to her conception of affective economies, emotions are more social in nature than personal (Ahmed 8), just like how Elishuba empathises with women in her life. The legacy passed through generations becomes the catalytic medium that instils emotions, similar to how Ahmed suggests “it is the objects of emotions that circulate” and not particularly the emotion alone (11).

Apart from capturing the positive, or rather productive, side of women’s collective mob psychology, Manorama Mathai also explores how women in transnational

spaces suffer at the hands of women through presenting stereotypical Western women within patriarchal structures. One of the expatriate wives, Sally Martin, is a character Manorama Mathai uses in her novel *Death at the British Embassy* to represent gendered insecurities, jealousy and paranoid self-doubts, who even doubts if she might have killed the protagonist Miow Limthongkul in a fit of rage and blackout (21). Sally's social mobility is confined within domestic suspicion and her role as a dependant wife, while Sarah Barret, the "organizing genius" (10), enjoys a socially sanctioned domain for diplomatic wives while coordinating the embassy fair. With myriad facets of femininity, Manorama Mathai attempts to draw the possibilities of how women with transnational exposure and expatriate identities can transform into alternatives to dependent and policed wives or towards freedom. The latter—the path of education and freedom—is what Anzaldúa dictates for women, while educated women are still on the verge of being exploited (17), like the case of Miow in the novel. The novel insists that women's lives in transnational spaces are doubly precarious: Miow's body is a site of violence, embassy wives are trapped in pseudo-respectability, and even the murdered decoy woman is reduced to a pawn.

Further, Meena Alexander also explores contested female identity that is subject to systemic violence and atrocities. The murder of a man and the rape of his wife, Rameeza Be, in *Nampally Road* generate collective anger in society, which deepens Mira's emotional turmoil as well. The event exemplifies Sara Ahmed's notion of the "'sociality' of emotion" (8), and Alexander underscores how gendered violence creates a rippling effect in women in general, a microcosmic reflection of which is carried through the character of Mira. "In Kochi by the Sea" is a vision poem that exposes the similar theme of how the female body becomes a site of violence and bloodshed. The imagery of a woman "Making forms of blood—" on a "stony road" (*Quickly Changing River* 14)

and the speaker who visualises it both expose how women become victims and witnesses of assaults and atrocities. This creative expression can be considered a reflection of the writer's own repressed trauma of being a child who was exploited. As Lavina Shankar opines, in the much-discussed later versions of the memoir, Alexander explicitly portrays her "repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse by her grandfather, whom she had idealised in the first edition of her memoir" (33). Her emotional detachment from her grandfather becomes evident when in the poem "Rootedness," she addresses him as 'the dead husband of her grandmother' (*Stone Roots* 9), distancing from him through verse.

In her memoir, Meena Alexander also commemorates the strain in her relationship with her mother—despite their unending bond—due to her mother's ignorance of the child abuse that Alexander had to endure from her grandfather. Nevertheless, Alexander mentions prohibiting herself from revealing the incident to her mother to save her from the shock of what had happened to her daughter (Shankar and Alexander 41). The stifled set of experiences happened to the writer as a result of her gender and incredibly vulnerable age, again causing an intersectional effect. Regardless, Alexander's withdrawal from openly confronting her mother about the assault by her grandfather indicates how "fear restricts the mobility," as Sara Ahmed discusses (Ahmed 15). However, Alexander also talks about the incident not being a secret, as she has had conversations about it with her siblings, husband and children, pointing out, "It was very important for me to do so" (Shankar and Alexander 42). This situation is indicative of Sara Ahmed's simultaneous opinion that fear or emotions in general can also extend the mobility of people while preventing people's movements in some cases. Alexander's and her confrontation of the repressed past with others, thereby, becomes a case of both suppression and emancipation. Despite criticisms of *Fault Lines* and discussions about

the credibility of memoir as a genre, the writer's dilemma in presenting her versions of truth arises from the conjunction of all her personal affiliations.

Alexander also presents how migration leads to rhizomatic female identities, which, according to Glissant, "appear interesting for its anticonformism" (11) to any fixed or sovereign roots. For instance, Sandhya Rosenblum from *Manhattan Music* is at once haunted by the memories of her dead ex-lover, all the while being married to a Jewish American, Stephen Rosenblum, and conflicted about her love interest, an Egyptian lover. This explicates Alexander's method of portraying Sandhya's regional and multiple geographical conflicts. Written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, all the characters are narrated through her voice except Draupadi, who narrates her own version. In such instances, the womanhood of immigrant female characters functions at an intersectional level, caused at once by their gender, racial and ethnic differences—a tone set from the description of Sandhya: "She was alone, afloat in the city" (3). Manorama Mathai similarly employs intersectional women characters belonging to various mixed ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, as in her novel *Mulligatawny Soup*. The narrator of the novel, who is on a quest to find her complex ethnic roots, as well as the older Anglo-Indian woman Elsie-Nora, whose life becomes the crux of the story, are both women who are othered by further twisted identities. The initial statement of the narrator, "I never took much interest in the country to which I half belonged because all of me was and always has been in England where I was born and bred" (1), evidences this simultaneous belongingness and un-belongingness to a geographic spatiality caused by immigration.

Further, Manorama Mathai problematises double marginalisation through her female characters, like Sita, Lakshmi and Aruna Das from *Love and Dr. Aiyar*, for whom the cause of oppression should not be reduced to gender alone. For instance, Sita's

constraints are shaped by her lack of education, marriage norms, and the demand for respectability she poses amidst all this; Lakshmi's vulnerability is shaped by the marriage market and domestic violence; and Aruna Das occupies a precarious position as an unmarried woman whose emotional dependence on Aiyar is reflected through gendered moralising. As Kimberlé Crenshaw explains the "paradigmatic political and theoretical dilemma created by the intersection of race and gender" that attempts to bury intersectional experiences ("Demarginalizing the Intersection" 160), Manorama Mathai tries to subvert such an occurrence by bringing into the limelight such marginalised and often neglected voices.

For instance, Miow is the central gendered figure Manorama Mathai uses in *Death at the British Embassy* to capture how women belonging to multiple affiliations, diverging from the dominant ones, are targeted and, if possible, annihilated. In describing Miow, Manorama Mathai recurrently uses the imagery of a cat, alluding to the fact that she possessed feline nature and characteristics, onomatopoeic in her name itself. Just like how a cat is often ignored in public, Miow expresses that "nobody in her life had ever taken her seriously and certainly had never considered her dangerous" (26), regardless of her being an undercover officer of drug enforcement in the embassy. Her statement "I'm sure I can go like a ghost through all kinds of events and no one would notice me except horny males" (26) becomes problematic in a macrocosmic sense, as she represents the entire community of the double or multiply oppressed women exploited from time immemorial. Miow is presented as an English-educated, multilingual Thai woman who speaks English as fluently as Thai, as well as French and German. When Miow—a woman belonging to a racially different community than the dominantly accepted English—works in the British embassy, she encounters oppressive attacks from multiple layers, just like the analogy of an accident at the traffic intersection Crenshaw

proposes (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 149). Moreover, her multiple identities and belongingness to several places at once situate her in a constant borderland, as Anzaldúa suggests. Miow, thereby, can be read parallel to the transnational sensibilities and existence that the writer herself had: a migrant identity in the U.K. while having roots in India. Manorama Mathai further underscores the issues of women caught in metaphorical and physical borderlands, such as the Anglo-Indian protagonist Elsie-Nora from *Mulligatawny Soup*, who feels that their plight is to be “despised by both sides” (15)—an aspect of being rejected by one’s own culture and ‘the other.’

Lakshmi, one of Aiyar’s and Sita’s daughters in *Love and Dr. Aiyar*, is instrumentalised by Manorama Mathai so as to capture how the modern, educated new generation reacts to unhealthy married life. Lakshmi symbolises female resistance and changing individual notions as she leaves her husband Murli “without a backward look” (88). In the latter half of the novel, Sita is seen transformed into an enlightened woman, providing lectures and reframing Indian legends and mythologies for American women (78–79). This outlook, which Sita developed as an aftermath of her cross-cultural interactions, is framed by Manorama Mathai to conclude that education and travel culture undeniably mould identity. This episode of Sita’s migration leading to her intellectual growth mirrors Appadurai’s popular opinion that migration as a culture disrupts people’s singular sense of belongingness and instils creativity (Appadurai 170).

Another of Anna Sujatha Mathai’s poem “The Blue Dinner Set” continues the poet’s sensibility of examining the idea of home and homelessness and the interconnectedness between the two. She connects the stereotypically feminine duty of cooking to that of passion and love, as the poet finds herself strangled between her lost love and her present contemporary dilemma of social immobility (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 32–33). When in “Casual Encounter,” the poet writes, “I wandered

only in my imagination” (*Attic of Night* 45), she evidently feels static and docile in her daily life, though she has had multiple geo-cultural dislocations—a contradictory existence of immobility. All these capture how women are forced to do mundane domestic chores while even their psychic mobility is being restricted and how they desperately long for love and attention.

The short story “A Headstrong Girl” by Manorama Mathai presents the tragic story of Jingliben, a tribal woman whose protest and refusal to be a conformist of patriarchal and communal frameworks leads to her merciless death, another instance of asserting that women’s lives are primarily intersectional. Manorama Mathai, through this autonomous and assertive characterisation, exhibits her notions of liberty, and the character’s refusal to “bend with the wind” (126) becomes a metaphor for Manorama Mathai’s agenda in life. The domineering and authoritative figures, like Inderiya, the witch doctor, and their culture and Jingli’s bold defiance, exemplify how the tribal woman faces intersectional marginalisation. Crenshaw, in her discussion of racial and gendered subordination faced by Black women, comments that coloured women are “protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either” white women or Black men (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 143), a reflection of which is the case of Jingli. A similar character, Supha, from “The Number Two Maid,” also experiences a strained relationship with her mistress, Susan Mallory, structured by gender and class (“Stories by Manorama Mathai”). Her reduction to an insignificant, replaceable and worthless role also signals a double marginalisation of a working-class domestic woman, again mirroring Crenshaw’s framework on intersectionality.

In discussing patriarchal oppression, Anzaldúa, by equating culture to men, ridicules the agency for spreading a pseudo-protective role, all the while keeping women rigidly intact in their predefined stature. She despises culture for establishing and

prioritising the individual as kin in relation to other people, while rejecting the idea of the ‘self’ (17–18). Anna Sujatha Mathai exhibits similar criticism in the poem “Why,” where she asks why a woman should always be selfless in order to be regarded as virtuous (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 10). In “The Woman in the Falling House,” the poet scorns men and fragile masculinity in general for wrapping tradition tightly around female flexibility (*Life—On My Side* 54), dismantling popular cultural demand for being selfless, as Anzaldúa denotes. The poet rhetorically asks society how the children of a “bondswoman” would be free if she herself were restricted, oppressed, and deprived of any essence of liberty in life (54). When the poet here speaks about her own house falling away from her, she aligns with Anzaldúa’s theorisation that deviants in a society have a tendency to not reveal their unacceptable aspects/sides to their family or culture in fear of being rejected from home (Anzaldúa 20). Manorama Mathai poignantly portrays the rise and formation of ‘the new woman’ in the public sphere with the advent and propagation of modernity, wherein women are active participants in the mainstream. For instance, in *Mulligatawny Soup*, she talks about “the new phenomenon” of “the Indian working girl[s]” who are “assertive, living alone in the big city,” hinting at how female spaces emerged and how women slowly began to own the public sphere in India.

Anna Sujatha Mathai is predominantly a poet, though the only short story of hers available, “Carmen Andrade’s Answer” (1992), reveals her promising prosaic style and effective narration. Narrated by Mitalee Gonsalves, a middle-aged woman working as the head clerk in a post office (80), the story is about women hemmed in by duty, longing and fear. It offers an exploration of how patriarchal structures, societal surveillance and emotional hesitation lead to self-betrayal and quiet tragedy. Mitalee’s longing for art symbolises freedom and emotional vitality, which are gradually eroded by

her fear of being rejected by her own culture and family, as Anzaldúa explains (20). Mitalee thereby becomes a ‘borderwoman’ who yearns for creative expressions amidst all her psychic unrest, compelled to remain inactive in the borderlands where her own cultural values disown and alienate her.

Manorama Mathai also problematises how women in India are brought under introspection and moral policing. From the perspective of Aruna from *Love and Dr. Aiyar*, the scandal of her association with a senior colleague becomes further problematic as a case of how society and scholarly pursuits in general pull down a bold girl of ambition and academic growth, scrutinising her with the lens of moral codes. Kunjam from *Whispering Generations* is yet another female characterisation of Manorama Mathai, who fights but fails against the oppressive patriarchal code that domesticates women’s experiences. The character becomes a tool at the hands of the writer in her projection of revolt against dominant regressive systems. Manorama Mathai rightly captures how a woman with a stance is detested—a trend that continues even in yet another generation, as in when Kunjam’s daughter-in-law, Young Maria, is reminded of the need to be mature after marriage by the same family (*Whispering Generations* 108). Kunjam’s eventual receding towards alcoholism and monotonous alien existence is her mode of protest against a family that rejects her ‘home.’ Her inexplicable existence and death, both “almost totally ignored by everyone” (40), are reflective of how society perceived and treated women who craved space and freedom. She is often scorned upon and prevented from any sort of social interactions and mobility (41). The character, thereby, is indicative of the plight of many transitional female lived experiences, caught between the depleting social order that was trying to hold onto its grip and the new women’s uprising.

Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* also puts forth the crisis related to women's migration through the protagonist Mira, who is a return migrant from England to Hyderabad after her four years of higher studies abroad. Mira's anticipation upon returning to India explicates how diverging identities attempt to converge at a point:

It was my fond hope that by writing a few poems, or a few prose pieces, I could start to stitch it all together: my birth in India a few years after national independence, my colonial education, my rebellion against the arranged marriage my mother had in mind for me, my years of research in England. (30)

Alexander addresses how Mira's gender and migrant identity merge to create multiple levels of issues for her. Similar to *Manhattan Music*, Alexander focuses on how the idea of multiple belongingness/un-belongingness works in migrants, the effects of which deepen according to other axes of their identity, like gender and race.

While the poetic style of Anna Sujatha Mathai differs starkly from that of her contemporary poet Kamala Das—the former being condensed and the latter being confessional—Anna Sujatha Mathai vehemently opposes Das for always seeking male company. Anna Sujatha Mathai's writings do not overflow with emotions but are rather brief and safe, while Das experiments with a rebellious and daring format. When Das explicitly states her love, cravings and desires, Anna Sujatha Mathai mostly conveys the absence of love and affection. Anna Sujatha Mathai attacks Das for being an obedient wife until the end, with a contradictory life and claims through writings. The writer believes that her life was more complicated than Das's and critiques Das for limiting her freedom of sex, love and life only to her books, saying it “was not ... worthy of her” (Mathai and Joseph). All the while, in poems like “Canute and the Celibate,” Anna Sujatha Mathai rebuffs “she's not a Room to Let / for a month or two” (*Life—On My Side* 48) while addressing a male suitor's advances towards intimacy to the speaker of

the poem, asserting that emotional connection is far more important than the physical closeness. The poet voices for the entire womanhood and feels that female lived experiences are shared and collective. Anna Sujatha Mathai further problematises Das's existence with a male protector throughout the poem, while she herself faced these challenges alone. In her poem "Forest Paths," Anna Sujatha Mathai mentions her mundane, isolated years of existence when she believed that "the only way / Out of the dark forest, might be / To delve deeper" (*Life—On My Side* 11).

While it is true that Anna Sujatha Mathai has continued the literary tradition of female creative writing in English from Kerala, inaugurated by Kamala Das, she has had obvious disagreements with Das. This again explains Glissant's theory of multidirectional spread of culture. It is the much-developed and elaborated worldview of Anna Sujatha Mathai—a result of her transnational migrations and exposure—that has caused her to develop a rhizomatic behaviour when compared to the 'root system' culture in Kamala Das. The divergent nature of Anna Sujatha Mathai from Kamala Das also explains how creative writing as a culture shows a non-linear fashion of growth (Glissant 11). Nevertheless, Anna Sujatha Mathai adored Das and understood the cohesion between their common Malayali roots when she wrote, "You celebrated your Malabar house / I, my Tiruvella dream" in "To Kamala Das" (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 66). Anna Sujatha Mathai's writing is more about the personal than the geographic, while Das was upset by the physicality of places and the emotional turmoil it caused. While Das's poetry deals equally with the absence/presence of places and the extremely personal psychological aspects connected to them, Anna Sujatha Mathai is more moved by the communal aspects of female lived experiences.

Mobilities and Transformations

Feelings pertaining to topographical swaps and emigrational aspects take place in Anna Sujatha Mathai's writings, mostly without specific mentions of the names of places. However, the inevitability of disregarding the nomenclature of these localities has prompted her to write poetry containing them. Anna Sujatha Mathai regards her Mangalore life as having had nothing to offer her solace and joy, which led her into ultimate boredom—a major turning point in her advent in poetry writing (Mathai and Joseph). Following her divorce, Anna Sujatha Mathai later moved to Delhi and held remarkable positions in poetry societies and mentoring, settling there during the last years of her life, and she recurrently states connections between her migration and creative writing. Meena Alexander interestingly states a similar point that it was in Khartoum that she began engaging in creative writing, while in India she did not have to (Duncan 24). Her statement explicitly hints that writing was a distraction or, rather, a channelling of her trauma of dislocation, and it also suggests that without migration, she might not have ventured into creative praxis in general. In a semi-poetic reflective note titled "Experimental Geography," Alexander explains how "in spite of everything there was much singing" among the refugees caught in an existential crisis (*Birthplace with Buried Stones* 3). Here, the writer juxtaposes how the refugees become voiceless, all the while being able to sing—an expression of the human self. Alexander's creativity directly resonates with Arjun Appadurai's major argument in *Modernity at Large* that migration is a force "that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of imagination" (4).

While constantly searching amidst her past to retain the present, Meena Alexander writes that she is haunted by the thought of owning a home/homeland which she may never find (*Fault Lines*, ch. 2), an enigma of migration. But Alexander expresses her fascination towards her life and settlement in New York, as the place

enabled her to recollect her memories, while the socio-political upheavals of India specifically fail to do so (Maxey and Alexander 28). She adds that America is a nation built upon multiple layers of immigrant history and thereby holds a power to trigger one's nostalgia (28). All these clearly evidence that, apart from the pain of dislocation, it is the geo-cultural spatiality of America that has helped in framing the creative identity of the writer here—an aspect that most studies on diaspora fail to notice.

Meena Alexander in *Fault Lines* also expresses her feeling of being “torn from the India I [the writer] had learnt to love” during the initial days in New York City after her wedding (ch. 2). Her non-belongingness to even her homeland, Kerala, and India, can be further explained by her childhood in distant cities and nations. It is notable that, just like the case of all the previously mentioned migrations of women writers, Alexander's constant uprooting was a result of her father's job abroad initially and her husband's life and settlement later. However, Alexander deviates from her predecessors by being a scholar of literature and travelling abroad for the sake of her own higher studies.

While writing and engaging prolifically in English and being a professor of English herself, Meena Alexander however consistently regarded English as an alien language to her. In her memoir, she remarks on the English language as a “pale skin” that covered her flesh and expresses her otherness in having to use it (*Fault Lines*, ch. 5). Contradictory to this, Alexander also writes about how English became a language of shelter through which she “dared to hope” (ch. 8). For her, English became a possibility of expressing her emotions and reaching out to the new world of migrant life. Alexander's statement that English “had covered over the roots of my being” (*Shock of Arrival* 35) explains how the language is a blessing and a pervasive factor in her life, perhaps disconnecting her from her mother tongue itself. This again indicates that

homogenisation is a myth in the case of migrant communities and complete assimilation into a culture is not possible. Alexander finds it difficult, or rather unattainable, to be a complete Malayali, all the while not being a native speaker of English either, yet another topic that Ngugi wa Thiong'o problematises, in the preface of *Fault Lines*, when he asks which language would aptly capture or "make sense of her many crossings."

Keki N. Daruwalla, in his introduction to Anna Sujatha Mathai's *Life—On My Side of the Street and Other Poems*, remarks that Anna Sujatha Mathai possessed a deep sense of regret and loss for her inability to write in her native tongue, Malayalam, though she was inspired by the poetic conventions and traditions of Kerala. He opines that "her writing is confined to English" (ix). Poems like "My Lost Language" also narrate the poet's repentance over not having strong cultural roots pertaining to her mother tongue, Malayalam. For Anna Sujatha Mathai, Malayalam feels like "A language that trembles / in my deepest sleep," which is a souvenir she has inherited from her cultural past, though she is unable to carry it along with her (*Life—On My Side* 44). This facet of the migrant identity of a writer—being able to express oneself more in English than in her root language—reveals the transfiguring nature of cultures, as Édouard Glissant explains. With the backup of arguments against a totalitarian root raised by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Glissant too suggests that identity is rhizomatic in nature with no permanent single absorbent like that in roots but a much-extended system (11). In Anna Sujatha Mathai's case, the aspect of her basic Malayali identity should be regarded as a rhizome and not as a monolithic root that hinders her freedom of expression in other linguistic media. Further, Alexander commemorates conceiving a story in mind in her native tongue, Malayalam, during the early days and not being able to write it (Duncan 24), pointing out the dilemma of a migrant writer with multiple linguistic affiliations, similar to her poem "Fragment, In Praise of the Book," where she writes the problems of

“all the languages that flow through” her (*Atmospheric Embroidery* 1). In an e-mail interview, David Lelyveld mentioned, “Ayyappa Paniker was amazed that Meena could not read Malayalam because her spoken Malayalam was at such a high register. But she never studied the literature. It was often said that her English poetry was influenced by the sounds of her mother tongue,” further explaining how her cultural flux has caused her to develop a rhizomatic behaviour, spreading in a non-linear pattern, as Glissant denotes (11).

Anna Sujatha Mathai mentions her initial ignorance about the rise of a new wave of English poetry in Bombay by writers like Kamala Das and adds that it was after moving to Bangalore that she began prolific writing. It, therefore, becomes evident that female writings of English from Kerala began with the writings of Kamala Das and have been ever since a voluntary project in its continuum, with the medium of writing catalysing and moulding an imagined community of female creatives. Manorama Mathai similarly explores the positive aftermath of migration [though financial]. In *Whispering Generations*, the marriage of Maria—the newly rich granddaughter of the earlier servant of the Big House, Maria Chedathi, whose family prospered through migration and foreign settlement—with that of Kuri reflects how economic flow enunciated by migration affected power relations in society.

Often in her writings and in her conversations, Anna Sujatha Mathai reveals her vivid memories of childhood in her ancestral home in Thiruvalla, Kerala, where Anna Sujatha Mathai and her sister Manorama Mathai spent two years of their childhood. According to Anna Sujatha Mathai, “It was the happiest time” of her life, which stands in contrast to her busy and tense life in the cities (Mathai and Joseph). In contrast, Manorama Mathai can be seen distancing her characters and settings from her individual spaces and affiliations as a means to isolate her ritualistic life occurrences from writing.

As previously mentioned, Manorama Mathai does not limit her geographical portrayal to the Kerala/Indian setting. Deviating broadly from the terrain, *Death at the British Embassy* is set in Bangkok, Thailand. The writer—a migrant to the U.K. and an Indian herself with a history of being ruled by the colonial regime—approaches the historical issues between Thailand and Britain and exposes how geography and power become intermingling and entangled entities. However, Manorama Mathai's novel *Whispering Generations* is set in pre-modern Kerala, where communism was taking root and narrates the story of different generations of an ancestral Christian family, whose secrets, history and mysterious existence weave the main intrinsic plot of the work. The story of the Big House unravels with its joint-family set-up in pre-modern Kerala, where women literally and symbolically signify continuity. The novel accurately represents the ancestral and customary lifestyle of Kerala during the times, which includes a feudal system, traditional ancestral homes, joint families, and matriliney.

In a poem like “The Name,” Anna Sujatha Mathai presents how her name and belongingness remain contradictory to her post-colonial identity and literary career. Despite being advised by mentors like Nissim Ezekiel to discard her first name, ‘Anna,’ because he believed it would create “a Western image,” Anna Sujatha Mathai nonetheless firmly supports her name and the identity it represents (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 1). She emotionally reconnects with her first name, Anna—the name she inherited from both her maternal and paternal grandmothers—and, through that, she revolts against pretentious othering from herself and her roots. Ezekiel's diplomatic stance in the publishing industry, on the other hand, brings to light the conflict within Indian writings in English. According to him, omitting her Westernised/Christian first name is a way to decolonise Indian writings, but Anna Sujatha Mathai believes in directness, truth and belonging. Here, the poet faces the

intersection of her identities as a woman, a writer, and a postcolonial citizen. The threat that Ezekiel poses arises from the conjunction of all these factors—the “multidimensionality” of experiences, as Crenshaw suggests (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 139). Furthermore, Ezekiel’s attempt was to assimilate Anna Sujatha Mathai into the Indian tradition of English writing by eliminating her colonial elements—a tendency that Glissant critiques in the case of heterogeneous human interactions. Glissant advocates to “agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity” (190).

In one of her conversations with Susie Tharu, Meena Alexander says that she writes because of her inability to understand or comprehend herself (14), again implying her numerous geographical uprootings and re-rootings. This gets reflected in poems like “Stone Roots” and “No Autumn in My Country,” where the speaker explicates “the gravity of exile” and evokes verses of the Tang dynasty poet Tu Fu to underscore her homesickness of exile (*Stone Roots* 25, 33). Meena Alexander’s poems are very similar to the writings of Kamala Das in her constant reclamation of her homeland. She draws on her memories of past landscapes to navigate her current experience of homelessness. For instance, poems like “Rootedness” use intense Kerala-specific imagery like “monsoons” and “family cobra nests,” evidencing that the writer is never devoid of her memories (*Stone Roots* 9). Alexander, in poems like “House of the Red Canoe,” directly uses Malayalam phrases like “Njangal ivida” [we are here] (*Quickly Changing River* 68), establishing her strong Dravidian roots and cultural issues associated with displacement from her mother. In her memoir, Alexander often captures how the topography of Kerala serves as a metaphorical abode of peace and tranquillity, symbolically defining the ideal land for the writer. When Alexander writes, “My attachment to Kerala deepened. Retained in memory, my affection grew closer, layer upon layer to the soil of my

imagination” (*Fault Lines*, ch. 5), she adheres that while she is a product of multiple localities, her migrant culture is rooted in her homeland, forming an enmeshed rhizomatic system like Glissant proposes (11). In the poem “Cold Weather Tree,” the poet maps her geographical closeness to Kerala through the voice calls with her mother (*Quickly Changing River* 9). Through Crenshaw’s lens, the author’s experience of otherness is highly gendered, and the shared vulnerabilities of the poet and her mother illustrate Ahmed’s idea of the contagious nature of emotions.

Anna Sujatha Mathai’s poetry, as mentioned earlier, is unintentionally woven across the socio-cultural terrains of her life, while the majority of her poems are personal, and they seldom carry revelation of any localities. While writers like Kamala Das purposefully capture the geographical specificities of their migrant existence so as to express their personal narratives of alienation, Anna Sujatha Mathai, on the contrary, accidentally incorporates physical realities and spaces of her being in her way of prioritising her deeper emotional expression. In the poem “Delhi in Summer,” Anna Sujatha Mathai presents two contradicting and adjacent emotional and spatial existences of the poet in Delhi (*Crucifixions* 4). While beginning on a positive note, in remembrance of a cold night, she peacefully slept with the moon, breeze, and stars caressing her; she later juxtaposes it with her rough, drained and weary summer mornings in the same Delhi. Her statement about the sudden shift in life as “The pattern changes” and her description of Delhi mornings through “The only sounds are sounds of death” (4) suggest her hopeless and cynical view on tribulations connected to urban life. This conflicting and insecure existence is an aftermath of her migrant experience away from her homeland. The confusion that the poet faced as a woman in an alien society defines her as a ‘borderwoman,’ while her rustic experiences in Delhi contribute to its characterisation as a borderland, similar to Gloria Anzaldúa’s theories.

Similar to this ambivalence that Anna Sujatha Mathai frequently addresses, Meena Alexander predominantly identifies herself as “a woman cracked by multiple migrations” (*Fault Lines*, ch. 1), alluding to the fact that her lived experiences are an amalgamation of both her gendered and migratory experiences. Crenshaw underscores how gender aligns with other identity factors to intensify marginalisation, and Alexander’s inability to connect and comprehend her reality reflects that. In poems like “Cosmopolitan,” Alexander redefines urbanism as a wound rather than a boon. The opening lines of the poem are, “You want a poem on being cosmopolitan / Dear friend, what can I say?” (*Quickly Changing River* 3), itself carries Alexander’s weight of being a cosmopolitan—which rather becomes an act of survival for her. Similarly, in “House of Breath,” Alexander says, “I had one house, then another and another” (*Quickly Changing River* 108), further explaining her multiple geographical existences. Susie Tharu poignantly raises the question of how Alexander weaves the idea of habitation, to which the writer interestingly replies that the very roots of the concept lie in her childhood of symbolic homelessness caused by migrations (Alexander and Tharu 11). Alexander’s statement that she never “really understand[s] what *place* means” (11) explains Anzaldúa’s statement that she has internalised her dilemma in the borderlands to an extent that one conflict cancels out the other to make her feel a zero (63). For instance, in poems like “Narcissus Never Knew Her,” Alexander explores how immigrant women are overtly scrutinised in the host place while not belonging to her homeland either. Lines like “they’re washing her now / over and over / with water” suggest how the otherness of being a woman of another nation or culture is attempted to be removed so as to homogenise or assimilate with the host environment. This is a clear example of Glissant’s understanding of how the mixing of culture works in migratory people, where

‘the self’ regards ‘the other’ as highly opaque and therein tries to make it transparent through assimilation (49).

Anna Sujatha Mathai herself opines that living in India—especially in Delhi—is a tedious task, and still she survived (Mathai and Joseph). In contrast to the dread and dejection about the city life in Delhi that Anna Sujatha Mathai herself projects, “Dilli, Across Centuries” is a poem where the poet laments about the pollution and lost glory of the city (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 9). The poem explicates how a same geographical space can bring about mixed feelings of trepidation and awe in a migrant person, making the concept of land and ‘home’ composite. In “Dark Roads,” she says, “We came to / sleeping cities / studded with brilliant lights” (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 6), alluding directly to her migration to cities, all the while exploring themes of her hybrid experience and perplexities. Anna Sujatha Mathai captures how a static state can prevail [with the author unable to move in her ambiguous and perplexed situation], even amidst social mobility.

In *Manhattan Music*, Meena Alexander brings into the forefront the issue of the belongingness of women, addressed in the case of the narrator as she says, “My ancestors were scattered from British sailing ships, dark bits of ground pepper flung onto plantations in Trinidad, Fiji” (4), further problematising the fluctuating geographical affiliations of migrants—a crisis the writer herself suffers. Further, Alexander problematises the contrasting migrant lives of Sandhya and Draupadi in *Manhattan Music* through Sandhya’s figurative understanding that she should be daring, individualistic and independent like Draupadi. This conflict of Sandhya’s—idealising Draupadi on one hand while wanting to be a free woman on her own—is made evident when Sandhya says, “Draupadi, I don’t want to speak your words. I have to find my own” (222), all the while acknowledging her friend’s helping hand in her early days of

migrant life. The line “Stephen had married her and brought her to America. She would live here, she would learn to forget” (11) is indicative of how women are forced to migrate to distant lands for the sake of any male figures in their lives and how they had to conform to it, in opposition to Glissant’s demand for “the right to opacity” (189).

Women in Manorama Mathai’s *Whispering Generations* show little or no mobility—both social and ideological—as a result of which they lack a sense of autonomy and freedom, as opposed to Elishuba and her mother, Maria, who show an inclination towards travelling abroad. Both Maria and Elishuba, while rooted in their homeland, exhibit an unwillingness to accept the totalitarian “torments of internal exile,” as Glissant points out (19). Manorama Mathai, in her story “The Returned Daughter,” portrays a narrator who had married a foreigner and had lived “in faraway places,” mirroring the life of the author herself (“Stories by Manorama Mathai”). The narrator belonging to multiple landscapes all at once and the constant life of Shona, who longs to walk in the park, reflect how notions of travel are important for gendered identities.

However, Anna Sujatha Mathai often shares her aloof and lonely existence, even in busy urban life, as in “Alone in Company.” The oxymoronic title of the poem reflects the contradictory and often paradoxical nature of modern life, where the poet feels, “But suddenly I am / alone and apart” (*Crucifixions* 11). The poet juxtaposes the pretentiously joyous state of urban life and the basic “emptiness and boredom” that encircles women’s lives (11). The poet here portrays the city life she was a part of, filled with music, parties and people, which she feels strange and detached from. All these further explain how various terrains transform into borderlands of confusion, chaos and multiplicity. Anzaldúa explains that borderlands are “in a constant state of transition” (3), evidencing the duality of the poet’s emotions in conceiving and inhabiting the land—feeling both connected to and detached from the place as a *mestiza*. In an e-mail interview,

Alexander's husband David Lelyveld remarked that "Meena was troubled and challenged by questions of identity well before she came to the US," referring to her frequent visits to grandparents at Thiruvalla and Kozhencheri, all the while having been educated and lived in other locations.

Following the ambivalence and dichotomy that Anna Sujatha Mathai mostly presents, Manorama Mathai also underlines women's problems within migration. For instance, her short fiction titled "A Girl's Story" situates female experience within intersecting axes of gender and geography, making it particularly useful for the discussion framed by migration-induced modernity in women ("Stories by Manorama Mathai"). The unnamed protagonist's first-person narrative begins with her displacement from a village to Kathmandu with her father, where access to education momentarily creates a possibility of liberation for her. Manorama Mathai, through *Love and Dr. Aiyar* also captures how the primitive and conservative orders of *agraharam* or Brahmin ghettos transform with the advent and spread of education and travel culture. Despite being poor, Aiyar's parents believed in the idea of education, and young Aiyar's aspiration to go to Oxford for higher education despite not having enough economic backup reflects the importance of education that the age upheld. For Aiyar—the autobiographical counterpart of the writer herself, who had higher education abroad—Oxford becomes a space of hope, educational prosperity and peace throughout the novel, alluding to the possibilities of transnational migration that the age promised. This further adheres to Anzaldúa's claim that a person should leave behind their roots and travel to other lands to rediscover and redefine their personalities (16). The statement "Aiyar had always said that education was the most important thing, be one girl or boy" (36) becomes the writer's own rhetorical perspective on the importance of education.

Further continuing the idea of education being a liberating force in “A Girl’s Story,” Manorama Mathai also underscores how the protagonist’s migration to a distant land with her father echoes the discussion by Zachariah et al. on the gender dimensions in migration, noting that women’s mobility is mostly dependent on men’s migration (*Dynamics of Migration* 309). Manorama Mathai juxtaposes a borderland with the girl, whose movement to the city makes her confront the early conservative expectations and the promise of autonomy that the new land offers, transforming her into a *mestiza*, as Anzaldúa suggests. The story portrays how structural power functions along gendered lines—as men traverse places as mobile, liberal beings, while female mobility is fashioned relationally to the male discourse of migration. However, Manorama Mathai also aligns with Anzaldúa’s assertive claim that she had to leave her home behind so as to discover her real home in her representative portrayal of Young Maria, who fights her love and adoration for Singapore and life there (*Whispering Generations* 120) when compared to the idea of return migration to Kerala. While Maria’s father’s sudden economic prosperity led to their move to Singapore, Elishuba, who is much younger and already experiencing cross-cultural interactions, strengthens her non-linear lineage through marriage.

Anna Sujatha Mathai’s critique of modernity and urbanism takes manifested forms through her poetry. For instance, she despises the noisy and pushy pigeons in “Tap Dancer Bird” who claim their existence over her air conditioner, obstructing the poet’s peace of mind (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 13), and at the same time, in “Green Magic,” she wonders how “an ordinary metropolitan sky” is made beautiful by the shades and lights of nature (36). “My World” is another poem by Anna Sujatha Mathai that merges her disdain of the artificial and busy city life in some distant country and her love that prompts her to cope with the mundanity, making her say, “This is *my* world ...”

(*Attic of Night* 9). Arjun Appadurai confirms the inevitable link between migration and the functioning of human imagination (10), and Anna Sujatha Mathai's creativity embedded in cityscapes attests that she breaks free from conventional singular patterns of living and uses her topographical plurality as an inspiration to her creative praxis.

Manorama Mathai uses yet another strategy of instrumentalising the protagonist of "A Girl's Story" to depict how various locations coexist and intermingle with a migrant person's identity, as in the vibrant streets of Kathmandu and the silence of the village in the story ("Stories by Manorama Mathai"). The girl represents an opaque existence of a migrant that Glissant comments on (111), as she is neither fully assimilated into the city's modernity nor adheres to the village's tradition. Manorama Mathai exposes how gendered modernity in India is fractured by intersectional interferences, despite female attempts to resist them, as seen in the narrator's final resolution to not subject her daughter to the same fate of societal oppression. On the other hand, Jingli from "A Headstrong Girl" is prevented from any kind of upward social mobility, as she is being accused by the mob of being a witch (130), an act that turns to be a controlling mechanism. Jingli's refusal—"No I am not a witch and I shall not say that I am. No one can make me do that" (131)—reflects how she asserts a radical claim to remain opaque, as Glissant's theorisation, thereby attempting to widen her geographical and conceptual freedom. The story becomes political in its treatment of how superstitions and the communal spread of fear are used to govern a person's landscape possibilities within the marginal societies.

While Anna Sujatha Mathai's creative works often ruminate around her emotional dilemma, and places are often limited to the backdrop, she adamantly states that England was the place that moulded her literary future and career. While she left behind her passion for theatre and literature once in England—focusing instead on social

work—England inspired her and presented her with a zest for life (Mathai and Joseph). She reminisces about her literary interest that she forged while in the U.K. This positive outlook towards migration/travel culture is pivotal in the study of women's social mobility, as such geographical swaps have not just dislocated these writers from their roots but have relocated them into more liberal physical and metaphorical topographies. Her poem "Monet's Garden" similarly captures her enthusiasm to live and is inspired by her cross-cultural associations. The poet here captures the importance of travel and places in the moulding of a person's psyche and freedom (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 42). Anna Sujatha Mathai, on an optimistic note, reveres Italian places and art, which posits inspiration to the author to live her life to the fullest—a rare account on the relevance of travel culture from a woman of pre-globalised India. Further, the correlation of migration and creativity authenticates Glissant's argument that those who do not engage in travel culture may face "internal exile" in life (19), a situation that Anna Sujatha Mathai testifies to have occurred to her after her return migration to India and static life in Mangalore. Meena Alexander uses art as a strategy employed by immigrant characters in *Manhattan Music*: Draupadi's and Sandhya's cousin Jay, for instance, are aspiring artists—again reflecting Appadurai's claim that migration and global interactions can trigger work of imagination. While constantly swapping the topographical backdrop of the poem from her ancestral memories of Kerala to India on a metaphorical level and beyond, the writer, in her poem "House of a Thousand Doors" discusses how women in migration face multiple levels of subjugation, which gets evident in lines like "I watch her kneel in all my lifetime / imploring the household gods / who will not let her in" (*House of a Thousand Doors* 3). The poem, thereby, attains a universal political sense, as the poet transcends from the mundane to a global issue of the immigrant crisis.

While writers like Anna Sujatha Mathai strikingly talk about freedom achieved by women through cross-cultural interactions, Meena Alexander problematises another aspect of living in the borderlands as well, as mentioned early. She aptly captures the entire essence of Crenshaw's argument that mainstream feminism is highly racial and it favours only the white women when she says that in many places she has been to, she has encountered racist feminism. She expresses her awe at being in New York and witnessing multicultural feminisms like Black, Indian, and Latina (Maxey and Alexander 36), resonating with Crenshaw's proclamation that female experiences should be dealt with by solving all the intersectional affiliations to which they are exposed. All the while, Alexander rhetorically asks, "What does it mean to be Unwhite in America?" (*Fault Lines*, ch. 10)—a racially charged introspection she extends to several of her poems. She expresses the racist treatment and hatred that life in America has brought to her and recollects her children calling her 'black' and her husband 'white,' identifying themselves as racially hybrid. Her racial conflict becomes further evident when she rhetorically asks, "why would I be so different in different places—by which I mean seen differently, treated differently, almost becoming another I?" (*Poetics of Dislocation* 89). For instance, poems like "Bright Passage" pose existential questions on migration, wherein the poet imagines her generations of successors being "Born to this North American soil, dreamers in a new land" (*Atmospheric Embroidery* 65), all the while feeling distanced and alienated in the place. Poems like "Child, Stone, Sea" again expose how racial othering was a constant threat to the writer in America through lines like "I sit on a bench marked WHITES ONLY" (*Raw Silk* 29).

Manorama Mathai's "The Homecoming," on the other hand, captures how migrant lives are framed by nostalgia and a craving for rootedness. Neetu's dream of returning back to her "green, lush" ancestral/native home in Vatakkara and her inability

to communicate in Malayalam to her grandmother make her a *mestiza* of conflicting identities (“Stories by Manorama Mathai”). The character’s impossibility of returning back home represents Manorama Mathai’s stance on migration and the subsequent alienation that follows. Meena Alexander’s sense of alienation from her homeland is evident in poems like “June 1977,” in which she equates herself with a “black vessel” floating somewhere distant from her place of origin, where she truly belongs (*Stone Roots* 21). However, she claims that several years of U.S. life had, of course, made the place a home and that she herself is an American “in some measure” and that she is “a creature of place [New York]. My poetry is a poetry of place” (Maxey and Alexander 27, 36), further explaining the rhizomatic nature of migration.

While writers like Anna Sujatha Mathai focus mostly on positive impacts of migration in her life, Meena Alexander explains how America demands constant answers to explain oneself, which the poet finds difficult to do. She fluctuates between being identified as an English poet writing from America but not as an American poet and being referred to as an Asian-American poet or a South Indian woman poet (*Fault Lines*, ch. 12). All the while, TriQuarterly Books, in their bio-note of *Raw Silk*, addresses Alexander as “New York City poet.” In a conversation with Roshni Rustomji, Alexander describes her intentions in creative writing as: “I would like to draw together India and America, flesh and blood and spirit” (89), further explaining how both Indian and American landscapes are important and how they naturally collide in her life and works. Alexander’s husband David Lelyveld in an e-mail interview remarked that she always considered herself to be an Indian writer, though she “had wider cosmopolitan interests.” Alexander’s migrant experiences had, thereby, pushed her into literal borderlands, where spatial, linguistic and existential questions converge.

Socio-political Consciousness Through English Writings

Meena Alexander, in an interview, interestingly opines that her poetry collection *Raw Silk* is highly political in its essence of capturing political events of Manhattan and the Hindu-Muslim riot in Gujarat, India, contrary to her later collections, like *Quickly Changing River*, that are highly personal (Shankar and Alexander 40). In *House of a Thousand Doors*, Alexander also mentions the socio-political interest running in their family, starting with her grandmother, recollecting the letters she had sent to their great-uncle, who was an Indian minister of education in London. Alexander addresses her as the “political grandmother” and has recreated some of her letters as prose pieces (*House of a Thousand Doors* 1). Herein, the writer reimagines the politically unstable times during the nationalistic movements and her grandmother’s role in them—being imprisoned by the British when she was twenty-seven. In her recreation of one of her grandmother’s letters to her grandfather during their imprisonment, she voices her grandmother, who writes, “You have a small window Kuruvilla that looks out on the hills. Unlock the bars with your gaze” (*House of a Thousand Doors* 21), implying the sense of freedom a woman with education and the right political sense possessed. Alexander associates her grandmother with her British women friends of the time, labelling them as feminists. Further, Alexander describes her grandmother’s connection with Balamani Amma, who together envisioned an independent India and free women, and to whom she had exchanged several personal yet highly political letters during the Indian independence (*House of a Thousand Doors* 22)—again exemplifying how education emancipates women towards fighting for their rights. Here, letters act as a medium through which Alexander identifies the social mobility of her grandmother, who lived before Indian independence, associating herself and other liberal women of the times with the predecessor.

Anna Sujatha Mathai should be regarded as a poet of shared belongingness and that of a community, since her verse addresses issues pertaining to a wider set of people. This communal sense of existence sometimes makes her a political commentator on the places and times of her life. Anuradha Marwah remarkably comments that “She [Anna Sujatha Mathai] possessed an unerring political instinct; a natural affinity with fellow human beings that was always evident in her poetry.” For instance, the poem “Easter 1966” alludes to ‘The Troubles’ in Northern Ireland during the 1960s to 1980s, following the replacement of a former army officer, Terence O’Neill, who introduced policies to improve the economy. Many such dynamic political moves subsequently led to widespread violence during Easter 1966 in parts of the Republic of Ireland and the U.K. Anna Sujatha Mathai addresses England as her own nation and laments the deep chasm and violence causing massive deaths and anguish (*Crucifixions* 10). She dreadfully says, “Death comes often and in many forms in my sad, sun-drenched country” (10), and she unfolds ways in which violence and bloodshed are unleashed in the land that is so close to her being. The identification of England as home by Anna Sujatha Mathai further enforces Gloria Anzaldúa’s statement that she had to leave her real home so as to identify the physical realities of her existence (16).

Manorama Mathai’s short story “The Number Two Maid” underscores the global privileges sustained by the former colonial powers (“Stories by Manorama Mathai”). In the story, the expatriate mistress, Susan, extends casual racism and patronising remarks, exemplifying the prevalence of Eurocentrism as an agenda in the global ideological sphere. Through such tales, Manorama Mathai presents her resentment and anguish regarding the post-global situation of inequity that normalises the superiority of a nation/set of people over ‘the other.’ However, Manorama Mathai frames the entire sequence of action in *Death at the British Embassy* as the East’s counterattack on the

West; the presence of a Thai body in the British embassy lake (5) is symbolic of resistance, violation, protest, and the collapse of the illusion of an impermeable diplomatic space owned by the English. Manorama Mathai metaphorically presents the evils of the colonial empire and how in a post-global scenario, a global space is transformed into a transnational hub of overlapping and conflicting identities. The embassy and the space where the Thai and the English confront each other in general thereby become a literal borderland, where “[t]he only “legitimate” inhabitants are those in power, the whites, and those who align themselves with whites” (Anzaldúa 3–4). The majority of the characters associated with the embassy in the novel are expatriates who struggle or adapt to their postcolonial migrations—a community of which Manorama Mathai herself is a part.

However, Manorama Mathai does not generalise the negativities associated with agents of modernity like migration and education and emphasises the positive turns that they can lead to. For instance, in *Whispering Generations*, she uses Maria Chedathi and her husband’s determination to provide education to their children (31) to convey the modern outlook even among the downtrodden. The novelist also portrays how English education, the printing press, and the new reading culture transformed people from a low caste toward self-awareness and dignity. Manorama Mathai also explicates how financial flow and economic exchanges accompanied migration, as in the case of money flowing from jobs in other places to the homeland. Manorama Mathai points out that this post-global phenomenon—the financescape as constructed by Appadurai—was initiated by the transnational remittance of wealth from Maria Chedathi’s sons and the educated grandchildren of the Big House (34, 45).

Anzaldúa, in her discussion about the complexity of living in a borderland, states that she has “so internalized borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels

out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one” (63). Anna Sujatha Mathai captures a parallel essence through “The Lost Centuries,” where she speaks about the static physical reality of a particular space in opposition to its cultural swaps and amalgamations, all the while feeling that the obscurity has made her “helpless,” “trembling” and “afraid” (*Lighthouse for Drowning Memories* 8). Like B. Raju opines, “[Anna Sujatha] Mathai ... shares a sense of responsibility for society, a responsibility transcending all kinds of distractions and depicting reality faithfully in all its forms” (iii) by pondering and voicing issues physically so far away from her.

While writings and commentaries by both Anna Sujatha Mathai and Manorama Mathai carry evident traces of feminist political inclinations, Meena Alexander intriguingly, however, remarks that she does not identify herself as a feminist writer, though she believes she is both a writer and a feminist in life. She adds that she engages creatively without considering a gendered agenda, and conforming to a label like ‘a feminist writer’ narrows the scope of her literary works and identity (Shankar and Alexander 47). Her rejection of such a homogenous, assimilative categorisation is a direct reflection of her migratory practices and the resultant liberation she has achieved through her multiple identities. In Glissant’s words: “Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity” (190). Similarly, Alexander reclaims her unpopular stance of wanting to avoid being seen merely as a feminist writer by asserting that her cultural existence is multi-directional, like a rhizome, rather than linear, while her works speak volumes about various episodes of being a woman.

Conclusion

Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander are categorised as pre-globalisation-era female writers of English from Kerala, having been born, brought

up, educated, migrated, and ventured into creative praxis in the pre-global age. Their identity formation was a pre-global phenomenon influenced by colonial modernity, access to English education, and increased social mobility during the 1940s and 1950s. Nevertheless, their creativity developed in the pre-global age, flourishing all through the post-global era. However, these writers are identified as pre-global, considering their ages of identity formation, which are reflected in their creative writings. The Mathai sisters and Alexander continue the trend set by Kamala Das and Leela Devi, extending the project of Kerala modernity to the post-global boom of female creative projects from Kerala. The forthcoming chapters of the thesis—chapters five and six—set out an analysis of post-globalisation era women writers of English from Kerala and how they contribute to the project of Kerala modernity through their creative praxis.

Chapter V

Internal Mobilities: Narratives of Post-Global Malayali Women and their Domestic Migration

Kerala writing in English reached its zenith of prosperity in the post-global age, with modernity an accomplished reality as well as an ongoing process, and the resultant increase in social mobility and overall outlook of people. It is crucial to examine Caroline and Filippo Osella's main argument that modernity is linked to mobility (582) in the context of Kerala's travel culture and the experiences of women migrants after the 1940s and during the post-global age. This chapter examines how English-educated and migrant women who stayed within India contributed to the project of Kerala modernity through their creative praxis. The selected writers under this categorisation include Susan Visvanathan, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Shini Antony, Anupama Raju and Smitha Sehgal. Herein, the select writers are brought under this set considering the age in which they began engaging creatively, which collectively falls after the 1990s. Though these writers were born, educated and migrated in the pre-globalisation era, their reflections of the same through creativity are solely a post-global phenomenon, unlike the two previous groups of writers [whose identity formation, education and migration, as well as venturing into creativity, are all pre-global events]. Additionally, the post-globalisation age witnessed an escalation in travel culture to major Indian cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai, as discussed in chapter two—the places to which the writers in focus have traversed. Furthermore, it is notable that, while it was specifically the father/husband's migration that caused social mobility in writers of the previous era, many of the women writers of the post-global age have either migrated for education of their own free will or their parents [both father and mother] constituted their cause for it.

Susan Visvanathan is one of the significant and often less-researched creative writers from Kerala chosen for this research who is more known and looked upon as an academic. Having published her first work of fiction in 2000, Susan Visvanathan was a professor of sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University [JNU] and was one of the pioneering and leading critics in the sociology of religion. Nevertheless, Susan Visvanathan confirms that she wrote her first story in 1989, which was published by the writer and academic Ashok Srinivasan. In one of her conversations with Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, she adds that she has “always wanted to be a writer of stories ... I did not know when. In 1989, when I was 32 years old, I took the plunge” (283).

The next writer in this category is Arundhati Roy, who brought Indian literature to global prominence with her debut novel *The God of Small Things*, which won the Booker Prize that year. Often associating and identifying herself as an activist, she, however, opines in her preface to the collected interviews, *The Shape of the Beast* (2009), on her intense engagement in public and political matters as both a “dream and nightmare for a writer of fiction” (vii). The very thought that Roy puts forth brings her into “a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa 3) and suggests the fear of being caught in an ambiguous space, as Anzaldúa states—a perplexity that ultimately arises out of a border conflict. Nevertheless, Roy had not attended school until she was ten years old, and Reena Jana, in an interview, quotes Roy saying that she was the first student of her Syrian Christian mother, who started her own school. Roy’s commemoration of her mother, an educationist who “had developed bigger ambitions for her students” (*Mother Mary Comes to Me* 54), further elucidates the literary values she instilled. She received further higher education from Delhi’s School of Planning and Architecture (Jana). Roy also critiques the “big colonial debate about writing in English” and why writers are being asked why they write in English. She says that her thoughts occur in English and

that the language is her medium, all the while not being British or American (Jana). The fact that her mother tongue is Malayalam and she inhabits India, a land of many languages, and still feels more affiliated with English to express her realities makes her another example of a rhizome. Her multilingual affiliation shares a rhizomatic behaviour wherein the writer, as a result of her migration, has diverged into various strands of belongingness, aligning with Glissant's observations (11).

Anita Nair, who has attempted various means and genres of creative expression in English, is yet another creative writer who migrated outside Kerala but has stayed within India. The writer, who graduated in English language and literature from Chennai and is currently based in Bangalore, recalls that English was a commonly spoken language in her household, and she grew up with "a felicity for the language that came very easily" to her (Interview). Additionally, she attributes her love for the English language and literature to her reading habit, which again has been inculcated by her parents. She also recollects her childhood days in Tamil Nadu, where her father was working in the Ministry of Defence Ordnance Factories and the resultant linguistic plurality running in her family (Interview), highlighting the rhizomatic nature of her own existence. Anupama Raju, a prominent contemporary Indian English writer and Charles Wallace Fellowship recipient, also belongs to the category of post-globalisation writers who migrated within India. She comments that "an education in English is something that just happened" to her, accounting for the naturalised acquirement of education by the later generations of Keralites, and regards English as the language of her imaginations (E-mail interview). Unlike Anita Nair, who presents a linguistic ambiguity, Raju offers a clearer answer to the question of her choice to write in English. Shinie Antony, by not limiting herself to the label of creative writer and by simultaneously being an editor, columnist, and curator of a literature festival, establishes the rhizomatic

nature of her existence. Her creative writings—by not fixating the narrative to any specific geographic localities—present a rhizome as well. Another post-globalisation era writer who has had internal migrations in life is Smitha Sehgal; unlike many of her contemporaries, she opines that she was fortunate to have inculcated reading and literary habits from her family, where they regarded both English and Malayalam equally. Nevertheless, she poignantly says that she “lives inside a writing space” wherein her “consciousness is shaped by the colour, taste, smell and the sounds of Malabar and Malayalam” (Interview). This sense of attachment to her roots is very much evident in her creative works as well, wherein she discreetly marks her gendered politics as well.

Problematizing Gender

Unlike the relatively frail literary background of previous creative writers of English, Susan Visvanathan had a very academically sound familial background, and not just her, but both her mother and father had an individualistic, independent and autonomous education and migrant history. Shinie Antony also has received a sound education and comments that her “parents were too preoccupied to monitor” what the writer read (Singh), accounting for her venturing into the creative world. In an e-mail conversation with Susan Visvanathan, she confirms the scholastically rich backdrop of hers, having been born to a social worker, Kuruvilla Paul, and a nurse, Mariam Paul. Both her parents, hailing from orthodox Marthoma families near Tiruvalla, had independently moved to Delhi before the partition during the mid-1940s, having been educated outside Kerala. Her mother’s self-induced and autonomous migration during the early twentieth century validates the observation of Zachariah et al. that among the female migrants, Syrian Christians were the largest in number (*Dynamics of Migration* 313), again pointing out the relatively greater social mobility and freedom among Christians during the age. Arundhati Roy underscores the significance of travel in her

life, describing it as essential to maintaining her sanity. Her fixation on social mobility and her rejection of rigid confinement to a 'home' align with her belief that she will not "ever be a person who has a permanent home" (Banerjee), situating her ideologies with that of Anzaldúa's claim that one has to leave home to find true home. In an e-mail interview, Susan Visvanathan also mentioned that her father was a stout and adamant communist all the while being a believer and spiritually involved person, and about his research in the Southern states of America. Susan Visvanathan's father can be read alongside the early transnational migrants who travelled for education and research, as K. V. Joseph mentions (*Keralites on the Move* 25). Besides, her father's communist stance reflects how, during the early 1900s, communism took root as a social and political movement in Kerala, taking over Kerala's renaissance and reformation ideas alongside nationalistic causes.

While talking about her research on St. Thomas Christians of Kottayam, Susan Visvanathan says that her father "was very proud of my achievement as was my mother" (E-mail interview), which reflects the supportive and positive academic background of the writer. Anita Nair, however, recollects her venturing into creative writing as "a secretive writer," mostly because she was from a family in which there were no writers as such, and the authorship of her first poem, which she wrote when she was seven, was sceptically looked upon by her family (Green). While it is both her father's and her mother's migrant lives that combine to constitute a migrant identity for Susan Visvanathan, Shinie Antony's migratory trend closely aligns with that of the early female migrant trajectory initiated by men, as Antony confirms it was her father's career in defence that caused their geographical swap (Interview). However, Antony's education that spanned across Mumbai and Delhi, as well as her native Kerala, and her subsequent job in Delhi, highlight the importance of education that her family stood for too. On the

other hand, Arundhati Roy criticises how the majority of the women face an extreme lack of support and backup, starting from the family and society, in one of her conversations with David Barsamian, labelling Malayali women's subjugation as "a very strange kind of oppression." (*Shape of the Beast* 39). Susan Visvanathan's social mobility and high freedom, along with those of her sister and mother, resonate with Gloria Anzaldúa's declaration that she had to leave home to find herself, "find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me" (Anzaldúa 16). Contrary to her life, Roy speaks about how the majority of women from Kerala are educated and working all over India and the world, all the while leading a voiceless, unopinionated and docile life of slavery (*Shape of the Beast* 39). Anzaldúa regards culture as a space of power presided over by men, who create laws, and women who "transmit them" (16), a reflection of which is the cultural scenario in Kerala opined by Roy. Shinie Antony also opines that she has an interest in living in cities like Mumbai that she finds "woman-friendly," "inclusive" and "work-oriented" (Interview), mirroring Roy's opinion regarding patriarchy in Kerala. Regarding not having a father in life as a kind of liberation, Roy regards herself and her mother as independent entities not having had any male agencies to control them (*Shape of the Beast* 33–34).

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*—weaving the contested relationships and conflicts within the Ipe family in Ayemenem—problematizes gender, body and gendered bodies, just as Roy opines on the inequity within the social ladder of Kerala. By making Ayemenem a microcosm for Kerala and the Indian subcontinent in general, Roy becomes a hypercritic of how women of the place have nothing else to do "other than wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework" (*God of Small Things* 38). However, Anita Nair reacts against being labelled as a feminist writer, though she is "a writer who may write female centric stories" ("In Conversation

with Anita Nair”), pointing out the male centrality in her books as well. She talks about her novels, like *The Better Man*, that are completely about masculinity and male life and says it is the human condition in general that concerns her (Pepper). The helplessness and unopinionated existence of women, however, have become a recurring thematic concern of Anita Nair, who, in novels like *Ladies Coupé*, *Mistress*, and *Eating Wasps*, portrays various means of women’s suffering as a commonality connecting them. While Akhilandeshwari strives hard to transform into a new woman of definitive identity and voice—though with the help of fellow women train passengers from her journey—she all the while tries to answer the rhetorical question, “I wish to live by myself but everyone tells me that a woman can’t live alone ... Can a woman live by herself?” (*Ladies Coupé* 21). Stories of shared experiences of oppression and inequality culminate in utter transformation for the protagonist, whose physical travel from Bangalore to Kanyakumari transforms into a metaphorical journey into self-realisation. Anita Nair’s fixation on the concept of women’s travel also can be read alongside Appadurai’s formulation that migration “seem[s] to impel ... the work of imagination” (Appadurai 4), a reality achieved when the protagonist towards the end of the novel asserts her independence from normative domestic shackles (*Ladies Coupé* 204).

Shinie Antony and her fiction follow a similar trend of exploring femininity with all its rawness and paganism. She believes that “Gender is the religion; women have a secondary status all over the world” (Interview), and the statement accurately mirrors Crenshaw’s theory of double marginalisation faced by women. Through *When Mira Went Forth and Multiplied*, the writer problematises the dilemma of womanhood through a tale of love and deception. Through sarcastic humour, Antony ridicules how women are made secondary in terms of identity, while her protagonist in her process of finding a suitor is encountered with questions like “You can cook, sew and ...?” and “Hope you

are not one of those women who will insist on working after the baby” (*When Mira Went Forth* 5). Antony thereby upholds Anzaldúa’s argument on how women are enslaved by the patriarchy and “are made to feel total failures if they don’t marry and have children” (Anzaldúa 17). Antony comments about Kerala as “one of the most patriarchal societies in India, especially when compared to other major cities” (Interview), and this spatial limitation [with the author herself primarily hailing from the place], along with her status of being a woman, would create an “intersectional experience ... greater than the sum of” just being a Keralite or being a woman (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 140). The idea of anti-placement of events as well as characters she speaks about is reflected in Antony’s fiction as well. Roo, or Rudrakshi, from *The Girl Who Couldn’t Love* represents a woman with a traumatic past of killing her father for having sexually exploited the family’s adopted child of nearly the protagonist’s age. The way Ela—“the Girl Whose Parents Were Dead” (*The Girl Who Couldn’t Love* 102)—was objectified and used as a sexual object by the narrator’s father (99–101) resonates with Crenshaw’s saying that women of intersecting identities [small age and economic dependence in this case] are prone to be marginalised and used further.

The sense of shared history and existence is reflected in stories like “Cleft” by Susan Visvanathan as well, where the narrator introspects about the interconnectedness of women’s lives in Kerala. When the narrator says, “There’s something a little similar about all of them” (*Something Barely Remembered* 132), she is explicitly haunted by and amused by the alternative models of womanhood represented by Sara, Elena and Mariam. When Susan Visvanathan says “‘Something Barely Remembered’ started the trail with women who returned home and had to make sense of their customs and traditions with family members who had stayed behind” (E-mail interview), the writer problematises the idea of return migration for women and how they are treated with

indifference back at home. The protagonist of “River and Sea” confronts a similar situation when the girl born and brought up in Kerala is dislocated to Italy (*Something Barely Remembered* 17), a spatial as well as gender conflict pervading in Susan Visvanathan’s writings.

Many of Susan Visvanathan’s short stories capture this essence of women on the move, or women facing the aftermath of migration or travel culture in general. For instance, her story “Nelycinda”—dealing with the lives surrounding the maritime activities and trade in Kerala and the socio-cultural temperaments of the Christian community of the region—revolves around a trader’s wife, Susa, who uses silence more as a survival tactic to cope with her multi-layered social life. Susa’s existence explains Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality, wherein she simultaneously exists as a woman and a Christian member of a minority trading class, which in turn makes her life worse. When it comes to *C: A Novel* by Anupama Raju, the narrator’s stature as a female writer in pursuit of a space that favours her writing expedition contributes to her intersectional identity. Raju gives prior focus to women on the move and concludes with a very optimistic note in favour of female mobility, as she believes in the utterly transformative power of travel culture that changes individuals from their core (*C* 149, 242)—a similar strategy to what Anita Nair tries to vouch for through *Ladies Coupé*.

Crenshaw also speaks about “the unique vulnerability of women of colour to these converging systems of dominion” (“Mapping the Margins” 1265–66), which Susan Visvanathan reflects through the sexual and emotional exploitation faced by her slave Summer in the story “Nelycinda,” who is oppressed due to her ethnic and racial othering (*Nelycinda*). Anita Nair’s *Chain of Custody*, as well as *Cut Like Wound*, continues this trend of exploring the realities of female trafficking and sexual exploits within the physicality of India. When Nair captures the stark reality of children caught in a sex

racket: “The clients don’t care what your face looks like when they fuck you” (*Chain of Custody* 19), she leads readers to associate the intersectional elements of gender, small age and economic dependence with the children being trafficked. When Crenshaw says, “Historically, there has been absolutely no institutional effort to regulate Black female chastity” (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 157), it should also be extended to the case of any girl/woman with intersecting multiple affiliations. Shinnie Antony’s *Kardamom Kisses* again addresses how one’s own home turns out to be a site of sexual exploitation for girls (90–91). Antony extends a vehement critique of the traditional joint family system that prevailed in Kerala, as she draws attention to the often-left unspoken realities of ancestral home and community living. Just as Anzaldúa narrates the risky life of the Mexican woman who confronts various cultures (12), girls like that in the novel were forced into borderlands of tension, unsafety and unrest.

The concept of women’s collective and mutually shared experiences is also reflected in Anita Nair’s *Eating Wasps*, which centres on the unfulfilled and restless life of a female writer named Sreelakshmi, as well as her unsatiated presence in the world even after committing suicide. Nair stubbornly opines that “The average Malayali male is a monster. He has become more patriarchal than a patriarch in some remote village of Jharkhand despite education” (“In Conversation with Anita Nair”), mirroring the opinion of Arundhati Roy regarding the paradoxical literacy rates and progressiveness in Kerala. Both the writers reflect on how “Culture professes to protect women” (Anzaldúa 17) but treats them as subservient, as in the case of Kerala. Nair uses her female characters to extend a direct critique of patriarchy in Kerala; for instance, Sreelakshmi’s decision to end her life itself is a direct protest against the system that questions her singlehood and stature as a writer and lover, which makes her an intersectional woman in Crenshaw’s terms. In Urvashi’s episode of being cyberstalked by her lover, she faces a dilemma

while witnessing the situation from the perspective of Sreelakshmi's lingering ghostly presence, who, after her death, "was reduced to a forgotten bone" (*Eating Wasps* 4); through this, Nair attempts to highlight how women's problems become universal, timeless, and recurring. Antony also highlights how gender and patriarchy prevail in societies through stark portrayals of masculinity and its female recipients. Sam from *When Mira Went Forth and Multiplied*, after getting Mira pregnant, backs away from taking the responsibility of accepting her (205). In *Can't*, Nena's madness, her desire for revenge, and her quest to satisfy her fluctuating identity are triggered by her husband's multiple relationships with women, which she ultimately comes to understand. While the protagonist regards "Monogamy is a lovely dream" (118), she begins a journey to decode the roots of her husband's infidelity. Antony continues this exploration of how cultures and patriarchy, under the guise of protecting women, in turn harm and confine them in Anzaldúa's terms, through her stories like "In the Night," where the woman is deceived and married off by a man, making her believe that her husband has died (*Séance on a Sunday Afternoon* 23).

The narrator from Susan Visvanathan's *The Visiting Moon* is at once a woman and a writer, as in *Eating Wasps*, all the while grappling with economic issues, making her a woman of intersectional belongingness. When enquired about her children, who are under the custody of her ex-husband, the narrator in a very detached tone talks about being separated from them with "no emotion to spare really" (*Visiting Moon* 8–9)—Visvanathan's way of problematising women's othering and the resultant distance. Additionally, Anupama Raju in *C: A Novel* also uses this semi-autobiographical strategy of capturing the life of a writer through the narrative. Raju's novel is closely connected to the concept of place, both in a physical and metaphorical sense, while also addressing female issues related to the reality of different spaces. The troubled and tortured narrator

of the novel—intentionally left unnamed to intensify how female lives and identities are often left unnoticed and undocumented—confronts demons from past and present and navigates her writer’s identity through a sunless city C, which does not feel quite like her sunny home. Raju, in her poems like “Name, Place, Animal, Thing,” also confronts the reality of her existence by problematising the concept of a person’s name and identity. While she uses the strategy of leaving her protagonist unnamed in the novel to elevate the significance of a name to an individual, in poetry she rhetorically asks “What isn’t in a name” in a much more direct voice (*Nine* 18). However conflicted, in alliance with Anzaldúa’s suggestion that women ought to leave their homes to find ‘home,’ the female protagonist from the novel feels satiated about “A city where day is as promising as night, with all its mystical blackness” (C 13), hoping that she has finally found a room of her own to unleash her creative side. This conflict, when seen through the lens of Crenshaw, is the result of multiple intersecting affiliations or identities for the protagonist, including her gender and existence as a writer. Raju regards herself as having “far too many labels ... Female. Writer of English. Writers who migrate. Writers from Kerala” and so on (E-mail interview), pointing out her own multiple affiliations that have all the chances to collide and create issues for the author, just like her unnamed protagonist. This multi-dimensionality in her existence gets reflected in her poems like “I Am a Woman,” where the poet adheres “I am a woman. And I write. / I am a woman and I write. / I write and I am a woman (*Bitter Gourd* 58), explaining her identical axes.

Roy’s central character Ammu possesses both “the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (*God of Small Things* 44), a contradiction that exists as a result of the multiple layers of oppression that the character faces. This multi-faceted existence can be noted in Roy’s own subjective life wherein she opines she mostly speaks Hindi, which is not her mother tongue (Kumar), making her a

‘borderwoman’ like Ammu herself. Ammu’s intersectional existence mirrors that of Lena Abraham from Anita Nair’s *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*, who leads an unhappy marital life stuck in a physical geography. However, Lena’s firm statement “I don’t want to change” (*Alphabet Soup for Lovers* 30) and her final decision to leave her husband and go with her lover knowing that “It isn’t going to be easy for KK or her parents,” make her different from Roy’s inescapably victimised tragic heroine. Meera from *Lessons in Forgetting* also decides to cling on to her identity, believing, “I shall not offer to be more than he wants me to be” (*Lessons in Forgetting* 159), and comes to terms with her husband leaving her. This swap in female predicament obviously accounts for the ages in which the novels are set, the former presenting a pre-renaissance space and the latter two novels, the modern and developed space.

Susan Visvanathan’s novella *Phosphorus and Stone* is set among the fishermen of Kerala, similar to the maritime world opened by “Nelycinda,” which captures the multiple layers of subordination faced by women in the community. The writer, with a keen attention to capturing the myriad ways women are exploited, moulds her characters who, in light of Crenshaw’s ideas, become “the product of intersecting patterns of” various axes of identity, such as being a woman and belonging to the fishermen community in this case (“Mapping the Margins” 1242). Further, through stories like “Odd Morning” and “Ambalavastu,” Susan Visvanathan explores how vulnerabilities of women happen at public and sacred places. In the former story, it is a diasporic woman from Kerala facing the ambiguities in a train journey, confronting ideas of home and homelessness, and in the latter, an American-born woman who is denied temple entry in Kerala (*Nelycinda*). The spaces where these women interact become borderlands where “the prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (Anzaldúa 3).

Such women continue to appear in a series of love poems scattered across Anupama Raju's *Nine*, as in "The Wait," where the speaker addresses her unfulfilled longing and deception by her lover (67), and "Revolt," where the passionate speaker expresses her need to be with her beloved (68). While the poet captures a peaceful, eternal and platonic love connection in poems like "The Memory Maker," where the man, after the death of his wife, lives with her memory (49), poems like "Tonight" become stark and vengeance-struck when the speaker wishes "just to let us know we're dead" (58). Raju, through all the poems, captures how prohibition and forbidding can force people into a borderland of conflict. Shinie Antony's *Barefoot and Pregnant* contains short stories that continue this tradition of exploring various borderlands in which ailing women inhabit. She explores men and women either in search of or in desperation of the idea and reality of motherhood. When the mother from the story "Joy" takes her own and her children's lives as a means of protest against an irresponsible husband and stringent poverty and starvation (*Barefoot and Pregnant* 75), the woman from "Mariam" agrees to give birth to her child in a smelly stable estranged from her husband (39). In "Vana" Shinie Antony portrays a woman diagnosed with breast cancer deciding to venture into exploring her sexuality while it is still alive (*Barefoot and Pregnant* 36) and uses all such doomed yet determined narratives of womanhood to arrive at a stance that "There is a rebel" in a woman who "refuses to take orders from outside authorities" (Anzaldúa 16). Antony's female characters do not yield to powers that threaten their autonomy and sovereignty. Smitha Sehgal's *How Women Become Poems in Malabar* carries myriad facets of women who confront and negotiate intersecting aspects of oppression. For instance, in "Chronicle of Breast Tax," the poet vehemently captures the institutionalised collection of tax from women for covering their torsos in pre-modern Kerala. The image of "naked upper torsos / faulting on tax."

accuses patriarchy and patriarchal-driven agencies that neglect women's rights and position in society (37). The poem "How Women Become Poems in Malabar" also deals with the issue of the voicelessness of women in Kerala who live and die without proper acknowledgement (20). Sehgal's remark that "Women will never taste true freedom unless they unshackle themselves from these constructs designed for them by men" (Interview) gets reflected in all these poems through which the poet proposes a gender-inclusive alternative.

Contrary to the female centrality in the characterisation of the protagonist, as mostly followed by writers, Anita Nair often presents gendered experiences with male leads in her narratives. For instance, novels like *Mistress* explore relationship crises among people, with Koman as the protagonist, whose sexual, emotional, and liberational exploits form the crux of the work. Through Saadiya, Radha, and Angela, Nair successfully weaves various facets and possibilities of being a Malayali woman: the one forbidden by love out of social order, the one conflicted by the idea of self, and the one who asserts her readiness to explore and be autonomous, respectively. Nair directly attempts a social critique while capturing the episode of unrequited love between Sethu and Saadiya, the latter being accused by her own people of putting "the honour of the family in jeopardy" (*Mistress* 129). A similar exploration of what it is like to be a hyper-masculine chauvinist Malayali is carried out by the author through the character of Achuthan Nair from *The Better Man*, whose wife however asserts that his mistress should not be brought to the house while she is alive (74). This scene reflects not just her sheer vehemence and self-respect but also her unwillingness to transform their 'home' into what Anzaldúa, in her preface to *Borderlands*, calls a "place of contradiction." Nair underscores how women's issues in Kerala or India at large should be approached from an intersectional perspective: the oppressed sector is being subordinated due to the

intersection of various constraints, such as gender and lack of economic independence. The female characters employed by Nair exhibit this “multidimensionality,” because of which a single-axis approach can “distort these experiences” in Crenshaw’s words (“Demarginalizing the Intersection” 139). Many of Nair’s short stories also feature male protagonists who illustrate aspects of womanhood and address issues related to man-woman relationships. For instance, stories like “Come to Bed, My Pretty” and “Mistress of the Night” capture men’s confusion about the female body and presence while presenting women as sort of mystical, all-powerful and in control. The women in these stories mirror Akhila from *Ladies Coupé*—new women fully aware of their position and potential in demanding their needs and priorities.

Arundhati Roy also voices this outlawed existence of multiple affiliations through one of her characters Nimmo, a Hijra, who occupies the borderland in her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. By equating the gender binary of masculinity and femininity within a single body, Roy points out a larger frame of Indo-Pak conflict (23) and connects gendered othering with shared border conflicts. Arundhati Roy often becomes hypercritical of the so-called ‘high literacy rate’ among Keralites, questioning the quality of education in the state (*Shape of the Beast* 38). She connects her argument with issues pertaining to gender in Kerala, explaining how literacy rates and regressive treatment towards women are totally disconnected from one another (*Shape of the Beast* 39). However, Roy also speaks about the “nightmare” she had of growing up in a mundane, rural village in Kerala. She says, “All I wanted to do was to escape, to get out, to never have to marry somebody there” (*Shape of the Beast* 40). Roy breaks free from Anzaldúa’s criticism of women conforming to roots and values “to avoid rejection” (Anzaldúa 20), by vouching against traditionalism and by setting herself free from the clutches of stringent societies. An analysis of the formation of the gendered

consciousness within post-globalisation era female creatives from Kerala proves that Malayali women continue their quest for autonomy and fight against the patriarchal system prevalent in ‘the modern’ Kerala. Writers such as Arundhati Roy critique the old social order in Kerala, where gender inequalities were normalised, while Shini Antony, Anita Nair, Susan Visvanathan, and Anupama Raju address the modern challenges faced by urban women confronting patriarchy in the public sphere. Smitha Sehgal, on the other hand, can be seen returning to legends and myths to re-read gender relations on a contemporary basis.

Mobilities and Transformations

Arundhati Roy shares a mixed opinion and emotion regarding the spatiality—geographic, cultural and political—of Kerala. She calls Kerala “a complex society because it’s progressive and parochial simultaneously” (*Shape of the Beast* 37). Her detachment explains the crux of Arjun Appadurai’s argument that migration breaks singular belongingness by enabling multiple affiliations and concurrent attachments. Appadurai’s statement on migrants and their “seductiveness of plural belonging” (170) is explained through the ambiguous stance of writers like Roy who stay in an expansive diasporic space. Roy’s stance on Kerala society and its uncouth and primordial order appears directly reflected through her characters in *The God of Small Things*, who ironically set a double standard in the evaluation of men’s and women’s moral conduct. The writer sarcastically observes how in a family, a man’s multiple relations and affairs are ruled over as “libertine relationships” (*God of Small Things* 168), while when the same is committed by a woman [Ammu from the novel], it is looked upon and judged as sinful. The society of Kerala, as captured by Roy, is therefore traditional, normative and judgemental—Roy’s way of documenting the ill nature of the place of her birth.

Nevertheless, Roy identifies herself as a hybrid person—spatially and culturally: “I’m not rural, not urban, not completely ‘traditional’ nor wholeheartedly ‘modern’” (*Shape of the Beast* 41), which makes her a ‘borderwoman’ in Anzaldúa’s terms. This multidimensionality in a person’s existence is what Shinnie Antony problematises when she says, “I lived outside Kerala for most of my life, and have felt like an outsider in both Kerala and outside Kerala,” while also acknowledging the “moments of utter identity” she had in Kerala (Interview). In her old age, Nena from *Can’t* sets out to explore her husband’s past and defines her marriage as “You can go from room to room to room and not be home” (136), an instance of abandonment from one’s existence according to Anzaldúa’s theory (120). Here, the protagonist, like the very biographical othering that the writer speaks about, feels outside her own habitat. Roy similarly shares an ambiguous view that in India she occupies an interesting position: that of a writer who lives in India and writes in English, all the while hailing from a village in Kerala (*Shape of the Beast* 93).

When read in the light of Crenshaw’s intersectional theory for women with multiple identical axes, the life and writings of writers like Antony and Roy would reflect the simultaneous layers of subjugation and experiences they would have faced. The existence of a female writer with Kerala origin, as autobiographically marked by Roy, gets fictionalised by Anupama Raju in her novel *C: A Novel*, which completely deals with the idea of spatiality and women’s place. Herein, Raju portrays the intertwined, complicated and conflicted life story of a woman writer who simultaneously belongs to two cities, one her hometown and the other that made her the writer she is. While the writings of Roy and Raju possess autobiographical traces, Anita Nair opines that she does not draw inspiration from her own life and experience but through

imagination (“In Conversation with Anita Nair”); Nair’s mode of remaining unquestioningly opaque.

Biographically speaking, Anupama Raju is a writer who “migrated ‘into’ Kerala” as she “grew up in Tamil Nadu and consider that as home. Though I now live in Kerala, I do not consider myself as a writer from Kerala” (E-mail interview). The protagonist of Raju’s novel, thereby, attains an autobiographical element and lines up with the argument that the process of migration breaks singular belongingness. The travels and space swap of the unnamed protagonist, along with her subsequent realisation that the new city has completely transformed her (*C* 50), align with Anzaldúa’s main argument that leaving one’s safe zone for other places can help in realising one’s true potential and sense of belonging (Anzaldúa 16). Her poems like “For the Traveller” also philosophise her romantic idea of travel and its significance in transforming an individual (*Bitter Gourd* 24). Raju however opines that “Migration was never a reason for my writing though moving to Kerala helped me find mentors like Dr Ayyappa Paniker” (E-mail interview). She talks about her simultaneous venturing into writing poetry around the 2000s and moving to Trivandrum, Kerala, around the same time (“Rhythm in poetry”), again hinting that the aftermath of migration is what triggered or rather catalysed her venturing into creative spaces, though it does not account for her creative interests. The protagonist’s simultaneous sense of rootedness to multiple places in the novel is again a result of her migration.

Shinie Antony, having worked in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore, shares a similar opinion to that of Anupama Raju regarding the link between their migration and creative praxis. While saying “I am sure living in multiple cities did impact my worldview” (Interview), Antony regards migration as not a reason to write. Further, Shinie Antony regards her fiction as “anti-placement” in nature (Interview), as

she does not normally mention any specific geographic locality in which her works are situated. Antony's works are not place-orientated, as she points out, but mostly human-centred, as in many of the short stories in *Barefoot and Pregnant* as well as novels like *Kardamom Kisses*. The writer's conscious withdrawal from locating her fiction—while vaguely centring it around a cultural milieu that could broadly be identified as Kerala, as in *Kardamom Kisses*, for instance—can be seen as her “way of making every place any other place,” in her own words (Interview).

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* also deals with the idea of homelessness and the quest for abode, setting the novel against the backdrop of Kashmiri land, its occupation and its occupants. By highlighting Kashmiri people's resilience and undying passion in staying rooted for their land—amplified by their act of swarming out of their homes to the graveyard to ritualise and honour people who died fighting with the military (230)—Roy powerfully states that the idea of ‘home’ is pivotal for human existence. The multidimensionality of Arundhati Roy's identity and the multiple affiliations she possesses evidently make her a woman of intersecting identity in Crenshaw's words. Roy opines that her literature, voluntarily or involuntarily, infuses certain landscapes into it that arise from her life that typically sprouted outside the urban areas (Jana). She mentions how her terrains are not so man-made and are obviously intruded by natural entities of rural habitat, and she also critiques cities “where everything is hidden behind walls and a veneer of urban sophistication” (Jana). When Roy writes, “The river was my refuge. It made up for everything that was wrong in my life” (*Mother Mary Comes to Me* 20), and recollects herself sitting in solitude on its banks, she inadvertently creates a borderland, having a border culture merging her physical and imaginative landscape, as proposed by Anzaldúa (11). This stance arises from the fact that the writer has been brought up and educated in the rurality of Kerala

but is all the while problematic and hybrid when considering her city life and settlement afterwards. Her urban exposure and vouching for the rural make her choice opaque, in Glissant's terms. She asserts her freedom and right to opacity (Glissant 190) by upholding a contradictory opinion about places.

Susan Visvanathan vividly recollects her birth and early life in New Delhi, a city where both her parents established their careers. This trend is something rare and new, unlike other early women writers whose families' migration was solely catalysed by the career of their fathers. Visvanathan says that her parents had distinct career interests even before they were married and also mentions how her grandparents were education-focused. She recalls her maternal grandfather—a schoolteacher—who was “one of the first from the village to get an English education” (E-mail interview). Visvanathan adds that her grandfather used to travel to CMS College Kottayam to learn English from the missionaries, one of the establishments made by the Church Mission Society starting in the 1830s, as discussed in chapter two. The culturally and educationally stout familial backdrop of Susan Visvanathan's parents and grandparents is a direct reflection of colonial modernity in Kerala, and her grandfather's travel culture during the times is indicative of the progressive outlook of the family, which was carried forth by his children and grandchildren. As discussed in the second chapter, the newly educated youth of Kerala in the early twentieth century found it difficult to tackle the lack of employment opportunities in Kerala, which led to the hike in the migration of the educated-class people. While talking about the idea of Malayali migration in *Something Barely Remembered*, Visvanathan remarks about the comfortable take on migration that Malayalis uphold in life and how mobility is regarded as a “right” by the Keralites (Ganapathy-Doré 284). Visvanathan further recollects her early travels to “Niranam and Pennikkara in the summer” every two years, with the travel concession her mother

received while working as the Head of the Public Health Department in New Delhi (E-mail interview). She adds that they only spoke Malayalam during that time, except when communicating with the *ayah* who accompanied their mother to New Delhi. Smitha Sehgal staunchly opines that “Malayalam is the earth” of her existence, though she barely speaks it in her daily life (Interview). This sense of attachment towards her mother tongue gets reflected in many of Sehgal’s poems as well, as in the poem “Malayalam,” where the poet feels that “there exist many ways / to sing and deep soak / our bones in the rain” highlighting her closeness to it (*Brown God’s Child* 16). Susan Visvanathan’s statement that those visits to Kerala “were the reason I could write short stories when I was thirty years old” validates the key argument of Arjun Appadurai that mass migration evidently “impel”/“compel” imagination (Appadurai 4).

Shinie Antony, however, problematises the modern predicament of the nuclear family system and the idea of travel and migration in her novels like *The Girl Who Couldn’t Love*, where, through Roo’s recollection of her childhood past, she writes how children of migrant parents suffer in the process. Roo recalls, “Life until four years of age had been a blur. Papa travelled a lot, ma waited for him a lot, and I was *ayah*’s bitter business” (95), highlighting how mobility was mostly a male business and how women are often left behind in journeys. A similar predicament is faced by the child protagonist Mala in her story “Doll,” where the child’s isolation and lack of care by parents—with her mother explaining “how difficult everything was ever since she had a child”—is presented as an aftermath of urbanism and modern life (*Orphanage for Words* 116). Anita Nair also extends a doubtful query about modern relationships that are ruled by the physical remoteness of people, which in turn is stimulated by travel culture. The character Shoola Pani from *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* and his detachment from his wife

are pointed out to be an aftermath of such a distance (20)—Nair’s way of critiquing modern long-distance life.

Susan Visvanathan, on the other hand, shares her good early memories of excitement on reaching Kerala, connected to migration and travel—her “naad” [homeland], which she precisely calls “nammulde naad” [our homeland] (E-mail interview), paralleling Édouard Glissant’s usage of the rhizomatic analogy for a migrant, who would in fact have a root [which is not totalitarian], but also have rhizomatic/multidirectional inclinations (Glissant 11). Herein, though the writer and her family are part of other regions as well, when it comes to her homeland, she exhibits a special sense of attachment.

However, writers like Anupama Raju counter this sense of extreme nostalgia for Kerala, as she regards Tamil Nadu—the place she was born and brought up, as in the case of her fictional character Sunless City C, who thrives in a host land—as her home, as quoted earlier. Tamil Nadu serves as a major setting for many of Raju’s poems, including “Your Hands,” in which the speaker expresses her differences and love for her mother, with whom she shared her early life in Tamil Nadu (*Bitter Gourd* 54), and “Mylapore, Chennai,” where the speaker provides a pen portrait of the cityscape filled with rush and colours (*Nine* 32). The writer mentions that she never studied Malayalam and cannot write in the language (“Rhythm in poetry”), which points at her linguistic non-linearity. This quality gets directly voiced in her poem “Malayalam,” where Raju captures how the language is very close to her parents’ roots and recurringly calls it “your Malayalam” as a way of distancing from it and expressing her non-belongingness to the language (*Bitter Gourd* 3). Nevertheless, the poet hints that she longs to remain young and immortal through her parents’ roots, words and songs in a language that defines her lineage. She, however, believes that “I will always be an outsider in Kerala.”

(E-mail interview) in a casual sense, again exemplifying Glissant's rhizome structure of culture, which is extremely unpredictable and not unilateral. Though writers like Smitha Sehgal constantly attempt to root their creative existence around Kerala, their works carry multitudes of places by which they are made. For instance, in poems like "A Poem for Delhi," Sehgal lurks around cityscapes and dark alleys. Rethinking her existence in relation to her surroundings (*Brown God's Child* 14), Sehgal hints at the hybridity that shapes her as a writer. Sehgal nevertheless opines that she tends to evoke "the memory and breath of Kerala" wherever she exists (Interview), grounding her identity as a Malayali.

Shinie Antony mentions a similar stance to that of Anupama Raju regarding Kerala, saying, "Life in Kerala was not always easy for me. One can feel like an interloper in one's own land. And in the 'outside' where you live you are seen as an outsider" (Interview), talking about how on her trips to Kerala she felt humiliated and othered while laughed at by her own people. While Raju possesses a relatively positive and proud outlook of her existence as a non-Malayali, Antony can be seen fluctuating and confused about the hybridity forced upon her, "afraid of being abandoned by the culture," in Anzaldúa's words (20).

Nevertheless, Raju regards her ambivalent stance and affiliation to Malayalam as caused by "certain rootlessness" resulting from "being born and growing up outside Kerala [that] certainly created a nostalgia for something one never had" (E-mail interview). However, Raju highlights the inconsistency in how a Malayalam writer is not asked why they write in Malayalam, while a Keralite or any regional person writing in English is questioned about their choice of English. The writer believes that "English is now as Indian a language as any other" and addresses it as "her own," while not regarding or accepting Malayalam as her mother tongue ("Why do I write in English?").

As Glissant talks about the tendency to transform the opaque to transparent by assimilating or annihilating 'the other' (49), Raju strikingly counters the tendency and vows to remain opaque with unpopular and often judged-upon opinions regarding her identity and linguistic affiliation. Smitha Sehgal also regards English as her "language of poetry" and highlights that she has never felt that she has been engaging creatively in a language that is not her mother tongue (Interview). The writer's simultaneous attachment to English and her native language, Malayalam, makes her another example of a rhizome with multidirectional affiliations. Anita Nair similarly believes that English became her "safe language" as she lived in an army camp where people from different parts of India spoke various languages and explains this identity formation as pivotal in her choice of writing in English (Interview). While writers of the previous generation, including Meena Alexander, expressed confusion regarding the multilingual affiliations she had, the post-global writers embrace it and feel that "there was no ambiguity with it," as Anita Nair notably opines (Interview).

In contrast, an ever-present love and nostalgic memory of homeland are evident in the works of Anita Nair, similar to those of Susan Visvanathan, with South India serving as the cultural landscape for most of her writings. Nair, in a telephone interview, opined that Kerala is a space that feeds her soul in such a way that she imbibes inspirations from the place and carries them with her to wherever she goes. Many of her poems from *Malabar Mind* echo geographical specificities pertaining to Kerala, including the titular poem "Malabar Mind" wherein the poet names various names that Kerala/Malabar had in history (28). Her frantic, or rather fervent, listing reflects her sense of attachment to the place. The happenings and settings of her novels, such as *Mistress*, *The Better Man* and *Eating Wasps*, occur in the rural backdrop of Kerala, and the writer exclusively captures the true essence of life in the place. However, when

Sreelakshmi from *Eating Wasps*, after her identity crisis and subsequent suicide, proclaims that she is regarded as Kerala's Virginia Woolf (1), Nair indirectly criticises and presents the ironic situation of the labels female writers are prone to. Nair also highlights how gendered ideologies and constructs work in Kerala through characters like Sethu's wife Devayani who is "a good enough wife" (*Mistress* 237), acceptable to the society of the place. Shinie Antony, using a ridiculing tone, satirises the traditionalism prevailing in Kerala by presenting the protagonist from *Kardamom Kisses* as being asked to convert to wearing a "veshti or saree," which she vehemently refuses (21). Koman from *Mistress* becomes Anita Nair's own voice when he speaks to Angela, strongly enforcing his need to be a Kathakali performer in his own native land (375). Mukundan, the meek, middle-aged and unmarried protagonist from *The Better Man*, struggles to resolve the conflict between land and existence, all while lacking a progeny to continue his line of inheritance (39), which reflects Nair's exploration of ideas related to Kerala.

Susan Visvanathan's fiction also manifests a special affection for her native land, with the locality of Kerala transforming into an ever-looming presence. For instance, in "Nelycinda," Visvanathan grounds the tale in the landscape of Kerala and its trading culture. The confinement and spatial rigidity dealt to slaves like Summer, as well as the socially immobile, docile and domestic lives of wives like Susa (*Nelycinda*), exemplify how "they may suffer the torments of internal exile" when left behind (*Poetics of Relation* 19). Thus, Susan Visvanathan juxtaposes the contradictory patterns of social movement through the extremely dynamic traders and the stationary lives of the wives back at home. These contrasting lives of men and women are what C. Rugmini Amma discusses through her article "Sthreejanasammelanam," where she writes how men are more aware of the world while women are forced into believing in their domesticity

(162), as discussed in chapter two. This focus on female mobility and the emancipation that results from it is carried forth by writers like Anita Nair in works like *Ladies Coupé*. Through an analogy of a train journey, the writer illustrates how certain women, such as Prabha Devi, who emerges from her cocoon of timidity and voicelessness (*Ladies Coupé* 167), and the protagonist Akhila, who realises her self-worth through interactions during the journey, break free from the confinement imposed by the system. The entire sequence of the women's communication can be read in alliance with Sara Ahmed's concept of the sociality of emotion, which works here when the emotions of pride and accepting oneself are circulated within people as "effects of circulation" (8). Ela from Shinie Antony's *The Girl Who Couldn't Love* and Summer from Susan Visvanathan's "Nelycinda" are women who are sexually exploited solely because of their homelessness and multiple oppressive affiliations that add on to increase their subjugation, in Crenshaw's words.

Kerala, as mentioned earlier, acts as both an anchor and a point of departure in many of Susan Visvanathan's stories, instilled by the writer's own personal memories and longing as a migrant. The pain of getting separated from one's roots is expressed in stories like "Gulf Baby," where a child is displaced from Kerala to Qatar (*Nelycinda*), hinting at the cultural history of a wave of Gulf migration from Kerala during the 1970s. Stories like "Nelycinda" and "Gulf Baby" do not romanticise the idea of cosmopolitanism in Kerala but pose a sceptical lens on the arrival and persistence of modernity. Visvanathan's multicultural upbringing and negotiations are directly reflected in stories like "River and Sea," "Ebbing," and "The Journey of Dispossession," where she strategically employs conflicted characters who navigate between places, nostalgia and identity (*Something Barely Remembered*). Anna from "River and Sea" lives in the clutches of her aching nostalgia for her old house, living neither in Kerala nor in Italy

(17), and Sarah from “The Journey of Dispossession” disappears into nowhere when confronted with her societal role as a wife and her internal conflict of non-belongingness to that figurative space (64). A quest for ‘home’ is carried forth by Anita Nair’s character Sreelakshmi as well (*Eating Wasps* 141), where the writer-protagonist obsessively ventures into seeking a room of her own.

Susan Visvanathan notably opines that the moment she arrives in Delhi—the place where she had spent her lifetime—her “neurons all settle in a known and familiar pattern” (E-mail interview), again explicating how migration breaks singular belongingness, as Appadurai remarks. Regardless, when asked about whether or not she would consider herself a writer of the diaspora, she answers, “I would describe myself as a diaspora writer, with a sense of being home everywhere as I consider my body to be my true home” (E-mail interview), an idea she carries forth by which her body itself becomes a borderland where “two or more cultures edge each other” as described by Anzaldúa’s in the preface to *Borderlands*. This conflict between the body and spatial reality can be seen reflected in stories like “Snakes and Fishes” and “Fire Drill,” where the female characters are all migrants who fight their own internal struggles because of their outsider status (*Something Barely Remembered*).

The notion of spatial plurality and simultaneously belonging to multitudes is again explored in the novella *The Seine at Noon*, where Susan Visvanathan, at the backdrop of an extremely emotional tale, addresses problems of identity and home. Set mainly in Paris, the story unravels through the intersecting lives of Stefan, Jacques, Esther, Tatiana and Bianca. With the life of Stefan, Susan Visvanathan really captures the historic trend of Malayali outmigration after the World War and reflects an age wherein Malayalis started exhibiting an increased willingness to move to places to counter poverty, as discussed in chapter two. Anita Nair also follows the trend of

locating narratives in distant places abroad in her short stories. For instance, in stories like “The Witch Wife’s Tale,” “Mistress of the Night,” and “Mercury Woman,” the writer captures events happening in a place alien to Kerala while constantly revolving around the idea of traditionalism versus modernity. For instance, specific locations like the Amsterdam Avenue Manhattan Bridge and Central Park unravel in “The Witch Wife’s Tale” (*Satyr of the Subway* 23), which tells the story of a raw woman of contested identity and validates the writer’s own expeditions and exposure to various places. In “Mercury Woman,” an American woman despises a hypermasculine Indian narrator—a microcosm through which Nair captures how different cultures interact and often fight when intersected. While the narrator becomes irritated by the superiority exerted by the woman, he can also be seen intimidated by the need to “feel very American” (*Satyr of the Subway* 140). Nair uses the conflict between the human body, places, and cultures to illustrate the formation of borderlands in Anzaldúa’s terms. The confrontation between Indianness [colonially oppressed] and the very commanding Americanness in the story results in the formulation of a landscape featured by “Hatred, anger and exploitation” (Anzaldúa)—which is an aftermath of migrant life as Anita Nair pictures it.

Anita Nair also vividly captures Malayali people on the move and the fascination they exhibit for the newly attained city life through their travel culture, as in *Lessons in Forgetting*, where an episode of Malayali youth’s “love with a way of life” in Calcutta is captured (28). Nair inadvertently reaches the conclusion that migratory culture can be rhizomatic, in Glissant’s words, and that the enmeshed culture resulting from cross-cultural interactions does not represent a singular sense of belonging (11), similar to how Nair’s characters are not solely fixated on life in Kerala. The spatial consciousness of post-globalisation Malayali women writers who migrated within India differs significantly from one another. If writers like Shinie Antony and Anupama Raju show a

kind of self-imposed alienation towards the concept of place, writers like Susan Visvanathan and Smitha Sehgal anchor their works in the nostalgia and connections to the homeland they possess. Writers like Arundhati Roy can be seen constantly negotiating the ideological and cultural positioning of Kerala by problematising its relations to other parts of the country as well as to the greater space of humanity.

Socio-political Consciousness Through English Writings

Extensively political and widely involved in social issues, Arundhati Roy nevertheless rejects the title of being the voice of the voiceless or the idea of being representative of the inarticulate (*Shape of the Beast* 64). In *The God of Small Things*, the writer can be seen as inadvertently deviating from her stance when she portrays how the poor and the underprivileged unknowingly accept their slavery. Roy, through Vellya Paapen—Velutha's father from the novel—underscores how social obligation and blind servitude towards a culturally and hegemonically superior class result in Vellya Paapen's confession to Ammu's family that his lower-caste son is having a secret affair with the girl of their family (255). Roy not only voices the internalisation of the oppressed and ostracised by the marginalised but also provides a pen-portrait of the primordial Kerala society, thereby involuntarily proclaiming the subtle politics in her writings. Additionally, Roy's political and historical awareness becomes evident in her situating the novel in the backdrop of the advent and flourishing of Marxist ideas in Kerala after Indian independence from the British. She also captures how traces of untouchability and related primordial orders stagnated in Kerala even after the legal abolition of these practices in the 1950s, as illustrated through the characters of Velutha, his family, and the lords of the Ipe family.

Roy further satirically comments on the hostility that regional writers from India, including those who wrote in her mother tongue, Malayalam, projected when she

received the Booker Prize (*Shape of The Beast* 77). She equates this to a direct reaction against Indian writers in English receiving acclaim and financial profit when compared to regional writings. Roy reacts vehemently and with disdain and dejection to the charges of obscenity against *The God of Small Things* filed in court and spread widely by vernacular media in India. She strongly proclaims her freedom of speech and asserts her politics of justice. Roy mentions that in India, the case becomes a confrontation between the state and the writer (Jana), as she adamantly declares a fight against any hindrance to a writer's liberty. Ironically, the charges against Roy originated from Kerala, which is both her motherland and the setting for her widely read novel. This is a serious case of abandonment by the culture and one's own home that a *mestiza* face, like Anzaldúa suggests. In contrast to Anzaldúa's assertion that some women "conform to the values of the culture" to avoid rejection (20), Roy here boldly opposes oppression, which results from the progressive environment in which she was raised; this opposition shapes both the politics of her life and her writings.

In an e-mail interview, Susan Visvanathan spoke about her idea of modernity and Malayali's growth in a positive light, unlike Roy's opinion about the paradoxical existence of Kerala's progressiveness, discussed in the previous section. The writer views Kerala as a place that undergoes continuous transformation, both in terms of technological advancements and people's ambitions along with it. All the while, the writer also feels that though Malayali women can be seen as relatively free and articulate, "In reality, women may express their feelings, but the shackles on their autonomy are also very profound" (E-mail interview). This theme gets echoed throughout her fiction as well—the ambiguities and nuances within Kerala's engagement with modernity. Susan Visvanathan clearly demarcates the level of freedom and mobility that women hold in Kerala society, which, according to her opinion, is limited to one's

household. Susan Visvanathan also opines that “these rules may be bypassed” among those belonging to the Malayali diaspora abroad, further exploring how migration can instil autonomy. This correlation between cross-cultural movements and liberty further explains Glissant’s observation that those who do not venture into travel culture “may suffer the torments of internal exile” (19). Susan Visvanathan thereby politicises the entire idea of female mobility through characters like Susa from “Nelycinda,” who are left behind and subsequently forgotten in migration. Susan Visvanathan, in a very subtle manner, makes a recurring political stance through her fiction by accepting modernity while admiring the traditionally rich cultural past. However, writers like Smitha Sehgal constantly problematise the politics of otherings—from oneself and from others—that the process of migration can lead to. Sehgal often observes migration as a crisis, as in the poem “Immigrant,” wherein the speaker feels as if “I bloom in my extinction,” presenting the paradox involved in post-global migrations (*Brown God’s Child* 28). This aligns with Sehgal’s opinion that a writer “need not be necessarily polemic. However, good poetry is intrinsically and inescapably political” (Interview). Sehgal’s poetry does not claim any political reflections but inadvertently carries in it reflections of the socio-political reality in which she is a part.

Anita Nair’s works also capture the changing social circumstances and the advance of modernity into Indian villages, as in her description of one such rural scape that transformed “From a sleepy little hamlet of cowherds and small farmers,” while cities like Bangalore have also expanded “in all directions” (*Chain of Custody* 36, 95). The writer on the recent development of rural localities of Kerala opines positively that modern people have enjoyed modern utilities like that of roads and transportation, and the new facilities have increased their standards of living (*Where the Rain is Born* vii). Nair also adapts to the changes that society demands over time. This tendency reflects

the multi-directional spread of one's ideology, "with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently," in Glissant's words (11). Nevertheless, Nair says that she sees herself "as a writer who can contribute to a social change" (Interview). She believes that she has been political in writing, which has made people feel uncomfortable, which explains her politics of life and writing.

Susan Visvanathan's stories like "Allapuzha," "Nelycinda," and "Ambalavastu" capture the tension of a transitional age between the preservation of the old cultural values and the curiosity towards progress, similar to the timescape of *The God of Small Things*. Nair also politicises and problematises cityscapes like that of Bangalore and makes recurring comments regarding Malayali migration to the place, leaving "behind their homes and families to make good in this city that promised them a living" (*Chain of Custody* 95–96), a trend of which Nair herself is a part of. Nair also captures the dark and dusty sides of places like Bangalore, where there is a whole underworld of women trafficking and all related mafia works.

Anupama Raju presents her anti-division stance on topography and humanity in her novel and many of her poems, without referring to a specific geographical locality. For instance, her poems like "No Borders" and "On Borders" attempt to politicise the problems of human-constructed divisions and geopolitical boundaries. The imagery of "Islands float, brushing / against each other without / passports. No limits." (*Nine* 15) is a direct attack on how geographically joined lands are divided by governmental policies and hinder people from free mobility and access to one another. The second poem extends the same concept of the deceptiveness of borders into personal events like marriage (*Nine* 21)—both causing visible divides made by the popular system. In Anzaldúa's opinion, "Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus" (4), and this restlessness is what Raju addresses through her poems on the politics of

divisions. This idea of home and homelessness among people—with a focus on creative writers—is what Anupama Raju tries to politicise throughout her novel, *C: A Novel*, where the entire process of seeking a topography becomes the crux of the narrative. Female writers seek a room of one's own, even though they technically have a place, which reflects a gendered cornering of patriarchal societies; thus, Raju addresses politics more related to womanhood and individual identity. A similar trend of presenting personal politics is also followed by Anita Nair and Shinnie Antony. When in Nair, the idea of presenting emotional baggage comes as a collective phenomenon—with people coming together to alter the trajectory of an emotion, as in the concept of Sara Ahmed's affective economies as reflected in *Ladies Coupé* and *Eating Wasps*, Shinnie Antony and her characters deal with the personal as personal, as in *The Girl Who Couldn't Love*. She strongly believes that “gender dynamics is the most political issue right now” (Interview), as evident in her subjective approach in fiction.

Anita Nair adheres to her collective consideration and approach when she speaks about writers and their writings as a product of “a collective imagination” (*Adi Sankarav*), a thought of sociality that prevails in her narratives. Nevertheless, Nair believes that a writer need not necessarily blend their individualistic ideologies and opinions into their writings (“In Conversation with Anita Nair”), explaining the lack of direct political references in her works. Anupama Raju, through her poem “If All Poetry is Protest,” shares her similar ideology that she would, in fact, protest against poetry if it always stood as a revolt against anything. The poet establishes her micro-politics of depoliticising the ordinary, mundane, rustic and genuine occurrences as the poet's own venturing into creativity (*Bitter Gourd* 6). Shinnie Antony, nevertheless, transcends this extremely personal approach while situating her narrative at the backdrop of a cultural or political event, as in *Kardamom Kisses*. At the backdrop of an ancestral family setting,

Antony mocks how the age of Indian independence was more like a transitional phase in Kerala, where the old order was degrading while the new 'modern' was not fully established. This attitude is evidenced in an episode where the characters, when they hear that 'India is free,' ignorantly ask, "Free with what?" (*Kardamom Kisses* 24). Antony becomes more directly political while addressing scenarios like the India-Pak rivalry in stories like "Munnu," where she attempts to capture how spaces become borders of conflict, fear and contestation (*Barefoot and Pregnant* 30).

Anupama Raju and her musical background, as she herself opines, bring about a sense of rhythm and musicality in her poems ("Rhythm in poetry"), which by itself makes them sound authentic. As the writer also remarks, English that comes as a spontaneous and rather natural language of her thoughts and imagination becomes even more usual and grounded with the musical element, making her writings more appealing and readable. The writer also discusses the experimental nature she had in the beginning phase of her creative career, as in composing poems structurally like that of the poem "Love" (*Nine* 62), which is shaped as "an inverse triangle" ("Rhythm in poetry"). Raju also attempts a similar structural experimentation approach in poems like "I," where she purposefully omits the alphabet 'i' from words in her poems that constitute it, as in "selfsh," "snster" and "nnth" (*Nine* 82), in order to attain a philosophical dimension in her concept of language and identity.

Anupama Raju also speaks about the visual element she attempts, as in the mixing of prose and poetry in *C: A Novel*. All of this implies the Western modernist influences that she discusses in the interview "Rhythm in poetry and the broad canvas of prose." Raju's creative amalgamation can be read along with Glissant's rhizomatic analysis of culture, in which her experimentative nature and curiosity for varieties exemplify her non-rootedness to a singular lineage. Regardless, the writer's proficiency

and confidence in the language are evident as well, owing to her stable English literary background and education. Raju can thus be evaluated as a post-global female English writer from Kerala who has had a sound educational upbringing and is so naturalised that she regards English as her only language of expression. Anita Nair also uses structural experimentation in fiction, as Raju has attempted in *C: A Novel*, like the intercultural approach of mixing Kathakali and *navarasas* into writing in *Mistress* and naming chapters in food names in an alphabetic order in *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*. Shinie Antony uses humour as a “way of looking at life” (Interview) and addresses utmost sensitive human relationships and issues through a stark sense of comedy and sarcasm. To be a native of Kerala and not a first-language English speaker, it is difficult for a writer to achieve such a natural linguistic ease, which Antony effortlessly masters. Additionally, Antony also follows the trend of experimentation with forms and narrative structure as Anita Nair, especially in her stories from *Séance on a Sunday Afternoon*. When the story “Overheard” follows the trend of compiling all twenty-four alphabets speaking a whole different narrative (*Séance on a Sunday Afternoon* 94–97), as in the alphabetically set chapter names of Anita Nair’s *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*, “The Blogger” is a tale structurally set inside a box following the presentation as in an individual blog (*Séance on a Sunday Afternoon* 160–80). While Western reading leads to experimentation with styles in Raju, influences such as Evelyn Waugh and the Malayali writer Aubrey Menen (E-mail interview), as Antony herself remarks, contribute to a rhizomatic nature in her writings, which is reflected through her humorous use of language and her tendency to experiment with Western forms.

Conclusion

The political reflection and social consciousness of post-globalisation era Malayali women writers can be collectively underscored as having more of a personal

level. They address issues pertaining to the modern human living in the modern society, rather than presenting particular socio-political upheavals happening around. The next chapter of the thesis analyses post-global Malayali women writers of English from Kerala who have had transnational migrations. This would include an in-depth exploration of how cross-cultural interactions in the contemporary world have helped develop sensibilities of writers and how they navigate their intersectional identities of being a migrant, a woman, and an ethnically othered citizen in ‘other lands,’ all at once.

Chapter VI

Moving Beyond: Narratives of Post-Global Malayali Women and Their Migration Abroad

As discussed in chapter two, the post-globalisation era migration of Keralites was closely linked to their strong educational background, which enabled many to seek job opportunities abroad. By the 1990s, the after-effects of colonial interventions grew stronger and visible in the society, as in the spread of liberal ideas and the ideology of egalitarianism that accompanied it. All such societal changes emancipated women's cultural position in society as well, reflected through an increase in social mobility, female education, political representation, and participation by women, among others. The age, marked by tremendous technological growth and the spread of social media, also nurtured the literary field, and especially female writings in both regional languages and in English. J. Devika opines that “the history of twentieth-century Malayalee ... modernity is inextricably bound with the intertwined histories of migration and transnationalism, and shifting of, diverse cosmopolitanism” (“Migration, transnationalism, and modernity” 129). Therefore, to trace the lineage of Kerala writing in English, which is in turn moulded by migratory culture, it is important to locate representative writers in the context of their transgression of boundaries. This chapter situates writers including Usha Zacharias, Jaishree Misra and Karthika Naïr—post-global Malayali migrant writers often associated with and shaped by places outside India—within the context of Kerala's developmental modernity and creative praxis.

As recalled by Usha Zacharias's brother Ajit Zacharias in a telephone interview, Zacharias's early immersion in literature ranged from canonical Western authors like James Joyce, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and José Saramago to classical *puranas* and mythological narratives. This cross-cultural reading habit of the writer has helped

develop a rich and layered literary sensibility, and her posthumously published short story collection *Night of the Fortune Tellers* reflects this breadth, particularly in its focus on women's narratives shaped by movement and travel. In contrast, Karthika Nair's entry into creative writing was mediated through her professional background in journalism, where writing reviews provided her with a structured and disciplined approach to literary production. Her relationship with English, shaped within a bilingual domestic space—her father speaking in English and her mother in Malayalam—further informs her stylistic and thematic choices that merge various cultures. Jaishree Misra, meanwhile, is notable for her deeply intimate portrayals of love and longing of women, often situated within cross-cultural contexts, explaining the writer's own transnational travels. Together, these writers illustrate the varied influences—literary, familial, and professional—that inform women's writing in English from Kerala in the post-globalisation era. Tania Das Gupta problematises how Indian women, or South Asian women in general, are often systematically erased from theoretical documentation and records and are just constructed as “invisible” and accompanied by their husbands, fathers or sons, without any accomplishments of their own (216). This chapter, and the research in a macrocosm, attempt to deconstruct the issue of the inconspicuousness of women's roles in societal and cultural dynamics—a form of social stagnation that has been countered and challenged by the advent of modernity in Kerala, particularly in the post-globalisation era. Further, the chapter situates transnational migrant women of this generation within Kerala's engagement with modernity through creative practices.

Problematising Gender

Usha Zacharias, a professor, journalist and writer all at once, exemplifies a multifaceted identity that informs her gendered perspective in her creative work, making her a writer worth reading in conjunction with the intersectional approach proposed by

Kimberlé Crenshaw. Zacharias, while analysing the representation of women in Indian television, identifies their “racial and cultural transformation from brown to white/western,” which she regards as a facet of “post-colonial whiteness” (“The Smile of Mona Lisa” 396). Her creative writings consistently reflect this attribution of newness and affixation to the concept of the ‘new woman.’ Her female characters are mostly hybrid and Westernised, and her stories are evidently constructed against the backdrop of a modernising society with all its confusions and flaws.

The liberal arrangements of Usha Zacharias’s narratives as well as her characterisation evidence the neoliberal values and ideas prevalent during the age. For instance, many of her female characters in her collection *Night of the Fortune Tellers* discuss patriarchy and are aware of their egalitarian rights, like Jwala, a liberal woman driven by Western ideals, from “The Polite.” The well-educated and thoroughly sophisticated woman from “The Polite” discusses feminism, globalisation and corporate issues, exemplifying Usha Zacharias’s portrayal of the modernised womanhood in contemporary Kerala. In that sense, Zacharias portrays a gender-friendly and inclusive globalisation arc, wherein women are educated, authoritative, and politically sound and visible. When read through the critical lens offered by Sara Ahmed, Zacharias’s female characters, who are extensions of the author’s own psyche, have created a “‘rippling’ effect of emotions” (45) that has moved multi-directionally within the author and has driven her to write about them. Jaishree Misra also reflects the positive impact of education through the character of the narrator’s mother, who had a liberal outlook and decisively liberated their maid from the clutches of her abusive husband in the novel *A House for Mr. Misra*.

Karthika Nair, on the other hand, uses the idea of the body and its ability and/or disability to explore femininity and her version of free women. In an e-mail interview,

Naïr recalls her first creative work to be published as an “excerpt of my hospital diaries,” reflecting how the idea of her terminal illness was at once restricting her physical mobility but enhancing her creative space as well. In her poems, women are aware of their societal positions and relationships, even though they may be physically weak or face challenges. She identifies herself as “a chronically disabled, first-generation migrant woman whose mother tongue is not French,” (E-mail interview) highlighting the complexities of the various systems in her life that contribute to her intersectional identity. Despite her existence as a female disabled person, having been oppressed and sidelined in India, she nevertheless finds emancipation through her social mobility and attains her freedom in Paris, a host land she regards as her home (Zecchini 200). Her speakers are thereby women of intersectional identity, as in “Tango for Two and Three-quarters,” where the woman totally realises her limitations and yet seems to question popular traditions of not including people with disabilities in mainstream stage performances like dance (*Bearings*). This questioning not just captures the political sense of the writer but also validates her statement that her existence as a writer is solely instilled by dance as well as her dysfunctional body (Zecchini 209)—an aspect of a ‘borderwoman’ seeking a literary space because of her physical non-belongingness.

These depictions stay in stark contrast to Jaishree Misra’s frequent portrayal of women who face gendered restrictions from the family. The writer constantly reminds us that modernisation has not been a completely successful event in matters pertaining to gender equality, as in Gayatri’s case in *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*, where she is advised by her mother that a good marriage is more important than education (150). The girl’s drive towards attaining education that contradicts the lack of support from her family makes her a *mestiza*, or ‘borderwoman,’ in Gloria Anzaldúa’s terms—an inhabitant of “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an

unnatural boundary” (3). When the narrator from *A House for Mr. Misra* realises the “subtle conservatism” that she is being indirectly infused with, as in her husband’s patriarchal “permission” allowing her to go for a morning walk, Jaishree Misra is mocking the ironic literacy of Kerala. The character’s understanding of being deprived of basic human rights makes her another example of a *mestiza*. Misra’s sceptical portrayal of postmodern gender relations and women’s place sprouts out of her very ideology that the publishing industry—even in the post-global era—is gender biased. Her poignant statement that “women struggle in attracting male readers” (Iqbal) mirrors V. Geetha’s remark on male-centred intelligentsia prohibiting women from engaging in academic and creative discourses from time immemorial (Devika, *Her-Self* xiii), discussed in chapter two. Contemporary writers of English find this view about the neoliberal literary industry highly problematic, given the impracticality of public discussions on gender equity and representation.

Usha Zacharias nevertheless underscores that modern women are conscious of how they present themselves in a way that pleases them, allowing them to carry and embrace their femininity (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 21). While the writer can be hypercritical and satiric about modern life, which she depicts as hasty, fraudulent, hollow, and filled with hypocrisy, she nevertheless documents the role and changes the picture of womanhood amidst societal change. Zacharias’s female characters resonate with Gloria Anzaldúa’s advocacy for women to choose education so as to transform into autonomous and independent individuals, rather than conforming to roles prescribed and offered by the society (Anzaldúa 17). By refusing to be only daughters, wives and mothers, they defy gender stereotypes propagated by mainstream patriarchy, as Anzaldúa demands women’s freedom to choose whether or not to be self-directed. In contrast to Zacharias’s consistent portrayal of empowered women, Jaishree Misra highlights that in

India, most women are unaware of their basic human rights, as exemplified by Neena in *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*. When most of Zacharias's protagonists talk about women's rights, Neena here fears the word "feminism"—"conjuring up images of hatchet-faced women who walk out of perfectly reasonable marriages" (23). The woman's irrational fear and misunderstanding here account for the lack of education she has received—Misra's way of depicting how lack of exposure limits women.

Karthika Nair, in the Author's Note to *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata*, describes the poetry collection as "a re-imagining of the Mahabharata through the voices of eighteen women" (5) and rethinks women from the legendary epic through their intersectional identity. Following the characterisation of helpless womanhood by Misra, Nair also underscores how history often intentionally omits the names of women from its record and how women are erased from the mainstream happenings. Through the lens of mythical women, Nair attempts to voice the unheard female voices in popular narratives. The author's act of recontextualising the legend itself is a representational rhizome in Édouard Glissant's words—a multidirectional mode of thoughts that seemingly has arisen from Nair's digression from adhering to a monolithic and autonomous root system. Nair analyses how women's lack of mobility has caused them to suffer "the torments of internal exile" (Glissant 19). For instance, Nair categorises women affected by wars as 'Spouses, Lovers' and examines how subtle yet most valid their domesticated torments are. Their pain gets vocalised through their pleas towards men to speak and touch before they leave for war and to "grow inwards, like root and rock" (*Until the Lions* 35).

Usha Zacharias, mirroring her autobiographical migrant identity and travel culture, frequently portrays independent women in transit. Her frequent reference to the travelling of women and their nomadic and carefree spirit can be seen as her constant

revisiting of her own identity as a travelling woman. In a telephone interview, Ajit Zacharias mentioned that Usha Zacharias had gone abroad on her own for her job as a journalist—affirming the autobiographical traces in her stories that often depict independent women outside their domestic spaces. The narrator of “Kagbeni Nights,” for instance, is a solo traveller leading a vagabond-like liberal life, often travelling with strangers (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 41). Here, the woman embarks on a spiritual quest to find a saviour, attempting this mission is attempted through her symbolic and metaphorical journey. Ajit Zacharias affirms this autobiographical element in Usha Zacharias’s writing, highlighting that her recurring theme of “being in different places and meeting people from different parts of the world” reflects the writer’s own immigrant experience, which is inevitably central to her work. Sonya from Jaishree Misra’s *A Scandalous Secret*, however, sets out on her journey to determine her parentage, but that nevertheless makes her a rebellious and independent woman (23). These mystical encounters and travels of these women echo another crux statement of Anzaldúa’s: that a woman needs to leave her home [or the theoretical safe/comfort zone] so as to find her true identity and belongings (16). Zacharias uses frequent references to the speaker’s exposure to and use of marijuana, wine, and other drinks to capture the sense of freedom upheld by her female lead. These phrases can also imply that Zacharias’s protagonist turns into a rebel or a “Shadow-Beast” in Anzaldúa’s words (16)—the one who refuses to abide by orders and rulers and openly confronts mainstream culture.

Karthika Naïr exposes the true patriarchal agents in the Mahabharata epic and underscores how women turn into similar rebels who leave their homes and true identities behind to seek vengeance. She, for instance, rethinks Amba’s rebirth as

Shikhandi and subsequent thirst for salvation by revolting against Bheeshma. Nair's version of Shikhandi outbursts:

Freedom. It was freedom you feared, was it not, my
ancient virgin prince? Freedom – that siren song you
could neither touch nor taste – to die, to want, to do,
to disobey... (*Until the Lions* 59)

Amba's act of seeking a body different from that of a woman is problematised by the poet as her projection of freedom in contrast to the limits of Bheeshma (*Until the Lions* 61), a man who ruined her life. Nair's reading of the *purana*, therefore, can also be read alongside Anzaldúa's open confrontation with any constraints imposed upon her. In addition to the representation of Shikhandi's inarticulate state, Nair purposefully addresses the unnamed female character from the Mahabharata as "Drupada's Wife," "Queen of Panchala," "Mother of Shikhandi, Draupadi & Drishtadhyumna," and "Woman Without a Name," highlighting how culture "focuses on kinship relationships" and prioritises family and community over individuals, especially in the case of women (18).

Usha Zacharias's story, "Machu Picchu, The Doorway to the Sun," feels like the writer's own excerpt from her travelogue, often referring to her real name (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 81). The story similarly captures the idea of women on the move and is centred mainly around cross-cultural interactions and the experiences associated with them. The story perfectly situates the travelling woman identity that the writer upholds in life and, of course, mirrors Anzaldúa's opinion on the relevance of leaving homes. As mentioned earlier, Neena from Jaishree Misra's *Accidents Like Love and Marriage* highly contrasts the dynamic flux and extreme mobility of the protagonist from Zacharias's story. The woman here is confined to the social space of her family, without

a scope of movement, and rather faces inescapable restrictions of her unhappy marriage to Rohit (103). Rohit's freedom of movement parallels his affair with a white woman, while Neena's immobility reflects her faithfulness. However, Misra unmistakably captures the rise of a new woman as Neena experiences an epiphany and decides to storm out of her husband's clutches. Neena's final act of leaving him, proclaiming freedom and heading towards her 'home' (207), while Rohit persuades her by saying that the place is their home, makes her a "Shadow-Beast" in Anzaldúa's words. The rebel woman towards the end "hates constraints of any kind, even self-imposed" (Anzaldúa 16) and attains the dimensions of Zacharias's free-spirited women.

Another of Misra's protagonists, Riva, who is "struggling not a bit against" Aman—her ex-lover—in a moment of sexual desire (*Secrets and Sins* 262), is yet another instance of how Misra sets her female leads free from the grip of morality and pseudo-stereotypes. Her defiance against abiding by systemic marriage itself is symbolic of her metaphorical storming out from the construct of family. Similarly, Janu from *Ancient Promises* sets out from her home and marriage to understand herself. Misra evidently liberates her women characters through their travels and thereby strongly projects the idea that mobility is key to women attaining a sense of belonging. All these female protagonists who leave their homes in pursuit of identity reflect the autobiographical element of the writer's own breaking free from her marriage and leaving for England (Vinai and Hazarika 195). Janu says that she leaves home "To escape a marriage that wasn't a terribly *bad* one but wasn't very good either" (*Ancient Promises* 170), reinforcing how important the idea of border/boundary crossings is for women. In this context, the woman's simultaneous sense of attachment to her marriage and her withdrawal from it stems from the cultural complexity that Édouard Glissant

theorises as the rhizomatic nature of identity. She maintains “the idea of rootedness” while questioning the totalitarian root that governed her mobility (11).

While all these women characters are devised by the writers to underscore the relevance of travel in women’s lives, Karthika Naïr nevertheless captures how women are often thrown out and abandoned from their homes—a facet of forced exile. For instance, in one of Sathyavati’s voices, the writer presents the account of how she was asked to be taken away by her own father saying “*call her Matsyagandhi, the / fish-scented one; take her away, far away, from this / land and our son*” (*Until the Lions* 40). Her ethnic diversity, or being fish-scented, becomes a reason for the culture’s unacceptability, and she is therefore abandoned (Anzaldúa 20).

Writers like Usha Zacharias often capture the concept of a lonely woman too, or perhaps a woman who enjoys solitude and selfdom. Her story “Andrei by Night” portrays a similar confrontation between a lone woman and a mystical, or rather fictional, man. Her ruminations and introspection, talking to herself in a mirror, can be understood as a woman’s philosophical enquiry on life and roots (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 39). The eighteen-year-old Sonya from Jaishree Misra’s *A Scandalous Secret* is also a lone orphaned girl who sets out on her quest to meet her mother, Neha Chaturvedi, who abandoned her from her premarital pregnancy (22–23). Her solitude and insecurity, her existence as a girl, and her lack of a true sense of home combine to make her a woman of intersectional identity. A re-rendering of the tale of Jhansi Rani, Misra’s *Rani* captures the young Manikarnika waiting for the King of Jhansi to come to her chamber. The description “she was still not very sure whether to be upset by his absence or not” (101) carries the true essence of rejection, avoidance and solitude that women in marriage face. Maya from Misra’s *Afterwards* also grounds the solitude associated with being a woman, though she is surrounded by many. Misra underscores her vision that

“it’s easy to make Kerala woman look like a very fortunate creature” because of the relatively high literacy rate and financial independence of Malayali women when compared to other parts of the Indian subcontinent (Vinai and Hazarika 197), while in reality, all these women are forced by patriarchal institutions into the borderlands of improbabilities and failed promises.

Karthika Nair’s re-recital of Shikhandi strongly emphasises how Amba’s body is transformed from its femininity during her rebirth, casting her shoulder “and pelvis in male / mould” (*Until the Lions* 86). Nair, through her characterisation, reinforces the idea that gender experiences are not homogenous. These characters become stark examples of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s idea of intersectionality, simultaneously holding the identities of a helpless, voiceless, and unopinionated woman, a wife in a loveless marriage, and a transgender person in the latter’s case. Misra effectively captures how Maya mirrors the plight of women of colour as Crenshaw opines: “burdened by ... child care responsibilities, and the lack of job skills” (“Mapping the Margins” 1245). The intersectional existence of Maya reflects the writer’s own “composite of different (and seemingly disparate) identities” of being Indian, British, woman, writer, mother and so on, all at once (Misra, “Tête-à-tête”). Maya, devised by the author as a representative of the Indian matchmaking system, faces loneliness the moment she has been alienated by her own family in the decision-making process of her wedding (*Afterwards* 43). Misra captures how the aspirations and ambitions of a studious and high-spirited girl are thrust over to India, with society making them feel like “total failures if they don’t marry and have children” (Anzaldúa 17). Maya, thereby, reciprocates the traits of the protagonist of Zacharias’s “Andrei by Night” through her lonely ruminations and quest to attain spatial freedom and salvation through travel (*Afterwards* 57).

While Anzaldúa critiques culture for imposing duties on women, Misra's protagonist attempts to break herself free from the shackles and chooses education and work culture over domesticity. Misra continues to explore similar issues pertaining to the confinement of womanhood and women's eventual realisations, as in *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*. The protagonist here, Neena, is again a victim of institutionalised subjugation and gender roles, as she herself is another woman with an intersectional identity. Karthika Naïr similarly explores how unnamed and often ignored legendary women like that of Poorna—a maiden who beds with Vyasa to provide him his only healthy child, Vidhura—view the exploits that they have had to endure. Poorna's bold rendition and explicitly presented sexual desire, for instance, "Transform from noun to verb these lips. Savour. / Brush. Sip. For tonight, we need no food to dine." (*Until the Lions* 107), exemplifies Naïr's counter-narrative that explores women's final realisation of self-worth. Similarly, Naïr gives voice to Sauvali, Dritarashtra's Dasi and concubine (133), and also to Francesca da Rimini from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Bearings*), breaking their fictional voicelessness. All these women represent lives of intersectional women who face "the consequence of gender and class oppression" in a compounded pattern, in Crenshaw's words ("Mapping the Margins" 1246). When analysed from Anzaldúa's light, Sauvali and Francesca become *mestizas*, who embrace contradiction and psychic unrest and unleash it through their expressions of sexual freedom and autonomy. Naïr affirms that she equates her portrayal of Sauvali to present-day Dalit women who are being violated of their rights to their own body and expression (Zecchini 204), explicating how *mestiza* is a postmodern reality as well.

Usha Zacharia's another short story, "A Strange Evening," narrates a bizarre and confusing evening where a woman who has lost her memory recollects her past love life in the company of certain unjudgmental listeners, including the narrator. Though the

woman finds it difficult to thoroughly reminisce about her past, she can be seen proudly proclaiming that “I know I was a tigress in one of my previous births” (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 73)—implying the sense of freedom and enlightenment she upholds. Her cloudy yet distinct memories of having three lovers who satiated her three different needs, and her bold and free act of sharing her gendered experience with people without a fear of being judged, evidence her sense of liberty. The tolerant, impartial and unbiased listeners, implied to be women, stably hear the woman and form an affective economy of their own, according to Sara Ahmed’s idea. Their common lack of memory brings about a “‘sociality’ of emotion” among them (Ahmed 8), and Zacharias effectively uses the communal harmony among women to reread femininity and womanhood of shared experiences.

Similarly, Karthika Nair also weaves a story of shared identity and existence of womanhood in poems like “Four Figurines on a Base by Alberto Giacometti,” wherein, by capturing the multiplicity of womanhood, Nair reinforces how they are all “in the same burnished silence;” (*Bearings*). Herein, Nair effectively uses her poetry as an “object[s] of emotion that circulate”—to quote Sara Ahmed (11)—to expose the feelings of bonding and fellow identification among women as well as readers. Additionally, Nair’s experimental and collaborative renga—a Japanese form of collective poetry writing adhering to a structural pattern—alongside Marilyn Hacker, can be read alongside her purposeful attempt at shared womanhood fraternity. Nair explicitly places female doctors as the nucleus while discussing the often unspoken and forgotten labour that female doctors and health professionals underwent during the COVID-19 pandemic. The emotional toll of being a woman worker is intensified when she writes “Caregiver C, whose hugs could / lull most breeds of pain, sounds lost.” (Hacker and Nair)—the poet’s way of associating with the women’s collective.

Marilyn Hacker, in a conversation with Nirica Sreenivasan, explains the paradoxical and contradictory difference [caused by separation and distance during the COVID-19 spread] and similarity [of facing the pandemic alike, though apart] that the outspread has caused that made her and Karthika Nair collaborate for the renga project. Here, the urgency of social exclusion intuited by the pandemic conjoins with the already oppressed and layered lives of these female writers, and these multiple affiliations make them women of intersectional identity. While it is a women's alliance that rules the abovementioned story by Zacharias and poem/renga by Karthika Nair, Jaishree Misra extends the concept of understanding to the next level while capturing the unconditional support that Neha Chaturvedi from *A Scandalous Secret* receives from her husband, Sharat. The protagonist here has had a liberal premarital life, with the secret of birthing a child before marriage out of an affair. Misra, through her characterisation of Sharat, minutely captures the innate goodness of the masculine and attempts to project that not every person is patriarchal. Sharat's acceptance of Neha's past and his eventual handling of the situation present a contrasting scenario to the typical mainstream reactions (348). The novel's arc thus becomes Misra's own understanding of modern education, the spread of values and the idea of freedom and morality. Sharat and Neha, though opposite in gender, exchange a shared sense of emotion [that of family] and become a part of the contagious nature of emotions according to Sara Ahmed's concept. While post-globalisation era writers who migrated abroad, like Jaishree Misra, continue the trend of the writers from the previous category in addressing gendered issues by mostly capturing personal or rather private tales of love and longings, writers like Usha Zacharias and Karthika Nair transcend this to present women in transnational, trans-cultural or rather universal spaces. An analysis of the idea of gender, gendered identity formation and female consciousness of writers in the category has proven that women writers,

irrespective of categories [ages or the type of migration they had in life], tackle and fight patriarchy of various degrees.

Mobilities and Transformations

Jaishree Misra's novels follow the pattern of including Kerala and other cosmopolitan cities the writer is acquainted with as the literary terrain of the narratives. For instance, *A House for Mr. Misra*, a book that the author herself regards as a "NON FICTION" ("My story so far"), shares a semi-autobiographical narrative of the writer's attempt to construct a beach home in her native Kerala. Thoroughly situated around the socio-political climate and dilemma surrounding the geographical reality of Kerala, Misra here attempts to situate her hybridised identity and the struggles she had to undergo to find the titular 'house' as a multicultural person. Regarding the time she has been investing to establish a place of her own and reclaim the roots, the author writes that those "two years were filled with such comedy and pathos" ("My story so far")—two elemental emotions that run throughout the work. Besides, Misra problematises the indigenous Malayali's suspicion of the diaspora Malayali, who "seem to get a bit uneasy when members of the diaspora return to the homeland," not accepting the *marunaadan* [diasporic] people for their hybridity (Vinai and Hazarika 197). Misra's critique of the native Keralites for their bitterness towards the other is a direct reflection of Anzaldúa's proposition on her dual identity of having amalgamated cultures when she writes that she has "so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero" (Anzaldúa 63). The writer extends her view of the ambivalence that arises from her own spatial multiplicity, saying that it is living outside India that has inspired her to write about the place. While acknowledging migration as a catalyst to her creative writing, Misra feels that not living in India made her feel she was not a part of it

(Balakrishnan)—mirroring Anzaldúa’s standpoint that “Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create” (73).

Karthika Nair often invokes Kerala through her ritualistic nostalgia combined with a feeling of otherness to the place, as in the poem “Half-past Three in Vellayani” (*Bearings*), mirroring her own conflicted past of non-belongingness to Kerala, as she describes in an e-mail interview. The writer explains that being in India, Europe and the U.S. are all different experiences, and in fact, moving within the states of India itself creates stark cultural changes due to the multitudes of languages and other relative factors. She says: “to the teen that I was, the move from Shillong to Trivandrum in the late 1980s was a more severe culture-shock than the one to France in 2000” (Zecchini 196), further problematising cross-cultural migration experiences. Nevertheless, the writer believes that France too had its shortcomings, such as the permeating monolithic attitude in cases like languages, and that the author longed for polyphony, and that led to her early writings (“NAW Interview”).

However, Karthika Nair also recollects how she was scorned in Northern India as a South Indian ‘Madrasi’ and how she hated her nomadic family culture while she was a child—which the writer now regards as a very positive event that has helped mould her identity. Nair emphasises that in India, moving between places often involves simultaneously swapping languages and cultures (Zecchini 195), a cultural amalgamation that felt tedious to her at the time but which she now views as an integral part of her contemporary life. While her creative works traverse between places she has been in her life, she often regards Paris as her true home (Zecchini 199)—an aspect of “dual identity” that Anzaldúa associates with being culturally hybrid (63). This further elevates when she conflictingly says that her roots are primarily in India and that she loves Paris because of its antipodal existence with respect to India (Zecchini 200).

Contrary to the geographical fixation on Kerala in *A House for Mr. Misra*, which mirrors the ideological affiliation of Karthika Naïr towards India, Misra's *Secrets and Lies* depicts a scattered narrative spreading across time and space and is narrated mainly around London and Delhi during various ages. A reunion plan acts as a motif for four high school female friends (36) for their travel back to Delhi—a journey that triggers their past memories of guilt and remorse. Usha Zacharias, through her short stories, similarly captures places that she has been in life, as opined in the back cover of *Night of the Fortune Tellers*.

Stories of Usha Zacharias always carry cityscapes and reflections of modernity with them. It can be seen filled with the idea of busy and hasty life, urban sophistication and all discreet noises associated with city life. This can be understood as a reflection of her cultural growth outside Kerala, as remarked by Ajit Zacharias. In a telephone interview, he remarked how the ever-present urbanity in the works of Usha Zacharias is caused as a result of her early adulthood life in a “cosmopolitan place like Bombay” and subsequent shift to the U.S., after which Zacharias ventured into creative practices in English. Zacharias, beginning her creative writing after her migration abroad, aligns with Appadurai's formulation that “mass migration ... seem to impel ... the work of imagination” (4). As mentioned above, her stories, such as “Balloon Swami,” are thoroughly situated in the “heart of the city,” filled with cars and other vehicles “that had suddenly started driving about in hundreds as if on their own, without any vehicle loans, round and round the narrow city streets” (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 7).

Karthika Naïr extends her ecological concerns while dealing with reflections of modernity and globalisation in her poems, as in the renga *A Different Distance*. She feels that the age of capitalism that globalisation has produced attempts to homogenise and threaten the culture when she talks about how the phenomenon monopolises ecology by

“blinding nations.” When the writer extends the spatiality of her existence to that of the ecology surrounding her, she nevertheless presents “a network spreading either in the ground or in the air” (Glissant 11), building a macrocosmic place of her own in the post-global world. Jaishree Misra similarly captures the cultural sensibilities associated with cosmopolitanism and globalisation through her novel *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*, wherein she locates the narratives within the urban landscape of Delhi. By fixating on the simultaneously intersecting and diverging lives of ethnically variant families hailing from different places, such as the Sachdevs, the Menons, and the Singhs, in the singular terrain of New Delhi (19), the author inadvertently captures the post-global trend of migration and cultural mixing. Karthika Naïr also reimagines cities as dynamic and fluctuating spaces defined by ethnic mixing and amalgamation, as in the poem “Soundscapes in Saint-Denis” (*Bearings*). The poet captures the essence of the city’s polyphony through counting the dynamic ranges of voices it contains and the languages it inhabits. Naïr underscores her own polyphonic childhood wherein her parents travelled very often—instilled by her father’s working in the Indian army—causing changes in regional language with each tenure. The fact that Naïr’s parents chose a pact ensuring “there was an equal balance between the three main languages: English, Malayalam, Hindi” for her (E-mail interview), amidst their hybrid cultural interactions in distant cities, explains the recurring presence of cityscapes in her works that functions through amalgamations.

Though primarily a creative writer in English, Ajit Zacharias remarks that Usha Zacharias was extremely fluent in her Malayalam as well—a language they spoke within the family and read a lot, and the connection “was always there.” The contradiction that writers like Usha Zacharias, even after being acquainted with and well-versed in Malayalam, chose to express creatively in English can be seen from Anzaldúa’s

theoretical lens of a woman being forced to leave her home [native tongue, in this case] so as to find her real belonging [creative expression in English here]. When Karthika Nair says, “Every language that has permeated me, or even just traversed my consciousness, shapes my *self*” (E-mail interview), it further explains the rhizomatic nature of humans in the process of cultural exchange. Misra and Nair’s depiction of this community living despite their differences can be read alongside Appadurai’s understanding of globalisation, mass mediation and cultural mixing, which may lead to conditions of collective inhabitation that can generate a “community of sentiments ... a group that begins to imagine and feel things together” (8). However, Misra underscores her own uncertainty of existence when she says, “I’m an outsider of sorts everywhere that I go, never quite belonging completely anywhere” (Vinai and Hazarika 198). This contradiction of the diaspora—experiencing a sense of communal togetherness amidst diversity while feeling a lack of belonging to specific places—has prompted Misra to accept the ambivalence and “claim my [her] space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*” (Anzaldúa 22) through her creative writing. Misra also attempts to depict the culture of the elite urban class’s lives and the “intimate dinner parties” trend through her novel *A Scandalous Secret* (2). The author aligns with the city lifestyle when her character Sharat opines that throwing parties “allows people to relax and meet each other without the fear of journalists or paparazzi lurking around the corner” (2). Herein, Misra chooses to satirise the newly emerged mediascape/technoscape culture, an aftermath of globalisation, wherein media and technology overpower and at times overshadow people’s normal lives.

Usha Zacharias effectively uses references that are technological and urban-specific so as to capture the essence of the age she lived in. The indication of specific car names, as in “Scorpio,” “Tata Sumo” and “Fiat Palino,” and of the excavator JCB

suggests the rise of a new social group of the elite class in the society with the advent of colonial modernity and the upgrade of the place from old Travancore into the new Thiruvananthapuram (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 7–8). Poems like “Shivaratri” also blend modern technological elements with traditionalism in India, suggesting the intermingled existence of modernity and rituals. The speaker’s satirical yet realistic statement “Take out your phones / Listen to varaveena” (Zacharias, “poetry drafts”) alludes to the modern predicament of depending on technology for everything. The poem, nevertheless, is situated around Kovalam in Thiruvananthapuram, a place that frequently takes part in Zacharias’s writings. “Thiruvathira in the Spell of Dhanu” is yet another of her poems thoroughly situated in the backdrop of Kerala rituals (“poetry drafts”). Zacharias, by adapting her narratives/poems to the advancing terrains of Kerala during her times, inadvertently adheres to the concept of technoscape introduced by Arjun Appadurai, which he defines as “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (34).

Jaishree Misra, on the other hand, offers a critique of the changing cultural and political climate of Kerala in *A House for Mr. Misra*, where the author mocks the “uniquely Kerala concept called *nokku kooli*” or ‘looking wage’ for workers democratised into practice by the communist party (ch. 11), the hypocrisy of the Thiruvananthapuram corporation with “their high pedestals” (ch. 13) and the very common strikes and processions (ch. 19). Misra opines that Kerala is a good place to be a random visitor, but to reside in the place is difficult, because “It’s a complex state, and still highly conservative” (Vinai and Hazarika 196). She regards that the place is less liberated in proportion to the extremely high literacy rate it upholds—a very common

standpoint that recurs in her creative writing as well. Similar to Misra's outlook on Kerala's unwelcoming spatiality, Karthika Nair also opines that "Kerala was stiflingly conservative" towards her during her childhood, though she herself believes that diaspora experiences were not so different from the pre-migration/nomadic life the writer had within India "in terms of cultural shock/ linguistic displacement" (E-mail interview).

Both Misra's and Nair's condemnation of the turbulence in post-global Kerala's treatment towards the Malayali diaspora echoes Anzaldúa's critique of native cultures being critical of people who belong to them (20). Unlike Misra's sceptical placement of Kerala as a cultural space in the work, Janu from Misra's *Ancient Promises* reminisces and ruminates about Kerala as a nostalgic place of longing (33, 37), which further elevates the author's own ambivalent stance on her native place, which at once attracts her but tricks her politically and culturally. Misra, however, situates her novel against the backdrop of Kerala's rigid customary and societal norms, depicting the not-so-constructive sides of Kerala life. Her take on Keralite's positive acceptance of the book, impressed by "how self-critical they were willing to be in appreciating a not-so-positive view of Kerala from a diasporic Malayali" (Vinai and Hazarika 195), further explains the two sides of simultaneous adoration and critical view the writer possesses about her native land. Karthika Nair extends a similar ambivalent take on Kerala when she says her performance-related works and collaborative projects revolve around "intergenerational experiences and legacies of migration. The joy, the laughter, the absurdity as well as the insecurity or the rootlessness" (E-mail interview).

Zacharias often takes her vision of modern Kerala to an epistemological level of scrutiny, where she explores how Westernisation has had its effects on people. Stories like "The Polite," for instance, observe how the cultural landscape of an educated Indian woman is transformed into the status of being addressed and treated as a "Madam"

(*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 20). This can be read in association with the spread of print culture and the formulation of a new women's intelligentsia in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, according to Meera C.'s observation discussed in chapter two. Jwala from Zacharias's story thereby becomes a neoliberal woman that the author has devised to explore gendered spaces. Maya from "Little White Horse" also revolves around the idea of modern women (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 162), who are educated abroad, just like the author herself. These women characters are all postcolonial residues that encompass a strange hybrid identity that branches out in a multidirectional pattern. Their multiple affiliations—as Indians, women, and members of the educated class—nevertheless make them similar to a mestiza, according to Anzaldúa, as they carry multiple aspects of their identities with them.

Contrary to the strong female characterisations and their liberal mobility portrayed by Usha Zacharias, Jaishree Misra often captures the spatial confinement of another sector of Malayali women, as in the novel *Afterwards*. When Zacharias writes more about neoliberal-educated women, Misra also voices the issues of the downtrodden, weighed down by rigid customary systems. The writer feels that the deterioration of the old traditional system of matriliney—which paradoxically ensured financial and spatial stability for the Nair women in Kerala, though partially rooted in patriarchy—has caused negative outcomes, "mostly leaving men feeling somewhat emasculated" (Vinai and Hazarika 196). The gendered submissiveness of women that escalated with the new order in Kerala, despite the widely acclaimed 'Kerala model,' is what Misra focuses on in her fiction. When Zacharias often pictures educated women, it is the protagonist Rahul Tiwari from *Afterwards* who is representative of the new intelligentsia, having been educated abroad. When Maya mentions Rahul looking like an Englishman, he retorts, saying that though one of his grandparents was English, he never truly had many roots

and that no one ever thinks that he is “English in England” (30). This is Misra’s way of problematising both gender and spatial ambiguity, as the protagonist exists in “a vague and undetermined place,” at times physical and mostly figurative, that arises from his multicultural upbringing (Anzaldúa 3). Misra also uses the strategy of situating Rahul and Maya’s meeting and their eventual elopement from her unhappy and stoic married life against the backdrop of Rahul’s coming to Kerala. Herein, his physical travel transforms into a metaphorical and symbolic journey to new and twisty beginnings—Misra’s take on the multitude of experiences that travel culture can lead to.

Janu from Misra’s *Ancient Promises* also becomes such an example of a person forced into borderlands of confusions, neither truly belonging to her native Kerala nor the place of her livelihood, New Delhi. She regards her multiple affiliations as “the chief paradox” in her life, as “these two places ran together in my [her] blood, their different languages and different customs never quite mixing, never really coming together” (18). Glissant problematises the “monolingual prejudice” that claims that language is one’s root and opines that language diasporas are extremely flexible and can alter rapidly through interaction with one another, just like people in diaspora do (98)—the linguistic as well as personal conflict that the migrant character here mentions. Janu from *Ancient Promises*, who shuttles across places, can be read alongside Misra herself—having lived her teenage life in Delhi and Bangalore and her adult life abroad (Chandrasekhar; Chhibber).

Drawing on her personal experience of exploring other places in life and enforcing the relevance of travel for women, Usha Zacharias situates her female characters in a socially dynamic and mobile climate. “A Day in Fes” is a story that explores the theme of women on the move and the cross-cultural interactions they undergo (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 29). The story explores odd friendships and

connections between nomadic people and illustrates the transformative power of travel culture. Jaishree Misra's *Secrets and Sins* also portrays a metaphorical journey of the protagonist Riva to Cannes (197), which leads to the rekindling of her past love for Aman, whom she meets there. Their subsequent decision to leave each other and choose family stems from the understanding that, although they love each other deeply, their love was never meant to be—an understanding that emerges from their travels. While her work constantly captures the situation of women on the move, Misra personally “longs for roots,” always having a tendency to reach back to her native India while she was in England. The writer's own existence as an expatriate woman “fortunate to have that choice” of returning to India (Chhibber) while the physical reality of England was ever present explains the multiple spatial affiliations that the writer upholds, as in the idea of rhizomes proposed by Glissant. When it is a random journey that leads to realisations and liberation in *Secrets and Sins*, it is her husband Raja Gangadhar's ageing and immobility that attributes mobility to Jhansi Rani in Misra's *Rani*. When the Rani says, “‘Jhansi is my duty too, Raja-sahib,’ ... ‘and certainly not a burden’” (161), she gains power and asserts dominance over the male agency that had previously hindered her political representation.

Misra often observes and captures the other side of women's mobility, having been caused and instilled by a compulsion stemming from confinement and familial pressure. Janu from *Ancient Promises* does not leave her family and home out of a quest for pleasure and experimentation but due to sheer resignation. The novel, however, ends on a positive note of Janu attaining liberation with her decision of leaving her assigned role. Her statement, “Tomorrow, the next chapter will begin,” (305) highlights the metaphor of her journey employed by the writer so as to capture the true essence of female mobility. Karthika Nair similarly explores the idea of home, exile, and her

existence as a diaspora through many of her poems. *A Different Distance*, a dialogic renga written during the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic, observes how the state-induced and necessary isolation during the spread is a form of exile from one's spatiality. Naïr carves out a techno-space during the pandemic wherein they can broadcast "Unmasked interviews" whose boundaries are "carved by broadband access" (Hacker and Naïr). While talking about the lack of sociality during COVID-19, the writer also underscores the possibilities extended by globalisation, which enables "different streams or flows along which cultural material may be seen to be moving across national boundaries" in Appadurai's words (45–46).

Usha Zacharias's poems, such as "Journey to the Sun" and "The Moon's Rocky Boat," also situate women on a socially mobile occasion. In the former poem, the writer speaks about "Our endless and finite / Journey towards the sun," emphasising the limits as well as possibilities she has for exploration and travel ("poetry drafts"). In a very different voice, Misra captures how abduction and kidnapping can be liberating to women enslaved through confinement, as in the novel *A Love Story for My Sister*. Contrary to the chosen and self-driven mobility of women assessed above, Margaret Wheeler from the novel develops Stockholm Syndrome towards her kidnapper, being attracted to him. However, it is to be noted that Wheeler's kidnapping should be considered an act of rescuing her from the massacre during the uprising, as the girl develops "another surge of missed feelings for the man" who kidnaps her and learns "to love him well" (126, 212).

In the story "Summer of 96," Usha Zacharias, herself a U.S. migrant, attempts to analyse the other side of cross-cultural mixing, highlighting the issues and fallacies associated with English language use in the U.S. The thematic concern of Zacharias is closely associated with her own hybrid migrant identity in the U.S., cracking "cultural

blunders,” as she mentions in the story (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 67). This conflicted nature of migrants stems from the fact that migration should be read as a multi-axial phenomenon, with “an enmeshed root system” spreading in all directions (Glissant 11). The cultural mix that the writer herself and her characters in travel undergo further enforces Glissant’s observation that “either the other [cultural aspect] is assimilated, or else it is annihilated” (49). On a positive, or rather progressive note, Zacharias’s female leads transform by fashioning developmental modernity while staying confused about their contested identity and backdrop, which the writer observes as the reality of modernisation. Jaishree Misra does not situate her creative topography on a singular idea of space but rather explores the various intersectional experiences of women belonging to transnational, transcultural, and migrant spaces. Writers like Usha Zacharias, however, present the duality of modern society, which acts as a recurring backdrop of her stories, while writers like Karthika Nair explore the idea of space beyond the physicality, or perhaps on a conceptual level. She rather explores the limitations of human beings and also the inability to get contained in a space and form. Regardless, all these writers collectively present a geo-cultural rootedness within the cultural milieu of India.

Socio-political Consciousness Through English Writings

In both her writing and her life, Karthika Nair extends her critical lens to a vision of modernity, expressing her simultaneous yearning for a pre-global era hybridised with the technoscape reality of the present. For instance, in her poem “Curriculum Vitae,” she juxtaposes her nostalgic “odd / shapes and sounds from home” with that of the rushing realities of the new world shaped by globalisation, urbanism and “synchronised moves” (*Bearings*). The in-betweenness that the writer here projects implies her sense of plural belongingness that has definitely taken root as a post-global phenomenon. Appadurai, while talking about people from former colonies moving to America and holding “a

plural belonging of becoming American while staying somehow diasporic” (170), problematises the association of the self to multiple places and situations at once, similar to the politics of plurality and its confusions that Nair presents.

Usha Zacharias also weaves her tales with a stark and vehement approach about her views on colonial modernity, which she underscores as a critical phenomenon. Stories like “Balloon Swami” capture the politics of technology and that of changes critiqued or rather sceptically scrutinised by Zacharias. She uses sarcastic mentions about the changing cultural values; for instance, the sculpture Sagarakanyaka’s artistic brilliance is juxtaposed with the contact details of the artist affixed into it (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 10), hinting at the degradation of artistic morals. This cross-examination is but a part of the greater canvas of extending her doubtful and rather hopeless stance on the project of Kerala modernity, which focuses solely on material aspects. The writer fictionalises in a figurative sense the modern reality that came with ending “the hollowness of the urgent” (*Night of the Fortune Tellers* 23).

Jaishree Misra extends this kind of critical outlook on the highly acclaimed ‘modern Kerala’ in her non-fiction *A House for Mr. Misra*, wherein she explains how the society, bureaucracy and the other conjoining systems in Kerala prohibit culturally hybrid people from having a space of their own in the place. The politics of indifference and hindrance posed by Kerala against the Malayali diaspora is what Misra problematises in the work, and thus it can be read in terms of Glissant’s observation about “the self’s opacity for the other” and the attempt to either assimilate or annihilate it (49). In the postscript of *A House for Mr. Misra*, the writer regards their struggle to construct a home in her native land as “trysts with Trivandrum Corporation.” She also problematises the issues that she and her family had to face due to the newly developed high standards and expectations of servants and maids, whom she addresses as “Kerala’s

newly empowered, financially independent women” (*A House for Mr. Misra*, ch. 14).

The writer critiques the changing temperament of social hierarchy in modern Kerala, while the paradigm shift itself can be considered an aftermath of technological developments that evidently transformed the attitude and lifestyle of people.

Further, Karthika Nair regards herself as a political poet, fixating on the idea that literature cannot be made free from politics (Zecchini and Nair). She follows the lineage of activist writers like Arundhati Roy and poignantly opines that “When you are a writer, you are political” (Zecchini and Nair). Nair’s attempt to rethink, rewrite and revoice the Mahabharata epic from a gender-inclusive perspective, as discussed in detail in the earlier part of this chapter, itself becomes a highly political act. Similar to Nair’s readings of Hindu myths and legends, Ajit Zacharias mentions Usha Zacharias’s interest in the multiple versions of Hindu *puranas* through which “she wanted to understand the Hindutva as a political phenomenon.” Karthika Nair’s testimony that her attempt through *Until the Lions* “wasn’t to reverse the gaze, and switch the good guys and the bad ones—it was to multiply the gaze, or the voices” inadvertently transforms her into a rhizome having spread out into multiple branches or axes of possibilities (Deitz). For instance, in one of her poems written from the perspectives of spouses and lovers—women left behind by men during war—the poet problematises the very act of war and warriors leaving their home and loved ones behind.

Novels by Jaishree Misra also voice in abundance about the gender politics prevailing in societies, irrespective of time and place, while the writer herself regards that her initial works “were written without any attempt to make political points” (Vinai and Hazarika 195). She adds that she does not believe fiction can alter societies and perspectives, though her own later characters were formed alongside the growth of her ideological feminism (195). Her novel *Rani* rethinks the historic uprising of Manikarnika

into Jhansi Rani after the demise of her husband, Raja Gangadhar. The writer juxtaposes the earlier life of Rani, wherein she was gender-coded and made to learn “conversation was not expected of new brides” by patriarchal agencies, to her eventual rise into a powerful political figure (93). Her father’s shadowing and directive nature and upbringing can be read alongside Anzaldúa’s critique of culture as expecting “women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men” (17). This minute cultural politics “Steeped in religious routines, domestic chores and moral femininity” (Sankar V. 121) is fashioned by societies to ostracise women from their engagements in the public sphere, as discussed in chapter two. Rani becomes a perfect example of Anzaldúa’s *mestiza*, having been made to feel like a failure if she had not abided by the gender expectations of the family and society (Anzaldúa 17).

Similar is the character of Janu from Misra’s *Ancient Promises*, who is denied further education and forced by her own mother to get married even after her repeated pleading (54). This is an exact exemplification of the situation that Anzaldúa criticises: “Educated or not, the onus is still on woman to be a wife / mother” (17). Janu’s eventual elopement after marriage with her lost love Arjun is what she regards as freeing herself “from that circle of forced happiness” (*Ancient Promises* 303). Jaishree Misra thereby strongly opposes the idea of women’s lack of mobility and portrays travel/leaving one’s home as an agent that catalyses women’s path to autonomy. Through very personal tales, the writer politicises the entire phenomenon of female emancipation and the resultant individual peace that results from claiming one’s place out of one’s own home. When it is forced marriage that sets the gender political aspect in *Ancient Promises*, it is Neha’s premarital childbirth and attempt to keep it hidden that restricts the protagonist’s fluidity in *A Scandalous Secret*. Herein, Misra explores how, in an Indian context, a woman fears being looked upon as unchaste (28), a gender politics predetermined by culture and

society which Anzaldúa again criticises in her discussion on culture being repressive against women (Anzaldúa 17). However, through the characterisation of Neha's husband, Sharat—liberal, understanding and accepting—Misra captures an alternative to the more common toxic Indian culture of abandoning woman by the name of infidelity. Sharat, by not being moral and judgemental, is portrayed as progressive (*A Scandalous Secret* 348), which can be seen as Misra's attempt at redefining 'the modern' gender politics that came out after the formation of a new, mature, and intellectual society.

Jaishree Misra and Karthika Nair are writers who drew inspiration from Indian history and tradition to weave powerful narratives/poems that carry the essence of their political stance. Misra situates her historic novel *Rani* in the socio-political climate of pre-independent India during the Indian rebellion of 1857. She underscores how the colonial period led to the first war of Indian independence and reimagines how Jhansi Rani's "bleeding body had been taken into the forests, never to be seen by the British again" (408). Karthika Nair regards her father's military background and dejected opinion on human-driven wars as reasons for her early rethinking of the politics of the living and the dead. Just like Misra's attempt in *Rani* to politicise the historic episode of Jhansi Rani, Nair understands the Mahabharata epic from a woman-friendly perspective—a point of view that has been widely ignored on purposeful grounds. Her poetry collection *Until the Lions* projects her evident and vehement stance against the "militant patriarchy" (3), an offshoot of the dominant popular patriarchy that is activated by the name of masculinity, honour and valour associated with being a man. Nair stands against the warfare initiated and instituted by and for men, wherein women "become repositories of lost honour, individual and collective" (*Until the Lions* 3). In the poem "Zero Degrees: Between Boundaries," Nair continues her critique of the political agencies and bureaucracies made up of "puny men who wall / up futures, then watch

unmoved as the walls / and roofs of egos tumble” (*Bearings*), attacking inhuman divisions that men create. This strong political stance of the author against the institutionalisation and normalisation of wars becomes contemporarily relevant as well, even in the post-global world wherein war and bloodshed are common. Through the voice of Padati, a name given to soldiers who are forced to join the warfare in Mahabharata, Nair underscores the warmongering nature of men: “This is Kurukshetra, Son. / This is where our kings seek / to die ...” (*Until the Lions* 27). This pseudo-politics of men—losing life in war so as to turn valorous and heroic—is what Nair rethinks and mocks in the poem.

Similar to Karthika Nair, Usha Zacharias also follows the pattern of using mythological and legendary figures in her poems, as in “Shivaratri” and “The Moon’s Rocky Boat”—the former one being completely woven around the Hindu ritualistic observation of Maha Shivaratri and the latter using cosmic and mythical allusions (“poetry drafts”). However, it is notable that Zacharias and Nair use ritualistic/mythical elements so as to meditate on a modern scale on the idea of the personal and the communal. Zacharias’s skilful attempt to place the Indian indigenous core alongside personal experiences emerges from her post-global identity, which questions and interrogates contemporary socio-political occurrences. Karthika Nair, on the other hand, in poems like “Zero Degrees: Screenshots,” converts her individual experiences of the emigrant crisis into her political stance of claiming a place in this globalised world. She desires to be uncategorised and not differentiated based on her differences when she asserts:

Define me without
numbers; describe me
devoid of codes, colour

and country. (*Bearings*)

Her renga in dialogue form also deals with border crossing and crises associated with identity conflicts. Nair underscores the deep chasm created by stringent caste and racial violence and how humans are reduced to nothing when “cased in / black, brown ... Dalit Skin ...” (Hacker and Nair). While resembling a confused *mestiza* according to Anzaldúa’s notions, the poet also aligns with Glissant’s proposition that “Being-as-Being is not opaque but self-important” (*Poetics of Relation* 185).

Jaishree Misra also narrows down her range of politicisation to a personal, or rather autobiographical, level in novels like *A House for Mr. Misra*—a highly political novel that critiques the oppressive and unfriendly political climate in Kerala. For instance, the writer satirises Kerala for being “one of the few states in the world that regularly and democratically elects communists to power,” which in turn works by promoting unfair wage systems in favour of the working class (ch. 11). Misra similarly captures the backdrop of the then-emerging communism in her novels, like *Afterwards*, in talking about the political climate of Kerala, while handling the decline and fall of *marumakkathayam*, or the matrilineal system of inheritance (3, 6). This political consciousness places the writer within a context that reflects a thorough historical understanding of Kerala, its socio-political systems, and the transformations occurring within them.

Karthika Nair, on the other hand, elevates personal experiences to a socio-political level in her didactic children’s story *The Honey Hunter*, where she employs teaching methods and oral traditions to explore her ecological politics and consciousness. When the speaker talks about the Bee Goddess: “Thanks to her and her bees, flowers bloomed and fruits / ripened. Thanks to them, life continued on earth,” she nevertheless underscores the eternally interconnected nature of life in the universe (*Honey Hunter*).

Towards the end of the story, Nair reaches the epitome of her environmental concern, wherein she directly addresses the anthropocentric power of humans, who dismantle everything natural and address them as “wretched.” Nair’s simultaneous interest in gendered nuances, experiences of places, and ecological reflections indicates her ability to transcend singular identities and focuses, which in turn accounts for her migration and cross-cultural interactions.

While female writers of earlier generations show a proper affiliation towards capturing the political realities and events during their respective ages, post-global Malayali writers who migrated abroad show less affinity for situating their creative works in a specific socio-political and cultural backdrop. Nevertheless, their creativity cannot be named as apolitical, as they write in abundance about the micro-politics that work in post-global societies, including the gender and cultural politics. Politics in Jaishree Misra’s works function on a very personal and microcosmic level, as the writer mostly weaves crises, turbulence, and issues faced by modern humans. Nevertheless, her works like *Rani* and *A House for Mr. Misra* are outwardly political when compared to the relatively domestic politics she deals with in her other works. Misra condemns the banning of *Rani* in Uttar Pradesh, wherein the government “claimed that the book was insulting to Rani Lakshmibai’s much-loved image” based on “how adulatory” the writer’s portrayal was. However, Misra opines that she wanted to analyse Rani as a woman apart from her historical heroic framework (Kareem).

Karthika Nair extends a similar stance against Indian bureaucracy when she hails the government of France for not setting any strictures to monitor the freedom of a writer, unlike in India (Zecchini 204). The breaking of stereotypes through female voices that Misra and Nair have attempted can be considered a form of resistance they practise against rigid and inflexible systems in India. Mirroring how Crenshaw underscores the

inefficiency of anti-racial doctrines to understand patriarchy and that of the feminist perspectives to understand racial issues in the case of women of colour (“Mapping the Margins” 1252), Rani can be identified as an intersectional woman with multiple identical affiliations. Her submissive patriarchal upbringing, early marriage, lack of financial and economic independence, and eventual rise to power make her existence problematic on layered levels—the gendered dimension that has politicised her novel. However, while writers of the same generation who have migrated within India, like Arundhati Roy, show great affinity to delve deep into the religio-cultural layers of Kerala society, writers like Misra can be seen choosing a politics that is subtle and personal. Regardless, the writer opines that the question of caste politics interests her as well and signposts future possibilities of her dealing with such matters through fiction, while the writer does not believe in fiction’s ultimate aim to reflect societies (Vinai and Hazarika 197).

Usha Zacharias’s works reflect a form of politics that can be situated as both minute and occasional, yet striking. She often deals with convulsions and confusions common in the age of globalisation through personal narratives woven through detached yet microscopic presentation. Her interest in blending gender issues into contemporary scenarios is associated with her engagement in other intellectual discourses regarding “shifting contours of feminism in the context of globalization” as commemorated by Sujata Moorti (Carter and Hegde 3). While in academic areas she divulged objectively in various projects concerning female issues in the cosmopolitan age in India, her creative works often blended emotions with her primary political concern. Regardless, Zacharias’s activism—mirroring that of Arundhati Roy—was mostly mainstream, as both of them mostly directed their creative side to a different quasi-political realm. Though both Misra and Zacharias exhibit modern sensibilities in framing their fiction,

they restrain themselves from much structural experimentation common to modern literature.

However, in addressing the micro-politics within the already existing narratives of Mahabharata, Karthika Nair often relies upon structural experimentation in her poetry, which can be seen as an evident aftermath of globalisation and the writer's interactive experience drawn from it. An instance can be seen in the section Spouses, Lovers, wherein in one poem, the poet structures the verse in the form of an 'all-powerful and observing eye' (*Until the Lions* 71) to narrate women's watching and longing, while in another, a bell is used to signify the spirituality and faith of women praying for their loved ones (115). This Western attempt to visualise poetry from the reader's point of view reflects the politics in Nair's creative writing. Additionally, Nair's act of shaping her poems into varying designs as well as her decoding of layered perspectives within the Mahabharata—both processes approaching myriad diverging techniques—explains her politics of blurring differences, as the writer believes that “We contain multitudes within ourselves” (*Zutshi*).

Conclusion

The writers analysed in this chapter are representatives of post-global, international Malayali women migrants, whose migration rates increased after the 1990s, as observed by K. C. Zachariah et al. and discussed in chapter two. This is evidently instilled due to highly educated women of postcolonial Kerala being allured towards transnational migratory possibilities mostly on their own. The social fluidity that has transgressed into a contemporary reality accessible to most of the present-day women of Kerala is further accompanied by media that mould a sense of unity and solidarity among female writers, the result of which is the hike in post-global Malayali creative writings in English. Usha Zacharias, Jaishree Misra, and Karthika Nair share the commonality of

womanhood and their transnational migrant identities, which are accompanied by other specific intersectional affiliations. Their creative expressions on various degrees encapsulate the spirit of ‘new womanhood’ in their writings as well—hypothesised as a myriad variant of Anderson’s imagined community in chapter two. The next chapter encapsulates the inference of this research by comparing, contrasting and formulating deeply the gendered and/or migratory sensibilities of each generation of select female Malayali writers and underscoring how female creative practice from Kerala has carried forth the project of Kerala modernity.

Chapter VII

Women on the Move: Relocating English Writings from Kerala

Malayali women's creative writings in English and the micro-politics of their engagement with Kerala's greater history of gender relations, migration, and the project of colonial modernity in general have been underscored by the re-reading of their lives and creative works alongside. The categorical analysis [carried out by dividing female writers into pre-globalisation and post-globalisation era writers and into those who migrated within and outside India within the initial categorisation] remarks on significant similarities and differences between the four sets of female creatives, arising from several factors such as the difference in the generation in which they developed their identities and began publishing, the extent of migration and exposure they have received, and their Western educational background. It, thereby, becomes pivotal to compare and contrast various eras of Malayali women's creative engagements and the sensibilities that different groups of writers projected so as to get a macrocosmic picture of how women writers have negotiated and established their role in the project of Kerala's developmental modernity. This chapter conceptualises female creative writings from Kerala as a holistic event and attempts to trace the similarities and differences among various categories of writers within it through three modes of comparative analysis: 1) between pre-globalisation era writers who migrated within India and who migrated abroad; 2) between post-globalisation era writers who migrated within India and who migrated abroad; and 3) between pre-globalisation era writers and post-globalisation era writers, respectively.

While migration of some kind is one of the commonalities that connect female creative writers of English from Kerala, the reason for their migration across generations, however, can be seen varying. Most of the early Malayali women writers from the pre-

globalisation era did not choose to migrate on their own; instead, they were forced to do so by the male figures in their lives, as exemplified by Kamala Das, Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander, although Alexander is a minor exception due to her own decision to remain in America. This phenomenon is a direct historical reflection of what Zachariah et al. pointed out: that women normally followed men in early Kerala's outmigration trend. Women writers like Kamala Das, who followed her parents' and later her husband's migration to major Indian cities, can be seen as a direct aftermath of industrialisation, urbanism and the growing trend of shifting to cities for job opportunities during the 1930s and 1940s. The sudden surge of voluntary migration occurred after the 1990s, when globalisation and modernity helped women attain education and freedom, as a result of which more women began to aspire to cross-cultural travel. Post-globalisation era writers, including Usha Zacharias, Anupama Raju and Smitha Sehgal, among several others, are generally products of such a phenomenon that in turn advanced Kerala modernity. The disparity in this migratory pattern of women—with early women being mostly dependent-on/following men in migration and post-global women showing a progressive or rather self-driven and autonomous mobility—evidences Kerala's transition from the 'pre-modern' to the modern, which again is an aftermath of the colonial episode and the liberating forces it brought along with it, including the Western education system.

Most of the female writers in focus commonly exhibit an autobiographical or semi-autobiographical nature through their creative writings and can be seen capturing the idea of female mobility, which is under apartheid on various ranges. This proves how the idea of the feminine is incomplete without the craving for emancipation and the idea of travel, and also how the idea of social mobility is intrinsically woven into the matrix of women's existence. Malayali women's creative engagements in English, thereby,

become writings from the margins, wherein women overcome years of social confinement to explore geographical and otherwise ‘many lands,’ that prompt them towards creative expression.

Pre-globalisation Writers: Internal vs. External Migration

This category of writers generally shares the commonality of projecting the struggle against patriarchy that they had encountered in their age, which is relatively stringent and inflexible compared to contemporary times. Writers, including Kamala Das, Anna Sujatha Mathai, and Manorama Mathai, jointly expose how regressive and repressive their migration episodes were, led by either the father or the husband. However, they univocally also opine that migratory episodes were in fact one of the reasons for their creative writing. In contrast to this, Meena Alexander is a writer who constantly expresses her trauma of exile, but the writer nevertheless agrees with how various places have moulded her into a holistic one. Pre-globalisation era female writers mostly vocalise about the domestic and familial struggles that they had to encounter, suggesting the relatively rigid family order that Malayali women were trapped in.

Kamala Das, through her poems and short fiction, constantly problematises how women face intersectional and multi-layered subjugations, starting from the very roots of their families. In many instances, she opts for a confessional, rebellious and vehement tone to address universal issues associated with womanhood, often resorting to protests and open attacks. Anna Sujatha Mathai discusses similar problems caused by patriarchal agencies, but in a lighter or rather mild tone. Nevertheless, Anna Sujatha Mathai can be seen embracing her femininity and exploring more deeply how myriad forms of womanhood co-exist in society, unlike Das, who rather regards her gendered position as a site of violence and oppression. Manorama Mathai, on the other hand, also underscores women’s issues by confronting the male-dominated order, but through a broader canvas

inclusive of women characters from around the world, which reflects the writer's own transnational experiences as a woman. Pre-globalisation writers like Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander constantly bring to the forefront the issues of migrant women and how immigrant women negotiate and navigate alien lands, as elaborated in detail in chapter four. This gendered outlook relating to 'un-belongingness,' or displacement, recurs in the writings and testimonies of all the pre-global writers. However, Leela Devi stands out as an exception with not just any available documentation of her life and career but also with her thematic concern and co-authorship with her husband. While almost all other early writers set out a feminist critique of Indian as well as transnational spaces, Leela Devi fixates her creative landscape on pre-modern Kerala wherein gender issues were not discussed in the mainstream. However, her fiction exposes women's position in the public sphere of early Kerala society and thereby becomes a socio-cultural documentation of pre-modern gender relations in the place.

The spatial settings of creative works, as well as the idea of space, differ among pre-global writers themselves. While nostalgia for homeland/Kerala is a recurring theme in the creative writings of nearly all pre-globalisation era writers, the degree to which they express attachment or detachment varies significantly. Kamala Das often adopts a critical stance on patriarchy for uprooting her from her home, a sentiment carried forth by writers like Anna Sujatha Mathai. While Das's works reflect her love, reverence and sense of loss for her home, the writer also opines that Kerala society is extremely restrictive and that migration enabled her to make a world of her own. Anna Sujatha Mathai and Meena Alexander are critical of the adversities they faced as migrants, but Manorama Mathai transcends her idea of spatiality to the physical realities of transnational places and attempts to portray both the pros and cons of migrant lives. The idea of cityscapes—both within India and outside—comes as repeated imagery in the

works of Kamala Das, Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander, accounting for their migratory patterns. The theme of ambivalence, or inability to place oneself in a specific locality, occasionally lurks around in the works of these writers, again caused by their multiple geo-cultural swaps. However, Leela Devi's creative landscape is devoid of cities or any elements of modernity as such, while thoroughly located in Kerala of the old order, as discussed in chapter three.

Pre-globalisation era writers like Anna Sujatha Mathai, and at times Kamala Das, frequently oppose or rather sceptically observe the socio-political transformation of the society into a modern one. While they are driven by fear of agents that bring in modernity, Manorama Mathai can often be seen opting for a rather more balanced view on change in the social climate. Pre-globalisation writers in general—whether migrated within or abroad—are overtly political in their writings. They portray the complex issues and dichotomies present in Indian/world politics during the times, accounting for the politically active and volatile temperament of the era. Reflections of the political upheavals that occurred around the time in their works prove the transnational exposure and awareness they received, as elaborately explored in chapters three and four. While Kamala Das transcends physical boundaries into the imaginative to politicise issues of people, writers like Anna Sujatha Mathai, Manorama Mathai and Meena Alexander, in varying degrees, write about such particular events as people who are part of those happenings [the writers being transnational migrants themselves].

Post-globalisation Writers: Internal vs. External Migration

Female writers in English from Kerala in the post-globalisation era are larger in number relative to the previous age, which can be read alongside the increase in social mobility, access to English education, and freedom for women after the 1990s. While most of the Malayali women writers from the pre-globalisation age have had migrations

that were urged and initiated not by the writers themselves but were dictated by male factors, post-global Malayali women/writers mostly show affinity towards a self-motivated migratory pattern. This aligns with the understanding that modernity is highly connected to the mobility of people, and gendered travel discourses additionally strengthen the project. Most of the female writers from the post-globalisation era possess an academically sound familial background, including Arundhati Roy, Karthika Nair, Susan Visvanathan, and Smitha Sehgal. They had well-educated parents who were the reason for the writers' interest in literature and language.

While Malayali women writers of the previous generation focused more on women-centric narratives, those from the post-globalisation era, like Anita Nair, vouch that their works are male-centric as well while basically writing about female narratives. Nevertheless, this category of writers, following the paths initiated by the previous group, continues to use the English language to weave tales of womanhood through their creative writings, thereby inadvertently forming a collective. Post-globalisation era writers who migrated abroad, like Usha Zacharias and Karthika Nair, often attempt to capture women's lived experiences in transnational and metaphorical spaces, in contrast to writers who migrated within India, like Shinnie Antony and Anita Nair, who mostly limit the scope of their protagonists. All the while Karthika Nair [who is a transnational migrant] and Smitha Sehgal [an intra-national migrant] both attempt to rethink and revoice ancient mythological/epic tales from a gender-inclusive perspective, hinting that regardless of their place of migration, writers tend to be connected to their cultural past and roots in the culture of orality in India.

Female writers who migrated within India and migrated abroad from the post-globalisation age both show an affinity towards capturing the contradictions within Kerala, as in the works of Arundhati Roy and Jaishree Misra. While writers who stayed

within India exhibit a relatively cynical view on elements of modernity like Anita Nair, writers who migrated abroad like Usha Zacharias can be seen presenting a rather inclusive view on social change and developments. Nevertheless, a majority of writings of both groups carry the idea of 'home' and homelessness in them, accounting for the uprooting and displacement they had in life. Additionally, most of the writers from the post-globalisation era adhere to the conception that a woman should leave behind her comfort space and lead a life alone, dismantling all the societal barriers, so as to truly find herself. While writers like Arundhati Roy and Anupama Raju opine a rather detached emotion regarding their homeland, Kerala, Anita Nair, from the same group of writers [having migrated within], aligns with sensibilities of nostalgia and attachment that the previous generation of writers upheld. Shinie Antony [an internal migrant writer] and Karthika Nair [a transnational migrant writer], however, share a similar opinion regarding Kerala as an ambivalent space in their mind: a place that hinders growth and freedom. Susan Visvanathan, however, reveres her homeland and mirrors Anita Nair's take on Kerala.

Post-global Malayali women writers can be collectively seen as instrumentalising the English language through their creative works to portray and voice their personal level of politics, other than being too specific about capturing the socio-political events. While writers like Anita Nair and Anupama Raju believe that a writer need not necessarily present their ideological position through their writings, writers like Arundhati Roy are overtly known for their political stance and activism. Post-global writers who migrated abroad, like Karthika Nair, fail to situate themselves in a geographic and existential reality and thereby project the politics of un-belongingness, as reflected in the works of Jaishree Misra as well. However, Karthika Nair regards herself as an extremely political writer, vouching that literature cannot be devoid of politics.

Jaishree Misra, through her opinion as well as writings, presents an ambivalent stance regarding this, as she expresses her disbelief in the transformative power of literature. Thereby, the idea of politics in the post-globalisation writings can be seen as developed into various strands, regardless of writers who have had internal migrations and transnational migrations.

Pre-globalisation vs. Post-globalisation Writers

While writers of the pre-globalisation era focused mostly on individual female characters dealing with the patriarchy of various grades all alone, those from the post-globalisation age tend to focus more on a collective sense of womanhood, as seen in the writings of Anita Nair. Nevertheless, writers like Shinnie Antony mirror the previous era's writers who mostly treat the personal as it is. This shows that when we historically look into the English creative works of Malayali women, post-globalisation era writers extend their scope and sphere of representing women and their mobility issues of various kinds. While writings of Kamala Das, Anna Sujatha Mathai and Meena Alexander mostly present autobiographical/semi-autobiographical narratives [the way that pre-globalisation writers chose to critique the patriarchy that attacks them on a personal level], writers like Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Jaishree Misra, Shinnie Antony, Usha Zacharias and Anupama Raju often deal with the same by universalising women's intersectional issues and by capturing women's issues from myriad occasions.

Moreover, writers of the first generation like Kamala Das, Leela Devi, Anna Sujatha Mathai and Meena Alexander can be seen vocalising more about their inability to break free from the shackles that have prevented them from being mobile and dynamic. The tone used by these writers ranges from representing the social picture of gender relations as such [as in the case of Leela Devi] to a violent and vehement tirade against the anomalies of patriarchy and a helpless portrayal of systemic personal

oppression. However, writers of the post-globalisation era poignantly mark the recurring idea of women on the move, suggesting that women's mobility and relative freedom are an accomplished or rather real possibility in the contemporary age. More often than not, their female characterisations are much bolder, daring and questioning when compared to the mostly projected inescapability by writers of the previous generation. Apart from that, post-globalisation era writers commonly project semi-autobiographical narratives of a woman writer caught amidst various intersectional issues, as is recurrently present in the works of writers like Anupama Raju and Anita Nair. This can be seen as their psychological liberation in dealing more genuinely with their day-to-day struggles, compared to the hindered rendition of pain and suffering common to writings from the early generation. Moreover, female writers in the post-globalisation era occasionally use varieties of literary techniques and meta-thematic approaches, as in the structural experimentation by poets like Karthika Nair and novelists like Anita Nair and Anupama Raju. Pre-globalisation writers like Manorama Mathai, Anna Sujatha Mathai and Kamala Das, however, limited their experimental scope, accounting for the rigidity of literary endeavours during the times.

While Malayali women of the pre-globalisation era express a kind of nostalgia for Kerala through their creative writings [as in the works of Kamala Das, Anna Sujatha Mathai and Meena Alexander], writers of the post-globalisation age diverge in their physical and psychological conception of homeland. For instance, Shinie Antony's narratives are mostly anti-placement in nature; Anupama Raju uses the strategy of not fixating or even naming places; Anita Nair repeatedly reimagines 'the new woman' and her spatial possibilities; and writers like Arundhati Roy openly state their sceptical stance on the duality of Kerala's reality. Manorama Mathai from the pre-globalisation age can be noted for deviating slightly from the trend, as she explores both the negative as well

as positive/emancipatory aspects of travel, migration and modernity for women, unlike her other contemporaries who mostly express their distrust and disdain of the cityscapes and modern world in general. Usha Zacharias, similar to Manorama Mathai from the early generation, situates her narratives within multiple geo-cultural locations. Writers like Jaishree Misra and Arundhati Roy can be seen constantly opening up a negotiating space or debatable platform regarding the socio-political order in Kerala. While there is Kerala or any geographical/topographical specificity in the backdrop of pre-globalisation era writings, post-globalisation era Malayali women writers digress widely in their literary landscape, owing to their multiple geographical affiliations in life that they acknowledge or rather accept.

Pre-globalisation era Malayali writers used the English language for openly discussing the highly volatile political climate during the age, like Kamala Das and Anna Sujatha Mathai, who constantly revisited the turmoil happening around. However, writers from the post-globalisation era exhibit rather generalised politics through their writings, such as reflections on changing social situations, as in the works of Anita Nair and Arundhati Roy. The politics of these writers are often more personal in tone, as they address their gendered experiences and existence as political beings.

A detailed inference conducted on these writers and their works primarily proves that a historical categorisation of female creatives of English from Kerala is possible—which was one of the primary attempts behind this research—and that there are significant similarities and differences between these writers as well as their creative productions published over time. In doing so, it is understood that female writers, regardless of time and the type of migration they have been a part of, have been resisting patriarchy on various levels through their creative praxis. It is also notable that women writers were able to counter male dominance largely through the emancipatory

possibilities that migration afforded them. The spatial concerns, depictions, and realities of these writers vary; for instance, they are specific in the pre-globalisation context and broader in the post-globalisation context. The chapter has also looked into how, as a result of their various kinds of migration across various time periods, they have forged a political and social identity of their own, which gets evidently reflected in their works as well. The attempt here has been to understand the sensibilities projected by each category into which the research primarily classifies writers into. Representative writers and their works have been compared and contrasted to determine the temperament of writers who underwent migration [internal/external] during various ages [pre-globalisation/post-globalisation]. Chapter eight of the thesis proposes future recommendations on this research, suggesting ways in which this study can further be extended, developed or made more inclusive in the future.

Chapter VIII

Recommendations

Malayalis' creative engagements in English open up myriad research possibilities to academia, with its post-global growth and flourishing across various branches. This study has been carried out through a gendered lens of reading Kerala writings through female creatives. Such a unified identification and categorisation of male writers of English from Kerala has also not yet happened. A historical identification and placement of male writers in the context of Kerala's developmental modernity is thereby another possible area of research. This study can be again extended through theoretical speculation on migration and masculinity studies so as to underscore how the idea of 'the masculine' and that of gender relations in Kerala have historically occurred, which resulted in a predominantly male-dominant intelligentsia. This research has focussed solely on creative writers, while there are immense number of non-fiction writers with Kerala roots who writes in English. Such a study is also possible that focusses on the prose writings from Kerala. Further, comparative research between lives and creative works of male and female writers is also possible, which would provide a more inclusive gendered reading of Kerala's migration history and modernity.

While this study focussed solely on creative writings in English, a similar juxtaposing of Malayalam and English writers/writings is also possible, to comprehensively research Kerala as a landscape and its literary productions holistically. Further, this research has limited its scope to only the creative writings [poetry, short fiction and novels] of mainstream, or rather representative, female writers. Kerala's developmental modernity can also provide a backdrop for an expanded exploration of emerging voices in its English literary production. This research can be expanded to bilingual writers as well, so as to understand how prospects of linguistic navigation are

being used by these writers in expanding the project of Kerala modernity. Individual studies on often-neglected female creatives from Kerala, for instance, Anna Sujatha Mathai, Usha Zacharias and Susan Visvanathan, are also possible as a focused extension of this research. An ecological reading of Kerala writing in English can be a further possibility, looking at how evolving landscapes and sustainability of places and geographies connect with land reform narratives in Kerala modernity. Creative writing in English from Kerala, in the post-global and post-pandemic age, is undergoing fast-paced growth, and the same demands scholarly engagement on new diverging trends in the digital era as well.

Chapter IX

Conclusion

The central hypothesis of this research was that migration has been one of the major catalysts that has caused Malayali women to begin creative productions, in addition to the acquiring of English education—all of which are evident aftermaths of colonial modernity. This study began with identifying a research gap in academia: a lack of major academic attempts to study the history of female creative praxis from Kerala, despite scattered research on individual authors or certain sets of authors. In doing so, the research has proven that such a historical identification, categorisation and analysis of writers is possible, and for that, migration has been identified as a common occurrence that connects the lives and writings of these women. Despite this, academia has viewed Malayali women writers and their works as merely a part of the larger canon of Indian writings in English; however, this study has highlighted that the writings of women from Kerala possess a distinct identity, separate from being a subset of the broader corpus of Indian literature in English or diaspora literature in general. This tradition that the women writers have forged took time and has traversed ages to reach the contemporary age—a historical mapping and analysis of which were carried out in the previous chapters.

The first chapter of the thesis proposed an introduction, explaining the major research problem and hypothesis behind this research. The chapter has traced the history and evolution of Kerala writing in English with just male writers during the initial generation and has located the presence and role of female creatives within the phenomenon. This historical identification and placement were pivotal to assess Kerala's creative engagement in English as a holistic and independent occurrence, rather than being a mere part of the greater Indian writings in English. An outward analysis of

female creatives from Kerala has been helpful to strengthen the hypothesis of the research that migration has been a decisive factor that has caused Malayali women to engage creatively through English. The chapter also fulfilled one of the subsidiary objectives of this research—to categorise female creative writers of English from Kerala—and divides writers into four major sets: pre-globalisation era writers who migrated within India, pre-globalisation era writers who migrated abroad, post-globalisation era writers who migrated within India and post-globalisation era writers who migrated abroad. Thereby, the chapter places Malayali women writers of English and their creative works as having expanded and continuing to do so with the project of Kerala modernity.

The Malayali women writers categorised in the first chapter needed to be situated within the broader history of Kerala's migration to further analyse their role in Kerala modernity through their creativity. Chapter two of the thesis traced a detailed history of Malayali migration with a focus on women's emigration from the place. Further, to attempt an in-depth exploration of the writers and their writings in the subsequent chapters, chapter two also set out to explain and ground theoretical speculations that connect gender and migratory experiences that have been used in the study. It is the writers' multiple affiliations pertaining to their migrant existences that prompt one to read them through the frameworks of the intersectional approach as proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, ideas pertaining to women in exile developed by Gloria Anzaldúa, speculations on amalgamation of cultures in migration by Édouard Glissant and ideas on migration and creativity that Arjun Appadurai has framed. Chapter two explains in detail these theoretical frameworks and signposts on how these can be implemented in the analysis of Malayali women's creative engagements.

Chapters three, four, five, and six have analysed the migratory self, identity formation, life, and creative writings of Malayali women, which are already divided into four categories. The migratory history explained in the second chapter has been pivotal in locating these women creatives, and the theoretical speculations discussed have been employed to decode how gendered experiences, migratory patterns, interactions with ‘many lands’ in life and the politics that all the above factors instilled in these writers work in their creative expression. While chapter three has explored the pre-globalisation era writings of Malayali women who migrated within India, chapter four has analysed pre-globalisation era writings of Malayali women who migrated abroad. Chapter five of the thesis discussed the post-globalisation era creative productions by Malayali women who migrated within India, and chapter six deliberated upon writers of the same generation who migrated abroad. Personal interviews with many authors as well as their family and acquaintances were conducted and used to underscore the hypothesis and major research objectives. These chapters have been significant in explaining the key argument of this research that the creative writings of Malayali women are intrinsically connected to their migration stories and their long journey of negotiating their identities with others and with themselves.

Chapter seven of the thesis has provided a detailed inference on the categorisation and analysis of Malayali women’s creative writings by synthesising the findings from the process. This has been carried out through the analytical method of comparing and contrasting the lives, sensibilities and creativity of these writers. The chapter presents the major findings of this research and strongly asserts that, regardless of age or migratory patterns among various categories of Malayali women, they all predominantly project a unique and common identity as Malayalis. The chapter also positioned these writers as individual and autonomous occurrences that do not have

much to do with the wider corpus of Indian literature in English—a generalised umbrella category into which Malayali writers were previously contained. Chapter eight of the thesis has proposed further recommendations and scope for future research in this area. The chapter also suggests that the fast-paced growth of Kerala writing in English, especially in the post-globalisation and post-pandemic age, invites continual scholarly attention to new authors and trends in Kerala writing.

The research thereby presents an alternative to identifying Kerala's creative productions in English as having been formulated from the region's unique socio-cultural and political history—an attempt that has not yet happened in academia. The historical identification, categorisation and analysis of these writers have been instrumental in documenting the often neglected and unvoiced history of Malayali women's engagement in the mainstream public domain through their creative engagements. Nevertheless, the research adheres to the standpoint that Malayali women have had a poignant role in the socio-cultural progress of the place, and a group of English-educated, well-read female intelligentsia ventured into creative praxis, thereby participating in Kerala's engagement with modernity. The research—a pioneering one of that kind that cross-reads Kerala modernity and gendered English writings from the place—introduces a research area to academia with immense futuristic possibilities. The study has not only introduced an often-neglected area but has also offered new/alternative frameworks for understanding regional and diasporic literary histories.

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