Remembering Toni Morrison (1931-2019)

"What’s the world for you if you can’t make it up the way you want it?"

VOICES AND SILENCE
DISCOURSES ON DEMOCRACY
With warm, respectful feelings, we dedicate this issue of the Malayalam Literary Survey to Toni Morrison (Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison), the Nobel Laureate and towering novelist of the black experiences, who passed away on 5 August 2019, leaving all her boiling words for us and the generations to come to visit and revisit, to evaluate and re-evaluate, and also to imbibe the burning human values she lived and used her language for. She raised her words to the face of the world to see its wounded mind reflected in and to provoke to mend. She knew death is common to all. But, she wrote: “We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives.” She reminded the world, the writers across the world in particular, all through her life, that the time was out of joint and that it was the time to act. She believed that the world is
bruised and bleeding. She warned us: “There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.” And she continued: “This is precisely the time when artists go to work - not when everything is fine, but in times of dread.”

Feeling, with Shakespeare’s Hamlet, that time is out of joint, and yearning for some solace, some soothing balm, we focus this issue of the Malayalam Literary Survey on the sounds and silences in the Malayalam Literature, concentrating on the writings of a few bruised and bleeding occasions in the past. Sounding the unfathomable fathom of the sounds and the silences in any literature, the profound writings of the times of troubles and turmoils in the society in particular, demands exhaustive and sympathetic understanding of the socio-political, economic and cultural undercurrents of the time, along with a deep insight into not only aesthetics but into human mysteries given expression to in words also. That any comprehensive and scholarly explorations happened in any given time may be revisited and questioned or sometimes even totally rejected, giving new readings, when social scenario changes through times, is only quite natural. Withstanding varied tests of times, when a particular text yields new readings in different ages, it deserves to be qualified as a classic. This underscores that such great literary creations will live through ages challenging critical acumen of generations yet to be born to fathom the unknown depths in the silences and sounds they are pregnant with.

Dr K. P. Mohanan
Secretary & Editor
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The implications of Bakhtin’s Theory of Polyphony: A casual encounter

Dr K. M. Sherrif

One of Mikhail Bakhtin’s most fundamental contributions to literary theory is his concept of polyphony or dialogism. Bakhtin borrowed the term from music in which it meant the playing of more than one note at a time. For Bakhtin it meant the presence of more than one voice in a narrative as opposed to the presence of the single, monologic, authorial voice.

Mikhail Bakhtin is probably one of the most discussed literary theorists of the Twentieth Century. He is often described as the most important figure in Twentieth Century Soviet literary/cultural theory. Although he has been often constructed in the West as a postmodern theorist who left the Marxist paradigms behind him, many of his works indicate that he had mostly been working
Bakhtin observed that individuals are in a process of constant dialogue with other individuals and with their universe of discourse. This appears to be a commonplace observation. But Bakhtin notes that it was Dostoevsky who first created a fully blown world of dialogism or polyphony in his fiction.

under the Marxist legacy he inherited. Of course, he had fallen out with the Stalinist regime - to the extend of being briefly exiled to Kazakhstan. In fact, his debates with the Soviet theoreticians and the Minister of Culture Lunacharsky show that he often took a patently anti-Marxist line in some of his writings. His description of the carnival as revolution in *Rabelais and his World* turns Lenin’s famous observation “revolutions are the festival of the oppressed and exploited”¹ on its head.

One of Bakhtin’s most fundamental contributions to literary theory is his concept of polyphony or dialogism, which is explained in detail in his monumental work *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*.² Bakhtin borrowed the term from music in which it meant the playing of more than one note at a time. For Bakhtin it meant the presence of more than one voice in a narrative as opposed to the presence of the single, monologic, authorial voice.
Dialogism is the opposite of ‘monologism’ (single-thought discourse; also termed ‘homophony’ – single-voice) which Bakhtin thought was typical of much traditional writing. In monologism, one transcendental perspective or consciousness pervades the entire text bringing under its fold all the significations, ideologies and values. Anything extraneous to this perspective is considered insignificant. Monologism effects a closure, masquerading itself as the ultimate word.

As Wayne C Booth points out in his introduction to the English translation of Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, the most fundamental position of Bakhtin was in discerning that the novel was the most suitable genre for the play of polyphony, for the different voices in a narrative to engage in dialogue. This is due to the convergence of a number of factors, the narrative being in prose for one, the broader canvas of the novel being another.

Bakhtin mentions the particular affinity that Dostoevsky displayed for the dramatic form, which might be at the core of the notion of dialogism or polyphony - voices engaging in conversation or dialogue, voices including the voice of the author. Bakhtin calls Dostoevsky’s novels ‘staged dialogues’  

He goes on to say that Dostoevsky realized the multifariousness of human experience and vision and tried to present them, not monologically as the single vision of the author but as a coexistence of contradictions. Nonetheless, Bakhtin also notes that “drama by its very nature is alien to polyphony” and that “it cannot contain multiple worlds”. Thus dialogism, although visualized as a property of drama is better realized in fiction.

Bakhtin observed that individuals are in a process of constant dialogue with other individuals and with their universe of discourse. This appears to be a commonplace observation. But Bakhtin notes that it was Dostoevsky who first created a fully blown world of dialogism or polyphony in his fiction. While there is no point in interrogating the legitimacy of this observation, it has to be
pointed out that Bakhtin, at best, had access only to the European masters of fiction and drama like Rabelais and Shakespeare. He had no idea of the narrative traditions of India, China or the Arab world. Of course, Bakhtin goes along with Lunacharsky in recognizing that dialogism/polyphony can be found in the works of certain writers of the past like Shakespeare, Rabelais and Cervantes too, he reminds the reader that it is in Dostoevsky that it reaches its culmination.

Ideologically committed works cannot, by their nature be polyphonic or dialogic. There is an overwhelming voice/point of view that predominates the text. It can be the author’s or of a character/a group of characters’. His observation that polyphony is present in the works of Shakespeare, Rabelais and Cervantes, as it is in the works of Dostoevsky, because they lived in situations of social conflict is significant. The unity of philosophical design which is characteristic of many authors keeps out polyphony from its domain. Bakhtin would go so far as to say that “the utterly incompatible elements comprising Dostoevsky’s material are distributed among several worlds and several autonomous consciousnesses. . .”

It must be noted that for Bakhtin the multiple voices in the text co-exist as equals, not in a dialectical thesis-antithesis relationship. They are “spread out in one plane, as standing alongside or opposite one another, as constant but not merging or as hopelessly contradictory, as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices or as their unceasing and irreconcilable quarrel.” The absence of dialectics in polyphony, the crucial element in Bakhtin’s theory is

Writers like Dostoevsky appear with their polyphony in times of conflict, when voices are pitted, one against the other. In a sense the conflicts and contradictions of modernizing, industrializing Russia produced a writer like Dostoevsky.
often overlooked. The common tendency is to look for a subjugated voice, or a set of subjugated voices that can be visualized as occupying a position from which it/they can subvert the dominant voice. Much of literary criticism, often without invoking Bakhtin, seems to take this line.

The expulsion of dialectics from the domain of polyphony is indicative of Bakhtin’s politics. An unending polyphony can simply become a cacophony which steers clear of any liberative agenda or action, which accounts for Lunacharsky’s and Gorkhy’s critique of Bakhtin’s theory (Bakhtin observes that Lunacarsky was speaking on behalf of Gorkhy). The theory of polyphony also incorporates a kind of opening, a guard against closure. The heroes of Dostoevsky’s novels are not finalized characters. There is a way in which they are evolving - in a polyphonous environment. The polyphony of the environment is projected on to the heroes. In this sense one can say the polyphony is not only without, but also within.

If the presence of multiple voices is itself problematic,
‘hearing’ them is even more so. It is in particular historical contexts, and for listeners who are in the thick of things, that many voices become audible, as they did in Dostoevsky’s Russia, or in Shakespeare’s England. Quite often, as Bakhtin himself has pointed out, the multiple voices are mistaken for elements in a grand unity of design, as happened to Dostoevsky’s works in the hands of some of his contemporaries.

Ironically, the appearance of writers like Dostoevsky is quite in keeping with the Marxist perceptions on the individual and society, as Bakhtin observes without actually referring to the Marxist view. Writers like Dostoevsky appear with their polyphony in times of conflict, when voices are pitted, one against the other. In a sense the conflicts and contradictions of modernizing, industrializing Russia produced a writer like Dostoevsky. He would not probably have appeared at another historical juncture when conflicts and contradictions had not reached polyphonic proportions or had been temporarily resolved or lulled.

The possibilities criticism which invokes polyphony is immense, for instance, in Malayalam fiction, which has refracted, in a big way, Kerala’s cultural complexity and the transformation of Kerala society over a period of more than a century. It is tempting to pit the voice of Govindnunni against that of Madhavan, representing two opposing streams of colonial modernity, in Chandu Menon’s Indulekha. It can also be a pleasurable exercise to watch Kunjupathumma’s identity politics subverting Basheer’s grand narrative of
Malayali nationalism in *Ntuppaappaakk Oranendarnnu*. (My Grandfather had an Elephant). With equal vigour one can talk about the silenced voice of Pareekkutty in *Chemmeen* (Thakazhi), or the futile attempt to silence Nijam Ali in *Khasaakkinte Ithihaasam*. (O.V. Vijayan). In a sense what happens in such critical forays is the extension of Bakhtin’s theoretical framework: Out-Bakhtining Bakhtin!

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Literature and the people

Dr Sudhakaran C. B.

Can we consider literature as the people’s voice? Or, to put it differently, does literature represent the people of a particular society or societies and their culture? The author examines these points with reference to two examples from Malayalam literature selected in a random fashion from different periods in its history.

The question, “What is literature?” has been a perennial one debated and discussed since the days when the artistic category of literature was written and read. Not only this, but the related questions like, “how is literature related to life and reality?” “how does it affect human beings and society?”, “what is the role of the writer?” and the like have also been bones of contention since the times when the written word was read and circulated. (A distinction has to be made here between the “literature of power” and the “literature of knowledge” as done
by the nineteenth century English writer, Thomas De Quincey who pointed out that the former “moves” and latter “teaches” because the written word is here meant to connote literature.) The earliest records of such debates and discussions have been of the ancient classical days of Athenian culture. Perhaps the earliest of the questions related to literature was raised by the Greek poet Aristophanes who makes the poet Aeschylus raise the question, “Pray, tell me on what particular ground a poet should claim admiration?” in his controversy with Euripides in the Frogs. And, the answer he makes Euripides respond with is interesting in more ways than one: “If his art is true, and his counsel sound; and if he brings help to the nation, by making men better in some respect.” What this suggests, obviously, is that there is and ought to be an audience for literature and it affects them somehow or other. The whole issue, needless to say, was taken up by those who came later. It is common knowledge that it was Plato who tried to explain such issues and, his commentary in the Republic and Phaedrus on art and artists in general and literature and writers in particular is too well-known to be explicated and commented upon here. Nevertheless, a brief reference to
Plato's views becomes important because it is generally considered the *locus classicus* of all discussions on the nature and function of literature.

It will be interesting to look at this relationship from a slightly different perspective: can we consider literature as the people's voice? Or, to put it differently, does literature represent the people of a particular society or societies and their culture? It will be my endeavour in this brief note to answer these questions in the affirmative with reference to two examples from Malayalam literature selected in a random fashion from different periods in its history. This voice, it has to be pointed out at the outset itself, cannot be a unified or collective voice representing the whole of the society but it can be that of a section, any section for that matter, of society.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century are a kind of watershed in the sociopolitical history of Kerala when the Malayali was slowly opening his/her eyes to the dawn of the modernity, obviously a colonial modernity. The Keralite society was literally awakened to imbibe the spirit of renaissance and reform themselves by casting away the skin of a rotten “tradition” and to instill in themselves the spirit of rationality and humanism by the social reformers Chattampi Swamikal, Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Dr. Palpu, Kumaran Asan and the like. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* (1889), considered to be the first novel in Malayalam, was written at such a time when the design for a new modern society was being formulated. (This is not to forget the view that it is not *Indulekha* but *Kundalatha* [1887] by Appu Nedungadi which is the first work in Malayalam which can be regarded as a “novel”, despite the weaknesses in the structure of its plot and its feeble characters.) *Indulekha* could be said to represent the voice of the people who belonged to the above mentioned period of transition in Keralite society debating, discussing, and passionately seeking for a paradigmatic change in the sociopolitical system of those feudal days. I am not
suggesting that *Indulekha* speaks the voice of the reform movements and their leaders who were mainly from the then considered “lower castes”. My contention is that the novel speaks the voice of the “upper” Nair caste of those days to which Chandu Menon belonged.

The novel, in no small measure, gives voice to the internal problems which have been brewing in the Nair community with regard to family property and inheritance rights, and the crude system of *sambandham* in which the men (elderly men, as a rule) of the Namboodiri community were allowed to enjoy marital relationship with the Nair girls without attachment of any familial responsibilities. This was a period in which “Internal differences, within the Nayar community, over marriage and inheritance, were challenging the authority of the family elders [karanavar] and the caste elites alike” (Arunima 274). Added to this was the ire they attracted from the “lower castes” of those days.

“The Nayars” and the Namboodiri Brahmins were facing an increasing amount of opposition from their tenants and lower caste dependents” (ibid). The tension existing between the two upper castes, Namboodiris and Nairs, is evident in more ways than one in the novel, especially with regard to the system of *sambandham*, a tension which also turns out to be a generational tension, between the elders and the youngsters. The profligate womanizer, Suri Namboodiri, is made the butt of ridicule by Chandu Menon and his satirical treatment of this character reflects the social tension between the two communities. In the
novel Suri Namboodiri is a forty-five year old who never married from his community but was more interested in “forming alliances with Sudra women” (Chandu Menon 95). That he did not have an attractive figure or demeanour is emphasized by Chandu Menon. This is how he presents Suri Namboodiri:

There was nothing remarkable in his features... When he laughed his mouth stretched from ear to ear, his nose, though not deformed, was far too small for his face, and, instead of walking, he hopped like a crow... When a man of wealth abandons himself entirely to the pursuit (sic) of women, it is unnecessary to expatiate on his other qualities... (Chandu Menon 95-96)

Politically, the end of the nineteenth century is important in the history of India, it being the period when the nationalist spirit was kindled at least among the upper caste communities and the educated middle class in India. *Indulekha* was written only a few years after the formation of Indian National Congress which was, largely, an organization of the educated bourgeois middle class which had a prominent say in national affairs. They claimed to be the voice of India and this voice finds its representation in *Indulekha*, despite the obvious political stance of Chandu Menon in favour of the British and their colonial rule in India. Menon took the position that the English kings and the English government should be the kings and government of India the very way the Norman
Kings became the British Kings and the British Government (S. K. Vasanthan 245). The novel’s protagonist, Indulekha, on the other hand, articulates, in a way, the view of the Indian National Congress which, with its social reformist projects of women’s education and women’s freedom, claimed to be a progressive movement and this spirit of progress is amply demonstrated by her. What is demonstrated through the character of Indulekha is the desire of the Keralite women for education and freedom. One has to appreciate that Chandu Menon gave life to this character at a time when the term feminism was not yet known in India. Through her one hears the voice of a people who were moving slowly but surely from the dark days of feudalism to colonial modernity.

We also hear the voice of the young men of those days in the demand for legislation legalizing monogamous marriage and the outcry for legal intervention in allowing for bilateral inheritance. In socioeconomic terms what these young men of those days were clamouring for was that “the conjugal unit and not the taravad” be considered socially and legally as the primary socioeconomic unit so that younger men could partition their mothers’ property with ease and will their assets to their children” (Arunima 275). This discontent, displeasure and frustration among the young men (and women) of the Nair community in Kerala, leading, at times, to revolt can be seen articulated in Malayalam fiction even of the nineteen forties and fifties which suggests that it took a long time for this practice to be abolished.
Another issue discussed passionately among the educated elites of the day given expression in the novel is westernization/rationalization/anglicization. This is expressly done in the (in)famous eighteenth chapter of Indulekha which is, in fact, an after-dinner discussion on English education and atheism among three Nair men, Madhavan, Indulekha’s fiancé, Govinda Panikkar, Madhavan’s father, a staunch Hindu, and Govindan Kutty, Madhavan’s cousin who is an English educated atheist. (The chapter has been criticized by many since M. P. Paul to be a misfit because it is prosaic and nonfictional, jutting out like a promontory away from the narrative of the novel having nothing to do with the theme of the novel.

This is not the context that calls for an exegesis into the merits/demerits, either of the chapter and its relation to the narrative or the criticisms against it. Suffice it to say that it voices a line of thinking among the learned of those times in Kerala.) The discussion also refers to the relevance of the Indian National Congress which was founded only four years before the novel was written, the question of the need for an agitation against the British for national freedom, the merits and demerits of western/English education and the need for rationality. It is pertinent to note that Krishna Menon, Indulekha’s uncle, though not part of the discussion, insists that she completes her education so that she is enabled to marry a man of her own choice. In short, it can be said without inviting any contention that the issue of the relevance and importance of English education as a civilizing force and a tool of resistance was seriously debated and discussed among the educated in Kerala during the eighteen nineties and that it is these thoughts that voiced by Chandu Menon in the very first novel in Malayalam.

In contrast to Indulekha, what can obviously be labeled a “society’s story” is Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s 1948 novel Randidangazhi (Two Measures). If a bland generalization be allowed, it can be said that Thakazhi was by all counts,
society’s story teller. What we read or hear in most of his novels is literally the voice of the people of the region he lived in, namely the erstwhile Travancore’s coastal region, especially the locality known as Kuttanadu. *Randidangazhi* takes place in an atmosphere saturated with the life word of the Pulaya/Paraya community (the majority of whom belonged to the working class, labouring hard in the vast agricultural lands owned by the landlords of the higher castes) of the nineteen thirties and forties subjected to all forms of exploitation.

We also get the echoes of their earnest desires and hopes to break free from the shackles of such subjection. The exploitation is not just that of socioeconomic and educational segregation but sexual too, this last from the heinous attempts of sexual assault on the women of the lower castes who had to live a life of nightmares during those horrible days. In *Randidangazhi* Chirutha represents the voice of those women whose awareness of the class based and gender based exploitation was instrumental in awakening themselves and their men folk to a sense of emancipation. Today, we may be shocked and surprised to learn that she does not reveal the landlord Pushpavelil Ouseph’s son, Chacko’s efforts to seduce her not just because she is a victim of a social system which was made to believe that the woman’s revelation of such things could only be detrimental to her own honour but also with a view to not letting Koran be killed in a socio-political order wherein the feudal lord was all powerful wielding an unquestionable authority. The value system
that was predominant during those days treated woman irrespective of her caste and class the same way, confining her to a world of darkness: “Be watchful. After a couple of years or so you’ll give birth to a baby. Then you’ll have nothing to worry about, dear. Be tight lipped.” This is the piece of advice Maria gives Chirutha.

Society as a character, society’s story, this is Thakazhi’s novel in a nutshell (Pillai, 403). The tension that existed between the working class and the feudal lord during those days is exemplified in the novel with much expressive vigour in “these vast areas of land where the masters live were lifted up from the waters by the Parayas”, and “If paddy grows that will be taken away by the masters.” It is also worth mentioning that, in contrast to the voice of the educated elite that we hear in Chandu Menon’s Indulekha, what we hear louder in Randidangazhi are the voices of the uneducated labour class, voices of a people represented by Koran, Chirutha, Chathan, and Kalipparayan.

Other forms of literature of the period could also be pointed out to illustrate the argument that literature articulates the voice of the people.

When we move on to the nineteen sixties and seventies and the birth of high modernism it seems that the voice of the people or society becomes increasingly feeble because of the primacy given to the individual thoughts and thought processes of a particular character who gets portrayed as an anti-hero who quarrels with the dominant ideology of society and is an alienated figure whose feelings and experiences of angst get articulated as the predominant theme. In the tension between society and individual that gets artistic articulation it is the latter who overshadows the former. Writers like O.V. Vijayan, Kakkanadan, and M. Mukundan led the way for the modernist writers who followed to chalk out ways and means of their own to delineate what Lukacs labels the “interior monologue” of the protagonist struggling against a hostile society which
is always kept in the background (Lukacs 17). The people that we get to see in the novels of the earlier periods disappear into inconsequenceality and society exists only as an insignificant entity. As Lukacs says, man as the Aristotelian zoon politikon or political animal in constant interaction with society almost completely disappears from the world of these modernist novels (Lukacs 19).

This Lukacsian perspective of the modernist novel could be countered if we accept the Jamesonian theory of “political unconscious” which suggests that any form of art, any cultural product is a “socially symbolic act” in which the society from which it takes its origin is bound to be represented because the seeds of time in which it is produced can be seen sown in various ways in the respective product. Jameson’s theory is founded upon the Marxian concept of “mode of production” which he interprets as a whole way of life of a particular period, and Capital refers to a whole set of socio-economic and politico-cultural relations. In such an interpretation social life is the totality of the various forms and stages of production. This is not to suggest in any way that any mode of production is a monolithic and mono-dimensional one. What Jameson emphasizes is that in each mode of production we can find a dominant force that wields hegemonic power over a set of heterogeneous forces. And, it is the fundamental responsibility of every critic to find out the signs of the respective mode of production from a cultural text. Political unconscious is the absent presence of history, a history which is repressed in narration in a
cultural text. What happens in narration is the repression of history opening up the possibility of a mediation between individual life and social reality. This is so because in the Jamesonian concept history is accessible to us only in a textual form and it is for the readers and the critics to read any cultural text keeping it close to the mode of production of a particular period. Thus conceived, every cultural text can be read to represent symbolically the voice of a society’s basic reality and what Lukacs classifies as nothing but the interior monologue of insipid characters refusing to creatively interact with the society they live in, in the high modernist texts as pointed out above, can be read to represent the voice of the majority of society alienated and reified by the repressive forces of the capitalist mode of production. In other words, the reifying forces of capitalism were not as powerful and repressive during those earlier times as they have been in the high modernist period of the sixties and seventies when they have become more hegemonic. How these forces have worked to keep the voice of the people suppressed needs to be investigated further.

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Temptations of freedom and clutches of despair: Malayalam Literature during the Emergency period

Dr K. M. Anil

During the Emergency period, writers were ready to take up the responsibility of their freedom. They wanted to be free and to articulate their being-in-itself. They did not want to enclose themselves within ‘bad faith.’ In their writings, writers of the period, felt burdened like Christ left to redeem all the sins of humanity.

The state of Emergency in India was a period of both despair and hope for writers. A good corpus of Malayalam literature has been successful in representing the conflicts and ambiguities of the period. Most of the writings shared a sense of awakening among farmers and labourers, who had lain in deep hallucination till then. However, at the same time, they had also shared an unfathomable
anguish regarding the fate of their struggles. Writers of the period put forth a strong critique of the function of state and supported people’s struggles for freedom. At the end, when we assess the balance sheet of the literary attempts of the period, we are left with a tranche of scattered memoirs of an unfulfilled revolution. As Walter Benjamin puts it: ‘To articulate what is past, does not mean to recognize ‘how it really was’. It means to take control of a memory as it flashes in a moment of danger.’ (Ferris, 2008:132). Writers of the Emergency period renewed the spirit of past revolutions, and the sacrificial struggles of an earlier generation to battle their contemporary political hurdles.

Now we live in a more despondent political situation. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the decline of the left and liberals in India, the emergence of Hindutva as a sole power and disastrous conditions created by the new global economy have made the situation worse. It is a moment of danger. So, we are searching for the flashes of memory to overcome the most dangerous moment in our national history. It is the relevance of revisiting the literature of the Emergency period.

The state of Emergency raised the fundamental question of freedom or, in other terms, the question of human existence. It was Sartre who theoretically engaged the basic question regarding the relationship between freedom
and being. For Sartre, consciousness is being-for-itself and by nature it is empty. In other words, consciousness is separated by the emptiness from past and future. The being-for-itself can define itself at any moment. This potency of being is termed as its freedom. In other words, freedom is the heart of being-for-itself. Freedom does not mean to obtain what one has wished, but to determine oneself to wish. Consciousness can determine that what it wishes is more important than the ability to achieve that wish. (Franchi, 2019:1) Sartre says that human beings are not free to not be free. ‘We are condemned to freedom…. thrown into freedom’ he says. Our attempt to avoid our freedom by lying to ourselves is designated as ‘bad faith.’ Here we do not wish to own up our essential freedom. It is through freedom that we continually choose our goal or project and it is this choice that controls the way that we interpret the objects that we deal with in our everyday life.

A conventional explanation of oppression is that it is simply the state when one is held and unable to do that which he wishes for—escape, speak freely etc. But does this have any effect on a human being’s freedom? To Sartre, it does not. Whatever situation that a person may be in, it is impossible for his freedom to be enclosed. Freedom is responsibility. It is the negation of in-itself and assertion of for- itself. Those who do not want to take up the responsibility of freedom, resort to bad faith: it is easier to live our lives if we ignore existential freedom. Hence Sartre’s concept of responsibility is closely linked to his philosophy of freedom. It is the basis for a practical morality and has a specific application for his theory of the responsibility of the writer and, hence of politically committed literature (Sapiro, 2006: 31).

During the Emergency period, writers were ready to take up the responsibility of their freedom. They wanted to be free and to articulate their being-in itself. They did not want to enclose themselves within ‘bad faith.’ In their writings, writers of the period, felt burdened like Christ
left to redeem all the sins of humanity. An irresponsible writer would be a consumer, not a producer. But writers of the Emergency period were producers because they were ready to take up the responsibility of their actions. The condemnation to death and execution of Brasillach during Second World War provoked a debate over the responsibility of the writer in Europe. Brasillach assumed full responsibility for his acts during his trial. A few weeks after Brasillach’s execution, Darien La Rochelle committed suicide, leaving a statement, in which he claimed full responsibility for his acts as an intellectual (Sapiro, 2006:41). As the writers in Europe, the writers in Malayalam also claimed full responsibility for their acts as intellectuals during the Emergency period. Their responsibility was derived from creative freedom.

Literature is an act of communication. Both reading and writing are active discourses. Reading engages the reader who must draw on his or her freedom and own powers of creation to make the work exist. This is the basic nature of literary communication. Both the reader and writer recognize each other’s freedom. The concept of freedom denounces the violence of oppression everywhere it appears. The writer cannot accomplish this political duty by enrolling in a party, for the writer’s responsibility differs from that
of a politician. Writing is a non-violent call to freedom. Malayalam literature during the Emergency period must be treated in this sense of non-violent call.

After the Emergency, now we are living in an almost similar national situation. Similar situations emerge in history which need optimism of the will, though the intellect is pessimistic. Political situations in Italy under the regime of Benito Mussolini that put Antonio Gramsci behind bars, resembles the contemporary political scenario in India. Since we are conquered by media giants, new capitalism and hollow spiritualism, living a revolutionary is an impossible task in our time. Ours is the age of ‘bad faiths’. Somehow, we are reluctant to take up the responsibility of our freedom. But the situation was not so worse during the state of Emergency. Writers and activists had come forward to claim their freedom. They were not ready to mortgage the optimism of their will.

Even as early as the time of the formation of Kerala state, the cultural sphere of Kerala had begun to witness a high esteem for a democratic public sphere. Secular and socialist ideas of the left had enjoyed hegemony in this public sphere. But the vimochanasamaram (1959), led by the communal and feudal forces which aligned together to oust the first communist government, led by EMS, challenged this hegemony. It was the beginning of a new era of extreme conservatism and cultural backlash. It also sowed the seeds of anti-democratic and anti-people ideologies. The much-celebrated modernism in Kerala comprises of many streams of sensibilities that are intertwined with these conservative ideologies. There are certain features that this literary modernism shares as common ground. 1) Anti-progressive and anti-left position. 2) Glorifying the feudal past. 3) Apolitical views that are performative, sometimes taken even to extreme violence. 4) Sharing revivalist ideologies. 5) Fear for people’s movements. 6) Patriarchal world views. The Malayali sensibility that was shaped by progressive movements was replaced by this elite modernism.
After the phase of agrarian revolution, left politics in Kerala encountered a deep crisis both in practice and theory. This ended up as innumerable fissures within the left. In the context of furious theoretical debates, issues of culture and its practices were overlooked. This negligence caused a deep gulf between the sensibilities of the elite and the common man. Pulp / elite literature, commercial/art movies are some binaries created during the period. By this time, Kerala was slowly being converted to a consumer society and ‘culture industry’ made remarkable inroads into their everyday lives. The film industry, television entertainments, pulp fiction and professional theatre occupied the major parts of people’s world of imagination. Cultural movements of the left were not theoretically equipped to fight the danger of this widespread apolitical and melodramatic sensibility nurtured by the culture industry. Literary modernism in Kerala developed the absolute binary ‘artistic/populist’ into a paradigm. They imbibed many western ideas without any order or purpose in a half-baked manner that constructed empty and hollow concepts and techniques. These techniques could not articulate the reality of social dynamics. The renaissance movements in Kerala tried to construct a new social identity for Malayalis. But it remained as an incomplete project because the later social developments took the society in its reverse gear (Ramachandran, 2015:10-35).

Some writers belonging to the extreme left tried to intervene in the sensibility created by literary modernism to draw it towards the left. But the organised left did not take it seriously.
The writings of the Emergency period represent the left lineage of literary modernism (Ravindran, 2002:437). Most of the writers in this group were not celebrities and they discarded such positions deliberately. Their writings appeared in unpopular little magazines which had very short longevity. They kept themselves away from the aura of stardom produced by the culture industry. Writers of Emergency period wanted to create a ‘third world modernism’, intended to replace the elite literary modernism. While literary modernism renounced the realist mode of articulation these writers revisited realism and rejuvenated its spirit in a new fashion.

The story, written by Kovilan, ‘RA’ (a Malayalam alphabet) treats the subject of hunger as it was done by the realists of the earlier generation. Similarly, the story Mallayya written by John Abraham has a linear mode of narration like any realist story. The story Mallayya is written in the background of the Naxalbari Movement. Mallayya, the protagonist of the story, is an agricultural labourer who had basic literacy, and is continuously haunted by Zamindar and police. He wanted to see his son become a graduate and took all the pain to send him to a college. Zamindar, who was illiterate, was not happy with all these developments. Once when Mallayya was away from home his wife was brutally raped and hanged to death. Mallayya’s son and his friends took revenge for this incident, by attacking an associate of the Zamindar, and for that, they were identified as ‘Naxalites’ by the police. Police took Mallayya also into custody and severely tortured him. Later, when he was released, the police told him that his son was absconding to escape from police arrest. Around the same time, someone informed him that his son was killed in a police camp. Mallayya, who was left in darkness, continued waiting for his son. Meanwhile, a film production group approached Mallayya to shoot a film on his life. In the end, the author himself feels repentance on narrating the story of his protagonist. The narration of the story does not follow any
The story ‘Mallayya’ written by John Abraham has a linear mode of narration like any realist story. It is written in the background of the Naxalbari Movement.

A complicated technique typical of, or associated with modernism.

However, it does not mean that all writers of the period opted for realism as their means of articulation. M. Sukumaran and U. P. Jayaraj were the two among these writers who used fantasy or non-realistic techniques to express their strong emotions and reactions. They revolutionized the ‘jargons of spirituality’ established by literary modernism in Malayalam. ‘Allopanishath,’ a story written by Pattathuvila Karunakaran, deals with moral regression, sexual anarchism and apolitical nihilism. The protagonist, who maintains an illicit sexual relationship with his wife’s younger sister, is interested in the Russian Revolution. But the heroine asks him to read Hindu philosophy. Their relationship is coloured with suppressed sexuality. The hero was dejected by the Communist Revolution happened in Kerala. He accuses that it was a brahminical movement that did nothing good for the needy. The story depicts the fate of defeated revolutions and the existential crisis experienced by the subjects involved. The language and style of realism are incapable of dealing with such a topic and hence Pattathuvila draws some techniques of literary modernism to tell the story.

The 1970s was a period of political upheaval at the global level too. Vietnam War, the Cuban revolution, student movements in America and France, black movements etc. gave a strong impetus to the struggles against capitalist systems around the world. In India, following
the Naxalbari movements, many armed struggles broke out at various places including Srikkulam, Mushahari and Bīrbhumi. Growing inflation and economic slowdown shattered the rural life of India. Everywhere, even in the corridors of IITs, Maoist slogans were raised. But state terrorism during Emergency period unleashed all suppressive measures and this new awakening for a total revolution was smashed before it could blossom. Hence the stories of this period share a sense of loss. Similarly, in Kerala, the extreme left movements could not influence the masses and hence it was confined within the limits of middle-class imagination (Ravindran, 2002:440). *Maappusaakshi* by Balachandran Chullikkaat, *Mahabali* by P. Surendran, and *athe kathayute punaraakhyaanam* by U.P. Jayaraj share the ambivalent sensibility of the revolutionary youth hailing from the middle class. ‘Red seventies’ receded from the scene by the end of the Emergency, leaving those youth trapped in loneliness. This loneliness is articulated in the poem *Otuvil njaan ottayaakunnu* by Satchidanandan.

The broken relationships between comrades, lack of mutual trust are some recurring themes treated by writers of the period. N.S. Madhavan’s *Choolaimettile Savangal* depicts an incident in which two comrades meet, even as they doubt each other for their commitment to the movement and revolution. Similarly organized left is seriously criticized in some stories. Gopalan, the protagonist of the story *Eiizhavan* by C. R. Paramesvaran is a character belonging to mainstream left. He gives false promises to people and becomes overweight. He flies to Eastern Europe frequently to get rid of his obesity. Similar sarcastic expressions are abundant in the stories of U.P. Jayaraj and M. Sukumaran. The mainstream left was criticized either from within or from without. N. S. Madhavan, as a writer, was an internal critic.

P. Rajan, an engineering student of Calicut NIT, was arrested by police during the Emergency and taken to
Kakkayam police camp. Later it was reported that Rajan was missing. Rajan’s father Prof. T.V. Eachara Warrier made many appeals to the authorities to reveal the whereabouts of his missing son. The legal battle continued till the end of his life. But the state was too merciless to listen to him. Rajan’s mother lost her mental balance after the incident and never came out of that darkness. This incident shook Malayali’s conscience and it was creatively reproduced in many forms. O.V. Vijayan’s *Kataltheeratu* (on the seashore) is one among them. *Vellaayiyappan*, the protagonist is an everlasting literary monument that brings all agonies of state terrorism to public memory. No political jargons, including nation and liberty, come to his help. The state survives upon the perished generations of *Vellaayiyappan*.

Another remarkable contribution of Vijayan in this regard is the novel *Dharmapuram* (The Saga of *Dharmapurī*). As it was advertised earlier, the novel was to be serialized in *Malayalanaatu* weekly from July 1975. But when the Emergency declared on 25th June it did not materialise. The novel appeared only in 1977, after the lifting of the Emergency. It was also very difficult to find a publisher thereafter. No publisher was ready to take up its publication as the memories of the dark days of the Emergency were still afresh. Publishers were reluctant to bring out the book, also because of its sexual, scatological language and imagery. It found a publisher only in 1985 when the tempers and fears had cooled a little.

The novel is a political satire. The writer targets
the authoritarian rulers in India during the Emergency. The great Prajapathi is the ruler of an imagined nation Dharmapuri but in fact, he is only an obedient of two superpowers. Allegorically Vijayan depicts the vicious circle of power, which spoils both the ruler and the ruled. The protagonist, Prajapathi, in the novel is a power-hungry, greedy president, who is portrayed throughout the novel as eating, defecating or fornicating. The president is only interested in appeasing the needs of his own body and cares little for the welfare of the people. To save the people of Dharmapuri from their oppressive, racist president there comes the mystic Siddhartha. Many reviewers commented that the novel is a satirical depiction of Indira Gandhi’s regime. The central character, Siddhartha, modeled after the illustrious predecessor of the same name, lends supernatural enlightenment to those who are attracted by his enchanting personality.

The novel was translated by the author himself with the title ‘The Saga of Dharmapuri’, published by Penguin in the year 1988. In his review published in Times Literary
Supplement, David Selbourne wrote: “The Saga of Dharmapuri is one of the great works of modern Indian literature. This is dangerous stuff and cut close to the bone. Vijayan’s vision in this novel is near-apocalyptic, this society so rotten to the core that collapse seems inevitable and yet for so long it creakily staggers on. The novel is a mix of myth and all too much realism that criticizes a sclerotic 1970s India—both leadership and citizenry and condemns the self-serving influence of outside powers that undermine any efforts for salvation from within” (Selbourne, 2019:1). The state of Dharmapuri itself could exist just about anywhere in today’s time. Not only in this novel but also in stories like The Foetus, The Wart, The Examination and Oil, Vijayan returns to the experiences of Emergency. About this he says in an interview: “I kept them in cold storage, until the end Emergency. I looked at tyranny in various forms, one as an organic quantity as in Oil, then as an allegory as in ‘The Foetus’ and ‘The Wart’ and as a comedy in ‘The Examination.’” In another interview Vijayan explained the revulsion or disgust which was the goal of the novel ‘The Saga of Dharmapuri’: “I was in search of the ultimate verbal obscenity because the objects of any criticism; the state, war, political and personal domination, the trivial motives beneath the grand historical posture of kings and presidents were not merely sociological aberrations, but obscenity rooted in the spirit itself.”

The allegory in the novel is made up of two parts: a grotesque political satire and a spiritual conclusion. Vijayan says that though
these two parts do not co-exist generally, it is specific to the Indian case.

“It will be inappropriate to compare (The Saga) with the portrayals of tyranny done in Latin America or Eastern European fiction. There was no Indian tyrant. There was only the Indian hedonist. Power was held and defended as a means to almost frivolous gratifications. In other words, we had a terribly inefficient tyranny and an inefficient resistance” (Pillay, 1992:93).

According to Vijayan, the Emergency is characterized by its ludicrousness, its ineffectuality and its superficiality, which ultimately must cede to spirituality. In other words, spirituality figured as reincarnation, sets Indian authoritarianism, as well as Indian existentialist agonies, apart from its counterparts elsewhere in the world.

The prominence of allegorical fiction in periods of censorship and authoritarian rule is not surprising. Allegory’s characteristics can appear in different degrees and different forms in various texts, genres and discourses. And indeed, many novels and especially those on the overtly political subject matter have prominent allegorical subtexts or referents, or contain elements of allegory or simply can be read allegorically even when the allegorical is not their overriding mode.

Many thinkers have made attempts to define the genre of allegory from different perspectives. “Frederic Jameson’s much-reviled statement that third world literature is necessarily a national allegory. Paul de Man’s argument about the endless deferral of meaning in allegory, Walter Benjamin’s theory of allegory as the experience of historical contradiction, Angus Fletcher’s claim that allegory is always about power, GordenTeskey’s about violence.” Modern generic allegory has no interiority. They are less complex and nuanced than a personal story. Allegory is always national (Yishai, 2019:7-8).
Allegory’s full meaning is fixed in a system of images, sights, events or ideas other than those belonging to the signifier. Therefore, the link between the signifier and the signified in the allegorical structure is a link which permanently preserves a distance. According to Paul de Man, this means that the allegorical sign always relates to another sign, so that the chain of allegorical representation always lacks a definite and final stopping point: The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the repetition of a previous sign with which it can never coincide. Based on this approach the relationship of estrangement between the signifier and the signified in allegory is explained by the fact that the meaning is devoid of any unified stability because it contains a simultaneous multiplicity of correlations and contradictions.

The pleasures of the body, such as eating, drinking and sex which stand for freedom and liberation in folk traditions, to which Dharmapuri claims to aspire, are turned by Vijayan into symptoms of oppression and perversion. Indulgence in The Saga does not indicate freedom and joy, as it does in the Carnivalesque celebrations in Rabelias, but cruelty and subjugation. There is enough scope to interpret the text as a national allegory or as an experience of historical contradiction. It is all about power and violence.

Another important writer of this period is M. Sukumaran. While working at the office of Accountant General of Kerala at Trivandrum, he got involved with the leftist trade union movement. The authorities utilized the state of Emergency which prevailed in India during
1975-1977 and terminated his employment. The theme of all writings of Sukumaran deals with the plight of the dispossessed and advocates an armed struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. Though Sukumaran was not a part of the Naxalite movement, his works upheld the principles of social justice and struggle for equality.

Like O. V. Vijayan, Sukumaran also used political allegory in his writings. He was a keen observer of international and national politics. He was aware of the gradual drying up of his sources of hope and dared to express this awareness sharply but subtly in his stories and short novels. He critiqued the gradual moral decadence and ideological shifts of the communist parties, mainly in USSR and China but also in India through stories like ‘Avalraajaavu’ (The king of the neighbourhood), ‘Vellezhuthu’ (Cataract), ‘Seshakriya’ (The last rites) and ‘Pitutaranpanam’ (Obeisance to father). At the same time, he did not give up hope. Till his last breath, he believed in the possible resurrection of the left in India in some form.

M. Sukumaran had a progressive political vision but moved away from the modes of realistic expression used by his predecessors. He gave an intellectual dimension to short story writing. His earlier stories introduced lonely, traumatized and abandoned individuals feeling tormented all time. Some of the stories are sadistic. They are soundly grounded on the principle of class struggle written in the form of parables and allegories with an aura of mythical around them. He had also written some stories dealing with contemporary political themes with an element of magic. Some of his stories are psychoanalytical. They analyze the mindsets and attitudes of the upper classes, bureaucrats, police officers and their middlemen, using the modes of dramatic monologue or the stream of consciousness technique. As K. Satchidanandan observes: “His early stories are deeply poetic, brimming with fresh metaphors, symbols and descriptions of nature. They deal with characters picked up from the working class
or the lower middle classes, covering a large thematic range from sex to devotion. Many of his protagonists in these are children or are those who suffer from some disability or the other (like disease, sterility, deafness) or are sex workers, housemaids, orphans, abandoned old women, betrayed lovers. But unlike the protagonist in the modernist stories of the sixties who were tormented by imagined identity crises and existential angst, his characters suffer from real sorrows. The later stories are more political, as the writer-narrator begins to diagnose the situations and discover the material reasons for their suffering feudal and capitalist exploitation, caste or class inequality and discover the connections between money and power and the discourses and practices of the capital and the state. Through these allegories and modern legends, Sukumaran created counter-aesthetics reminding us of Walter Benjamin’s statement: allegorization happens when art becomes a problem for itself.” (Satchidanadan, 2018:2)

Some attempts are made to compile the poetry of resentment written in Malayalam during the Emergency period. They differ from each other in their style of narration. But all of them flow to the same destination called freedom. M. Govindan’s famous expression

“Word or your neck
To which you are more committed?”

cited repeatedly as the flag mast of the period. For the writers it was a decisive moment as American poet James Russel Lowel observed:
Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide
In the strife of truth and falsehood
For the good or evil side......
Then it is the brave man chooses
While the coward stands aside! (Govinda Pillai, 2015:8)

Writers in India after 25th June 1975 were compelled to make their choice between truth and falsehood. In every sense, it was a dark period. Many writers and political leaders were tortured behind bars. Many went missing and were killed brutally. Strong censorship was imposed on media. The press that published the opposition leader’s (A.K. Gopalan’s) speech was confiscated. Even Tagore’s poems, Nehru’s letters and Gandhi’s autobiography were banned. Mass attacks on people at Mussafarapur, Turkuman’s gate were notorious. But people built up their resistance to defeat the impudence of power and most of the writers stood along with them. They were alert, optimistic and impatient towards slavery. At national level, we have a series of writers who challenged the autocracy of the period, like Sivarama Karanth, Mulk Raj Anand, Anantha Murthy, Durga Bhagavath, Phule Des Pande, Satyajit Ray, Mrunal Sen, Kishore Kumar, Rajesh Khanna, Satrughnan Sinha etc. In Malayalam, major poets like Vailoppilliil Sreedhara Menon also responded sharply to the situation of power-madness. Vailoppilli’s ‘Maaveli Naatu vaaniitum kaalam’ (The reign of Maveli) depicts Maveli as an autocrat. The poet converse with Maveli and asks him whether the famous song eulogising Maveli is composed by some poet under pressure? While replies, Maveli legitimizes his position on the imposition of power. The poem appeared in Onam Special of Mathrubhumi weekly in the year 1976. Ayyappa Panicker, Vishnu Narayanan Nambuthiri, Satchidanandan, Ezhacheri Ramachandran, Katammanitta Ramakrishnan, Punalur Balan, M. Krishnan Kutty, C.P. Aboobacker, Mullanezhi, Hiranyan, Kunjappa Pattanur,
P. Narayana Kurup, Pazhavila Ramesan are some among the poets who strongly declared their position through their writings during the Emergency period. Ayyappa Panicker’s ‘poojyam’ appeared in Vivekodayam (on 8th Feb. 1976). The word poojyam signifies ‘zero’ in Malayalam but in Sanskrit it means something to be revered. Poet says that he became zero by revering the goddess. It was a sarcastic reaction to the state of Emergency. Ezhacheri Ramachandran’s velicham vithacha tettinu (For the crime of spreading light), Katammanitta’s Prabhaatham (Morning), M. Krishnan Kutty’s Aathamgatha (Song of the Self), C. P. Abooacker’s Achatakkamulla nunungu kavithakal (Well-disciplined short poems), Satchidanandan’s Naavumaram (Tongue Tree), Mullanezhi’s Eethuvazhi? (Which route?), Punalur Balan’s Seemakkonna (Glicicidia), Hirayan’s Karinkatal (Black Sea), Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri’s Kuthikkuka Suhruthe (Hey friend, leap!), Kunjappa Pattanur’s ente gramam, gramangal (My Village, Villages), Vailoppilli’s Cartoon Poems, Ayyappa Panicker’s Katukka (Gall Nut), P. Narayanakkurup’s Njaangalute Maunam (Our Silence), Katammanitta Ramakrishnan’s aikamathyam (Solidarity), Pazhavila Ramesan’s karthaavillaathakavittha (Poem Without Author), Satchidanadan’s AaranuSatru? (Who is the enemy?) are some of the poems that responded to the dark days of Emergency. M. Kuttikrishnan was arrested for writing the poem ‘Vandemaatharam’ (The National Song)

Why need flowers?
Why need dawns?
Why need enchanting dusks
With floral decorations?

......................................

Oh, mother! When fetters
At your hand jingles?

For writing these lines Kuttikrishnan was put under bars for sedition. He was not released even after the Emergency. He had to go on a hunger strike inside the jail, to persuade the authorities for his release. The poets of this period experimented with many sorts of genres in their articulations. Navumaram by Satchidanandan is written in the style of a folk song with many number of folk images. Cartoon poems by Ayyappa Panicker and Vailoppilli were also stylistic experimentations. ‘Cow and Calf’ by Vailoppilli carries direct references of Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay Gandhi. Cartoon poems contain single images that are direct and transparent. In these poems, the message predominates over narration and they belong to a genre called ‘committed poetry.’

Adorno sees differences between art that is committed and art he considered to be autonomous. Autonomous art is that which does not carry an overtly political message. Of all arts committed and autonomous it is actually art that is preferred. Adorno traces the history of “Commitment” and its problems in the French and German consciousness. Adorno presents us with the view of “Art for Art’s sake” which was prevalent in France. He brings to our notice that aesthetics dominated there and even the most revolutionary writing or extreme avantgarde work had a decorative allure there. Therefore, the call to existence and commitment was revolutionary there. In Germany it is the other way round, a work of art should not have a being of itself. It should be socially committed. The generation of Malayalam writers who responded to the situation of Emergency produced works in which their politics were
evident but were also of high literary and aesthetic value, we can say that they attained a sort of compromise which Adorno proposed or even succeeded in maintaining high literary aesthetic value in spite of being political.

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Dealing with majoritarianism: Thoughts from a post-identity scenario

Dr N. P. Ashley

Majorities in most countries seem to be all too happy to place their faith in strong leaders who put people against each other in the name of newly found mono-cultural nationalism that the current phase we are in looks like a dead end. The people are stupid, people are unkind or the people need to be replaced as a whole are three kinds of responses one hears. It is just that the first is elitist, second is essentialist and third, impossible.

“On the day when I know all the emblems,” [Kublai] asked Marco, shall I be able to possess my empire, at last?”

And the Venitian answered: “Sire, do not believe it. On that day you will be an emblem among emblems.”

- Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities.

Twenty first century majoritarianism is often read in two ways: one as a re-run of the twentieth century fascism/Nazism and
two, as a peculiar development originating from the undergrounds of neo-liberalism, from the black holes of a project which began with the promise of no borders in techno-economic terms. Majorities in most countries seem to be all too happy to place their faith in strong leaders who put people against each other in the name of newly found mono-cultural nationalism that the current phase we are in looks like a dead end. The people are stupid, people are unkind or the people need to be replaced as a whole are three kinds of responses one hears. It is just that the first is elitist, second is essentialist and third, impossible.

A quick shorthand of the contemporary crisis of liberal commentators, feeling this unprecedented innocuousness, could read like the paragraph given above. It does feel like the last sky of thinking and argument! Their alarmism is making despair convincing; not hope possible. More than anything else, having to deal with majoritarianism is also irritating because it is based on huge spectacles and the majoritarians continue to set the agenda. Majoritarian feels like a crazy and unpredictable batsman who reduces the fielder to an awkward onlooker. By the time one is back from unsuccessfully chasing the ball, it has been hit in another direction.

Majoritarianism, if the argument is that it is a continuation of fascism and Nazism, should be understood as the “aestheticization of politics” in Walter Benjamin’s telling formulation. Convert social issues into symbols by blaming it on the “other”, inventing enemies and keeping the politics go around these entities is basic to such movements and it is not difficult to see this aspect in any of majoritarian trend now. It works with the sense of “enough is enough” and thus made to feel scared of these “enemies”, the fear is all paralysing and exhaustive. Majoritarianism is created around spectacular symbols that convert masses into cowed entities is a thought we get from anti-Nazi theoreticians of Germany.
It is possible to see two American presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, as the children of 1960s. One of the most noticeable tendency when Obama became President was to see his Presidency as the culmination of the “I have a Dream” speech delivered by Luther King.

So the process of “de-aestheticizing”, then, is of developing a materialist outlook towards culture and society. One of the ways in which this de-aestheticizing was historically attempted was through identity-politics. I would argue that identity-politics is different things for different ages, contrary to the homogenous idea of identity-politics that seems to be prevalent now.

There are three kinds of identity-politics that become visible in the nineteenth century itself: both are anti-liberal humanist and against the universal assumptions of liberal humanism, which assumed that ideas, well-debated constituted a better world: working class, women and the colonized. It delegitimized the very claims of the French revolution, which sought “Liberty, Fraternity
and Equality” saying the liberty was the liberty of middle classes, equality was of the whites and fraternity, of men. So their larger singular narrative of standardized human was challenged thus through the assertion of gender, class and national identities. It constituted a strong critique of the liberal humanist universalism. So this was an attempt to de-link themselves and thus get liberation from the all encompassing narrative that came from the colonial, white, middle class masters.

Two world wars marked a return to what must have looked to be on the decline: the mono-cultural, mono-religious and mono-lingual nation state. Working classes were integrated through this variety of nationalism, women’s movements were appropriated in the service of white interests and anti-colonial nationalism muted. The life and energy of identity assertions were exhausted into a frame of European nationalism and its discontents such as Holocaust before and Hiroshima after.

This frame was unsustainable because of the havoc caused by the Second World War: Europe lay in ruins resulting in the sub-sequential liberation of many a colony. The horror of the Second World War made the generation born from 1920s to 1940s be called “the Silent Generation”. Reconstruction and investing in the youth became the only sensible thing this period can do. This made them spent for the educational sector and open up the hitherto restricted arena of higher education to students from varied backgrounds, such as women, people of colour, minorities (especially the post-Holocaust Jews) and migrants from colonies and so on. America, on the other hand, became very rich after the Second World War and they had the means to open up higher education to people from different backgrounds. This orientation towards the future brought in the possibility of a new kind of identity-politics (The one that is actually begun to be called identity-politics).

The inescapable universalism of earlier notions of class, gender or nationalism became challenged in the 1960s
because of the emergence of the first wave of global developments: the Cold War, the Moon-landing, changes in the nature of means of production of a global nature (Green, White and Blue revolutions), and student opposition to capitalism in capitalist countries, Communism in Communist countries, and native elite’s socialism in newly born socialist countries presented a whole new paradigm for thinking about materiality of thought, experience and collectives. Radical assertion of race, sex, sexuality, minority-status or colonial subjectivity, and the search for a new subjectivity outside the prevalent ones constituted a critique of the abstract notions of power and knowledge. This set of intellectuals devised a mechanism of reviewing history, society and aesthetics from such a vantage point. While its ethical urge could be called inclusive and egalitarian, it could engage with the dynamicity of identities, the possibilities of “being one identity among many others” at a given point of time in a given time. Subaltern identity politics went both against and ahead of the ideas of class as the constituting social force, anti-colonial nationalism as the all exhausting political source or the universalism of the gender politics of a certain time, thanks to the appropriation of the women’s movement by the men. Abstract dogmas could now be refilled with the historicization of subaltern experience.

It is possible to see two American presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, as the children of 1960s. One of the most noticeable tendency when Barack Obama became President was to see his Presidency as the
culmination of the “I have a Dream” speech delivered by Martin Luther King. On the other hand, Donald Trump not only repeats the slogan of “Make America Great Again” from Ronald Reagan, but builds on the conservative alarmism around the right to body and choice fought by feminists in the form of abortion rights or on the social values on which civil rights movement was built. The diversity of subaltern politics doesn’t seem to hold the potential to check majoritarianism any longer. The characteristics of the public sphere, previously taken for granted, leaves a chasm in all major democracies where electoral arithmetic, rainbow alliances of social oppositions or regional conflicts are proving to be grossly inadequate.

From such a situation, there is a need to rethink the socio-political values that are available and their compatibility with the techno-economic givens. Idealising earlier values and essentializing earlier steps is going to contribute to converting identity-politics to an experiential and ethical vacuum. At that level, it becomes a different way of aestheticization of politics for its inability to engage with the social content and its tendency to ruin conversations through arbitrariness. If identity-politics of the sixties chose to liberate the silenced diversities around macro, universalized political categories, once it became a mode of continuous and comprehensive critique, it became quite abstract and arbitrary. If Political Correctness was invented by the Jews against the use of language to extend social discrimination, humiliation and exploitation, Political Correctness began to be caricatured as sanitization of language which rendered it to be a political vacuum of a thought-policing kind. Social processes became so minutely dissected in the Universities that it lost any ability to engage with the corpus of issues which resonated with huge collectives. Political values and rhetoric was seen to be so taken for granted that questions, or even doubts, were met with outrage and alarm. Political discourse became the new way of symbolizing camps and
thus aestheticizing politics. Atomization and campization of politics that the social media achieved made it impossible for any effective engagement with this. Procedural democracy of this sort became the problem in that there was no sense of how to de-link from it and start anew.

Subaltern politics has three major tasks: one, the ability to devise an inclusive and sustainable understanding of the society; two, the readiness to rethink social values and political rhetoric as per the changes in socio-economic factors; three, the ability to be introspective and self-reflective without being dogmatic or essentialist. If the failure to do the first constitutes a rejection of the political as the domain which defines the agenda of the people where the people are created, unwillingness to do the second makes it a parade of the “old-new”, as Bertolt Brecht spoke of it and the lacunae in the third aspect rejects the foundational insight about the need not to trust knowledge creation or dissemination. Politics cannot be about defending castles of democracy and culture, which is rather feudal and is one of the ways in which anti-intellectualism spreads among the sections of the society.

There is a way in which subaltern politics can both correct and counter majoritarianism in effective ways. But that depends, mostly, on its ability to redefine the subaltern with social changes and create an ethical narrative that resonates with people. This means subaltern politics has to be seen primarily as a kind of materialist politics which is concerned about
social justice. Even then, social justice political rhetoric, if not supplemented with social development projects and a vision of the future, it is going to lose perspective and commit the very mistakes which it began critical about. In short, it is paramount to acknowledge the kind of perpetual symbolization that collectives can slip into- the danger of the very narrative becoming a symbol among other symbols as Italo Calvino warns.

The theoretical foundation of such a political practice is of post-identity. Post-identity is both an extension and a critique of identity-politics. It is ready to see the interplay of identities in social interactions and believes in cultivating diversity as an ideology that way it has to acknowledge the debt to the identity politics of earlier period. But it is critical of the lack of imagining a collective as a product of these assertions which identity-politics is guilty of. Away from the earlier versions of humanism and its coercive and homogenous tendencies, this political frame requires a kind of humanism which can say “I am human among other things” - a line deeply rooted in the very practice of identity politics. Without such a notion, the discussions on empathy, kindness and understanding remain lose individual characteristics; not social tools of reimagining and rebuilding collectives into a people. The identity thus means both assertion of the self and the cancellation of the self, for the sake of an unknown other who is always in a category different from oneself, or an other in the eternal future to be. It is the politics of tomorrow, without ever wanting to exhaust it but extend it, both in space and time!
Revisiting the beginnings: Kundalata and the nationalist ideology

Dr K. C. Muraleedharan

The colonial elite in the emerging India confronted the need for producing a cultural form by which the issues of sovereignty, recapture of the land could be reflected, debated and actualized. Appu Nedungadi, author of Kundalata, was doing precisely this and the gesture was informed with a sense of resistance to, and notable traces of ambiguous compromises also, with the colonial ideology.

The itinerary of the critical pursuit associated with Kundalata is marked by a cluster of significant names like KeralaVarma Valli- yakoyithampuran, Moorkoth Kumaran, M.P. Paul, K.M.George, George Irumpayam and Ayyappa Panicker besides other pioneers and scholars. Their responses mark a long period of critical interests of definitional thrust directed towards the identification of the first Malayalam novel and the father of
The search for the father of the Malayalam Novel has not been resolved for a long time and even now it waits to be settled satisfactorily. The generally accepted position is to recognize Kundalata as the first narrative in Malayalam that introduced a new model in the manner of novel.

the Malayalam Novel. These critics employed standards of chronology, generic particularities and notions of realism to either brand Kundalata as the first Malayalam novel or to deny the primacy of origin to it and confer it on some other texts like Indulekha. Literary categories like the KeraLeeya novel (George Irumpayam) or the Ideal (Lakshanamotha) Malayalam Novel (M.P.Paul) were called into existence to validate what a reader can identify now as the canonizing gestures. The search for the father of the Malayalam Novel has not been resolved for a long time and even now it waits to be settled satisfactorily. The generally accepted position is to recognize Kundalata
as the first narrative in Malayalam that introduced a new model in the manner of novel and confer on Indulekha the status of the first narrative in Malayalam that can rightfully claim most of the characteristics of a novel, which involved the elimination and century-long suppression also of some contending or dissenting texts at the point of emergence of novel in Malayalam. With the shift in reading strategies and focus on social practices rather than on individuals the question of primacy of origin came to be sidelined as simplistic or even pointless. Critics and literary historians now speak of the beginnings of novel. This does not mean that the debates surrounding the early Malayalam novels and its originators were futile cultural exercises. But their critical and literary engagements had unforeseen consequences too though these debates did indeed throw up remarkable insights that could be profitably elaborated with interrogative readings. This paper intends to make sense of the text by unfolding the political unconscious that informs the ambivalent attitude to colonial violations, aggressions and the trauma of domination in the second half of the nineteenth century.

II

A scrutiny of the critical enterprise regarding the early novels in Malayalam reveals that Kundalata along with certain other novels is consistently accused of insufficient sociality which in turn allows it to be marked as the first but not full-fledged Malayalam novel. (M.P. Paul 144). Late 1970s produced readings from the same premises reinforced with the received notion of realism and truth to subjective experience and as a result the text came to be labeled as a romance and excluded from the genre ‘novel’. The objection was that the social background of the story was pushed into anonymity and romantic remoteness. Critics like M.P. Paul and George Irumbayam conclude that the work distances itself from the genre novel by way of the faraway, unknown locale of the story and names
of characters dense with ancientness and remoteness. These insights about the setting and characters can be put to better use. The question why the writer turns to the past and imagines lands and peoples is very significant. Appu Nedungadi makes a statement in the foreword to the first edition of the work that the story is projected into a remote space and time to give a feeling that if certain things and manners depicted do not go well with the Kerala ways of life, the reader is free to think of the story as taking place in an alien territory. He speaks specifically about the use of names like Kalingam, Kunthalam and Tharanathan. But one need not take his words with such certitude. In the next movement of his pen he cautions the reader not to be very obsessive about the story happening in these alien countries as well (v). Here, the writer is involved in a seemingly deliberate game of mystification of the locale and it suggests a crisis in geographical identity which can be understood by historicizing the emergence of Kundalata. The somewhat insurmountable social contradiction of the communities of people in the Indian continent of the times was either the loss of the native land or the threat of losing it in the wake of the numerous colonial battles culminating in the 1857 defeat. The 1857 rising, the last, disorganized but densely political kick at the British East India Company by the dying feudal class, marks a point of rupture in the consciousness of the Indian middle class. The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of transition in the history of India when the expansion of
British empire was reaching a point of consolidation at the continental scale and the responsibility of winning back sovereignty gradually shifted from the failing feudal class to the middle class that was rising to a decisive position. The feudal and subaltern response took the form of rebellions and the 1857 defeat confirmed the disastrous consequences of taking up arms against a colossal and brutish empire. Cultural battle and negotiation politics begin to attain primacy over physical confrontations manifesting the slow and gradual transfer of leadership of the struggle to the emerging middle class.

The transformation of the organization that A.O. Hume founded into a nationalist outfit, the Indian National Congress, occurred just two years before the publication of the text in consideration. This is also the moment when nation, narration and the novel converge in the consciousness of the elite. The middle class commences its search for a cultural form and realizes that the invention of the cultural artifact involves what E.V. Ramakrishnan prefers to describe as the search for the nation. The colonial modern in different parts of India in these years manifests the urge to produce some story after the fashion of the English (European) novel and these attempts mark the reconstitution or reconsideration of the literary space for middle class ideological needs.

The extended social space was not available as a cultural form that could be deployed to meet the ideological interests of the colonial modern of India. What was available was definitely the one, European novel, through which expanding societies of Europe established their primacy over the land and cultures of the non-European peoples. So the colonial elite in the emerging India confronted the need for producing a cultural form by which the issues of sovereignty, recapture of the land could be reflected, debated and actualized. Appu Nedungadi was doing precisely this and the gesture was informed with a sense of
resistance to, and notable traces of ambiguous compromises also, with the colonial ideology. Culturally alien to the feudal values, the middle class looked forward to imagining and establishing a nation that would be refreshingly free from the suffocating aspects of native tradition. The ambivalence related to the geographical space is thus a marker of the loss of land and a desire for the sovereignty. The relocation of the contemporary narrative in disguise into the pre-colonial space and time is strategy to resolve the desire and make up the loss by imagining a free nation. It can also be interpreted as a means of resurrecting a glorious past free of colonial traces.

Colonial aggression, annexation and the consequent losses were invariably felt by the elite on a pan-Indian scale and it was equipping itself to address this political issue of sovereignty. But this could not be done easily as the middle class was culturally dependent on the colonial authority that with the ardent support of this class was undermining the somewhat conservative indigenous structures. That is, the Indian elite desired this to happen and thereby wished the continuance of the colonial presence, tutelage and subjugation by a supposedly progressive and civilized ruler. This attitude of the elite, termed as ‘dependency complex’ by O. Mannoni, is one factor that informs the imaginings of Appu Nedungadi. An equally decisive factor is what Edward Shills calls a ‘sense of provinciality’ (quoted in K.N. Panikkar 130). These two factors anchored the middle class, and defined its constant shift between
the binaries collaboration/resistance, hybridity/purity, modernity/tradition and empire/nation. K.N Panikkar observes that the cultural perspective of the middle class that was being drawn into the colonial world was “neither entirely hegemonized by the colonial nor confined within the traditional but was posited in a dialogue between the two”. Kundalata internalizes these ambivalent cultural and political oscillations and takes a position that eventually validates subjugation though it boldly thinks of counteraction for sovereignty. This argument can be substantiated by a contrapuntal reading of an embedded narrative of the revolt of a Samantha or a subjugated king, a family of the kind the author also belongs to.

III

The twelfth chapter of Kundalata presents a detailed discussion of the attempt of the King of Kun thalam, Kruthaveeryan, to reclaim his right over the kingdom from the king of Kalingam, Prathapachandran. Kunthalam was under domination for nearly one hundred years. An earlier fight for sovereignty by the present king’s brother was thwarted and Kruthaveeryan after remaining submissive for twenty years thinks of a one more battle to release his kingdom from domination. A detailed discussion about the possibilities of a successful revolt ensues in the court. The king and his four ministers take stock of the strength and weakness of their side. This is the key episode that holds together the whole narrative. M.P. Paul takes note of this serious conference but dismisses it commenting that it befits Duryodhana’s court in Hastinapura (143). Paul finds in the text some features of an epic or romance and admits hardly any claim to reality. George Irumbayam also considers the battle as a stock feature of the romance which by its very character deserves to be rejected as unreal and irrelevant to the world (67). An awareness of the ideological baggage that realism carries with it and the anti-colonial attitudes to the realistic mode would prompt
one to respectfully bypass these observations and explore the politics of the imagined battles.

The author-narrator validates the fight by making the second minister assert the right of a country (king) for regaining freedom: To fight in the way we can to regain freedom is by no means wrong. We are not attacking them without reason. Aren’t we trying to regain what has been robbed of us? (75). All the four ministers support the move and their difference of opinion is only regarding whether they should attack or let the other side attack by provoking them. Finally it was decided to stop paying the tribute and provoke a war. A messenger comes at the moment and Kruthaveeryan conveys his intention to defy the king of Kunthalam. The king of Kalingam regrets his rashness of sending the messenger to Kunthalam and thus provoking a war when he got this message.

The discussion between the prime minister and the king of Kunthalam throws up certain observations that reveal the suppressed connections of the text to the culture and society it emerges from. The prime minister, Aghoranathan, reminds the king that Kunthalam in the recent thirty years has become very prosperous by way of its treasury, army, intelligent ministers, faithful subjects, flourishing towns of trade, burglar-free roads, machine-bridges, centres of education, hospitals and such modern institutions (88). Here, thirty years is definitely a historical marker. The thirty year span divides the first war of Indian independence and the year of
publication/writing of the text in discussion, 1887. The material prosperity that Kunthalam achieved corresponds to the colonial claim of welfare measures in the British India since 1857 defeat and transfer of power to the British Crown. Another instance of clear correspondence is the reference by Kruthaveeryan to an earlier battle that has been defeated by the organizational weakness and thoughtlessness of the ministers. The battle takes place and the king of Kalinga wins the war reimposing his domination over Kruthaveerya and subjugation of his land and people. The question of right over a land and subjugation of its people are resolved by the author by imagining an ambiguous and unlikely compromise within the framework of capitalist structures.

Krutaveeryan is released from the prison, allowed to go to his country and rule the kingdom “as his own”. The two kings, in the words of Kapilanathan, the former prime minister of Prathapachandran, are to part as friends. Apparently, Kruthaveeryan is tacitly made to respect the hierarchy and pay the tribute. Thus the text implicitly theorizes colonial domination as harmless and conducive to progress. It does this by engaging in crucial silence regarding the political consequences of such a defeat on the king and the people. Extrapolated to the society that made the text possible, one is persuaded to say that the narrative advocates a position of benign colonialism. The text raises the question of sovereignty and reconsiders the anti-colonial encounters, especially the first war of independence, as an embedded narrative. But it resolves the question in a most disappointing way draining away the political and cultural consequences of loss of sovereignty.

IV

A look at the nation that Kundalata calls into existence would reveal further the ideological directions the
imagination of the nationalist elite travels. This imagined territory is absolutely free from the physical presence of the colonizing people, modern institutions and non-Hindus. It is a terrain where one encounters mainly the brahmins, aristocratic personages (in disguise and other wise), some of whom speak in the logic of the middle class (Kapilanathan as Yogeeswaran) and a few ordinary people who appear to serve the ruling class. The upper class nationalist ideological consciousness is at work imagining a nation devoid of its ‘Others’. It is an exclusively Hindu nation populated with the obedient servant class and women scripted to nationalist size by patriarchal notions of reform and education. The three Greeks who come to the rescue of the Kalinga king are disguised natives. All the same, it is a space for the assimilation/taming of colonial modernity and its disciplines.

Kundalata’s informal education in the wilderness and in isolation from native community is marked by the complete absence of any lessons on music, art and literature but by the vigorous presence of what may be called modern disciplines, especially the sciences: The Yogeeswaran used to take Kundalata with him and enlighten her about the germination of seeds, the characteristics of trees and plants, Ornithology, Astronomy, Geology and such aspects of nature (6). Besides this, training was also given in physical culture. Tharanathan disguised as Ramakisoran, is tutored in horse riding. The people who believe that the movement of celestial bodies decides human condition are described as
blind with ignorance. Most of them are reported to be the common people (58-59). But the narrative voice also ridicules the dominant anthropomorphic stream of enlightenment for privileging mankind on earth over every other creature and also for thinking that everything exists for the sake of human beings. This narrative has moments that persuade one to say that the major endeavour of the writer is the erasure of the colonial presence from the native landscape which was possible only by posting the narrative into remote pre-colonial spaces. But in doing this, it involuntarily resurrects the feudal nation from which most of the communities wished in Kerala and the elite also wished to free themselves.

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A Novel from Malabar

Indulekha

O. Chandu Menon
Stories and histories: Perspectives in O. Chandu Menon’s Indulekha and William Logan’s Malabar

Dr. C. Padmanabhan

Chandu Menon is constrained to define what a “story” proper is and as to how it differs from what is known as “history.” Dearth of a well-formed native prose-fictional lineage forces Chandu Menon also to borrow his justifications for composing such a narrative from Europe where it had already acquired relevance, acceptance and readership much earlier in time.

Among the large collection of works produced during the colonial period, there are four seminal works, which belong to the second half of the nineteenth century, and which essentially symbolize Malabar’s arduous tryst with colonial modernity. The first of these is the book on grammar titled Malayala Bhasha Vyakaranam [The Grammar of the Malayalam Language], by Hermann Gundert, which was published in the year 1851. As
is evident, even a preliminary project on grammar based on perspectives of comparative philology would involve attempts to “norm” a language, within the precincts of another dominant language is upheld as the yardstick in the comparative scheme of things. The second work that belongs to this category is the *Malayalam-English Dictionary* compiled by Gundert himself and published in the year 1872. If the norms of grammaticality would forefront the problematics of comparative philology, lexicographic attempts to organize a native language will have to confront a fresh set of problems, which belong to the arena of “translation.” The third work that belongs to this category is William Logan’s *Malabar*, which was published in the year 1887, and the fourth work is *Indulekha*, the novel by O. Chandu Menon, published in the year 1889, which is hailed as the first novel of character in Malayalam.

While the first two works attempt to tackle the problems of “comparative philology” and “comparative lexicography” the third and fourth works mentioned grapple with the problems arising out of the binary relationship between fact and fiction. As pioneering works attempting to construct historical and fictional narratives respectively both *Malabar* and *Indulekha* bear the burden of having to clear the path by offering definitions and descriptions regarding their intended purposes and plans of action. Therefore, Logan is constrained to define what constitutes “history” and how it differs from the other existing native “stories” such as *Keralolpatti* which he promptly labels as “the farrago of legendary nonsense”
(1: 244). In this attempt he is aided and abetted by the entire discourse of European historiography which had by then acquired certain fixed characteristics and features of its own, both as an academic discipline, and as a respectable and scholarly pastime. At the other end of the spectrum Chandu Menon is constrained to define what a “story” proper is and as to how it differs from what is known as “history.” Dearth of a well-formed native prose-fictional lineage forces Chandu Menon also to borrow his justifications for composing such a narrative from Europe where it had already acquired relevance, acceptance and readership much earlier in time. While they attempt to clear the path by offering such definitions and justifications the diverse ways in which the all-pervasive theme of colonizer/colonized interacts with the other textual binaries like preface/content, fact/fiction and history/lore would offer interesting examples of the structural exchanges between such thematic components. This article attempts to delineate the definitions of history contained in both works and aims to locate such definitions within the cultural discourses of the colonial context.

Let us first take a look at how Chandu Menon attempts to situate his Novel in its proper place and perspective. Attempting to write a novel in Malayalam at once throws open a large number of questions regarding the relationship between genre, society and the act of narration, and Chandu Menon himself attempts to address some of these issues in his preface to Indulekha. That Chandu Menon himself was aware of the curious standing which his forthcoming work, a novel, had in the minds of his contemporaries vis-à-vis the usual works on history is more than amply revealed in the following passage taken from his preface:

I have no idea what my countrymen will think of a book like this. It is unlikely that those who do not know English will have ever read such a book. I doubt that those who are reading such stories for the first time will have the taste to appreciate them.
While I was writing this book, some of my friends who did not know English had asked me what I was writing about. When I explained to one or two of them what exactly I was writing, I did not get the impression that they were pleased. I know of one who said: “What is the point? Why have you taken so much trouble over this? Of what use is it to write about something that never actually took place? I have only one thing to say in response. Most of the books in the world are story books. Some of these stories are what is called history and these are based on actual events. As for all the others, these are stories that are simply believed to have taken place or ones that we suspect may or may not have happened. (238)

Obviously, what appears to be a matter of primary concern for Chandu Menon, as evident from the above passage, is not just the fact that the genre of novel was completely alien to a majority of the natives who did not know English, but that they also lacked the very taste to appreciate the genre. He states that this particular mode of writing about “something that never actually took place” did not have the social and cultural sanction among the native population that it had enjoyed in the West. It is not the “fictionality” of the account that seems to matter presently, but the “prose format” in which the fiction is being rendered that elicits such baffled responses from his friends regarding his attempt to write a novel.

However, what is more poignant as well as relevant for the purpose at hand is Chandu Menon’s response to the queries from his friends wherein he explicitly underlines
the “story” status of “history” and also comes up with the concluding remark that histories are “stories” which happen to be “based on actual events.” Thus, the fictionality of history seems to be a foregone conclusion as far as Chandu Menon is concerned. If we show a little bit of eclectic leniency in dealing with the history of ideas it could be said that Chandu Menon’s statement seems to anticipate the premises of the new historicists. He seems to succumb to what Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt would describe as the “The anecdotal impulse in new historicism” (54) much ahead of the historical schedule of ideas.

Having outlined Chandu Menon’s take on the difference between stories and histories let us look at how Logan deals with the problem while compiling *Malabar*. Evidently, Logan’s work happens to be the most comprehensive of all the above attempts, because it combines the characteristic features of the other works including comparative cultural perspectives, translation, building fictional narratives, and also attempts to venture into the troubled premises of historiography. He is aware of his Promethean role as the bringer of history to a people who were basking in the “farrago of legendary nonsense.” He is also aware of the need to carefully delineate history proper from all the other narratives that were prevalent in Malabar under the guise of history. For example, there is this instance in the preface to *Malabar* where Logan laments the apparent dearth of facts for constructing the history of Malabar. He writes that facts, which characterize the “histories of European races, are not to be expected here” (1: iv). With the hindsight that we have gained on the history of European historiography it is rather easy to see that this lamentation springs from the perception of a profusion of history-related data elsewhere. The explicit allusion is to the abundance of facts generated by the project of positivist historiography which belongs to enlightenment and which portrays the story of the rise of humanity from
the abyss of the dark ages in the West. It is from this perspective that Logan labels the Malayalis as people “with little or no history” (1: v). Logan sums up his view of the history of Malabar when he writes, “Moreover, it ought never to be forgotten that facts, which bulk largely in the histories of European races, are not to be expected here. Violent ebullitions of the popular will directed towards the removal of tyrants, and great upheavals of classes are not to be looked for in Malabar” (1: iv).

How does Chandu Menon’s view of the story/history binary differ from Logan’s view? What are the discursive elements that structure such differing views? And finally, what are the constitutive elements of these apparently differing views? Are Chandu Menon and Logan looking at the same historical context from two antithetical vantage points? These are the questions that need to be addressed presently. As already stated, Logan views the historical narrative as the essential boundary that separates the Europe of the dark ages from the Europe of enlightenment. It may be noted that Logan is not merely lamenting the lack of recorded facts but the lack of facts or incidents that qualify to be included in proper historical narratives.

Therefore, Logan’s lamentation regarding the dearth of facts or absence of history in Malabar is a covert attempt to equate the present situation of Malabar with the dark ages of Europe and thereafter to further equate the arrival of the Europeans with the arrival of enlightenment. The positivist fervour brought in by the British was realized through the systematic build-up of gazetteers, manuals,
census reports, survey reports and cartographic ventures. On the whole Logan’s statement about Malayalis as a people without history collocates with the grand colonial barter wherein the native land is taken in exchange for the grant of history. The state of happiness which Logan ascribes to the Malayalis is to be understood as a rather naïve and complacent kind of happiness and peace which happens to be the characteristic hallmark of social and economic stasis, because, Logan states alongside that progress, in the modern sense, was impossible under such a system. The picture of happiness that evolves is a kind of prehistoric or Edenic joy of a people who have not yet been exposed to the rigours of history. Europe has earned its rightful place in history and history has earned its rightful place in Europe by virtue of the violent socio-political upheavals aimed at the removal of tyrants. As mentioned earlier Logan’s reference here is to the evolution of history in the West, or rather to the severing of the historical narrative from the general fictional narratives, necessitated by the arrival of early capitalist logic in the domain of humanities.

What are the essential and underlying features of Chandu Menon’s take on the similarities between stories and histories? Does it, as some might hastily conclude, reflect some kind of a backwardness in the socio-cultural evolution where histories had not yet properly evolved out of stories? Obviously Indulekha was constructed within the same spatial and temporal narratives of colonialism. Chandu Menon himself admits that his work is the end result of his reading a large number of English novels and the subsequent attempt at translating a few of them. In his preface to the novel Chandu Menon addresses the problematics of having to transport a modern genre like the Novel from its European context to the colonial context and to native sensibilities. He is concerned about the lack of taste on the part of the natives who have not been initiated into the genre and its mode of narration. However, it is not the lack of sensibility as such that problematizes
the ushering in of the Novel into Malayalam. Nor is the issue a result of the Novel being an ostensibly European genre. Essentially speaking the problem is one of subjectivities and is deeply related to the differences in the reception accorded to a fictional account in the context of colonial modernity as opposed to the original reception that it gained in the context of European modernity.

In the context of European modernity, it is possible to visualize the historical account gradually diverging from the numerous fictional accounts and forming a de jure autobiography of the West with its own self-proclaimed commitments to factuality, truth and clinical objectivity. Such a process is sanctioned by the epistemological evolution of Europe whose journey towards modernity was fueled by its own internal dynamics. However, within the native society whose modernity is problematized by the presence of the colonizer and which bears the marks of both oppression as well as struggles against such oppression a radical separation between fiction and history is not only difficult to achieve but historically untenable and difficult to articulate.

This is so because colonial oppression constantly distorts the emerging narratives and thus destabilizes the claims of factuality, truth and clinical objectivity which are the self-proclaimed assets of European historiography. It is not naïveté but an intense insight into the nature of things that problematizes the fact/fiction, history/story binary in Indulekha. There is an instance in the novel where Panchu Menon expresses surprise and shock at the fact that the story that Indulekha was
reading was a concocted story as admitted by Indulekha herself (47). In another scene Indulekha clarifies to her curious grandfather that the story that she was reading then was not a concocted story but *Shakunthalam* (52). It may be that the word “concoction” here might be a reference to any narrative that does not bear the sanction and approval of tradition.

Notwithstanding the story/history binary and the respective positions adopted by the two authors, the apparent similarities are too numerous to be missed. A Nayar household happens to be the stage on which both the events of *Malabar* and *Indulekha* are played out. The protagonist in *Indulekha* is of course a Nayar youth who has further empowered himself with a sound English education. He even mimics the acts of circumventing and mapping the nation when he undertakes a twenty-three-day long voyage from Bombay to Calcutta in the course of which he views Malabar through a telescope. In both the works the satirized figure of the Nambutiri provides the reader with all the humour and the villain, when he eventually arrives on the scene, happens to be a Muslim. Therefore the story within history and the history within the story seems to carry more or less the same politics of representation.

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The use of imagination
E.P. Rajagopalan

The author re-reads the story “The Birds Roost in Babri Masjid” by Pramod Raman, which validates and revalidates history through a quirky combination of fiction and reality with a solid political undertone.

Translated by P. Shyma

Pramod Raman’s story “The Birds Roost in Babri Masjid” begins with a precise date 30 May 2019. The theory that date is the mainstay of history might be old, but not antiquated. A date may be considered as one of the foremost indicators of how a story exhaustively uses a historical knowledge to suit its purposes. However, the sense of precision gradually loosens its hold as it coalesces with imagination and transforms
into a document of art. Fiction, a narrative that gives importance to imagination has evolved to another category called faction over the decades. Faction is the confluence of fact and imagination. Even as any work of art evolves from this confluence, faction is a narrative which is directly influenced by facts. Faction hence gives more importance to facts. Coming back to Pramod Raman’s story, the date 30 May 2019, appears along with the presence of a historian, Prof. Romila Thapar. The professor is reading a book. It is a new book, in the sense that the approach to the book is new. Her attitude to the approach becomes a document in the story in this way. “She became curious to the way in which youngsters approached history.”

This sentence is very important for the study of this story. As a branch of knowledge, various forms and methodologies have evolved as part of understanding history. This story, I underscore, also should come under the purview of historians and researchers. It is not only as literary evidence that this story ought to be understood. History has the responsibility of acknowledging how imaginary literature perceives history and uses it. Literature has inherited the right to freedom as well as to be the voice of the people. Literature is also a response to history. This makes it necessary that the literary use of history, the fictional textualization of history, have to constantly come under the consideration of historians. History need not understand a complex social condition only through traditional sources. A minute and wholehearted approach to literature would be self rejuvenating to the

The present is witnessing the intervention of history in people’s lives in ways quite different from earlier times. Though writers like Fukuyama had predicted the end of history, this is how it is being materialized.
discipline called history. Such an organic evolution of a historical theme may be seen in the story.

The present is witnessing the intervention of history in people’s lives in ways quite different from earlier times. Though writers like Fukuyama had predicted the end of history, this is how it is being materialized. The modus operandi of the right wing including the communalists have been to create and disseminate bogus histories, mythify history, transform epics to histories, forge evidences etc. A right wing leader had recently asserted how “We are telling fake stories. But that sells among the people.” This is just one aspect. On the other side there are the ordinary people who realize the dense presence of history and its activities and how it implicates in their personal, everyday lives. In the story “Thiruth” by N.S. Madhavan, the aged editor is possessed by severe fever on the day of Gandhi’s murder and then on the day of the demolition of Babri Masjid. He may seen to have been possessed by history. Medical practitioners might diagnose it as a case of psycho somatic affliction. The medical gaze would be certain about it, which is fine. But it is also an instance where a historical event affects an individual body. In the story of Pramad Raman, Athira P.M., the character from Kanjanhad, is possessed by history not in the form of a fever, but in the form of imagination. It is a democratic Indian consciousness and popular historical conscience that feels that Babri Masjid shouldn’t be demolished. This is Athira’s stand as well. Hence Athira asks Prof Romila Thapar, “Is it true that Babri Masjid is still there, undemolished?”

It is the popular interest of a secular India that like many other historical sites, Babri Masjid also should stand. It is an ideological position, which has roots that go deep. The question to the secular historian is its sharp and imaginary manifestation. The phone call from the northernmost tip of Northern Kerala in fact startles Romila Thapar. “She cuts the phone helplessly,” goes the story. At the same time the
Professor doesn’t treat the question as rude or as coming from an unstable mind. Athira’s question came from reading the heading of an article in a journal, “The Undemolished Babri Masjid.” One might reason that it is an article that sees Babri Masjid as an icon of secularism. Athira however read it as reality, without considering its symbolic implication. This kind of a reading happens not because of any problem of the character, but as part of the desire, which like many Indians, Athira also nurtures. Her question arises from her profound sense of history which also is the reason behind her dreaming of the same.

On her part, Prof. Romila Thapar, the researcher, author, communicator and a veteran in the study of history doesn’t ignore the question as a figment of imagination. The professor becomes friends with Athira. She realizes that the meaning of Athira’s question and its interpretation are important to the study of history. Imagination is not naïve. It has the interventions of history and reality in it. This realization brings the Professor and Athira together in Ayodhya, UP. They walk through Ayodhya, led by different directions, one of which is guided by books of history. They experience the histories of K.N. Panikker, Susheel, Srivastava, A.G. Noorani, Mushirul Hassan, S. Gopal, Asghar Ali Engineer, Adithya Mukherjee, Neeladri Bhattacharya, Amiya Kumar, Bhagchi, as well as Romila Thapar’s various articles as a space. A space of ideas. There, there is an undemolished mosque. It is the representation of Athira’s vigilant ideological consciousness. Imagination is politicized here. The belief in
this materiality illumines the story and veers pessimism away. The “birds” in the title suggest this mobility of the story. It is the anticipation and belief of a democratic life held against the autocracy of communalism. There are a few instances in the story that supports and fortifies this.

The first one is about intellectual life. Romila Thapar is a globally renowned historian of India. She is one who constantly renovates herself, engages in creative debates, and lives in the excitement and exertions of writing/historicizing. She is also a senior-most professor in JNU. The crony scholars of communalism are threatened by Romila Thapar’s work. Her friendship with Athira P.M., from the northern-most part of Kerala is an extremely democratic one. It is a hearty instance of an intellectual friendship. She is capable of pursuing her friendship with Athira as though with an equal. Both of them share an activist spirit. A great visionary like Romila Thapar is ready to learn from Athira’s doubts. She is an organic intellectual.

The North Indian engages with the Kanjangad Malayalam of Athira on a very friendly note. Athira addresses Romila Thapar as Romilechi, Romu etc. the professor on her part accepts the love of friendship unconditionally. Age, power of position, fame, acceptance, none of these affect their friendship. This is an imagination of the story. It is the presentation of a model.

Fascism is the theory and practice of monologue and autocracy. It is the cruel drama of excess authority and customs. Protests against this happen at the level of individuals also. Friendship ought to be redefined as politics. There should be open and dialogic human relationships at the personal level, against fascist ideologues. It is the imagination of such a relationship in the story that culminates in a dream like friendship between the Professor and Athira.

The second one is the knowledge that Athira receives from
a co-traveler Dona during her train journey to Lucknow. Dona was from Kottayam who was currently working as a nurse in Uduppi, Karnataka. Dona’s immediate response to Athira when she understands that Athira’s destination is Ayodhya is quite revealing. She asks, “Ayodhya is even otherwise very special for you Hindus, isn’t it?”

“What an innocent question” thinks Athira. Yet the story claims to believe otherwise. Here, the story resonates the bad omens of a country being divided on communal lines. The Dona episode is a brief example of how fascism has seeped into and work in the lives of ordinary people and their families. When Athira says that she is going to see Babri Masjid, Dona asks, “What is that chechi?” This ignorance of Dona is more dangerous than her other knowledges. This makes the imagination represented by Athira and its counter politics more relevant.

The third is regarding the presence and nature of Gods. In the third AC coach of Mangala Lakshwadeep Express, idols of Raman, Ganapathi, Shiva and Devi enter. Athira shakes hands with each of them. They chat with Athira. Athira recognizes them as idols of friendship. The story also mentions that Athira’s atheism has in no way affected their friendship towards her. Communal fascists are always particular about giving prime membership to the Gods, converting worship sites to offices for their political propaganda and reaping the benefits of politicizing religion. They reduce, and rewrite the concept of God for their needs. It is the protest of the story and an alternative imagining that is manifested in
the description of the train journey. It is an instance that underscores the extent of liberty that imagination creates as well as its political importance.

The fourth one is Athira’s response to the girl whom she invites to travel with her in her car on her return journey from Ayodhya. Since she is travelling in a car, the ten year old girl is very happy. The story ends with the line that, “Athira just asked her name and address.” The girl might have replied (imaginary). The reply is not there in the narrative. This absence is not deliberate. The name and address are inconsequential to the secular imagination, Athira. It is also not a matter of concern to the secular history, Romila Thapar. It is the manifestation of a love and sisterhood that transcends the segregations in humans. The car that they travel transforms to an ideal space. This instance proclaims that it is possible through imagination and relationships of love to have an ideological resistance to the institutions demolished by Hindu fascists. The story communicates with ease that it is with humanity as against violence.

Imagination is the spur of this transformative story. The story has a freedom that overcomes the rules of realism. Realism is only one mode of representing reality. Realistic spaces are rather insignificant in the world of art. Storytellers become global through the freedom that they imagine through their stories. Imagination is not the other of reality. It is one of the means of art to minutely trace reality. The mechanical materialists, however, wouldn’t acknowledge that imagination has any wisdom or liberatory value. Both Romila Thapar and Athira contemplate whether imagination can overcome the violences done by history. Marx observes that capitalism is against art. “Capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of spiritual production for example art and poetry.” Capitalism nurtures artistic entertainments which are in keeping with the status quo. Liberation through imagination hence is an eloquent and relevant philosophy.
Hailed as the first ‘indigenously’ built ‘Catholic’ press of Kerala, St. Joseph’s press was set up in 1846 at Mananam, in Kottayam, by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara- a prominent priest of the Syrian Catholic community. Having witnessed a dearth of books to propagate Catholic religious ideas and teachings in Malayalam, he recognised the importance of establishing one’s own press.

Saint Chavara’s memoirs chronicle the difficulties encountered to set up the press.

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1 He was canonised on 23rd November, 2014
2 p.III, Preface, Athbutha Lilli Pushpa Manjari – an 1897 book written by the editor of the prominent daily Nasrani Deepika T J Paily as part of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Mananam press
“Using the 12000 chakram\(^3\) donated by Kappamavum Mootil Mariyathumma, the 7500 chakram reserved for holy mass and another 1500 chakram, we bought 150 para\(^4\) land from Chennagattu Thommachen Maapila on vrichikam\(^5\) 27 of the year 43 (Malayalam year). From chingam\(^6\), 44, we concentrated on starting the press.”\(^7\)

In order to learn the intricacies of printing, he procured permission to visit the government Travancore Press (estd. 1834)\(^8\). Muttuchira B Parambil Kuriakose Kathanar who went to the press on Mananam’s behalf managed to study the functioning of the press using the help of catholic workers there. Apparently, Kathanar, who was talented in wood carving and sculpting, made an impression of the press in a banana stock and with the help of a carpenter built a wooden press- the base of which was made of stone.\(^9\)

After the procurement of the press, accessing suitable types was the next big challenge. A Tamil goldsmith by the name of Shivaraman was brought in who created Malayalam types that were slightly squarish in shape. Employing the help of the Metropolitan at Varapuzha, Government permission was procured in 1846. Though the press started functioning, the lack of experienced staff to run the press became a recurring hindrance. Journalist T J Paily in the preface to his book Athbutha Lilli Pushpa Manjari (1897), notes that it was during this critical time that an employee by the name of Kurian from the Travancore government press joined Mananam and trained the rest of the team. Interestingly, references are also made in certain documents to a black Jew, a native of Cochin, who taught the staff book binding.

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\(^3\) A currency of Travancore now defunct.
\(^4\) Area measurement in Malayalam
\(^5\) 4\(^{th}\) month in the Malayalam calendar, Nov-Dec in the Gregorian calendar
\(^6\) 1\(^{st}\) month in the Malayalam calendar, September-October in the Gregorian calendar
\(^7\) p.42, Nalagamangal, Volume 1
\(^8\) p.43, ibid.
\(^9\) p. IV, Preface, op.cit., Though occasional articles make references to some of key individuals who helped set up the press, very little actual information is available on these people.
The first material to be printed at the press was a letter written by St. Chavara to his friends. The first book to be published was a prayer book, *Jnanapiyusham*. As the press did not have the resources to import printing paper from abroad regular writing paper stuck together was used for printing.\(^{10}\)

*Prajagaram*, a translation by Thoppil Kuriyan Kuruvil of a Tamil work was the second work to be published.\(^{11}\) Kuruvil translated a lot of works for St Joseph’s press as well as V.I.P Printers at *Veliyanatil*. He is also believed to have penned original books and songs and chiefly looked after the publishing at *Mananam*. In 1851, *Divyamathrika* was published. Though the name of the translator was not given in the preface, indications are that it was Kuruvil.

**Conclusion**

In its formative years, St. Joseph’s press represented a unique site of borrowings, amalgamations and tensions where myriad cultural and intellectual worlds collided. The history of Tamil printing, especially in the Catholic tradition, is important as it becomes a critical part of the literary inheritance of *Mananam*. Efforts were made by earlier missionaries such as the Jesuit Roberto de Nobili in the 17th century.

\(^{10}\) p.VI, Preface, op.cit.

\(^{11}\) Year unknown. Kuruvil is another key figure in the building St. Joseph’s Press. He was also the main force behind most of the publication work at the press including translations of numerous Tamil tracts. He was considered an eminent scholar and linguist with mastery over Tamil, Sanskrit, Malayalam, Syriac and Latin. However, very little actual information of the man and his contributions survive today.
century, to create a Christian devotional literature moulded along the lines of Tamil religious literary traditions, especially bhakti. Father C J Beschi, another Jesuit and a reputed linguist, is believed to have initiated the tradition of ‘Tamil Christian devotional literature.’ In the early 18th century, he wrote Tempavani, a life of Joseph in ornate Tamil verse, apparently modelled on earlier Tamil epics such as Kampan’s 12th century version of the Ramayana epic. This attempt may be read as an attempt by early catholics to generate a corpus of literature that was organically born of the literary traditions of the vernacular but infused with Christian ideas and values.

The lifeline of St Joseph’s press also sheds light on the modes of transition from pre-colonial ‘manuscript’ to ‘print’ cultures in Malayalam and the attendant processes of language standardisation and literary canonisation. It also helps us better understand the role of missionaries in cementing ‘prose’ as the crowning glory of 19th century literary genres. A similar study, in a more detailed manner, would help generate a vibrant intellectual history of the Malabar region while also facilitating a nuanced investigation of the genesis and shaping of the modern self in colonial Kerala.

Select bibliography

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Marathahalli Walker’s Club

K. Satchidanandan

Translated by Prasad Pannian

Walking was the one and only pastime and physical exercise for Suveeran. Sometimes, he felt that the paths he trod were the skies and that he was a slow, meandering breeze blowing across the galaxies. In moments of agonised pride, he felt he would have already strode up to Kapilavasthu, Calvary, Medina or Dandi in his previous births. Sometimes he felt he was walking in places that his feet had never touched: Bombay, Delhi, Kathmandu, Damascus, Tehran, Istanbul, Cairo, Athens, London, Berlin, Paris... places that he would like to see, but would imagine he had already walked around. Through novels and travelogues, he had acquainted himself with the streets, gardens, temples, mosques and memorials that dotted those places.

Suveeran's walks were never eventless; nor were they always solitary. It was true that humans found it impossible to keep pace
with him and walk the long distances he covered. Nonetheless, sometimes either an enthusiastic dog would run with him or a crow fly in the same direction above his head. Although many trees wanted to walk with him, their deep roots didn’t allow them to do so and tightly held them down in their assigned spots. Hence they only waved their branches and wished him well to satisfy themselves.

A few humans and cats always stared at this briskly walking thirty-year-old. Some even dared to ask: “In a hurry?”

He would then routinely respond in negatives: “Not to buy pills for breathlessness”, “Not to call the priest for someone’s last rites”, “My sister has not yet felt labour pain” “No, I am not late for the job interview”, “My beloved is not waiting in the restaurant”, “Not to inaugurate any protest march”, “No, my house is not on fire”, “No tsunami is pursuing me”, “There is still time for the wine shop to close” and so on. Whoever was curious about his motive once would never again dare face such insolence.

Very rarely did Suveeran return along the same path he had taken. He would never think if the path he took was the sinners’ or the saints’. And so once in a while he has been in the suspects’ list of the moral police. But would one who has fixed his eyes on the horizon ever have the time to quench the longings of the mortal body? Would one who was wedded to the path he travelled ever have any mundane goals? Could the omnipresent one have any sinful sojourn?

By this time, he was familiar with all the
streets, lanes and the labyrinthine bylanes of his city. He knew which route each bus or vehicle would take and when they would go by. He knew where they would stop and who would routinely board those vehicles. He also knew who all were plying those private cars and which office or college or house they would go to, and he was sure which cow would cross the road at what time.

In a certain sense, one could say, he was a cartographer of the city, a repository of its many mysteries! Some even doubted whether he was a Sherlock Holmes. However, they didn’t take him to be one, as there was no Watson with him! Nobody could predict when and how Suveeran would traverse his path. After all, he was not the Equatorial line, was he? Though a good observer, he was never a good planner. In other words, it could be that he hid his roadmaps from his own feet.

He never thought of buying even a scooter; leave alone a car, even though he was rich enough to do so getting good returns working a couple of hours daily on his laptop. He was staying in one of the suburban lodges of the city- if at all one could say, he was ‘staying’ there! To be more specific, he stayed in a lodge on the outskirts of Bangalore city, in Marathahalli. He worked for a big company in a distant land that he had never visited in his life. If he had been ready to work full-time, it wouldn’t have been difficult for him to get a job either in White Field or in the Electronic City. There were two reasons why he didn’t try to have a full-time job: one, he led a modest life and wanted only to make both ends meet: he was afraid of riches; two, then where would he find time to go for his long walks? Coming back tired from the office and then going for a long walk would have been really demanding.

Initially, he used to walk from Marathahalli to Cubbon Park and return. Then he changed his route. From Marathahalli, he would walk through Koaramangala, Jayanagar, Tipu’s Fort, Golf Course, Jalahalli via Kalakari and Indiranagar
and then back to Marathahalli. Wasn’t there a weave of bylanes in Jayanagar and Indiranagar to walk along! Gradually, his walks grew longer. He covered places such as Jeegani, Hosur, Shoolagiri and Kuppam. He also went up to Tumkur, Doddaballapur, Kurboor and Kolar; and then to Kunigal, Yediyur, Magadi and Ramnagar, and then again via Chithradurga up to Davanagere and crossing over Kemkeri, Bidadi, Ramanagaram, Chennappattanam, Madur, Mandya, Sreerangapattanam up to Mysore, then via Sivasamudram, Chamaraj Nagar, Sathiyamangalam, Pollachi and Munnar up to Kodaikkanal, across Gonikkoppa to Madikeri; what is more, from Madikeri via Sultthanbathery up to Ootty and then crossing over Kolar, Chittoor and Thiruvallur up to Chennai. He would know Channasandra, Guttahalli, Bommanahalli and Yeswanthpur like the lines on his own palm. Sometimes, he felt he was walking on the stretchmark of a mother’s belly; at other times, that he was a cartographer!

Gradually he got fed up with his solitary walks. Wouldn’t there be others who are also interested to walk like me? That is how Suveeran found out fourteen other walkaholics; rather, twenty-eight legs including those of two women! Women were fewer in numbers not because they didn’t like walking. After their day’s job and routine homecare, they didn’t get much time to walk. Out of these two women, one was a dalit Kannada researcher doing a comparative study on the different ideas of India in works such as UR Ananthamurthy’s Samskara, SL Bhyrappa’s Aavarana and Siddhalingaiah’s
Ooru keri. And the other woman was an environmental activist. Although the men were mostly jobless youth, there were three retired officers too.

That was how ‘Marathahalli Walkers’ Club’ was founded. Suveerans’ room functioned as its office. Although he would have preferred mobile offices, he couldn’t find moving houses or buildings! Or else, he would have to rent out a van or so but he didn’t have enough money. As it was not mandatory that everyone should walk on the same routes, Suveeran was mostly independent in his choice of routes; sometimes, with his permission some other members accompanied him. That everyone should keep individual journals recording the experiences of their daily walks was the irrefutable code of conduct. They were also supposed to present those experiences at their Sunday meetings. If one put all those reports together, it would make a huge novel! It would be a novel where humans, animals, birds, trees, stars and dust would have equal importance. Let us leave the task to some genius – dead, alive, or yet to be born.

Maybe one could give a romantic twist to this story here: like this female researcher often keeping Suveeran’s company, getting intimate with him and gradually marrying him and so on. But, it is imperative that these propitious romantic situations of music and dance have to be done away with- in other words the story never progressed that smoothly! The researcher Pratibha found time only to pursue of those three writers and their worlds. Thus at a young age, she understood the difference between the three Indias. Sometimes she witnessed how these three countries fought against one another in the bar, streets, or in the countryside. In each of these places, the Brahmin India continued to win with their infinite cunning. One day, during one of her walks, Pratibha had to witness her favourite journalist soaked in blood lying still on the ground surrounded by a few onlookers. There was nothing wrong in her concluding that the dead journalist was the
real India! Those walks changed Pratibha’s worldview completely. She began walking with the rhythms of a route-march. She started secretly looking for criminals who committed such murders in the labyrinthine routes and cyber corridors. She helped the police track down several such crimes, though it is yet another story if all those crimes were followed up seriously afterwards.

I never imagined that this story would turn out to be documenting reality. I hate realism. But our times are such that whatever impossible story you imagine, it would finally turn real and would inevitably lead to many diverse ideas of the nation. Leave it at that. All the diary scribbles of our club members were full of such events; land encroachments, secret murders, narratives of corruption, looting of forest-resources, hunting of wild animals, murders of Dalits, the secret night unions of the daytime foes, the mob-lynching in the name of cows and Ram. Yet, sometimes they also had some positive entries - like that of a secret love-affair crossing the borders of religion, a girl carrying a wounded puppy for its treatment, some organisations distributing ragi and sugar, of small protest meetings raising slogans of justice, so seldom seen these days, some bold writers and artists speaking up, or of some youth organising the Adivasis—rare consolations, these. They were only like occasional fireflies in the depth of the dark woods.

One member of the club was a Tamil Crime Branch officer. The weekly diary scribbling of the members turned out to be useful to him, although he didn’t very much relish the ones that talked about police officers’ criminal
activities and their helping some rich criminals. It was Suveeran himself who often presented such reports in the meetings.

Thus the club went on functioning well for five years. But then one day, Suveeran didn't comeback after his routine walks. As he never used to reveal to his friends the directions or routes his walks took, all searches for him proved vain. Members of the club and police searched for him in every nook and corner, including the forests, streams and mountains. As Pratibha too was not to be found, they kept imagining tales around their disappearance. Who could imagine that the two of them would fall in love and elope?! There was no such sign in their gestures or moves. By this time, Prathibha had been awaiting her *viva voce* after submitting her thesis. She was studying the political murders in the state and around and would present her findings in some of these meetings. Moreover, under her leadership, the Club had recently started publishing a bulletin based on the Sunday reports with Suveeran as the editor.

Gradually, the number of members of the club started dwindling as they left one by one for various reasons. Some passed away. Some others became very busy with their career. Switching jobs or retiring; some relocated to other cities. The signboard ‘Marathahalli Walker’s Club’ which Suveeran himself had designed on his laptop remained there still. And the neighbours could hear from that solitary room the footsteps of someone loitering there on Sundays and reading out notes from a diary about one’s walks and sojourns, in a subdued voice. It is rumoured that sometimes, a young man in his mid-thirties bleeding from the deep wound on his chest would suddenly appear in Theerthahalli, Old Airport Road, or Shivasamudra, or on the elephant corridors of Madikkeri before the pedestrians and vanish abruptly. Some also claim to have seen in those phantom moments, accompanying the young man, a red chudidar-clad young woman, her face and legs turned blue!
Two poems
Jayasree Asokakumar

1. Autumn

With the changing colors of the season
In the palette of my mind,
I mix the reds, yellows, browns and gold
Mixing and spreading;
A stroke here
A swish there
And I paint the world inside me,
With a million beautiful colors!

2. Twilight

Perched on the window sill,
I watched the sun setting...
The shadows deepening
The twilight falling
The dusk painting the sky
In myriad hues........
There is a longing in me,
A poignant desire;
To hold on to the last of the sun’s rays.
Bystanders

Parvathi Warrier

She is there, lies upon that cold hard ground.
The eyes staring at her, colder, harder.
She screams for help; her throat is sore.
Their replies of silence are even louder.

Bound within these patriarchal chains
They watch her stoic, without a care.
They watch, they watch as she is torn to tatters.
They watch as her cloths, dignity, ripped and raped.

Are we so callous to her pains?
Are we so scared to raise our voice?
We watch as she’s shattered again and again
But is it to remain impotent, mute our choice?

We stand alongside the crowd, we frown
Upon those people that hurt and maim
Yet are we too not guilty here,
When we do nothing to stop the shame?

Beaten, bloody, bruised and torn
She holds out her hand, her last cry for help.
Yet as bystanders, we stare, and turn our face
Brought up to ignore everything but ourselves.

‘Stay safe’, my mother tells me everyday:
‘This world is cruel, they’ll tear away
Everything womanly in you and me
And as women, we don’t have a say’.

They’ll watch as bystanders, scared to speak
Unless there are more echoes from the crowd
They’ll deny there exists of a problem
Of their honour and identity; yet, they’ll be proud.

She cries for help; this woman, distraught
For no one will help her or save her from him
They all watch as bystanders forever, always
Even as in tears and blood, she swims, she drowns.

She is there, lies upon that cold hard ground
The eyes staring at her, colder, harder.
She screams for help, her throat so sore.
Their replies of silence are even louder.

And, so I remain upon that ground
Ignoring my pain, I look around
“What have we come for? What state are we in?
To leave me here, aren’t you monsters with human face?
OUR WRITERS

Dr K. M. Sherrif
Associate Professor & HOD
Department of English, Calicut University

Dr C. B. Sudhakaran
Head of the Department (English),
Ilahia College of Arts and Science,
Pezhakkappilly, Muvattupuzha

Dr K. M. Anil
Associate Professor & Director, Ezhuthachan Padana Kendram
Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University, Tirur

Dr N. P. Ashley
Department of English
St. Stephen’s College, Delhi-110007

Dr K. C. Muraleedharan,
Associate Professor and HOD (Retd),
Dept of English, Payyanur College
(Principal, St. Joseph’s College, Pilathara)

Dr. C. Padmanabhan
Associate Professor
Dept. of English, Pazhassi Raja NSS College
Mattannur, Kannur-670702

E. P. Rajagopalan
Sreerekha, Maniyatt
Kasargod- 671310

Manjusha Madhu
B7, Upper Ground floor,
Mittal Building (Divya Shiv Sai Society),
Near Hanuman Mandir, Lado Sarai, New Delhi 110030

Jayasree Asokakumar,
‘Janaky’, Forus Cosy Nest, Machingal Lane, Thrissur – 680 001

Parvathi Warrier,
2249, 4th. A - Main, KA Extn., Vimanapura PO, Bengaluru - 17.

To our writers

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