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Being-onto-Itself: Binx Bolling as the Outsider in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*

Dr. G.V. Naresh

“Abraham saw signs of God and believed. Now the only sign is that all the signs in the world make no difference. Is this God’s ironic revenge? But I am onto him” (1973:146). So notes Binx Bolling, the central character in Walker Percy’s first novel *The Moviegoer*. Elsewhere, Percy observes (*The Second Coming* 1980:16): “A person nowadays is two percent himself. And to arrive at a diagnosis is already to have anticipated the cure: how to restore the ninety-eight percent?” One of the chief interests of Percy is in the nature of being: specifically, he is interested in defining the modern self. As Percy makes it clear, definition of self contains in itself the cure for the malaise from which ‘modern’ humanity suffers. Percy had modest ambitions for his first fiction. He confined himself, to borrow a term from the judges who awarded the 1962 National Book Award for Fiction to *The Moviegoer*, to an “intimation” of the everydayness that has enveloped the modern mankind.

Walker Percy at the very outset makes his aim clear – the epigraph from Soren Kierkegaard’s (referred to as the Great Danish Philosopher towards the end of the novel) *The Sickness Unto Death*, which reads “... the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair”. *The Moviegoer* has in it one, rather

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two, characters – Binx himself and his cousin Kate – who are represented as beings with self-awareness in the midst of beings who are lost to themselves, sunk in inauthentic existence. As Percy himself enunciates:

My novel is an attempt to portray the rebellion of two young people against the shallowness and tastelessness of modern life. The rebellion takes different forms. In Kate, it manifests itself through psychiatric symptoms: anxiety, suicidal tendencies and the like. In Binx it is a “metaphysical” rebellion – a search for meaning which is the occasion of a rather antic life in a suburb of New Orleans... (Serebnick 1985:3)

Perhaps “rebellion” is a strong word. Binx particularly appears to be unable to confirm to the norms of modern life, despite all his longing to do so. The reason is that Binx is a Being-onto-itself and onto the mystery of Being and therefore he becomes, by virtue of his consciousness, an Outsider. The attractiveness of the novel of discussion rests on the recognition of how Percy yokes these two appearances of being (or facets of self) which makes this work stand apart from other literature of alienation. This paper aims to elucidate the above.

First, a brief explanation of the term Being-onto-itself. Jean Paul Sartre in his monumental work *Being and Nothingness* defines the qualities of Being-in-itself, Being-for-itself and Being-for-others. Being-in-itself, which is the fundamental state of being, is non-conscious being; being which is unaware of its self. Being which is conscious nihilates Being-in-itself and stands out as Being-for-itself. Being-for-others is a dimension of being in which the self manifests as an object for the other. Being-onto-itself must be distinguished in a fine but necessary manner from Being-for-itself. On the surface, both would appear to represent the same phenomenon of being. Largely, the term (which does not occur in Sartre) must be coined for the being which is conscious – as delineated in formal existential writings – as well as what being makes of itself. Binx Bolling, on the other hand, is only just awakening into consciousness. Thus Being-onto-itself is an

intermediary, and by its nature temporary, stage before it takes a leap of faith and emerges as Being-for-itself. Percy succeeds in a remarkable manner in capturing this transitory and elusive appearance of such a being, for Binx is only just blossoming into self-awareness.

Van Cleave observes that “Binx’s dialogue with his posited reader is a deliberate dramatization of his awakening into consciousness” (1970:999). Binx’s search, vertical and horizontal, his modes of rotation and repetition are phases of his existential metamorphoses. Movies have their role to play: they are a metaphor and a vehicle of repetition; accordingly, Binx is a moviegoer.

In this plenitude of existents, Binx Bolling is onto the abyss of being. He is onto the various moods and emotions of being. He understands malaise in this manner; malaise is a central theme of the novel:

What is the malaise? You ask. The malaise is the pain of loss. The world is lost to you, the world and the people in it, and there remains only you and the world and you no more able to be in the world than Banquo’s ghost. (1973:120)

It must be admitted that no apter symbol would express the ethereality of existence than a reference to a (literary) ghost. Humanity is as much situated in the world as a ghost, the implication being that our existence is only that much real. Binx knows his angst and the despair of the other as well. He is under the impression that “everyone is dead” (1973:99). Perhaps at the root of such a – weird? – reaction to the world must lie the realization of the enormity of creation, or life. Binx possesses this sense of wonder in his soul: the mystery of the universe fills him with awe and amazement. Once Binx works with a person called Harry in a laboratory, conducting an experiment. It resulted in Binx spending less and less time in the scientific work at hand. Rather, he began to sit down and gaze spellbound, engrossed in the splendor of summer afternoons. Recalling this period of his

life, Binx declares:

I would not change places with him if he discovered the cause and cure of cancer. For he is no more aware of the mystery which surrounds him than a fish is aware of the water it swims in. He could do research for a thousand years and never have an inkling of it. (1973:52)

Captivated by the reality of the universe around him, Binx naturally responds to the idea of a search. Obviously, Binx undertakes a search in order to be – as he phrases it – “onto something”. In an insightful observation, Binx shatters the illusion of contemporary humans who are etherized in the false belief that they lead meaningful lives. Binx points to the heart of the matter here:

The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. This morning, for example, I felt as if I had come to myself in a strange island. And what does such a castaway do? Why, he pokes around the neighbourhood and he doesn't miss a trick.

To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something ... (1973:13)

Not finding oneself as if in a strange island is despair. T.S. Eliot formulates this sickness of everydayness in a similar fashion. Harry of *The Family Reunion* decries:

You are all people

To whom nothing has happened, at most a continual impact of external events. You have gone through life in sleep,

Never woken to the nightmare. I tell you, life would be unendurable

If you were wide awake. (1982: 293)

Arguably, there is a certain bliss in ignorance. However, for Percy this is an evidence of despair. Binx prefers or at least attempts at an authentic self with all his strength. For the moment,

all he lacks is a proper focus on possibilities. While refusing to identify or name the object of his search, Binx explores all avenues at his disposal in order that he may be led to the true Light, whatever that may be. Binx is a seeker of the unknown. Truthfully, Binx accepts honestly, “it is the fear of exposing my own ignorance which constrains me from mentioning the object of my search” (1973:14).

Initially Binx embarks on what he calls a “vertical search”. Binx reads fundamental books – key books on key subjects – in order to have a glimpse of the Truth. Binx succeeds in gaining a fair amount of knowledge of the universe. The only snag, which distracts Binx from such a search, is that while “the universe had been disposed of, I myself was left over” (1973:70). Binx thereupon starts a “horizontal search” which is the situation in which he appears to us in his narration.

Yet another cognitive source is movie going, even with its limitations. “The movies are onto the search”, informs the seeker, “but they screw it up. The search always ends in despair” (1973:13). Movies serve another function of greater importance – they help towards fulfilling “repetition”. Binx, after a lapse of 14 years, watches a film, *The Oxbow Incident*, in a bid to recapture the mood of the past and to integrate the past with the present. Binx views repetition as a “re-enactment of past experience toward the end of isolating the time segment which has lapsed in order that it, the lapsed time, can be savored of itself and without the usual adulteration of events that clog time like peanuts in brittle” (1973:79-80).

The other existential mode of “rotation” helps in the “experiencing of the “new beyond the expectation of the experiencing of the new” (1973:144). As Binx perceives, visiting a new place is an ordinary rotation, but stumbling upon something unexpected, say a hidden valley, is a good rotation. These two devices together with the centrality of alienation compose the form of modern self, battling against the malaise. Binx is bitter when he says “Everydayness is the enemy” (1973:145).

Thus far, we have with us the “metaphysical” reference to the mind of Binx Bolling which guides us to posit him as a Being-onto-itself. Quagliano’s reaction substantiates this point of view: “To be aware of one’s alienation is to open the possibility of a way out, but it is far from the guarantee of escape. Self-awareness of one’s alienation can be no more than a dim recognition of one’s malaise and need not initiate a ‘search’ such as Binx Bolling’s” (1977:217). Sweeny concurs: “Percy’s protagonists pass from awareness of their malaise, to a search and journey, to belief and communion...” (1987:3).

No self engages in isolation. Alienation is not a physical actuality. Every self without exception must confront the other. The difference with Binx is that for him “role playing and his assigning of star roles to others are a part of his often witty self-awareness” (Byrd 1872:176). Also, “Binx uses the movies as metaphors for himself” (Frenshney 1982:719). Binx uses the movies to chart out the other. Freshney articulates that “Binx is astute and observant enough to see through the roles of those around him and identify them as what they are – roles, like the ones in the movies” (1982:719). For Tharpe, the fact that Binx takes to movies reflects the state of his angst. “...the more a moviegoer attends the movies, the more intense is his awareness of the abyss beneath him...” (1979:5).

These critical responses suggest the interplay of movies, self and the other. It is true Binx makes some use of movies for himself and others. This is one special feature of Percy’s novel of alienation. The second highlight of this fiction is the conflict between the Self and the Other. This one aspect which differentiates *The Moviegoer* from other literatures of alienation say, Kafka’s *The Trial* or Albert Camus’s *The Outsider* also includes in it the element of concreteness. Binx Bolling is very much in the midst of a thriving, vibrant and kicking culture. Culture and not merely society. Society implies citizens but culture men and women with a way of life. Aunt Emily, godmother and benefactor of Binx, has stoicism and good old southern values to fall back on.

Binx's mother (his father ends his life) and stepfather have the Roman Catholic faith to direct them. The all pervasive, ubiquitous need and love for money is another realistic nail to pin Binx to the earth. He himself is a stock and bonds broker earning more than a living. Walker Percy in an interview with Keith enunciates:

I felt that it would be a fascinating idea to start out with a young man whose life was free of all ordinary worries, one with a good family, fair financial stability and things with which he should be aesthetically satisfied, but who, somehow, finds himself as one of the "outsiders" about which existentialists talk. (1985:7)

Undoubtedly with his sense of alienation, Binx, like his better known literary companion Meursault, must be the "outsider" as well. Binx, on the other hand, is also a paradox:

Binx is in his society but not of it. He is at once a typical insider and a classic outsider. As an insider, he lives in his natal city, works in a family business, spends a good deal of time with friends and family connections. Yet, he feels himself a man almost without identity. Alienated from his culture, he feels that his most fortunate circumstance is that he regains the ability to see his life as a stranger might, freshly and from the outside. (Webb 1979:1)

Further, Binx "is going along with the others, but he does so *as an outsider, as one consciously acting a part*" (Webb 1979:9) [Emphasis added]. The Being-onto-itself, profoundly intoxicated by movies, is the outsider in the bargain. It is typical of Percy to intertwine complex ideas to portray a faithful picture of reality. A reader of Percy must be wary of recondite circles of meaning in his fiction.

The point that is being labored is this: despite all his intentions to educate himself by being an outsider, Binx is drawn into a crushing encounter with the other. Briefly, during the course of his social visits, Binx, by accident, leaves New Orleans for Chicago with his neurotic and suicidal cousin Kate, without the knowledge of the formidable Aunt Emily who finally traces Binx and Kate.

Upon their return, she has an audience with Binx, quietly

venting her angry disappointment with him. She expected much. After all, she stood up for all the beautiful values which would make this earth a paradise to live in. Worse, Binx more to soothe the distraught Kate (who had just recovered from a deliberate over dosage of tranquillizer pills) had attempted to copulate with her. All this shatters Aunt Emily. She had believed that Binx is or was “one of her kind”. She dismisses Binx from her presence and favor. What saves Binx from disaster is Kate’s decision to marry him, which (as Binx records in the epilogue) restores the love which Emily had for Binx. All’s well that ends well. Or is it?

In one of the best instances of subtle drama, Percy hints at this underlying war of supremacy between the self which strives for authenticity and the others who are bent on conformity. Lawson explains that in everydayness, man falls into a “they-self” system (1982:129) which means that the “they” exert the greatest pressure on the self to fall in line. Luschei is insightful when he remarks “these twin perspectives, the existential [Binx’s search] and the aristocratic [Emily’s expectations of Binx], are to follow parallel courses through the novel, supplying what line it possesses and culminating in a sort of denouement” (1972:73). In this battle for supremacy, Cleave has an inclination of what is to come: “Binx may take her [Aunt Emily] ideal for what he ought to be, or what is his truest, if unrealized, self. Her power is great enough to drive Binx back from consciousness” (1970:1001).

Binx does admit defeat: “My search has been abandoned; it is no match for my aunt, her rightness and despair, her despairing of me and her despairing of herself” (1973:228). Binx had played for high stakes. Walter contends that Binx was “after something to make possible an integrated conception of life and thus a unity of being that will validate in proper human relation all the parts of the self: the private and the social; the intellectual, emotional and physical; the aesthetic, scientific, and practical; the playful and serious; and the worldly and spiritual” (1980:576-77). A spirited endeavor to achieve an integrated self and unity of being, with a balance of emotion maintaining orderliness is to be fulfilled.

Binx's search is abandoned. In a moving statement, Binx makes it plain that his self had suffered great anguish and he manifests this by his decision to confirm:

There is only one thing I can do: listen to people, see how they stick themselves into the world, hand them along a ways in their dark journey and be handed along ... (1973:233)

Walker Percy observed that his plan in his works is to study man in the European sense and that his aim is to "Americanize the movement" (Doar 1985:5). *The Moviegoer* is remarkable in situating an alienated self in the ocean of humanity and allowing the self to survive in it. Vanderwerken decides that the novel forces us to see "America anew – not as alive and free and happy, but as dead, imprisoned, despairing" (1979:52).

The novel's melancholic undertone is what impresses us most. For unless one strains to hear these tragic notes, one would be glad at the happy ending (Kate and Binx marry). True despair, finally, is not merely being aware of being in despair but in the imprisonment of the conscious self. Being that is onto itself is stopped in its tracks and made to retrace its path.

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Women Empowerment- the SIS/DMRT Perspective

Dr. Jyothirmani Vatakkayil

In India the first organisation for women was begun by men who belonged to the new religious reform associations. Begun in Bengal, it was inspired by Kashub Chandra Sen, the charismatic leader of the Brahmo Samaj. These were also part of the educational experiments of the late 19th and early 20th centuries which produced a “new woman” with interest that went outside the household. Its remarkable effect was that for the first time in India’s history women began to communicate with women outside their families and local communities.¹ The leaders of the Prarthana Samaj were also concerned with improving women’s status as part of social reform.

The first organisation for women by women was the Arya Mahila Samaj set up by Pandit Rama Bai Saraswathi for the general uplift and enlightenment of the women. Rama Bai’s organisation imagined the ideal woman as an efficient housewife and one who would enter the public world to do service during emergencies such as flood, famine and plague.² The National Social Conference initiated by justice M.G. Ranade had also organised a Lady’s Social Conference (Bharat Mahila Parishad)³. The National Social Conference was formed at the third meeting of the Indian National Congress in 1887 to provide a forum for the discussion of social issues⁴.

In the first meeting of the Parishad, Ramabai Ranade exhorted women to work side by side with men for the regeneration of the nation.⁵ The general discussions focused on issue like medical relief, domestic life, early marriage and child welfare.⁶ In all their meetings the main topics continued to be female education and the need to abolish evil social customs such as child marriage, dowry and neglect of women⁷.

The British support for female education did not extend to issue of autonomy. As Ramabai pointed out, the government though advocated education and emancipation, “comes to break her spirit allowing its law to become an instrument for riveting her chains”, when women refused to “be a slave”⁸. The movement for women’s education, as inspired by these male guided organisations, provided them with their first experience with public work. But they also imposed certain limitations on women. They regarded the household as the primary focus and fundamental arena of activity for women. The colonial administration did not make any attempt to empower women through education by making them daring enough to challenge the social system which was typically patriarchal⁹.

The first women’s organisation founded by women was the Bharat Stree Mahamandal, began in 19110 in Allahabad by Saraladevi Chandurani, who was quite critical of the women’s meetings held in connection with the Indian National Social Conference. She called for a permanent association of Indian women. The Bharat Stree Mahamandal has opened branches in various parts of India like Lahore, Allahabad, Delhi, Karrachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Midnapur and Calcutta to promote female education by bringing together, “women of every race, creed, class any party.. on the basis of their common interests in the moral and materials progress of the women of India.”¹⁰ The Mahamandal found “purdah” as the main stumbling block to popular acceptance of female education. To get round this practice, they sent teachers into the homes to teach reading. writing, music, sewing and embroidery.¹¹ Gradually,

through these activities, women began to understand many of the problems shared by all women. What the Mahamandal did not share was the same economic base as the women they claimed to represent. Hence their perceptions of the viability of certain options was limited to a particular class to which they belonged. This class prevented the rural poor from sending their daughters to the schools even if they favoured female education. However, for the expansion of opportunities beyond home required that women learn new skills- linguistic and social for the new roles.¹²

Women's organisations on a national level were formed after World War I. Between 1917-1927 there emerged three major organisations: the Women's Indian Association (WIA), the National Council of Women in India (NCWI), and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC). Though a few eminent women of Kerala were associated with these organizations, they did not attract the vast majority of the female population who lived in the villages. Mrs. Ammu Swqaminathan, for example, was one of the honorary secretaries of WIA. The Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bayi of Travancore was the President of the NCWI from 1938-1944¹³. In spite of some amount of good work which they have done by way of promoting women's education and enhancing their self-respect, their elitist bias was restricting them from becoming a dynamic movement. Their programmes continue to be "superficial" because they did not enquire into "root causes", as was pointed out by Nehru.¹⁴ Therefore they failed in their efforts to bring lower-class rural and urban women into their organizational field.

Despite their inadequacies women's work in colonial India deserves serious consideration, especially in view of their alignment to the working class in India. Faithful to what appears in documents and records, have ignored the role of women in labour unions".¹⁵ Nevertheless, women's participation in strikes and labour disturbances, as strike breakers and as labour leaders was not from the 1920's.¹⁶ It remains a fact that the women's organisations ignored empirical evidence on the problems faced by women in different sectors of labour. As Ammu Swaminathan

argues, “Our working women are neither educated nor organized to speak for themselves and it is this helplessness due to illiteracy and harmful social customs, such as child marriage, etc. that alone makes us ask for a certain amount of protection for them”¹⁷.

It was through the conscientious work done by a few middle class women that more light was thrown into the miserable conditions of working class women, especially in the industrial sector. Godavari Gokhale (later with startling knowledge of the pitiful condition of the factory women. Godavari with her friend Bahale Rao, formed the Women’s Fellowship of Service as a women’s wing of the Servants of India Society.¹⁸ (SIS) while working with SIS projects, Godavari focused on labour: teaching, sewing promoting labour unions, organizing domestic workers, and developing adult literacy programmes. (Eventually, however, she was radicalized by the appalling conditions of the working women and was attracted to the Communist party.

The work of the SIS for the promotion of female education was a neglected chapter in the history of women’s movement in India. Geraldine Forbes who has studied the achievement of Indian women over the last two centuries.¹⁹ has almost wholly left out the contributions of men like G.K. Devadhar, one of the founder members of the SIS, on female education. The perceptions of the SIS in this respect was materialized in the shape of several of their educational social upliftment programmes carried out in different parts of the country including Kerala on the subject.

During the period of his extensive tour to various parts of India in connection with “India work” (*India* was the publications of the British committee of the Congress) Devadhar had acquired a first hand knowledge about the social backwardness of India. He learnt that the main reason for this backwardness was the widespread lack of education of the people of India. As a result he found that “public spirit was at very low ebb” even in the urban areas²⁰, this awareness was a potential motivation for Devadhar to choose educational work as a life-time career.

Devadhar knew that spread of education among Indian

women would go long way in their liberation. His deep concerns and ideas in this respect were presented by him in *Note on Female Education in India* submitted to the government of Bombay in 1916, in response to their call views and suggestions on the subject.²¹ He was quite unhappy that the spread of mass education was very hopelessly slow. He demanded more governmental funds and the participation of the local governments in solving the question of backwardness of female education in India. Eventually, with a deep passion for social work, he got himself associated with several voluntary organizations, He was one of the founders of the Poona Seva Sadan,, which was started in 1909 had branches in different parts of the country to serve the poor, the sick and the distressed.²² He worked as Honorary General Secretary of Seva Sadan Poona, the Seva Sadan Home Classes, Bombay which was working for the Marathi speaking women and several Home Classes and normal classed committees in Bombay, Poona and Surat. These institutions were meant to cater to the educational needs of married women, grown up unmarried women, girls and widows. They gave literary, industrial, and professional education and training to women²³. These were run on the pattern of “continuation classes” so common in Western countries, especially in Germany for the education of the labouring class boys, as well as on the model of the “Mother’s schools” in England which aimed at training women in the discharge of their domestic duties by equipping them with the necessary amount of literary and other knowledges.²⁴ They sent women candidates to appear for the various examinations of the training college for women in Poona and many of them became teachers in the schools run by the Christian missions, Municipalities and the Seva Sadans. Arrangements were also made for the professional training of women in the medical field such as midwifery and general, surgical and obstetric nursing.²⁵ as the number of women who opted to take such training was limited, the Seva Sadans introduced women to new professional avenues like sewing, embroidery hosiery, painting, first aid, home nursing, domestic economy and gave certificates of proficiency so as to enable the women candidates to

earn a decent livelihood on the strength of the knowledge acquired. Devadhar's work in the field of female education was appreciated even by the Bombay Government.²⁶

Devadhar had clear ideas about the role of women and the role of education in social transformation. He placed great stress on the education of grown up women for several reasons. First, he argued that, "the educated mothers will be missionaries of female education and the elevation and emancipation of their own sex"²⁷ Secondly educated mothers would be better able to manage their household economically and thus be a source of economic strength to their families especially in the midst of strained circumstances; thirdly they will be better able to take care of their children and thus materially and intelligently assist in reducing infant mortality; fourthly they will be true companions of their husbands and other male relations by being able to take an intelligent interest in social and national questions and by helping in the gradual realization of the social and political aspirations which were dominating the thoughts of the present generations; and lastly they will be truly efficient and patriotic citizens of the British Empire.

These ideas of Devadhar were very much in tune with the educational proposals of his master Gokhale, who was the champion of Elementary Education in India. In 1910, Gokhale moved a resolution on this subject in the Imperial Legislative Council urging the government to introduce compulsory elementary education.²⁹ Piloting Elementary Education bill in the Council on 16th March 1911 Gokhale emphasized that "the Education of girls is with us even a greater necessity than that of boys and look forward to the time when compulsion will be extended to all children alike of either sex."³⁰ The significance of the views of Gokhale and Devadhar was born out of the governmental approach to Education as it was brought to the notice of the Council by Gokhale: "there was then no separate portfolio of Education, and educational interests rubbed shoulders with jails and the police, in the all-comprehensive charge of the Home

Department”.³¹

The other recommendations of Devadhar to the government include establishment of an Anglo-Vernacular Girl's School either in a district town or in a big taluk where there is High School for boys, “continuation classes” for married girls; provisions for reading room and library attached to such classes; a local committee with District Hospitals for the training of young women as nurses and midwives.³² In the field of secondary education Devadhar pleaded for the establishment of girls high schools at provincial head quarters or provincial towns or in cities with arts colleges. English should be taught as a second language.³³ In the field of higher Education he suggested that instead of spending money for the establishment of separate Arts Colleges for women, the money should be spent wisely, for popularizing education among women by granting scholarship and establishing hostels etc. However he was farsighted enough to suggest that when number of women taking higher education grows, it would be necessary to begin separate colleges for women which could ultimately lead to the establishment of a separate women's University on the lines of those in America and Japan.³⁴

Women leaders elsewhere were defining women's issue as female education, child marriage, the observance of purdah and women's status in the family. Obviously they spoke from a specific class orientation. In Malabar, as part of their multifarious work the SIS had done remarkable services for the upliftment of women. Education was thought of as a means to achieve women's society. Other issues were sought to be tackled through the scientific awareness and consciousness imparted through education.³⁵ Though the work of the early women's organizations were limited, their historical significance cannot be by passed. As Geraldine Forbes states, “Clearly they spoke from a specific class orientation but they did at a time when there was considerable prejudice against female education, child marriage was preferred, and widow remarriage was unheard of in respectable families.”³⁶

In Kerala the work of the SIS was concentrated mainly in

Malabar for historical reasons. It was the Malabar Rebellion which was instrumental for their arrival and subsequent activities in Kerala. In the wake of the Malabar Rebellion several voluntary organizations came to Malabar for relief work. These include the Servants of India Society (SIS), (Poona), Sevasadan (Poona), Arya Samaj (Lahore), and Christian organisations like the YMCA. Infact the SIS came to Malabar in the shape of a fact finding delegation from its Poona headquarters, and was led by G.K. Devadhar. The SIS soon began relief activities along with the other voluntary organisations. After some time, the work of these organisations merged into Malabar Central Relief Committee (MCRC). In 1924 MCRC was disbanded and a trusty was established in honor of G.K. Devadhar's great services to the cause of Malabar. The trust was known as DMRT. Ever since, SIS worked in Malabar was performed under the aegis of the DMRT. Since then their work continued for about four decades in different areas such as distress relief, education, rural reconstruction and social reform.³⁷ The educational activities of the SIS in Kerala extended through the DMRT (Devadhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust) emphasized the education of women especially of the rural areas and of the down trodden sections of the society. They have thus played a pioneering role in the education of the Dalits in Kerala. In the feudal, casteist and orthodox social set up of Kerala, the educational activities of the SIS/DMRT was quite unique with its emancipatory potential and secularizing mission.. The great achievement of the SIS in Kerala was their recognition of the ubiquitous role of education in fostering a sense of public spirit, which was thoroughly lacking in Kerala society. This was then extended to the fields of rural upliftment, social reform and communal harmony as the solid foundation for a new social formation on liberal, egalitarian principles.

Though the SIS was a purely voluntary organization, its strong organiser in Kerala, V.R. Nayanar, was informed by a political, vision. As he wrote, capitalism was the root cause of the extreme poverty which was pervasive experience in the thirties. He explained that the history of landlords and industrialists

proved the intimidating power of capitalism. Their administrative machinery and idea of justice were based upon a limited sense of public welfare in almost all countries. Therefore he made a case for a social system based on the principles of socialism.³⁸ The economy had to be decentralized so as to enable the humble folk to play a role in it. At a time when the impoverished Indians were in capable of productive ventures which require substantial investments, the constructive programmes of the SIS/DMRT, very often conceived on the principles of Swadeshi were of great significance. As J.C. Kumarappa arguedm, any project which exploited the raw material of a country, and over looked the more potential human resource was second-rate and incapable of creating equality among human beings.³⁹ Though their industrial training centers, the SISS/DMRT sought to achieve these goals through a variety of constructive program in which women were persuaded to involve. In course of time these stood in good stead not only in combating poverty but also in empowering them. Women thus began to recognise their role in the production process and realize their status as potential members both of the family and the society.

Nayanar had pointed out that the spread of Western education had created among women an unprecedented enthusiasm, sense of sacrifice and more involvement in the freedom movement. Women showed courage and conscientiousness much to the surprise of the men folk. However, he was alarmed by some of the pitiable conditions of women in India. Not only that their number was disproportionate to that of men, they were also enfeebled by such practices as child marriage and consequent early widowhood. Indian women also suffered from ill health; their children suffered from under weight, and were subject to infant mortality. He argued that so long as Indian women continued to be uneducated and their miserable plight remain unchanged, no significant social development would be possible in India⁴⁰ This awareness prompted the DMRT to focus their attention to the upliftment of women. Girls, especially of the marginalized groups, such as the *Dalits* were increasingly persuaded to attend schools.

The DMRT had established a string of schools, both night schools and day schools and adult literacy classes throughout Malabar.

The DMRT took special interest in the education of Muslim girls of Ernad. According to the Trust's annual report for 1939-40, three Muslim girls who completed Std VIII from the DMRT's Nediyrippu school were admitted to high school at Malappuram. This was the first instance Muslim girls pursuing high school education in Ernad Taluk.⁴¹ The DMRT had also joined hands with the activities of the Harijan Sevak sample both in the field of education and social reforms. That way women empowerment project gained further momentum in Malabar.⁴²

Though their industrial training centers the DMRT was able to impart vocational training to women, especially the *Dalit* Communities. The significance of the DMRT venture in this respect could be gauged from the historical phase in which the task was executed. In the 1930s and 1940s, following the spread of cholera and malaria, there was widespread unemployment in Malabar villages. In extreme distress large numbers of people were turned destitute. As a way out from their predicaments, Nayanar thought of launching an industrial training centre, first at Tanur.⁴³ The

DMRT village industrial centre imparted training in spinning and weaving, net-making, paper making, soap making, coir mating, and new agricultural methods. Training centers were also started at Nediyrippu, Gopalapuram (near Koyilandy) and other places. Large number of women received vocational training at these centers and they were able to make a humble living. This led to the eventual recognition of the role of women in rural economy. Lessons in hygienic living, the need to keep away from unhealthy habits like drinking were also imparted to the trainees. The awareness so created though a comprehensive method contributed greatly to the ideal of empowerment in the true sense of the term.⁴⁴

The sudden death of Nayanar in 1945 at the age of 45, created a gap in the public life of Malabar which could not easily

be filled in.⁴⁵ In the words of Thikkodiyan Nayanar's secretary, "the light has gone out unexpectedly". At this juncture, however, Mrs Mayanar thought of continuing public work, in her own humble way. She came to Calicut (the Nayanar's were settled at Tanur) and took up the task of running the Balika Sadanam, an orphanage established by her husband. She was the Honorary Secretary of the Nayanar Balika Sadanam Trust till her death in 1985.⁴⁶ She took special interest in the education of the Dalit girls of the Sadanam. In her work she was also assisted by her brother Vasu Menon, himself a freedom fighter.⁴⁷ Mrs. Nayanar was a unique example in Malabar women in public life. Through her committed and unrelenting activities for the cause of destitute girls, she set a model for the spirit of service and kept the flames of SIS idealism alive for decades even after the SIS/DMRT ceased functioning in Malabar. That way she had contributed her share in respect of women empowerment. The Sadanam is the only institution which continued functioning in the SIS/DMRT model till quite recently.⁴⁸

A very important task undertaken by the DMRT during this period was the establishment of several orphanages throughout Malabar. Hundred of children had become orphans in Malabar as they lost their parents by cholera. Nayanar and his volunteers considered it their scared duty to protect these children who were in extreme distress, irrespective of caste and creed.⁴⁹ From Madayi in the north to Valappad in the south they set up orphanages. Among the thirteen orphanages begun by Nayanar in various parts of Malabar the one at Eranjipalam in Calicut was meant for girls in various orphanages in one centre.⁵⁰ Following the death of Nayanar the centre was called "Nayanar Balike Sadanam" and was looked after by his wife Madhavikkutti Amma, popularly known as Mrs. Nayanar.⁵¹ In the first few years they got meagre grants from the government. But the major expenses were met by donations. Mrs. Nayanar was the Honorary Secretary of the Trust which controlled and managed the Sadanam till her death on 16th July 1985.

The Trust, namely Nayanar Children Home Society was

registered on 14th May 1957. The objects of the Society was” to help the destitute or orphaned children to brings them up by starting sand running children’s homes and by providing among other things, protection, food, shelter, education, etc., and help them to grow up as healthy and useful citizens”.⁵² There were in the beginning 54 inmates in the Sadanam.. In the initial stages it was very difficult to meet the expenses. They grew vegetables in the Sadanam compound. Inspite of difficulties Mrs. Nayanar gave the girls proper education. Her idea was to secure them placement to sent them in marriage⁵³ and thus make them self reliant.⁵⁴ Mrs. Nayanar made constant requests to benevolent persons and institutions for help.

The Nayanar Balika Sadanam was a great protection to hundreds of girls belonging to the backward classes of Malabar who were rendered helpless or orphaned either by epidemics or by extreme poverty and other misfortunes. V.R. Nayanar was infact a father figure to the inmates owing to his affection and kindness. After his death Mrs. Nayanar took up it work as Hon. Secretary. The inmates began to address her as mother.⁵⁵ Like her husband, she was also extremely devoted to the cause of the destitute. But for this yeoman endeavour many would have been spoiled or drawn into wretched conditions.

A significant aspect of the DMRT programme was the emphasis given to women in the rural upliftment programmes. Through their industrial training centers, they initiated women of all classes to join social work and constructive programmes. That way, they had done quite a lot by way of fostering the ideal of women empowerment in Malabar, vis-a-vis the current stress on the subject. Women were encouraged to come out of their domestic confinements to the mainstream of public life. The multifarious activities of the DMRT in the areas of literacy, adult education, library movement, rural reconstruction, education and social reform were all simultaneously venues and occasions where the objective of women empowerment was sought to be realized. The egalitarian thrust of the SIS/ DMRT programmes were particularly

suited to achieving the above goals, as their programmes were executed grass root level.

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Memory, History and Marquezian Narratology

Dr. Zainul Abid Kotta

Pierre Nora's idea that "the quest for memory is the search for one's history" (289) aphoristically comments about the inter relationship between history and memory, the dichotomy on which Garcia Marquez works with. Gabriel García Márquez relies heavily on the use of memory as a means to rewrite the history of those oppressed because of race, class and/or gender in a world where historiography has been dominated by the white colonizer. Memory is closely related to the reclamation of identity and history — both personal and collective. Memory and history dominate in majority of Marquezian narratives including his magnum opus *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. García Márquez seems to believe that memory and imagination are essential parts of the narrative art especially in a Colombian perspective.

Marquez introduces the unsettling question of what happens to communication when language breaks down. It asks myriads of questions like to what extent languages are reliable for the permanence of memory, and what happens when we all stop speaking that language? Those topics are particularly relevant in Latin American history, which was notoriously distorted even in school text books.

The novels like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *General in his Labyrinth* enact quest stories since they enclose the

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development of a character's search for his family history, which consummates in his solving an enigma, be it enclosed in a song or in some parchments written in a foreign language. This can rightly be interpreted as another example of the inadequacy of the history written in a hierarchical world where the oppressors/colonizers write the history of the oppressed/colonized.

By trying to record an alternative history, Garcia Marquez debunks the official myth that Europe imported culture to South America. He metaphorically questioned Spain's claim that it has bequeathed to America the benefits of European civilization. The much boasted conquest is ridiculously parodied by the expedition in which the Macondoians (OHYS) re-enact the ordeals of the Spanish explorers and conquistadors in order to make contact with the civilization which Spain expanded to its colonies. Marquez reiterates that one of the prime factors of Latin America's miserable socio economic backwardness is the Spanish colonial heritage.

Garcia Marquez endeavors to recreate the lost world of his childhood by exploiting the inherent possibility of Magical Realism, which ostracizes the documentary approach of realist fiction and expresses the world view of rural people destined to life in remote isolation from the developed modern world. Magical realism is an effort to have a new look at the unique problems of Latin America. Such a new look could be attained only after erasing the European cultural presupposition, because of the complexity of the class and ethnic pattern in Latin America. His version of magical realism has a declared objective. In order to recreate and rewrite history supported by memory he believes that no other technique is more ample than employment of magical realism. Here, magic realism proves to be a valid means of rewriting history for those people who have to deal with the ghosts of slavery and colonialism, and the distorted reality they bring about.

If transgression of boundaries is one of the features of magic realism, the break of narrative linearity — by means of flashbacks and flash forwards — is another feature of magic realism. Most of his characters are journeying into the past through memory to

reconstruct their personal and collective histories. Time plays a crucial role in García Marquez's masterpiece, as it can be inferred from its very title. The novel begins with one of the multiple flash forwards which anticipate future events and memories and it continues till the end.

Marquez makes use of history and its crosscurrents as his source for creative intuition. Many typical Colombian ideas along with its peculiar and extra ordinary incidents become immortalized by his pen. The history, written by colonialists, start only with the conquest of America by Columbus. They deliberately avoided any reference about the full fledged civilization of the continent long before the Europeans reached there. In fact Latin America developed a strong culture before the colonization.

Modern writers are not ready to start their history with Columbus. They were not even ready to call him discoverer. They prefer to call him conquistador. The discovery of America was considered by many as the most important break in Western history after the embrace of Christianity. (Gonzalez Echevarria 183). To Mendoza, Marquez told that the person he disliked most was Christopher Columbus (Mendoza 116). Christopher Columbus is a tradition. That name indicates everything European: historiography, religion, culture, literature, economics, philosophy, food culture, dress code, colonization, sexuality, music etc.

Marquez was dead frank in acknowledging that he wanted to bring forth 'the outsized reality' of Colombia. He illustrated this predicament in his Nobel Lecture entitled *The Solitude of Latin America* in the following lines.

I dare to think that it is this outsized reality and not just its literary expression that has deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of Letters. A reality not of paper but one lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths and that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity full of sorrow and beauty of which this roving and nostalgic Colombian is but one cipher more, singled out by fortune. (Mc Guirk *et al.* 207).

Marquegian novels are not speculation or experimentation but dedicated exploration of Latin American reality. Though Christopher Columbus “discovered” America in 1492, many Native Americans did not acknowledge it. As suggested earlier, they prefer to call it conquest rather than discovery. Unlike the past, the history text books of today’s Latin America start not with 1492 but with the story of aboriginal cultures, that were there long before of European invasion and colonization. “Our fifth grade social studies textbooks devoted a lot of praise to the abominable United Fruit Company, and South American generals were supposed to be jokes, brutal windbags in gold-embroidered tunics” (Stein Mayer).

Latin American confederation is a long cherished ambition of Marquez, and like Simon Bolivar he pampers the thought of Latin American unification – “the golden dream of continental unity” (GIHL 17). Marquez once said it was “the only cause I would die for” (See the Nobel lecture of Gabriel Garcia Marquez entitled *The Solitude of Latin America*). This principle, definitely he has drawn from Simon Bolivar. He championed the cause of unity whenever he gets a chance. In the Jamaica Letter, he accuses the Latin Americans for their disunity. “It is not the Spaniards but our own lack of unity that has brought us again to slavery...We are the human race in miniature” (See Bolivar’s *Jamaica Letter*). Simon Bolivar ardently believed that Latin American Unity was the only way of unarming its enemies. He was never tired of repeating this even in his final voyage of disillusionment. “Our enemies will have all the advantages until we unify the government of America” (GIHL 97). His aim was not winning the war. According to him the war against the aggressors will be meaningful only when the victory is supplemented with unity. In order to attain this elite vision, sacrifice is the most important ingredient. “The great sacrifices must come afterwards, to make a single nation out of all these countries”. (GIHL 99). Marquez believed that in order to bring Latin American themes to the nucleus of historical discourse, mere anecdotes written in a European fashion were not sufficient. European colonizers formulated their concept of historiography

to reproduce their perception. So naturally it was inclined towards colonizers, not towards colonized. Marquez thought of new historiography, not based on the “lie” of colonizers but the memories of the people. He attempts, through this strategy, to highlight Latin American reality that is different from European sensibility.

He used history as his source material to correct the European notion that Latin Americans were subhuman or mean creatures. His works are the strong attempts to confront this notion and he wants to prove that the indigenous cultures of the Continent are either as strong as or at least equal to the European ones. The three major works that I have chosen for detailed exploration are the imaginative transformation of politics and history of Colombia in particular and Latin America in general. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* celebrates all Marquezian themes : solitude, discovery, science, frustration, liberation and colonialism. *The General in His Labyrinth* exclusively focuses on Simon Bolivar and his final disillusionment. The major concern of *In Evil Hour* is Colombian polity and heinous civil war along with individual violence and state repression.

Myth and history inspired many writers from the classical age to today. That have been widely used, and sometimes abused by different writers at different times. In English literature Sir Walter Scott was a memorable figure who extensively used history for creating his literary world. Most of his writings are based on history. He has written more than twenty history novels. Of them *Ivanhoe* and *Heart of Midlothian* are very famous. He portrayed Scotland, England, and the whole of Europe from the medieval times to the 18th century. But he concerned only with an aristocratic segment of society. Moreover his novels are moving around certain major figures. The concern of all serious historians has been to collect and record facts about the human past and often to discover new facts. They know that the information they have is incomplete, partly incorrect, or biased and requires careful attention. Even the Greek master Aristotle acknowledged this aspect of incorrectness. He tried to distinguish between fiction and history.

Historian would tell lies. And fiction writers too. Many of the fiction writers and historians rely on falsehood or untruthfulness. But Aristotle supported the fiction writers. His famous aphorism, probable possibility is better than improbable possibility, justifies all fiction writers who work with history. (See *Poetics*). Fiction is not something outside, but rather an integral part of human imagination. That is why there is a strong communication between fiction and history. In other words, fiction establishes its identity when it is being placed in a historical context. A literary work gets its full meaning when it is placed in a historical context, what Wilson and Duttan call “archival continuum” (See *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama* as qtd. by Peter Barry, 173).

The aim or agenda of using history may be different from one writer to another. Walter Scott used ancient, medieval and contemporary history as the source and theme of his novels. He concentrated on the social, cultural and political history of the period/person of his choice. Shakespeare used history for many of his plays. Again the implication was socio political. Many modern thinkers believe that Shakespeare was not as innocent as we perceived in handling history. His “plays represented not harmony but the violence of the puritan attack on carnival, the imposition of slavery, the rise of patriarchy, the hounding of deviance ...” (Wilson and Duttan 08). His portrayal of Shylock, Caliban, Othello etc. are the explication of his communal agenda of Christian and Elizabethan England. His kings are remarkably different from the Kings with same name who ruled the nation.

Political history of contemporary situation is the focal arena of Marquez and he keeps the tradition of using history as his source material. Equal importance he gives to intellectual and cultural history of his Continent. Since his narrative technique is different from that of many writers and his employment of past, present and future indiscriminately, we are not able to place him in a confined historical context. But he relies on the political history of his Nation and its neighborhood. He uses not the remote past but the contemporary history. To him history is a tool by which he

wanted to educate his own community to realize their strength and weakness. This kind of a treatment of contemporary history for correction is not very common among writers who dealt with history. His employment of peripheral and deep history of the Latin American consciousness is highly praisable.

Although history was used by many writers like Scott and Shakespeare in English literature, Marquezian concern, unlike that of other major writers who used history, is with the contemporary social, political and economic situation which constitutes present history. Therefore it is a device for exploration and correction. He touches the life around him and experiences the trauma that society creates for itself, and his fiction is a projection of that aspect where we find human desire and aspiration in terrible confrontation with forces of denial and refusal. Therefore the drama in his fiction is the real felt experience, of course, transformed through fictional devices. He does not have a retrospect into the remote past in his search for history. History is what is near, what is felt every day. This kind of a projection of history transforms the near and the familiar into something highly imaginative. History is the material on which the simulacrum in fiction is constructed. By reading Marquez' novels one can experience what individuals would have felt in a wide background of collectivity.

A new pattern of historical writing is framed through his fiction. It is a multi layered approach that looks into the colonized individual who experiences solitariness, frustration, setbacks, illusions, hopes, dreams, etc. Most of his characters are ordinary human beings with certain amount of individualism and weaknesses. Jose Arcadio Buendia, Ursula Iguaran (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) Carmichael (*In Evil Hour*), Jose Palacios (*General in his Labyrinth*) etc. are examples. Most of the characters of the writers with history as background are either great personalities or historical figures. But Marquezian heroes and characters are simple human beings. These human beings have their own dilemmas and delicacies. These dilemmas lead them to many discoveries and fatal setbacks. Marquez novels are premier

examples for how an individual's history becomes the history of a community. As a post colonial society, Colombian society too suffered the aberrations from the colonial high handedness. Here comes the second layer of Marquezian employment of history. The individual's history becomes the corner stone of the collective history, which in turn influences the individual back. So Marquezian characters are the microcosm of a larger macrocosm that is the society as a whole. Then this society stretches to the Nation and the nation is the result of a system. Only great writers with high level of brilliance can effect this kind of a projection of history with an agenda of awareness creating mechanism.

This historical sensibility leads him to further explore the underground quest through the spiraling corridors of the labyrinth of Latin American colonial experience. Individual labyrinths have their own fields like language, culture, memory and text, and paths comprised utterances, discourses, images and themes. This multi layered labyrinthine experience is the product of each individual's specific origins, his conditions, compositions and history. In Latin America writers as well as others pamper the quest for identity theme. Marquezian characters share this aspect and they think of four things: development, nationality, identity and self realization. Identity crisis of a Latin American is different from that of a European. It is a duality or a dichotomy like Indian/ Spaniard, female/male, America/Europe, country/city, matter/spirit/ barbarism/civilization, nature/culture, speech/writing, etc. He tries to place his characters in this cultural context to define an individual only to comment that the Latin American individual was not made out of his choice, but by others.

Marquez depicts in his novels an urgent present as well as a surviving past. Through archival fiction he tries to place his characters in the historical context. Marquez started writing with history because the available history texts are not literary and moreover the available books celebrate the European heritage. In his Nobel lecture he acknowledged his vision of literature that he wanted to write about "a reality not of paper but one lives within", and he calls himself a "roving and nostalgic Colombian"

(Mc Guirk *et al.* 2007). Even the autobiographical work of Marquez carries this message. His autobiography has been rightly named *Living to Tell the Tale*.

Autobiographical material gets integrated with the collective experience of the society, which in turn merges with and defines the national history. All these are shaped in the mould of a complex and ill-defined post colonial background. The interconnecting narrations holding different levels of experience create a whole which speaks on different levels simultaneously. Hence quest, memory, myth etc create the simulacrum of Marquezian narratology.

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Veiling/Unveiling: Islamist and Orientalist Constructions of the Muslim Woman

Asha S

Introduction

The image of the veil has for long pervaded discourses about the Muslim woman; this fixation with veiling has rendered difficult **fair and impartial** inquiries into her status and freedom. In the post 9/11 atmosphere of mounting Islamophobia, the conventional veil of the Muslim woman is growing in symbolic associations. The veil has become so politically charged a symbol that the Muslim woman is more than ever called upon to rationalize her sartorial choices. Whether a Muslim woman dons the veil or not has been made to appear crucial to determining her identity.

Veiling has ardent advocates as well as strident critics. Both the defences and critiques of the practice, when articulated by the forces of orthodox patriarchy and imperialism, should be read as moves to perpetuate their respective hegemonies. The argument of the Islamists – the fundamentalist Muslim ideologues – that veiling is divinely ordained and hence mandatory for the Muslim woman downplays the patriarchal interventions that have turned the institution into an instrument for control and subjection of the Muslim woman. At the same time, the politics behind the Western imperialist and Orientalist moves for the ‘unveiling/emancipation’ of the Muslim woman is only too palpable and sinister. This paper examines the genesis, semantics, and semiotics of the veil to argue that the cause of the Muslim woman is but poorly served in the proliferating discourses on the practice.

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Analysing the semiotics of the veil in Islamist and Orientalist discourses on Muslim women, the paper argues that both these discourses are underwritten by a politics - sexist or racist - and are guilty of a skewed, myopic vision.

The Semiotics of the Veil

The veil is more than mere apparel; it is a symbol with multiple meanings in different contexts. In Leila Ahmed's phrase, the veil is a signifier "pregnant with meaning" [1992, 166]. In the early Islamic society of Arabia veiling was a mark of dignity distinguishing respectable Muslim women from slaves, who were freely available for male sexual gratification. In the years of expansion of the Muslim society, patriarchal interpreters of the Quran have turned the custom of veiling into a convenient device for confining the woman to the interiors of the home. The veil acquires political overtones in colonial discourses and Islamic counter discourses. In British India the veil and the segregation of women along with the practices of child marriage and widow immolation was used in colonial discourses as a site to legitimise colonial intervention and reject the demand for self-rule. In countries where Muslims are in the minority the perceived threat to community identity makes a defensive stance on the veil imperative for the Muslim male orthodoxy. There is an overemphasis on the role of women as the repositories of religious codes and values and the custodians of cultural identity consequent on the heightened awareness of community identity. In Islamic countries too the veil has had an increasingly political dimension. In Iran women have used the veil as a symbol of rebellion, a sign of protest against the Pahlavi regime. During the Iranian revolution headed by Ayatollah Khomeini the veil was a potent tool in the project of resisting the 'corrupting' influence of the West. Images of veiled Muslim women in Afghanistan dominated American media in the run-up to and during the notorious 'war on terror'; these were images skilfully manoeuvred to reinforce the 'primitive', 'barbaric', 'retrograde' character of the Taliban thereby underscoring the 'inevitability' and 'justness' of the war waged ostensibly to 'liberate' the Afghan woman and establish freedom

and democracy. An eagerness to capture images of Afghan women discarding the veil was too manifest in the euphoria after the war. Daphne Grace points out that since 9/11 the veil has taken on hitherto undreamed of political and religious significance as a corroboration of the righteousness of the Western alliance campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq [2004, 19].

Originally instituted as a protective garment, the veil has thus performed various symbolic functions in different contexts – a symbol of repression, backwardness, rebellion, nationalist resistance and assertion of religious and community identity. As Gillian Whitlock observes, “The veil is a shifting signifier, open to various and strategic uses” [2005, 58].

The Semantics of the Veil

In popular narratives about Middle Eastern Muslim women produced from the West the term “veil” is used unvaryingly to designate the Muslim custom of concealing the female body disregarding the cultural complexity and diversity of the practice. As Myra Macdonald observes, “the single item of clothing identified as “the veil” obscures diversity in body-covering practices and brings both the loose head-scarf and the all-encompassing *burqa* into a singular discursive frame.” [2006, 8] The Egyptian feminist, Fadwa El Guindi, observes that there is no one Arabic term equivalent to the English ‘veil’ [1999, 7]. “Yet media discourse and debates are fixated on “veiling” and “unveiling” and rarely differentiate between styles of Muslim clothing.” [Macdonald, 2006, 8] In fact, most Muslim women who **cover the hair** do not wear the *niqab* or face veil; instead, they wear the *hijab*. Although the word *hijab* is commonly used by Muslims to refer to the headscarf, *hijab* (from the root *hajaba*, meaning to cover) is a multifaceted construct encompassing both action and apparel. For most Muslim women the *hijab* signifies *iffa* (modesty), *tahara* (purity) and *taqwa* (righteousness). The Moroccan feminist theologian Fatima Mernissi observes:

The concept of the word *hijab* is three-dimensional, and the three dimensions often blend into one another. The first dimension

is a visual one: to hide something from sight. The root of the verb *hajaba* means “to hide”. The second dimension is spatial: to separate, to mark a border, to establish a threshold. And finally, the third dimension is ethical: it belongs to the realm of the forbidden [...] A space hidden by a hijab is a forbidden space [1993, 93].

The heterogeneity of the practice of veiling – embodied in terms as diverse as the *hijab*, the *burqa*, the *niqab*, the *abaya*, the *duppatta* worn with different styles of dress, the *daavani*, the *purdah*, the *chardari* and the *chador* – is lost sight of in the obsession with the term, “veil”, which, needless to say, enjoys high marketability. Fadwa El Guindi comments that she wanted to call her book *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, (1999) *Hijab* to make more accurate reference to Arabic practices, but the publisher insisted on inserting “Veil” in the title to improve sales [1999, xi]. Islamic feminists object to the term “veil” because of its association with Orientalist imagery. Besides, the practice of ‘veiling’ is not unique to Islam (the Christian, Jewish and Hindu communities, for example, observe variant forms of the practice) nor does it have a monolithic character in Muslim societies. There are many Muslim women who do not wear the veil. The diversity of the practice ranges from the *gallabeyas* and *abayas* with scarves of the Arab world to the *chador* or *manteau* (coat) and *russari* (scarf) of the Persian world to the *chuni*, the wispy fabric accompanying the *shalwar kameez* in the Indian subcontinent to an assortment of veils and *burqas* worn in Muslim Southeast Asia and Africa.

Genesis of the Islamic Veil

Sociological studies show that the custom of veiling is not Islamic in origin. The practice prevailed in older eastern Mediterranean societies. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states that Prophet Muhammad was not the originator of the idea and that “he borrowed it from older Semitic cultures”. Leila Ahmed holds that in introducing seclusion of women the Prophet was borrowing from practices like the *gynaecium* and the harem, prevalent in the more ancient cultures of Byzantium and Persia [1989-90, 11].

The practice existed in Arabia itself before the Prophet. There is evidence to suggest that the women of the town covered their faces while the desert dwellers went unveiled. Nevertheless it was Islam that legitimized the practice and gave it currency. The Prophet assimilated it into the fold of Islam with a view to safeguarding the honour and dignity of the Muslim woman and protecting her against rampant sexual assaults.

The rules of *hijab* were enjoined by the Quran and sanctioned by the Hadith. Verse 53 of Surah 33 is regarded by the founders of religious knowledge as the basis of the institution of the *hijab*. The verse reads:

O ye who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses until leave is given you for a meal [...]. And when ye have taken your meal, disperse, without seeking familiar talk, such (behaviour) annoys the Prophet [...]. And when ye ask (his ladies) for anything you want, ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs.

Leila Ahmed [1989-90, 10] and Fatima Mernissi [1993, 86], quoting theologians, argue that the wedding feast at Muhammad's marriage to Zeinab was what occasioned the revelation of the verse. The Prophet was annoyed by a group of tactless guests, who stayed a long while in Zeinab's room, lost in conversation. "The veil was to be God's answer to a community with boorish manners whose lack of delicacy offended a Prophet" [Mernissi, 1993, 86].

Other verses in the Quran enjoining the *hijab* are verses 32-33 of Surah 33, 30-31 of Surah 24 and verse 59 of Surah 33. Verses 32-33 of Surah 33 go as follows:

O consorts of the Prophet. You are not like any of the (other) women. If ye do fear (Allah), be not too complaisant of speech lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak ye a speech (that is) just. And stay quietly in your houses and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance.

The verses refer only to the wives of the Prophet, who had

special status and special responsibilities. They were like mothers to the believers and their conduct and deportment had to be in consonance with their dignity. Such restrictions were imposed on them so that they would not be trifled with by the uncouth Bedouins, who came to see the Prophet with their problems. Verse 33 cautions the Prophet's women against making vulgar worldly displays as in the times of Paganism. Life in pre-Islamic Arabia was characterized by excessive moral latitude. *Jahilia* (pre-Islamic) women not only displayed their sexual charms but also solicited publicly.

The Quran propagated a new socio-sexual code. "The Prophet's wives had to be active in propagating the new sexual conduct which would restore to women their dignity and would not make them mere sexual objects" [Engineer, 1992, 85]. As part of the enforcement of a strict moral code, some restrictions were laid down for both the sexes:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them [...]. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male attendants free of sexual desires. Or small children who have no carnal knowledge of women; And that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments [*The Holy Quran*, 24. 30-31].

As the verses show, the rule of modesty applies to men as well as women. The Quran required the believers, both male and female, to devote themselves to the creation of a better society, both materially and spiritually, and hence put restrictions on indiscriminate sexual indulgence [Engineer, 1987, 90]. But the

restrictions are tighter in the case of women. The imposition of greater restrictions on women seems to have been a social necessity. Quoting theologians like Ibn Sa'd and Al-Bukhari, Leila Ahmed observes that "there was no single, fixed institution of marriage at the time of the advent of Islam and that a variety of types of union were practised by both men and women" (Ahmed, 6). *Zawag el mosharaka* or the marriage of sharing, *nikah al-Istibda*, or 'the marriage of seeking intercourse', a method akin to the idea of artificial insemination, and *zawag el mutaa* or marriage of pleasure (which was a short-lived arrangement) were some of the common forms of sexual union that prevailed alongside the monogamous relationship. The 'marriage of sharing' allowed the woman to marry more than one man, but not more than ten. When she became pregnant she would send for the man with whom she had intercourse and would name the man she desired as father and guardian to the child and he could not refuse. In all these three kinds of marriages, biological paternity seems unimportant and the concept of female chastity is therefore absent. This is unsurprising given the predominantly matrilineal character of the pre-Islamic tribal society.

Analysing the socio-economic changes in Arabian society during the sixth and early seventh centuries, Montgomery Watt emphasizes the disintegration of the tribal system. Mecca's commercial growth over the fifth/sixth centuries and the rise of a thriving mercantile economy led to the breakdown of tribal values. As dominant traders started accumulating wealth, the tribal notion of property as communal was replaced by the idea of private property. Men now wished to pass on property to their offspring which gave new importance to paternity and hence greater restrictions on women's sexuality became imperative. (1956, 290) This view endorsed by Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi, is echoed by Asghar Ali Engineer who argues that as the institution of private property was well developed, determining a child's paternity was essential, which necessitated a greater insistence upon the chastity of women [1980, 135].

Verse 31 of Surah 24 is the most explicit Quranic regulation regarding the hijab and female modesty. It specifies the men with whom women may interact freely. But even this verse does not explicitly prescribe veiling; it merely instructs women to guard their private parts and throw their scarf over their bosoms. “The Quran advocates neither veil nor segregation of sexes, but insists on sexual modesty” [Rahman, 1982, 290]. In fact, the Quranic injunction urging women to look down would be pointless if the women were not allowed to go out of the house [Siddiqui, 1986, 124]. As Roushan Jahan observes, later interpretations were directed more toward restricting women’s mobility and self-determination [1988, 45].

Verse 59 of Surah 33 relates to a time-bound situation: “O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments (*jilbab*) over their persons (when out of doors): That is most convenient that they should be known (as such) and not molested.” This Quranic injunction should be seen as a protective measure required by the special circumstances in Medina and not meant for suppression of women. At that time free and slave women, who used to go without any wrappers on, and their heads bare, were exposed to physical assault and verbal abuse by *hypocrites* – a group of Medinians whose faith was lukewarm. When questioned, the *hypocrites* excused themselves by claiming confusion about the identity of the women they abused, i.e., they harassed only those women they believed to be slaves. Besides, the *hypocrites* were always on the look out for opportunities to spread scandalous stories about the Prophet’s household. This was the reason Allah revealed the verse urging the free women to cloak themselves so that they might be recognized and be spared the insolence of street men. “Thus the *hijab* is a response to sexual aggression” [Mernissi, 1993, 182].

From Hijab to Harem

The *hijab*, originally instituted for the protection of women, was in course of time degraded to mean confinement for its own sake rather than protection. This degeneration of the veil into an instrument of confinement and seclusion of the woman has no

grounding in the scriptures. Interpreters of the Quran often demanded more than the original and enforced confinement for its own sake rather than for protection. The deterioration in the position of the Muslim woman is a consequence of the feudalisation of the Muslim society, the onset of absolutism and the turning of Islam into a dynastic system, in the years following the death of the Prophet and the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate.

Throughout Prophet Muhammad's life the *hijab* was restricted to the women of his family and tribe. Besides, that the formula "(She) took on the veil" is used in the Hadith to mean she became a wife of the Prophet, suggests that for some time after Muhammad's death and at the time of the circulation of the material incorporated into the Hadith, the *hijab* was still thought of as peculiar to Muhammad's wives [Ahmed, 1989-90, 11]. The Muslim conquests, the influx of wealth, the resultant raised status of the Arabs and the Prophet's wives being taken as example – all these might have caused its adoption by the rest of the community. The Prophet's women, though in *hijab*, were accepted as persons of authority. Political or military problems were not alien to the Prophet's wives. The household was not their sole legitimate domain.

In the opinion of Mazhar ul Haq Khan, the purdah as a system of total exclusion of women from public life was non-existent in the Prophet's time and it appeared "among the ruling aristocracies of the later Umayyads" [1982, 32]. This view is corroborated by other historians and sociologists. Fazlur Rahman argues that there was no veil or segregation of the sexes in the Prophet's time, in the sense that Muslim societies came to develop it later [1982, 290]. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the *harem* system and seclusion of women are variously ascribed to influences from Iran or to the rule of the Umayyad Caliphs of Damascus. Asghar Ali Engineer is of the view that the custom of veiling began during the Umayyad period [1992, 91]. Most historians note that the *harem* system was first adopted during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph, Walid II (743-44 A. D.). The *harem* is the creation of the ruling community, according to Zeenat Shaukat Ali [1987, 54]. Jawaharlal

Nehru attributes the origin of the *harem* and female seclusion to later influences. With the expansion of the Arab empire, decadence set in. “It is said that it was due especially to the influences of Constantinople and Persia that the seclusion of women began among the Arabs” [1982, 148]. “Islamic society came under the influence of the highly feudalised societies of Byzantine and Persia – to the disadvantage of woman” [Engineer, 1992, 82]. “The rulers began to maintain large harems [...]. Soon the ways of the rulers began to be followed by other members of the ruling classes and finally by the people in general. Thus purdah became common” [Engineer, 1992, 91]. Islamic doctrines can provide only a partial explanation for the seclusion of women. Reuben Levy observes:

The early interpreters of the Koran were men who originated in Persia, a land in which the women had long been secluded, and it is probable that their authority in Islam began to make itself felt after the close of the rule of the Umayyad Caliphs of Damascus. By the time of Harun al-Rashed, one - and - a - half centuries after the death of the Prophet, the system was fully established, with all the appurtenances of the harem in which, amongst the richer classes, the women were shut off from the rest of the household under the charge of eunuchs [1957, 127].

The Ideal of Domesticity – An Islamist Construction

While the enforcement of the *hijab* in Islam did not entail the domestication of women, fundamentalist Muslim thinkers still valorise the domestic sphere as the ideal domain of the Muslim woman, disregarding the exalted status women enjoyed in early Islamic society and the active public roles they played. Over the ages it was this voice of patriarchal Islam that gained precedence over its earlier, egalitarian aspect. Abul-ala Maududi, a notable Islamist, denounced the doctrines of sexual equality, economic independence of women and the free intermingling of the sexes to which he attributed the entire decay of the European society. He also took on the westernised Muslims who internalised these doctrines. He and his associates idealised the domestic space and women as the queens of that space [qtd in Metcalf 14-17]. In

Maududi's view, "the right sort of education for women is that which prepares her to become a good wife, good mother and good housekeeper [...] she should be trained primarily in those branches of knowledge which make her more useful in that sphere" [1996, 198-99]. Mohammad Mazheruddin Siddiqi argues: "Islam insists on the segregation of sexes to the utmost extent compatible with individual and collective self-preservation [...] For each sex a certain sphere of life has been allotted within which it should concentrate its energies, leaving other fields for the opposite sex" [qtd in Ad-Darsh, 2003, 18]. While maintaining that Islam does not desire women to be wholly confined to domestic life he avers that it underscores their primary duties as wives and mothers. [qtd in Ad-Darsh, 2003, 24] The basic structure of Islam is such that women have been assigned the most important task as homemakers while being allowed to participate in public affairs is a view articulated and underscored almost unvaryingly in Islamist discourses on the Muslim woman's role and status.

That the enforcement of the *hijab* did not entail the domestication of women is borne out by the active social participation of women in the early Islamic period. Islam emphasizes the equality of the sexes in both the spiritual and the temporal domains. Women can be self-supportive economically and enjoy the same benefits as their male counterparts. "[...] To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn" (*The Holy Quran* 4.32). The Quran recognizes women's rights to equality in marriage. "They are your garments and ye are their garments" (2.187), i.e., the two are for mutual support, mutual comfort and mutual protection, fitting into each other as a garment fits the body. The Quran gave women concrete and well-defined rights in matters of marriage, divorce, maintenance and inheritance. Women enjoyed an enviable status in the early Islamic society. Women's participation in any field of activity, be it education or public life, was perfectly legitimate [Ali, 1987, 44]. They participated in the life of the community and performed social and religious functions. They attended mosques, led prayers, were involved in the transmission of Hadith, encouraged to pursue

knowledge like their male counterparts and were both instructors and pupils. In fact, there was no profession in which the women of the Prophet's time did not participate.

It is androcentric theological interpretations, which crept into Islam owing to the influence of Jewish and Christian traditions, Arab tribal practices and Byzantine and Persian cultures and which held sway in the absence of women exegetes to offer alternative interpretations that gave precedence to the domestic role and duty of the woman. "For 1,400 years, discriminatory interpretations of women have been produced; these aren't religion, but interpretations of religion," observes Hojatolislam Saidzadeh, a modernist Iranian cleric, who holds that religion and religious knowledge are to be starkly differentiated [qtd. In Kunkler, 2004, 382]. He sees gender inequality in the *shariah* not as a manifestation of divine justice, but as a mistaken construction by male jurists that is contrary to the very essence of divine will as revealed in the Qur'an. [qtd. In Kunkler, 2004, 382-83]. There are other views strengthening the legitimacy of this position. According to Walther, many theologians who developed and interpreted the Sharia in later years were of non-Arab stock [1993, 6-7, 60-61]. It was this "legal and social vision of establishment Islam that gave precedence to women's obligations to be wives and mothers" [Ahmed, 1992, 66].

A sexist politics is at work behind the Islamists' celebration of domesticity as the ideal role of the woman. In this as in the insistence on the *hijab* as the unvarying dress code for Muslim women living in all climes we witness an obdurate insistence on replicating the outer forms of the Arabian society into which Islam was introduced. The social circumstance of the male being the breadwinner of the family, a circumstance that validates Islam's privileging of the male in certain respects (verse 34 of Surah 4 of the Quran, for instance), is a rarity in most societies today. The argument of the Islamists that women taking up jobs outside the family jeopardizes the stability of the home and the happiness of children stems from a refusal to acknowledge the worth of a woman as a person of intellect and creativity.

Western Stereotypes about Veiling

Western representations of the oriental Muslim woman have, for long, showed a preoccupation with the image of the veil. The veil and the seraglio (harem) have found a place in Western representations of the Muslim woman since the 17th century. [Kahf, 1999] “For the Western media, the picture of the veiled woman visually defines both the mystery of the Islamic culture and its backwardness” [Majid, 2002, 66]. According to Claire Dwyer, the veil has come to “represent a whole constellation of meanings for the West over time – mystery, exoticism, forbiddenness, sensuality, sexuality, backwardness, resistance, domination, passivity, religious fundamentalism” [1991-92, 8] Exotic sexual fantasies of life in the harems pervaded narrative discourses of early European travellers. What fuelled these fantasies was the inaccessibility of the male travellers to the women secluded in the harems and the mystery surrounding them. Sarah Graham-Brown observes that in 19th century Orientalist literature, paintings, engravings and photographs which purported to reveal the real life of women behind the walls and barred windows of the harem, the women appeared first and foremost as possessions. Along with an indulgence in sexual fantasy the practice of veiling and seclusion also triggered a sense of disapproval, disgust and denigration of a culture that legitimised such ‘archaic’, ‘regressive’, ‘pre-modern’ practices [2003, 502-03].

Analysing the representation of Egyptian women in accounts of 19th century American travellers Jeanne- Marie Warzeski observes that these travellers were not motivated by feminist concerns; they were interested in “other peoples” only insofar as such subjects validated a belief in the superiority of their own culture. They cited the veil as a symbol of unenlightened and backward cultural practices that oppress women [2002, 308-09]. Leila Ahmed writes:

The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was used, in the rhetoric of colonialism to render morally justifiable

its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples ... Veiling—to Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies—became the symbol now of both the oppression of women and the backwardness of Islam and it became the open target of colonial attack on the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies [1992, 324].

The hypocrisy of the imperialist stance is manifest in the double standards they maintained with regard to the status of women at home and in the colonies. Lord Cromer, British consul-general in Egypt from 1883 to 1907, for instance, advocated the unveiling of women for its perceived barbarity while simultaneously opposing women's suffrage in Britain.

With a renewed media focus on Islam and terrorism after the September 11 attacks, Muslim women's dress is again an issue of contention. There has been a sudden mainstream focus on Afghan women as victims needing to be rescued by US and allied bombs while the women and children of Afghan have been living for 20 years under war and the oppression in the last years under the Taliban regime. One leaflet dropped over Afghanistan during 'Operation Enduring Freedom' 'shows a member of the Taliban religious police whipping a woman in a burqa' with text accompanying the image reading 'Is this the future you want for your women and children?' [Friedman, 2004]. The burqa encapsulates the sufferings of the Afghan women in Western representations while in reality the burqa is not a serious problem for the Afghan women; instead they are concerned about the insult of their daily lives and the theft of their identities. The struggles and campaigns launched by Afghan women's organizations like the RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) subvert the stereotypical depictions of the Afghan women as passive, silenced and submissive *burqa*-clad beings.

In the post 9/11 years popular narratives, memoirs and travel accounts by native as well as Western authors recounting the harrowing tales of victimization and brutalization of women in the Middle Eastern countries, Iran and Afghanistan in particular,

have burgeoned. A quick look at the titles, subtitles and/or face cover of a few of these narratives would betray the Orientalist fixation with the veil as an all-encompassing signifier of the status of women in Muslim countries. Jean Sasson's *Mayada: Daughter of Iraq* (2003), Asar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Teheran* (2003), Siba Shakib's *Samir and Samira* (2004) and Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* (2003) are best-selling works that feature on their front cover the half veiled faces of beautiful Muslim women. Helen Watson observes that "the image of a veiled Muslim woman seems to be one of the most popular Western ways of representing the 'problems of Islam' " [1994, 153]. The veil is more than ever before represented as the singular image of the repression of women in Muslim societies. In fact many Muslim women in the United States itself gripe about the excessive attention the media has been paying to what they call "behind the veil" stories.

Conclusion

The hijab has no unitary meaning. It reflects the diversity of Muslim women's experiences and aspirations throughout the world. In itself, the *hijab* is neither liberating nor oppressive; the power relations invested in it are situational and contextual. In Islamist and Orientalist discourses it becomes an over determined signifier for the position of the Muslim woman. Discursive constructions of the Muslim woman in Islamist and Orientalist scholarship do not often demonstrate a sincere commitment to her cause; instead they uncover a sinister politics of domination – patriarchal or imperialist. Such politics has to be exposed and unprejudiced, contextualised studies about the meaning and function of veiling are to be encouraged if justice is to be done to the cause of the Muslim woman.

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Situating Literature in Technoculture: A Reading of Three Postmodern Poems by Steven B. Katz

V. P Anvar Sadhath

Cultural artefacts of postmodernism often occupy and are set against the backdrop of the still emerging realm of the virtual, and therefore the aesthetic dimensions of these works follow a new dialectic that forms part of what is frequently referred to as 'Technoculture'. The present study attempts to identify some of the major preoccupations in cultural texts in general and literature in particular in the wake of the ongoing process of establishing and practising technoculture or the cultural arena of computer, cyberspace, communication technologies and internet, and seeks to locate some these changes in the select poems of the contemporary American poet, Steven B. Katz.

The term technoculture is "used in a woolly manner to refer to technologies implicated in western cultures, and to constructions of culture that incorporates technological aspects." (Green xxvii) Technoculture is generally aimed at examining the issues of technology and culture and the "raw materials with which we construct our sense of ourselves and the communities in which we live and to which we feel connected.", and exploring "the digital age and the meanings of space, time and the virtually real." (Green xxv) Technoculture of cyberspace and the internet and their effects on the world of digital communication are probably areas where

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human experience is still in an emerging state. According to Lelia Green, “one of the critical issues raised by technoculture is that of community and what we mean by society and connectedness when we have choices which include the digital and the analogue, the virtual and the real.” (xxvi) He argues that, Cyberspace offers unparalleled global opportunities for interactivity, and the lacks of bounded areas make it no less a real place than the Roman Forum or the American Senate, and no less real a place than the human mind.” (xxxix)

Technoculture operates within the essential context of the creation and circulation of culture where “[a]nything and everything human can be constructed as a cultural text – a life, a car, music, the stock exchange – and we write our culture as a collection of such texts. (Green xxix). As U Franklyn puts it, “our language itself is poorly suited to describe the complexity of technological interaction” and in his view “like democracy, technology is a multifaceted entity. It includes activities as well as a body of knowledge, structure as well as the act of structuring”. (14)

The domain of technoculture revolves around the circulation of culture through tools of communication using high-tech devices like computer and internet that enable a real culture to operate in a virtual space created by “internet interactivity.” (Green xxxi) More importantly certain of the key concepts in culture like time, space, and place get completely “reconceptualised and reconstructed to fit within the cyberspatial context.” (Green xxxi) According to Jan Fernback “cyberspace has become a new arena for participation in public life” as “users can act as media audience “and “yet users are also authors, public rhetoricians, statesmen, pundits.” (37) Taking the conceptual framework of ‘Public Sphere’ as discussed by Habermas, the political health of a society can be judged on the basis of the accessibility, nature and scope its public sphere. The discourses in the internet “construct technoculture as a liberating force promising freedom and political power to people.” (Green 118)

The aesthetics of technoculture is to be thought of as a new phase in the production and reception of cultural texts, similar to the ones identified in different earlier occasions like the early modern period of mechanical reproduction, and the era of culture industry in the later part of twentieth century by critics like Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. These theoreticians and those who followed them attempted to ascertain the various dimensions of aesthetic production with reference to the times that they represented. While Benjamin problematised the questions pertaining to the authenticity of a work of art when mechanisms of reproductions took hold, Theodore Adorno located works of art part of what he popularly called ‘culture industry’, which makes art part of consumer capitalism. According to Benjamin, in the age of mechanical reproduction of art the authenticity or the “aura” of art is interfered with thus jeopardising the authority of art. “[M]echanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from the parasitical dependence on ritual...instead of being based on ritual it begins to be based on another practice – politics.” (Benjamin 226) Similarly postmodernist theories by the Marxist thinkers like Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson tried to fathom the politico-aesthetic implications of works produced in the aftermath of postmodernity, citing such prevailing fashions or inclinations as commodity fetish and the use of parody and pastiche. Eagleton argued that “[t]he aesthetics of postmodernism is a dark parody of [...] anti-representationalism: if art no longer reflects it is because it seeks to change the world rather than mimic it, but because there is in truth nothing to be reflected, no reality which is not itself already image, spectacle, simulacrum, gratuitous fiction.” (387) According to the postmodern theorist, Jean Baudrillard real is “no longer real at all. It is hyperreal: the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyper space without atmosphere.” (146) All these are instances of changes in perception owing mainly to the changing conditions of cultural production, and arguably the changing conditions are brought into force by innovations in the technological front.

The cultural texts that prompted the theoreticians to frame

aesthetic standpoints like cyber philosophy and notion of hyperreality showcased transformations in the social sphere mainly brought out by the innovations in technology. These works include experimental novels like Milan Kundera's *Immortality* that employs postmodern imagology, the sci-fi fictions of the era of cyberspace, Manjula Padmanabhan's, *Harvest*, a futuristic drama, in which the panopticonic surveillance, using highly sophisticated communication devices, of the neo-colonial elite who awaits to harvest organs from a third world unemployed poor is powerfully portrayed, and films like *The Matrix*, directed by Larry and Andy Wachowsky, and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, and the postmodern poems by Steven B Katz set in the virtual space of computer and internet, to deliberately delimit examples. These instances, and many others from the age of technoculture, reveal that the production and reception and conceptual or thematic indicators and even the vocabulary of literature and other cultural artefacts have undergone tremendous shifts in paradigm owing to the interface with technology. In *Immortality*, for instance, as Stephen Ross observed,

Kundera portrays an image-obsessed society that has reached the point where the image is confused with that which it purports to represent. The result, in this marginally hyperreal version of our own contemporary culture, is a loss of content in the endless proliferation of images that finally refer only to other images in the annihilation of the real. (333)

A number of literary works, more specifically, science fiction, showed a growing interest in narratives about future and parallel universe. As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun mentioned elsewhere, "faced with new encounters between computer and humans cyberpunk literature...responded with a seductive orientation that denied representation through dreams of disembodiment these narratives romanticize networks, gritty city streets, and their colourful inhabitants." (248-49) In films like *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* "our society tells itself stories about what it is to be human in a world where humans are increasingly influenced by and depended

upon technology and technoculture” where “the myths and longing are played out in the context of technologically driven futures where machines can feel feelings and have roles with more humanity in them than the ‘people’ characters do” as Green wrote (167). And more interestingly “[a] recurring theme of these narratives concerns the merging of the human with the machine and questions of the essential nature of humanity.” (Green 167) Cyberspace and cyborg as they are presently imagined in cultural texts are to be taken as symptomatic of a society under the process of a grand transformation where almost all aspects of social is being mediated by artificial intelligence of cyberspace.

The question of situating literature in technoculture may further be explored by a close reading of three poems by Steven B. Katz, viz., ‘A Computer File Named Alison’, ‘In the Beginning’, and ‘After Reading Gordel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid.’ In fact Katz’ poems selected for analysis here provide the readers with the poetics of an early phase of technocultural development as they were published in the early 1990s. All these poems are set in a virtual space; the first two of them clearly indicate that they are set in the ‘space’ within computer and internet. The third poem is a postmodern response, (seemingly, in the truly Derridean way of deconstructing certain of the fundamental notions in our culture) that comes out, as the title suggests, after reading Douglas R. Hofstadter’s Pulitzer Prize-Winning book, *After Reading Gordel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (1979).

The poem, ‘A Computer File Named Alison’ is subtitled, “For My Wife”. The poem, narrated in first person, presents a situation in which the speaker has decided to do away with a file he created in the name of his wife, Alison, in order to accommodate other files:

I dated a file named Alison, created
worlds in her name; but needed more space,
new memories to save, new files to live.

(Lines 1-3)

The speaker tells that when he pushes the button he would be able to eliminate Alison “from the disc of earth” which is “constantly rotated, read in this dark machine drive of the universe” The poem is a clear example of the discourse of a virtual sphere where concepts like space and elimination have distinct meaning, and where reality is more virtual than real. While creating a metaphoric earth inside the spacious machine, (“there is only so much space inside machines”) the speaker wonders about the impersonal attitude of “cold, dump, personal computer” taking him literally (and never having to show any emotions) dispersing with the remnants of his wife. The poem concludes with the speaker expressing his inability to conform the computer’s action of deleting Alison, saying “But oh I could not conform it could not conform it” The poem, possibly, presents a universe sans space except inside the machines, and the construction of a universe with its own rules of creation and destruction, where the role of the user is only to conform actions. When relationships are thought of in this kind of a universe there is nothing that cannot be annulled by the pressing of a button. The poem invokes the concept of space in technoculture and explains the human-machine interface in an extended level of impersonality.

‘In the Beginning’ can be read as a pastiche of the story of creation revealed in the Genesis. It parodies the purpose of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* too (to Justify God’s ways to man) in its subtitle, “To justify God’s ways to 21st century.” The poem opens thus:

In the beginning was the computer. And God said
:let there be light!
You have not signed on yet.
:God.
Enter user password.
: Omniscient.
Password incorrect. Try again!

:Omnipotent.

Password incorrect. Try again!

:Technocrat.

And God signed on 12:01 a.m., Sunday, March 1.

(Lines 1-13)

The poem presents the creation of the world as a computer programme initiated by God in six days by using e-cash, and lot of programming commands. God presents himself neither as omniscient nor omnipotent, but as a technocrat who “signed on 12.00 am, Sunday, March 1,” in his mission to create the world. He creates light, firmament, dry land, sun, moon, stars, fish, fowl, cattle, man and woman, Garden of Eden, desire, freewill, tree of knowledge, and good and evil, until finally when he logged off on the sixth day when the computer was down. Replacing the first word (God) with computer, the poem apparently presents that computer precedes God, or it has been pre-existing as a platform for God to operate his world. At every stage of the creation (programming) the poet brings in actual or near actual passages from the Bible, and finally shows how errors started showing up in the process of creation and in the created universe. The texture of the poem is peculiar with symbols of the programming commands, and the entire poem appears in the form of the stage-wise arrangement of a computer programme. The poem presents the world as basically virtual, invoking the way the internet generation imagines it. After every day’s work of creation God is presented as logging off, to resume work on the next day, till the process gets complexly concluded with errors like the coexistence of desire and free will, shame and evil and so forth. At almost every stage of creation the computer rejects the commands given by God for reasons like “too many characters” in the command. Finally when God has exceeded the allotted file space, he gives the command to destroy earth before the execution of which the computer goes down making the programmer to sign off. The presentation of God as a technocratic programmer of the (virtual) world, who created things

at his will and wish without caring for the contradictory elements like good and evil is what the poem probably achieves. The poem reflects on the radical and contented way the society of technoculture uses its imagination to fathom the new world order of virtual reality.

The poem, 'After Reading Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid' (A Pantoum) is seemingly an immediate response to the path-breaking ideas that the poet discovers in Douglas R. Hofstadter's book, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* that deals with such issues as the question of consciousness and the possibility of artificial intelligence, the meaning of 'self', with such diverse topics as mathematics and meta-mathematics, programming, recursion, formal systems, multilevel systems, self reference, and self representation. The poem brings out a series of propositions in the most subversive fashion all of which are finally said to be "paradoxically false." These ideas resemble the amalgamation of art (represented by M.C. Escher, the Dutch graphic artist), music (represented by J.S. Bach, the German composer) and mathematics (represented by Kurt Gödel, the Australian-American logician and mathematician) in Hofstadter's book, typical of the postmodernist style of erasing boundaries of intellectual realms and making every work a discourse. The poem begins abruptly:

So this musical invention can begin:

push down in a paradoxical painting:

all formal theorems are incomplete:

every procedure's a stranger loop

(Lines 1-4)

As the subtitle suggests, the poem is a Pantoum, comprising of quatrains in which the second and fourth line are repeated as the first and third lines of the following quatrain. In each stanza the first three lines end in colon, and each line communicates the self- referential nature of phenomena and the impossibility of

reaching a transcendental signified or final meaning of ideas and things around us. These lines are to be taken as revelations that essentially illustrate a paradoxical outlook and carries forward a postmodern world view, in which the central notions of our culture are decentred in the poststructuralist fashion. These ideas are presumably adapted directly from Hofstadter. The paradoxical propositions that the poem meditate on include “all formal theorems are incomplete”, “all understanding is self-referential”, “the human mind is a programmed search: / but the meaning is always a random concurrence” “reality is just one of many possibilities”, “language is the necessary software of thought” and societies are hierarchies of information”. These propositions again are modelled probably on the dialogues by Achilles, the Tortoise, and their company that Hofstadter includes at the beginning of each of the twenty chapters of his book. Like the dialogues in the book the lines here deal mainly with form and content, which at the same time is a serious topic of debate in a number of recent literary theories. Following Hofstadter’s book the poet employs metafiction-like self referential statements and wordplay that probably signifies the impenetrable condition of phenomena. The poet makes use of many expressions that originally are played around in Hofstadter’s book. For instance, ‘strange loop’ the expression Hofstadter coins to refer to the self referencing objects, frequently appears in the poem as “stranger loop” (“Every procedure is a stranger loop”). Interestingly, most of these axiomatic statements in general and self-referentiality in particular can be located in postmodernist theories, and postmodernism’s approach to the world. Moreover, most of these statements validate the way the world of virtual reality conceive the world at large, and arguably are part of the ideational arena of technoculture. The poet however draws the readers’ attention to the essentially paradoxical nature of all statements using language, not excluding poetry, as language ceases to represent and draws attention to itself. The poem ends both accepting and invalidating its own propositions:

These statements are most certainly true:

but there will be harmonic resolution too:
and so now all this non sense may stop:
the statements are all paradoxically false

(Lines 68-72)

In the final analysis all these three poems put into practice the conceptual aspects of the literature of technoculture where an overt emphasis on the concept of real and virtual is at the locus of things. They all seemingly carry the anxiety of the virtual and showcase the impossibility of representing reality, as the so called reality available for the poet is already an image, spectacle or a copy.

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Hegemony of the Spectacular: Understanding the Matrices of Contemporary Visual Culture

Dr. Vellikkeel Raghavan

Hegemony of the spectacular is the most conspicuous specificity of contemporary culture. This sort of a paradigm shift in cultural indices invites keen intellectual observation, categorisation, analysis, and theorization of all forms of cultural codes that primarily appeal to the visual faculty of human beings in order to communicate and make meaning. A heightened emphasis on ocularism or ocular-centrism could be the most perceptible aspect of such forms of cultural produces of the current period, which is termed as an era of ‘visual culture.’ Almost all objects which are deliberately displayed for “seeing” become the target of intellectual speculation here.

Physical/digital objects of various make, size, shape, colour, purpose, dimensions that are placed in a particular space constitute the subject of study in visual culture. Or, is it easy to identify the objects of Visual Cultural Studies (VCS) by deleting just the oral-verbal and print-textual materials that we often engage with, in our cultural interactions? If it is so, the objects of academic scrutiny here could belong to a really wide spectrum: from ancient cave carvings to modern digital images; from the exterior look of pre-historic cave-dwellings to the architectonics of contemporary ultra modern metropolises; from the shape of pre-historic leaf-body-coverings to the current fashion industry; from ancient hunting-

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dance to modern performance studies; from early actuality films to the current interactive-multimedia-computer-games and so on and so forth. In short, every specifically “spectacular” object/activity of culture comes under the field of visual culture studies. In the early stages of disciplinary formation of ‘visual culture studies’, the concept visual literacy was considered to be an “obscure cousin of ordinary literacy, based on the notion that pictures have syntax and grammar in the same way writing does” (Elkins 125).

That magnificent transition of a bone-tool into a space-ship in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) probably illustrates the entirety of the range of visual culture studies in the contemporary epoch. For Howells (2010), visual cultural studies embraces various fields like: iconology, art history, semiotics, hermeneutics, fine arts, photography, film, television, the New Media and so on. As the field of study here is very broad and encompasses a multitude of academic disciplines and non-academic areas, all attempts at categorisation of the objects of study would be essentially arbitrary. Nevertheless, for the sake of comprehending the ‘object’ of scrutiny, some convenient categorisation is indispensable. One such a purely arbitrary gradation could be the one as follows:

a) Plastic arts: drawings, graphs, diagrams, paintings, photographs, sculptures etc. which defines a certain object placed in a particular cultural context and makes meaning accordingly.

b) Mass media: Movies, TV programmes, Advertisement, Internet, Web portals, multimedia computer games etc. which represent our cultural activity.

c) Personal accessories: apparels, portable electronic gadgets, toys, jewellery, foot-wares, and other props of fashion which redefine the human body.

d) Structural Objects: architecture, landscaping, interior design, furniture, designs of automobiles and various other tools that we generally use which reformulates a cultural space.

These objectified cultural produces demand our visual

attention ranging from glancing, looking, watching, seeing, gazing, and, at times some of them demand our gazo-motor engagement. The commonality that unifies these objects of varied properties and proportions is that they primarily communicate or address through the visual faculty of human beings. They provide an ocular definition to objects, geographical or virtual space, activity, and the human body. Therefore, visual cultural studies are concerned with the various ideological, political, economic, institutional issues related to the conception, production, circulation, intention, manipulation, maintenance and reception of visual cultural artefacts in a society. The ideology of visual culture is to be understood as a ‘“spectacle pedagogy” in that images teach us what and how to see and think and in doing so, they mediate the ways in which we interact with one another as social beings’ (Garroian and Gaudelins 298). The spatial range of study could start from the micro level (the body of the individual) to that of the exploration of the cyberspace. In between these two extreme poles lie the academic disciplines ranging from ethnography, history, art, literature, science and so on.

The objects of visual culture studies do not have any inherent cultural value of their own, unless they are contextualised, situated or ‘installed’ in the larger domain of human activity, human body and the spaces engaged by human beings. There could be no better example for this than Marcel Duchamp’s artistic revolution of the placing of an ordinary urinal after rechristening it as the *Fountain*, in 1917, in the culturally loaded space of an art exhibition. This sheer replacement of an object, otherwise the cultural value of which could be minimal, explains how ordinary things deliberately placed in a particular cultural context and space become objects of thick descriptions. Duchamp’s act was a radical attempt aimed at altering the existing semantic code of an ordinary implement. That was also an attempt to inject into the object a cultural semantics which was hitherto absent thanks to its absence from the larger cultural practice of putting up works of art for exhibition. In Saussurean terms Duchamp’s *Fountain* is a parole which derives its meaning from the larger langue of the art as a cultural practice.

To reverse the order, the removal of an object from its 'chair' in a museum could reduce a piece of art into a mere piece of material object deprived of its hitherto arbitrarily attributed meanings. Therefore, Duchamp's act of placing the urinal in a peculiar space represents the unperformed possible replacement of any other object from the sacred space of an art museum thereby stripping off its visual cultural value.

Steven Spielberg's selection of black-and-white film stock for his 1993 classic, *Schindler's List* has to be placed in the larger visual cultural context of the Nazi Germany in particular and in the contemporary context of xenophobia of various hues. By selecting the greyish b/w material, Spielberg was emphasizing the cultural blindness that afflicted Germany during the Nazi regime. In order to emphasise the mainstream cultural cataract that blinded the Nazi Germany, Spielberg denies the audience the celebratory ambience of multi-colour images. Here a simple act of selecting a particular material for artistic expression becomes a breakthrough in the field of cultural studies. What else could be an appropriate method to depict a world which had denied the comfort and richness of colours to the Jewish people? In the same film, the insertion of the final short colour sequence implies the return of the polychromatic vision and the consequent acceptance of the 'other' in post-Nazi Germany.

Picasso's predominantly greyish *Guernica*, drawn in the background of Spanish Civil war, also deliberately depicts a world where the richness of colour and definiteness of shapes are absent. Had colour film stock been available in 1936, Leni Riefenstahl might have made use of it in her cinematic paean to the Fuehrer, *Triumph of the Will*. She compensated the absence of colour by making people in the film frequently smile, laugh, dance, play and move merrily in maximum number of shots and sequences. Such well-choreographed, exaggerated, 'staged' activities which denote a general mood of mirth has to be read along with diffidently moving enslaved Jewish people in *Schindler's List*.

Visual cultural studies if converted into an intra-disciplinary

comparative analysis, would yield a better perspective on human nature and the cultural landscape of the world which is represented in many ways. Dziga Vertov's adept suturing of apparently random shots and sequences of people, objects, activities, and urban spaces in and around Moscow of the time provides the illusion of a systematic narrative in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1926). This film enjoys an iconic status in film studies in particular and visual cultural studies in general for two reasons: it does not have 'textual story,' not is it a talkie. It dismantles an ideological illusion that cultural artefacts can be meaningful only with the back-up of written/oral text. Vertov suggests a visual cultural approach model which is independent of both the ancient model of orality and the modern Guttenberg model. Almost all residual aspects of culture discussed previously under four categories, forms the content of Vertov's filmic introspection on the emergence of a culture which predominantly visual in nature in the beginning of the 20th century itself. It was his political understanding that the soundtracks or storyline that accompany the visual sequences often dictated 'preferred readings' from the spectator. This critical understanding prompted him to do away with any specific narrative content and continuity editing practices. As synchronized sound was a technological impossibility during the time, most of the filmmakers of the time tried to supplement these absences with a silent narrative content or story or by inserting text frames in between sequences. Vertov's decision to keep the film going without a story is as relevant as Spielberg's decision to use b/w film stock as well as Reizensthal's frequent frames of mirth and merry-making, from the point of view of visual cultural studies.

One could detect a steady acceleration in the proliferation of visual cultural artefacts of many 'other' cultural communities in the post-globalized, virtually connected world. This phenomenal penetration of indices of cultural artefacts of other nation/community into the social and private space of the 'natives' demands a redefined intellectual paradigm in our cultural analysis. An interactive model which could communicate across cultures/curriculum/language is slowly emerging with a very

strong emphasis on the spectacular dimension of things. This huge inflow of visible markers of cultures into our academic/individual contexts would widen the mindscape of individuals and foster cultural tolerance among communities, as it is the non-familiarity with the other's cultural images often breeds hatred of the other. Often the way to understand these visible things of culture demands a sort of interdisciplinary approach and methodology, for the objects under scrutiny might have been conceived, produced and consumed in different spatio-historical-technological environments ranging from pure science of the material to the pure philosophy of abstract thinking. Chris Jenks elaborates on the essential paradox of the undefinability of visuality itself in the larger context of VCS as follows:

Any attempt to establish a social theory of visuality seems to beset by paradox. In western society we have, over time, come to regard sight as providing one immediate access to the external world. But beyond this and perhaps because of this belief, visual ability has become conflated with cognition, and in a series of very complex ways, on the one hand vision is lionised among the senses and treated as wholly autonomous, free and even pure. Yet on the other hand, visual symbols are experienced as mundane and necessarily embedded, and their interpretation is regarded as utterly contingent. (1)

Nevertheless, visual cultural analysis offers potential possibilities in a world which is showing a steady, but fatal, attraction towards the visuality of things. 'In a society dominated by the production and consumption of images, no part of life can remain immune from the invasion of spectacle' (Christopher Lasch in Garoian and Gaudelius 298). When the sense of being-looked-at-ness is gradually built up in the individual psyche by the forces of consumer capitalism, the body becomes an important site of look. So, visual cultural studies overlap with the individual's psychological behaviour in relation to the presentability of their physical exteriority.

It is not difficult to understand that similar apparel codes act

as a strong binding agent among most groups. To Terry Smith, visual regimes of colonization form a structure consisting of three major components: practices of calibration, obliteration and symbolization, especially aestheticization (in Mirzoeff 483). This is evident from the ancient military dress codes to modern school uniforms. Uniform dress code is a distinctive social accessory with a strong emphasis on solidarity within the particular group thereby erasing, to a certain extent, other markers of difference among an otherwise heterogeneous group of people. This attraction towards the visibility of things can be extended to the imaginative cultural similarity that is cultivated and nurtured by multi-national companies among their culturally heterogeneous consumers who regularly shop for the same brand of things. The consumption of same brand of things acts as a pseudo-social equalizer, making the people forget some other fundamental differences among diverse cultural communities of similar consumer behaviour, independent of nation, race, gender, sexuality and so on.

Images occupy focal importance in visual cultural studies. Images, in other words, people or objects put within a specific spatio-temporal frame, becomes fundamental indices of visual culture. Ultimately all visual cultural artefacts are reduced to motionless images within distinct frames—frames of occularism, frames of ideology, frames of spatio-temporality, frames of subjective preferences. Putting things within specific visual frames, or imposing a linearity to things is an enlightenment legacy based on print-textuality. The pre-textual world was engaged in the cultural behaviour of oralization of things. The Guttenberg generation exhibited their conspicuous cultural behaviour with its obsessive acts of reducing all cultural artefacts into signs and texts on pages. The contemporary electronic generation is engaging in the mass production, projection and consumption of spectacular texts. ‘Spectacle’, according to cultural critic Guy Deobord, ‘is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between the people that is mediated by images’ (1994: 151). This shift of mode in comprehending things around can be detectable even in the changing patterns of production of

increasing number of print texts with more and more graphs, tables and images in them. Even in the designing and distribution of blank spaces across the pages of print texts also emphasise the aspect of visual space. So is the marketing strategy of providing CDs/DVDs forms of books along with their hard copies. Our newspaper pages nowadays are crowded with more and more visual texts, not only with the maximum use of photographs and drawings, but also in the usage of fonts of multiple size, shape and colours. A more telling example for this would be the emergence of the genre called photo essays or graphic essays in the print media. Recently, one of the regular issues of the popular Malayalam weekly, *Mathrubhumi*, had an exclusive “cover story” on Endosulfan issue in Kasaragod, in Kerala where the entire human-made environmental catastrophe is told through photographs. The image-text ratio in the aforementioned issue would be approximately 95:5. What else could be a better symptom for the proliferation of visual culture across media formats?

Is there any anatomical/biological reason for the spread of dominant mode of visuals in contemporary culture? To use computer nomenclature, a 50,000 word-length written text occupies only very small kilobytes in the cyberspace, whereas an image of 5x5 inches would consume certain megabytes. Does this imply, when read with the saying that a picture can communicate something more clearer than thousand word, a visual cultural artefact or image can carry heavier cultural content than a print/oral text? That arresting picture captured by Nick Ut in 1972 of the naked little Vietnamese girl running away from the explosion of napalm bombs could better convey the politics of American imperialism than thousands of articles written on the same subject put together. Similarly Raghu Rai’s photograph, *Unidentified Baby*, an pen-eyed-half-buried-child-in-the-grave politicizes more explicitly the unbridled multi-national industrial complexes of post-independent India, in the immediate backdrop of Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984.

The consistently growing popularity of community network

sites like Facebook and Orkut, that offer maximum space for personal albums, demand for camera-attached mobile phones, laptops and other personal gadgets point to the emergence of a social-psychology of contemporary generation's obsession with the to-be-seen-ness of things. In such community network sites you don't see the individual but a selective self-presentation of herself or himself. Here, in the virtual space the consenting individuals are reborn and exhibit themselves as an object of mass gaze, where his own descriptions become a sort of spectatorial narcissism. The logic, to subvert Descartes in a vulgar fashion, 'I am online, therefore I am,' has become the order of the day. However the mature online community has learned to live with a willing suspension of disbelief on each other in a world of virtual reality and identity. People who are diffident of meeting and talking to people physically are confident of meeting and chatting with others in social networking site, probably because of the illusive freedom to terminate any exchange at any time of interaction.

Decades back, the French film theoretician Andre Bazin called this irresistible human passion for images and plastic arts as "mummy complex" (*What is Cinema?*, 9). Mummy Complex originates from the essential human urge to arrest the passage of time, there by overcoming at least some of the elements of the ultimate mortality of human beings. In other words, our passion for capturing images is an act against death by preserving the corporeal images of the body. The very same mummy complex is evident in the pre-photographic era's fascination with portraits in oil paintings. The wonderment of photography and personal mobile video clips reiterates the contemporary fetishism of images. The only difference is that with the proliferation of cheap image capturing electronic gadgets that are used to capture life's moments, the mummy complex is extended to all strata of people.

Another major area of visual cultural studies is devoted to the understanding of digital products or "digital beings" as called by Johan Kim, who teaches communication studies at Yonsei University of South Korea. He opines that digitization of life is one of the essential features of contemporary mediated world (88).

The ongoing attempts to visualize cultural produces belonging to other genres like folk tales, epics, graphic novels, children's stories etc. has to be read along with this changing behavioural patterns in society. Everything is being reduced to its aspect of seeability. For the contemporary generation, epics are something to be seen, not to be read, and replayed at one's own time and pace. The first Indian cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) itself is a local example of this urge to visualize non-visual cultural heritage like the epics and the *puranas*.

With the widespread availability of image capturing and storing devices, not only that individuals are becoming major producers and archivers of videos and images, but also there can be detected a changing pattern in the appreciative and perceptive behaviour of human beings. Everyone is busy in capturing moments with the mechanical eye, only to watch them later on with the viewing machines like mobile phone, computer or TV screen or projectors and so on. What has happened here is a deliberate postponement of appreciating moments instantly with our biological eye, but with the mediation of one or other types of mechanical eye. This urge to record and keep things from losing out is an extension of the mummy complex. Probably one of the earliest instances of critical understanding of these obsessive behavioural pattern is Kieslowski's film *Camera Buff*, where the protagonist who had just bought a portable movie camera, is shown busily capturing the 'moment' when his little kid falls down from the perambulator, instead of rushing to prevent the child from falling down.

There has already been a non-reversible deep penetration of visual forms of cultural artefacts in all walks of life, ranging from a person's self-perception to inter-personal communication to mass communication and to the production and dissemination of information in a world which is connected virtually. Cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer had conceptualised the spectacle of visual culture as "the mass ornament" which is simultaneously something but devoid of any explicit meaning (in Garoian and Gaudelins 300). One of the post-industrial commercial responses to assure the

visibility of production houses was to construct a visual image of the company—the logo. Thus, logos became the industrial counterparts for the individual's photographs thereby giving a unique visual identity to the brand/company. All these developments make it mandatory that the range and scope of visual cultural studies needs to be extended to all our socio-cultural engagements. At the same time one has to take into consideration the warning given by scholars against the exaggeration as well as oversimplification of the idea of 'visual culture.' Among them the following opinion is highly relevant.

It seems that visual culture is everywhere and thus nowhere, wholly over-determined and almost meaningless simultaneously. Its pervasiveness indicates that Visual Culture Studies is fast becoming a prevailing field of enquiry in the humanities and beyond, and yet its ubiquity is an unhelpful indicator of both what it is and what it does. What is astonishing, and somehow not unexpected, is that there is no real common consensus as to what 'Visual Culture' signifies. (Morra and Smith, 2009: 10)

The interconnectedness of visual cultural artefacts is another major area for critical enquiry. Nowadays visuals exhibit a consistent cross-disciplinary or cross-media fertilization. With the provision of digitization, visual forms of culture thrive in entirely different media, other than its original medium of production, so as to circulate among mass spectatorship. Now, it has become an almost anachronistic practice to go to the Louvre to watch Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Hundreds of Google images of *Mona Lisa* which offer more clarity than the fading original in the museum are available online which can be accessed simultaneously from different locations in different parts of the world. Moreover with digitization, details of the image as per individual preference can be extracted from the digitized image and projected on any screen in different magnitude and colour combinations. With digitization the even aura of work of art prior to the age of mechanical reproduction too is lost forever (courtesy to Walter Benjamin). To take another example, with the emergence of 3D/4D technology, the Statue of Liberty can be watched on a

computer monitor from as many angles and distances as one like at different times. To put it in other way, digital texts of visual objects give a sensory experience which often surpasses the faculty of human eye when juxtaposed in contrast with the real objects. In other words, digitally mediated reality has become more dynamic and more real. The very same visual form undergoes multiple reconfigurations during the process of adaptation to different viewing platforms like projection screen, TV, computer monitor, mobile screen and the printed page. Perfect reproducibility, simultaneous multilocal accessibility, alterability and complete eraseability are the characteristic features of these digital texts. However the accessibility of digital texts requires an 'equipmental contexture' (Kim), or a mechanical mediation and frequent updating of the devices. All these prerequisites sometimes diminish the importance and independence of our biological capacities thereby subjugating them to the tyranny of electronic gadgets.

As mentioned earlier, is the human effort to decode the natural world becoming primarily an effort in visualizing things and concepts? However, human comprehension of the world is a hybrid of multi-sensory perceptions that include images, sounds, texts etc. the proportions of which vary in different cultural historical contexts. The pre-Gutenberg world was designed and dominated by orality, as '[p]rior to the advent of the modern mass media, people were the primary medium or conduit through which information passed' (Ott 2). However, the Gutenbergian world witnessed the predominance of the written word. The contemporary, post-Gutenberg cultural landscape is undoubtedly infested with visuals of all conceivable shape, size, colour and formats—a paradigm shift from the oral to the literal to the visual. This cultural reality necessitates a reformulated curriculum in our higher academia, especially in the Humanities scholarship, so that the stakeholders are equipped with sufficient visual literacy to comprehend, contain and create counter-visuals to resist new forms of hegemony and oppression.

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Impact of Arabic Resistance Literature on Anti-colonial Struggles in Kerala

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The tradition of Islam in Kerala was different from that of North India. It was through traders and scholars that Islam peacefully spread in the region while it had spread via kings and nobles through invasions and conquests in the North. *Rihlat ul Muluk* states the story of the early Muslim missionaries and the reception they got at Dharmadam. Tender coconuts were provided to them. When the new comers asked about its real owners and their permissions, the natives were astonished of their honesty.¹ Such honesty and trustful dealings and characters attracted the natives at length to the new faith.

As stated trade was the main link between Arabia and the Western Coast. The Arabic language was used for communication in the port towns for centuries. When the East India Company recruited Factors to India, it was made compulsory that they should know Arabic. The Arabic language was treated as an element of culture as well as medium for commerce.² In the pre-modern period the Zamorins of Calicut had employed scholars in Arabic. He had contact with rulers in the Middle East against the Portuguese intrusion in the port towns.

The Arabic literatures became a great source of power because of the ulama (scholar in the Islamic theology) who had a dignified position in Islam. Islam recommends boundless rights and powers to the ulama. The traditions of the prophet are replete with the

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references of their status. The Prophet has said “the *ulama* are the heirs of the Prophets”.³ Prophet Muhammad completing his mission has declared unhesitatingly that ‘After me there will not be any Prophets, the *ulama* of my community (*ummah*) are like prophets of the *Bani Israel*’.⁴ These are the clear indications of the responsibility and rights of *ulama* on the society. It has also some illustrations to the society that they are bound to obey the directions and commands of the *ulama*. Prophet also has directed the *ulama* to protest in time of anarchy and misrule. He has stated that ‘the best *jihad* is the expression of protest against a cruel ruler’.⁵ As Prophets were the religious and political heads in one, the *ulama* are meant to be both in one. They were to guide the people both in spiritual and temporal field. Thus the *ulama* had the responsibility to save the people from the tensions of both this life and the life hereafter.

Right from the beginning of Islam the *ulama* performed their part faithfully. The history of the world is replete with the examples of their participation in politics. The centres of their activities were mainly mosques. They mobilized the people against the oppressors through their literatures mainly in the form of poems, pamphlets, letters, *fatwas* (decrees) *etc.* These literatures had great appeal among the common mass and the call of *jihad* was considered a blessing to attain *Shahadath* and subsequently to enter heaven. As the writers were considered the guide and guardian of the community, the spirit in the writings of these divines were found mandatory to be followed.

Muslims of Kerala enjoyed a very respectable position in the society before the advent of the Portuguese. They mainly engaged in the trade which was largely peaceful and prosperous. Socially they were respected and even conversions to Islam were promoted. The Zamorins took keen interest in the religious observances of the Muslims. Friday prayers and *Eid* celebrations were made compulsory.⁶ *Qazis* and *Muazzins* were paid from the state exchequer. Qazi Muhammad admires Zamorins not only as the helpers of Muslims but also as protector of the *Shariat*. The Zamorin also prescribed that the reading of Friday *Qutuba* was to

be in the name of Turkish Khalif.⁷ Both the rulers and the traders benefited from the trade. The empowerment of the Zamorin was due to two factors- absence of incursion from the domineering powers of the subcontinent⁸ and his coalition with Mappilas and the Arab traders. Thus, economically the coalition had beneficial results for both the parties.

It was in this context that the Muslims considered Malabar as *Dar ul Islam* (abode of Islam). Sheikh Zainudhin considers Adil Shah as the upholder of Allah's words who endeavors to root out the heretics and to extirpate the wrong doers,⁹ indicating that the Zamorin and his state is abode of Islam and believers; and by fighting with the Portuguese Ali Adil Shah upheld the words of God. It is also to be noted that, when Sheikh Zainudhin and Qazi Muhammad were eloquent of the fight against the foreign infidels, they emphasized the need to strengthen the rule of Zamorin. They never suggested the replacement of the rule of the Muslims.

In such a situation, the Portuguese entered in the horizon of trade with the vested interest of dominating the trade and occupying the territory. It inaugurated a series of conflicts and fights in the coasts of Malabar. They posed menace to the social, economic, and cultural life of the people in general and the Mappilas in particular. The atrocities they inflicted in Malabar were beyond descriptions. The *ulama* of Malabar were far ahead in realizing the needs of the time and urged the community to support the Zamorins and to question the legality of the European interlude. They used all their potency in resisting their influence. They not only preached but wrote widely in different forms of literature. They also issued a large number of *fatwas* to carry out *jihad* and some time led them personally to the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle. They imbibed the *jihadi* spirit from religious scriptures and transmitted it to the ordinary Mappilas through the resistance literature and folk literary pieces.

Abu Yahya Zainudhin bin Sheikh Ali Bin Sheikh Ahmad popularly known as Sheikh Zainudhin Makhdum Senior was a reformer and Mudarris of Ponnani. Having felt the chaotic

conditions of the native land created by the European intruders, he determined to fight against them. He was running a well flourished *Dars* at Ponnani where a large number of students from far off places including foreign countries were studied. Through these disciples, he prepared a strong defense against the Portuguese. He declared *jihad* against the intruders and compiled an inspiring work '*Tahrid Ahlil Iman Ala Jihadi Abadathissulban Al Marghabati fil Jinan al Munquidat min an Neeran*'. He gave a graphic picture of the atrocities perpetrated by the Portuguese and appealed the people for *jihad*. He sent the copies of it to various localities to motivate the people against the Portuguese. He also wrote letters to the rulers of various countries seeking their support for the fight against the Portuguese.¹⁰ The rulers like Muhammad Shah, Arshad Beg, Mubarak Shah and Adil Shah responded positively and sent their forces to Calicut. Zainudhin called upon the people for *jihad*. Number of Moors resort to die as *Shahid* to defend the town.¹¹ The Portuguese continued the atrocities unabated. The Muslims under the *ulama* were never sluggish in their defense. Many heroes like Kunhi Marakkar, the disciple of Sheikh Zainudhin wrote the brightest chapters in the history of Malabar by defending the Malabar Coast.¹²

Sheikh Zainudhin junior, the grandson of Shiekh Zainudhin Senior was also the *Qazi* and *Mudarris* of Ponnani. He also continued the struggle against the colonialist and wrote *Tuhfat ul Mujahidhin fi Baazi Akhbaril Burtughaliyeen* to inspire people for *jihad* against the Portuguese. A full chapter of the work was devoted to describe the virtues of *jihad*. He explains the purpose of his writing as to inspire the Muslims to fight against the Portuguese.¹³ The work also gives serious warnings to the world against the colonial forces. He presented the Zamorins as a model king who fought against the Europeans powerfully and appeals the people to join with the ruler in the fight. He also complaints against the attitude of Muslim rulers who are not helpful to the warring Zamorins. Zamorin also sought the support of the Sheikh through personal meetings and letters. By the advice of the ruler Sheikh wrote letters to the rulers of many dynasties.¹⁴

Sheikh Zainudhin was assiduous in mobilizing people against the Europeans. Responding to the call, the Western Coast recorded the most horrible days of bloodshed. The Portuguese power was traumatized due to the constant fight with the locals. The description of Zainudhin about the atrocities of Portuguese had a great appeal among the Mappilas. He also makes a heart felt picture of the desperate leaderless state of Muslim community. It was from the writings and preaching of the *Makhdums* that many fighting bands like the Marakkars drew their inspirations.

Alike the *Makhdums*, the family of Kunjali Marakkar's, the admirals of the Zamorin, also had come from Kayalpattanam and had close association with the *Makhdum* family of Malabar. Basically, the Marakkars were rice traders. It was from the writings and preachings of the *Makhdums*, that they drew their inspiration for *jiḥād*. References are found in *Tuhfat* and *Fathul Mubin* about Marakkars such as Pattu Marakkar, Mammali Marakkar, Faquih Ahmad Marakkar, Kunjali Marakkar, Muhammad Ali Marakkar and so on. They whole-heartedly carried out the call for *jiḥād* made by the *Makhdums*. They came to the battlefield against the Portuguese under the influence of Sheikh Zainudhin and Sheikh Abul Wafa.¹⁵ Hence the *ulama* served as sources of inspiration to the Marakkars in their prolonged struggle against the Portuguese.

The dragging Portuguese attempt for their survival was decisively ended with the most dreadful battle Chaliyam. The Chaliyam fort was besieged by the Zamorin's forces with the co-operation of different groups of people. Qazi Muhammad of Calicut presents a portrait picture of the events in his illuminating war descriptions in the *Fathul Mubeen li Ssamiriyyilladhi Yuhibbul Muslimeen*. The divines like Sheikh Abul Wafa Muhammad Shattar, Seethi Ahmad Al khumami, Umar Andabi, Abdul Aziz Makhdumi, Abdul Aziz, the *Qazil Quzath* of Calicut not only wrote in different forms but were in the forefront of the fight.¹⁶ The fight became successful with the collective wars, letters and prayers of the *ulama*. The aged mother of Zamorin twice went to the house of

Abul Wafa seeking his support and prayers for the success of Zamorin's forces. Sheikh Abul Wafa reported to have called the Muslim leaders at the Chaliyam Mosque and discussed the new tactics to be adopted in the war against the Portuguese. He also organized a congregation of thousands at Ponnani and offered special prayers for the victory in the war.¹⁷

Qazi Muhammad records the immaculate report about the battle of Chaliyam. He upholds the valour and model of Zamorin before the rulers of the world and advices to follow him. It also pictures the benevolent activities of the Zamorin which could be adopted by other rulers. His presentation of the arrival of Portuguese and their character and activities would ignite a strong anti-colonial spirit among the readers of all the time.¹⁸ The leaseholders were subjected to revision and transfers. Landlords at their will had the right to increase the rent (melhart) or to evict the tenants from their holdings. The vigilant stand and strong interference of the *ulama* and their literature contributed great moral strength in checking the expansion of Portuguese dominance in Malabar.

Advent of the British occupation multiplied the role of *ulama* in the society. The British attitudes towards the agrarian structure were one-sided. Landlordism with all its vigour exploited the peasants. In order to win over the support of the landlords, the British adopted an anti-tenant policy. Mostly the Mappilas were the victims of this policy. The condition of the tenants was miserable. They had no right over their property. Lion share of their production was assessed as state revenue. Imposition of taxes and the treatment to the tenants were at the will of the landlords.¹⁹ Thus the British land revenue policy and administration acted as facilitating factors to the oppressions and exploitation of the landlords. This sort of economic distress made the Mappilas resort to social banditry.

In such a state of condition, the task of *ulama* was manifold-to fight against the colonial oppression, restore the economic stability and bring normalcy back in the community. The *ulama*

of the 19th century undertook this task with great concern. During this time, series of outbreaks were reported. Between 1836 and 1919 thirty-two major revolts took place. All these were in an identical manner. From this experience, the British authorities assumed that, “the religion gave them a philosophy of action and nourished their feelings of antagonism against the well to do landowners”.²⁰ The argument would be proved from the statement of Kunhikoya Tangal, an *ulama*, who led the revolt of 1849. He states, “My reason for joining these people arise from the dictates of religion, for when a member of Mussalmans are in trouble and in danger, it is for us, Sayyids to join and die with them. Seeing their grievous state, I thinking of the face of God, joined them”.²¹

Large number of folklores of shuhada was in vogue. The *ulama* taught them the need to oppose the injustice and thus it led to recurring outbreaks in Malabar. The British authorities took the problem seriously and appointed various commissions to study the problems of the tenants. It invariably emphasized the role of *ulama* especially the *Tharammal Tangal*²² in these outbreaks.

Mamburam became the seat of spiritual leadership to the Mappilas in their struggle against colonialists. Sayyid Alawi Tangal initiated a process of revitalization and regeneration among the Mappilas.²³ The common mass looked upon the Tangal as being imbued with divinity. In the outbreaks of the 19th century, the *jihadis* are reported to have received blessings from Mamburam Tangal and vowed *Nercha* and *Moulud*.²⁴ He wrote an exciting work, *Assaiful Battar ala man Yuaril Kuffar wa ya khudum min Dunilladhi wa Rasulihi wal Muminin wal Ansar*, for exhorting the people to fight against the frengis (Europeans). It was secretly circulated from mosque to mosque. Thus the British authorities considered the work most dangerous and issued orders for proscribing it. At the top of each page of the book was written *Qatilu A'da Allahi Innal Jannatha Tahta zilal li Ssuyuf* (fight against the enemies of Allah, for the paradise is under the shadow of the sword). The work prescribes *jihad* against the *Kuffar* (Europeans) incumbent including the old, women and children. He recommends

being non-co-operative and non-compromising to the British. He also urged the believers to fight till the last breath for the liberation of the country from the British colonial rule²⁵ and not to seek any help, justice or contact with the British government which was presented as un-Islamic and great sin which would make one infidel.²⁶ Many of the revolts of the 19th century are found to have staged with Sayyid Alawi's blessings and even with personal participations.²⁷ Thus the British government considered the Tangal most dangerous and took steps to eliminate him, but the fear of consequences held them back.

Sayyid Fazl Pookkoya Tangal, the son and successor of Sayyid Alawi Tangal was stronger in his attitude to the British. He even dared to declare publicly in *Khutba* (sermon) that to kill a *janmi* who evicted the peasant is not a sin but a virtuous deed.²⁸ The Friday sermon of the Tangal was very popular that people from different parts of Malabar attended. The Tangal used the occasion to make the people aware of the circumstances.²⁹ He always cited the British by the term *Kuffar* (infidel) and advised the writers to compose war songs in different languages to mobilize the people against the Europeans.³⁰ Besides, the Tangal also took some strong steps to reform the lower castes.³¹ The British authorities in the beginning tried to make some compromise and negotiations with him. Finding it futile, the British took strong steps to deport him to Makkah.³²

Both Sayyid Alawi and Sayyid Fazal had deep roots in the hearts of the people. It was well proved by the Commission Reports of T L Strange. Logan, the Malabar Collector, with great admiration admitted the great role of Mamburam Tangal even after the banishment. Having got inspired from a visit to the tomb of Sayyid Alawi the fighters prepared for their jihad.³³

The pen and tongue of the Sayyid Fazal created great fear among the authorities. He considered the pre-British Malabar as *Dar ul Islam* which is ruined by the *Kuffar* (Europeans). He edited some famous *fatwas* against the British in the name of '*Uddath ul Umara wal Hukam le Ihanatil al Kafarti wal Abadatil Asnam*'.

The British authorities found his activities in Malabar dangerous to the British safety and took steps to deport him. According to the authorities, due to many reasons, Mamburam Tangal was responsible for the outbreaks in different parts of Malabar. Moreover some social reforms which introduced by the Tangal was found anti-landlord and-anti British. Yet, the government was reluctant to take any step against him. Finally, he was diplomatically persuaded to leave Malabar. Thus on 19th March 1852, Syed Fazl with his relatives left Malabar for Mecca.³⁴ After the banishment, Sayyid Fazl or his relatives were never allowed to visit Malabar due to the fear of their further role against the British. T L Strange laments, "After the deportation of Mamburam Tangal many of the *Qazis*, *Sayyids* and others of Mohammedan priesthood in Malabar are active against the British."³⁵

The spirit and soul of all these works were to inspire and exhort the community towards *jihad*. Thus a number of audacious '*shahid*' bands were kept alive in popular songs composed in their honour.³⁶ When a man decides for *jihad* he also determines to become *shahid* and in most cases completes a series of rituals like wearing the white cloths of the martyr, divorcing his wives, clearing all the obligations with fellow beings and visiting tombs and saints for their blessings and offering prayers at mosques for the success of their great undertaking³⁷

The spirited hero before proceeding to *jihad* performs *Nercha* and *Moulid* in honour of the Prophet or some deceased persons.³⁸ There are records of such preparations and recruitments of *jihadis* from mosques, *chandass*, (weekly markets) and places of annual *Nerchas* and so on. "Number of Moors," states Logan, "swore to die as *Shahid* (martyr) to defend the town."³⁹

The cult of *shahadath* (martyrdom) was considered glorious. Many scholars were astonished to see the way the Mappilas were prepared to become martyrs. An analytical study of the Mappila quest for *shahadath* would bring out some amazing findings.⁴⁰ One such amazing observation made by Fawcett was that the Mappilas fought to die and those who go out to die in *jihad* and returned

alive is never forgiven, and his life would not be safe for a moment among his own people. “Why did this would be *shahid* not die”? Was the response of a family member left out in the outbreak⁴¹ Fawcett presents a living instance of the revolt of 1894 when thirty two rebels were shot, of whom but two survived, one a convert shot through the spleen, and a boy of 15 wounded in the leg. The mother of one of the survivors was heard to say indignantly: “If I were a man, I would not come back wounded!”⁴² Thus, it proves the longing for *shahadath* and achieving the heavenly bliss was the spirit behind *jihad*. Before such a spirited community all the worldly pleasures and joys are insubstantial

A large number of folk songs were in vogue praising the heroism of the suicidal bands. In one of such works, *Kottuppalli Mala* or *Mahatbhuta Mala*, a youth named Mannath Veettil Kunhi Marakkar of Ponnani went out of his marriage function and rescued a girl from the Portuguese ship where she had been kept under custody. Though she was rescued, the hero was cut into pieces and thrown into the deep sea.

Umar Qazi of Veliyancode was another stalwart who took some steps further in directing the people in the non co-operation with the British authorities. He was said to have composed a lot of instant verses criticizing the evils of the day. He advocated the theory of non taxation, long before Gandhi thought of it.⁴³ He was quite disturbed by the heavy taxes imposed upon the people. He issued fatwas against the British and gave intellectual guidance to the early non-co-operation, non taxation movement in Malabar.⁴⁴ Thus he was bold enough to advocate techniques of struggle which the nationalists fear in 20th century feared.

During his lifetime, he never paid taxes and popularized the mission through his poems, fatwas, and letters. He wrote, ‘He (the collector) illegally increased and imposed the taxes on us, on the contrary, reduced the taxes on the properties of Adhikariens and Menons’.⁴⁵ Due to his non taxation movements, he was declared guilty and arrest warrant was issued in the regard. The British officials approached him with negotiations but he stood firm and

stated, 'you are the usurpers of our dynasties like Mysore, Cochin, Calicut etc. God is the real lord of all the lands, so I will not pay the tax'.⁴⁶ The subsequent developments led to the arrest of the Qazi at Chavakkad and later at Calicut. The iron bars and ruthless treatment could not change the mind of Umar Qazi. In the solitude of the jail, he wrote to Sayyid Alawi Tangal of Mamburam, 'we should not allow such oppressions to continue. It is better for the Mappilas to fight and die against those oppressive rulers'. Thus Umar Qazi was a herald to the modern nationalists and a guide to the social reformers.

The *ulama* leadership and their literary pieces prepared the society to fight against the exploitations and injustice. The peasants protested in 19th century as suicidal forces as stated before. But by the beginning of 20th century, the movement got wide currency as they were organized to meet the danger. Hidayat ul Muslimeen Sabha, a socio-cultural Trust of Manjeri presented two memoranda before the Madras Governor relating to the difficulties of the tenants and appealing for the redressal of their hardships.⁴⁷ Similar petitions from Ponnani Taluk also submitted before the Collector of Malabar demanding the increase in value of goods and against the bidding of *Melchart* before the actual expiry of *Kanam*.⁴⁸

They went ahead with the plan to unite the tenants and to organize them to question the authority of the landlords. In 1916 *Malabar Kudiyan Sangham* (Malabar Tenancy Association) was formed as M P Narayana Menon and Kattilasserri, two leaders of Indian National Congress as President and Secretary respectively. The success of the *Kudiyan Sangham* was due to the determined struggle against the landlord-British alliance with tooth and nail.

During the First World War, the British Prime Minister Liyod George sought the support of the Muslims and promised some concessions after the war. Out of great hopes, the *ulama* of Malabar called the people at *Himayat ul Islam Sabha Hall* and appealed them to join hands with the Britain in the war and to make prayers by offering *Fatihah* in each mosque for the victory of Britain.⁴⁹

But after the war Britain went back on their promise and thus the *ulama* determined to throw out the regime. People were organized on the line of Khilafat question. Strong Khilafat agitation was staged at Malabar. Mahatma Gandhi and Ali Brothers visited the region to attend a conference of the movement.⁵⁰ It declared Friday, 17 October 1919 to be observed as Khilafat day. The message of the Khilafat day was that the Muslims needed a strong Khalifa. Only a free India could help such an attempt to realize the aim and so Mappilas should strive for the freedom of the country.⁵¹

When Gandhiji and Shoukath Ali arrived at Calicut to attend the Khilafat meeting, an enthusiastic mass of 20,000 attended the meeting. Malabar Khilafat committee was formed with Kunhikoya Tangal as President, T Hassan Koya and U Gopala Menon as Secretaries. Subsequently, large number of local committees was formed. The *ulama* took the lead in each locality.⁵² Ali Musaliar was the Secretary of Tirurangadi Khilafat Committee, Pareekutty Musaliar and Kunhikoya Tangal were the Secretaries of Tanur and Malappuram respectively.

Aminummantakath Pareekutty Musaliar, the secretary of Tanur Khilafat committee, published and circulated *Muhimmatul Mu'mineen*. It was the collection of his Fatwas in supporting the activities of the congress and asking the Mappilas to wage holy war against the British. Through this Arabi-Malayalam work, he urged the Muslims that, "it has been made evident in the light of the *Quran* and *Hadith* of our Prophet and the decrees of the unanimous Fatwas of all Imams that it is the bounden duty of all the Muslims to endeavour in attaining *Swaraj*."⁵³ He prescribes *Jihad* against the British compulsory to all (*Fardh Ain*).⁵⁴ He also took a step further and suggested that if any one is reluctant to do *Jihad* against the British, then it is compulsory on others to do *Jihad* against such people.⁵⁵ If anyone is unable to resist the British, he should migrate to other countries. Pareekutty Musaliar was very bold towards his attitude towards Khilafat. In order to emotionalize the importance of Khilafat office, he sited examples from the early history of Islam. When the Prophet died, the

primary concern of his followers was the election of a follower to the Prophet. So the burial of the dead body was delayed for three days till the selection of a Khalifa.⁵⁶ Thus it is *wajib* (compulsory) on every Muslim to pray for the glory and success of the Khalifa. The *ulama* like Cherussery Ahammed Kutty Musaliar, Panaikulath Abdu Rahiman Musaliar, Kutti Bava Musaliar and Mylassery Zainudhin kutty Musaliar authenticated the call of Pareekutty Musaliar.

As response to the Khilafat and national call *Kerala Majlis ul ulama* was formed. It was the counterpart of *Jami'at ul ulama-i-Hind* of the North. It had its beginning in Thiruchirapalli and later under the leadership of Vakkam Abdul Kadir Mawlawi and Syed Murtaza Saheb, it's first meeting was held in the venue of Ottappalm Congress Conference on 25th April 1921. Forty one *ulama* and seven hundred delegates attended the conference. The organization declared its established aim to fight against the colonialist and to support the freedom movement under the Indian National Congress.⁵⁷ It elected Mawlawi Sayyid Alawi Tangal as permanent President and Vakkam Abdul Kadir Mawlawi, Mahin Hamadani Tangal as Vice President, E Moidu Mawlawi as General Secretary Kattilassery Muhammad Mawlawi, K M Mawlawi and Mawlawi Arabi Shemnad as Joint Secretaries. It passed three resolutions to help the Khilafat cause, to follow peaceful means for the national struggle and to appeal the Muslims to join the Congress.⁵⁸

After the conference, Moidu Mawlawi issued a pamphlet in Arabic entitled *Da'wath ul Haq*. It appealed the people to contribute a good share of their *Zakath* to the Khilafat fund and to strive and sacrifice all including their life to save the Khilafat. *Majlis ul ulama* also convened a large number of meetings to impart the lessons of nationalism among the common mass.

The Muslim awakening and the show of unity made the British restless and they planned to effect a divisin among the *ulama* group. They instigated a small group of *ulama* through presents and bribes and arranged an *ulama* conference at Ponnani Pathar

on 24 July 1921. Though the conference was grand and splendid with the British support, the nationalist *ulama* showed the courage to arrange a parallel meeting at Ponnani itself on the same date. Despite all blocks and threats, *ulama* from different regions assembled at Puthu Ponnani. A lot of *fatwas* for and against the conference was issued. Those which were sent brought to the conference at Ponnani Pathar were cleverly smuggled out to the nationalist conference at Puthu Ponnani.⁵⁹ Thus the official conference of Ponnani Pathar ended in fiasco. No known *ulama* was said to have attended the conference.⁶⁰

Khilafat committees were unable to work due to the menace of British arrest after 1921. As most of its leaders were arrested and sentenced to lifelong imprisonment, those who escaped to Kodungallor with the *ulama* of that region and the members of *Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangam* gave shape to *Kerala Jamiat ul Ulama* in 1922. M Abdul Kadir Mawlawi was elected as president, C Abdulla koya Tangal, K K Muhammad kutty Mawlawi as vice president and C K Moideen kutty Mawlawi and E K Mawlawi as secretary and assistant secretary respectively.⁶¹ Its objective was the independence of the country.⁶²

Ali Musaliar, a strong Khilafat nationalist, was determined to expel the Europeans from the Indian soil. He had a galaxy of scholars as disciples and friends. His religious classes and preachings at the mosques contributed to spread the anti-colonial struggle.⁶³ The British authorities were astonished at his regular communication system and the well attended *murids* (disciples) who could be instantly summoned at any place.⁶⁴ Thus Ali Musaliar and his disciples were taking an active role in the spreading of Khilafat ideas. The wide contact and fourteen years of service as *Mudarris* made him the nucleus of the revolt of 1921. Yet, he was a strict follower of *Ahimsa* and secular principles.⁶⁵ He evoked great respect and recognition among all communities. When *Kizhakkepalli* was raided, a false message was spread that Ali Musaliar was arrested and Mamburam Mosque was demolished. People from neighbouring places rushed to Tirurangadi shouting

Taqbir. Tottenham brings the list of thirteen *ulama* from Kallingappalli preparing to proceed for a *Jihad* at Tirurangadi.⁶⁶ After the event of 21st August at Tirurangadi, fearing the Mappila wrath the British officials left the place and not even a village peon was left in the region. All the supporters of the government also fled from the place. Ali Musaliar declared Khilafat Raj and himself acted as the head of the Khilafat government.⁶⁷ But the subsequent developments led to an open fight with the British and arrest of Ali Musaliar. After a short trial he was hanged with many of his associates at Coimbatore Central Jail.

The *ulama* like K M Mawlawi, Kattilassery Muhammad Mawlawi, Chembrassery Kunjikoya Tangal, Konnara Muhammad Koya Tangal, Tanalur Avaran Kutty Musaliar, Kumaranputhur Seethi Koya Tangal, Mattath Saidalavi Koya Tangal, Kalakkandathil Kunhabdulla Musaliar were some of the most prominent *ulama* who took key role in the revolt of 1921 and the national movement till the independence of India. After the revolt of 1921, there was a vacuum of *ulama* leadership in the national movement for they were either killed, jailed, deported or went underground.

During the days of the revolt of 1921, K M Mawlawi and E Moidu Mawlawi were very active as negotiators of peace and defenders from violence. They also took key role in the preparation of *Kerala Muslim Majlis* and reform movements in the society. Kattilassery Muhammad Mawlawi was a staunch worker for the uplift of tenant classes. He worked tirelessly amongst them for the redress of their grievances. Along with M P Narayana Menon, he started *Malabar Kudiyan Sangham* and propagated its messages to the villages. He also mediated to solve many tenant issues in Malabar.

The *ulama* of the Muslim community have played their role beyond the periphery of the religion. They acted as the spokesmen of the society and leaders of the community in all walks of life. They upheld the scriptures and produced a lot of resistance literatures to mobilize the mass against the common enemy of the

motherland. The masses in return acknowledged their guidance and accepted their leadership unquestionably. This reciprocal relation has contributed a lot in shaping the history of the Muslim community in Kerala from its very early times to the present.

In a nutshell the *ulama* were in the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggles from the beginning to the end of the struggle. The lessons they imparted through their direct participation and literatures will be inspiring to all generations to come as they were a model to the *ulama* community of the world. To them, the struggle for the motherland is not alien from their religious worship and is integral part of their religious faith.

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On Conceptualising Gender and Social Space

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Key terms: Human being, Gender, self reflexivity, social space, habitus.

This paper attempts to conceptualise gender and social space while doing research on gender related issues and engaging in the day to day life situations with gender sensitivity. The argument of this attempt is that gender is created partially self-reflexively and partially socially constructed and social space is an empirically translatable term. Conceptualising gender either as purely essentialist or as completely a social construction evades the interlinkage between the human-self reflexive and the social aspect. Hence it needs to analytically examine the arenas like gender-based roles, gender-relations, self, identity, and the social and gender perceptions. The originary (The coinage meaning original + primary) point to start with the researching/ understanding is 'human being.' It is the human being that is gendered as masculine and feminine. This conceptualisation is part of the methodological considerations of this researcher's doctoral thesis named "Gender Justice among Partners of Self-Choice Marriages".

Gender an overview of the conceptual considerations.

There are two fundamentally distinctive arguments regarding 'what gender is' Essentialism and social constructionism.

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Essentialism presupposes certain particular characteristics specific both to males and females, which acts as basement for the gender difference independent of the social life context. Main arguments of essentialism are the following, gender is biologically determined, biology/anatomy is destiny, and there is presence of man essence and woman essence. Since essence can never change there is no chance for the human beings to outlive or transform the living/social situations by and through their own lives. There are two types of Essentialism namely, Universalism and Individualism. The argument of Universalism is that women altogether should form a “group” for they have the “essence” in common, resulting in universal womanhood. According to Individualism, individual woman has her own essence hence should be treated as an “autonomous” individual entity. It stands for individual autonomy. Consequently essentialism ascribes certain unchangeable entity either to the group of women or to the individual woman, as the case is. One of the basic critiques against essentialism is that, as the directions of social life are open ended there can always be possibilities of transformation and hence gender cannot be conceived as purely based on essence. If gender is being conceived based purely on Anatomy/biology, the leading argument will be that it is quite natural and unchangeable. The aftermath of the same is that gender is not transformable. The fundamental question is that if there is such an essence for women (or men) by birth itself how can there be chances of transformations? The logical conclusion of this argumentation can reach the idea of biological determinism. The gender dissonances, deprivations disadvantages and thereby subordination of women continues socially, through the same human beings.

Moreover, as humans cannot be understood by detaching them from the social environment they live, are alive, and present, human being and becoming cannot be understood without considering the socially constructed part of the categories, especially gender. Social constructionists’ argument is that gender is a social construction. They breathed the idea that biology is no more the destiny. The basic arguments of social constructionism

are the following, individuals socially constructed and there is duality of individual and the society. They perceive that society is constructed, structured and posited 'out there' away from the individuals. They anticipate if at all for a transformation change of the social system is the only possibility. The outcome of such an argumentation is that there is no chance for human beings to outlive or transform (by and through their lives). As per this conceptualisation people/individuals should wait for the transformation of the whole social system -in its macro level. This researcher's critique to social constructionism is that micro-level interactional contexts of life situations and transformative relations are not addressed and the same practice of gendering perpetuates. Hence both arguments are contestable for these cannot perfectly depict the complexity of humans' life affairs in interactional/relational contexts. Furthermore women as a group (as human beings) continue to be disadvantaged. It is the immediate necessity/need of the day to end of social suffering of women (as they are also human beings!) Gender therefore is not pure essence and not just a social construction. In such a juncture it is necessary to probe how gender can be conceptualised based on the self reflexivity of the human beings and their committal to the social to make transparent the complexities of life. Towards understanding the same it will be worth to have an overview of the concept of gender that had already been deeply researched and discussed, especially during the second half of twentieth century.

Gender is a construct that can be clearly seen in the day-to-day human life realities. But as and when we try to disentangle the life situations it leaves behind so many complexities that construct and reconstruct the very human life. Common sensically *gender* is understood as the division between woman and man, based on the bearing of their body at the time of their *Janmam / jananam*, that is, at the time of birth, human bodies having the male sex organs are commonly considered as males and those having female sex organs are considered females. But the process of gendering is something more than that and once named female/

male it works almost independently of the bodies to which it belongs. In all spaces such as that of socialisation of children, social positioning, experiences, conceptual formations and cultural mediations it is tactile and present. Through the cyclic processes it creates the cobwebs of the organisations of the entire social institutions, the self-formation and self-expression of each human being.

Contentions of the experts of this area of study are worthy to be noted in this regard. "Gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms for sex are male and female the corresponding terms for gender are masculine and feminine these latter may be quite independent of biological sex" (Stoller, 1968: 9). According to Peterson et al "Gender refers to socially learned behaviour and expectations that distinguish between masculinity and femininity where as biological sex identity is determined by reference to genetic and anatomical characteristics, socially learned gender is an acquired identity. We learn through culturally specific socialisations; how to be masculine and feminine and to assume the identities of men and women. Gender analysis helps us understand how this presence-absence dynamic occurs and offers a more comprehensive explanation, it enables us to "see" how women are, in fact, an important part of the picture even though they are obscured when we focus on men". (Peterson et al, 1993: 57)

Gherardi opines that "gender as a category of thought extends the meanings of sexual difference from sexed bodies to two symbolic universes-the male and female" (Gherardi, 1995:128). She quotes Goffman, "Gender is the prototype of social classification and our social arrangements are the expression of the institutional reflexivity"...social organisation- which guarantees coherence, continuity and social reproduction between sexual difference and the attribution of gender" (Goffman quoted in Gherardi, 1995: 129). Gherardi observes, Gender as a socio-cultural product is constructed at both symbolic and the interactional levels. It gives rise to social structures, which reflexively institutionalise gender-relations (Ibid: 184).

According to Flax, “Gender-relation is a category meant to capture a complex set of social processes. Gender both as an analytic category and a social process is relational. That is gender relations are complex and unstable processes through inter related parts. These parts are interdependent, that is, each part can have no meaning or existence without the others” (Flax, 1990: 44). Andermahr, et al suggest “Early second wave feminists adopted the distinction formulated by the psychologist Robert Stoller between sex and gender to differentiate the socio-cultural meanings (masculinity and femininity) from the base of biological sex differences (male and female) on which they were erected (Stoller, 1968, Oakley: 1972). “... However difficult it is to disentangle that which belongs to biological sex from that which belongs to the domain of the social, every society must and does distinguish at least two kinds of body, under the presently unavoidable constraints of human reproductive exigencies. All people enact a vast super structure of cultural meanings around this ‘socially necessary distinction between the sexes” (Keller quoted in Andermahr et al, 1977). “Notwithstanding the conceptual difficulties feminists have raised around the distinction between sex and gender, we will continue to need some way of disentangling the differences that are inevitable from those that are chosen from those that are simply imposed” (Philips, 1992).

According to Gherardi “Organisational production of gender can be described in terms of four sets of processes.

Ä The production of gender divisions, that is, the gender patterning of jobs, wages, hierarchies’ power and subordination.

Ä The creation of symbols, usages and forms of consciousness, which explicate, justify or oppose gender divisions.

Ä The interactions among individuals in the multiplicity of forms that exact dominance and subordination create alliances and exclusions.

Ä The interior mental work of individuals as they consciously construct their understandings of the organizations structure of

work and opportunity” (Acker quoted in Gherardi, 1995:18).

Based on the above depiction, Gherardi arrives at the conclusion, “Gender¹, therefore, is socially produced by processes in which organizations actively participate and by which these organisations are shaped. Practices make gender in that they produce and reproduce social relations and material culture and the artifacts that sustain them. The meaning the social representation and the rhetoric with which these practices are made accountable to those engaged in them and to all others constitutes the organisational culture as textuality which moulds the subjectivity of these individuals and their audiences” (Gherardi, 1995: 18).

Butler argues about gendered subjectivity “as a history of identifications, parts of which can be brought into play in given contexts and which, precisely because they encode the contingencies of personal history, do not always point back to an internal coherence of any kind” in her *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 2007: 5).

All the above mentioned which are quoted from exhaustive analyses of gender deal with what gender means from different directions, to the human beings who are situated in distinctive social positions. This researcher understands that how human beings produce, reproduce and perpetuate gender (along with all the other social differentiations) needs further clarification, from the human beings’ side and their committal to various life affairs. Hence the following attempt is made, adding to the hitherto discussed part of it. This researcher’s argument is that gender is partially socially constructed while it is partially self reflexively produced reproduced by and through the human beings socially internalised social ascriptions, rules and regulations of roles and relationships, social structural properties e.g. mentality of androcentricity, legitimation of roles through interactions and communications. Hence it needs social transgenering. How can it be conceptualised?

Gender: Aspects of self-reflexivity and social construction

Body of each human being has a role in the process of defining it's self. But it doesn't mean that the very same body is there in the definition of it's self argues Nizar in his "Aspects of Reflexivity in Social Theorising". According to him the body is present in the social situations, with certain kind of reflexivity, internality, which is transcendental with respect to consciousness. But intuitively people are trained socially to think that mind is different from body and they also presuppose that it is as if intuitive. In the social situations the interiority of the body constitutes the human subject. For any mentality to perpetuate this condition is required. The presence of such a human being is to be essentially or necessarily assumed for further arguments through whatsoever different methods we proceed with. 'It is essential' has nothing to do with the idea that there is something retrievable as human essence as essentialists conceive it. Human being is the power present in any context. Power or active aspect can be defined as the relationship of a subject to its discourse. Human being in this conceptual frame is undivided or the undifferentiated power. It becomes self when it attains reflexive capacity. That is the cognitive directionality; it is the cognitive sense of directionality to things and itself. It is having the capabilities of being effective. Power is not to be understood as focal or central to one being only. It is pervasive. Power is cognitive through numerous selves at the same time, as in the case of neurons. Power is socially effective and creates productivity.

This researcher's argument is that the same conceptualisation can be applicable to gender also for placing the committal of the human beings to understand their life activities, actions and interactions. That is, the sexual appearance of a human body plays its part in the process of defining the gender. But it need not have any role in the definition of gender, the thereby social structurations, and legitimating of the androcentric mentality. i.e., once constructed gender works independently of the sex. In effect, this constructs and reconstructs gender disparity creating social spaces of domination and prestige for men and the subordinate

roles for women resulting in reinforcing and reifying the structural properties of the social and the patriarchal system thereby. Though it is structured in a peculiar way gender is determined not in an ultimately unchangeable and unquestionable manner. Perhaps, women and men who go through experience and thereby create the lower and upper stratifications of being feminine and masculine may have the belief that it is quite natural and normal. The condition that they accept it without even an iota of doubt in turn becomes the basement for strengthening the gender disparity. On critically analysing any life situations, when we reflect on the question why and how these social situations/relations/issues/circumstances/practices/institutions/systems/cultural mediations/subjectivities are like this, we will necessarily have to enquire about the possibilities of interactions of each agent therein, the agents' part in determining their own roles and their access to the resources. If the resource allocation and distribution in social, cultural, political, economic and the whole arena of life are in a particular way where women are deprived of the access such a social system/situation demands raising questions about social/gender injustice. The doubts regarding each experiences of day to day life that whether this should have happened in the same manner, how I (any agent) should intervene and what is my (any agent's) role in this particular time space continuum are anxieties faced by any human being that have no easy answers. (This 'I' itself being such construct)

During the life even before one understands that 'this is not what I am' the conceptualisations of 'what one is' and construction of 'that one' happens. The very thought that whether it is right to categorise the behaviour, ascribed qualities, values, expectations and beliefs that human beings are forced to learn socially into feminine and masculine dichotomies and thereby construct women and men 'differently' demands the denial of the self and the consciousness based on feminine and masculine ascriptions which may make the human agents socially insecure. Woman subjectivity and man subjectivity are very much actively taking part in the very day to day life, and the social affirmation of the self is

happening, making the agents involved 'believe' that it is unable to transform those selves, once they are constructed in our lives. But actually, there are possibilities to have the moments of recognition in every human's life that these selves are transformable, can be denied at any moment and creatively constructed otherwise by and through the very human being's actions and interactions. This recognition makes the human beings more sensitive and responsible in turn, compelling, not to turn back from it. This makes the concerned beings to seek ways to learn more about the complexities of life beyond making mechanical declarations and fights for rights. This situation that makes the seekers'/researchers'/living beings' own life unpredictable will be tempting the human beings not to go on in those ways.

Receiving the social situations and roles as they are (women, men, girls and boys) and standing for reconstructing these in the same manner, will be creating the beliefs in those who obey, that the life is easy in such moulds. Hence, the interacting agents won't be easily getting social circumstances to question the so called socially ascribed, determined and allowed-make believe-roles (like wife, husband, mother, father, sister, brother, and the whole lot). The properties in store of these roles-those construct and restore the roles by and through the human agents-are not mere mechanical rules handed over through generations as if in a baton relay. The recognition that the very same human agents partaking in the roles, through their perceptions create the 'political' situations, which restore or transform these roles and thereby reproduce or revolve the social arrangements and configurations, has much to do in the day-to-day life and Gender Studies/Social Research. The perception of those who intervene/interact in the social institutions, like family and marriage, that there can be possibilities of interactions and interventions even beyond the institutional provisions, among the interacting agents (woman-man) of the institutions the interacting/intervening agents make, the human beings understand that life is not mere permutations/combinations of predetermined roles. This leads to the thought of how can we intervene in our own life situations as human beings.

For example, it will be misrecognition to conclude that in the day-to-day activities of all the families the ascribed ideas and concepts regarding the roles and the social distribution of the power, productive and creative capacity of each being, happens in the socially anticipated ways only.

On studying each social institution, in its particular historical context and time space continuum, it may create clarity on issues like the complexities of the roles in the life activities, how the interacting agents overcome the complex situations, what are the dissents and dissonances they constructed. This will help us to understand that human interactions are changing a lot. But this leap, shedding one's own self constructed in the traditional mould, demands much energy from the human agent's part because the traditional social arrangements through the reified social properties and those agents who believe that they should reproduce the same through the roles ascribed to them, will be always in the social, trying to play the part at their best. It is comparatively easy a procedure also. The thought that there should be rigour of the perception that human life is possible not through the relations based on the pre determined so called static roles only but there are chances for the stances of changing it radically and disentangling all sorts of dominations makes Gender Studies much serious.

Practice and theory, if treated as two distinct factors do not help to problematise the depriving life situations women/ disadvantaged beings face, i.e. theory-oriented practice is the need of the day. It can help human beings' conscious intervention in life situations towards transformation. To end social suffering it needs questioning the secondary social status of women, in the androcentric sociality. Human relations constitute innumerable chances of vigorous interventions and immensely unexplored possibilities of the Being. Here, being means not 'the essence' but the stance of a human being 'is there' arbitrarily. For example, though marriage as an institutional provision may be present socially there are so many possibilities of human interactions

between the very agents who get into marital practice. To explore these commonly unseen possibilities it needs rationality on the part of the agents that in turn make the interactions transparent. To intervene rationally means it enhances the responsibility² of the interacting agents. It is this responsibility along with the sensitivity³ to leap deep into and disentangle the complexities of life situations makes the interacting agents ‘the representatives of humans’. In this sense, it is the responsibility of humans, irrespective of being woman or man, to infer their own experiences rationally.

The studies based on experiential analysis should be understood in terms of the idea that ‘experiences are institutionally mediated’ and at the same time ‘instinctively motivated’, argues Nisar. This argument gives a new direction to Gender Studies as well as understanding human issues. The preconditions of human cognitive capacity, perception and the sensitivity thus enhance the seriousness of our day-to-day human life. Otherwise it is this sensitivity that can be understood as the responsibility that is, the basic stance of Being.

Being and the Social

Being is the active aspect or power in which individualisation, subjectivation, or even habitus-formation is grounded. Being discussed here means not the essence but the active aspect or power that is “the originary point” brought to account for the effectiveness of the subject or habitus. The interconnection between the interiority of the being along with its exteriority, that is, the body and the habitat in which it inhabits and interacts causes the construction of the self. The self is constructed after a human’s birth and it will be present only till death. But its ontology exists even after one human is dead. Self can be understood as the state of being attentive. The observation that the self is the reflexive property of the being is a novel idea applicable to Gender Studies. Self in its content is a social construction. But the bearing, that part which depends on the interiority that contains the experiences, is connected with the

being of the human. That is why we are unable to understand the whole of human life by mere social structural explanation.

The fundamental determination of the active aspect or the distribution of power, of being, is partially or wholly interactive, that is, social. This in turn transforms the meanings of the very social distribution of the being and 'trans-substance' the being. The interactions of human beings and the 'active aspect or the power', the being, that enables the interaction determines the identity of the interacting agents. Meanings, signs, symbols, all these participate in the determination of the being of human. Here the co-mingling of ontology and ideology happens. The subjects in specific time space contexts can be the subjections, as well as the projections of the self. The projections and the subjections of self are not contradictory but complimentary ones. In this sense if we can conceptualise the social map of the world, it contain two factors: 'Social distribution of power' and 'Social affirmation of the self'.

Hence the social situations of the gender, gendering, generation, upper and lower stratifications and the allocation and distribution of resources should be studied based not only on the vertical direction (For example, social status of woman and man) but on the horizontal axes also. Then only we can understand the map of the specific life situations of every being. The questions like, whether these maps should continue like this or is it necessary to make changes (it being a possibility of changing the whole life) are worth raising in this context. The researcher's argument is that gender is not merely a social construction though partially socially constructed and it is socially possible and active only through self reflexivity. Humans are active in any of the social situations through both the social affirmation of self⁴ and social distribution of power⁵ enables to observe Gender Studies from another angle. Even though commonly we see, ascribing, all the characteristics observable in the social spaces in which human bodies are situated and being active specifically, on the bodies of the human, strong and solidified social provisions for interactions leading to the gendering of female and male bodies with 'apt and

accurate' feminine and masculine characteristics, women and men who are the 'active agents' in these interactions celebrate the social self projections, without caring their own subjections of the same projected selves, the thought that the human-being the active aspect or the power 'is there' which cannot be replicated to female-being and male-being helps us to seek autonomy and social justice with added care, tolerance and fellow feeling. This in turn makes it possible to retrieve the social responsibility. There can necessarily be an argument against this, that in the day-to-day reality possibilities for such seeking are rare. But it will not be that much exhaustive an argument since the possibilities of the "being" never exhaust. People, who are observable as agents in concrete life situations can be seen situated and being active in very different and dissimilar statuses, like labourers, managers, leaders, and advantaged/disadvantaged/marginalised/isolated beings.

The sensitivity of these agents, seen situated in all the social situations, involves the "energy" needed to transform the very situation. Sensitivity in concrete life situations is the readiness to go deep into the complexities of relations/interactions and enquire the justice involved in the allocation and distribution of resources. This sensitivity demands suspending one's own judgments by trying to go deep to understand the complexities of life. The sensitivity regarding how gender works socially and what are the roles of the interacting agents in producing and reproducing the same are very much necessary to understand human issues. The perception humans attain through sensitivity is the energy that helps to see through what is happening to, by and through *us*, in the process of making the social/gender. In this sense, sensitivity can be seen as the readiness to problematise one's own life and its patterns. This sensitivity is much necessary to study issues like patriarchy and domination. If an advantaged one considers this as the approach to life, her/his first responsibility will then be the readiness to give up the advantages she/he has in the life. This readiness, to give up the advantages, will enable the humans to explore the possibilities of their own 'being'. Hence to be responsible

in the day-to-day life and in doing research on human lives means to be sensitive to the injustice, disadvantages and under privileges humans suffer during life situations.

The concept that the qualities and characteristics of those humans who bear female bodies is 'feminine' and those of the humans who bear the male bodies is 'masculine' hinder both women, and men socially, from exploring their own power that is, the immense possibilities of 'being'. Any ascribed quality deserves analysing based on this idea. These ascriptions and the interactions based on these, make the human beings move mechanically, in predetermined patterns, later these predetermined patterns will be conceived by the interacting agents as creative and worth celebrating. Both giving up these mechanical imitations and norms that are reproduced and repeated simply for they were followed by our ancestors as well as attaining the understanding that femininity and masculinity are human capabilities or qualities that any being can possibly have, will create new pathways in the Gender Studies arena.

Woman and man are not mere 'bodies', and the possibilities of the survival is to be explored self reflexively. Human life shows that the possibilities of interactions and interventions are not unilateral. There will be whole lot of chances of co-operative and combined human activities in the day to day life situations. It is here we have to be aware of the creative capacity of the "being". This reflexive property of the being gives space to the thoughts regarding how can human life and relations be transformed to more productive and creative realms if though in our daily life we are cribbed with the social pressures of heterosexuality that hinder us from thinking and acting in such a direction. The concept of heterosexuality goes hand in hand with the concept of the homosexuality of the social, as Bourdieu observes in his *Masculine Dominations*⁶. However, to retrieve "the active aspect" it needs enquiring deep into the complexities of the day-to-day life and social structurations. Because, it is very essential, both in day-to-day life and research work to have the understanding of 'where the

human agents, what we are and whom we study, are situated', which constitutes the social space of the agents.

Social space

It was Pierre Bourdieu for the first time introduced the concept of social space, in his "Distinction"⁷ to understand the human interactions based on the social positions the agents hold and the resources they attain with the properties they have by being in such positions. He explained the social space of the humans of Europe and France, based on their distinctions. Distinctions are the characteristics each groups internalise and share as being part of that group. These characteristics are unique and distinctive to that group. Agents thus are able to be socially effective using the symbolic capital they attain by having particular social spaces. Each human agent or group is differentiated in social life based on the distinctions they have due to they being in different sorts of social positions. For example, professors, industrialists, doctors, nurses, schoolteachers, and the like can be considered as groups, being in particular social positions having specific characteristics, ways of life, attitudes interests, beliefs, the article people consume, entertainments, behavioural patterns and values groups of people of any social level can be considered based on these abovementioned distinctions. Each will be treated in different hierarchical classes. There can be some common properties shared by the schoolteachers, small scale businesspersons etc, that constituting a social class.

The concept of social class is reified, such a class is not available socially, is not possible to observe empirically. But social space is present in social reality, for some people share something common socially, thereby creating some properties. To evade the essentialism due to the reification of the concept of social class, Bourdieu uses the term social space. Hence working class socially means workers of all countries share certain properties in common as distinct from the capitalists which provide their social space and that is based on certain differentiations, mutual exclusiveness of certain properties shared by these groups. But do not form a

class socially. The fields of interaction are the objective structures of the social, according to Bourdieu, structured in a particular way over there. Social agent is not an isolated human being, but conceived as someone who is occupying a position in the field, capable and effective socially. Arguing after Bourdieu, the attempt here is to expose that the concepts like social space and fields of interaction are not merely structural but can be empirically translated when it is conceived from the angle of the interacting human being. When one agent occupies a position in a field then there is a way in which the agent internalises the properties that are anticipated for the functioning of that field. The field is constituted along with the position of the agents that constitute the field. An agent is not merely inserted in a position. But the being internalises the disposition needed for that position.

Nevertheless according to the various other kinds of constraints on the field or external influence, the field is also emerging, equation may be transforming, different sorts of dispositions might be anticipated, it needs integrity between the positions and dispositions. If two human beings marry traditionally it is by internalising beforetime the expectations of being wife and husband they enter the institution. The same is with all the roles humans take in the whole life. Slowly the interacting humans will get habituated to and it becomes the agents' and it is reified. Hence the *habitus*⁸ as Bourdieu explains. This brings in a tendency for the position occupying agent to behave in a specific way and continue reproduce these specificities, which shows the integration of the field. The human agents internalise the positions in the fields, the properties of the positions and a rapport between the external world and internality of the agent comes in. Hence, in the social positions in each field--objective structure--there are agents, human beings. These agents have to internalise the properties that are assigned to these positions. Consequently at one side there is the internal world of agency and the external world of the structure. The consensus between these two is necessary for the smooth functioning of the institution. Social space can be observable from the social positions occupied by the agents

in an institution, not merely based on the angle of the fields of interactions, objective structures. Observing from the angle of the agent, social space is the provision of properties the humans could uniquely attain, that helps the agents being in the position to do certain actions and make other agents do certain actions so that interaction in the field takes place.

To interpreting Bourdieu, Nisar considers that social space is actually something empirically translated. Bourdieu considers it from the field/structure's side, but not empirically. Bourdieu frames it through some other notions to explain the structure, which is not considered in this frame. Here the social space is used as a notion empirically consequential. Without concentrating on the structural side of the field, this study considers that any regular interaction will be a field-a small field. When social space becomes an empirically observable property it is based on what an agent could do in a particular system, in its interactional context. The indicator that can be identified as the social space also indicates the power or active aspect of the agent in the specific context. So, to exert power in the social contexts is to change the way in which the agents conduct the activity daily. Most probably in conducting the social, the structure is not 'out there'. It is the day-to-day activities what makes 'social' in its fluid sense. There is nothing written in its constitution as the structural features. But its structure is in the mentality the agents' intake. Hence whatever the agents carry out in the day-to-day life are the manifestations of the social structure, in its minimum level of the claim.

According to Bourdieu, the internalised dispositions mark the behaviour, life style, habits, self images, what all humans buy, consume, what dress, what plays, hobbies, leisure time spending, what reads, and such whole habituates the disposition. All these probably group together. His argument is that within the relation we should look for what objective structures are given for the possibility of action. But Nizar argues that how we translate the notion of social space is based on certain decision makings in the research, not only that this concept can't be considered as exact or

precise one for it is observable in the exposed data that is, to understand the informations, the terms and the conceptual structures are used. Profiles of each relation based on the properties are observed through the frame of reference about what sort of data should be gathered, constituting social space, power/human being, fields of interaction, and gender justice, which is sort of horizontal integration. This means these are some nodal points to construct guidelines to enquire the social world, proceeding as if there is social space, but not over there, but explicable through the relations exposed.

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Notes

- 1 She argues, "Persons 'do' gender when they celebrate each other's gender identity and repair offences to the symbolic order of gender. As they do so they defer the meanings of gender as they cope with the ambiguity of the blurred boundaries between universes of meanings...The principal arena

for the study of the dual presence is the family and the presence of men in the symbolic universe of the female...Gender thus is an organising principle and an organisational outcome. Gender characteristics are presupposed, imposed on people and exploited for productive ends, and there are organisational dynamics, which create them. However, the belief that there is one sole culture of gender or that there are only male or female organisations is simplistic... It may differ even within the same group of men or women... Difference as a social stigma, the labelling of form of behaviour as 'female' and thereby devaluing it is a cultural belief". (Ibid)

- 2 Responsibility is the basic stance of the human being in all the social contexts.
- 3 Sensitivity is the readiness of the human agent to go deep into the complexity of the social affairs.
- 4 Self means the reflexive property of the being.
- 5 Power in this conceptual frame means the active aspect, that is, being
- 6 Masculine Dominations enquires how domination of the male beings is made possible through the social structure habituating the humans making them habitus and how it is structural and structured in specific ways and dimensions.
- 7 Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste (1984) was named as one of the 20th century's ten most important works of Sociology by the International Sociological Association.
- 8 Habitus can be defined as a system of dispositions: lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action. The individual agent develops these dispositions in response to the objective conditions they encounter. In this way Bourdieu theorises the inculcation of objective social structures into the subjective, mental experience of agents.

Interactivity and beyond: A Study of Indian Net Dailies

Muhammadali Nellyullathil

Abstract

Of the characteristics ranging from multimodality to hypertextuality and sociability to easy navigation, interactivity has triggered more interest in online communication researchers since it encourages a multi-directional flow of communication amongst a community of users. Being the primary characteristic of new technologies it has caused a considerable reassessment of communication research in the last three decades. The study examines scope and application of this feature of newmedia in Indian scenario based on the the web versions of the two largest circulated Indian newspapers: The Times of India and The Malayala Manorama.

New media's most celebrated feature of interactivity can be meaningfully utilized to ensure better reciprocity in communication. However, they could not go out of the box of traditional pattern of interactivity. It also indicates that language of the media is a predictor of the level of interactivity. This article exposes some fundamental realities embedded in this specific feature of new media in Indian context. The features that

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distinguish online newspapers from their print versions are: multimediality, hypertextuality, interactivity, sociability, speedy updating, autonomy, privacy, personalization, horizontal distribution, decentralization, accessibility, no hierarchy, no censorship, and playfulness (Lasica, 1996). Of these characteristics, interactivity has triggered more interest in online communication researchers since it encourages a multi-directional flow of communication amongst a community of users. Being the primary characteristic of new technologies it has caused a considerable reassessment of communication research in the last three decades. (Rice and Williams, 1984: 35; Heeter, 1989: 221; Pavlik, 1996; Rafeli and Sudweeks, 1997, McMillan, 1998; Shyam Sundar, 2000;).

This potential of interactivity has motivated communication to explicate the concept and has made its mark in the communication model development also. In an interactive environment, the ritual model of communication seems more appropriate than the traditional transmission model. The ritual model is linked to such terms as sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith (Carey, 1975). A ritual view is not directed towards the extension of messages in space, but the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs. Its emphasis is on the intrinsic satisfaction of the sender or receiver, rather than on some instrumental purpose.

According to McMillan (1998) interactivity increases as:

- the goal of communication is more to exchange information than to persuade
- participants have greater control of the communication environment
- participants take an active role to fully benefit from the communication
- participants act and react to messages via two-way communication

- timing of communication is flexible and responsive to demands of participants
- communication environment creates a sense of place

This argument has been validated by the recent new media consumption research by Shyam Sundar (2000) which reveals that the more interactive opportunities websites give to users, the more involved the users will feel about the web site. In short, with the multidimensional flow of messages, interactivity offers to the audience more control over the media content and more choices for and participation in information production, dissemination and retrieval along with a real time experience.

Given this prospective interactivity and changing media consumption in new media environment, news organizations are now competing to ensure their vibrant presence on the cyberspace through online newspapers and portals which offer high interactivity to the audience. Adding to this trend, the advent of an array of new media devices like the iPad, Kindle, iPhone and Android is quickly having a positive impact on newspaper e-editions and their readership. The Audit Bureau of Circulations' Fas-Fax numbers in 2010 shows that the top 25 papers with digital editions rose about 20 percent from March 2010. Same trend is expected in the circulation of Indian online newspapers also given the fact that by 2012 the number of internet users in India is predicted to touch 100 million and in India the newspapers on the net has now been recognized as a major mass medium to news dissemination and consumption (*Indian E&M industry outlook 2009-13 for digital media*).

Although the potential of interactivity for journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Deuze, 2003) and online news publications' incorporation of interactive features (Chan-Olmsted & Park, 2000; Chung, 2004; Deuze, 2003; Li, 1998; Massey & Levy, 1999) have been independently examined, little has been done to shed light on the distinct types of interactivity implemented through online newspapers, especially in a non-western media

context. It is against this background that the present study seeks to explore the three types of interactivity of two major, yet, distinctive online versions of Indian newspapers.

Central Theme: Interactivity

The study is centered on the concept of interactivity. As Shyam Sunder (2000) pointed out the notion of interactivity undermined the classical assumption of a passive media audience, to the point of changing the label of communication receiver from “audience” to “user.” Hence, still it remains much-touted but untheorized concept, since many dimensions of the implications of the concept are yet to be investigated. However, many scholars both from the fields of communication and sociology have attempted to conceptualize interactivity with various definitional models which can be summarized into three principal areas: the technological properties of a medium, the context of communication setting, and user perception (Kiouisis, 2002).

At the ideological level, interactivity is understood as one of the key ‘value added’ characteristics of new media. Where old media offer passive consumption new media offer interactivity. The term stands for more powerful sense of user engagement with media text, a more independent relation to sources of knowledge, individualized media use, and greater user choice. These ideas about the value of ‘interactivity’ draw upon the popular discourse of neo-liberalism which treats user as, above all, a consumer. Neo-liberal societies aim to commodify all kinds of experience and offer more and more finely tuned degrees of choice to the consumer. People are being able to make individualized media consumption patterns from a never-ending array of possibilities offered by the market.

This ideological context then feeds into the way the audience thinks about the idea of interactivity in digital media. In short, it is seen a method of maximizing consumer choice in relation to media texts. (Lister, 2002) From a technological standpoint, Steuer (1995) defined interactivity as the extent to which the medium allows the participant to modify the content or form of a

mediated environment in real time. In the context of communication setting, Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997) focused on message responsiveness and defined interactivity as “the extent to which messages in a sequence relate to each other and especially the extent to which later messages recount the relatedness of earlier messages.” With regard to users, interactivity refers to users’ ability “to perceive the experience as a stimulation of interpersonal communication and increase their awareness of telepresence” (Kiouisis, 2002). In this study, McMillan (2002)’s feature-based approach to interactivity has been adopted as it is considered a strong predictor of the web sites as communication media and offers insight into the implementation of appropriate levels of interactivity. A recent study which used this model is by Chung, D. & Yun Yoo, D. (2008). But, the approaches, objectives and methodology of this study is entirely different from that of Chung, D. & Yun Yoo, D. (2008) According to McMillan’s conceptualization, there are three types of interactivity on a continuum: ‘medium’, ‘human-medium’, and ‘human-human’ interactivity.

Typology of Interactivity

Medium interactivity refers to interactive communication through the nature of the medium itself and how users are able to work with the technology to make choices and exert control over the communication process. Medium interactive features solely rely on the technology to allow users to exert control, which are considered as lower levels of interactivity.

Human/medium interactivity relies on those features that utilize characteristics of medium interactivity and that allow partial human-to-human communications (e.g., expressing one’s own opinion) are considered human/medium interactive features.

There are two ways of human-medium interaction available on sites. They are registrational interactivity and non-registrational interactivity. The registrational interactivity refers to the opportunities that new media texts afford their

users to ‘write back into’ the text, that is to say, to add to the text by registering their own messages. The base line of this interactivity is the simple activity of registration by sending feedback or adding references etc. Pre registration is never being a requisite for non-registrational interactivity.

● **Human-human interactivity** is the communication between two or more individuals that takes place through a communication channel. This kind of interaction allows for the sender and receiver to exchange communication roles and offer feedback to each other. It may be online or offline.

Off these three levels medium interactivity allows low level interactivity while human-human interactivity ensures higher level interactivity while human-medium interactivity stands in between. Feature based interactivity model helps give a clearer picture of the concept.

Medium Human -Medium Human - Human

Search featuresSend article buttonsAudio downloadsVideo downloadsPhoto galleriesAnimated adsUpdate featureUser login etc. Customization and personalization featuresE-mail alertsRSS feeds Submit content optionsPolls Blogs etc ForumsBulleting Board systemChat room featureFeedback to editorLive chats etc,

Adapted from Feature-based interactivity model as depicted in Chung,D. & Yun Yoo,D. (2008).

Based on this theoretical framework, the study poses the following research questions:

RQ 1: What is the level of interactivity (from medium to human-medium) offered by Indian online newspapers?

RQ 2: Does the language of the newspaper predict the level of interactivity offered by the online newspapers in India?

Research Design

The method was a content analysis . e-versions of two large Indian newspapers namely the Times of India daily and the Malayala Manorama daily were subjected to interactivity analysis. The newspapers were selected for their similarities in reach and tradition and differences in language and content typology.

The Times of India was founded in 1838 and now it is the largest circulated English newspaper in India. According to the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2010, *The Times of India* is the most widely read English newspaper in India with a readership of 70.351 lakhs (7.035 million) (Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2010 — Quarter 1). In this web presence of *The Times of India* is represented by its site timesofindia.indiatimes.com. The URL of the analyzed website is <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>. According to ComScore, it is the India's most-visited newspaper website with 159 million page views.

Incorporated in 1888, *The Malayala Manorama* is the most read newspaper in Malayalam, one of the vibrant South Indian languages(Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2010 — Quarter 1). Like *The Times of India*, *The Malayala Manorama* is also active in Indian mediascape with its crossmedia publishing. The URL of the analyzed website is <http://www.manoramaonline.com/>.

The dates sampled were in the first half of 2011. A total of 42 issues were randomly selected in the manner described by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) so that equal days of the week were represented (i.e., 3 Sundays, 3 Mondays, 3 Tuesdays, etc.), which enables generalizations of the findings over the time period examined (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). Because the focus is on interactive features and typology, only the hyperlinks which facilitate one of the three interactivity modes such medium, human-medium, human-human were coded. The unit of analysis was hyperlink. A total of 1433 hyperlinks on the home pages were analyzed. Repetitive links were excluded to avoid duplication

Procedure

The interactive features generally available on online newspapers based on features-based interactivity model were divided into three categories: medium, human-medium, and human-human interactivity.

The interactive features were also grouped according to previous research such as that of Chung,D. & Yun Yoo,D. (2008), on interactivity and online sites that specifically examined such distinctions. The medium interactivity dimension includes 12 features: audio files, video files, update tickers, log-in function, search function, e-mail updates /alerts /RSS feeds and personalized headlines/ bookmarking, customized information, customized topics on news Web sites, send article button, advertisements, and photo galleries. The human-medium interactivity dimension includes five features: polls, ‘submit news stories’ function, ‘submit photographs’ function, blogs, and ‘submit news tip’ function. The human-human interactivity dimension includes five features: chat facilities, message boards, Q&A (live chat), reporter and editor e-mail links and ‘letters to the editor’/contact author links.

Findings

RQ 1 asks whether the language is a predictor of the level of interactivity of Indian online newspapers. Media-wise distribution of interactive links of the e versions of two major dailies in India shows that the differences in providing interactivity are significant. Data in Table 1 categorically point to this fact.

Table 1: Media-wise distribution of interactive links

Online Newspapers	Interactive Links	
	Frequency	Percentage
timesofindia.indiatimes.com	979	68.32
manoramaonline.com	454	31.68
Total	1433	100

While the largest circulated English newspaper *Time of India*'s timesofindia.indiatimes.com provides 68.32 percent of the total sample hyperlinks having interactivity, *Malayala Manorama*'s manoramaonline.com gives less than half of this number. In other words, online version of English language newspaper is two times interactive than its Malayalam counterpart.

RQ2 asks whether the language of the newspaper is a predictor of the level of interactivity offered by the online newspapers in India. To find out this, analysis was done on the basis of three categories/levels of interactivity namely medium, human-medium and human-human on a continuum.

The data in Table 2 show that there is a highly significant difference ($p < .01$) between the two language categories of e-versions of newspapers in terms of the level of interactivity (from 'medium' to 'human-human').

Table 2: Media-wise distribution of interactivity categories

Online Newspapers	Interactivity Categories			
	'Medium'	'Human-medium'	'Human-human'	Total
timesofindia.indiatimes.com	41.1%	38.9%	20.0%	100%
	(402)	(381)	(196)	(979)
manoramaonline.com	51.1%	31.9%	17.0%	100%
	(232)	(145)	(77)	(454)

$$X^2 (2, N = 1,433) = 12.71, p < .01$$

Figures in parenthesis denote frequency

Conclusion

In none of the interactivity categories, Malayalam newspaper fares better than its English counterpart. At the same time, though significantly different, both the language categories keep a symmetric pattern in the level of interactivity. While medium interactivity links are highest in numbers in both the sites, human-human interactivity links are the least in both of them. It indicates

that the Indian newspaper sites, irrespective of their language or type of the target audience, could not go beyond the traditional pattern of interactivity.

There has been the assumption that the concept of interactivity is a natural attribute of interpersonal communication (Morris & Christine, 1996; Rafaeli, 1988). According to Goffman (1967), people would spontaneously become involved with and respond to participants during interpersonal communication. Goffman proposed that reciprocal responses are important for maintaining smooth communication. This study aimed to analyse interactivity on the assumption that new media's these enhanced social attributes are meaningfully utilized by news media for better reciprocity in communication. And, the results prompt to think that Indian new media try to utilize these options to a greater extent. However, they could not go out of the box of traditional interactivity options and levels.

When drawing conclusions, it has to be taken into account that the language of the news media is a stronger predictor of the level of interactivity provided. In Indian context, English as a global language and Malayalam as a regional language have multidimensional effect as they determine the size and demographics of the audience as well as the potential of the media to reach out global community, in addition to all other cultural, social and economic aspects of communication process of the media/sites studied. And, this findings warrant further enquiries to explore how various Indian language news sites compete with the their Indian and global counterparts in utilizing new media attributes like interactivity, multimodality, hypertextuality etc. This requisite assumes significance at a time when websites are more and more becoming a metamedium that provides multiple submedia platforms to ensure optimum utilization of human-human conversational environment in mass communication using new media for a global audience irrespective of their communication language.

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From Parliamentary Swaraj to Personal Swaraj: Is India Ripe for It?

Dr. K.K. Kunhammad

It is a sadly ironical fact of modern Indian history that the progressive relegation of Gandhi to the intellectual backwaters of Indian life in the last 60 years coincides with the creative appropriation, at a global level, of Gandhian ideas and principles and the resultant elevation of Gandhi as the most appropriate model of personal and political excellence. While scholars and thinkers beyond the subcontinent continue to fruitfully tap into the immense potentials of Gandhian thought and ideas by shaping them to achieve excellence in all walks of life, we are still struggling to understand the reason why the Mahatma is fast losing his significance in the country of his birth. Our love and memory of Gandhi seems to be actuated more by a vague sense of guilt than any deep fascination for the quality of his ideas and principles while the international renewal of interest in Gandhian thought is firmly based on the current relevance of his teachings to the complex contexts of modern-day living and thinking. Gandhi of India is all surface—woefully limited to the tokenistic display of academic affection such as the printing of his pictures on bank notes and the wearing of khadi clothes while the global Gandhi is all depth—a fecund area of serious research in disciplines as diverse as deep ecology, psycho-history, conflict resolution studies and personal transformation research and training, in countries as

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culturally diverse as America, Norway, France, China and Japan.

This globalizing of Gandhian ideas, in the sense of applying Gandhian thought to the resolution of pressing issues of a global nature like environmental desecration, moral and spiritual degeneration and the threat of terrorism and violence sharply contrasts with our own inadequacy in effectively utilizing the immense resources bequeathed to us by one of the greatest minds of all times. While it is doubtful whether any institutions or Gandhian experts in our country have so far been able to develop and effectively deliver any comprehensive practical training programme based on the Gandhian principles of happy and peaceful living, several American experts in personal effectiveness and transformation studies like Dr. Stephen. R. Covey (1989), Anthony Robbins (1997) and several others have designed and continue to successfully deliver powerful training programmes that help to inculcate and integrate the timeless Gandhian values of self-leadership and excellence in the daily lives of individuals. It is instructive to note that almost all of these day-long and week-long training programmes are inspired by Gandhi's idea of *personal swaraj* as suggestively defined in *Hind Swaraj*. Against the backdrop of this global adaptation and application of Gandhian principles of living, a rethinking on the Gandhian concept of *personal swaraj* as opposed to *parliamentary swaraj* assumes crucial significance.

Experts on Gandhian thought like Dennis Dalton (1996), Gerald Heard, George Catlin, Surjit Kaur Jolly and B.N Ray have greatly helped us in coming to terms with the multifarious dimensions of swaraj as a fundamental concept in Gandhian studies. It is rather ironical that in *Hind Swaraj* Gandhiji does not offer a straightforward definition of *swaraj*. In response to the Reader's question, "What is swaraj?" Gandhiji says:

It is quite possible that we do not attach the same meaning to the term. You and I and all Indians are impatient to obtain Swaraj, but we are certainly not decided as to what it is. (HS)

‘Swaraj’ as Gandhi envisions it includes but is definitely not limited to the idea of parliamentary self-rule. Gandhiji draws a clear distinction between ‘parliamentary’ swaraj and ‘personal’ swaraj. While parliamentary swaraj refers to the notions of political and economic self-rule, internal swaraj is ‘a state of being’ to which every individual has to aspire. Personal swaraj refers to the arduous process of removing the internal obstacles to the experience of freedom. And to Gandhiji, the real swaraj is inner swaraj. “... if we become free, India is free. And in this thought you have a definition of Swaraj. It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves”. (HS) For an individual to be totally liberated, parliamentary swaraj is not an essential pre-requisite while the removal of internal obstacles to freedom is crucial to the attainment of internal swaraj (Ray, 2008). To Gandhiji, parliamentary swaraj is only a formal mechanism that facilitates the flow of political freedom while inner swaraj is:

“the rule of the self by the self. More precisely, it is the rule of the mind over itself and the passions—the passions of greed and aggression...Self-rule [in this sense] enables one to pursue *artha* and *kama* within the bounds of *dharma*” (Ray, 2008, 170).

Although the control of government by the people is conducive to the development of swaraj, political freedom is only the form of swaraj. Gandhi believed that the substance of swaraj is personal swaraj, a ‘real change of heart on the part of the people.’ Personal swaraj is a purely individual matter. Personal swaraj is:

... in the palm of our hands. Do not consider this Swaraj to be like a dream. Hence there is no idea of sitting still. The Swaraj that I wish to picture before you and me is such that, after we have once realised it, we will endeavour to the end of our life-time to persuade others to do likewise. But such Swaraj has to be experienced by each one for himself. One drowning man will never save another. (HS)

But the process by which an individual can attain personal swaraj still remains one of the neglected areas of research in Gandhian studies. Most writers, especially Indian writers, on the

concepts of swaraj mentioned earlier focus almost exclusively on the political, economic and national swaraj and elevate the quality of inner swaraj as a vague spiritual concept that can be attained only by an enlightened minority while in developed countries like America, a number of experts in the field of human excellence, after intensive studies into the psychological processes of personal excellence or inner swaraj have developed extremely effective practical training programmes that help ordinary individuals to attain personal swaraj in their lives. To take one illustrative example, Dr. Stephen. R. Covey has developed a unique practical training programme based on Gandhiji's idea of the inseparability of ends and means. Gandhiji believed that purity of means is as crucial as the ends themselves. He strongly maintained that ends can never justify the means because ends pre-exist in the means. Means and ends are interchangeable terms in the Gandhian way of living. Stephen Covey's ground-breaking book titled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, by his own admission, provides an effective toolkit to combat the Seven Deadly Sins¹ by helping individuals develop the seven essential personal traits of character that can lead to the attainment of personal swaraj. It is regrettable to note that no such attempts at designing an effective training programme based on Gandhiji's principles of good living have been designed by Indians.

Sociological studies indicate that we are at the fag-end of the Age of Knowledge. And futurologists like Alvin Toffler persuade us that from the Age of Hunter-Gatherers through Agricultural, Industrial and Knowledge Ages, we are finally entering the Age of Wisdom. In this context, it is instructive to note that Gandhiji's concept of personal swaraj is derived from the *Baghavat Gita*. The opening verses of the second chapter of the *Gita* introduce the *sthitha-prajna*, 'the person of steady wisdom' as it is usually translated (Ray, 2008, 1966). *Sthitha-prajna* is Shri Krishna's ideal human being. '*Prajna*' means 'mind,' 'intellect,' or 'wisdom'. '*Sthita*' means 'stable'. *Sthitha-prajna* is 'the last man' whose mind has stabilized through wisdom into a state of equilibrium. Man in the Age of Wisdom will have attained personal swaraj.

We have read the words of our former President Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam talk of India becoming a developed nation by 2020. For people familiar with Gandhiji's works there is nothing new in that prediction because Gandhiji had made it as early as the 1920s. We are told that our country has already reached super power status in areas such as space technology, nuclear technology, agricultural research. We are told that we have immense capital lying dormant with individuals due to ignorance about investment opportunities. We are told that if we could replicate the 13% growth rate that we achieved in 1999, we could be an economically developed nation by 2020. This is not wishful thinking; this is firmly based on sound research data. But there is a catch. If we cannot welcome the Age of Wisdom, we can never really make it to the top of the world. This reluctance to usher in the Age of Wisdom is the main reason why social and religious issues like temple-mosque disputes decide election outcomes in our country and this resistance to the Age of Wisdom can be overcome only by designing and delivering comprehensive practical training programmes and intensive courses based on Gandhian principles of personal swaraj. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhiji believes that India is still 'not ripe' for personal swaraj:

"If India adopted the doctrine of love as an active part of her religion and introduced it in her politics, Swaraj would descend upon India from heaven. But I am painfully aware that that event is far off as yet." (*HS*)

It may safely be assumed that personal swaraj is an idea whose time has at last come and therefore more concentrated and concerted scholarly effort and energy should be channelized in that direction. As Victor Hugo put it: "Nothing else in the world... not all the armies... is so powerful as an idea whose time has come."

Notes

1 The Seven Deadly Sins are as follows:

Wealth without work
Pleasure without conscience
Knowledge without character
Commerce without morality
Science without humanity
Worship without sacrifice
Politics without principle

It is quite disturbing and ironical that in little over a period of six decades after the death of Gandhiji, we Indians have successfully integrated all the Seven Deadly Sins forbidden by Gandhiji into our democratic way of life. Even though the authorial authenticity of the Seven Deadly Sins is a matter of debate among Gandhi experts, it may be noted that they continue to be attributed to Gandhi by writers on leadership on the ground that they are in harmony with the spirit of Gandhian philosophy. Dr. Stephen. R. Covey re-cites them in his latest book *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness* (2004, 76).

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