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Editorial

It is my pleasure to release Volume XVIII of *Pursuits*. *Pursuits* is a per-reviewed research journal published annually by the Research Centre for Comparative Studies, PG Department of English, Mercy College, Palakkad.

Volume XVIII is a compilation of articles on divergent areas such as Covid-19 pandemic and the way it has impacted the world, film studies, cultural studies, feminism, and environmental activism. The areas explored throw light on the issues and concerns pertaining to contemporary world. The topics of the research papers compiled here are attempts to study the socio-political contexts in which culture manifests itself. They are an attempt to understand contemporary culture and its complex manifestations in art and literature.

I place on record our gratitude to the faculty and research scholars who have contributed to this issue. We also gratefully acknowledge the continued support from our subscribers.

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BIOETHICAL CONCERNS IN ARUNDHATI ROY: A STUDY OF SELECT WORKS OF NON- FICTION

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> We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. …. the one less traveled by offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth (Rachel Carson).

Concerns regarding the environment are not a very recent trend. Literary discourses of the past have dealt with environment as a matter of concern for centuries. It is generally believed that it was Rachel Carson who successfully projected environmental threats to life on earth. Her book *The Silent Spring* (1962) reveals her great love and concern for nature. But even before the nineteenth century, the English Romantic poets had shown deep interest in safeguarding the environment and interacting with it. Several of their works focused on celebrating nature. England witnessed the clarion call for conservation of nature in the works of Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. These nature poets were greatly aware of the responsibility vested in their hands as writers, and their poems can be taken as examples of "romantic pantheism," as they upheld a mode of life which worshipped nature (Roe 697).

The Romantics showed their genuine concern and also inspired interests through their works for the environment. They fostered a deep love for nature. They seemed to have been endowed with the power to foresee the selfish turn man is going to adopt, as life advanced. Wordsworth, in one of his poems, writes about the futility

of material life: "The world is too much with us . . . / Getting and spending we lay waste our powers" (1-2). He was trying to warn man against proceeding in life with vested interests and the fretful fever of life which will not redeem him. The Romantics felt that the rat- race will not fetch man fulfillment in life. They advocated a "[h]armonious co-existence with nature," which will lead life on in the universe (Roe 203).

Arundhati Roy's repeated pronouncements on environmental hazards in her non-fictional works are reminiscent of the words of Henry David Thoreau: "As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind" (www.azquotes.com /author/14637-Henry_David_Thoreau). With the intention of creating a deeper and wider path for herself and all nature lovers, Roy devotes several of her non-fictional works to bioethical concerns. Her prophetic harping on the careless violence of man against nature is not heeded by the power structures. Several of her works draw attention to eco-concerns, with the objective of gathering forces against short-sighted political actions against nature.

Roy, in her essays and interviews, seriously reflects on the insane measures taken in the name of development, by various governments of this nation. In her interview with David Barsamian, titled "The Colonization of Knowledge," she asserts that, this "development debate is a scam" (47). She feels that claims to development "with a lack of imagination" will be catastrophic. Though a writer herself, she feels that she cannot hold herself back from activism because she finds that the "voiceless" victims needed her support (*Conversations* 64). She is of the conviction that her education makes her privileged and gives her a vantage point to describe the plight of the victims of the so-called development.

Roy's essay "Mr. Chidambaram's War" comes with a rhetorical question, which sums up her tirade against exploitation of nature: "Can we leave the bauxite in the mountain?" (*Broken Republic* 24).This has a rebounding effect and challenges man to find a different path for development. She talks about the flat-topped hills which overlooked Dongria Kondh in Orissa. The hills were looked upon as gods by the local inhabitants. But the hills have been sold for the bauxite they contain" (3). Gods, it seems, have been sold for their bauxites to a multinational company with a belying name 'Vedanta.' Along with the hills would disappear, the forests, rivers and streams and, finally, the tribal people. The local people wonder if gods would have been sold off, if they had been Ram, or Allah, or Christ.

Arundhati Roy, though best known for the Booker Prize-winning novel, *God of Small Things*, claims that she had already written political essays even before writing the novel. Yet, the novel helped her to evolve from writer to an activist with ecological concerns. The strange response from the Narmada Bachao Andolan activists to her novel launched her strongly on a warpath against the corrupters of the earth. They surprised her with the statement, "We know that you would be against big dams and the World Bank when we read the *God of Small Things*" (*Conversations* 49). Not every writer turns into an activist. But Roy has evolved, and freely navigates between fiction, non-fiction, and activism. If she bases her non-fiction on ground realities, fictional terrain is no different to her. She claims that "fiction was the truest thing there ever was" (*Conversations* 44). She calls the trend of specialization bizarre and does not want to confine herself to any particular genre.

Roy's reverence for nature is a quality that she imbibed from the local people whose cause she has taken up. She is very much

against unwanted interventions in the ecosystem. She cites instances where certain missteps led to serious consequences. Her concerns are similar to those of Henry Thoreau, when he talks about the smaller creatures of nature. "Every creature" could be let to live than die, and "he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it" (https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/h/henrydavid105004.html). In the North East of India, frog legs were being exported to France to earn foreign exchange. This had led to the paucity of frogs which, in turn, resulted in the increase of pests. These pests destroyed crops. After a few years, the damage done was understood, but nothing could be done to repair the damages. Man's refusal to celebrate the music of nature, to which all creatures, big and small, contribute in their own way, will only bring about destruction. Unwarranted interventions often result in damaging the natural cycle of events. One example would be the farmers in Tanzania shooting hippos that destroyed crops. The decrease in hippos resulted in the disappearance of fishes. Enquiry into the matter led to the finding that fishes used to lay eggs in the excreta of hippos. Such arrogant interventions in "ecosystem that you don't understand can be ruinous," warns Roy (*Conversations* 49).

Roy has also examined the damaging effects of pesticides on nature. Initially, soil responds favourably to application of chemicals. After a point, the use of unnatural measures and pesticides will cause "the productivity of the land" to diminish" (49). Hence, food grains have to be imported. The farmers are compelled to invest more in pesticides and fertilizers so as to force "a little productivity out of these dead lands." After the land dies, the next victims are the farmers themselves. They end up by killing themselves by drinking pesticides" (*Conversations* 49).

The writer-activist's fight is against enemies that are not in any way equal to her. To governments ruling India, she is a trivial opponent. Still, she continues her fight, using her powerful voice as a writer. She insists that all contracts signed between the governments and other foreign organizations pretend to have philanthropic interests but the actual results are devastating. Measures taken in the name of development only make the people all the more poor. The "development lobby" claims that mining industry will increase "the GDP growth dramatically" ("Mr. Chidambaram's War" 19) and provide employment to the people it displaces. "The catastrophic costs" to environment is not taken into account. The lion's share of the money reaches private pockets and less than 10% reaches public exchequer. The people displaced only get slave wages for doing "back breaking work" (Chidambaram 19).

Western concept of development is taming the wilderness; a triumph of the human soul. World Bank arbitrarily assumes that the Narmada Valley Project will have "an irrigation efficiency of 60 percent" and the dam, when constructed, will be of use to "all the politically powerful areas …. right up at the head of the canal (*Conversations* 48). Sugar would not be planted according to the terms, but "sugar factories have been licensed before the dam was built" and "huge five star hotels and golf courses have been built" (*Conversations* 51). Though tall claims were made by the exploitative power structures, the reality was that the dam can irrigate only 12% of the cultivable area of Kutch and 9% of Saurashtra. Roy points to the lack of social link between the people who make the decisions and the people who suffer the aftermath of these decisions. This particular model of development continues to pursue "the brutal path and ignores the consequence" (*Conversations* 55).

Narmada is so far away from Kutch and Saurashtra that it's "a joke to take all that water all the way up through Gujarat" (*Conversations* 52). It would indeed be a visionary measure to invest this amount in water-harvesting schemes. The Narmada Project submerged almost twice the government's projection - 70,000 people - and also washed clean 101 villages. The people displaced are not accounted for, as most are non-people according to the powers, the Adivasis, the Dalits. The author bases her analysis on fifty four dams done by the Indian Institute of Public Administration, where the number of reservoir-displaced came to an average of 44,000 people The stark reality, according to her,, is that, India has built 3,300 big dams which displaced 56 million. The people driven out of villages migrate to cities, "packed like lice into every crevice" and are again evicted at a moment's notice, "if an office complex or a five- star complex comes up. In several contexts the poor of India are non-entities which the series of governments do greatly ignore" (*Conversations* 58).

In "Chidambaram's War," Roy emphasizes that certain politicians who have had foreign education fail to be in tune with the thinking of the poor Indian villagers, who are depend on and worship natural resources. She justifies the tribespeople for taking up arms against a government that has given them nothing but violence and neglect. Through armed warfare, they only want to defend "the last thing" that they have, that is "their land," against those who show irreverence towards it (6). The tribal culture of safe guarding and reverencing nature has been described as "museum cultures" by the then Home Minister, P. Chidambaram ("Walking" 30). Museums being valuable assets of heritage protected by the community and government, such a usage, in the given context, becomes highly ironical.

Roy's war is also against the education that we have been provided with and the scientists who mislead people into believing that they can research and find results that are reliable. She is of the view that education sometimes makes people float even further away from things they ought to know about. It seems to actually obscure their vision. The kind of ignorance that people with Ph Ds display, she says, is unbelievable (45). Organizations like the World Bank probably employ more PhDs than the Universities in the world. This, in Roy's opinion, is indicative of the vested interests of such organizations. These researchers seem to be willing pawns in the hands of companies that fund them. Such funding agencies expect researches to endorse their exploitative plans that will bring benefit for them and it matters little when it brings ruin on the indigenous population. This kind of prejudiced and biased policies in higher education is actually crippling rather than enriching the country. People have to take it that "they're being robbed for their own good" like in the times of colonization (*Conversations* 46).

Roy is of the opinion that science cannot tackle all questions about the natural phenomena. Nature has dimensions which are inscrutable and it is never easy to explain the intricacies and the deeper realms that constitute it. She feels that certain things have to be left alone. There's a "kind of humility" in accepting that there are certain things in nature that are beyond the intellectual capacities of man (*Conversations* 50). The arrogance that Indian 'powers that be' get reflected in their violence against nature, and Roy feels this is an aftermath of colonization. The colonizers' oppression of Indian knowledge-structures is revealed in all the interventions against nature.

The Aborigines living in the different geographical regions

are in total harmony with their habitat. There is a kind of understanding with nature which is not decipherable to the external powers. To them, nature is above all gods, and they bring to memory the religion of early man, which was pantheism. "So while for the Adivasis the mountain is still a living deity, the fountain head of life and faith, the keystone of the ecological health of the region, for the corporation, it is just a cheap storage facility" ("Chidambaram's War" 17). This storage facility is something that could be dispensed with when it suits them. Nature's omnipotence is a thing that modern man finds difficult to accept.

Roy alerts her readers to the fact that they are also willing accomplices in the corporate 'war' against the tribals: "when we put money in a bank, it's going to fund the bombs and the dams … when we pay tax we are investing in projects the people of the country are not happy with. … All our hands are dirty" (*Conversations* 59). This allegation brings to mind the words spoken by Lady Macbeth as she sleepwalks: "Here's the smell of the blood still: All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." The difference is that Arundhati Roy is wide awake and is beckoning the like-minded to join the campaign to keep both the environment and their hands clean.

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ONE-MAN-LED MOVEMENT: VISCERAL REALISM AND ROBERTO BOLANO

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Chilean author Roberto Bolano may be described as the 'visceral discovery' of the future second. Born in the year of the death of Stalin and Dylan Thomas, his life was marked by dislocations, uprootedness, and exile. Bolano was typical of a generation of Latin American writers who had to adapt to exile and had a complicated relationship with their motherland, its values and ways, and its turbulent history. America is a continent of symbiosis, mutation, *mestizaje*, engenders, and baroques. It is considered an anamorphic landscape of dreams and desires. On the other hand, Chile was a country of profound inequality and social conservation, with power held in the church and by elites aspiring to new a faraway dream of impeccable purification.

Bolano and his family shuttled between towns in Chile during his childhood. He inherited the lifestyle of a wanderer from his father who was a truck driver and whose job was to roam. In the late 1960s, in his teenage years, the family moved to Mexico City. Bolano found this geographical dislocation perturbing and he coped up with the vast, imaginary Mexican landscape where freedom and metamorphosis were a mundane spectacle. During this time, like his literary idol, the Argentine writer Forge Luis Borges, Bolano consumed everything from esoteric poetry to pulp fiction.

Mass demonstrations erupted frequently on Mexico City's streets in the late 1960s. Steeped in the political ferment, Bolano became a Trotskyist and travelled to El Salvador. There, he

befriended leftist poets and writers, who carried guns alongside their poetry books. In 1973, he left Mexico for Chile. Then he landed in Santiago, the Capital of Chile, hoping to join a leftist revolution that had taken hold in Chile, with the election of a socialist government. He became active in left-wing political causes. Augusto Pinochet had launched his coup that September against Allende. The socialist regime of Salvador Allende was overthrown. Like many others of his generation, Bolano was jailed suspected to be a 'foreign terrorist.' During most of his early adulthood, he was a vagabond, living at one time or another in Chile or Mexico, two geographical edges of Latin America. Eventually, in 1974, he made his way once more to Mexico, where he ventured on his literary career. Bolano was a bohemian poet and led a chaotic lifestyle with erotic behaviour which went along with his leftist ideologies. Though he was nobody then, he was a provocateur who engaged in myriad forms of provocation by shouting their poems at poetry reading sessions and was feared by all publishing houses. In Mexico, with his friend and poet Mario Santiago, he formed a band of literary guerrillas, whom Bolano christened as 'Infrarealists.' French surrealist elements were fused with Dadaistic and Mexican styles of poetics in Infrarealism. This was the aesthetics of this surrealistinfluenced, anti-status-quo school of poetry. In 1974, when he was just twenty, Bolano announced the manifesto of this Infrarealistic guerrilla literary movement Visceral Realism. Acclaimed translator of Bolano's novels, Natasha Wimmer, re-writes the manifesto in her Afterword to *The Savage Detectives*, where we hear him urging his fellow poets to give up everything for literature, to follow the example of Rimbaud, and hit the road. Bolano moved to Europe in 1977, and made his way to Spain. There, he continued to write, living with family and settled on the Mediterranean coast near Barcelona.

Bolano showed more inclination to his poetic self and thought of himself primarily as a poet. Later, in his early forties, he shifted to fiction writing for the financial well-being of his family, which he knew he could never achieve from the earnings of a poet. Thus, he slowly abandoned his beatnik existence and non-conformist ideologies of his life. Though he considered himself as a poet, his reputation and fame ultimately exist in his novellas, novels, short story collections, and prose writings. He began to produce substantial and influential works in the 1990s, which garnered awards and acclaim and readers around the world.

Bolano proclaimed the then ruling literary phenomenon Magic Realism 'stinking.' He considered the god-father of Magic Realism, Gabrial Garcia Marquez, as "a man terribly pleased to have hob-nobbed with so many presidents and Archbishops." He supported the cosmopolitan experimentalists while he tried to liberate Latin American literature from all those clairvoyant script writers. Bolano combines two basic instincts of a novelist: he is attracted to history and past and he desires to correct them, to point out the errors. For him, "literature is a beautiful bomb," which destroys and reconstructs everything it bombards. Bolano creates a void at the centre of all his works -the void of blackness and blankness. It is a space from which nothing germinates, at the same time everything sprouts out. All of Bolano's characters take as many forms as humans can find ways to be evil or good or forgotten. The void is limitless, borderless. Thus, Bolano's novels left many unforgettable, incarnations in the deep potentiality of this void. He 'mythifies' himself in his novels and they are a kind of projection of his ambiguous self. His novels and their narrations are pure inventions - a sharp, piercing, critical reflection of reality they are illuminatingly realist. No one can pigeonhole him to the Latin

American tradition of any streams.

The pious sentimentalism of the kind of socially committed literature irritated Bolano. He described subverting the fair taste, revolutionary and conservative. This iconoclasm is his invented genre of creative writing; a one-man-led movement called Visceral Realism. He transcended the then prevailing literary scenario with his visual mode of literary writing, which liberated Latin America from the invisible clutches of fantasy and wild imaginations that had been popularized by the Boom.

Bolano believed that literature was the product of a strange rain of blood, sweat, semen, and tears. Realism is visceral and illogical today because everything that is bizarre and exorbitant is now mainstream. Bolano breaks decisively with the stylistics and the thematic obsessions of Boom writers. The enthusiasm of the literary mainstream for Magical Realism was dampened and an exuberant visualization of the things was brought out within his final decade of life. In his ten novels and three short story collections, Bolano's characters wander a life in an irritated migration. The invented narrations, numerous narrators, silent and violent characters, major and minor themes, the antagonists and the protagonists, messy and disorienting array of new mediators - all occupy a Bolanian space of Visceral Realism. None of these novels follow a very particular narrative technique. He discovers new modes of narration for each of the novels. They are just like reportages, extended interviews, diary scribbling, unedited footage of a documentary with overlapping viewpoints side-lining the linear chronology of the plot. Visceral-realists are visionaries or dropped-out miscreants. The cerebral frame of visceral creativity includes biographical details, the personification of myths, or the mythologization of personal histories which the Boom kept its sights too far from. Magical Realism is

carnivalesque while Visceral Realism is purely anti-carnivalesque. It is rooted in hard-core reality when Magical Realism floated on the ideologies of dramatic dreamy clouds. The Boom expressed the physical and spiritual ascending of the characters into heaven, whereas Visceral Realism reflected the physical and mental landing of humans on the mundane earth.

Bolano's characters are really larger than life. They are erected over the false masks of our societal norms and codes. Language is emblematically allegorical and agitatedly whimsical. In his novels, Bolano creates an electrifying subtle nod of recurring motifs which is transformed into haunting and hallucinatory fiction. His works are full of quests. Poetics of crime and the relationship between crimes and poetry along with the violence of the contemporary world are the significant elements in it. In one of his stories, Bolano expresses his vision about the essence of art. It is actually his poetics of human life:

> That's what art is, he said, the story of a life in all its particularity. It is the only thing that really is particular and personal. It is the expression and at the same time, the fabric of the particular. And what do you mean by the fabric of the particular? I asked, supposing he would answer. ART. I was also thinking, indulgently, that we were pretty drunk already and that it was time to go home. But my friend said: what I mean is the secret story…. The secret story is the one we'll never know, although we are living it from day to day, thinking we've got it all under control and the stuff we overlook doesn't matter. But every damn thing matters! It's just that we don't realize. We tell ourselves those art scenes on one track and life, our lives, on another we don't realize that's

a lie. ("Dentist" 12)

Thus, Bolano says that the tracks of life and art are parallel and, sometimes, the same. His writings repeatedly manifest a mirror-like reflection of the political undertones of the apocalyptic monotonous landscape. He says:

> All literature, in a certain scene, is political. I mean, first, it's a reflection on politics, and second, it's also a political program. The former alludes to reality to the nightmare or benevolent dream that we call reality which ends in both cases, with death and the obliteration not only of literature but of time. The latter refers to the small bit and process that survive, that persist, and to reason. I suppose one writes out of sensitivity that's all.
>
> (http://www.scribd.com/doc/157425963/Roberto-Bolan-o)

As Argentine novelist Roderg Frosane correctly puts it, "[Bolano's] books are political, but in a way that is more personal than militant or demagogic, that is closer to the mystique of the beatniks than the Boom" (http://www.scribd.com/doc/157425963/Roberto-Bolan-o).

The roots of Bolano's genealogical tree spread far wide and go deep inside and beyond the entire Latin American national border. Unlike many of his predecessors, he did not have a fixed nationality. This lack of geographical roots made him an odd one out among the writers of the previous generation. Many writers of his generation lived in exile and they focused on international leadership, their fiction was constructed upon vernacular life. National literature was thus reinvented and recultured. To Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Colombia, Mario Vargas Llosa of Peru, and Carlos Fuentes of

Mexico, their identities had been too close to their native land. Bolano's characters, on the other hand, move rigorously, breaking all the nationalistic barriers. When asked if he was a Chilean or Mexican or Spanish, he said he was not any of these, but 'a Latin American.'

The autobiographical style of rendering is another feature of Bolano's works. His characters look into themselves and give voice to the solitude of the author. *The Savage Detectives*, the first magnum opus, is painted in the backdrop of Mexico City. Multiple narrators are used in telling the story of two poets, Arturo Belano (Bolano's alter-ego) and Ulises Lima (Bolano's poet-friend Santiago), and the novel also traces the Visceral Realist poetic movement. Though two of his works, *Nazi Literature in the Americas* and *Distant Star* were published, early in 1996, Bolano became a cult figure with the publication of *The Savage Detectives*. *Nazi Literature in the Americas* is a mock encyclopedia of fascist, make-believe writers. *Distant Star* is about a skywriter and a fascist. The novel discusses murder, photography, and poetry. It is a satirical novel that treats the past of Chilean politics humorously; it is more surreal in tone. The protest and resistance during the dictatorship can be considered as the poetics of politics or the politics of poetics. Carlor Wieder, an ambitious Chilean poet during the Pinochet regime, tries to come up with a scheme for getting ahead. He becomes the pilot of the Chilean Air Force and writes poetry at the behest of Pinochet's military. He turns the publication of verse into a hideous military spectacle. Crime, an inherent theme of all of the Bolanian novels, is omnipresent. In the end, Wieder murders two superior poets, and vanishes into exile. The Regime of Pinochet eventually falls. Thus, disappearance, search, and exile become the recurrent motifs of Bolanian territory. The autobiographical portrayal of Bolano's alter ego - Altruo Belano - makes the 1998 novel, *The Savage Detectives,*

the real-life novel of the author. The quest for literature in the novel is the ultimate Bolanian quest and the wanderings of the characters are the eternal Bolanian vagabondism. The whole novel is narrated by a group of poets. The novel's backdrop is Mexico but it travels to Paris, Israel, Vienna, and Barcelona, and many more illusory landscapes through the two decades of irreversible experience. The novel, presented as reports and reportages, cover the stories about the trips and adventures of Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima between 1976 and 1996. Bolano called the novel 'a love letter to my generation.' This generation was a generation of 'forgotten youth' in Latin America which was sworn with the history of the whole continent. Visceral Realist's passion for literature is contagious and they had a kind of contentious relationship with all the literary establishments of the land during this period. *Mexicans Lost in Mexico, The Savage Detectives* and *The Sonora Desert* trace the mysterious arc of the memory underlying beneath the dry leaves of history. It encounters the souls whose existence became even more austere with endless words and incessant thoughts.

A confrontational Mexican, Ulises Lima (called by others as a 'ticking bomb') and Chilean expatriate Arturo Belano, together, led Visceral Realism. They were the prophets and guardians of the movement. Later, the narrator of the novel, Madero, discovers the secret history behind this poetic genre. Belano and Lima borrowed the name of the movement from an equally uncompromising group of poets of the second decade of the nineteenth century. Cesarea Tinajero, the founder of Visceral Realism, was an influential poet and her verse was greatly admired by his co-poets. But her verses were almost lost and cannot be found in libraries. She seems to have vanished in the Desert of Sonora, north of the city, decades ago. Prefiguring the hunt for a missing writer, Bolano's fiction weaves

dream-like narratives around the vanished writers. Bolano introduces a disorienting array of narrators at each turn and sometimes the story comes to a sudden standstill and later resumes with volcanic velocity. The movement is outward, expanding wider and wider orbit to collect everything about our lonely world. Odyssey of the characters is in a circular way, they move on till the eternal fire of quest extinguish.

The horrific and terrific Bolanian environment is revealed and concealed in the posthumously published massive novel *2666*. The novel presents a catalogue of tragedies- killings, murders, murderers, and dead bodies.

The encyclopedic novel traverses two continents and eight decades. In a more hallucinatory narrative fashion, Bolano works some of the same geographical territories - the arid frontier between Mexico and the U. S. The novel starts and ends in contemporary Germany. The novel focuses on the unsolved and still ongoing serial murders of Ciudad Juarez, portrayed as an imaginary border city, Santa Teresa. Every bit of *2666* is, omnivorous, vulgar, and violent; it relentlessly boomerangs towards a dark center: the hundreds of mysterious murders of female factory workers in the desert borderlands in northern Mexico. The apocalyptic *2666* is submerged in a horror that is both haunting and deeply humane. The corruption and decadence of twentieth-century European history and culture are intertwined with images of Santa Teresa. The novel's epigraph (from Baudelaire's long poem 'The Voyage' directly points to the malaise of the modern man. The self-colliding, self-reflective hyperbolic novel revolves around death and deserts, lost writers, and literature. *Last Evening on Earth*, *The Romantic Dogs*, *The Skating Rink*, *Antiwerp*, *By Night in Chile*, *Monsieur Pain*, and *Woes of the True Policeman,* are Bolanian works share almost similar themes of love, death,

madness, and an unending quest for life.

Life and literature cross-pollinate to become Bolanian novels. Characters prefigure themselves in other names and continue to be travellers from one novel to other. They all are on an unending journey through unknown ways searching for the secret of the world. The narrator of *2666,* Arturo Belono says, "I've done it all, I lived it all, if I had the strength, I'd cry; I bid you all goodbye, Arturo Belano" (898). These words are true to their core. Reading Bolano is entering his world, a world full of terror, revolutions, crimes, sex, drugs, unfulfilled promises, and failed poets. They are the visceral visualization of our own society. The novel consists of three hundred pages that give gruelling cold-blooded descriptions of Santa Teresa killings. Realities of misogyny and the classism in the Mexican society, the hierarchy within the police force, all find their way into the novel. The victims are all women; they are all lower-class *maquiladora* workers. Men, especially cops, consider these women as disposable trash. It is evident from their conversations that they never considered women as a human entity. As one of the cops says, "Women are like laws, they are to be violated" (372). Police would be more motivated and serious if most of the victims were not low-class worker females. They take the killings of Santa Teresa in a light manner discussing how many ways are there to rape a woman during their investigation. The murders of women and girls in Ciudad Juarez since 1993 have received international attention. Many of the murder victims in Ciudad Juarez have been *maquiladora* employees. During the latter half of the 1960s, industries in *maquiladora* expanded rapidly geographically and economically and became Mexico's second-largest source of income from exports, behind oil, in 1985. 25 % of Mexican gross domestic product was accounted for by the industry in the 90s. Media reports on hundreds to thousands of female

homicides in the Ciudad Juarez region were a shocking revelation to the world. The femicide ('killing of women only because they are women') database documented and incidents of femicide that occurred from 1993 2001 found that sexual serial femicide was one of the main forms of femicide that took place in the northern border city of Mexico. Though the city was the place of murders and killings, *Financial Times* named Juarez, the city of future in 2008. By the metrics of development, the city is on the way to be a successful one. Homicides and drug-related violence, the real dangers of the city, still witness a steady flow of women across Mexico to move north to Ciudad Juarez due to the relatively high *maquiladora* wages.

The women of Juarez had no choice but to suffer. The land was totally devoid of moral consequence and the menacing crimes made it a land of public abandonment. Bolano's pursuit is not just to bring attention to Juarez, though it is an inaccurate parallel. The victims are all women; they are killed for no moral purpose. Thus, deep void and vacuum pervade each of their deaths.

Juarez is the Bolanian Santa Teresa. Bolano graphically presents these murders before the readers, thus, we see the evil and cruelty. We are not just reading it. Along with the academics of the first session, Amalfitano, and the Journalist of the second and third sections respectively are drawn to the aggression of Santa Teresa. The literary irony with which 'The Part about the Crimes' is presented makes *2666* a post-modern tragedy. No justifications can ever imbue any kind of ethical rationale behind all these murder motives. In this portrayal of malevolence, Bolano compares Mexico City as a cemetery in the year 2666, a locus of all human kinds' capacity for cruelty, a forgotten symmetry under the eyelid of a corpse or an unborn child.

In *The Savage Detectives*, the founder of Visceral Realism, Cesarea Tinajero, predicts the end of the world, when she names a date "sometime around the year 2600." The work in which art and aesthetics, infamy and blasphemy, craft and narratology, crimes and murders, dictatorship and totalitarianism, all are entwined together and it gets dwindled at the place of murder. The resonating motif of the novel is the brutal rapes and killings of hundreds of women. The novel is the ultimate accusation of the author's gender, desires, and culture of machismo, gangsterism, and tyranny that equate masculinity in many parts of the world. The social commentary-like narrative conveys the density of the descriptions. But, at the same time, it keeps striking the horrific social realities around. The sex-crime narrative is disgracefully poetic to brutalize the victims. With this dreadful narration of crimes, the author has created a geography of visceral realist Bolanian oasis of horror.

The literary value of Boom literature and the historical contradiction they embody needed to be revisited in the new readings in order to define the significance and relevance of it in the contemporary time frame. An active re-animation of modernist texts is being done by the readers throughout the world and the Boom movement or Visceral Realism is no different from this. This study was an attempt to bring out the excitement and possibilities of Visceral Realist texts alive through an attention to the socio-political and economic condition of land where it was born and matured into arguably the first considerable literary movement of the twenty-first century. Despite the rise of the modernist tendency of negating the historic and social implications of a text, it is indeed relevant to read any modernist text in the light of these parameters because they speak and respond to the contemporary pre-occupations and debates. The instabilities of the capitalist system continue to cause political

turmoil, and the economic depression of 2008 has similarities with the Wall Street crash of 1929. Any text is still defined by tensions between individualism and the promotional necessities of the group. This conflict of identity representation is easily seen between the Boom writers and the visceral writers as one fantasizes everything including the past, the present, and the future while the Visceral writers make it more obvious and discrete.

The end of the Boom has widely been discussed in the latter part of the twentieth century with no major effect and the discussion on the Post-Boom era has been dissected by Latin American critics such as Shaw. Still, Robert Bolano propagated the new movement, not through his life, but through his work. The Post-Boom was a concept that had no power to break the strong clutches of the Boom movement, riding on its commercial success and global market penetration. As Donald L. Shaw wrote in his article on Post-Boom, this phase began in the mid-1970s, and he even specifically mentions the year - 1975 - the year in which Antonio Skármeta 's first novel, *Soñéque la nieveardía*, was published. Shaw's reasoning for calling it the inception point of the new movement was based on the condition that it broke the tradition of demythification and dehistoricization of the Boom era, by publishing a more realistic and political novel on the collapse of the left-wing Allende government in Chile. The Post-Boom may rightly be said to have started with Antonio Skármeta's novel, with his deliberate attempts on avoiding the three major landmark intentions of the Boom:

I. Excessive elitism and reader-unfriendliness

2. Excessive cosmopolitanism and desire for universality at the expense of the here and now in Spanish America

3. Excessive emphasis on technique, on the supposed

> mysteriousness of reality, and on the possible inability of language to express it. (http://www2.ups.edu/faculty/jlago/sp411/html/unit7/postboom.html)

Post-Boom brought in many new narrative techniques and thematic specializations to Latin American literature in the 1980s. The most important characteristics among those were the introduction of personal likings and affections, as observed by Shaw.

Post-Boom culminated in a new movement in Visceral Realism, propagated and created through *The Savage Detectives*, *2666*, and other novels of Roberto Bolano. The transition age that began with Antonio Skármeta has got the form of a new movement only in Bolano, who created a Bolanian'oasis of horror' in and around Mexico, Santiago, and other geographic spots of Latin American cities of crimes and drugs. In Bolano's works, each character carries the geographical space, its horrors, evils, and spirits along with them. So is the time they are born, they are living and they are dead and gone in these given spaces. However, the geography of the works was never represented as a real character but often developed and matured through the ambitious, fearful discourses of the characters. Mexico is at the centre of all Bolanian works of fiction. Through unique depictions of the geography of horror, he has succeeded in bringing alarming social conditions of the Latin American continent to the global attention and has ended the over fantasised literary representations of Latin America, a stereotype developed and ripened by the Boom Movement. He has created an alter ego Arturo Bolano, a character who has been presented in his different novels -- has played a crucial role in bringing the present alive breaking the existing literary narrative styles whole around. With a life-size alter ego that spans across a series of novels and novellas, Roberto Bolano has paved way for the inception of a single-author literary movement

Visceral Realism. A literary movement created around the life of a group of the vagabonds, anarchist writers who travel with a gun at one hand pen at the other. *The Savage Detectives* talks in detail about the dream of the writer to create a new literary movement that put forward a new lifestyle rather than a literary/writing style. In the manifesto of the movement that the writer had proclaimed during the 70s, he demanded the fellow writers to shed off the comfort and hit the road. His characters have done this and hit the road and thus Roberto Bolano - through his alter ego - has succeeded in creating a literary movement through a novel that flies on the wings of the same literary movement. This way, the novelist, the character, and the work created a new history of creating a movement with fake writers who live lives fitting to the movement.

As much as it has identified with realities of life, the Bolanian universe has a unique bending of its own that defines the narrative and stylistic techniques of the Visceral Movement. It had deviated from the pseudo-realistic social representation during the Boom era and has violated non-linear time representations of the same genre. In Visceral Realism, the novel is as much a nightmare as living in a highly crime-struck Latin American continent, a reality, which was instrumental to the formation of the new literary movement. Bolano's fiction weaves dream-like narratives around the vanished writers and strives to redefine the social realities on all fronts of life.

By replacing the cosmopolitan hangover of Boom Literary narratives and representation with a form of realism and social protest, which are more broadly faithful to the contemporary age, Bolano had established a new literary movement that has given a perspective on both literary and socio-cultural grounds. This is made possible at the technical level with a reader-friendliness, strong emphasis on plot, and sometimes with elements of melodrama and

romance. The Bolanian universe shows a tendency towards closure rather than open-endedness, a reaction against experimentalism both in narrative technique and in the use of language, and returned to the linear narration of stories and plots. Also, it has strongly marked its deviation from the Boom era with a chronological structure and 'strong' characterization. However, the new movement brings alive realities that seem to be unrealistic for a global audience and has won as much or more applauds and global market share as its predecessor had enjoyed.

Bolano has successfully reflected the current phase of neo-liberalism through a crisis of cultural authority and of epistemological confidence, and a literary movement, which portrays the lives and philosophies of a group of vagabond poets. It has simultaneously rejected the cosmopolitan national identity and the colloquial rural fantasies created by the Boom writers. Meanwhile, to an extent, it has responded to the needs of the highly-exploited, underdeveloped continent to explore a new social and political identity. The Visceral Movement was successful in portraying the social realities of Latin American which even now hovers between the traditional and the contemporary, has more clear-cut problems of injustice and oppression, and is in a sense a more reality than that of metropolitan nations, as David L. Shaw has observed.

Visceral Realism was a reaction to the socio-economic hallucinations propagated by the Boom writers. Bolano has intelligently and intentionally used crimes and drugs as a medium to fight the highly fantasized narrative techniques of their predecessors. Hence, it may be concluded that, Roberto Bolano and his texts, through the use of realities of a continent that is a victim of the neo-liberal market policies, marked the end of the Boom movement and the inception of the first structured literary movement of its kind, in

the new millennium.

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YAKSHI UNPLUGGED: INTERROGATING MALAYALEE MASCULINITY IN THE POPULAR CULTURE OF KERALA

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The *Yakshi* myth can be identified as a a collective fantasy upon which the fears and anxieties of the patriarchal society is located. The deviant 'other' feminine form of *Yakshi* continues to be a powerful icon in the popular culture of Kerala. The evolution of *Yakshi* myth may be traced back to Buddhism and Jainism to Hinduism and, later, to the popular culture of Kerala, through texts such as *Aithihyamala*. It is significant to note that the construction of the aberrant woman *Yakshi* can be read along with the project of Kerala modernity. In recent times, the *Yakshi* myth was re-imagined in the popular culture of Kerala through a viral rap song 'Pani paliyo' by the actor, Neeraj Madhav. The mythology of *Yakshi* has transgressed the boundaries of oral tales to literature, and finally to the contemporary visual spaces of Kerala.

The *Yakshi* has always been associated with the idea of fear and sexuality. Corrine Dempsey, in his article, "Nailing Heads and Splitting Hairs", describes *Yakshi* is "a young shape-shifting woman who is truly ravishing in both senses of the word-she is, in actuality, a fanged, voracious, vampiric ogress" (112). The *Yakshi* tales of Kerala depict her as a white-saree clad woman with long hair and seductive attire, who roams freely at night to lure young men. She enchants them to have a tryst with her, after which she kills them by drinking their blood.

Michael Kaufman, in his essay, "Men, Feminism, and

Contradictory Experiences of Men's Power," observes that "Patriarchy exists as a system not simply of men's power over women but also of hierarchies of power among different groups of men and between different masculinities" (145). It is significant to note that it is always the alpha-male of a community that tames the *Yakshi*.

In the *Yakshi* myths of Kerala, it is always the chaste male priest and the upper caste Brahmins who have the power to tame the *Yakshi* over other men because it is believed that the excessive sexuality of a *Yakshi* can only be regulated by a man wielding enormous power in the society. This throws light upon the connection between 'power' and 'masculinity'. In his book, *Theorizing Masculinities*, Michael Kaufman notes that "the equation of masculinity with power is one that developed over centuries. It conformed to, and in turn justified, the real-life domination of men over women and the valuation of males over females" (146). The myth of the *Yakshi* has its roots in the 'castration' fears of the patriarchal psyche, where men internalise these fears, and direct it towards an agency such as *Yakshi*, who is depicted as a voluptuous and blood-sucking vampire.

The popular culture of Kerala is rich with folklore, literature, and films representing the *Yakshi* myth. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in his book, *Monster Theory*, proposes that a society's "anxieties" and "fears" manifest itself symptomatically as a "cultural fascination" with monsters (Preface viii). The *Yakshi* as a deviant 'other' occurring outside the realm of patriarchy appears in the legends such as *Aithihyamala* by Kottarathil Sankunni and *Aithihya Kadhakal* by K.S. Neelakandanunni. Similarly, texts like *Marthandavarma* (1891) by C. V. Raman Pillai, *Neelavelicham* (1952) by Vaikkom Muhammad Basheer, *Cheriya Cheriya Bhookampangal* (1933) by M. T. Vaudevan Nair, *Yakshi* (1967) by Malayattoor Ramakrishnan,

etc. are highly imaginative and fictional accounts of the *Yakshi* myth in Kerala. The legendary sculptor Kanayi Kunhiraman's statue of Yakshi (1969) in Malampuzha, Palakkad is pivotal in the cultural space of Kerala.

Due to the paradigm shift in the Malayalam literary scenario and to meet the expectations of the entertainment industry, these myths were transferred to the visual spaces of Malayalam cinema. In her article, "Marriage and Family in Malayalam Cinema", Janaky Sreedharan locates *Yakshi* among the movies of the 1960s that expressed a fear of transgressive feminine sexuality, in the aftermath of the collapse of matrilineal property and family relationships (*Women in Malayalam Cinema* 69). Films such as *Bhargavi Nilayam* (Dir. A. Vincent, 1964) *Lisa* (Dir. A. G. Baby, 1978), *Veendum Lisa* (Dir. A. G. Baby, 1987), *Manichithrathazchu* (Dir. Fasil, 1993), *Ente Swantham Janakikutty* (Dir. Hariharan, 1998), *Akasha Ganga* (Dir. Vinayan, 1999), *Indriyam* (Dir. George Kithu, 2000), *Akam* (Dir. Shalini Usha Nair, 2011), dealing with the *Yakshi* myth, have given rise to the horror genre in Malayalam. In all these movies, the *Yakshi* becomes an avenger, strives to seek vengeance against her murderers in the past life. Once the political justice is done she will either be exorcised by the alpha-male of the religion, or will be transformed into an asexual mother-figure.

Kerala's fascination with *Yakshis* can be traced back to her European counterparts like vampires, zombies, *femme-fatales*, and witches. The trope of *Yakshi* allows her to be outside the realm of patriarchal ideals of 'docile' and 'obedient.' Any kind of deviation from the established norms of the society led to the process of 'othering.' According to Judith Butler in her seminal work, *Gender Trouble*, defines gender identity is an "on-going discursive practice" that is "performative" at its core (33). In previous centuries, in

countries such as Europe, women of the powerful disposition were condemned by the religious institution and the patriarchal society as 'witches' and they were burnt alive. Similarly, homophobia practiced by religious institutions such as the Catholic church and Puritanism led to the social ostracization of homosexuals. The *Yakshi* is treated as an outcast and aberrent woman who flouts the norms of patriarchy and hence the collective male consciousness believes that she is an agency that needs to be feared.

The myth of the *Yakshi* as a fertile goddess has also been popular in Kerala. Raghava Varier's essay, "Yakshikal, Amma-Daivangal," in *Mythum Samoohavum* (*Myth and Society*) edited by Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, reads the *Yakshi* myth as it is conceived in the cultural imagination of Kerala. He traces the myth of the monstrous feminine back to their association with the pre-Vedic culture, right after mapping out the transformations the Yakshi had undergone in various religious phases, such as Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Varier in his book, *Mythum Samoohavum*, suggests: "The once denounced fertility goddesses of the pre-Vedic tribes were adopted by the Vedic culture and later when Buddhism gained prominence, they also followed the same. Later, as Hinduism as an organized religion gained an upper hand, these goddesses were re-appropriated again into the established order" (91).

Hence, in Jainism, the *Yakshis* were treated as the protecting goddesses of Jain Tirthankaras. The *Yakshis* represented fertility, feminity, and benign motherhood in Buddhism.

The *Yakshi* narratives of Kerala have been constructed around the patriarchy's fear over the sexuality of the women. Texts such as *Aithihyamala* depict the *Yakshis* as the celestial-beings. They show a behavioural pattern of monstrosity. In all the tales, the Yakshi lures

the Brahmin priests, by disguising as a young seductive female asking for lime. She invites him to her abode, which is usually a *pala* or palm tree, which will look like a seven-storeyed mansion. The *Yakshi* myth of *Aithihyamala* includes tales such as, "Venmani Nampoorippaadanmaar" (125), "Vayaskkara Chathurvedi Bhattathiriyum Yakshiyum" (259), "Thevalasseri Nambi" (320) and "Panachikkattu Saraswathi" (689), etc. In the legend of Kaladi Bhattathiri (114), the hero avenges the death of his father by severely punishing the *Yakshi* who has murdered him. In the story of Venmani Nampoorippaadanmar (125), the *Yakshi* who dwelled in a painting at Thrissur Vadakkumnatha Temple used to have clandestine visits with the Brahmins who were enchanted by her beauty. Finally, she had a marital relationship with a Brahmin called Venmani Namboothiripad and resided with him as his first wife till their old age.

The inherent monstrousness of the *Yakshi* was always in opposition with the image of the mother figure. The *Yakshi*, tamed by love, becomes the mother of a girl child in the legend of "Vayaskara Chathurvedi Bhattathiriyum Yakshiyum" (279) in *Aithihyamala*. In "Kadamattathu Kathanar" (462), Kathanar fetters the Yakshi and idolizes her in Panayannarkkaavu as a 'mother' goddess, who protects and nourishes the community. In this myth, Kathanar is a symbol of the alpha-male, who threatens the *Yakshi* with violent exorcism. He chases the *Yakshi*, called Kalliyankattu Neeli to the premises of a *pala* tree and threatens her: "I won't allow you to harass anyone. If you are to defy my command, I will give you in sacrifice to fire or else I will allow you to stay here in the temple. The choice is yours!" (Sankunni 528). Thus, he transforms her from the voluptuous woman to the mother goddess. Dempsey notes in the "Nailing Heads": "Their victory comes from the holy men's superior strength within a shared framework of magical might rather than from the requirement that the

Yakshi converts to a new way of viewing herself and the world" (119). In the legend of "Panachikkattu Saraswathi" (727) in *Aithihyamala*, the *Yakshi* is worshipped alongside the Goddess Saraswathi to avoid any obstacle that might occur during the rituals performed by the brahmins. In all these legends, the vociferous and promiscuous *femme-fatale* is suppressed into a passive and asexual mother goddess by the patriarchal society.

The *Yakshi* is subjugated by the dominant patriarchal ideology by driving an iron nail, (a phallic symbol), into her head or through violent exorcism, where her 'otherness' is being harnessed by brutal acts performed on the female body. The *Yakshi* can only be kept away by holding a holy book or by the possession of iron. V. V. Haridas, in his work, *Yakshisankalpam*, observes that the plausible conclusion for the *Yakshi*'s fear of iron might be that she might have been a goddess of the Stone Age, who was marginalised by the arrival and worship of new gods and goddesses in the iron age (94). The taming of the *Yakshis* are usually done by the celibate priests of the religion, who wield enormous power in the society. Sindhu Jose, in her thesis, *Representation as Translation*, observes: "Exorcism violently violates the cultural body of the women in question. Her body is outside the margins of the established customs, for they violate the dominant cultural codes. Her body manifests resistance and the attribution of monstrosity upon her is an attempt to contain her resistance" (109). The victory over the female body was seen as a way to "prove their mettle" ("Nailing Heads" 111) for these religious authorities.

The *Yakshi* trope in Kerala has to be read along with the ongoing project of Kerala modernity. The colonial government played an instrumental role in creating the ideal of the 'new women,' with their reformation laws in marriage, education, and land. There

was a transformation of marriage laws of kinship structures from matrilineal to patrilineal form. They were seen as "the cultural production of a new morality than legal infringements" as observed by G. Arunima, in her article, "Matriliny and its Discontents" (159). The sexuality of women got re-imagined within this social and cultural milieu of Kerala. The family, as well as religion, was reinvented under the head of a patriarchal figure, and the women became domesticated within the realm of the household. As noted by Devika in *En-gendering Individuals*, "modernity" did not abolish "female domesticity" (11). Rather, it only further enslaved women under the fetters of patriarchy.

It is under these pre-modern excesses that *Yakshi* became the symbol of the libertine 'other' women. The Malayalee masculinity imagined women as an obedient, fragile, and subjugated 'other,' whereas man was seen as the dominant patriarch who was intellectually and morally superior. The excessive feminine energy of the *Yakshi* was treated as an antithetical force to the domesticated 'ideal' woman. Gail Hinich Sutherland, in his book, *The Disguises of the Demon*, observes that "The devouring of offspring is the formal and ethical opposite of the usual maternal function of discharging rather than physically withholding infants" (147). Thus, the *Yakshi* was seen as the monstrous female figure and probably the only female monster in the popular culture of Kerala.

The mythology of *Yakshi* in the popular culture of Kerala imagines her as a liberated female entity or a cultural fantasy upon which her excessive sexual energy is directed at creating fear and anxieties in the collective psyche of the Malayalee man. Nevertheless, when the alpha-male figure of the community tames her libidinal energy, by performing violent acts such as exorcism, they are trying to regain the superior position of the males in the

society. Hence, it is possible to see the trope of the *Yakshi* as something reinvented; it may be looked upon as a feminist project of Kerala modernity or as a challenge to masculinity resulting from a shift in the power structures within the society.

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BODY AND PERFORMANCE: PROBING INTO MASCULINITIES OF MALE BODIES IN *PAAVA KADHAIGAL*

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The term 'masculinities' refers to the norms formed from historical and cultural practices in societies and focus on different groupings of men within any one society. Masculinity can be defined as the sum total of the social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man.

The relationship between masculinity, identity, and gender as social structure has changed somewhat during the various phases of development with the sociology of masculinity. Early influences tended to draw heavily on notions of gender role and its 'strains' or 'discrepancies' for men (Pleck 21)

Masculinity is defined in a myriad of ways. American writer, Jack Donovan, in his work, The Way of Men, points to the virtues of men: "Strength, Courage, Mastery, and Honor are the alpha virtues of men all over the world" (52). Edwin Louis Cole, an American Evangelist, in his speech in 1985, referred to the performance of masculinity: "Being a male is a matter of birth. Being a man is a matter of choice." Mahatma Gandhi also reminds us of the performance of masculinity : "Manliness consists not in bluff, bravado or loneliness. It consists in daring to do the right thing and facing consequences whether it is in matters social, political or other. It consists in deeds not words."

Men's lives are constructed in a socio-cultural context in which powerful myths about masculinity inform the 'gender folklore' of families. Men who rigidly accept these myths will be

uncomfortable with the implication that they need help, or may have '"emotional" problems.' The plural 'masculinities' is also used in recognition of the ways of being a man and cultural representations of/about men which are determined historically and culturally. In the literature masculinities are defined from various theoretical perspectives. Natural Sciences define masculinities as controlled by physiological factors such as hormones or chromosomes. Nathaniel Goldberg identifies the 'neuro-endocrine system' (the interaction of the nervous system with the hormone system) as the biological basis of masculinities. Such essentialism is also characteristic of populist 'celebratory' writing about masculinity, in which men are urged to reinvigorate their 'natural' masculinity. Robert Bly sees masculinity as being damaged by the conditions of modern society, and remedy in men-only retreats and bonding rituals. In contrast, from the more critical, academic perspective of the social sciences, masculinities are understood as a form of power relation, both among men themselves and between men and women. Essentialism views masculinities as arising from the social contexts in which men live, from their positions in the various institutions and organizations of their society and/or in the context of the socially available discourses about gender. Masculinities and femininities can be understood, therefore, as the effects of these interpretations and definitions - on bodies, on personalities and on a society's culture and institutions.

In India, the different modes of masculinity have emerged from the extremely tense political and socio-cultural atmosphere. At least four categories of male bodies can be identified based on our social system - the body of the feudal lord, the body of the lower-class Indian, the body of the anglicised professional and the body of imperfections. All these body types are destined to perform their stereotypical roles. The feudal lord is expected to be virile and

authoritative. He takes charge of the lives of people around him, demands resources of areas under his control, and is the local administrator. The lower caste Indian, effete and meek, is the serf of the feudal lord, and would have been bonded to serve the lord and his land for generations. The westernized is the product of colonization - a hybrid part Indian and part-western. He/She is covered in western attire within legitimized boundaries and controlled by community rules when living inside the system of values. This is the privileged class which can easily transgress the community boundaries as they are employable outside. The fourth category is the imperfect bodies of trans community and differently-abled, who are free to live within the borders of the community. They do not appear as makers of rule and are usually out of serfdom. These roles assigned to them indicate their duties to society. Apart from the specific duties, generally, masculinity demands certain responsibilities.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw massive transformations of gender relations. This was for many reasons economic, political, sexual, and spatial. Gender, gender ideology, and ideologies around gender became more explicit. While the words 'feminine' and 'masculine' were in use in the sixteenth century, 'femininity' and 'masculinity' did not acquire widespread recognition as significant categories for describing identifiably gendered people until the nineteenth century. A central feature of this was the establishment of a series of ideologies around the notion of 'separate spheres' for women and men: “the central belief … of a male breadwinner gaining a livelihood through work and maintaining his female [and child] dependants within the home…. In this view, husband and wife were the archetype, but father and child, brother and sister, uncle and niece, master and servant reproduced the relationship of clientage and dependency” (Davidoff 64).

Paava Kadhaigal (transl. Sinful Tales) is a Tamil anthology of four tales. It was released on Netflix on 18 December 2020. The tales include "Thangam" directed by Sudha Kongara, "Vaanmagal" directed by Gautham Menon, "Ooru Iravu" directed by Vetrimaaran and "Love Panna Uttranum" directed by Vignesh Shivan. The movie is about the sins committed by the males and the punishment for failure in duty.

"Thangam" is a tale of friendship of Sathar (Kalidas Jayaram) and Saravanan (Shantanu Bagyaraj), set in a small village in Kovai, in the 1980 s. It is a story about a whole village, along with the families refusing to give shelter for the transwoman Sathar for helping his sister Sahira (Bhavani Sree) to elope with his childhood friend and secret lover, Saravanan. Sathar used to small errands for the villagers and collect money for his sex reassignment surgery, after which he thought he would have a normal life with Saravanan. Saravanan had confided in Sathar his love for Sahira, and Sathar helped them elope from their village, as both families were against their love. A year later, Sahira and Saravanan returned to their familes, but they refused to meet them, as they had heard about the tragic death of Sathar. Sathar was thrown out of his house, and brutally raped and killed by the village hooligans. Saravanan, whom Sathar dearly called 'Thangam,' on his return, goes to Sathar's favourite place in the village to find his possessions, including the gift he had given him. Saravanan mourns the death of his dear departed friend.

"Love Panna Uttranum" tells the story of Aadhilakshmi and Jothilakshmi (Anjali), twin daughters of a feudal lord, Veerasimman (Padam Kumar), who is a political leader as well. He is against inter-caste marriages, and his henchmen, headed by Narikutty (Jaffer Sadiq), see to it that the couples marrying out of their castes receive death punishment. For political propaganda Veerasimman had helped

some couples to marry, but they were killed secretly by his men. Misguided by her father's change, Aadhilakshmi reveals to her father about her love for their driver (Manikandan), who is of a lower caste. Veerasimman agrees to their marriage and Jothilakshmi (who lives in the city after leaving parental home) is informed by Aadhi about it. Jothi returns home to find her sister dead (she had electrocuted herself with live wire which was set by Narikutty with the consent of Veerasimman). With the help of Penelope (Kalki Koechlin), whom she introduces as her lesbian partner, and Bharani (rapist Bharani who was Jyothi's real lover) they escape from the village, though they are threatened. Veerasimman finally joins Jyothi and Bharani in France, having left the village and its rules behind.

"Vaanmagal" is the story about Ponnuthayi the twelve-year-old daughter of Sathya (Gautham Menon) and Mathi (Simran) - a middle class couple living in Madurai. The girl is kidnapped and sexually harassed by her brother Bharath's (Aadithya Bhaskar) senior at college. The family is disheartened; the young girl is traumatized; and people even start to make stories about her elder sister, Vaidehi. The young girl, who always aspired to fly, is left embittered and hopeless. Bharath finally manages to find the culprit and castrate him. Mathi is initially remorseful and for a brief second considers killing her daughter. On regaining her wits, she finally convinces herself that it was not her daughter's fault and that she should not be punished. The story comes to a close with the family finding strength to support their daughter once again.

"Ooru Iravu" narrates the story of Janakiraman (Prakash Raj), who learns that his daughter Sumathi (Sai Pallavi), who had eloped and got married to her lover, is pregnant . He keeps his animosity aside and visits her in the city. Though hesitant to accept his son-in-law at first, Janakiraman willingly invites both of them to his house in

the village for Sumathi's baby shower rituals. Surprised at her father's sudden change of heart, Sumathi agrees and goes to her village where she is met with indirect hostility from everyone for eloping, but eventually they warm up to her. On the night before the baby shower, Sumathi falls sick. When Janakiraman refuses to call the doctor, it is revealed that it was he who poisoned Sumathi's drinking water and is waiting for her and her unborn child to die. Despite Sumathi and her mother's pleas for help, Janakiraman turns a deaf ear, locks her up and chastises her for marrying out of their caste, and says that only her death would restore his family's pride and honour. Sumathi begs for her life despite her deteriorating condition. At one point, she realizes that her unborn child is dead. Too weak to continue, Sumathi finally succumbs and dies. Janakiraman is beside himself with grief at the fate of his daughter, yet he thinks that this was the only solution to his problem. Finally, it is shown that Hari learns about the tragedy that struck his family and presses murder charges against Janakiraman, who awaits his trial.

The prominent themes of the series are:

a) The Failed Father: The most repeated image in the anthology is the father who fails to protect his daughter's honour.

In "Love Panna Uttranum," Veerasimman seemingly endorses inter-caste marriages for his political agenda, but deep down in his heart, he has a strong hatred towards lower caste villagers and his henchmen headed by Narikutty (Jaffer Sadiq) go about killing the couples who marry out of their caste. Aadhilakshmi falls in love with their driver who is a lower caste. Aadhilakshmi, who is her father's darling, gets killed with the permission of her father to protect the honour of the family. In "Vaanmagal", Satya's (Gautam Menon) twelve-year-old daughter Ponnuthai gets raped and Satya remains

paralyzed and disarmed. In Ooru Iravu, Janakiraman's (Prakash Raj) daughter Sumathi elopes and marries a lower caste man, Harikrishnan, thereby tarnishing the family name. Janakiraman finally kills his daughter to bestow the lost honour of his family.

Despite differences in theories, many contemporary writers do agree that exquisite narcissistic vulnerability and susceptibility to humiliation in males may lead them to murderous violence in order to purge themselves of such intolerable emotions. The role of destructive aggression, as mentioned by Twemlow, in maintaining the cohesion of masculine identity or the masculine self "is a question that has implications that go way beyond the consulting room, as the management and prevention of violence is a worldwide social challenge." As John Munder Ross describes it, "Men... struggle against two dangersthe danger of succumbing to their feminine nature and the danger of affirming their masculine integrity through repeated acts of aggression" (Ross 335-36).

Veerasimman, on the advice of Narikutty, agrees to kill Aadhi and her boy friend, to preserve the honor of their community. Narikutty sets up a live wire and gets Aadhi to electrocute herself.

Veerasimman admits to Jyothi that caste and community is most important for him and admits the murder of Aathi. Janakiraman poisons Sumathi's drink and kill his daughter and her child to save family's honour. Sathya, in Vaanmagal, is the one who failed to protect his daughter and his violence is soo subtle which is expressed when he confides to his wife of his inability to behave normally to his abused daughter. He takes the blame on him and the weight of the crime gives him nude and nasty appearance in society.

After the tragedies, these fathers change totally. In remorse, Veerasimman decides to support Jothilakshmi, Adhi 's twin sister,

who was about to follow her sister by falling in love with Bharani - a new generation rapper. Veerasimman lets Jothilakshmi go away from his land, its rules and limitations, to escape to France. Sathya remains a protective father. Janakiramman awaits trial, haunted by the last words of his daughter that "he is committing an irrevocable crime." (Ooru Iravu 02:31:45-55)

These fathers represent the three different body types. Veerasimman is the authoritative feudal lord regaining his pride and honour by plotting his daughter's death. Janakiraman is the lower class Indian father who believes in the sanctity of caste system. Sathya is an Anglicised middle class father who lives with middle class morality.

b) The Brother Prototype:

Bharath (Aadithya Bhaskar) in Vaanmakal is a typical Indian middle class youth preparing hard for a white collar job. He lives a carefree life until his sister's rape, and the assault on his sister initiates him to adulthood. The initiation into adulthood happens in his castration of his senior, who had raped his twelve-year-old sister. The son protects his family's honour by avenging the crime and saves his father from the shame. A picture of god as witness in the castration episode sanitizes the brutal revenge. (01:31:54-57)

c) The Imperfect Bodies :

The transwoman Sathar in Thangam performs the roles of a male and a female. Ze is introduced as an economically independent eunuch, running small errands for his villagers. Ze also presents herself as an ideal female sacrificing her life for her lover. Sathar the eunuch, though sexually abused, is shown to die with dignity and pride. He has sacrificed his life for his beloved. 'Thangam,' and as a dear brother, stood with his sister, when she was turned down by other

family members.

In "Love Panna Uttranum," the dwarf man Narikutty beats up Bharani, and this forces Penelope (friend of Jyothi) to reveal that Jyothi is a lesbian, in a homosexual relationship with her, and Bharani is just a friend. Though he was confused about Jyothi, he was able to convince Veerasimmam that his pride lies in killing his daughter, Aadi, for falling in love with a lower caste man.

When Veerasimman stepped out of his position Narikutty ascended to power and kept to the rules of his clan. He would always remain a true slave to the system. Veerasimman had to give up his feudal rights, flee from his land and people to join his daughter at France, who had married out of her caste. The dwarf Narikutty is shown to remain with his men controlling them forever.

"Paava Kadhaigal" reinforces the images of masculinity. Veerasimmam, Satya and Janakiramman are shown to fail in their filial duty of 'protecting' their daughters. Rememption is not possible; yet, they try to repossess their dignity. Veerasimmam has to leave his land and clan to settle in France, Janakiramman awaits trial, and Satya forever lives as a family man, protecting his women, and initiates his son to middleclass masculinity and values. Paava Kadhaigal focuses on lives of men from different strata of Indian society; yet, it points to the similarities in the duties assigned to males to prove his masculinity, as defined by Indian culture. The body becomes a biological trap, which demands specific performances from them. The movie reinforces the binary construction in gender performance. The imperfect bodies are portrayed, as against the dominant male bodies. When the dominant males fail to impress, these imperfect ones fit into the definitions of gender constructions. The retrieval of dominance is attained through violence, and the violence is

sanctioned in a society, which defines aggression as a masculine behavior. The Jewish political philosopher Hannah Arendt states, "Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance" (34).

Identity is the effect of performance, and not vice versa, Judith Butler observes. All individuals are skilled at creating their selves, but within the parameters of their social and cultural experience, factors which are also subject to change. Men and masculinity suggest that masculinity is intimately linked to wider social and cultural transformations within western countries and that the assumed crisis of masculinity can be read as an effect of the wider crisis of late modernity.

The question of identity once again emerges as one of the key dynamic concepts in the context of rethinking social and cultural change. It is suggested that socio-cultural change is marked by the disintegration of older social collectivizes such as social class and increased fluidity of social relationship, with an accompanying interest in identity and subjectivity.

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NEOLIBERAL FEMINISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA IN *LIPSTICK UNDER MY BURQA*

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> Feminism is instrumentalised, it is brought forward and claimed by Western governments, as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of what freedom now means. Freedom is revitalised and brought up to date with this faux feminism. The boundaries between the West and the rest can, as a result, be more specifically coded in terms of gender, and the granting of sexual freedom. (Angela McRobbie)

The gender politics discussed in the film *Lipstick Under My Burqa* (2016) by Alankrita Srinivasan converges with the western neoliberal perspective of oppression, freedom, choice, and liberation, which in alliance with the multinational corporates, global marketplace and media, had succeeded in projecting political and ideological discourses emphasizing consumerist culture concealed under the garb of individualism. It is quoted as an example of film festival space constituting an arena to emancipate narratives of gender-based repression, sexual violence and abuse to an international audience (Devasundaram 40). The film was screened at UKAFF 2017 but was subjected to ban and censoring in India by Central Board for Film Certification (CBFC) which initiated further discussions on the same.

Lipstick Under My Burqa revolves around the lives of four women: Usha Parmar aka Buaji, Leela, Shirin Aslam, and Rehana

Abidi. The film begins with a *burqa*-clad Rehana in an expensive cosmetic store displaying international brands like Dolce & Gabbana, Versace and Gucci. The setting of film is Bhopal, where the lower middle class lives of the crumbling Hawaai Manzil contrasts with the city filled with multiplexes and pubs. Later, we see that a construction company is trying to take over the old mansion for their new mall. The female characters are in search of the new world outside the suffocating confinement of religion, patriarchy, and traditions, represented by Hawaai Manzil.

The film begins with the voiceover of Buaji reading from the erotic fantasy novel *Lipstickwale Sapne* (*Lipstick Dreams*): "In every girl's life comes that moment when she craves to be a woman…," while Rehana makes use of her anonymity provided by a *burqa*, and shoplifts an expensive red lipstick from the mall. She slips to her college, removes her burqa and transforms into a modern teenager with a loose T-shirt, tight jeans, messy hair, and 'red lipstick.' The moment she removes the *burqa* and applies lipstick is translated as a movement of 'liberation.' Buaji continues to read: "Rosy stood trapped behind the iron bars of the window. Through the binoculars, she watched the dazzling city lights. Jeans-clad girls, clinging to their boyfriends, rode freely on motorbikes" (00:02:41-52).

In contrast to her orthodox Muslim parents, who earn their living through their small *burqa* shop, Rehana is a free-spirited youth, who loves Miley Cyrus, Led Zeppelin, and all fineries of life. She wants to be part of the college band. Like the other characters, Rehana also lives a double life, in which she is a traditional daughter at home and a modern teenager at college. But when Rehana is caught by the police for theft, her father shuts her up in the *burqa* shop, her studies are put to an end, and they decide to marry her off soon.

Leela is introduced by the lines from the same book:

"Through the binoculars, Rosy now sees new images. Far from these crowded lanes, riding a Harley Davison, her hair flying in the wind" (00:04:16-25). She is an aspiring youngster who dreams to start her wedding-honeymoon event management venture, with her boyfriend, Arshad, who is a photographer. Leela is creating a luxurious fantasy and trying to sell it for making it real in her life. Her desire stands in opposition to her mother, who wants to marry her off to someone who is in a better financial position. During the engagement ceremony, she rebels, making love with her lover and recording it, in case he backs off from the relationship. Her mother slaps her and puts lipstick over her lips and brings her back to the stage as if nothing had happened. The lipstick moment here hides Leela's broken dreams.

Shireen is the submissive housewife of Rahim Aslam. She is introduced like a robber with a pistol in a *burqa*, who tries to intrude into a rich household, but she is a salesperson from Magic Products and is trying to sell a pest pistol. Her employment as a salesperson is unknown to Rahim and is now offered a better position as a sales trainer. As she tries to reveal this great achievement to Rahim, he sexually harasses her. She is forced to have unprotected sex every day, which turns out more like marital rape. Thus, she has three children and has no right to family planning. Even when she discovers Rahim's adultery, she remains trapped in the abusive relationship.

Usha Parmar is a fifty-five-year old widowed matriarch who runs a sweetshop. She is seemingly the co-owner of Hawaii Manzil and lives with her nephews. She has deep-buried desires to love and to be loved. In fear of losing respect from the family, she assumes the identity of Rosy, the fictional character from the book she had been reading, and indulges in a secret relationship with her young swimming instructor, Yashpal, via phone. The lipstick gives colour to

Usha's dreams. She imagines herself as beautiful and capable of becoming the object of Yashpal's love, but when he comes to know that his sensuous lover Rosy is only the old *Buaji*, he is shattered.

The climax happens in the *burqa* shop, where Rehana, confined by her father; Leela, abandoned by both her lover and fiancé; Shirin, abused by her husband, and Usha, thrown out by her family, all come together. They try to put together the pieces of Usha's book cover, torn by her nephews, which reads *Lipstickwaale Sapne*. They share a cigarette and laugh. The voiceover reads: "She won't veil her desires anymore, the iron bars at the windows cannot hold her back now" (01:52:40-46)

The film's parallel narrative is the sexual fantasy titled *Lipstickwale Sapne*. The four female characters are evaluated on the backdrop of the repressed desires of Rosy, the protagonist of the novel. Her desires are codified by city nights, motorbikes, desirable men, high heels, jeans, flowing hair and, most importantly, the lipstick. Rosy's desires reflect the desires of these four characters. Their desires altogether fuse into the 'lipstick dreams.' Like Rosy, these four characters are caged inside their own bodies. Unlike the women in western societies, Indian women are caught inside the intricate network of familial ties, which are portrayed as the primary oppressive force in their lives.

As Judith Butler states in her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990), the political ideologies which assume a universal basis for feminism is accompanied by the assumption of a universal hegemonic structure for patriarchy, and these forms of feminism tries to explain gender oppression as a form of non-western barbarism (3). Some special categories of 'women's oppression' in non-western countries were highlighted by Neoliberal feminists through Western NGO-sponsored media, social workers,

and writers. *Lipstick Under My Burqa* specifically points towards these kinds of codified oppression, especially inflicted by Muslim men on their women.

The Muslim men are stereotyped recurrences, where Rahim is a typical chauvinist husband and father, whom we can see in a couple of other Bollywood films like *Gadar: Ek Premkadha* (2001), *Veer Zara* (2004), and *Secret Superstar* (2017). He treats his wife like a sex slave, whom he uses according to his demands, and does not care about any of her feelings. While he indulges in adultery, he wants Shirin to be shut inside the home. He is against family planning and insults Shirin for buying condoms. He condemns women who are employed. Arshad is a philanderer who does not have any commitment to his relationship, and inflicts both verbal and sexual abuse upon her. Leela's mother is unhappy about her relationship with him, and asks her: "You want to be the plaything of that Muslim?" (00:55:29-31). Rehana's father is portrayed as a tyrannical and unfeeling father, who tries to restrict Rehana's movements, and expects her to wear *burqa* outside, like Shirin.

Muslim women are projected in a paradoxical way where, at the same time, they function as a threat to public order and submissive victims of Islamic patriarchy. Rehana, we see, is a regular shoplifter. We see her stealing an expensive lipstick, a branded dress, and a pair of shoes from the mall. She tricks her parents, attends parties at night, and participates in protests. She is once arrested for participating in a protest and, another time, for theft. Shirin is also shown as a potential agent, who has the ability of intrusion and spying. She lies to her husband and hides her job. She is also portrayed as a person who adds to the already growing population. The sales trainer at her company asks her: "Is popping out babies your only plan? Or do you want something more?" (00:41:31-33). The gynecologist despises her for

using contraceptive pills instead of protection. Here, *burqa* enables them to flout societal norms but, the same time, it also subjugates them. *Burqa* becomes synonymous with the iron bars of windows in the book read by Usha. It is the veil for their real persona, dreams, and desires. It also hides the 'dark lives' they are living.

The neoliberal feminists maintain that religious patriarchy was primarily responsible for the predicaments of Muslim women, who could be saved and integrated to the western cultural landscape by denouncing Islam altogether or at least by the erasure of its visible marks. Shirin's and Rehana's possibilities of liberation are marked by the disavowal of religious barriers. When Rehana removes her *burqa*, she is empowered, and has the voice of resistance and protest. She yells to the media person: “Right to jeans, right to live” (00:25:17-19). Here, 'jeans,' juxtaposed with *burqa*, is translated respectively as the 'modern' juxtaposed with the 'primitive.' The lipstick turns out to be the metaphor of empowerment of all these female characters. The projection of cosmetics and western outfits as female empowerment had even led to the coinage of the term 'Lipstick Feminism.' The liberation envisaged in this strand of feminism discreetly serves the western capitalist beauty standards and cosmetic industry. The lipstick, which remains hidden under the *burqa*, is the mark of liberation suppressed under orthodoxy. Only the removal of the veil can facilitate the subversion of traditional submissive roles assigned to Muslim women through her religion. The liberated women, for Rehana, are figures like Miley Cyrus, who are endowed with all possibilities like wealth, fame, and sexual freedom, which a Third World Muslim woman can only dream of.

These celebrities and their images are used to sell the brands which, in turn, fetishizes these products. Through imitating Miley Cyrus, dancing, drinking, smoking and getting involved sexually

with her boyfriend, Rehana tries to transcend the barriers of both her religion and society. As Sara Farris points out in her work, *In the Name of Women's Right: The Rise of Femonationalism* (2017), the journey of a Muslim woman toward autonomy is defined not only as a path which will eventually make her conscious of her rights, but also as a journey toward unveiling, or taking off *burqa*, which in western European imagery has come to symbolize oppression and lack of independence (130).

Shirin's emancipation is linked to her employment. All her efforts are directed towards proving herself a good employee, which she expects will earn dignity to her. The definition of reproductive work in the household as disempowering and of waged work as an emancipating condition were appropriated by most feminists (Farris 134). Thus, employment becomes a precondition for Shirin to be liberated. The workplace becomes a joyful and fulfilling experience for her which is opposed to the dark, abusive, and suffocating space of home.

Shirin's talents are not encouraged by her husband and three children, who constantly demand most of her time and attention only to receive abuse and insult in return. She forgives Rahim for his adultery whereas the latter responds violently upon knowing that she had been involved in a sales job.

Neoliberal feminism creates a binary which defines oppression and emancipation. Here, the concept of emancipation is narrowly constructed, reducing it to the single definition of 'Body Liberation,' which was only one of the movements belonging to the second wave of Feminism. Even at the point of time when Poststructuralist Feminism had given way to Decolonial Feminism, for building a more pluralistic approach towards women's

experiences, the film tries to present a myopic view of feminism. As Saba Mahmood argues in her work, *The Politics of Piety*, the narratives surrounding the oppression of Muslim women are often filtered through the western liberal feminist notions of individualism, agency and freedom, which define freedom as only subversion or re-inscription of the existing system. The film projects capitalist consumerist practices as the only form of resistance, tactfully ignoring the exploitation under these systems. This also nullifies all the political struggles of Muslim women and erases all other forms of marginalization experienced by them. It reiterates the oriental prejudices which imagines Muslim woman as a hidden universe of intense desire, violence, and threat. When alternative portrayal of Muslim women becomes possible through films like *A Separation* (2011) by Asghar Farhadi, which brings forth the political scenario of Iran and the way individuals exist and perform inside the matrix of religion, ethics and emotional ties, the discourses formed through films like *Lipstick Under My Burqa* subject the cultures of Third World again to the scrutiny of the neoliberal feminists, especially, its Islamophobic tendencies, which it deems as nothing less than primitive and barbaric.

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COVID-19 AND THE FACES/PHASES OF BIOPOLITICAL FALLOUT

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Covid-19 pandemic defines not only the future of human life but also the fate of almost all countries in the world. China, America, Russia, Israel, India and many other countries have already invented vaccines to fight against the epidemic, but still the world is not yet relieved from the clutches of the disease. Many of these countries including, China, Israel, Finland, and Switzerland have already vaccinated their complete population and attained higher levels of safety and supremacy over other countries. In an article on the biopolitical reading on the covid scenario, Michael A. Peters speaks about completely vaccinated 'immuno-states' and the power exerted by them over other states. This article draws on such insights, and discusses the way these 'immuno-states' are struggling not only due to Covid but also as a consequence of the risk of bio safety, bioterrorism, biowarfare and bioweapon in the world. The paper would also analyze the concept of "immune-state" in the time of Covid-19 and the results of vaccination by employing Roberto Esposito's philosophical notion of the "immunization paradigm" (*Immunitas* 1) and Foucault's "governmentality" and "sovereign power" (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 12). Through a biopolitical reading, this paper also attempts to explore the social relevance of Esposito's "immunization" against biowar and bioterrorism as well as the emergence of a neo-feudalism to the contemporary situation.

Esposito's concept of 'immunity' that is used here is a philosophical concept that extends far beyond the body immunity.

According to Esposito, "just as the immune system functions for the human organism, law ensures the survival of the community in a life-threatening situation" (*Immunitas* 28). The Covid immunity attained by the immune- states like China, Israel, Switzerland and other countries are produced by their respective governments, with the help of vaccines developed by different medical firms and companies. Esposito describes this immunity as something that is "prescribed to preserve peaceful cohabitation among people" (*Immunitas* 28). In other words, Esposito defines immunity as something that is protecting our life from threats and this protective dimension of immunity later transforms in to affirmative biopolitics in his *Bios*.

Immunity against Covid in different states, is either forcefully created by the law and judiciary for the protection of community, or it operates in capillary circulations of power. For Esposito, community has nothing to do with possession and belonging, but it is portrayed as a "lack," "a debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given" or an "obligation" (*Communitas* 30-31). Out of fear, or sometimes due to social obligations, people gradually form communities based on nation, state, districts, villages, containment zones..etc and start to obey the rules. According to Timothy Campbell, the translator of *Communitas*, "community immunizes itself by constituting sovereign power. With the risk of conflict inscribed at the very heart of community,it appears simultaneously as its "intimate essence" (*Communitas* "Translator's Introduction" xii). For each community, there had been no other options other than believing and obeying their governments for their survival.

As Ignas Kalpokas has aptly remarked, during Covid time, human life and health have become a subject of governance, through a series of containment measures such as quarantine, lock down, and many other modes of isolation. Government ensures biosafety and a

fruitful governmentality to the people through technologies these days. Mobile apps, vaccine sites, online consultations, online conferences, bill e-submissions, webinars, and other new technologically advanced life style modes control and track human life through online governance. As Foucault describes, these restrictions are internalized by the people as social norms, or in other words, people desire to be in the clutches of governments or online oligarchies rather than in the crushing grip of Covid.

Esposito speaks about the relation between community and immunity not only in *Bios*, but also in *Communitas: Origin and Destiny of Community* and *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*. Community and immunity connect through *Bios* by connecting his immunity paradigm to Foucault's notion of biopolitics. Biopolitics, as Foucault explains, is a neoliberal method of celebrating a new form of depoliticization by managing population and bodies "to regulate the behaviour of subjects" (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 7). When China properly immunized its citizens through vaccination and other drastic prevention methods, they were immunizing themselves not only against Covid but also from the threats of bioterrorism and recession. Covid-affected economies produced consequences in global capitalism as well, through stagnation. Moreover, it highlighted the weaknesses in public health and mental health, and consequently revealed the faults in the neoliberal capital accumulation and privatization in terms of investment, productivity and growth in general.

In some countries, things have become worse, despite effective governance and advanced treatments and medicines for the treatment of Covid-19. Corona virus severely affected the U. K. and the U. S. during the first wave. Their powerful vaccination measures helped them navigate the crisis of the second wave, and they are still

preparing for possible waves in the future. When China had managed the arrival of corona, American President Donald Trump had appreciated them for their efforts, but it was not easy for America to control the spread when they were facing it. The situation was even more pathetic in other more populated states like Brazil, Indonesia, Philippines and India. As Covid demands effective management and governmentality, people desire and willingly submit to various forms of governmental control, and they show appreciation and gratitude by reelecting and celebrating Governments that managed the Covid-19 healthcare crisis effectively, while some other countries faced severe criticisms for their inability to effectively control the spread of the virus.

The threat of biowar or bioterrorism still exist as one of the major security concerns of many of these countries, who are struggling to win over the pandemic. Perhaps the most appropriate definition of bio-weapons is given by WHO, which states that, "biological weapons are microorganism like virus, bacteria, fungi, or other toxins that are produced and released deliberately to cause disease and death in humans and animals or plants" (*WHO*). The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention defines bioterrorism as "an intentional release of viruses, bacteria, or other germs that can sicken or kill people, livestock, or crops" (CDCP). They include Bacillus anthracis, the bacteria that causes anthrax, as an agent to be used in a biological attack. There are news reports about Chinese conspiracy in using Covid-19 as bio-weapon. *The Economic Times* reports that "china has initiated number of steps to produce bioweapons". More than that, Nalinkumar Mohanpatra, in this article gives a detailed research report on the studies of different researchers and reporters about the presence of dangerous pathogens in Wuhan lab. CDC Director Robert Redfield told CNN that "covid virus

originated in a lab" (*The Economic Times*). While many political commentators have discredited the bioweapon theories about the Chinese government, it is true that such dangerous rumours about the threat of bio-terrorism are deeply disturbing and stress the necessity of ascertaining the true source of the novel corona virus.

Biosafety is also a profoundly significant topic of discussion during Covid times. When human beings started to control all the forms of microorganisms on earth, they also started to raise challenges to human existence. There are safety issues when human beings are working in laboratories with these microorganisms to diagnose their characterization, therapeutics, and vaccine development. In order to protect the workers, the state should provide a biosafe working atmosphere. In addition to these security concerns, there are chances of microorganisms being used as bioweapons in war. Since biotechnology can control the upcoming population, the various elements of biowar pose serious threats to the entire humanity. Offering Covid-19 immunization and biosafety to the people is not an easy task without mobilizing private healthcare infrastructure and facilities and investments. Biosafety is undoubtedly is a matter of crucial consequences.

What one can recommend to this world now is an affirmative biopolitics and governmentality to bring about a better life in the future. As Foucault envisioned it, biopolitics is something that can "ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order" (*History of Sexuality* 138). Following and extending Foucault's perspectives on the biopolitical dimension of human life,n Agamban has defined the human as a life form through which, "biopolitical body that is bare life must itself be transformed into the site for the constitution and installation of a form of life that is wholly exhausted in bare life and a bios that is only its own zoe…." (*Homo Sacer* 188). In other words,

effective control of body can elevate our life from bare life to a fruitful life or life progresses through state's control in the form of affirmative biopolitics. But when the state itself is in the control of an "online oligarghy" (Kotkin), a truly affirmative outcome in the mode of biopolitical control remains impossible to bring into being.

The involvement of private stakeholders in the process of vaccination at the population level can also have disastrous consequences that might even lead to the activation of a turn from biopolitics to thanatopolitics. Government's inefficiency to immunize the world may bring corporates to the field where the poor are excluded from the expensive and effective vaccines. For example, in India, the government provides millions of people with two types of vaccines for Covid: Covishield and Covaxin. The protection offered by these two vaccines are around 80% ,whereas Pfizer and Sputnik offers more than 90% protection. Also,the estimated effectiveness of Covishield and Covaxin is yet to be approved by the UN. This is an exclusion- inclusion boundary where a bio terrorism and bio-genocide is also possible through corporate involvement. The efficiency of Covid-19 vaccine may also define who are excluded and included in the survivors' chart. In such a situation, "biopolitics turns to thanatopolitics" (*Bios* 122), or in other words, death becomes a political one, rather than a biological one.

Covid-19 can also lead to the emergence of a neo-capitalism along with new forms of neo-feudalism and neo-corporatism. Fritz Sager and Celine Mavrot speak about the Covid policies of Switzerland, and how they helped to manage Covid-19 through neo-corporate reopenings. While lock down has severely affected and, in some cases, even vaporized small scale businesses, the corporates have been flourishing with unprecedented benefits, since most of them are operating on online platforms. Online companies like

Amazon have tripled their profit as a result of the pandemic, producing a fertile ground for the development of neo-feudalism. Joel Kotkin makes the following observation on neo-feudalism:

> Our society is being rapidly reduced to a feudal state, a process now being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions of small businesses are near extinction, millions more losing their jobs and many others stuck into the status of a property less serfs.the big winners have been the 'expert' class of the clerisy and most of all, the tech oligarghs, who benefit as people rely more algorithms than human relationships. (https://joelkotkin.com/books/)

In a situation where the governing power of the world will reside in a group of corporates, it is impossible to study affirmative biopolitics and thanatopolitics without analyzing the governing power of these corporates. According to Foucault, governmentality is an individual's autonomous capacity for "self-control." It does not "juxtapose politics and knowledge, but articulates a "political knowledge" (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 14) through certain strategies. These strategies provide immunity to the people and government simultaneously. But in a world of neo-feudalism, it is difficult to implement affirmative biopolitics as the corporates overpower states. In such a situation, all democratic countries, capitalist countries and socialist countries are equally unable to control the situation except some of them with low population density.

In a neo-feudal world, neo-liberalism has a significant role as it offers "freedom of the political and economic subject, especially evident in the contemporary repetition of the idea of individual choice across all domains of life" (Mills 216), but the freedom offered here would be only the freedom of exclusion or inclusion, based on the

economy of the subject. Rather than being operated by the corporates, this biopower should be controlled by the fraternity of different states without "exclusion,""inclusion," and "abandonment" strategies. As Agamban places sovereignty as the centre of biopolitics, he says "it can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power" (*Homo Sacer* 6). Therefore, immunity should be inculcated through affirmative biopolitics without taking care of the inhumanity and criminality of emerging neo-feudal capitalism. Since the state - corporate interventions and the emergence of neo-feudalism in the time of Covid-19 bring forth an exclusion-inclusion boundary for the citizens based on their economical status, it is difficult to avoid the possibility of thanatopolitics in future. Therefore, the relevance and scope of the an affirmative biopolitics in the upcoming neo-feudal world through a global fraternity as a protecting guard from inhuman capitalist policies become all the more important.

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THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL WAY OF SEEING: THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF THE MALAYALAM FILM *IVIDAM SWARGAMANU (IT IS HEAVEN HERE)*

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The term 'cultural landscape' appeared in the academic circle very dynamically in the 1990s. It was the German geographer Otto Schlüter (1872-1959) who used the term for the first time in the academic scenario during the early-twentieth century. He used the term in order to differentiate it from natural landscape which, according to him, was the landscape untouched by human interference. Carl O. Sauer, an American human geographer, is said to have been influential in promoting and developing the concept of cultural landscape. The 1960s' and 1970s' concept of cultural landscape focused on the heritage centres and great monumental and archeological sites. The World Heritage Committee further promoted the understanding of cultural landscape in 1992 by listing cultural landscapes of outstanding universal value as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Essayist and critic J. B. Jackson and his successors expanded the concept of cultural landscape and intensified it to include common landscapes that exhibit everyday ways of life and the role of individuals in creating and making a place and space alive.

Han Lorzing, in *The Nature of Landscape: A Personal Quest,* categorizes landscape into four types: namely, man-made, factual, visual, and emotional depending on the way we look at landscapes. These levels of understanding unveil the influence of landscape on man. According to him, landscape is what we make. Man alters his

environment to suit his needs. This is called the 'layer of intervention.' Landscapes, according to Lorzing, are vehicles that carry our emotions.

It is possible to see what we do to our landscape and what landscapes do to us, by analyzing the film as a text. Each of the characters provide different perspectives of the very same landscape. This plurality in the way of seeing the landscape is due to their different perspective, perception, interpretation, knowledge, generation, environment and background. While analyzing an individual landscape, it is possible to explore the various interpretations of the characters on the landscape.

Ividam Swargamanu (*It is Heaven Here*), directed by Rosshan Andrews, was released in 2009. The film portrays the differing attitudes of the characters towards a particular landscape. The protagonist, Mathews, owns a splendid farm house with 150 cows and a wide range of cultivation. To Mathews, his land is more than an asset with material value; it is his very life. The frequent visits of a land mafia goon, Chandy, triggers tension in the film, and the plot centres on Mathews's struggles to protect his farm and family from the invasive hands of the mafia. Those who see land only as material possession negates its power to produce and cannot understand the mystical bond of humans with their land. The film reveals this very touching aspect the bond between humans and land. An analysis of the plot reveals the various perspectives that the characters have about the same landscape, thus unravelling the power landscape holds over the psychescape of the characters.

The term 'psychescape' refers to the mindset of the people. The landscape is the manifestation of human being's innerscape. This innerscape or mindscape has the potential to decide and shape according to the external influences. The psychescape is the

amalgamation of the attitudes, interpretation, emotion, perception, memories and understanding of a person, place or thing. The term 'psychescape' has been used to showcase the differing attitudes of the characters in the film chosen towards a particular landscape.

The story is about a greedy land mafia goon, Aluva Chandy, who attempts to grab the land of a hardworking farmer, Mathews, who intensely cares for nature, his land, its various inhabitants, and his family. Mathews fights for his land all by himself in his fight against his neighbours, his own villagers, the local administrators, politicians, government officials, and protectors of law, who become the supporters of the land mafia.

Mathews, the protagonist, lives by the dictum that nature can exist without human beings whereas human beings cannot. His approach to nature is biocentric in that he tries to give his best to the flora and fauna in his farmland. He plays music to his cows because he understands that sweet music would influence their moods. He is against injection-induced pregnancy and takes pains to fetch a highbred bull from a far off place to make breeding happen in a natural way. His farmland for him is life itself. He has understood that his life is rooted in the natural community and acknowledges the 'kinship with the earth' (Wirzba ix). He belongs to a time where "farmland has been taken over by agribusiness, the intimate and concrete knowledge of our dependence on others, human and nonhuman, has been usurped by the industrial practice of human control and self-interest" (Wirzba ix). Mathews tries to be unaffected by the tide of selfish motives and exploitation of nature, driven by industrialization and globalization. He lives a very peaceful and happy life in the farmland. The ideas of Wirzba about land in *The Art of the Commonplace* (2012) may be applied to Mathews:

If the effect of an industrial, now increasingly knowledge-

> based economy is to turn us away from the world, the focus and inspiration of agrarian practice is the land. By "land" agrarians mean the life-giving sources of soil, water, and air, as well as the communities of organisms they support. Human life, no matter how much it may aspire to the realm of eternal, unchanging spirit, is thoroughly and necessarily embedded within the land . . . . in many cases human progress has been measured in terms of our ability to combat and control the land, and so to establish human flourishing in opposition to the well-being of the earth. This is a temptation to which even farmers fall susceptible. But it is a temptation we must at all costs overcome, for what is at stake is the long-term happiness and health of ourselves and those we live with. Recognizing the general dis-ease of our own culture, we should now consider how agrarian insights and responsibilities serve as the point of departure for personal and cultural health. (xiv)

Most of the characters in the film perceive land as an article for trade. But Mathews is not a person who falls for that temptation. One day, Mathews is visited by an officer from the Agricultural Department. He asks Mathews if he has plans to sell his plot. To Mathews, the very thought is unbearable. The officer from the Agricultural Department, who is expected to help the farmers to excel in their activities, asks him what profit he hopes to get by just planting vegetables. The officer is evidently part of the real estate business, which is now flourishing as an easy money-making business in Kerala. He tells Mathews that selling land for profitable prices is the best way to make money. The officer negates the potential of the land to produce both yield and power. He particularly neglects the mystical bond that humans have with their land.

Right from his childhood, Mathews had seen his father struggling hard to hold back the land which was confiscated. He had to drop his studies to help his father restore the property. His attachment to the land is not understood by those who see land as just a saleable property.

Mathews is accosted by Aluva Chandy again. One of his assistants approaches Mathews and asks him for how much price he would like to sell the plot. Mathews says straight on his face that he does not intend to sell. Aluva Chandy had already shown the land to a business magnet from Mumbai, who has close connections with the underworld. Chandy can neither see land beyond its materialistic dimension nor can he appreciate or understand the sentiments and feelings of farmers. As the businessman becomes more and more interested in the land, Chandy has no other way but to force Mathews to sell his farm. Chandy buys five acres of land adjacent to the four acres of land owned by Mathews, and he could earn big profit if he succeeded in making Mathews sell his land.

Realizing that Mathews will never sell his land, Chandy garners the support of the whole villagers by making them believe that the village can be made a township, only if he could buy Mathews's land. The villagers, in no time, falls prey to Chandy's selfish motives, when he falsely claims that if Mathews's land could be bought, it would give a good frontage to build a five-star hotel. If this works out, Chandy promises, he is also willing to build modern hospitals, engineering college, and shopping complex in the adjacent land he has bought, which would change Kodanad, the village, into a township. As evidence, Chandi puts up hoardings in his plot, which read: Arcade Shopping Complex, Ria Appartments, Medical Mission Super Specialty Hospital, and St. Stephen's College of Engineering. The villagers become so bewitched by his moves that they start

dreaming of the township and the economic change that would immensely change the face of their village.

The false hopes encourage discussions on the development that would empower the village with generation of employment opportunities, flourishing of markets, development of roads for immediate access to airport, building of bridge, and ultimately a tourist spot. Chandy succeeds in beguiling the villagers, so that all of them take sides with Chandy in instigating Mathews to sell his plot. Mathews finds himself in a very trying situation. Mathews is even offered land at another place as compensation by Chandy. But assimilation to another place is not possible for Mathews. He cares for that land on which he has toiled hard, and with which has developed a connection and unconditional love. He firmly tells the people who come to convince him about the prospects of the township that it is not just he and his family who suffer due to the relocation to a new place but also all the animals on his farm.

Mathews soon understands the scheming of Chandy; he moves the court and, with the help of *amicus curiae* appointed by the court, he wins the case. Just like saving the vegetables and plants of his farm from pests, he gets rid of the pests who are trying to attack his land. Through clever moves, he succeeds in bringing the wrong doers to justice. The court punishes the land mafia and places on record its appreciation of Mathews, the farmer, for his bold stance to save his land. The township dream, by now, got media coverage, and proved a headache to the government, since the Minister of Tourism who had sided Chandy, could not take back his promise to make Kotanad a tourist spot.

The film does not give any sort of a solution to the land mafia problem but shows that anything can be possible if one is right and

has a strong will power to stand by one's principles. The film closes on the note that Kotanad is going to become a tourist spot, a township. Development has to happen and the villagers encourage development since it means betterment of life. The film conveys the message that when all the villagers are supporting the idea of a better life, they are blinded by their material dreams, which prevent them from seeing how important it is to protect the farmland for their own health benefits. They easily forget that they get fresh and pure vegetables, fruits and milk from the farmhouse. Their progressive attitude is one sided. They apparently forget the fact that they are sacrificing the easy availability of organic vegetables and pure milk in the name of a township. In "Beholding Eye," D. W. Meinig refers to some people who :

> . . . look upon every scene with the eyes of an appraiser, assigning a monetary value to everything in view . . . . This view of landscape as wealth . . . represents our general acceptance of the idea that land is primarily a form of capital and only secondarily home or familial inheritance; that all land, all resources, are for sale at any time if the price is right; that speculation in land is time-honored way to wealth . . . . Such a view is clearly the mark of a society which is strongly commercial, dynamic, pragmatic, quantitative in its thinking. (41-42)

Aluva Chandy and all his supporters see the landscape in terms of its commerciality, dynamism, pragmatism and quantitative aspect. This psychescape enables them to see a five-star hotel with a good water frontage in the place of a farmhouse. This vision reminds us of the way a hen is seen as a delicious cuisine by some and a beautiful bird by others. This dynamic psychescape would not have resulted if the farmland had been absent. The whole plot of the story revolves round

the landscape. The landscape is bestowed with a certain power by the characters; for Mathews, it is the spiritual power and for the others it is materialistic power. But the villagers, the politicians, and the administration - all support the selling of the land because they are focusing only on its materialistic dimension. The landscape is powerful enough to instigate people to change and shape their minds correlating with the external influences. For the villagers, the external influence was Chandy's promise of a township. For Chandy, the external influence was the thought of getting a big fat money from the businessman of Mumbai. Mathews, on the other hand, is influenced by the nurturing and loving capacity of the land itself.

Pierce F. Lewis, in his essay, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape," observes that "Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible forms" (12). The farmhouse is a tangible entity that reflects the intangible psychescape of Mathews, his taste, value, memories and aspiration. When his connection with nature grows strong, the whole nature would support him, even if he has to stand in opposition to a whole village. This reminds us of Paulo Coelho's words from his *The Alchemist* that when someone wants something, the whole universe conspires to help one to achieve it. This success story of Mathews is due to his spiritual bond with his land and his firm stand that his land is not for trade. The film clearly depicts the differences between the power of spiritual and materialistic dimensions of psychescape.

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THE *HIJRA* AND THE *HIBAKUSHA*: DEVIANT BODIES IN KAMILA SHAMSIE'S *BURNT SHADOWS* AND FAIQA MANSAB'S *THIS HOUSE OF CLAY AND WATER*

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The idea of "deviant" bodies may be looked upon as examples of a departure from the idea of a universal "normal" body that is a product of the intersection of "superior" strains of race, gender, sexuality, ability, caste or class (Terry and Urla 5). The construction of such bodies as the "Other" is largely a function of identity markers like these, the representations of which in everyday life, literature, and art contribute to the consolidation of the specific categories in which the bodies are located. The Otherness of these bodies is traced through their struggle to combat life while embodying various kinds of deviances, showing how the identity of the Other results in a diverse tapestry of struggles that demand detailed examination. The queer body of Bhanggi (*This House of Clay and Water*) is safest when disguised, either as a religious man, a *qalandar*, or as a transgender woman, a hijra. Raza and his Japanese mother Hiroko (*Burnt Shadows*) encounter suspicion and ostracization due to their status as survivors of the nuclear bomb at Nagasaki - an event embodied in their racial features even more than any scar of injury. As can be seen from the potentially 'deviant' bodies such as the above, it is evident that Othering and the experiences it produces are diverse and challenging.

Adding to the discrimination that the physicality of being a "deviant" body is subjected to is the violence faced by anyone who does not fit the stereotype. This raises several questions: Is there ever

a 'right' way to embody one's sexuality or race? How do acts of clothing, or social behaviour contribute to the creation or recreation of identities? Beginning with the idea that identities are constantly constructed by societal norms,it is possible to trace the ways in which such constructions are performed by bodies denigrated as 'deviant.' Drawing on the ideas of Judith Butler, the consequences of such performance may be studied, focusing on interpreting these as indicators of resistance to Othering through the creation of alternate spaces that offer protection from violence.

The tendency of social forces to create categories of the Other based on identities like race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and nationality betray an imbalance in power as the dominant groups position themselves as the Self to which the Other is seen as a binary opposite. The Self and the Other, here, are constructed identities, which acquire meaning through a confluence of attributes assigned to each category. The Other is discriminated against and oppressed by the dominant Self so as to legitimise their hegemonic position. The existence of the Other is essential for the Self to maintain their social identity. This idea is suggested in Edward Said, who views the Orient and Occident as binary oppositions; the native Other validating the western Self (7). Taking this theory of the social construction of identities forward, is the work of Judith Butler, who attributes the apparent rigidity of these categories to repeated performances of actions associated with each category, coming to the conclusion that performances of social identities can be negotiated. Butler posits that understandings of concepts like gender, sex, and sexuality are deeply embroiled in what she calls the “heterosexual matrix” a set of social norms that restrict gender identities to the male/female binary, presuming that all normal manifestions of gender are cis-gendered and heterosexual. The heterosexual matrix ensures that bodies that do

not follow the prescibed norms are made to exist in a marginalized condition outside the boundaries of the matrix, but still governed by it (*Gender Trouble* 165). To identify as 'non-binary' is not exactly a subversion of the power exerted by the heterosexual matrix because it allows for such deviations while still holding the deviant bodies in an oppressed state. Registering resistance to such a pervasive system of suppression will be possible only by re-appropriating the tools of the system to "redeploy and destabilize the categories of sex and the originally derogatory categories for homosexual identity" (166). Thus, it is by the reiterations of previously existing norms on gendered behaviour that one comes to occupy a gender identity, and these repeated performances hold the potential to rewire the heterosexual matrix. As Butler elaborates in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, power operates in such a way as to not only oppress the lower rungs of the hegemonic structure, but also to create the identity of the oppressed. Calling this the "paradox of subjection," Butler explains that power is sustained by not just active subjection, but by the creation of a condition of dependency that causes the oppressed to both define themselves and their resistance: "subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency" (*The Psychic Life of Power* 2).

When Bhanggi admits that he feels that his body is nothing more than a "communal vessel" (Mansab 5), he unconsciously hits on a truth universal to all bodies that have come to mean only what the hegemonic forces want them to mean. Bhanggi, who self-identifies as a heterosexual male, is forced to live as a transwoman, a *hijra*, in Lahore's red-light district due to his intersex physicality. Bhanggi voices his helplessness when he calls his body, "[the] cage of bones and flesh that holds [him] prisoner… makes a mockery of [him] and

[his] desires, destroys [him] daily", before emphatically demanding of the reader, "How can anyone be held responsible for the body they're born with, ji? Who can help that?" (5). Bhanggi's childhood was marred by being abandoned at birth, after which he was taken in by a transwoman named Gulabo, who raised him only to force him into sex work at the age of eight. The child's body and his care were thus only future "investment" for Gulabo, whose male customers preferred transwomen sex workers to cisgender sex workers simply because the latter were beyond their means. Both Gulabo and Bhanggi's customers are appreciative of his body only as far as it meets their needs, reducing him to the natural ambiguity of his genitalia. The violence that arises from his "deviant" body is solely his "responsibility", as he mentions in the lines quoted earlier (5-6).

Society at large has always reduced Bhanggi to the specifics of his genitals, with personalities being concocted and attributed to bodies like his homogeneously and without their permission. Even though "respectable society" found the likes of Bhanggi and Gulabo reprehensible, they were allowed to exist within certain spatial confines in the old parts of the city, where their actions could be monitored and controlled. Once, when Bhanggi was caught crossing the lines drawn for the hijra community by daring to engage in a surreptitious love affair with a woman, public backlash forced him to leave the locality (44). Everywhere he goes, Bhanggi is hailed by the gender and sexual identities that Gulabo assigned to him when she got him his first customer. The abuse does not stop even after he leaves the garb and occupation she gave him, with physical and verbal vitriol frequently flung at him, in the form of beatings and taunts: "'Go away before I have you beaten,' [the mullah] says, trembling with ire. 'Look at you, with your woman's face and man's torso… What is down there, you hijray?'" (110). Agents of the power structure, like the

neighbourhood moral police and the pious mullah are constantly around to remind Bhanggi of his physical difference, and consequently, his inferior place in the heterosexual matrix.

Bhanggi's discomfort with the traits automatically attributed to one's body is shared by Raza Ashraf, the son of Hiroko and Sajjad, in Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*. With a Japanese mother and a South Asian father, Raza inherited a mix of bodily features that elicited many a curious look in his hometown of Karachi. While Hiroko, having left her own country over three decades ago, is at home with the idea of being considered foreign, Raza grows up troubled by his tendency to not fit in, "flinch[ing] every time a Pakistani asked him where he was from," when their efforts to divine his nativity failed upon encountering his curious facial features (204). He is often teased by street children, "tugging at the skin around their eyes, chanting, 'Chinese, Japanese, money, please'" (182). He tries to minimise his difference from the other boys from their street, avoiding speaking Japanese, his mother's "foreign" tongue in the presence of his peers, asking, "Why allow the world to know that his mind contained words from a country he'd never visited? Weren't his eyes and his bone structure and his bare-legged mother distancing factors enough?" (139). Even as a polyglot, with command of Japanese, Urdu, German, English and Pashto languages, Raza is careful about revealing this talent for acquiring languages to his peers. He got along exceedingly well with his friends, but attributed the camaraderie more to "a studied awareness one he'd had from a very young age of how to downplay his manifest difference," than a friendship based on a shared identity (139). Having been brought up in Karachi, Raza identifies himself as a Pakistani national, but the "manifest difference" on display in every contour of his body kept him from feeling connected to his friends and compatriots. He is well-liked and

popular among is friends and teachers, but is aware that his popularity is something he had to actively work towards by moulding his history, tailoring his multilingualism, and relegating to the background all those aspects of his self that did not represent the archetypal Pakistani boy. However, this self-fashioning is ineffective in minimizing the physical difference of his biracial body in the landscape of Karachi, rendering Raza literally uncomfortable in his own skin.

It is in an attempt to find for himself a space which will allow him to not have to feel conscious of the foreignness of his body that Raza finds himself increasingly enamoured by the idea of America, a land where, in his honorary uncle Harry Burton's words, "everyone can be American. That's the beauty of the place … Even you, I swear it" (185-86). Raza views America as his reprieve, a place that will not make him feel like an outsider, until his naive hopes for an American university education is met with practical obstacles. It is at this juncture that Raza discovers another place and name that would make his extraordinary face look right at home: the training camps of mujahideen soldiers fighting the Soviets at the Afghan border, taking on the identity of the Central Asian tribes of Hazara. During a chance meeting, Abdullah, a Pashtun boy from Afghanistan mistakes him for an Afghan:

> 'Are you Afghan?'
>
> Raza touched his cheekbones reflexively. Until the Soviets invaded Afghanistan he'd never heard that question; but in the last four years, as increasing numbers of refugees made their way to Pakistan, it had become something less than unusual for Raza to be identified as an Afghan from one of the Mongol tribes.
>
> 'Yes,' he said, and felt the rightness of the lie press against his

spine, straightening his back. (164)

Correctly guessing that Abdullah had mistaken his bodily features for those of the Hazara tribe, Raza decides to take advantage of the misunderstanding. It was the first time in Pakistan that someone had instinctively known where to place him and his different physicality. When he is assumed to be a Mongol Hazara, Raza no longer feels the need to "downplay his manifest difference" like he did with his schoolmates from Karachi, instead feeling "the rightness of the lie press against his spine," boosting his confidence. The fact that the only means by which Raza experiences "rightness" in his body is through a lie speaks for the extreme Othering he had encountered till then.

On finding this crevice in the social topography where he can fit his body into, he soon starts living a double life that of Raza Konrad Ashraf, a misfit who increasingly felt out of place in the nation Pakistan was transforming into (Raza's teenage years coincide with the reign of General Zia ul-Haq as President of Pakistan and, as Ian Talbot points out in his book, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, his reign is infamous for the government's "Islamization" policies that changed the socio-cultural fabric of the country irrevocably) and of Raza Hazara, who did not have to be self-conscious about his neither-here-nor-there body and was accepted without question as a Hazara. Raza Hazara had the kind of confidence in himself that was difficult for Raza Ashraf to have, as the former "never had to duck his head forward so his hair would hide his features" (207). When Salma, a neighbourhood girl he felt attracted to confessed that neither she nor any other girl who is aware of his family's history will marry him because he could be "deformed," Raza Ashraf saw that in addition to the difference he felt in his cheekbones, there was another aspect of

his biological make-up that would always keep him a stranger: his nuclear lineage as the son of a *hibakusha* from when his mother survived the bomb at Nagasaki. Akiko Naono defines *hibakusha* as "someone who has directly received injurious effects from an atomic bombing, rather than all who suffered as a result" (334), especially with reference to Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks. It was Salma's rejection of Raza, based on his foreignness and 'deformity' that pushed him further into the persona of Raza the Hazara. Yearning to prove to her that there were people who were not repulsed by him as she seemed to be and counted him as one of their own, he decides to travel with Abdullah the Afghan to a mujahideen supply line in Peshawar. Raza had been moonlighting as a Hazara in front of Abdullah and his brothers, making up tales of family loss in the war and learning to handle assault rifles to avenge this fictional tragedy (198). He gets tired of his new identity after a while, describing it as "wearying" at one point, but is unable to completely abandon the comfortable space it provides him (207).

Like Raza, Bhanggi too was able to find sanctuary right at the epicentre of a religious ideology that refused to acknowledge his existence as a person. After being attacked for transgressing the boundaries of a hijra placed around him by the hetrosexual matrix, he realises that it is easier to survive if he does not reveal his true identity as a cis-gendered man by living under the disguise of a holy *qalandar*. The identity of a hijra, though it put him on the margins of society, offered him protection in the form of Gulabo and the rest of the hijra community of Heera Mandi. However, Bhanggi was not one of them; he never identified as transgender (Mansab 44). The only way for Bhangii to escape a life of being raped and exploited as a sex worker is by donning the robes of a religious *qalandar*, performing the role of a holy man. As he confesses to his friend the *kabbadiyya*, "They all

think I am a holy hijra. Laughter bubbles in my chest but it dies long before it can coalesce in my throat. It's because I wear green robes like Khizr and sit in a dargah. Symbols and masks are enough, ji. No one bothers to look any deeper" (76). In Bhanggi's laughter is the quiet mockery of a moral and religious order that had kept him imprisoned within fear and self-doubt for all of his life. The teenage Bhanggi lacked agency as well as the financial and emotional independence to confess his difference from the only family he has known, the *hijra* community, but the adult Bhanggi is able to subvert this situation to his advantage by holding on to the hijra identity for as far it it offers him protection, at the same time disguising himself as a holy man which keeps him away from the red-light streets of Heera Mandi. Bhanggi retains the support of the hijra community, but the green robes and wise words of a *qalandar* function as "symbols and masks" that allow him to exist in a religious space similar to one he was accused of defiling not long before (110).

Thus, it is possible to see the ways in which Raza and Bhanggi subvert the encoded meanings of their Othered bodies to carve out safe spaces to exist in. Bhanggi attains this through a performance of piety, calling upon "symbols and masks" to allow him to lead a life of dignity and self-sufficiency. The teenage Raza is able to feel unlike a misfit only in a borrowed ethnic identity. Kamila Shamsie's and Faiqa Mansab's novels offer commentary on the Othering faced by bodies that do not align with the dominant paradigms of categories like gender and race, and the lengths to which refashioning helps create alternate identities that preserve the dignity of such bodies while also offering them a safe space to inhabit. Such spaces, the novels argue, do not completely subvert existing power structures, but offer hope of progress.

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