

Comparative Literature

COURSE CODE: M21EG04DE

Postgraduate Programme in English
Discipline Specific Elective Course



SELF LEARNING MATERIAL



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Comparative Literature

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Semester - III

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Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centres around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India. His name is a reminder for us to ensure quality in the delivery of all academic endeavours.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities. The PG programme in English Language and Literature is benchmarked with similar programmes of other state universities in Kerala. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

The University is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The Self Learning Materials have been drawn up with a very clear prescription. It recognizes the autonomy of an adult learner and a journey through the treasures of the curriculum structured with provisions for interactive learning, interrogative reflections on the content and didactic discussion through illustrative scenarios. The University takes a strong position that the learner is to be engaged in a dialogue with the content and the materials are shaped to elicit reflections in the form of questions. The questions of the learner are considered to be the vital milestones in the pedagogy of the system of the University as well as the trajectory of the learner's progression. I would like to request you to bestow your personal attention in generating questions after having an intense dialogue with the content, as it has connection with the internal assessment.

Feel free to write to us about anything that you feel relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,
Dr. P. M. Mubarak Pasha

01.03.2024

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Socio-Political and Literary Content

BLOCK-01

Block Content

Unit 1 : The Origin and Growth of the Comparative Approach

Unit 2 : Translation and Comparative Aesthetics

Unit 3 : The Third World Malayalam Literature

Unit 4 : Romanticism



Unit 1

The Origin and Growth of the Comparative Approach

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ understand the origin and growth of comparative literature.
- ▶ able to understand literature from a global perspective.
- ▶ able to explore intricate connections between cultures.
- ▶ gain insights into the literary aesthetics and expressions.
- ▶ understand the global impact of the printing press on the evolution of literature.

Background

Comparative literature is the interdisciplinary study of texts across cultures. It not only studies the cultural history of a nation but also the linguistic history. It enables one to read across genres and cultures without any national and linguistic borders. Comparative literature involves analysing and comparing literature from different cultures, languages and traditions to identify common themes, motifs and literary techniques. Once we are into reading, we cannot read within a single literature; rather we move across frontiers, build associations and connections within an open space of literature.

Benedetto Croce defined comparative literature as the exploration of ‘the vicissitudes, alterations, developments and reciprocal differences’ of themes and literary ideas across literatures. The comparative approach in socio-political and literary context stems from a fundamental human curiosity to understand differences and similarities among societies, cultures and literary works. It gained traction in the 19th century as scholars sought to explore the vast diversity of human experiences and which enabled them to uncover underlying patterns that might explain social, political and literary phenomena. This approach was influenced by the advancements in anthropology, linguistics and the study of ancient civilizations.

The romantic movement played a significant role in stimulating interest in different cultures and literatures. Romantic writers and thinkers were fascinated by folklore, fairy tales and ancient myths which led to cross-cultural comparisons. The proliferation of translation efforts brought literature from different cultures to wider audiences. As literature from various languages was translated, scholars began to notice common themes and narrative structures across cultures.

Keywords

Comparative Approach, Romantic Movement, Cross-Cultural Connection, Global Perspective

Discussion

1.1.1 The Origin and Growth of the Comparative Approach

The comparative method was formerly used by the scholars to study the relationship between languages. In 1786, Sir William Jones, a British philologist, proposed that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, among others, have a common source of origin. This concept of Jones created a revolutionary idea that languages were not isolated entities and they possess a common lineage which in turn laid the foundation for comparative approach. In the 19th century, scholars like August Schleicher, Franz Bopp, Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm propounded the idea of comparing cognate words of different languages and identifying phonological and morphological shifts.

- ▶ Study the relationship between languages

The term comparative literature first appeared in a series of French anthologies published in 1816. Rene Wellek, in an essay, notes that the term came into use in the 1820s and 1830s in France. He adds that the German version of the term appeared in 1854 in a book by Moriz Carriere. The English usage of the term is attributed to Matthew Arnold which he used in a letter to his sister in 1848. Later on, he emphasised the need for comparative literature studies in an inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1857. However, it was H.M. Posnett who wrote the earliest book on the subject, *Comparative Literature* in 1886.

- ▶ First appeared in a series of French anthologies

Susan Basnett states that the term ‘comparative literature’ originated in an age of transition. As European nations struggled for freedom from the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empire, from France and Russia, new nation states were formed. Thereafter, national identity began to be ingrained with national culture. In this context in order to ignore the heated political context, comparatists made first statements about comparative literature. When we probe into the origin of comparative literature, it is clear that the term



- ▶ Harmony between nations

- ▶ International recognition

- ▶ Three major schools of comparative literature

- ▶ Suitable works for comparative studies

predated the subject. Initially, people having not much ideas about 'comparative' literature, they used the phrase against 'national'. In brief, the term was constructed to bring in Europe and harmony between nations.

Mid-nineteenth century witnessed a systematic approach in defining the term 'comparative literature' by scholars like Jean-Jacques Ampere and Abal Francois Villemain. They wrote on what could be described as histories of literature, unveiling the connections and influences. Later in the century, the subject gained academic status. In 1897, the first Chair was set up in Lyon and subsequent Chairs appeared in France. Comparative literature received international recognition that it was included in institutions of higher education in Europe and the United States.

In the West, we can witness the origin of three major schools of comparative literature. Among these, Sorbonne University in France was the first institution to incorporate comparative literature as an academic discipline. The French school dealt with textual elements and the influence of one literature over the other. It largely remained a European phenomenon. The concept of national literature was prominent in the French school. The concepts of 'Influence' and 'Reception', and 'Imitation' and 'Borrowing' are attributed to the French school. Like the French school, the German school also had its origin in the nineteenth century. European interests and tastes dominated this school. Henry Remak is considered to be the founding father of American School which was formed in the twentieth century. They propounded the comparison of literature beyond boundaries. The American school followed a method similar to traditional literary criticism. The major contribution of this school was the theory of 'Parallelism' and 'Intertextuality'.

Apart from the stream of studies, scholarly publications enriched the term with further definitions. In 1879, Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz, a German scholar, brought out a multilingual publication entitled *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*. Then came two German periodicals which were edited by Max Koch. Later, in 1886, Hutcheson Macauley Posnett published a full-length study of the concept entitled *Comparative Literature* which was followed by the launching of two of the journals in Europe. In 1931, Van Tieghem, a famous critic, proposed that modern literatures provide suitable works for comparative analysis.

The growth of comparative approach in literature was influenced by a range of factors:

1.1.1.1 Anthropology and Evolutionary Thought

Early scholars like Sir Edward Burnett Tylor and James George Frazer played a crucial role in the growth of the comparative approach. Tylor's work in anthropology particularly his concept of "survivals" and "animism" laid the foundation for understanding cultural evolution and the similarities in religious beliefs across societies. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* compared mythologies and rituals from various cultures, highlighting shared themes.

▶ Mythologies and rituals

1.1.1.2 Literary Theory and Methodology

The development of literary theory such as structuralism, post-structuralism and psycho-analysis provided frameworks for analysing and comparing texts across cultures. These theories allowed scholars to delve deeper into the underlying structures of literature. In the literary realm, the comparative approach gained prominence with scholars like Joseph Campbell, who examined the Hero's Journey across different mythologies. Comparative literature emerged as a field, focusing on analysing themes, motifs and narrative structures that transcended cultural boundaries.

▶ Comparing texts across cultures

1.1.1.3 Interdisciplinary Connections

Comparative literature drew inspiration from other disciplines like anthropology, history and philosophy. This interdisciplinary approach enriched the field and encouraged scholars to examine literature within broader cultural contexts. Scholars like Claude Levi-Strauss analysed underlying structures in myths, rituals and kinship systems to reveal universal cognitive patterns that shaped human societies.

▶ Broader cultural contexts

1.1.1.4 Post-colonial Studies

As colonial powers expanded their reach, they encountered new cultures and literatures. This exposure to diverse literary traditions spurred interest in comparing these works to better understand the human experience. The late 20th century brought a shift towards post-colonial and global comparative approaches. Scholars like Edward Said critiqued Eurocentrism and highlighted the importance of considering marginalised voices and perspectives in comparative analysis. The post-colonial movement emphasised the importance of understanding literature from marginalised and colonised

▶ Marginalised voices and perspectives



societies. Comparative literature played a role in highlighting the impact of colonialism on literary creation and expression.

1.1.1.5 Cultural Exchange and Translation Studies

- ▶ Nuances of translation

Comparative literature thrived as scholars explored the nuances of translating literary works. Translation studies illuminated the challenges of preserving cultural and linguistic elements in literature. Scholars like Leo Frobenius and Franz Boas emphasised the importance of understanding cultural interactions to explain societal changes.

1.1.1.6 Digital Age and Connectivity

- ▶ Digital databases and cross-cultural analyses

The digital era enabled easy access to literature from around the world, further encouraging comparisons and cross-cultural analysis. Digital tools and databases facilitated large-scale cross-cultural analyses, enabling researchers to uncover intricate patterns and connections. Advances in communication and travel facilitated the exchange of ideas and texts across cultures. This interconnectedness fostered a deeper appreciation for the diversity of literary expressions.

1.1.2 Contemporary Relevance

- ▶ Interconnected world

Today, the comparative approach remains relevant as it helps us navigate an increasingly interconnected world. It aids in understanding global issues, cultural interactions and the ways in which literature reflects and influences societal changes. In general, the origin and growth of the comparative approach in literature were shaped by a combination of historical events, literary movements, theoretical frameworks and a growing appreciation for the diverse expressions of human creativity across cultures.

1.1.3 World Literature

In 1827, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer, coined the term 'Weltliteratur' or world literature. He used the concept of world literature in his essays in the early nineteenth century but the concept gained wide recognition when his disciple, Johann Peter Eckermann published a collection of conversations with Goethe in 1835. On reading a Chinese novel, he remarked "the characters think, act and feel as we do, and one feels oneself almost to be one of them". He observed that "poetry is a common possession of all humanity. National literature is no longer of much account; the age of world literature is upon us, and everyone must work to hasten its arrival". He perceived the need for world literature that

- ▶ Feeling of universality

was able to invoke the feeling of universality while reading various literary forms. i.e., the powerful influence a great writer possesses on readers irrespective of boundaries. Goethe even criticised the narrow provincialism exhibited by the German writers of his time. A significant change in view from national to world literature occurred with the translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Posnett traces the history of early literature which has undergone a process of development from regional to a wider sphere of the world.

- ▶ Space for cultural exchange

It is generally accepted that world literature is the outcome of several scientific aspects from mythology, history, philosophy, tradition, poetry and so on. It often involves the study of literature, translation and analysis of literary texts from diverse cultures and languages. Now, world literature exists as a space for cultural exchange. It propounds acknowledgement all over the globe.

- ▶ Stood the test of time

World literature deals with literature or great works that stood the test of time and are acclaimed beyond their country of origin. It deals with distinguished literary productions of excellent quality like *The Odyssey* by Homer, *Divine Comedy* by Dante, *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare, *Don Quixote* by Miguel Cervantes and so on. Many of these world's masterpieces are read in translations by the readers which do not affect the greatness of the works.

Here are some key features of World Literature:

1.1.3.1 Global Perspective

- ▶ Interconnectedness of cultures

World literature emphasises the interconnectedness of cultures through literary works. It recognises that certain works hold universal themes and appeal that resonate with people across different societies. The readers will have a broad perception and knowledge of the global significance of literary works.

1.1.3.2 Translation and Reception of Diverse Voices

- ▶ Insights into different societies

Translators play a vital role in bringing world literature to broader audiences. Translating texts allows readers to access literary works from cultures and languages they might not be familiar with. World literature includes writings from various regions, languages and traditions. It celebrates the diversity of human experiences and perspectives, offering insights into different societies and their histories. David Damrosch identifies world literature as a matter of circulation and reception in global context.

- ▶ Layers of meaning

1.1.3.3 Cross-Cultural Connectedness

World literature often involves examining how literary works from different cultures influence each other. This might include tracing themes, motifs and narrative techniques that appear in various cultural contexts. Understanding the cultural, historical, and social context of a literary work is crucial in world literature. It allows readers to appreciate the layers of meaning within the text and the ways it reflects the society that produced it.

- ▶ Comparing works of different cultures

1.1.3.4 Comparative Analysis

Comparative literature scholars engage with world literature by comparing and contrasting works of different cultures. This comparison can reveal shared themes, unique cultural insights and the ways in which literature reflects the human condition. Understanding the cultural, historical and social context of a literary work is crucial in world literature. It allows readers to appreciate the layers of meaning within the text and the ways it reflects the society that produced it. The concept of literary canon is challenged by world literature, as it expands the scope of what is considered valuable and influential beyond a single national tradition.

- ▶ Impact of colonialism

1.1.3.5 Post-Colonial Perspectives

World literature has led to discussions about the impact of colonialism on literary production and reception. Scholars often examine how colonial histories have influenced the dissemination and perception of certain texts. For example, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe which was published in 1958 is a Nigerian work that attained worldwide acceptance for its discussion of British colonialism from the perspective of the colonised.

- ▶ Shared human experience

In general, World literature recognises the richness of human storytelling across cultures and languages. It encourages readers and scholars to explore the vast array of literary works that contribute to our understanding of the shared human experience.

- ▶ Diverse range of literary traditions

1.1.4 National Literature

Indian literature encompasses a diverse range of literary traditions, languages and cultural expressions across the Indian subcontinent. The study of Indian literatures within the framework of comparative literature involves examining their unique features, themes, and connections to global literary traditions. Indian literatures can be analysed on the following aspects:

- ▶ Home to numerous languages

1.1.4.1 Multilingual Diversity

India is home to numerous languages and literary traditions, including but not limited to Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Urdu, Marathi, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. Each of these languages has a rich literary heritage with its own themes, forms and storytelling techniques. National literatures often reflect the cultural, historical and social identities of different regions within the country. They contribute to the broader understanding of the nation's complex diversity.

- ▶ Profound impacts on literature

1.1.4.2 Epics and Mythology

Ancient Indian texts like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have had a profound influence on literature and storytelling not only within India but also across Asia. These epics are often studied in comparative contexts to explore their similarities with other epic traditions. These are works of art, and at the same time serves as a mirror of a perfect human. The cultural heritage depicted in these epics has been carried over in later works of all other Indian languages and several Indian painters.

- ▶ Colonial experiences

1.1.4.3 Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives

Indian literature has been shaped by colonial experiences and the struggle for independence. Comparing Indian postcolonial literature with other postcolonial texts provides insights into shared themes of identity, resistance and decolonization. The post-colonial period in India resulted in the formation of new identities and cultures and therefore Indian writers developed their indigenous languages. Post-colonial writing witnessed the emergence of new consciousness and vanishing of western thought. For instance, Kamala Markandaya, in her novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* portrays the condition of women in colonial India.

- ▶ Bridge cultural gaps

1.1.4.4 Translation and Globalisation

Translations of Indian literary works, both ancient and contemporary, have contributed to their recognition on the global stage. Comparative studies of translated Indian texts help bridge cultural gaps and promote cross-cultural understanding. The systematic translation and publication of regional writings into English and other Indian languages were initiated by the government sponsored Sahitya Akademis in 1950s and 60s. Indian literature often explores philosophical and religious themes, reflecting the cultural ethos of the subcontinent. Comparative analysis can uncover connections between Indian literary works and other religious and philosophical traditions.



- ▶ Intersection of oral and written traditions

1.1.4.5 Oral Traditions

Many Indian literary traditions have oral roots, with stories and poems passed down through generations. Music and literature were in the form of oral songs and thus they easily got transmitted from one language to another. As a result of this, there are many versions of *Bhagavata* stories and retellings of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Comparative literature can examine how these oral narratives intersect with written traditions. Comparative studies can explore the parallels between Indian folktales and those from other cultures, highlighting universal storytelling elements and cultural variations.

- ▶ Address contemporary issues

1.1.5 Modern and Contemporary Literature

Indian literature of the 20th and 21st centuries address contemporary issues, such as globalization, urbanization and social change. Comparative approaches can reveal how these themes resonate with similar global concerns. Contemporary writers like Aravind Adiga, Amit Chaudhuri, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Deshpande, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy etc, with their writings, placed India on the world's literary map.

- ▶ Understanding of the shared human experiences

1.1.6 Intersection with Global Literary Movements

Comparative literature enables scholars to explore how Indian literary movements, such as the Bengal Renaissance or the Progressive Writers' Movement, intersect with broader global literary trends. By studying Indian literatures in comparative contexts, scholars gain insights into the ways in which cultural, linguistic, and historical factors shape literary narratives. Such comparisons contribute to a deeper understanding of the shared human experience across different societies and traditions.

- ▶ Indigenous languages

1.1.7 Bhasha Literatures

Indian Bhasha literature refers to the literary traditions written in various languages indigenous to the Indian subcontinent, excluding Sanskrit and English. These literatures represent the diverse cultural, linguistic, and regional identities of India. The study of Indian Bhasha literatures within the field of comparative literature involves examining their unique characteristics, themes, and interactions with each other and global literary traditions. The key features of bhasha literature are as follows:

- ▶ Richness of India's cultural mosaic

1.1.7.1 Linguistic Diversity

Indian Bhasha literature encompasses a wide range of languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu, Kannada, Gujarati, Punjabi, Odia, Malayalam, and many others. Each language has its own literary heritage with distinct features and nuances. These literatures reflect the cultural, historical, and social specificities of different regions within India. They contribute to the richness of India's cultural mosaic.

- ▶ Different linguistic traditions

1.1.7.2 Themes and Motifs

Indian Bhasha literature often explores themes that are unique to their linguistic and regional contexts, while also addressing universal human experiences such as love, social justice, spirituality, and human relationships. Different linguistic traditions have their own literary forms and genres, including poetry, prose, drama, short stories and novels. Comparative analysis can reveal similarities and differences in these forms across languages. The modern Kannada classic novel, *Samskara* by UR Ananthamurthy serves as the best example which probes deep into the complexities of human existence and societal norms.

- ▶ Oral traditions and folk narratives

1.1.7.3 Influence of Ancient Texts

Many Indian Bhasha literature draws inspiration from ancient texts like epics, myths and scriptures. Comparing how these texts are interpreted and reimagined across languages can provide insights into cross-cultural influences. Indian Bhasha literature often incorporates elements from oral traditions and folk narratives, making them rich sources for comparative studies on storytelling techniques and cultural transmission.

- ▶ Intercultural communication

1.1.8 Modern and Contemporary Narratives

The literature has evolved to address modern challenges, ranging from urbanisation to globalisation. Comparative analysis can highlight how different languages engage with these contemporary issues. Translations of Indian Bhasha works into other languages and vice-versa contribute to cross-linguistic and cross-cultural interactions. Comparative studies of translations reveal the challenges and opportunities of intercultural communication. Various linguistic traditions have witnessed literary movements that respond to socio-political changes. Comparative analysis can shed light on how different linguistic communities engage with common themes and concerns.



- ▶ Unravel the complexities of cultural identity

- ▶ Interconnectedness

- ▶ The earliest text on poetics

- ▶ Style and diction

- ▶ Sound and meter

1.1.9 Cultural Identity and Diversity

Comparative approaches to Indian Bhasha literature help unravel the complexities of cultural identity and diversity in India. They showcase how regional voices contribute to the broader Indian literary landscape. Studying Indian Bhasha literature comparatively allows scholars to explore the intricate connections between languages, cultures and narratives. It provides insights into the ways in which regional literatures contribute to the larger tapestry of world literature and how they resonate with global themes and human experiences.

1.1.10 Sanskrit and Dravidian Poetics

Comparative literature can explore into the distinct yet interconnected realms of Sanskrit and Dravidian poetics, shedding light on the literary theories, aesthetics, and practices of these two major linguistic and cultural traditions within the Indian subcontinent. Here is an overview of Sanskrit and Dravidian poetics in a comparative context:

1.1.10.1 Sanskrit Poetics

Natya Shastra and Rasa Theory

Sanskrit poetics is deeply rooted in texts like the *Natya Shastra* by Bharata, which outlines principles of drama, dance, and music. It is the earliest text on poetics. The Rasa theory, central to Sanskrit aesthetics, explores the emotional impact of art on the audience. The concept of rasa applicable to drama is included in *Natya Shastra*.

Alankara and Riti

Sanskrit poetics emphasises the use of figures of speech (Alankara) to enhance the beauty and impact of poetry. Bhamaha wrote *Kavyalankara* and mentioned upto thirty alankaras in his work. The concept of Riti focuses on style and diction, categorising poetry into various modes based on expression. Vamana in *Kavyalankara Sutra Vritti* describes riti as a particular organisation of verbal structure or the structure of sounds with poetic excellence.

Sound and Meter

Sanskrit poetry places great importance on sound and meter. Complex rhythmic patterns and meters (*chhandas*) contribute to the musical quality of the verse. It is considered inevitable for the purity and rhythmic chanting of Vedas. Acharya Katyayana adheres to a fixed number of letters to make *Chhandas*. There are seven meters in Vedas known as Gayatri, Anushtubh,

Pankti, Jagati, Brihati, Ushnik and Trishtubh. There are further subdivisions of the meters depending on the number of letters. *Chhandashastra* by Pingala is the adisthana grantha that deals with Vedic meters.

Kavya and Mahakavya

Sanskrit literature features various poetic forms, from shorter lyrical poems (*kavya*) to epic narratives (*mahakavya*) like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These texts employ intricate narrative techniques and poetic devices. Being the first epic ever written, *Ramayana* is called Adikavya. It has a vital role in the development of later epics. Many of its translations also attained popularity and are considered great works. *Mahabharata* is the largest epic in the history of literature.

► Various poetic forms

1.1.10.2 Dravidian Poetics

Tolkappiyam and Ettuttogai

Dravidian poetics finds its roots in ancient Tamil texts like the *Tolkappiyam*, which offers insights into linguistic and literary principles. *Tolkappiyam* is the earliest text in Tamil. It explains the grammar and poetics of their literary tradition. The work also offers information regarding the social life, political and economic conditions during the period. The Ettuttogai anthology showcases early Tamil poetry which comprises eight anthologies. Ettuttogai consists of poems varying from short stanzas to stanzas of forty lines.

► Roots of poetics in Tamil texts

Akam and Puram

Dravidian poetry is categorised into *Akam* (inner, emotional) and *Puram* (outer, societal). *Akam* poetry deals with love and personal experiences, while *Puram* poetry focuses on social and heroic themes. *Akam* poetry is basically dramatic monologues without the voice of composers and no poem is addressed to the reader. *Puram* poetry speaks about the socio-political life of ancient Tamils. It also includes the experiences of wise men and saints. Both these classifications had well-organised genres that paralleled one another. Similar to *Akam* and *Puram*, Telugu poetics also divides literature into *Aham* (subjective) and *Puram* (objective) categories, reflecting the internal and external facets of human experience.

► Personal and social themes

Sangam Literature and Prabandham

Sangam is an association of Tamil poets that originated in ancient India. Agasthyar is believed to form the first Tamil sangam which is known to be the Sangam Period. Tamil Sangam



► Tamil literature

literature and Tamil Bhakti poetry (Prabandham) celebrate love, nature, and devotion. These texts are known for their emotional depth and cultural significance. The earliest bhakti poets were the devotees of Lord Siva. Similarly, during this period, there were poets who were devotees of God Vishnu.

Comparative Perspectives

Comparative analysis of Sanskrit and Dravidian poetics can reveal how different linguistic traditions address shared human experiences within their specific cultural contexts. Comparing the aesthetic theories and techniques of Sanskrit and Dravidian poetry can unveil commonalities and differences in their approaches to literary expression. Despite linguistic distinctions, there have been interactions between Sanskrit and Dravidian literary traditions. Comparative studies can explore how these traditions influenced each other. Comparative analysis can track the evolution of poetic forms, themes, and techniques within both Sanskrit and Dravidian traditions over different periods. Through comparative studies, scholars can explore how Sanskrit and Dravidian poetics contribute to the cultural identity and literary heritage of their respective linguistic communities. By examining Sanskrit and Dravidian poetics comparatively, scholars can gain deeper insights into the diverse literary aesthetics and expressions that have enriched the Indian literary landscape.

► Interactions between Sanskrit and Dravidian traditions

1.1.11 Colonial Contact

Colonial contact had a profound impact on Indian Literature, shaping its themes, styles and perspectives. The study of colonial contact in Indian literature within the context of comparative literature involves analysing how different linguistic and cultural traditions responded to the challenges and transformations brought about by colonial rule. The impact of colonialism in literature can be identified as follows:

► Colonial contact in Indian literature

1.1.11.1 Diverse Regional Responses

Indian literature in different languages responded uniquely to colonialism, reflecting the linguistic and cultural identities of various regions. This led to a diverse range of literary expressions across languages like Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu and more. Some Indian literatures responded with resistance against colonial oppression, while others embraced new forms and genres introduced by the colonisers. A significant change that took place among the writers was that they preferred the language of colonisers, i.e., English. They used the language in

► Diverse range of literary expressions

opposition to the colonisers. Comparative analysis can explore how different languages negotiated this balance.

1.1.11.2 Themes and Motifs

Nationalism and Identity

Many Indian literatures engaged with themes of nationalism, self-identity, and cultural pride as a response to colonial rule. Indian literature often critiqued social issues exacerbated by colonial rule, such as economic disparities, cultural marginalisation and exploitation. Comparing these critiques can reveal shared concerns. In addition to this, the writers also dealt with certain sub-themes like alienation, labor exploitation, corruption, hybridity and poverty. Comparative studies can highlight how similar themes emerged across different linguistic traditions.

- ▶ Response to colonial rule

1.1.11.3 Literary Forms and Genres

The introduction of the novel and short story form by the British had a significant impact on Indian literature. Comparative analysis can explore how these forms were adopted and adapted across different languages. English and vernacular literary journals played a role in fostering intellectual exchange and literary debates. Comparative studies can examine how these journals influenced literary movements in different languages. Indian writers also used their languages as a form of resistance against colonial linguistic policies. Comparative study of linguistics can reveal how language became a site of contestation. Translations between Indian and English facilitated cross cultural interactions thereby shaping the literary trends and influences.

- ▶ Introduction of genres like novel and short story

1.1.11.4 Representation of Colonial Experience

Indian literature depicted the colonial experience, portraying the impact of colonisation on individuals and communities. Comparative analysis uncovers the similarities and differences in these narratives. The encounter with colonial culture which led to the emergence of hybrid identities were portrayed and navigated in different linguistic traditions. By comparing the impact of colonial contact on various Indian literatures, scholars can gain insights into how different linguistic and cultural communities responded to a shared historical experience. This comparative approach enables a deeper understanding of the nuances, continuities and diversities within Indian literature during the colonial period.

- ▶ Colonial contact on Indian literatures



- ▶ Printing press and production of literatures

- ▶ Knowledge accessible to a larger audience

- ▶ Hybrid cultural forms

- ▶ Coexistence of the printed and oral narratives

1.1.12 Print Modernity

Print modernity refers to the transformative impact of the printing press and print culture on societies, cultures, and literatures around the world. The study of print modernity in the context of comparative literature involves examining how the advent of the printing press influenced the production, distribution and reception of literary works across different linguistic and cultural traditions. Earlier, only elites enjoyed reading books and were not accessible for the common people. Apart from reading from books, common man gained knowledge orally from folk tales, ballads and sacred texts read out for the public.

1.1.12.1 Dissemination of Knowledge:

The printing press revolutionised the availability of literary and scholarly works, making knowledge more accessible to a larger audience. A new reading public emerged as the result of printed books. It facilitated the spread of ideas, enabling the circulation of intellectual and philosophical discussions across cultures. The printing press played a role in the standardisation of languages, impacting linguistic identities. The availability of printed material encouraged the growth of vernacular literatures alongside established literary traditions. Comparative analysis explores how different cultures responded to this newfound accessibility. It also explores how different languages adapted to print culture.

1.1.12.2 Cultural Exchange:

Print culture facilitated the adaptation of literary works across languages. The encounter with foreign texts through print led to the emergence of hybrid cultural forms and thus integrated foreign influences into their literary productions. The advent of the printing press enabled the development of new literary forms such as novels, magazines and newspapers. The first among those to appear was *Bengal Gazette*, the weekly founded by Gangadhar Bhattacharya. The Comparative analysis explores how these forms were adopted and adapted in different cultural contexts.

1.1.12.3 Impact on Oral Traditions

With the advent of printing, a transition took place from hearing public to reading public. The oral tradition gradually entered the printed realm and a lot of printed materials got orally transmitted for those who were not into reading. Thus, the hearing and reading community merged into a common

group of readers. Comparative literature investigates the effects of print culture on oral storytelling traditions and reveals how printed texts influenced or coexisted with oral narratives.

1.1.12.4 Political and Social Change

Political Mobilisation

Printed materials played a role in political mobilisation and social movements. It laid emphasis on human perspectives and feelings regarding political and social norms that shaped society. Printing began to shape ideas about religion and politics, and society and culture. Comparative analysis can explore how different cultures utilised print for activism and advocacy.

▶ Printing and activism

Critique of Authority

Print culture provided a platform for critiquing authority and challenging existing power structures. Printed words possessed the power to persuade people to think and act differently. This significantly influenced the lives of people. Comparative studies can examine how literary works engage with religious, social and political issues. For instance, religious reformer Martin Luther's criticism of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church came out in 1517, disturbed the religious beliefs of the people.

▶ Challenging existing power structures

Literary Communities

Comparative literature can investigate how print culture facilitated the formation of literary communities, fostering intellectual exchange and collaboration. It reveals transnational literary interactions facilitated by print culture, showcasing how literary ideas transcended geographical boundaries.

▶ Print culture and literary communities

By studying print modernity comparatively, scholars can explore how the printing press transformed literary production, cultural exchange, and the dissemination of knowledge across different linguistic and cultural traditions. This approach provides insights into the global impact of print culture on the evolution of literature and intellectual discourse.

▶ Global impact



Summarised Overview

Comparative literature serves as a bridge, allowing readers to traverse genres and cultures seamlessly, transcending linguistic and national boundaries. In the realm of world literature, a profound emphasis is placed on fostering harmony among diverse cultures through the medium of literary works. Bhasha literature, drawing inspiration from oral traditions and folk narratives, weaves a rich tapestry of cultural expressions. Meanwhile, Sanskrit poetics underscores the significance of the emotional impact of art on its audience, creating a profound connection between the creator and the observer. On the other hand, Dravidian poetics finds its roots in ancient Tamil texts, adding a unique and distinct flavour to the literary landscape. The encounter with colonial culture has given rise to hybrid identities, reflecting the complex interplay between different cultural influences. The advent of the printing press marks a significant turning point, democratising access to literary works worldwide and making them more readily available to an expanding audience.

Assignments

1. Discuss the factors that enabled the development of comparative approaches in literature.
2. Comparative literature is the study of texts across cultures. Justify the statement.
3. Describe world literature from a global perspective.
4. What is the relevance of Bhasha literature?
5. Explain the features of Sanskrit and Dravidian poetics.
6. Prepare a brief note on the impact of colonial contact in literature.
7. The advent of the printing press brought a revolution in the field of literature. Examine the statement.

Suggested Reading

1. Hogan, Patrick Colm. "Beauty, Politics, and Cultural Otherness: The Bias of Literary Difference." *Literary India: Comparative Studies and Aesthetics, Colonialism and Culture*. Ed. Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit. State University of New York, 1995.3-44.
2. Susan Basnett. "Introduction: What is Comparative Literature Today and How Comparative Literature Came into Being?". *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1993

Reference

1. Chandran, Mini. "Into Bhasha and English: Comparative Study of Bhasha and English Translation in India." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2016, 359-376. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/compllit-studies.53.2.0359>.
2. Misra, Vidya Niwas. "Sanskrit Retic and Poetic." *Sanskrit Issue*, vol. 7, no. 3/4, 1971, 1-18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40874432>.
3. Rene Wellek. "Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism." Yale UP, 1970.
4. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "The Politics of Translation." *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Routledge, 1993. 179-200.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

Unit 2

Translation and Comparative Aesthetics

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ know the significance of translation and comparative aesthetics in comparative literature
- ▶ understand the interdisciplinary nature of comparative literature
- ▶ analyse literary works in a broader context
- ▶ understand the remarkable role of readers in interpreting a text

Background

Translation and Comparative Aesthetics are integral components of Comparative Literature, offering profound insights into the cross-cultural exchange of literary works and the analysis of aesthetic principles across different cultures. Translation plays a significant role in making literary works accessible to a global audience, preserving cultural diversity, and fostering appreciation on a broad scale. Cultural exchange is facilitated through translation, allowing for a dialogue between different languages and traditions. Comparative Aesthetics probe into the analysis of aesthetic principles, themes, and styles in literature, exploring how different cultures express beauty, emotion, and artistic innovation.

The preservation of diversity is a key aspect of translation, ensuring that voices, stories, and ideas from various cultures are not confined to their original linguistic spheres. Translators, as interpreters, navigate the complexities of language, culture, and context. Comparative Analysis involves comparing different translations, revealing how language choices significantly impact the meaning and reception of a text in diverse cultural contexts.

Comparative Aesthetics, on the other hand, scrutinises aesthetic principles, uncovering underlying patterns and divergences in how literature is crafted across cultures. Scholars examine themes, styles, and artistic techniques employed in literary works, shedding light on the cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts in which they were created. Aesthetic choices profoundly influence how literary works are received and interpreted, emphasising an interdisciplinary approach that draws from art, history, philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies.



Keywords

Comparative Aesthetics, Translation, Intertextuality, Parody and Satire, Interdisciplinarity, Reader-response, Comparative Cultural Studies

Discussion

- ▶ Literary translation possesses aesthetic functions

- ▶ Cross-cultural dialogue

- ▶ Cultural diversity in literature

1.2.1 Translation and Comparative Aesthetics

Translation of a literary work involves preparation of the version in a new language incorporating appropriate style, diction, tone and imagery. It makes the text available for common readers worldwide thereby promoting appreciation in a broad sense. Literary translations also possess aesthetic functions. In a multicultural world, translation is an effective medium for communication all over the world.

1.2.1.1 Cultural Exchange

Translation is the gateway through which literary works from different languages and cultures can be exchanged and appreciated. It facilitates cross-cultural dialogue and allows readers to access the richness of world literature. In India, comparative literature facilitated the development of nationalism. Translation awakened the national literature thereby creating multiple cultural voices.

1.2.1.2 Preservation of Diversity

Translation preserves and promotes cultural diversity in literature. It ensures that the voices, stories and ideas of various cultures are not lost or confined to their original linguistic spheres. Translators are not mere transcribers but interpreters who must navigate the complexities of language, culture, and context. Scholars like Toury, Lefevere and Hermans state that translation coincides with the will to change. They transform the source text into a few creations in the target language, making choices that impact the interpretation and reception of the work.

1.2.1.3 Comparative Analysis

Comparative literature often involves comparing different translations of the same work. These comparisons reveal how

- ▶ Comparing different translations of the same work

- ▶ Analysis of aesthetic principles

- ▶ Concept of beauty in different cultures

- ▶ How literary works are received by readers

language choices, cultural adaptations, and stylistic nuances can significantly influence the meaning and reception of a text in different linguistic and cultural contexts. Translators face the challenge of capturing the nuances, idioms and cultural references of the source text while ensuring readability and resonance in the target language. This delicate balancing act requires deep linguistic and cultural expertise. Translations not only consider the words but also the soul and spirit of the text. It is not a mere technical transfer to attain equivalence rather it considers linguistic, literary, cultural and philosophical factors.

1.2.1.4 Comparative Aesthetics

Comparative esthetics in literature involves the analysis of aesthetic principles, themes, styles and artistic techniques employed in literary works from different cultures. It seeks to uncover the underlying patterns and divergences in how literature is crafted.

1.2.1.5 Cross-Cultural Exploration

Scholars in comparative literature may explore the aesthetics of, for example, classical Chinese poetry and European Romantic literature. Comparing these aesthetics reveals how different cultures express concepts of beauty, emotion, and artistic innovation. Terry Eagleton in his work *The Ideology of the Aesthetics* states that the concept of aesthetics relates “to the whole region of human perception and sensation”. It develops close to our senses within the boundaries of culture. Understanding the cultural, historical and philosophical contexts in which literary works were created is vital for analysing their aesthetics. For instance, the aesthetics of a Persian epic may be deeply rooted in Islamic mysticism and Persian folklore.

1.2.1.6 Impacts of Reception

Aesthetic choices profoundly influence how literary works are received and interpreted by readers. The act of translation is always renewable, from one field to another and from one genre to another. Comparative aesthetics can shed light on why certain works resonate differently in various cultural and historical contexts. It often adopts an interdisciplinary approach. Scholars draw from fields such as art, history, philosophy, sociology and cultural studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the artistic choices that intersect with broader cultural trends.

- ▶ Comparative aesthetics are pillars of comparative literature

Translation and comparative aesthetics are pillars of comparative literature. Translation facilitates the cross-cultural exchange of literary works, ensuring their preservation and accessibility to a global audience. Comparative aesthetics deepens our appreciation of literature by uncovering the aesthetic principles that shape it, allowing us to explore the diverse ways in which different cultures express creativity and meaning through their literary traditions. Together, these components enrich the study of literature and foster a deeper understanding of the world's literary heritage.

- ▶ Interdependence of texts

1.2.2 Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a fundamental concept in comparative literature. It refers to the intricate web of connections between literary texts, where one text references, influences or resonates with another. The term was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to refer to the interdependence of texts. She states, “texts do not present clear and stable meanings; they embody society’s dialogic conflict over the meaning of words”. Intertextuality enriches the understanding of literary works in several ways. Comparative literature thrives on the study of intertextuality.

Authorial Intent

1.2.2.1 Cultural and Historical Context

Intertextuality reveals how literary texts are in constant conversation with one another. It can involve direct references, quotations or adaptations of earlier works, or it may manifest as subtle allusions and echoes. Intertextuality often reflects the cultural and historical context in which a work was created. By recognising intertextual references, scholars uncover layers of meaning and cultural significance embedded in a text.

- ▶ Author’s intention

Understanding intertextuality helps illuminate an author’s intentions and influences. Authors may intentionally draw upon earlier works to engage in a dialogue, challenge established ideas, or pay homage to literary traditions. Intertextuality is a concept with multiple meanings and applications. In comparative literature, the author makes his choice that suits his intentions and purpose.

- ▶ Evolution of literary genres

1.2.2.2 Genre and Literary Movements

Intertextuality contributes to the evolution of literary genres and movements. For instance, the intertextual connections between Shakespearean tragedies and classical Greek dramas highlight the continuity and transformation of tragic themes

and structures.

1.2.2.3 Universal Themes

Intertextuality can reveal universal themes and motifs that transcend cultural and temporal boundaries. For example, the theme of the “hero’s journey” appears in diverse cultures, from Greek mythology to contemporary literature, showcasing its enduring appeal. Scholars analyse how different cultures and languages engage in intertextual dialogues, tracing influences and adaptations across literary traditions. Intertextuality often emerges from cultural exchange and translation. Literary works translated may maintain intertextual links with their source texts, allowing for cross-cultural comparisons.

- ▶ Universal themes and motifs

1.2.2.4 Reader Participation

Intertextuality invites readers to actively participate in the interpretation of a text. Recognising intertextual references can enhance a reader’s appreciation and engagement with a work. On reading *Gulliver’s Travels*, the reader can relate instances with Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*.

- ▶ Reader involvement in the interpretation of a text

1.2.2.5 Post-Colonial and Feminist Perspectives

In postcolonial and feminist studies, intertextuality can be a powerful tool for deconstructing dominant narratives and giving voice to marginalised texts and perspectives. It allows for the exploration of counter-narratives and alternative viewpoints.

- ▶ Voices of the marginalised

1.2.2.6 Parody and Satire

Intertextuality is often used in satire and parody. Authors play with familiar texts to critique or satirise societal norms, ideologies or literary conventions. For example, *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift is a parody of travel narratives, at the same time, it is also a satire on contemporary England.

- ▶ Critique the societal norms

In comparative literature, scholars examine intertextual relationships between texts from different cultures and languages. They trace how texts influence one another, whether through direct adaptations or thematic resonances. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between literary traditions, cultural exchange, and the evolution of storytelling across time and space.

- ▶ Interplay between literary traditions

1.2.3 Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity is a foundational principle in Comparative literature, as it involves the integration of various academic



- ▶ Integration of various academic disciplines

- ▶ Comparative Literature and Linguistics

- ▶ Framework for exploring the philosophical themes

- ▶ Relationship between visual and textual narratives

disciplines and methodologies to analyse and understand literary works in a broader context. It involves the study of the relationship between literature and other areas of knowledge such as the arts, science, philosophy, history and social sciences. Here is how interdisciplinarity plays a crucial role in Comparative Literature:

1.2.3.1 Linguistics and History

Comparative literature often requires a deep understanding of linguistics and translation to explore the nuances of language, cultural translation, and the impact of linguistic choices on literary meaning. Linguistic analysis reveals how language shapes narratives and themes. Historical context is vital for understanding literature. Comparative literature often draws from history and cultural studies to contextualise literary works within their time periods. This interdisciplinary approach helps uncover how literature events and cultural shifts.

1.2.3.2 Philosophy, Sociology and Anthropology

Philosophy provides a framework for exploring the philosophical themes and ideas embedded in literary texts. Comparative literature often engages with existentialism, postmodernism, phenomenology, and other philosophical schools of thought to analyse literary works deeply. Sociological and anthropological perspectives are valuable for understanding the societal and cultural aspects portrayed in literature. Comparative literature comprises these disciplines to examine how literature reflects and comments on social structures, norms and behaviours. Psychological insight is necessary for the analysis of character development, motivation, and the psychological underpinnings of literary themes. This interdisciplinary lens helps unveil the complexities of human nature portrayed in literature.

1.2.3.3 Art, Music and Visual Studies

Visual culture often intersects with literature, particularly in graphic novels, illustrated books, and ekphrasis (descriptive writing about visual art). Comparative literature incorporates visual studies to explore the relationship between visual and textual narratives. Literature often intersects with music, theatre and performance. Comparative literature, therefore explores the connection between written texts and their performative aspects, including how music and theatre influence and are influenced by literature.

- ▶ Literature reflects ecological concerns

- ▶ Comparative literature and digital humanities

- ▶ Holistic analyses of literary works

- ▶ Interpretation of a text

- ▶ Globalisation and multiculturalism of literature

1.2.3.4 Gender and Environmental Studies

Comparative literature often incorporates gender and women studies to analyse gender roles, identity and representation in literature. This interdisciplinary perspective sheds light on the portrayal of gender in diverse cultural contexts. Environmental themes in literature have gained prominence, and comparative literature integrates environmental studies to explore how literature reflects ecological concerns and the human-nature relationship.

In the digital age, comparative literature increasingly incorporates digital humanities methods to analyse large datasets of literary texts, track intertextual references, and explore new forms of literature in the digital realm. Comparative literature frequently engages with various critical theories, including structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxism, and postcolonial theory, to deconstruct and interpret literary works from different angles.

Interdisciplinarity in comparative literature enriches the field by offering diverse perspectives, fostering holistic analyses of literary works, and revealing connections between literature and other domains of human knowledge. It allows scholars to approach literature as a dynamic cultural artifact deeply intertwined with the complexities of human experience.

1.2.4 Reception

Reception theory was proposed by Hans Robert Jauss in the 1970s to indicate the reader's reception of a text. The process involves altering responses, along with evaluation and interpretation made by the common readers over the course of time. Later Stuart Hall, cultural theorist, in his essay *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, explains that the encoding and decoding model of communication is a form of textual analysis that focuses on the interpretation of the meanings of a text, made by the reader. The meanings may vary from person to person on the basis of their culture, knowledge and experience.

1.2.4.1 Emergence and Growth

Comparative literature as a formal academic discipline began to gain recognition in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its reception was marked by the need to address the increasing globalisation and multiculturalism of literature. Comparative literature faced some resistance initially in academia, as it challenged traditional literary studies that focused primarily



► Bridging gaps

► Literature beyond national boundaries

► Cultural hybridity

► Universal appeal

on a single national or linguistic tradition. However, over time, it gained acceptance and is now a respected discipline in universities worldwide.

One of the key aspects of reception is its interdisciplinary nature. It was received positively by the readers for its ability to bridge gaps between cultures, languages, and academic disciplines. Comparative literature has significant influence on literary theory, contributing to the development of concepts like intertextuality, reception theory, and world literature.

1.2.4.2 Global Perspectives

The field has been praised for its emphasis on global perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and diverse understanding of literature. The reception of comparative literature reflects the desire to explore literature beyond national boundaries. Certain works considered classics continue to be well-received across cultures. For example, Homer's *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* are widely appreciated and analysed within a comparative context. Contemporary authors whose works explore themes of cross-cultural exchange and identity are often well-received within comparative literature. Authors like Salman Rushdie and Jhumpa Lahiri have received acclaim for their contributions to this field.

1.2.4.3 Postcolonial Literature

The reception of postcolonial literature, which often engages with questions of identity, power, alienation and cultural hybridity, is a significant part of comparative literature. Works by authors like Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have received international recognition. Doris Lessing who was from Zimbabwe, published her first novel *The Grass is Singing* in 1950 for which she won the Nobel Prize in 2007. The novel dealt with her African experiences of racial politics.

1.2.4.4 Global Classics

Certain works from non-Western literary traditions have gained prominence and are now considered global classics. For instance, the reception of texts like *The Tale of Genji* from Japan or *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez reflects their universal appeal. What made *Genji* a significant work was the human passions of the novel, which the readers could easily relate to. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* depicts a blend of real and magic. Mythical heroes along with supernatural elements make the novel extraordinary.

- ▶ Aesthetic function of language

- ▶ Cross-cultural understanding

- ▶ Readers are creators of meaning

- ▶ Open to multiple interpretations

1.2.4.5 Translation and Adaptation

The reception of translated literary works is central to Comparative Literature. Translation is not mere rendering of information but it has aesthetic functions too. The era in which the translation is done and the place of translation are the important aspects that affect a translation. Seminal texts like *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri or *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes enable cross-cultural appreciation and analysis. Comparative Literature also engages in debates and controversies, such as discussions about cultural appropriation, the role of the translator, and the ethics of adaptation. These debates reflect the field's dynamic nature.

The reception of Comparative Literature as a discipline is generally positive, recognised for its role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and interdisciplinary exploration of literature. Within this field, specific literary works continue to receive attention and acclaim, often reflecting the universal themes and cultural exchanges that are central to Comparative Literature.

1.2.5 Reader-Response

Reader-response theory is a critical approach within Comparative Literature that emphasises the importance of readers in interpreting and assigning meaning to literary texts. The theory gained prominence in the late 1960s. The theory states that a text is not autonomous and it is the readers who construct meaning to texts. In this, the readers dominate the actual text. They are not passive consumers of the text but creators of meaning. Here's a deeper look at how reader-response theory operates in the context of Comparative Literature:

1.2.5.1 Subjectivity of Interpretation

Reader-response theory acknowledges that literary texts are open to multiple interpretations, and readers' responses are subjective. It disagrees with the idea of valid and invalid interpretations and accepts every interpretation that shapes the text. Comparative Literature recognizes that readers from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds will bring their unique perspectives to the text. Here, reader-response analysis often explores how readers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds engage with the same literary work. This approach highlights the cultural variations in interpretation and the impact of cultural context on readers' responses.



- ▶ Translation and target culture

- ▶ The of idea of interpretive communities

- ▶ Become co-creators of meaning

- ▶ Cross-cultural dialogues

1.2.5.2 Translation and Reception

Translation is a central concern in Comparative Literature, and reader-response theory plays a role here. Translators make choices that influence how a text is received in the target culture. Reader-response analysis considers how these translation choices affect readers' interpretations. Comparative Literature frequently examines how readers respond to intertextual references and allusions in a text. Readers who are familiar with the referenced works may have a deeper understanding of the text, while those without that background may interpret it differently.

1.2.5.3 Historical and Social Context

Reader-response theory in Comparative Literature takes into account how historical and social contexts shape readers' responses. Readers from different time periods or social settings may interpret a text's relevance and significance differently. Stanley Fish proposed the idea of interpretive communities to group the readers according to their historical and cultural contexts. He opines that there is no correct interpretation as each meaning is the outcome of different cultures.

1.2.5.4 Dialogues and Debates

Reader-response theory empowers readers by recognising their agency in shaping the meaning of literary works. It encourages readers to actively engage with texts and become co-creators of meaning. The scholars engage in dialogues and debates about the role of readers in cross-cultural interpretation. These discussions consider how readers' perspectives contribute to a more dynamic and inclusive understanding of world literature.

1.2.5.5 Cross-Cultural Dialogues

Reader-response analysis often reveals the complexities of cultural encounters in literature. Readers from different cultures may bring preconceived notions, biases, or unfamiliarity with cultural references, impacting their interpretations. Comparative Literature, through reader-response analysis, encourages cross-cultural dialogues among readers. By considering how diverse readers respond to the same work, the field gains insights into how literature facilitates communication across cultural boundaries.

In Comparative Literature, readers are sometimes viewed as translators in their own right. When reading works in translation, readers engage in a form of cultural and linguistic

- ▶ How literature transcends cultural boundaries

- ▶ Interactions between cultures

- ▶ Holistic understanding of culture

- ▶ Cultural Interaction

- ▶ New forms of cultural expressions

translation, which can influence their responses to the text. It can be concluded that reader-response theory in Comparative Literature underscores the dynamic and interactive nature of the reading process. It recognises that readers play a pivotal role in shaping the meaning of literary texts and that their responses are influenced by cultural, linguistic, and historical factors. This approach enriches the field by promoting a deeper understanding of how literature transcends cultural boundaries and fosters diverse interpretations and dialogues.

1.2.6 Comparative Cultural Studies

The term ‘Cultural Studies’ evolved in the 1980s, when a cultural turn took place in the field of translation studies. Comparative Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines cultural phenomena, practices, and expressions across different societies, regions, and historical periods. It seeks to understand the complexities of cultures and the interactions between them. It focuses on the study of culture and its products.

1.2.6.1 Interdisciplinary Approach

It draws from multiple academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, literature, art history, linguistics, and more. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a holistic understanding of culture. It explores the ways in which cultural differences affect the social, political and economic phenomena that shape human communities.

1.2.6.2 Cultural Exchange and Identity

Comparative Cultural Studies often explores the ways in which cultures interact, exchange ideas, and influence one another. It considers factors like colonisation, globalisation, migration, and trade in shaping cultural dynamics. Comparative Cultural Studies involves comparing cultural elements from various contexts. This could include literature, art, music, language, rituals, customs, and more. The field examines how individuals and groups construct their identities within cultural contexts. This includes exploring issues of ethnicity, race, gender, and nationality.

Comparative cultural studies investigate the power dynamics within and between cultures, including issues of cultural hegemony, oppression, and resistance. It focuses on the cultural hybridity, where cultures merge and create new forms of expression. This is particularly relevant in today’s globalised world.

- ▶ How language reflects cultural practices

- ▶ Move beyond Eurocentrism

- ▶ The shared human experience throughout history

- ▶ Crisis of comparative literature

1.2.6.3 Literature, Media and Communication

Literature, film, television, and other forms of media are often analysed within Comparative Cultural Studies to understand how they reflect and shape cultural values and narratives. Language plays a crucial role in culture, and the field examines how language both reflects and influences cultural practices and worldviews.

1.2.6.4 Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Comparative Cultural Studies can encompass historical and contemporary analyses. It may explore ancient civilizations, recent cultural movements, or a combination of both. The field often emphasises global perspectives, encouraging scholars to move beyond Eurocentrism and explore cultures from around the world. Comparative Cultural Studies engages with various cultural theories, including postcolonialism, cultural relativism, postmodernism, and critical theory, to analyse and interpret cultural phenomena. It addresses social issues and challenges within cultures, such as racism, gender inequality, religious conflicts, and environmental concerns, from a cross-cultural standpoint.

1.2.6.5 Global Challenges

Comparative Cultural Studies can examine global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and migration through the lens of culture and cultural responses. It acts as a source where people come to know the shared human experience throughout history. For example, *The Plague* by Albert Camus tells the story amidst plague sweeping the French Algerian city of Oran. Thus, Comparative Cultural Studies provides a framework for understanding the diversity and complexity of human cultures, their interactions, and their impact on society. It seeks to promote cultural awareness, cross-cultural dialogue, and a deeper appreciation of the rich tapestry of human expression and experience.

1.2.7 The Crisis in Comparative Studies

The field of comparative studies, like many academic disciplines, has faced its share of challenges and debates over the years. These challenges, often referred to as “crises”, have prompted critical reflection and discussion within the field. It was Rene Wellek, for the first time, in his work, *The Crisis of Comparative Literature* expressed his views on the crisis of comparative literature. Here are some key areas where crises or debates have arisen in comparative studies.

▶ No legitimate theory

▶ Crisis of Eurocentrism

▶ Cultural relativist or Universalist approach

▶ Decolonising comparative studies

▶ Finding appropriate methods

1.2.7.1 Theoretical Frameworks

Comparative studies have grappled with debates over which theoretical frameworks to employ. Scholars have questioned whether the field should prioritise grand theories or focus on more localised and specific analyses. The scholars criticise that the crisis refers to the crisis of the theory of comparative literature as it has not reached a state of legitimate and convincing theory since its origin.

1.2.7.2 Eurocentrism

One historical crisis in Comparative Studies has been the perceived Eurocentrism of the field. Critics argue that it has often centered on Western literature and cultural traditions, neglecting non-Western and marginalised voices. Bernheimer observes that this crisis of Eurocentrism would last forever unless a deliberate transformation from western centrism to a global multicultural comparative study of western and eastern cultures takes place.

1.2.7.3 Globalization

The process of globalization has posed challenges and opportunities for Comparative Studies. It has created new forms of cultural exchange and hybridity but has also raised questions about cultural homogenization. There is an ongoing debate about whether comparative studies should adopt a cultural relativist perspective that values the uniqueness of each culture or a universalist approach that seeks to identify common human experiences and values across cultures.

1.2.7.4 Ethical Considerations

Comparative Studies has grappled with ethical considerations, especially when dealing with the study of marginalised or oppressed cultures. Scholars must navigate issues of representation, cultural appropriation, and the potential harm of research. Another significant crisis in the field has been the call for decolonizing comparative studies. This involves reevaluating and reshaping the field to center non-Western and to address the legacies of colonialism in research and teaching.

1.2.7.5 Methodological Challenges

The field faces methodological challenges, particularly when comparing cultures with vastly different languages, historical contexts, and textual traditions. Comparative literature lacks systematic scope for research and methodology of its own. Finding appropriate methods for cross-cultural analysis is an ongoing concern.



- ▶ Integrating diverse methodologies

- ▶ Digital technologies and comparative studies

- ▶ Broader discourse on global issues

1.2.7.6 Interdisciplinarity

While interdisciplinarity is a strength of comparative studies, it can also present challenges in terms of defining the boundaries of the field and integrating diverse methodologies. The American scholar, Remak, shared his concern that comparative literature loses its significance if it includes almost everything that comes under literature.

1.2.7.7 Digital Humanities

The advent of digital technologies has both expanded and challenged comparative studies. Digital tools and archives provide new ways to analyse and compare texts, but they also raise questions about access, ethics, and the preservation of cultural heritage. The challenge of working with multiple languages in Comparative Studies can be formidable. Language barriers can limit access to texts and create inequalities in scholarship.

1.2.7.8 Global Challenges

Comparative studies have had to respond to global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, migration and economic disparities. These issues have prompted scholars to explore the cultural dimensions of these challenges. Despite these challenges and debates, comparative studies remain a dynamic field that continues to evolve and adapt. It strives to provide valuable insights into the complexities of human cultures, foster cross-cultural understanding, and contribute to the broader discourse on global issues. The crises within the field often serve as catalysts for innovation and critical self-reflection, ultimately enriching the study of cultures and societies.

Summarised Overview

Translation serves as the gateway through which literary works can traverse linguistic boundaries, enabling a global exchange and appreciation of diverse cultures. Comparative literature, a field that often involves contrasting different translations of the same work, sheds light on the nuances and interpretative choices made by translators. The exploration of comparative aesthetics deepens our understanding and appreciation of literature by highlighting the impact of cultural and linguistic variations on the interpretation of a text. Intertextuality, which reflects the cultural and historical backdrop of a work's origin, invites readers to actively engage in the interpretation process, fostering a deeper connection

with the text. Interdisciplinary approaches, such as interdisciplinarity, integrate various academic disciplines and methodologies, enriching the analysis of literature by drawing insights from diverse fields.

The reception of postcolonial literature is a testament to the interdisciplinary nature of literary studies, as it deals with profound questions of identity, power, and cultural hybridity. Reader response theory further facilitates communication across cultural boundaries by acknowledging the role of readers in shaping the meaning of a text. Cultural studies, within the realm of literary analysis, examine how individuals and groups construct their identities within specific cultural contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics influencing literature. However, language barriers remain a formidable challenge, limiting access to texts and creating inequalities in scholarly pursuits. Overcoming these barriers is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and diverse scholarly landscape, ensuring that literature can be appreciated and studied across linguistic and cultural divides.

Assignments

1. Describe the significance of translation in Comparative literature.
2. Explain the role of aesthetics in comparative literature.
3. How does intertextuality help illuminate the author's intentions and influences?
4. What are the benefits of interdisciplinary approach in comparative literature?
5. How did reception of literary works of different categories contribute to the growth of comparative literature?
6. Readers have a significant role in shaping the meaning of literary works. Justify the statement.
7. What are the key aspects of comparative cultural studies?
8. Describe the crisis involved in comparative studies.

Suggested Readings

1. Behdad, Ali and Dominic Thomas. *A Companion to Comparative Literature*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011.
2. Zepetnek, Steven Totosy de and Tutun Muhherjee. *Companion to Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies*. Cambridge U P, 2013.



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1. Chellappan, K. "Comparative Indian Literature: Problems and Perspectives." *Sahitya Akademi*, vol. 30, no. 3, May-June 1987, 101-108.
2. Dominguez, Cesar, Haun Saussy and Dario Villanueva. *Introducing Comparative Literature*. Routledge, 2015.
3. Hogan, Patrick Colm and Lalita Pandit. *Literary India*. State University of New York Press, 1995.
4. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of A Discipline*. New York: Columbia, UP, 2003.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Unit 3

The Third World Malayalam Literature

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ understand the notion of third world Malayalam literature.
- ▶ identify the role of language in literature.
- ▶ relate the poetic forms and styles from various literary traditions.
- ▶ gain a deeper understanding of the epics in Malayalam.
- ▶ understand the impact of colonialism in Malayalam literature.

Background

The terrain of Third World Malayalam Literature weaves together the threads of economic, social, and political challenges specific to its unique perspective. This literary tradition stands as a poignant mirror reflecting the struggles and aspirations of societies grappling with issues that extend far beyond their national borders. It is a literary terrain where the written word becomes a powerful instrument, not just to tell stories, but to voice the collective experiences of people navigating the complexities of a world marked by disparities and injustices. The narratives emerging from Third World Malayalam Literature serve as a compelling testament to the resilience and dynamism of cultures confronting adversity, providing readers with insights into the diverse fields of human existence in regions often marginalised on the global stage.

Translations within this literary realm undertake the intricate task of preserving and conveying the cultural essence of epics, ensuring that the richness and significance of these narratives are not lost in linguistic transition. In this way, Third World Malayalam Literature transcends linguistic boundaries, offering a bridge between the past and the present, connecting generations and fostering a deeper understanding of cultural heritage. It becomes a shared reservoir of stories and wisdom that traverses time and space, emphasising the enduring relevance of these literary works in the contemporary global context.

Keywords

Third World Malayalam literature, Social Realism, Diaspora Literature, Adaptation, Bhakti Influence, Lyric impulse, Hymns, Ottan Thullal

Discussion

- ▶ Malayalam literature from a Third World perspective

- ▶ Tradition and modernity

- ▶ Realistic writings

1.3.1 The Third World Malayalam Literature

The term “Third World Malayalam literature” refers to literature written in the Malayalam language from the perspective of the so-called “Third World” countries. The concept of the “Third World” originated during the Cold War era to describe countries that were not aligned with either the Western capitalist bloc (the First World) or the Eastern communist bloc (the Second World). These countries often faced economic, social, and political challenges stemming from colonial histories, poverty, and underdevelopment.

Malayalam literature, as it pertains to the Third World, can be explored in several ways:

1.3.1.1 Postcolonial Perspectives

Many Third World countries, including India, gained independence from colonial rule in the mid-20th century. Villages were the worst affected regions of colonialism. Post-colonialism left these regions a mix of traditional cultural practices and a slow progress towards modern ways. Therefore, Postcolonial Malayalam literature often reflects the struggles and aspirations of these societies as they sought to establish their identities and assert their cultural, social, and political autonomy. A typical example is the novel, *Khasakinte Ithihasam* by O.V. Vijayan depicts the picture of a village deeply rooted in traditions struggling to incorporate the modern ways.

1.3.1.2 Social Realism

Malayalam literature from the Third World often inquires into the harsh realities of life in these regions. Authors may address issues such as poverty, social injustice, rural-urban divides, and the impact of globalization. The origin of social realistic writings spoke for the marginalised, and provided voice to the voiceless. Such kind of literature explores questions of identity, particularly in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies like India. Authors examine how various communities negotiate their identities and navigate issues of belonging and marginalisation. They used their writings to discuss the contentions between colonial modernity and native traditions.



- ▶ Influence of globalisation on local cultures

- ▶ Cross-cultural dialogues

- ▶ Concepts of otherness and resistance

1.3.1.3 Globalization and Cultural Exchange

Third World Malayalam literature may reflect the influence of globalisation on local cultures. This can involve the incorporation of global themes, styles, and languages into Malayalam literature. Modern trends in Malayalam literature include science fiction, fantasy, magical realism and psychological thrillers. These themes which are new in Malayalam literature engage the readers with innovative approach and enable them to explore new literary realms. Some authors use their works to address political and social issues, advocating for change and social justice. These texts can be seen as part of a broader literary activism within the Third World.

1.3.1.4 Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Malayalam literature in the Third World may engage with other literary traditions and cultures, contributing to cross-cultural dialogues. Malayalam literature had a remarkable influence of foreign languages but at the same time, the contact with other cultures flourished the literature. This interaction enriched the literary landscape and fostered a more global perspective. Language plays a significant role in Third World Malayalam literature. Authors explore the relationship between language, identity, and power, particularly in regions with linguistic diversity.

1.3.1.5 Postcolonial Theory

The study of Third World Malayalam literature often draws from postcolonial theory to analyse the impact of colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism on literary production and cultural expression. The theory is based on concepts of otherness and resistance. The translation of Third World Malayalam literature into other languages can be a means of showcasing the voices and perspectives of these regions to a broader audience, contributing to intercultural dialogue.

1.3.1.6 Diaspora Literature

Malayalam literature created by authors from Third World regions who have migrated to other countries can also be a significant part of this literary tradition. These works may reflect the experiences of diaspora communities and their engagement with both homeland and host culture. As a result, Third World Malayalam literature is a multifaceted field that explores the literary production of Malayalam-speaking

- ▶ Contribute to the global conversation

- ▶ Adaptations in Malayalam literature

- ▶ Transcreation goes beyond literal translation

- ▶ Reinterpret the themes and narratives

- ▶ Retell stories from world literature

regions within the broader context of postcolonialism, social justice, cultural exchange, and global interconnectedness. It provides a platform for writers to engage with critical issues facing their societies and to contribute to the global conversation on culture and identity.

1.3.2 The Question of Adaptations

Adaptations in Malayalam literature from other literary traditions involve the translation and reinterpretation of works originally written in languages other than Malayalam. These adaptations are a vital part of the cultural and literary exchange between different linguistic and cultural communities. Here are some common forms of adaptations in Malayalam literature from other literatures.

1.3.2.1 Translation and Transcreation

Translation is the most common form of adaptation, where literary works from languages like English, Hindi, Tamil, or other regional languages are translated into Malayalam. Skilled translators play a crucial role in preserving the essence and nuances of the original text while making it accessible to Malayalam-speaking readers. Transcreation goes beyond literal translation and involves creative reimagining of the original work to capture its spirit, cultural context, and linguistic intricacies. Transcreators are often bilingual authors or poets with a deep understanding of both languages.

1.3.2.2 Adaptation of Classics

Classic works of world literature, such as the works of Shakespeare, Tolstoy, or Dickens, have been adapted into Malayalam. These adaptations reinterpret the themes and narratives in a way that resonates with Malayali readers. Folk tales, legends, and myths from various cultures are adapted into Malayalam literature. These adaptations often infuse local cultural elements and settings while retaining the core narrative. Scholarly works and literary criticism from other languages are also translated and adapted to enhance the understanding and appreciation of literature within the Malayalam literary community.

1.3.2.3 Literary Influences and Retellings

Malayalam authors may draw inspiration from the literary styles, themes, or techniques of renowned authors from other languages and cultures. This influence can be seen in their original works. Authors may choose to retell or reinterpret



famous stories from world literature, offering a fresh perspective or a contemporary spin on familiar tales. These adaptations provide new insights and relevance to timeless narratives.

1.3.2.4 Cultural Exchange

- ▶ Exposure to diverse literary traditions.

Adaptations from other literatures facilitate cultural exchange and promote cross-cultural understanding. Malayalam literature benefits from exposure to diverse literary traditions. Some adaptations from other literature are done with a focus on addressing contemporary issues or themes that resonate with Malayalam-speaking audiences.

1.3.2.5 Poetic Forms and Styles

- ▶ Unique poetic expressions

Malayalam poets may experiment with poetic forms, styles, or techniques borrowed from other literary traditions. This fusion of styles can lead to innovative and unique poetic expressions. For instance, *Kurukshetram* by Ayyappa Paniker depicted contemporary life and its dilemmas using surreal imagery and the nature of modernism in Malayalam poetry. Paniker adopted the style of free mixing of meters and non-linear style apart from the conventional pattern.

1.3.2.6 Cross-Media Adaptations

- ▶ Simplify complex narratives for young readers.

Literary works from other languages may be adapted into various media in Malayalam, including films, theater productions, radio dramas, and digital content. Adaptations of classic children's stories from global literature are common in Malayalam children's literature. These adaptations often simplify complex narratives for young readers.

- ▶ Adaptations enrich Malayalam literature

Adaptations from other literary traditions enrich Malayalam literature by introducing new ideas, themes, and narrative techniques. They contribute to the diversity and global perspective of Malayalam literature while fostering a deeper appreciation of world literature among Malayalam-speaking readers.

1.3.3 The Translations of the Epics

- ▶ Popularisation of Malayalam literature

The translations of the epics, particularly the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, into Malayalam literature hold immense significance in Kerala's cultural and literary heritage. These adaptations have not only preserved the essence of these timeless epics but have also contributed to the enrichment and popularisation of Malayalam literature. Here's a closer look at

the translations of these epics into Malayalam.

1.3.3.1 *Ramayana* in Malayalam Literature

Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu

The *Adhyatma Ramayana*, attributed to Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, is one of the earliest and most revered translations of the *Ramayana* into Malayalam. Ezhuthachan's rendition is not a literal translation but an artistic and spiritual adaptation that aims to convey the moral and spiritual teachings of the epic to the common people. It is considered a foundational work in Malayalam literature and had a profound influence on the language and culture of Kerala.

1.3.3.2 Modern Translations

In contemporary times, scholars and writers have undertaken the task of translating the *Ramayana* into Malayalam in various forms, including prose and verse. These translations aim to capture the nuances and cultural significance of the epic for modern readers.

- ▶ One of the ancient Indian epics

Mahabharata in Malayalam Literature

The Mahabharatha Kilippattu

The *Mahabharatha Kilippattu* is a unique and artistic adaptation of the *Mahabharata*, one of the ancient Indian epics, created by Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, 16th-century Malayalam poet. This adaptation is known for its distinctive style and presentation, similar to the *Ramayana Kilippattu*.

Modern Retellings

Alongside traditional translations, there have been modern retellings and adaptations of the *Mahabharata* in Malayalam literature. These adaptations often reimagine the epic's characters and stories in contemporary settings or offer new interpretations of its timeless themes. These translations of the epics into Malayalam have served multiple purposes. They have made these revered stories and moral teachings accessible to a wider Malayalam-speaking audience, providing cultural and spiritual guidance. These adaptations have contributed to the evolution and enrichment of the Malayalam language and literary tradition. The adaptations continue to be cherished and

- ▶ Adaptations often reimagine the epic's characters



celebrated as significant cultural and literary assets in Kerala.

1.3.4 Ezhuthachan

Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, often simply referred to as Ezhuthachan, holds a revered and foundational place in the world of Malayalam literature. He is widely recognised as the “Father of Malayalam Language” and his contributions to the development and popularisation of Malayalam literature are profound. He is a pioneer in Malayalam literature who introduced religious textuality in Kerala. Here’s a closer look at his role in Malayalam literature:

- ▶ Religious textuality in Kerala

1.3.4.1 Standardisation of Malayalam Language

Ezhuthachan played a pivotal role in standardising the Malayalam language. Before his time, Malayalam was in a state of linguistic flux, influenced heavily by Tamil and Sanskrit. Ezhuthachan’s efforts in shaping and refining Malayalam grammar and script contributed significantly to the language’s evolution into a distinct and literary form.

- ▶ Refining Malayalam

1.3.4.2 Educational Reformer

Ezhuthachan was not only a poet but also an advocate for education. He recognised the importance of literacy and made significant efforts to promote the use of the Malayalam script in education. His influence contributed to the spread of education among the masses.

- ▶ Spread of education among the masses

1.3.4.3 Ramayana in Malayalam

Ezhuthachan’s most celebrated work is his Malayalam adaptation of the *Ramayana*, known as *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu*. This epic retelling of the story of Lord Rama in Malayalam made the narrative accessible to the common people of Kerala. It became a cornerstone of Malayalam literature and remains a celebrated text to this day.

- ▶ Accessible to the common people

1.3.4.4 Bhakti Influence

Ezhuthachan’s literary works were deeply influenced by the Bhakti movement, a devotional trend within Hinduism. His writings often carried moral and ethical lessons and emphasised the significance of devotion to God. The movement is considered a social reformation in Hinduism to spirituality irrespective of one’s caste or gender.

- ▶ Spirituality irrespective of caste and gender

1.3.4.5 Cultural Icon

Ezhuthachan is considered a cultural icon in Kerala, and

► Legacy of Ezhuthachan

his birthplace in Tirur is a site of reverence and pilgrimage for Malayalam-speaking people. His legacy has transcended literature and extended into the cultural and spiritual fabric of Kerala.

► Ezhuthachan Puraskaram

1.3.4.6 Literary Legacy

Ezhuthachan's contributions to Malayalam literature remain celebrated. He is honoured with the title "Ezhuthachan," which means "teacher" or "guru," signifying his role as an educator and literary guide. The highest literary honour awarded by the Government of Kerala is known as the Ezhuthachan Puraskaram. In honour of his contributions, the Kerala government has instituted the "Ezhuthachan Puraskaram," an annual literary award presented to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to Malayalam literature.

► Cultural icon

In short, Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan's significance in Malayalam literature cannot be ignored. His efforts in standardising the language, promoting education, and making classical epics accessible to the masses through his literary works have left an enduring legacy. He is celebrated as a pioneer and cultural icon in the literary heritage of Kerala.

► Devotional poetry

1.3.5 The Lyric Impulse and *Krishnagatha*

In Malayalam literature, the lyric impulse is a prominent feature, and *Krishnagatha* written by Cherusseri, is a prime example of how this lyrical tradition has been expressed in the context of devotional poetry. The lyric impulse in Malayalam literature refers to the inclination of poets to express their emotions, thoughts, and experiences in a personal and emotive manner. This impulse often results in poetry that is highly subjective, passionate, and introspective.

Characteristics of the lyric impulse in Malayalam literature include:

► Convey a wide range of emotions

1.3.5.1 Emotional Intensity

Malayalam poets often infuse their work with profound emotional depth. They use their verses to convey a wide range of emotions, from love and longing to devotion and spirituality. They employed a range of stylistic devices so that the language appears aesthetically rich to move the readers into the narrative world.

1.3.5.2 Personal Perspective

Poets frequently adopt a first-person perspective in their



- ▶ Read through the author's mind

poetry, allowing readers to connect intimately with the poet's own experiences and emotions. This personal touch enhances the relatability and authenticity of the work. It allows the readers to read through the author's mind and experience. Personal narratives also reflect social and cultural values prevalent in the society.

- ▶ Create a sensory experience for the readers

1.3.5.3 Vivid Imagery

Lyrical poetry in Malayalam is known for its vivid and evocative imagery. Poets use rich metaphors, similes, and descriptive language to create a sensory experience for the reader, immersing them in the poet's world. The use of images add visual richness and provide the best aesthetic experience to the readers.

1.3.5.4 Themes

The lyric impulse in Malayalam literature explores a wide range of themes, including love, nature, spirituality, and devotion. These themes are often intertwined with the poet's personal experiences and reflections.

Krishnagatha

Krishnagatha is a quintessential example of the lyric impulse in Malayalam literature. It is a devotional poem written by Cherusseri Namboothiri in the 16th century, focusing on the life and exploits of Lord Krishna. Here's how *Krishnagatha* embodies the lyric impulse:

- ▶ Lyric impulse in Malayalam literature

1.3.5.5 Emotional Devotion

Cherusseri's deep devotion to Lord Krishna is palpable throughout the poem. His verses are infused with profound emotional devotion, making it a deeply personal and heartfelt expression of his faith. The poet frequently addresses Lord Krishna directly, establishing a personal connection with the deity. This direct communication reflects the personal perspective that characterises the lyric impulse.

- ▶ Deep devotion to Lord Krishna

1.3.5.6 Spiritual Exploration

Krishnagatha is replete with vivid descriptions and imagery, vividly portraying the stories and incidents from Krishna's life. This use of imagery enhances the emotional impact of the poem. Cherusseri's exploration of themes related to devotion, spirituality, and the divine is central to *Krishnagatha*. These themes are intertwined with his own spiritual journey, showcasing the lyric impulse in a devotional context.

- ▶ Spiritual journey

- ▶ Exploration of various themes

- ▶ Devotional songs

- ▶ Celebration of nature, spirituality, and moral values

- ▶ Aesthetics and spirituality

- ▶ Sense of community and devotion

In short, the lyric impulse is a fundamental aspect of Malayalam literature, characterised by emotional intensity, personal perspective, vivid imagery, and the exploration of various themes. *Krishnagatha* by Cherusseri Namboothiri exemplifies this tradition by offering a profoundly lyrical and devotional portrayal of Lord Krishna's life and Cherusseri's own spiritual journey.

1.3.6 Hymns

Hymns hold a significant place in Malayalam literature and culture. Malayalam hymns, often referred to as "Keerthanam" or "Kirtan," are devotional songs or verses that are typically composed in praise of deities, particularly in the context of Hinduism. Here's an overview of hymns in Malayalam literature:

1.3.6.1 Devotional Tradition and Versatility:

Malayalam hymns are deeply rooted in the devotional traditions of Kerala. They are an integral part of religious rituals, festivals, and ceremonies in the region. Hymns in Malayalam literature cover a wide range of themes. While many are dedicated to praising Hindu deities like Lord Krishna, Lord Shiva, or Goddess Saraswati, others may celebrate nature, spirituality, and moral values. This versatility allows hymns to cater to various aspects of life and spirituality.

1.3.6.2 Linguistic Beauty

Malayalam hymns are known for their linguistic beauty and lyrical qualities. Poets and composers craft verses that are not only spiritually meaningful but also aesthetically pleasing. The use of metaphors, alliteration, and rhythmic patterns adds to the charm of these hymns. Hymns often serve as a form of devotional poetry. Poets draw upon their own spiritual experiences and beliefs to compose verses that resonate with the devotees. These poems are often filled with deep emotions and heartfelt devotion.

1.3.6.3 Prominent Hymn Writers

Several notable poets and composers have contributed to the genre of Malayalam hymns. Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, Cherusseri Namboothiri, and Narayana Guru are among the prominent figures known for their devotional verses and hymns. Hymns play a crucial role in religious rituals and ceremonies in Kerala. They are recited or sung during temple festivals, religious processions, and other



spiritual events, fostering a sense of community and devotion among the participants.

1.3.6.4 Cultural Heritage

- ▶ Sung in religious gatherings and celebrations

- ▶ Spiritual depth and musicality

- ▶ Hymn dedicated to Lord Ayyappa

Malayalam hymns are not only a religious expression but also a cultural heritage. They are passed down through generations, preserving the language, traditions, and spirituality of Kerala. Malayalam hymns are meant to be sung or chanted, often accompanied by musical instruments like the harmonium or traditional percussion instruments. The musical aspect enhances the devotional experience, making hymns an integral part of religious gatherings and celebrations.

Hymns in Malayalam literature are a cherished form of devotional expression, combining linguistic beauty, spiritual depth, and musicality. They are an integral part of Kerala's cultural and religious heritage, serving as a means of connecting with the divine and expressing deep devotion and reverence.

Malayalam literature boasts a rich tradition of hymns and devotional poetry. Here's an example of a famous Malayalam hymn "Harivarasanam". The renowned Malayalam poet and composer, Kumbakudi Kulathur Iyer composed this hymn. "Harivarasanam" is a devotional hymn dedicated to Lord Ayyappa, a revered deity in the Sabarimala temple in Kerala. The hymn is sung during the nightly closing ceremony at the temple. The hymn is celebrated for its linguistic beauty and lyrical qualities. It is written in a poetic and rhythmic style that captures the devotion and mysticism associated with Lord Ayyappa.

Opening Lines

Harivarasanam Viswamohanam

Haridadhiswaram Aaradhyapadhukam

Arivimardhanam Nithyanarthanam

Hariharatmajam Devamashreye

Meaning

The hymn begins with praise for Lord Ayyappa, addressing Him as "Harivarasanam" (the Lord who is seated in the abode of Hari, a reference to Lord Vishnu). It goes on to describe Lord Ayyappa's divine attributes and his role as the son of Hari (Vishnu) and Hara (Shiva). The hymn conveys devotion, surrender, and a sense of awe towards the deity. It is sung during the closing ritual at the Sabarimala temple, known as

- ▶ Sung during the closing ritual at the Sabarimala temple

- ▶ A prominent poet and devotee

- ▶ Devotion to Lord Guruvayurappan

- ▶ Dialogue between Poonthanam and Lord Krishna

- ▶ Intimate relationship with the deity

“Aarati,” as the deity is put to rest for the night. It is a moment of deep spiritual significance for the devotees who gather to witness and participate in this ritual. This hymn is not only a religious expression but also a cultural symbol in Kerala. “Harivarasanam” is just one example of the rich tradition of hymns and devotional poetry in Malayalam literature. These hymns serve as a means of spiritual expression, connecting devotees with the divine and contributing to the cultural and religious heritage of Kerala.

1.3.7 Poonthanam

Poonthanam, also known as Poonthanam Namboothiri, was a prominent poet and devotee in the realm of Malayalam literature. He lived in the 16th century, during a time when the Bhakti movement was gaining momentum in Kerala. Poonthanam’s contributions to Malayalam literature are primarily in the form of devotional poetry, and his most famous work is the “Jnanappana”.

Poonthanam was born in 1547 in Keezhattoor, a village in present-day Kerala, India. He was born into a Brahmin family and was deeply devoted to Lord Guruvayurappan, a form of Lord Krishna. His devotion and love for the deity would become a central theme in his literary works.

Here’s a more detailed look at Poonthanam and his literary significance:

1.3.7.1 Jnanappana

Poonthanam is best known for his composition, *Jnanappana*, which translates to “The Song of Wisdom.” It was written while he was passing through grief due to the loss of his child. He became a detached man after this incident and a great devotee of Krishna. This devotional poem consists of 101 verses and is revered for its simplicity, lyrical beauty, and profound spiritual insights. The poem is a dialogue between Poonthanam and Lord Krishna, where Poonthanam expresses his doubts and questions about life and spirituality, and Lord Krishna provides answers and guidance. The poetic work is simple and also appealing.

1.3.7.2 Devotion to Guruvayurappan

Poonthanam’s devotion to Lord Guruvayurappan was unwavering. He believed in a personal and intimate relationship with the deity and saw him as the ultimate source of wisdom and salvation. This devotion is vividly portrayed in *Jnanappana*.



- ▶ Universal themes of devotion

- ▶ Wisdom through devotion

- ▶ Many commentaries on *Jnanappana*

- ▶ Devotion and wisdom

- ▶ Celebrated figure in Malayalam literature

1.3.7.3 Impact on Malayalam Literature

Poonthanam's *Jnanappana* is considered a masterpiece of Malayalam literature. Its verses are often sung or recited in Kerala, especially in the context of devotional gatherings and festivals. The poem's universal themes of devotion, faith, and seeking spiritual wisdom continue to resonate with people of all backgrounds.

1.3.7.4 Spiritual Philosophy

Through *Jnanappana*, Poonthanam explored profound philosophical and spiritual concepts. He emphasised the importance of surrendering to the divine, letting go of ego, and seeking wisdom through devotion. His teachings continue to inspire spiritual seekers and scholars.

1.3.7.5 Legacy

Poonthanam's influence on Malayalam literature and culture endures to this day. His poetry remains a significant part of the devotional and cultural fabric of Kerala. Many renditions and commentaries on *Jnanappana* have been created over the centuries, further cementing its place in Malayalam literary history.

Poonthanam was a distinguished Malayalam poet and devotee known for his devotional masterpiece *Jnanappana*. His work continues to be celebrated for its spiritual depth, poetic beauty, and profound insights into the nature of devotion and wisdom. Poonthanam's legacy lives on as his poetry continues to inspire and resonate with people seeking spiritual growth and understanding.

1.3.8 Kunjan Nambiar

Kunjan Nambiar, born in the 18th century, is a celebrated figure in Malayalam literature and performing arts, particularly for his contributions to the art form of "Ottan Thullal." He was born in the village of Killikurissimangalam in the Palakkad district of Kerala, into a family of artists and grew up with a natural inclination for performing arts. Here's a detailed overview of Kunjan Nambiar and his significance in Malayalam literature and culture:

1.3.8.1 Ottan Thullal

Kunjan Nambiar is most renowned for his role in popularising and refining the art of Ottan Thullal, a traditional performing art form in Kerala. Ottan Thullal combines dance,

- ▶ Popularising Ottan Thullal

music, and poetry and is known for its wit, humor, and social commentary. Kunjan Nambiar is considered the father of Ottan Thullal as he developed and elevated the art form to its current stature.

- ▶ Introduced new rhythmic patterns

1.3.8.2 Innovation and Contributions

Kunjan Nambiar made several innovations to Ottan Thullal. He introduced new rhythmic patterns and made it more accessible to the common people by using simple and understandable language in his compositions. His performances often touched upon contemporary social and political issues, adding a layer of satire and commentary to the art form. Nambiar's compositions for Ottan Thullal are characterised by their rhythmic and lyrical qualities. His works are still widely performed, and his wit and humor continue to resonate with audiences. Some of his well-known works include "Kalyana Sougandhikam," "Sankaracharitam," and "Bhima." These compositions are not only entertaining but also carry moral and ethical messages.

- ▶ Indelible mark on Kerala's cultural heritage

1.3.8.3 Recognition

Kunjan Nambiar's contributions to Ottan Thullal and Malayalam literature have left an indelible mark on Kerala's cultural heritage. Ottan Thullal, with its distinct style and humorous storytelling, remains a popular and cherished art form in the state. Nambiar's legacy is celebrated annually through various cultural events and competitions dedicated to Ottan Thullal in his honour. Kunjan Nambiar's work has received recognition beyond Kerala. He is considered one of the most significant poets and playwrights in Malayalam literature. His contributions to theater and literature earned him a special place in the hearts of Malayalam-speaking people. Kunjan Nambiar was a pioneering figure in Malayalam literature and performing arts, particularly for his role in popularising and refining Ottan Thullal. His wit, humor, and social commentary in his compositions continue to entertain and educate audiences, making him an enduring and celebrated figure in Kerala's cultural history.

- ▶ Transformation in the literary landscape

1.3.9 Colonial Modernity

Colonial modernity refers to the period in Malayalam literature during British colonial rule when there was a significant transformation in the literary landscape influenced by Western ideas and cultural exchange. Here's a more detailed exploration of colonial modernity in Malayalam literature:



- ▶ Printing press in Kerala

- ▶ Emergence of literary magazines and journals

- ▶ Incorporate Western literary forms and themes

- ▶ Devotion and wisdom

- ▶ Development of modern Malayalam literature

- ▶ Experimented with language and narrative techniques

1.3.9.1 Introduction of Printing Press

The arrival of the printing press in Kerala during the colonial period had a profound impact on Malayalam literature. It made books more widely accessible, which led to an increase in literacy rates and the dissemination of new ideas.

1.3.9.2 Literary Magazines and Journals

The colonial period saw the emergence of literary magazines and journals in Malayalam. These publications provided a platform for writers to share their work and engage in intellectual discourse. *Kerala Kaumudi*, founded in 1911, is an example of such a magazine that played a pivotal role in promoting modern Malayalam literature.

1.3.9.3 Influence of Western Literature

With increased contact with Western culture, Malayalam literature began to incorporate Western literary forms and themes. European literary styles and genres, such as the novel and short story, started to find their place in Malayalam literature. The Indian middle class began to glorify and imitate the west finding themselves in the novel culture.

1.3.9.4 Social Reforms and Enlightenment

The colonial period also coincided with social reforms and the spread of Enlightenment ideas. Writers began to use their literary works as a medium to address social issues, challenge traditional norms, and advocate for reforms in areas like caste, gender, and education. Social practices like Sati and Infanticide and also religious rituals like human sacrifice were abolished.

1.3.9.5 Prominent Writers

Several prominent writers emerged during this period who contributed to the development of modern Malayalam literature. Writers like Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, and Kesari Balakrishna Pillai explored a range of themes, including social realism and individualism.

1.3.9.6 Language and Literary Experimentation

Writers during this period experimented with language and narrative techniques. They used colloquial language and dialects to capture the authentic voices of their characters and settings. The novel gained prominence during colonial modernity. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* is a notable example. This novel explored complex human emotions and relationships, reflecting the changing dynamics of society.

1.3.9.7 Nationalist Movement

- Emergence of modern Malayalam literature

The colonial period was also marked by the Indian nationalist movement. Many Malayalam writers actively participated in the freedom struggle and used their literary works to propagate nationalist ideals and sentiments. The colonial period facilitated cultural exchange between Malayalam literature and other literary traditions, both within India and abroad. This exchange enriched Malayalam literature by introducing new perspectives and ideas. Colonial modernity had a profound impact on Malayalam literature, ushering in a period of literary and cultural transformation. It brought about a fusion of traditional Malayalam literary forms with Western influences, leading to the emergence of modern Malayalam literature that addressed contemporary social, political, and cultural issues. This period laid the foundation for the vibrant and diverse literary landscape that continues to thrive in Kerala today.

Summarised Overview

Malayalam literature serves as a rich terrain reflecting the multifaceted challenges faced by society, encompassing economic, social, and political dimensions from a third-world perspective. Translations within this literary realm are not mere linguistic conversions; rather, they aspire to encapsulate the profound cultural significance embedded in epics for contemporary readers. The visionary Ezhuthachan, a key figure in Malayalam literature, not only underscored the importance of literacy but also championed the adoption of the Malayalam script in education. The lyric impulse, intrinsic to Malayalam poetry, encapsulates the poets' innate inclination to articulate their emotions, thoughts, and experiences through verse. Malayalam hymns, beyond serving as expressions of religious devotion, stand as invaluable cultural heritage. Poonthanam's *Jnanappana*, a masterpiece celebrated for its spiritual profundity and poetic beauty, continues to resonate with audiences. Kunjan Nambiar, regarded as the father of Ottan Thullal, played a pivotal role in elevating this traditional art form to its current stature. Along with it, the advent of colonial modernity catalysed a significant transformation in Malayalam literature, ushering in a period of literary and cultural evolution that continues to shape the contemporary landscape.



Assignments

1. Explain the key concepts in third world Malayalam literature.
2. What are the forms of adaptations in Malayalam literature?
3. Describe the significance of translation of the epics in Malayalam literature.
4. Explain the characteristics of lyric impulse in Malayalam literature.
5. Hymns have a significant role in Malayalam literature. Analyse the statement.
6. What changes did colonial modernity bring into Malayalam literature?

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Unit 4

Romanticism in Malayalam Literature

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ understand the features of romanticism in literature
- ▶ know the different genres of writing in Malayalam
- ▶ learn more about the writers of different periods
- ▶ appreciate the literary works of romanticism, modernism and postmodernism

Background

The high tide of renaissance was brought into Malayalam literature by a variety of influences. The significant among them were the establishment of English education, printing press, and literary journals. All these paved the way for the better exposure of poetic creations which in turn made the readers more connected to poetry. The 19th century Kerala witnessed a drastic change in the field of literature with a number of precursors of the Romantic Movement. One of the major figures was V.C. Balakrishna Panikkar who was a renowned poet and journalist. He is best known for his works *Oru Vilapam* and *Viswaroopam*. These works had a sober tone and exuberant emotions that were against the prevailing conventional ideas. Then came *Malaya Vilasom* by Prof. A.R. Raja Raja Varma in 1895. The work not only offered new dimensions in writing but also rejected classicistic appeal to perfection and embellishment. His style introduced a new archetype in Malayalam poetry.

K.G. Kesava Pillai and C.S. Subramanyan Potti were the immediate followers of A.R. Raja Varma who popularised the style. Kesava Pillai's *Asanna Marana Chinthasathakam* and Subramanyan Potti's *Oru Vilapam* hold the stamp of Raja Raja Varma's mode of expression and thus a new literary movement gained popularity. Then came the legends of Malayalam literature, Kumaran Asan and Vallathol Narayana Menon. They introduced a unique charm in their poetry.

Keywords

Romanticism, English Education, Modernism, Postmodernism

Discussion

1.4.1 Kumaran Asan

- ▶ Amalgam of ethics and aesthetics

The romantic movement in Malayalam literature began with N. Kumaran Asan who created a revolution in poetry in the early 20th century. He is one among the modern triumvirate along with Vallathol Narayana Menon and Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer. His knowledge in Sanskrit had a major influence on his poetic advancement. He echoed the tradition of Ezhuthachan. Asan, through his writing, reflected the consciousness of the humble and outcastes. His writings maintained an amalgam of ethics and aesthetics.

- ▶ Fight against the social injustice

His meeting with Sree Narayana Guru marked the turning point in his life. In 1904, he started the journal *Vivekodayam* which he used to fight against the social injustice that prevailed in the society. *Veena Poovu*, which was published in 1907 began a new era in Malayalam literature. The poem was a true depiction of the tragedy of life that probed into the heart of readers. The poem was first published in the Malayalam newspaper, *Mithavadi*. He used simple diction, Sanskrit metres that has a resemblance to Dravidian metre. It has a blend of lyrical, elegiac and romantic features in it thereby providing the readers with a novel experience along with an *Advaitic* perspective of life. The poem is composed of forty-one stanzas. His early writings were philosophical, spiritual and had dramatic contextualisation.

- ▶ Socially relevant issues

Asan is admired for his poems of love which he depicts as transcendental. *Nalini* and *Leela* serve as the best example. He glorified love that unfolds by itself and attains spiritual heights as in *Nalini*. In *Leela*, he portrays passionate love. These poems emphasise resistance to colonialism. *Duravastha* is written on the backdrop of Moplah riots of 1921. This poem unveils the social reformer and the prophet in Asan. He has also written two major poems on Buddhist legends titled *Chandalabikshuki* and *Karuna*. *Chandalabikshuki* which tells the story of a Harijan girl towards a buddhist monk gives a picture of the caste system and untouchability. In *Karuna*, he presents the love of Vasavadatta, a courtesan. These two poems are known to be his last works before his death in 1924. He gave rise to a new genre in Malayalam poetry in the form of elegy, when he lamented on the death of Raja Raja Varma in his poem *Prarodanam*.



- ▶ Shield against this discrimination

All his writings gained popularity among readers and the new literary movement got transformed to grandeur. Asan narrated the discrimination existed between the *savarnas* and *avarnas*. His poems acted as a shield against this discrimination and he wrote in favour of the poor and the subjugated. At the age of twenty-three, he translated *Saundaryalahari* from Sanskrit to Malayalam, an epic work by Sri Sankaracharya.

- ▶ Vision of a Utopian community

Asan's writings possessed an immense influence of missionary translations and literary criticisms. His poems had a blend of motifs from Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam literature. His early writings exhibited not only his social experience but also his vision of a Utopian community. In his poem, *Puspasankalpam* he elevates individual love to that of universal and makes the readers feel the same experience as the poet. He glorified beauty and love through his poems stating both transcend parameters of space and time. His poems had a realistic vision of self-expression and emotion. One can experience the harmony of romanticism and devotion in his poems thereby creating a reform in Malayalam poetry.

1.4.2 Vallathol Narayana Menon

- ▶ Reform in Malayalam literature

Vallathol, one among the poetic trinity of the 20th century, Vallathol Narayana Menon brought radical reform in Malayalam literature. He was trained in classicism but contributed more to romanticism. He followed traditional Sanskrit and wrote verses in Sanskrit. *Chitrayogam*, the mahakavya by Vallathol, is eminently composed in Sanskrit metres. Gradually, his writing style exhibited a shift from Sanskrit metres to focus on Dravidian metrical forms.

- ▶ Awakening national consciousness

Though he has written a mahakavya, he is best known for his middle length narratives. He is regarded as the most sensuous poet in Malayalam literature. His ingenious in portraying the landscape of Kerala is exceptional which made him unique from other poets of his age. His poems had an inevitable part in awakening national consciousness among the people.

- ▶ Strong women characters

Vallathol translated *Valmiki Ramayana* and *Rig Veda* into Malayalam. *Uma Keralam*, the mahakavya by him, manifests devotion to land, language, poetic legacy and moral values. He revealed his socio-religious commitment in his works like *Bandhanasthanaya Aniruddhan*, *Sishyanum Makanum* and *Magdalana Mariam*. Vallathol's verses also depicted strong women characters like Usha in *Bandhanasthanaya Anirudhan*, Mariam in *Magdalanamariam*, Radha in *Radhayude Kritharthata* and so on. His heroines did justice to

themselves and their lives. For instance, Usha defends herself and her lover when confronted by her father's minister. In *Magdalanamariam*, a dramatic episode was created when a professional courtesan got converted to a spiritual path. For the first time in Malayalam poetry, Vallathol depicted a scene from the western source. It was also a revolution in Malayalam that he created with the introduction of Christian symbolism in poetry.

Vallathol wrote in the backdrop of the national movement for freedom. Through his writings, he spread the message of communal harmony. He was against casteism, untouchability and all sorts of disunity prevailed in the society. He visualised a world where freedom and fraternity go in hand. He revived Kathakali and other art forms like Mohiniyattom by establishing Kerala Kalamandalam.

- ▶ Message of communal harmony

1.4.3 Modernism

Modern Malayalam poetry underwent innovation and experimentation in all aspects. In this process, traditions were reconstructed, new genres were employed and formal devices were used. It rejected the clichés of romanticism and held against the simplification of poetry. Modernism of the sixties witnessed diminishing progressive sensibilities, discontentment with forms and styles of writing and disappearance of Gandhian values from public life. Writers like Ayyappa Paniker, N.N. Kakkad, Satchidanandan, Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan and other poets employed fantasy, surrealism, irony, black humour and mixing of verse and prose.

- ▶ Experiment with theme and form

In the seventies, individual identity got replaced with socio-political identity. The poetry of the decade marked a transition from lyrical to dramatic mode. Modern Malayalam poetry witnessed a blend of conventional and unconventional metres. The use of chanting prose was also adopted by poets. Metrical pattern became the choice of poets to achieve humour, irony and creative impulse. There were numerous poems by T.S. Eliot, Pablo Neruda, Bertolt Brecht etc. which were translated into Malayalam.

- ▶ Transition from lyrical to dramatic mode

The modernists in Malayalam literature probed into the emotional essence of things rather than the realities of life. The existence of an individual was an abstract concept in the vision of modernists. Hence, they were prompted to write stories that were philosophical in nature. But this resulted in little choice for the writers. The greatest contribution of modernism was the freedom of thought. Another important factor that concerned

- ▶ Freedom of thought



modern writers was the density of language. Modernists stuck on to the misery of the world which they transformed into their inner life and reflected in writings.

The evolution of modernity in fiction began with the novel *Indulekha* by Chandu Menon. The novel was contradictory to the beliefs of the age that produced it. It conveyed the significance of rational and scientific thinking. The author clearly asserts women's rights and the class discriminations prevailed in the society. Baudeliere stated, "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable. There was a form of modernity for every painter of the past".

► Scientific thinking

1.4.4 Kesari Balakrishna Pillai

Through his journalistic interference, he established himself as an architect of modern literary criticism in Malayalam. He is regarded as one of the visionaries of Progressive Movement of Arts and Letters in Kerala. He possessed deep knowledge in western literature. In the history of Malayalam literature, he is celebrated as a pioneer who experimented with western ideas in the Malayalam literary horizon. He gained inspiration from writers like Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, T.S. Eliot, Sigmund Freud, Kate Chopin etc. His works had a blend of ideas not only from Sanskrit and English but also from indigenous traditions. He believed that Malayalam has to make use of western literature in order to flourish in the future. At the same time, he felt the necessity to retain the originality of Kerala's ancient literature.

► Architect of modern literary criticism

It was he who refined literary criticism in Malayalam with his obsession of literary schools and movements, literary genres, formalist criticism, history, myth and psychoanalysis. In an essay, in 1939, he reveals his perspective on modern drama by expressing his anxiety regarding both western and Indian theatres developed from traditional cultural practices. He remarks that conservative dramatists believed that only such art forms will allow them to express the emotions of their period and satisfy their audience. The problem he finds with traditional western theatre is that most of them fail to represent the mental environment that Malayalis are acquainted with. As an alternative, he recommends German Expressionist theatre.

► Perspective on modern drama

Kesari insisted on adopting the form of Expressionism which is capable of creating a social and political revolution. He celebrates the art of the present and longs for a New World that prospers undergoing social changes. An artist, as he

► Employed expressionists techniques

► Transition from realism to experimentalism

► Social equality

► Pioneer of modernism in Malayalam poetry

► Arts of narration

defines, must be able to sacrifice their ease and comfort for the sake of the society. Indeed he was one of the prominent figures of the Purogamana Sahitya Sanghatana, organisation of the progressive writers in Kerala.

Kesari had a similar observation as Baudeliere who dealt with concerns of the present rejecting imprints of the past. The new world of Kesari is built in the present immanence across nations and cultures. Kesar's critical career witnessed a transition from realism to experimentalism. He had a clear insight for the necessity to resist the cultural invasion of the coloniser. He advocates his contemporaries to learn from the French and Russian writers of fiction than from British writers.

Kesari was a strong supporter of *Nivartana* movement which strived for social equality and proportional representation for all communities in the legislative assembly dominated by upper castes. He propounded the principle of egalitarianism. Such a social transformation reconstructs the life and personality of an individual. Similarly, Kesari states that reconstructing the life of an individual at the subjective level is possible through progressive literature.

1.4.5 Ayyappa Paniker

Ayyapa Paniker is regarded as a pioneer of modernism in Malayalam poetry. Paniker dissolved his voice of protest in irony for it to operate skillfully. He was a scholar in ancient Indian aesthetics and literary traditions. His early writings show that he was influenced by Changampuzha's verses. But later he moved to modernism. His interest in comparative literature brought a drastic change in Malayalam literature by its acquaintance with English literature.

Paniker's typical style of writing is evident in his poem *Kurukshetram* which is often compared to *The Waste Land*. The opening of the poem takes the readers to the first *sloka* of the *Bhagavadgita*. The man who speaks in the poem is Sanjaya. The poem can be defined as a modern oracle that artistically picturises the crisis of contemporary society. The poem has a dynamic tone. It has free mixing of meters, surreal images and the dilemma of contemporary life. The poem attempts to find new ways to restore passion and happiness in the world. Paniker's thoughts take a new dimension when he writes *Kutumbapuram* where he places himself in a higher position to face the evils of life with vigour. Another significant work by him is *Indian Narratology* which studies the forms of arts of narration in Indian literature beginning with Vedic to



contemporary literature. He perceives that individual genius and efforts are essential for the success of a community.

► Various styles

Paniker's poems projected lavish use of free verse thereby removing the artificiality and formed a pattern suited to modern writing. His writings emphasised words, sounds, phrases and sentences rejecting the prosody of metrical feet per line. Most interestingly, it is true to say that Paniker did not stick to any particular form of writing but his style varied in each of his works.

► Glorifying mystic love

In the poem, *Hymn to Death* he speaks about the hypocrisy that shadows human life. He finds death as the only saviour to escape from this situation. Death finds a subtle presence in many of his poems. *Yesterday* is a poem in which he glorifies love in mystical heights. His usage of simple diction along with simplicity shows a resemblance to William Blake and Poonthanam. The view that dream is the only happiness that a man could have in his life is recurred in his poems as in *Cold War*. Though he is aware of the futility of dreams, he says that man is compelled to content with dreams. The uniqueness of Paniker's verse is that he plays with words which are hard to replicate in translations. As a poet, he was successful in providing a new experience to the readers and as a critic, he took his readers to higher levels of knowledge and awareness.

► Radical humanism

1.4.6 M. Govindan

M. Govindan is an inevitable figure in modern Malayalam literature. He was closely associated with radical humanism during the freedom movement. He wished to attain modernism in arts and literature. He founded the magazine *Sameeksha* (in English titled 'Poetry and Renaissance') in which he discussed his perspectives on modernism. His keen observation on the lives of people, myths and history made him expose the emptiness in it. His poems along with humour and grace dealt with the complex aspects of life. His language is more colloquial and had an inclination to Tamil. He was well versed in both Malayalam and English. He was against the excessive use of Sanskrit in poetry and in this process, poetry appears to be artificial.

► Worst condition of untouchability

In his poems recently published in a book in *Kerala Kavita* series, he has used archaic expressions with emphasis on initial rhyme and alliteration which offers a new experience to the readers. In his biographical novel, *Anaadham Ee Agniveena* he portrays the worst condition of untouchability which was supposed to be practiced between a father and his son.

- Transformations in the genres of literature

- Diversity of truth

- Socio-political conflicts in contemporary Kerala

- Everyday life in Kerala

1.4.7 Postmodernism

By the beginning of the eighties, tremendous transformations were visible in various genres of literature. The writings that reflected these changes are referred to as postmodern. The wave of postmodernism had a different impact in different countries. Hence, Postmodernism that evolved from different socio-political situations hardly shared similarities or unified sensibility. In India, the factors that determined postmodernism were consumerist culture, communication revolution, political and philosophical doctrines and the effect of electronic media over people.

According to Ayyappa Paniker, postmodern Malayalam poetry emphasised contemporary reality and their mode of expression rejected rhetoric and hyperbole. He takes this shift in emphasis as the change in perspective. Postmodern writers look forward to the meaning and aesthetics of the innovative process. Unlike modernism, postmodernism sways on material reality, concrete approach, language of reality and indefinite vision. While modernism valued the soul of the individual, postmodernism gave importance to cultural materialism. Postmodern writers replaced unity of truth with diversity of truth.

Post-modern writing reveals the diversity of truth and socio-political context, i.e., the contemporary Kerala. These features of postmodern writing can be clearly found in *Dharma Puranam* by O.V. Vijayan, *Marubhoomikal Undaakunnatu* by Anand, *Daivathinte Vikruthikal* by M. Mukundan. These novels deal with socio-political conflicts of contemporary Kerala. In these novels, social reality finds a new and unfamiliar form of expression different from that of traditional Malayalam novels.

1.4.8 P. P. Ramachandran

Ramachandran was a major figure among the Malayalam poets of the 1990s. His verse portrayed everyday life in Kerala and probed into the layers of silence and distress that underlies the contemporary Indian life. His writings attempted to defamiliarise the world. He reminds us “that radical poetry is not about slogans, but about recasting the familiar world in new formations”, says E.V. Ramakrishnan. His poems reveal modulated versions of poetics. He transforms mundane into mysterious and common place into enchanted with his poetic excellence.

In his poem, *The Horn*, the sound of the horn gets



- ▶ Words giving way to silence

- ▶ Blend of tradition and novelty

- ▶ Voice to the voiceless

- ▶ Poetry free from religious overtones

- ▶ Life of lower castes Kerala

transformed to that of a beast as a victim in the wilderness of the night. He describes the chaos caused in the library when the one who is in charge dies, in the poem *After the Librarian Died*. Reading his poem, one may find words giving way to silence at any point. Ramachandran uses pauses, ellipses, gaps and precision in his narratives.

Ramachandran addresses poetry as inherited that has its roots in ancient tradition which no writer can ignore. And so, readers find a blend of tradition and novelty simultaneously in his poems. He also used his verses to unveil the environmental problems of contemporary society without any incertitude. For instance, in the poem *The Two Sculptures*, he identifies that the construction of Kuttippuram bridge will devastate the agrarian society though it is an achievement of modern technology. He is a poet who has a strong adherence to sustainable development.

1.4.9 S. Joseph

Joseph's poetry reminds of the common people who are not able to lead a noble life. He says, "Poetry is still a wonder, a mystery to most, including me". He remarks that the magic once associated with poetry has disappeared and the reason is its language. He portrays the life of those who are left unacknowledged. He upholds the concept of humanism in dealing with the concerns of the society. His writings provide voice to the voiceless.

Another significant feature of his poetry is that all his poems possess a firm root in Kerala and its diversities. He identifies specific elements from the surroundings instead of generalising. He strived to liberate poetry from the rhetoric and to take in the concept of reality. He insists the writers consider their readers as equal to them. Reading is equally significant like writing and for him, poetry should be free from religious overtones.

Joseph is considered as the forerunner of Malayalam Dalit literary tradition. His verses exposed the life of people who belonged to lower castes. He suggests a transition in poetry which he refers to as 'emerging poetry'. In his poem, *E.P. Meeting*, he reminds the need for equality wherein the responsibility is vested on the elite class to bring the common people to the mainstream.

Summarised Overview

The transformative era marked by the advent of English education, the printing press, and literary journals ushered in a profound connection between readers and literature. In the 20th century, Kumaran Asan emerged as a pivotal figure, sparking a literary revolution. Simultaneously, Vallathol instigated a radical reform in Malayalam poetry, while the modernist movement contributed the invaluable gift of freedom of thought. Balakrishna Pillai elevated literary criticism to new heights in Malayalam, and Ayyappa Paniker boldly experimented with free verse in his poetry. In contrast, Govindan staunchly opposed the use of Sanskrit, advocating for an authentic and unadorned expression in poetry. The post-modernist wave emphasised a keen awareness of contemporary reality, while Ramachandran, through his writings, championed the cause of sustainable development. S. Joseph, a resounding voice for the voiceless, left an indelible mark on the literary landscape, echoing the importance of social justice and inclusivity. Collectively, these luminaries illuminated the diverse facets of literature, shaping and reshaping the cultural tapestry of their times.

Assignments

1. Describe the significance of Asan's writing in romanticising Malayalam literature.
2. How does modernism differ from romanticism in the way of presentation of literary works?
3. Identify Ayyappa Paniker as a pioneer in modern Malayalam literature
4. Examine the transformations that took place in the postmodern era.
5. How did Ramachandran defamiliarise the world through his writings?

Suggested Reading

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SGOU



Poetry and Drama

BLOCK-02

Block Content

Unit 1 : Poetry

“The Fallen Flower”- Kumaran Assan

“Kuruksheetra” -Ayyappa Paniker

Unit 2 : Drama

Investment - N. Krishna Pillai

Crime 27 of 1128 - C. J. Thomas

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ have a background knowledge of ancient Malayalam Poetry
- ▶ understand the different forms and themes that are dealt with in ancient poetry
- ▶ comprehend the philosophy of life and vision expressed in ancient poetry
- ▶ be aware of the poet's world view

Background

The rise of modern Malayalam poetry began with the Venmani group rejecting the classical mode by experimenting with new forms and subject matter using simple diction and Dravidian meters and dealing with forbidden subjects. It was also an age when literary orthodoxy was the most active in public culture. For instance, the elite Brahmin poets (with last names like Iyer, Sharma, Moothathu, Varma, Namboothiri) and Nair poets (Menon, Pillai, Marar, Panicker) frequently indulged in poetic combats such as *akshara sloka* (recitation) and *samasya* (poetic riddles). New poets started resisting the orthodoxy to produce unrhymed verse, subsequently freeing the language from traditional epic poetry. The orthodox poets were evasive about the harsh social and economic realities prevalent in the land while the new generation was encouraged to seek out new forms and content for their poetry.

With the publication of K. C. Kesava Pillai's *Asanna Marana Chinta Satakam* (Verses on Imminent Death) and V. C. Balakrishna Panicker's *Oru Vilapam* (A Lament, 1909), Malayalam poets began to pronounce their romantic aspirations; the revolutionary spirit of the English Romantics appealed to these poets. Panicker's life was short like those of Shelley and Keats. Having established himself as a major poet at the age of 19, he died at the age of 27. The poets of his generation resisted mythological subjects and stressed individual experience, humanity and cultural renaissance, and motifs of sacrificial suffering became central poetic images. This late arrival of the romantic spirit quickly transformed Malayalam literature and out of the ferment emerged the three poets known as the Great Trio.

Three of the most prolific poets of the first half of the twentieth century, Kumaran Asan (1871-1924), Ullur Parameswara Iyer (1877-1949), and Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958), are collectively known as the Great Trio (mahakavitrayam). Their work

provided Malayalam with a truly native tradition in literature, nationalist in spirit, romantic in style and modernist in outlook. They freed the language from having to depend on the Sanskrit heritage. Together, their works have acquired the status of a “school of poetry,” even though each of them was unique and seldom stable in his aesthetics.

While the classicism of Cherusseri, Poonthanam, and Ezhuthachan derived mainly out of their allegiance to the Brahmin culture of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, the Great Trio produced a massive corpus of literature drawing on the Buddhist, Christian and Islamic, as well as Hindu traditions, in essence creating a new mythos for the modern age. Much of the poetry and criticism of twentieth-century Malayalam literature is actually an extended response to the works of the Great Trio.

Keywords

Modern Malayalam Poetry, Elegiac Poetry, Humanity, Life, philosophy

Discussion

Poem I : “The Fallen Flower”

- Kumaran Assan

2.1.1 N. Kumaran Asan (1873-1924)

Known as Mahakavi Kumaran Asan, was a Malayalam poet, philosopher and social reformer who initiated a revolution in Malayalam poetry in the first quarter of the 20th century. He was a champion of the underprivileged and a great visionary. Asan’s poetry analyses a wide range of issues that existed during his time. He gave a new direction to classically structured Malayalam poetry and played a crucial role in introducing the spirit of modernity, revivalism and renaissance in Malayalam literature. Asan started the Romantic Movement in Malayalam Literature. He was known as “Asaya Gambheeran” (an individual of great ideas).

Kumaran Asan was one of the eminent poets of Kerala Triumvarate along with Vallathol Narayana Menon and Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer in the first half of the 20th century and a disciple of Sree Narayana Guru in 1890. The prefix Mahakavi was awarded by Madras University in 1922, meaning a great poet and the suffix Asan means scholar or teacher. Kumaran Asan was born in April 1873 to a merchant family belonging to the Ezhava community in Kayikkara village, Chirayinkeezhu Taluk, north of Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala, South

► Spirit of modernity

► Disciple of Sree Narayana Guru



India. Kumaran was the second son in a family of nine children. His father, Narayanan Perungudi, was well-versed in Malayalam and Tamil. His mother's name was Kaali. He got training in Mathematics and Sanskrit and got a job at the age of 14 due to the efforts of his father but later quit it as he wanted to pursue higher studies in Sanskrit.

► Great poet

In his early life, Kumaran was frequently ill. At the request of Kumaran's father, Sree Narayana Guru once visited him when he was bedridden. Guru suggested that Kumaran stay with him and Kumaran found the invitation irresistible. Kumaran was sent to Sree Chamarajendra Sanskrit College in Bangalore to pursue his higher studies in Sanskrit. But Kumaran did not complete the course and later he joined the Central Hindu College in Calcutta where his teacher was Mahamahopadhyaya Kamakhya Nath, who prophesied that Kumaran would one day become a great poet, which eventually became true.

► Secretary of SNDP

Asan was actively involved in the activities of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) and became its secretary in 1904. The same year, he founded *Vivekodayam*, a literary journal in Malayalam, and assumed its editorship. In 1913, he was elected to the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly (Sri Moolam Praja Sabha), the first popularly elected legislature in the history of India. He relinquished the position at SNDP in 1919 and a year later, took over the editorship of *Pratibha*, another literary magazine. In 1917 Asan married Bhanumathiamma, the daughter of Thachakudy Kumaran who was a cousin of Padmanabhan Palpu. On January 16, 1924, he died by drowning. His body was recovered after two days and the place where his mortal remains were cremated is known as Kumarakodi.

► Social commentary

The earliest works of Asan include *Subramanya Sathakam* and *Sankara Sathakam*, which were devotional in content. But later his poems became a social commentary. He published *Veena Poovu* (The Fallen Flower) in December 1907 in *Mithavadi* of Moorkoth Kumaran which went on to become a literary classic in Malayalam; its centenary was celebrated in 2017 when a book, *Veenapoovinu 100* was published which carried an introduction by M. M. Basheer and an English translation of the poem by K. Jayakumar. *Prarodanam*, an elegy, mourning the death of his contemporary, friend and grammarian, A. R. Raja Raja Varma, *Khanda Kavyas* (poems) such as *Nalini*, *Leela*, *Karuna*, *Chandaalabhikshuki*, *Chinthaavishtayaaya Seetha* and *Duravastha* are some of



his other major works. Besides, he wrote two epics, *Buddha Charitha* in 5 volumes and *Balaramayanam*, a three-volume work.

2.1.2 Veena Poovu

Translated to English as “The Fallen Flower” was written in 1907 during his sojourn in Jain Medu, Palakkad. This epoch-making poem is considered the beginning of a new era in Malayalam literature and is one of Asan’s most significant works. A highly poignant poem that details the transience of the mortal world is represented through the different stages in the life of a flower. The poem consists of forty-one stanzas that are highly philosophical and Asan uses the image of the fallen flower to depict the various intricacies that change the nature of life. The poem was first published in *Mithavadi* of Moorkoth Kumaran, a well-known critic. Later it was reproduced in *Bhashaposhini* with an introduction by C. S. Subramanian Potti. Various translations and other artistic representations of the poem have been produced and its centennial was celebrated in Kerala.

- ▶ The image of the fallen flower

The first four lines set the tone of the poem. The poem starts with an address to the flower calling it a “lovely bloom” which shone like a queen, but now it lies in the dust without any beauty.

- ▶ Address to the flower

*Ah, lovely bloom! once thou didst shine
High like a Queen!
How sad thou liest now in dust
Shorn of thy sheen!*

- ▶ Reason for the impermanence

The next lines express the reason for the impermanence. Fortune and Beauty are not constant on this earth. It is a timely reminder to all who give excessive attention to these two.

*Inconstant is Fortune on earth,
Impermanent is Loveliness.*

- ▶ Comparison between a flower and human life

The poet then makes a comparison between the life of a flower with the life of a human being. The life of a human being is divided into three stages: Childhood, Youth and Old age. Childhood passes with great joy and enthusiasm. The innocence of childhood is exemplified here.

The poet says the flower was given birth by a creeper who tended it in its ‘leafy bosom.’ The flower was bathed in the ‘milky moonlight’ and learned the songs of birds in its day in the morning and thus enjoyed its carefree serene childhood among the ‘blithesome buds.’ The flower learned the secrets

► Childhood and innocence

of life upon the earth during the night by eagerly lifting its head 'toward the twinkling crowd of stars.' Childhood days are the carefree days in one's life. Children enjoy the beauty of nature with their innocent and serene mind. They are not disturbed by the harsh realities of life.

► Youthhood and beauty

The second stage is youth which is described by the poet as a stage where the beauty is enhanced, the countenance changes and the cheeks acquire a new glow.

*O Flower! with a new-born light,
A new-born smile through them did flit.
Lovesome loveliness, purity,
Meekness and sheen, –
Such fleckless attributes of Youth
To things terrene
Do they compare? 'twas a sight to see
Thy glorious state of golden prime*

The flower's beauty becomes unfathomable. It is endowed with the qualities of beauty, purity, modesty and lustre, the 'attributes of Youth'. The beauty of the flower is incomparable to any earthy thing. The beauty of the flower becomes a feast for the eyes.

*Alas! alas! my darling bloom,
Upon thee Death
He placed His pitiless hands and froze
Thy perfumed breath;
Doth a hunter i' the wood-land reck
A vulture or a dove he kills?
The lustre of thy lovely limbs
Grew faint and fled,
And o'er thy shining visage sweet
A pallor spread;
Life's oil dried, fast wither'd thou
Life's flame in thee fticker'd and died.
Blown by the morning breeze adown
The spiry stem
O Flower, thou fell! O couldst thou be
A bright star-gem?
Or a Being come upon earth.
Content with drinking bliss divine?*

► Attributes of Youth

While the flower was enjoying its youth, Death, the leveller, put its reckless hands on the flower without any mercy and took

► Death as the leveller

away its perfumed breath. Death is equated with a hunter who is on a killing spree, never caring whether his prey is a vulture or a dove. Death took away the lustre of the limbs which grew faint and the shining face became colourless and finally the flower succumbed to death. The poet ponders on the question of whether the flower is enjoying its heavenly abode. Nature also grieves in the death of the flower. Spiders wove a silken shroud for the flower and the dawn decked the flower with a garland of dew drops. Sparrows expressed their sorrow through continuous wails. The poet then ponders on the question of 'why,' but fails to find a satisfactory reply. The poet finally comes to realise that we are not able to bring back the dead to life. Here there is no use in grieving. In life, happiness and sorrow are intermingled. The poem ends not with the earthly fall of the flower; Asan sees its future in the stanzas:

*In the western sea,
And rises over the eastern mount In white jubilee,
O Flower, thou may'st on Meru great Bloom on that
Kalpak branch again.*

► Rebirth of the flower

The rebirth of the flower is envisaged here. Though elegiac in tone and matter, the poem ends in an optimistic way. The poem occupies a supreme place among his works and all other works such as *Nalini*, *Leela*, *Karuna* etc. We can find the elegiac tone but they are all merely extensions of *Veena Poovu*. The heroines of Asan are all fallen flowers.

*O eyelids, fold on humid eyes
For soon this bloom
Will shrivel, rot and turn to dust; This is the doom
For all; and what can tears avail? Our life is but a
dream alas.*

► Nothing is permanent in life

The poet finally arrives at the realisation that this is the fate of all on earth irrespective of caste, creed, class etc. Nothing is permanent in life. Once born we have to succumb to death. The momentary glories of life should not blind our eyes. Beauty, power, wealth etc are not permanent in life. We should never be arrogant or look down on others on the basis of these. All human beings are equal before death. Beauty, wealth or power can not save us from the dark clutches of Death. The flower that was pampered by the mother plant, leaves and buds shone like a dazzling queen. In its youth, the flower attracted everyone with its beauty. But one day unexpectedly it was withered away by Death. Similar is the fate of human beings. It is a timely warning to all who pride in their beauty, wealth, position and power. The poem is idealistic in the sense that it exemplifies

the life of human beings and the transience of life. Here Asan compares life to a dream; as in a dream nothing is permanent in life.

Summarised Overview

“The Fallen Flower” is an idealistic poem that exemplifies the life of a human being and puts across the transience of life. Asan conveys a strong message that every living being is bound by the same laws of nature and will one day wither away just like a flower. Death is inevitable. It is the ultimate truth of life. All living beings are the same before death. Caste, creed, class hierarchy *etc.* are nothing before death. So, we should never be arrogant or proud but should have compassion and humility towards our fellow beings.

Assignments

1. Kumaran Asan’s “The Fallen Flower” is a poem on life. Comment.
2. Comment on the style and language of the poem “The Fallen Flower.”
3. Consider Kumaran Asan’s “The Fallen Flower” as an allegory.
4. What is an elegy? Is “The Fallen Flower” by Asan an Elegy? Substantiate.

Suggested Reading

1. OmniMaster. “Twentieth-Century Malayalam Literature.” *Omnilogos*, 3 July, 2023, omnilogos.com/twentieth-century-malayalam-literature. www.wisdomlib.org. *The Fallen Flower*. 17 Mar. 2022,
2. www.wisdomlib.org/history/compilation/triveni-journal/d/doc67382.html.

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1. Kailas. “The Fallen Flower – a Mini-tribute.” *Straight N’ Sweet*, 8 Nov. 2014, straightnsweet.wordpress.com/2014/11/07/the-fallen-flower-a-mini-tribute.



Poem II : “Kurukshetra”

- Ayyappa Paniker

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ have a background knowledge of Modern Malayalam Poetry.
- ▶ know about the different forms, techniques and themes that are dealt with in Modern Poetry.
- ▶ be aware of the philosophy of life and vision expressed in Modern Poetry.
- ▶ increase cultural awareness, as the poetry of a culture offers insight into that culture’s history and values.
- ▶ help readers connect to those emotions in the poems they have studied.

Background

As varied as their backgrounds and contributions, some of the late Romantics continued the Vallathol School of poetry; conservative and lyrical in style, yet progressive in terms of the poetic vision, though their poems were region-specific and not easily translatable. Some of their work seemed like products of a region that was too distant from the larger world.

The postmodern poets and fiction writers connected Malayalam literature to a world larger than Kerala. With the death of Sankara Kurup, Idassery, and Kunjiraman Nair, what was known initially as a strange generation of “ultramoderns” came to take Malayalam poetry in a new direction. They were actually the postmoderns, and their landmark publication was Ayyappa Paniker’s long poem *Kuruskhetra* (1961). With its resonances of *The Waste Land* and *The Bhagavat Gita*, this long poem gathers together varied strands of Indian Post-modernity: the East and the West merge in this era of late capitalism; poverty lingers; the revolution has failed; no certainties are left to offer us solace, not even the old tribal rhythms because our modernity has disturbed them. Paniker’s poem voices the sense of guilt and terror an individual has to bear while living in an unbounded historical moment in which, according to Paniker, the World Bank becomes the custodian of truth.

In spite of the wide difference in terms of their age, postmodernist poets like Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, M. Govindan, A. Ayyappan, O. V. Usha, Satchidanandan, Balachandran Chullikkad, Chemmanam Chacko, Cherian K. Cherian, N. N. Kakkad, Madhavan Ayyppath, K. G. Sankara Pillai, Vinayachandran, and three dozen other poets have created a sustained poetic culture in Kerala. Some of these poets have also brought poetry into the public culture through street performances and campus readings, ushering in a new golden age of poetry.



Keywords

Modernism, *The Wasteland*, Modern Man's dilemma, chaos, disillusionment

Discussion

2.1.3 Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker (1930–2006)

Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker was an influential Malayalam poet, literary critic, academic and scholar in modern and post-modern literary theories as well as ancient Indian aesthetics and literary traditions. An outstanding teacher, Dr K. Ayyappa Paniker was born on 12th September 1930 at Kavalam village of Kuttanad in Kerala. His father was Narayanan Namboothiri and his mother Meenakshi Amma. His academic qualifications included B. A. (Hons) from the University of Travancore, Master's Degree from the University of Kerala, M. A. and Ph.D. from Indiana University (USA). He served as a professor at C. M. S College, Kottayam; University College, Thiruvananthapuram and at the Institute of English (University of Kerala). He was a professor and Head of the Department, Institute of English from 1980 till his retirement in 1990.

► Influential Malayalam poet

Dr. Ayyappa Paniker began writing poems during his high school days. He published articles on poetic geniuses like Shelley, T. S. Eliot and others. These were published in Malayalam weekly *Kaumudy* and *Democrat* in the 1950s. Initially, he was, to a great extent, influenced by Changampuzha. Later, he moved to modern poetry. His poetry is abundant in the usage of irony and black humour. He used irony to expose the hypocrisy of society and individuals and took poetry to a higher form, deviant from the conventional forms. He experimented with new forms of poetry, of which *Kurukshethram* is an example. He played a key role in familiarising the Malayali reader with different forms of poetry from across the globe.

► Expose the hypocrisy of society

He was one of the pioneers of modernism in Malayalam poetry. His ground-breaking works like *Kurukshethram* made a considerable impact on the genre. *Ayyappapanikkarude Krithikal* and *Chintha* and several essays were important influences on the playwrights of his generation. He published over 25 works, and translated several important works into Malayalam, including *Guru Granth Sahib* and a book in French; as a scholarly editor he produced numerous anthologies on Indian literature, he was the chief editor of

► Pioneers of modernism in Malayalam poetry



- ▶ Recipient of a number of honours

the Sahitya Akademi's *Indian Literary Encyclopaedia*. *Indian Narratology*, published by IGNC, was the first of its kind to study various forms of the art of narration, in Indian literature, starting with Vedic and oral literature to Buddhist and contemporary literature.

Paniker was a recipient of a number of honours including the Padma Shri, Kerala Sahitya Akademi award for poetry and criticism, Kendriya Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry, 2005 Saraswati Samman for his collection of writings *Ayyappa Panikerude Krithikal*, Distinguished Teacher award, Mahakavi Ulloor award for poetry, Kabir Samman, International Man of the Year, Indira Gandhi Memorial Fellowship with lead to the book, *Indian Narratology* published by IGNC, Gangadhar Meher National Award for poetry, Asan Prize and Jana Sanskriti Award (Abu Dhabi), Vayalar Award, Pandalam Keralavarma award and Vallathol Award.

- ▶ Poetry rooted in Indian myth and legends

Kurukshethram, the literary masterpiece of Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker created a new era in Malayalam poetry which was till then dominated by the classical poems of Asan, Ulloor, Valathol and the romantic poems by Changampuzha. The poem was an experimentation both in substance and form. The poem rooted in Indian myth and legends earned him the sobriquet 'T. S. Eliot of Malayalam poetry.' The poem has close parallels with T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* but was Indian in thought and expression. He started writing the poem in 1952. He was dissatisfied with the poems of his contemporaries and with his own poems since the subjects or themes were inadequate to express the decay that lies within, "the atmosphere was saturated with the nauseating stench of decayed poems coming from within and without." The 494-line poem was completed in 6 years and was divided into five sections. Published in 1960 in *Desha Bandhu*, the poem became an epic in Malayalam poetry. K. Satchidanandan remarks: "Kurukshetram is the first poem of Ayyappa Paniker with a definitive thematic and idiomatic significance." Themes, like "value and valuelessness," "repeated betrayal, failures and hazards in the country," had fleeting appearances in his earlier poems. It was in *Kurukshetram* that all of them were organically amalgamated into a 'monologue of momentous hesitations.' "Kurukshetram" exemplifies Paniker's views of poetry where he discards the idea of form and prosody as the fundamental elements of poetry. He advocated free verse in writing poetry.

The poem begins with a quote from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

*Tell me Sanjaya. what my sons and the sons of Pandu did,
When they gathered on the sacred fields of Kurukshetra
Eager for battle*

► Commercialisation
of modern life

In the modern age, the battle happens in the mind of the modern man: a site for the quest for right and wrong, helplessness and powerlessness that one experiences in the encounter between the mighty forces and himself. Like *The Wasteland*, this is a quest poem. The first section starts with an invocation to the star who is the mute spectator of all that is happening on earth. It depicts the commercialisation of modern life and its loss of faith but finally finds solace in the positive images of little girls and the warmth of the sun. He profusely uses images from legends, myths and folktales. Dawn, day, dusk and night are compared to childhood, adolescence, motherhood and old age. The infants are like “the sun at break of day” with golden rays, the adults or the youths like the dusk, the mothers like noon with “the strength and purity of their passion of maternity” and finally the old “like sombre clouds of darkness that spread over the earth at midnight.”

► Destruction of nature

The second section echoes the second section of *The Wasteland*, “A Game of Chess.” The poet here introduces a person who shares the same thoughts as the poet. It shares the angst of destroying the forests by man and its impact on future generations. The destruction of nature and its consequence on posterity disturb the poet. The section describes the pathetic condition of Mother Earth eagerly waiting for the rain. All the living beings on earth wait for the arrival of the monsoon.

*And the tall palm trees
stretch their skeletal fingers athwart the
blue and glassy air
to plunder and pocket the blue of the skies.*

► No sign of rain

The scorching heat makes the water boil but there is no sign of rain. The poet ponders the complexities of life and the mysteries of the Universe.

*The melody simmering in the veins
reflects the pattern of the world
arising from the clash and clasp
of Being and Becoming.*

The anxious thoughts of the poet lead him to question his existence and identity. The thoughts of the poet shift to the



- ▶ Claustrophobic images

golden days of the past filled with happiness and innocence. The objects which would inspire the poet now have a withered look. The second section is a web of claustrophobic images of entrapment such as the shut and locked door, the curtained window, the privacy of closed chambers, convent walls, the fortress, the cage, the bosom of the family and the circumambient void.

- ▶ Impossibility of distinguishing between the good and bad

The third section is a continuation of the second where the poet questions what is right and what is wrong and comes to the conclusion that it is impossible to distinguish between the good and bad in the present day. He exemplifies the concept through instances of Dharma from the epics - *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. He asks whether Rama gained anything in the end, despite all that he had done. Even the tactics of the Chanakya could not give solace to his thoughts.

*On the field of battle
crying for justice
with streaming eyes
Arjuna heard the Gita
but that Arjuna I am not.*

- ▶ Representative of all sinners

The poet says that now our mind is like a battlefield but we are not like the great hero, Arjuna. The poet becomes the representative of the whole human race, a representative of the modern man. The modern man has committed a lot of sins, he has become a sinner like the Greek Oedipus who killed his father and married his mother. The poet also brings the story of Vyasa in *Mahabharata* who had a son with a low-caste woman. Here in the poem, the poet himself becomes a representative of all sinners.

The fourth section opens with the lines:

*Fade and begone
you, memories of cast iron,
withered dugs of a battered dame!*

- ▶ Dualities of life

The poet says that the memories of the lost past are unwilling to go like a “battered dame.” They still linger on. The poet then ponders on the dualities of life like the light and dark, day and night, good and bad, dream and reality. When one fades the other will come but they will meet one day, and then the thin line that separates them will blur. It is death. Then the poet is brought back to the good old days of carefree and blissful childhood.

*Like a wave of rapture
like a single faith for this vexed world,
in that brief season of my innocence...*

But now he has lost the 'brief season' of innocence. Now there is mere oblivion and neglect. And the poet yearns for glorious days.

*Can the Banks of this world
yield a better return?*

► Trust oneself

The poet then turns to the political theories that guarantee happiness or truth for man. But they have failed in their theories. Only we can provide happiness to ourselves. We have to trust ourselves if we want to move forward and that is the fresh hope provided by the poet.

*Let us, then,
move into a new frenzy
and wage an endless fight
to shape and remould
the world around
nearer to the heart's desire.
Our own hands must trace the route ahead
our own eyes decide where the feet should go.*

► Make life meaningful

In our future journey, we will be troubled by a lot of questions. But we have to trust ourselves and move forward. Death is a certainty. But till then we have to live a meaningful life by loving each other. Thus, we will be able to create a new world together.

*When,
out of the white seeds of fire
hurled down by the sovereign sun
and plunged into the womb of the sea
days are born anew;*

► True meaning of happiness

The concluding section begins with a reference to the star as in the first section. The poet tries to find a meaning to the short life span of human beings on mutual trust and friendship. Only then can human beings know the true meaning of happiness.

*The time we spent
in friendly camaraderie
is the sum of happiness
gained; this much I know;
this, after all, is all that life means.*



► World of compassion

The poet envisions a new world born out of love and compassion. The poem is born out of a dream; similarly, the poet dreams of a world with life and fertility which is born out of compassion. The fusion of nature and humans can bring a new world.

*...the message of my eyes
and the compassion of your rays unite,
and your love buds into blossom, into fruit into seed.*

► Necessity of illuminating our souls

The poet says that the world is full of philosophies. But it is not a philosophy that is needed but a solution to all the problems that we are encountering. There is no need for us to sit under the Bodhi tree nor is there a need to repeat the story of Jesus Christ. The need of the hour is to illuminate our souls.

*If the soul illumined,
who has to speak
of the Mount Calvary?
If indeed for a rare moment
we could all just human be.....
We could redeem, take a new birth as virtuous men for
achieving a new world...*

► Innovator of metrical patterns

About the poetry of Ayyappa Paniker, Satchidanandan writes: "Ayyappa Paniker is one of the pioneers of that transition of poetic sensibility, which began in the early fifties in almost all the Indian languages: a transition that consisted primarily in a realistic revolt against senile romanticism on one side and mechanical progressivism on the other. He has remained alive to the variety of forms and patterns of poetry that range from short confessional fragments, hymns, lullabies and epitaphs to long revealing sequences, dramatic monologues and classical ballads. Paniker has also been a bold innovator of metrical designs. Besides bringing back to Malayalam poetry the glamour and the music of the Sanskrit, Dravidian and folk metres, he has experimented with metrical collages, rhyme-less verse with irregular rhythms and stylised as well as sinuous, forthright prose".

No doubt Kurukshetram stands out from the traditional forms of poetry in form, structure, and thought. It was a bold innovative attempt in the field of poetry. As Satchidanandan

► Innovations in poetic forms

observes, “the first section of the poem introduces the ontological anguish shared by Arjuna and Abraham alike and inherited by the alienated modern man in his Hamlet-like trepidations. The second part points to the futility of philosophical systems invalidated by the burning reality of existence. The third contrasts the phenomena of experience with the archetypes of imagination and rejects conventional moral standards as stale and unrealistic. The fourth expresses a kind of metaphysical surrender to the illusion of the existence of which we are mere observers. The concluding fifth section rejects even the solace of mystery; the tension-fraught lyrical ego finds its final comfort only in the assertion of the authenticity of the self-contained individual after the Yeatsian fashion.”

Summarised Overview

The poem “Kurukshetram” was an experimentation both in substance and form. The poem rooted in Indian myth and legends earned him the sobriquet ‘T.S. Eliot of Malayalam poetry.’ The poem has close parallels with T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*, but is Indian in thought and expression. He started writing the poem in 1952. He was dissatisfied with the poems of his contemporaries and with his own poems since the subjects or themes were inadequate to express the decay that lies within. The book devotes its first chapter to revisiting the signature poem that inaugurated the era of the ‘fragmented self.’ The 24-page chapter is an engaging reflection on *The Waste Land*, given that the perspective is put on record almost a century after the publication of the poem in 1922.

Assignments

1. Consider “Kurukshetram” as an epitome of modernist poetry.
2. Compare T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* and Ayyappa Paniker’s “Kurukshetram”.
3. Can we consider Ayyappa Paniker’s “Kurukshetram” as an example of meta-textuality?
4. Allusions and Imagery in “Kurukshetram”.
5. Predicament of modern man in Ayyappa Paniker’s “Kurukshetram”.



Suggested Reading

1. Endres, Clifford. "On Ayyappa Paniker's Kurukshestram." Khas, Sept. 2018, www.academia.edu/37454038/ON_AYYAPPA_PANIKERS_KURUKSHETRAM.
2. OmniMaster. "Twentieth-Century Malayalam Literature." *Omnilogos*, 3, July 2023, omnilogos.com/twentieth-century-malayalam-literature.

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1. Satchidanandan, K. "Modernism in Malayalam Literature." *Routledge eBooks*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4324/0123456789-rem1870-1>
2. Sreenivasan, T. P. "Remembering Ayyappa Paniker." *Rediff*, 31 Aug. 2006, www.rediff.com/news/report/tps/20060831.htm.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ have background knowledge of Modern Drama
- ▶ be familiar with the different techniques and themes that are dealt with in Modern Drama
- ▶ know the philosophy of life envisioned by the dramatist
- ▶ analyse, interpret, evaluate and describe dramatic literature and theatrical productions
- ▶ understand the social, cultural and historical context including the theatrical conventions of the period

Background

Though Sanskrit literature had an illustrious dramatic tradition, and a school of Sanskrit plays known as Trivandrum Plays written by playwrights from different regions of Kerala, theatre in modern Malayalam literature did not begin to flourish until late into the nineteenth century. Since the dominant Hindu culture had elaborate traditions of temple theatre such as Koodiyattam, Thullal and Kathakali, realistic drama failed to receive respectability or audience.

The Portuguese contact had helped the development of a Christian theatre, and the Christians who lived primarily in central Kerala staged plays on the history of Charlemagne, Jacob of the *Old Testament* and the lives of various saints. Most churches produced passion plays and gospel enactments, which went unnoticed by mainstream culture. Only after Valia Koyil Thampuram's translation of Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* (1882) did drama begin to get the proper attention of Malayalam writers. The Kalidasa play set off a stream of translations and borrowings from Sanskrit and English and, following Varghese Mappilai's adaptation in 1893 of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare's plays began to appear.

The novelist C. V. Raman Pillai also produced adaptations of English neoclassical dramas of Sheridan and Goldsmith. His *Kurupilla Kalari* (A Chaotic Place, 1909) provided a model for the future development of comedy, and E. V. Krishna Pillai's farces filled the lacuna of a dramatic tradition in Malayalam. At this point, Thottakkat Ikkavamma, the first woman dramatist in Malayalam, introduced her play *Subhadrarjunam* with a proclamation that it was not to the glory of the Muse that women were incompetent in writing plays.

With the rise of communism, drama became popular as an expression of the revolutionary zeal of the emerging political culture. The progressive writers were at the vanguard of the new theatre movement. With Thoppil Bhasi's socialist-realist play *Ningalenne Kammunistakki* (You Made Me a Communist, 1952) performed by the Kerala People's Arts Club in every village and town in the state, Malayalam theatre came of age. C. J. Thomas ushered in the modernist phase with his *Avan Vintum Varunnu!* (Behold! He Comes Again, 1949) and *Crime 27* (1954). Krishna Pillai's adaptation of Ibsen, especially in his *Bhagna Bhavanam* (Broken Home), helped the refinement of the theatre and led to further adaptations and translations from Continental drama. With the enormous success of a dozen plays written and produced by N. N. Pillai (*Easwaran Arrestil* [God under Arrest, 1967]), psychological and existential drama became a dominant part of Malayalam literature. With Thoppil Bhasi, N. N. Pillai, and K. T. Muhammad, touring theatre companies became a major cultural factor in Kerala; but in the late 1960s, the artistic theatre declined with the rise of the popular, commercialized theatre, performed by groups like Alleppey Theatres and Kalanilayam and by dozens of smaller professional and amateur companies located throughout the state. That most of these performing groups are still patronized by Hindu temples and church organizations explains the general weakness of modern Malayalam drama.

Other important playwrights of the mid 20 th century include Ponkunnam Varkey, C. N. Srikantan Nair, Kainikkara Kumara Pillai, Thikodeeyan, Idassery, T. N. Gopinathan Nair, K. T. Muhammad, P. R. Chandran, and C. L. Jose. Though television and the film industry have weakened the theatre, a new wave of postmodernist drama has begun to take root, rivalling the mainstream theatre. Again, like the fiction writers and poets, their formal approach is determined by a new anchoring in precolonial cultural forms, reinterpreted for a world that has lost much of the certainties of modernism. This new generation is led by G. Sankara Pillai, Vayala Vasudevan Pillai, Vasu Pradeep, Kadavoor Chandran Pillai, S. Ramesan Nair, Narendra Prasad, and Kavalam Narayana Panickar. They have begun to relink theatre with Kerala's ancient traditions of ritual theatre.

Keywords

Sanskrit Plays, Comedy, Modernist Drama, Psychology



Drama I : Investment

- N. Krishna Pillai

2.2.1 Prof. N. Krishna Pillai

Prof. N. Krishna Pillai dramatist, essayist, translator, historian and critic of Malayalam language and literature, was born on 22nd September 1916 at Muthana in Chirayinkeezhu Taluk, Thiruvananthapuram district. His portrayal of realism and social problems in dramas earned him the title 'Kerala Ibsen.' After completing his school education in Sivagiri and Attingal, he joined Maharaja's College, Thiruvananthapuram, now known as University College, where he graduated with honours in Malayalam and joined as a school teacher in Sivagiri Malayalam School in 1938. Later he quit his job to pursue research at the University of Kerala. In 1943 he joined as a Lecturer in The Madurai Diraviyam Thayumanavar Hindu College, but after one year he joined the University College Thiruvananthapuram. Later he worked as a Professor at Government Brennen College, Thalassery, as Principal of Intermediate College, Thiruvananthapuram and professor of Malayalam at the University College. N. Krishna Pillai was married to Azhakattu Saraswathy Kunjamma, and the couple had four daughters, Sahiti, Kala, Madhuri and Nandini, and a son, Hari. Pillai died on July 10, 1988, at the age of 71.

► Portrayal of social problems

Krishna Pillai's oeuvre consists of 14 plays of which three were written for radio, 13 one-act plays, and 7 books of children's literature, literary criticisms, historical essays and research papers. He was credited with introducing social issues into Malayalam theatre when mythological operas were popular. He focussed on characters and social problems which earned him the sobriquet "Kerala Ibsen." *Bhagna-Bhavanam* (Broken Home) in 1942, *Kanyaka* (Spinster) in 1944, *Balabalam* (Might against Might) in 1946, *Anuranjanam* (Compromise) in 1954, *Mutakkumutal* (Investment) in 1960 and *Kutathile Vilakku* (Lamp Inside the Pot) published in 1972 are some of his notable works. He was a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Drama, Odakkuzhal Award, Vayalar Award and Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi Award, among other honours. The Kerala Sahitya Akademi considered him as a distinguished fellow in 1979. He also published 11 essay compilations, two books of memoirs and interviews and 9 books of children's

► Mythological operas

literature. His book, *Pratipathram Bhashanabhedham*, is a detailed study of the novels of C. V. Raman Pillai and it has won several awards. *N. Krishna Pillai Foundation*, an eponymous organization, organized a three-day art festival in Thiruvananthapuram in memory of Krishna Pillai in 2018 on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of *Kanyaka*, one of Pillai's works. *N. Krishna Pillai Memorial Cultural Centre*, an institution in Pillai's honour, is situated at Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram, and houses a 250-seat mini theatre and N. Krishna Pillai Memorial library, a research centre with over 8000 titles. The Foundation also organises an annual theatre festival in his honour.

Investment (1960) by N Krishna Pillai is a modernist drama that talks about the complex psychological processes that happen in the minds of individuals. The drama revolves around the lives of Prabhakaran Nair, an affluent figure in his community and his wife Thankamma. Prabhakaran Nair was forced to marry Thankamma out of a special circumstance in his life. Before marriage, Padmanabhan Nair's life was in debt. It was Thankamma's father who gave him money to clear all the debts. In return for this Prabhakaran Nair had to marry Thankamma. Prabhakaran Nair was a person who had concepts about his married life and the person whom he wanted to marry. Contrary to his expectations, Thankamma entered his life. He was not able to accept Thankamma as his wife. To him, she was only considered as a person to attend to his needs. But as the name suggests, Thankamma, thankam means gold in Malayalam language, she was a nice woman. She was a dedicated wife and fulfilled all the wishes of her husband. But Prabhakaran Nair never paid attention to the needs of Thankamma.

► Complex psychological process

► Poor family background

Shyamala was a paying guest in the house of Prabhakaran Nair. She was also called by the name Shyamam. She hails from a very poor family. Her mother was a domestic helper and it was with the meagre income that her mother earned that met the needs of the family. Though she had sisters and brothers they were not hardworking or ambitious. The sole hope was on Shyamala. She was good at her studies. Prabhakaran Nair offered monetary help for her studies. She was considered a member of the family. She was very close to Thankamma and considered her as her elder sister.

But as time went by Prabhakaran Nair wanted to make Shyamala his wife. For that, Prabhakaran Nair sent Thankamma and their children to her house. Prabhakaran Nair tried several times to seduce Shyamala, but she always talked about the



- ▶ Money is not the greatest investment

demeanour of Thankamma and how Thankamma treated and loved her husband. This made Prabhakaran Nair very furious. One day Shyamala went to the house of Thankamma. On seeing Shyamala, Thankamma became angry. Shyamala asked her why she left her husband alone with another woman. The ailing Thankamma became sad and asked Shyamala to marry her husband as she was sure that her death was near. Shyamala returned to Prabhakaran Nair's house and said what happened in the house and about her request to Shyamala to marry Prabhakaran Nair. He became remorseful on hearing this. He decided to bring her back and at that time Shyamala's brother arrived with the news of Thankamma's death. Shyamala decides to raise the children of the couple even though she is penniless. She thus convinces Prabhakaran Nair that it is not money but humanity is the greatest investment.

Summarised Overview

Investment (1960) by N. Krishna Pillai is a modernist drama that talks about the complex psychological processes that happen in the minds of individuals. The drama revolves around the lives of Prabhakaran Nair, an affluent figure in his community, his wife Thankamma and a paying guest in their house. The drama takes us to the conflict in the minds of the characters about values in life.

Assignments

1. Consider *Investment* as a problem play.
2. Make a psycho-social reading of *Investment*.
3. Analyse the character of Prabhakaran Nair.
4. Explore the Gender issues addressed in *Investment*.

Suggested Readings

1. N, Krishna Pillai. *Investment: Malayalam Drama*. Translated by Velayudhan S, Kerala Sahitya Academy, 1981.

Reference

1. OmniMaster. "Twentieth-Century Malayalam Literature." Omnilogos, 3 July 2023, omnilogos.com/twentieth-century-malayalam-literature.

Drama II : Crime 27 of 1128

- C. J. Thomas

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ gain an understanding of C. J. Thomas's role in introducing modernism into Malayalam theatre.
- ▶ recognise the importance of literary translation as they explore C. J. Thomas's translations of classics from world literature into Malayalam.
- ▶ engage in critical analysis by examining how C. J. Thomas deviated from conventional biblical dramas in his plays.
- ▶ comprehend the modernist approach employed in *Crime 27 of 1128*, recognising its experimental nature.

Background

C. John Thomas (C. J. Thomas) (1918-1960), popularly known as C. J., was an Indian playwright and literary critic of Malayalam literature. He was credited with introducing modernism into Malayalam theatre with his plays *Aa Manushyan Nee Thanne*, *Avan Venndum Varunnu* and *1128-il Crime 27*, evidently showing the influence of Bertolt Brecht and epic theatre. He based his plays on biblical themes but they deviated from the conventional biblical dramas, often criticising the religious ills. He translated a number of classics from world literature into Malayalam which included *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* of Sophocles, *Ghosts* of Henrik Ibsen and *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes. The famous line in *Oedipus Rex*, *Thou art the man, Thou the accursed polluter of this land* is the base for the title of his play, *Aa Manushyan Nee Thanne*. Thomas's oeuvre consists of 11 plays which included translations, 4 literary criticisms, 6 essay compilations and a novel.

C. J. Thomas was born at Koothattukulam, in the Ernakulam district of the south Indian state of Kerala in 1918 to a Syrian Orthodox Christian priest, Yohannan Mar Episcopa and Annama. After his schooling at the Government High School, Koothattukulam and Vadakara High School, he was ordained a deacon of the Orthodox Church and completed his pre-university studies at C. M. S. College Kottayam where free education was provided for deacons. Later, he graduated from the Union Christian College, Aluva in 1937 and it was during this time, that he quit the priestly vocation. He joined a primary school in Vadakara as a teacher but his involvement in the Indian independence movement worsened his relationship with the school management leading to his resignation from the job. He studied law at the Government Law College, Thiruvananthapuram, and on graduation in 1943, he started practising as an advocate under N. V. Chacko, a leading



lawyer of the times. However, he did not continue with the job and after two months, he quit it to become a full-time member of the Communist Party.

Thomas met M. P. Paul, the renowned critic, became a faculty of the tutorial college run by Paul, but quit the job in 1949. Later he made an unsuccessful attempt to study for M. Litt. He met M Govindan in Madras and worked in the USIS. His next assignment was at the Sahithya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham, a writers' cooperative, a job Thomas got through his friend, D. C. Kizhakemuri, where he designed the covers of the book published by the society. Shortly afterwards, he returned to M. P. Paul's College and had the opportunity to meet Rosy Paul, the daughter of M. P. Paul. After a brief period of romance, he married Rosy, amidst the disapproval of many, on 8 January 1951. After the death of Paul in 1952, he managed the college for a while and ran his own college for a brief period before joining All India Radio as a producer in 1957 on a three-year contract, but left the job after one year. He also worked as the production officer at the Dakshin Bharat Book Trust, at their Chennai and Kochi offices, starting in 1958 and a year later, he was diagnosed with brain tumour. He died on 14 July 1960 survived by his wife, their two sons, and a daughter. His life has been documented in a biography titled *Manalkaattinte Sabdam* (The Voice of a Sandstorm), by George Onakkoor.

Keywords

Modern Malayalam Theatre, Epic Theatre, Biblical Themes

Discussion

2.2.2 *Crime 27 of 1128*

C. J. Thomas's *Crime 27 of 1128* was published in 1954 and was translated into English by Allen Wendt and Ayyappa Paniker. The play is a perfect example of modernism and it ushered in an era of Experimental Theatre in Malayalam. Modelled on Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), the play deals with the theme in an objective way. The play's main theme deals with the question of death and how it affects people at different levels. The play analyses the theme from different levels: first from the level of Guru and Disciple (Mathew), secondly, how it is taken by the newspaper reporters Zachariah and Ramakrishnan, and finally through court trials. Scene I begins with the Disciple visiting his Guru because the disciple has heard the news that his Guru is dead. Guru enlightens the Disciple that death is a joke and should be treated accordingly. He shuns all the gravity that was attached by the Disciple and asks him to treat it in a light

► Experimental Theatre in Malayalam

manner. It is the living who are affected by the death rather than the dead.

► Sensational news

The second scene shifts to the newsroom where Zachariah and Ramakrishnan work. They are in search of sensational news since they are bored with the daily, routine news. When they come to know about the murder of Marcose by Varkey they are excited. However, the news has nothing sensational in it since the one who was killed (Marcose) and the killer (Varkey) are known. Both were workers in a lime kiln. The motive behind the murder was also clear. Marcose was suspicious of Varkey having an affair with his wife. They entered into a war of words and Varkey pushed Marcos who fell into a furnace as per the eyewitness. But his body or bones were not recovered from the furnace. But Marcose was missing. For the media persons, the murder becomes only a space-filling activity.

► Capital punishment

The third scene of the play happens in the courtroom where we find Marcose's death being put on trial by the prosecutor and the defence attorney. The prosecutor argues that since the dead cannot be brought back to life, the one who has taken the life of the person should be given capital punishment. The defence attorney claims that no one has the right to take the life of a person, hence capital punishment cannot be given to the accused. The play brings forth the question of whether capital punishment is right or wrong. The play also has a soliloquy by the accused, Varkey, who suffers torture at the hands of police officers. He prefers death since he can no longer endure the pain both physical and mental that he is undergoing. Varkey thinks of suicide and attempts it but does not succeed. The police and all others in charge save him from suicide to face the trial for capital punishment. But Varkey dies due to a heart failure which is the result of the severe trauma that he has undergone during the trial. The absurdity of the situation is also brought to the audience for discussion. The author tries to bring forth that law and justice are entirely two different things.

► Reversal of roles

The fourth scene presents a reversal of roles to understand the situation better. Here Chaki, the neighbour of Marcose and Eruppuka's (wife of Marcose) friend takes the role of the attorney while the Guru plays the role of Judge. Chaki questions the prosecutor, defence attorney and the judge. The prosecutor believes that there was much evidence for the murder while for the defence attorney, it was a boring case due to lack of evidence. The judge was not all affected by the gravity of the case and took his time to analyse the etymology

of the word pot-belly used to describe a fat man. Marcose then appears on stage and reveals that he had not fallen into the fiery pit. He escaped and was hiding to see the harassment that Varkey would undergo due to his death. But he did not foresee that Varkey would meet with such a fate. The disciple then decides to take Marcose home.

► Compensatory money

At that time Sastri, the employee of the lime kiln, was trying to settle the compensation money with Marcose's wife Erupukka. She demands a sum of two thousand rupees while Sastri tries to settle her with a hundred rupees. Finally, when the two arrive at a settlement, Marcose enters and the play ends with Sastri throwing the amount on the stage and asking Marcose and his wife to take it as stage money.

► Death is a joke

The play *Crime 27 of 1128* is modernist in its approach to theme, techniques and representation. The major theme of the play is Death. 'Death is a joke' is the main idea that runs throughout the play. To substantiate the whole theme different characters are brought on stage. The perspective of the media which is still relevant in contemporary scenarios is the most significant aspect. The media is not at all concerned about the psychological or emotional aspects that a murder will bring forth. They consider it only as a matter of filling the news column. The emotional trauma that Varkey undergoes from society, judiciary and personal is unfathomable and it leads to his untimely death. More than emotional, it is the financial loss that is experienced by Marcose's wife Erupukka and Marcose's father. Hence, Guru explains to his Disciple that death is a joke.

► Play within the play

The play is an example of play within the play. The main theme is death which the Guru wants to explain to his Disciple. This theme is exemplified through the murder trial of Marcose and the plight of Varkey and other characters. The play also employs the Brechtian technique of alienation where the audiences are frequently made aware that they are watching a play and the characters are not to be sympathised with. The play also mocks the pretensions of people from different sections of society. The narrative is ingrained in dark humour which exposes the system as insensitive and malicious. Thus *Crime 27 of 1128* ushered an age of experimentation in Malayalam theatre.

2.2.2.1 Major Characters

Guru- A rational and logical person, the author of the drama, and he philosophises on death.

Disciple- youth, hence vulnerable, finally understands the meaning explained by Guru.

Marcose- one who is thought to be murdered by Varkey - works in the lime kiln.

Varkey- works in a lime kiln, is convicted of murdering Marcose- attempts suicide but fails - and finally dies due to heart failure.

Ramakrishnan- works in a newspaper firm - the one in search of exciting news.

Zachariah - a colleague of Ramakrishnan - shares the same enthusiasm for news as Ramakrishnan.

Prosecutor, Defence Attorney, Judge - Characters in the courtroom.

Witness - one who witnesses the crime in the kiln - sees the murder but it is dark.

Sastri - another witness – works in the lime kiln, also becomes a representative of the employer and negotiates the settlement money.

Erupukka - Marcose's wife - accused of having an illicit relationship with Varkey - becomes aware of her rights when Sastri comes for settlement.

The Old Man - Marcose's father.

Chaki - Erupukka's friend and neighbour - takes over the role of lawyer in the last scene.

Summarised Overview

C J Thomas's *Crime 27 of 1128* was published in 1954 and was translated into English by Allen Wendt and Ayyappa Paniker. The play is a perfect example of modernism and it ushered in an era of Experimental Theatre in Malayalam. Modelled on Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), the play deals with the theme in an objective way. The play's main theme deals with the question of death and how it affects people at different levels. The play analyses the theme from different levels: first from the level of Guru and Disciple (Mathew), secondly, how it is taken by the newspaper reporters Zachariah and Ramakrishnan, and finally through court trials.



Assignments

1. Discuss *Crime 27 of 1128* as an experimental play.
2. Discuss how dark humour is employed in the narrative of *Crime 27 of 1128*.
3. “Death is a joke”-Do you agree with the statement? If so, substantiate your answer.
4. Perspective of the middle class towards death in *Crime 27 of 1128*.
5. Portrayal of women characters in *Crime 27 of 1128*.
6. Representation of media in *Crime 27 of 1128*.

Suggested Reading

1. Thomas, C. J., et al. “CRIME 27 OF 1128.” *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1980, pp. 165–212. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40861190>. Accessed 11 Sept. 2023.
2. Vivekshankar, K. “Hindu Review of C.J. Thomas’s Play ‘Crime 27 of 1128.’” *Paperless Musings by Script Writer K.Vivekshankar*, 20 Dec. 2010, kvivekshankar.wordpress.com/2010/12/20/hindu-review-of-c-j-thomass-play-crime-27-of-1128.

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1. Hari, Vaisakh E. “Five Decades on, Crime 27 of 1128 Remains a Crowd-puller...” *The New Indian Express*, 19 Oct. 2015, www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2015/oct/19/Five-Decades-on-Crime-27-of-1128-Remains-a-Crowd-puller-831499.html.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Prose and Fiction

BLOCK-03

Block Content

Unit 1 : *Indulekha* - O. Chandu Menon

Unit 2 : *The Second Turn* - M. T. Vasudevan Nair

Unit 1

Indulekha

- O. Chandu Menon

Learning Outcomes

Up on completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ Understand the contribution of O. Chandu Menon to Malayalam literature through his novel *Indulekha*.
- ▶ Analyse the socio-cultural backdrop that shaped the origins and impact of *Indulekha*.
- ▶ Examine the social commentary and critique encoded within the text of *Indulekha*.
- ▶ Situate *Indulekha* within the wider landscape of 19th-century Indian writing.

Background

An avid reader immersed in both his native literary heritage and popular English fiction, Chandu Menon belonged to a unique bilingual intelligentsia produced by Anglicisation under the British Raj. This Anglophone writer voraciously consumed English novels, developing a taste for intricate social commentary woven through gripping fictional narratives. Inspired to nurture such literary sophistication in Malayalam, Menon wrote *Indulekha*. Blending the tight plot structure of British romance fiction with astute sociological critique, targeting customs like child marriage and caste inequities, *Indulekha* sparked far-reaching conversations on social reform.

Indulekha emerged alongside early Indian novels in other regional languages that also uniquely blended Western narrative techniques with radical questioning of local tradition. These pioneering works reflected how English education catalysed modernisation by fostering new literary forms and progressive ideologies. However, *Indulekha* stands out through its enduring legacy over a century as both Kerala's foundational novel and an artistic catalyst for monumental social change.

Keywords

Customs, Psychological, Child marriage, Education, Perspectives



Discussion

► Pioneering novelist

► Early life

► Official roles

► *Indulekha*

3.1.1 O. Chandu Menon

Oyyarathu Chandu Menon (1847-1899), popularly known as O. Chandu Menon, was a pioneering Malayalam language novelist. He wrote the first major Malayalam novel, *Indulekha*, which was published in 1889.

Chandu Menon was born on January 9, 1847, in Naduvannur near Perambra in present-day Kozhikode District. His family moved to Thalassery when he was an infant. He started his studies under Koran Gurukkal and later learnt Sanskrit poetry, drama and grammar from Pandit Kunjanbu Nambiar. Around the same time, he received English lessons locally and then from K. Kunjan Menon. Chandu Menon had his higher secondary education at the Basel Evangelical Mission Parsi High School in Thalassery. While studying there, he qualified for the Civil Service by securing a high rank. However, he had to abandon studies in 1864 following the death of his mother.

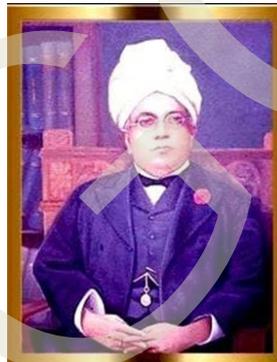


Fig. 2.1.1 O. Chandu Menon

Chandu Menon started his career as a clerk in the government service under William Logan, the author of the *Malabar Manual*. After working in various offices across Malabar, Chandu Menon slowly rose up the ranks to become a Munsiff. In 1892, he became the Sub-Judge of Calicut. He also served as the District Judge of Mangalore in 1895. Chandu Menon assisted Logan in preparing the *Malabar Manual*. He was also a member of the committee constituted to inquire into Marumakkathayam and report on the Malabar Marriages Bill. His observations on matrimony among Nairs during that time were of great historical significance.

Inspired by his wife, Lakshmikutty Amma, Chandu Menon wrote his first novel, *Indulekha*, in 1889. It was the first Malayalam fictional work to meet all the characteristics of a novel. The novel shed light on the transforming Nair community while exalting English education and satirising orthodox marital practices. It also depicted the love and life of an upper-caste woman and addressed issues like feudalism, polygamy, and caste oppression. *Indulekha* was translated into English in 1891, and it remains the only Malayalam novel to

► Death

be reprinted every year for over a century. Chandu Menon also wrote part one of his second novel, *Sarada*, in 1892 but could not complete its sequel.

Chandu Menon was a progressive social reformer who supported education and social reform. In 1898, in recognition of his excellent government service, he was awarded the title of Rao Bahadur. Chandu Menon died in 1899 at his Oyyarath residence in Thalassery due to heart failure at the age of 52. He is regarded as the pioneer of Malayalam novel writing for his path breaking work, *Indulekha*.

3.1.2 *Indulekha*

► Impact of the novel

Hailed as the first major social novel in the Malayalam language, Chandu Menon's pioneering 1889 work, *Indulekha*, occupies a seminal position in Kerala's rich literary heritage. However, this groundbreaking literary achievement did not emerge suddenly in a cultural vacuum. An in-depth examination of Chandu Menon's unique personal background coupled with the turbulent social crossroads of 19th century Kerala provides critical and enlightening context on the origins and monumental social impact of this novel.

► Western impact in Kerala

Chandu Menon lived during an era of tremulous upheaval and awakening in Kerala, triggered by the expanding influence of British colonial governance. Great transformations swept across the region under the Raj as Western-style English medium education became widely accessible to Indians for the first time through newly established schools. This produced an Anglicised elite class of civil servants and professionals serving the mechanisms of the colonial administration. The gap in learning also fostered growing contact with Western literature and philosophical ideas among this English educated intelligentsia.

► Chandu Menon's dual inclinations

As an erudite polyglot equally proficient in English and his native Malayalam, Chandu Menon himself belonged to this bilingual class that imbibed English literature while retaining deep roots in indigenous culture. After a prosperous career in the colonial civil service, Menon devoted his leisure time to voracious reading. He was particularly entranced by popular English social novels, which impressed him deeply with their psychological insight and intricate social commentary.

Chandu Menon grew increasingly eager to nurture a parallel novelistic tradition in Malayalam literature, which at that point consisted mainly of poetry, folk songs, and



- ▶ Mixed nature of *Indulekha*

classical dance dramas without much emphasis on social themes. Initially, he set out to translate popular English novels directly but struggled to bridge the cultural divide for local readers. Eventually, he conceived the pioneering idea of crafting Malayalam fictional narratives modelled on the structural and thematic sophistication of English novels but organically woven around authentic contemporary Malayali characters and scenarios from the complex transitional society he inhabited. The fulfilment of this vision was his masterwork, *Indulekha*.

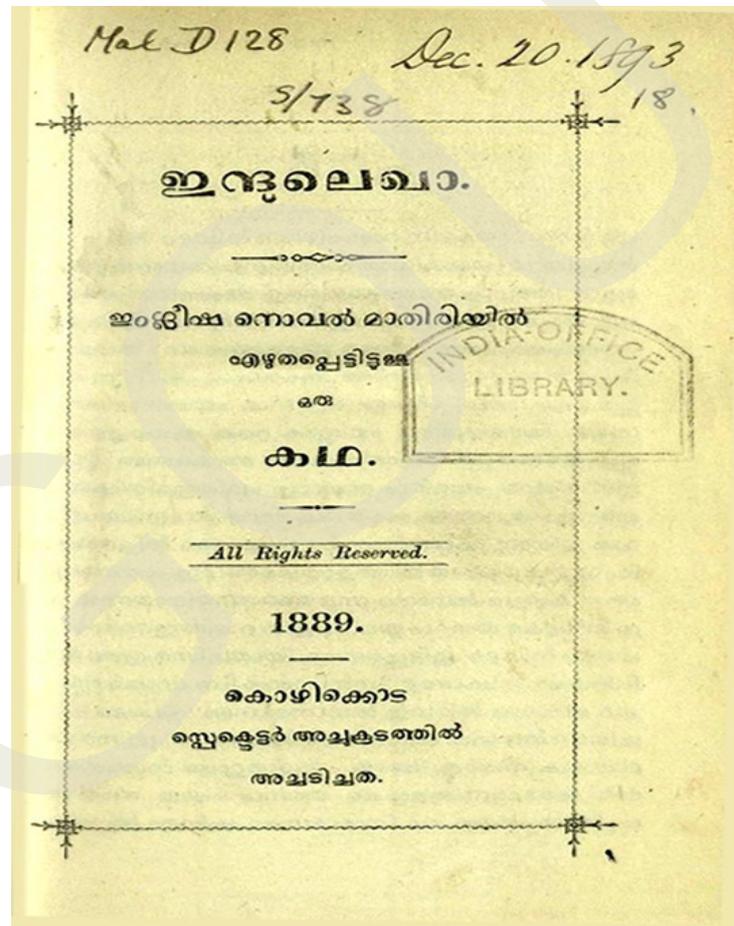


Fig. 2.1.2 The title page of the first edition of *Indulekha*

3.1.2.1 Plot Summary

Indulekha is an intelligent, artistic Nair girl. She is an educated, knowledgeable young woman who has studied English and Sanskrit. She falls in love with Madhavan, the hero of the novel. He is a member of the newly educated Nair class, a university graduate who dresses in Western clothes but keeps his long tuft of hair in the Nair custom.

The story shows how, at that time, the matrilineal Nair society encouraged old Namboothiri men to start relationships

- ▶ *Indulekha* and Madhavan

► Opposing
Sambandham

► Against social evils

► Love imbibed in mutual
understanding

► Promoting goodwill
among people

► Female potential to
resist

with young Nair women like Indulekha through a practice known as *Sambandham*. Indulekha firmly rejects the advances of the old Namboothiri man. Madhavan hastily runs away to Bengal, where he makes many friends. Eventually, he returns and reunites with Indulekha, and they leave together for Madras. The story promotes inter-caste marriage.

The old Namboothiri in the novel represents the decay of the feudal system and its practice of polygamy. Indulekha, the educated female heroine, resists the oppression of the Namboothiri and instead marries Madhavan, who stands up against the social evils of that period.

The love story in *Indulekha* is about more than just romantic feelings. It shows a deep connection between the two main characters, Indulekha and Madhavan, based on understanding, respect, and a shared desire to learn and grow. Both Indulekha and Madhavan are portrayed as thoughtful, educated people who care about tradition but are also open to new ideas that fit with universal truths. Their caring relationship develops through innocent exchanges of poetry and music, which show how similar they are in their beliefs and values. Even when they face a crisis that briefly separates them, their strong bond brings them back together joyfully in the end.

By showing Madhavan's own traditional family helping to reunite the couple, Chandu Menon suggests that elders can sometimes be persuaded to accept social change through thoughtful, kind reasoning rather than aggressive confrontation. The happy ending shows that moving forward often happens through goodwill between people rather than fights between opposing extremes.

3.1.2.2 Analysis

Chandu Menon's nuanced critique of customs avoids harsh denunciations but points to their psychological toll, as depicted through sensitive portrayals of affected women. He reveals the stifling waste of female potential when denied the light of education. Through Indulekha's anguished resistance to marrying the arrogant elderly suitor, Chandu Menon spotlights the crushing impact of child marriage, which wedlocks naive, tender young girls to partners utterly unsuited to meet their emotional needs.

The novel also highlights how backward customs can damage men by limiting their ethical development. Despite his material privileges, the egoistic Brahmin groom's spiritual



- ▶ Traditional and contemporary blends

poverty makes him unable to meet the needs of an equal partner like Indulekha. So Chandu Menon suggests that customs that restrict freedom for all genders cause a net loss for society by preventing interconnection and compassion. His moderate tone conveys that social groups contain diversity - neither the past nor modernity is uniform, but rather has multiple nuanced perspectives. Benign traditional wisdom combined with expansive contemporary viewpoints can enable human progress. A blend of helpful old and new beliefs is better than insisting only one or the other has merit.

- ▶ Nuanced evolution

Chandu Menon crafts multifaceted characters who feel like real people rather than stereotyped symbols of tradition or modernity. Giving each character complexity by balancing both traditional roots and progressive thinking, he insightfully conveys the nuanced social transitions underway in 19th century Kerala. For example, despite visibly embracing modernity through his English law degree and cosmopolitan lifestyle, Madhavan still occasionally puts on traditional *mundu* and retains his top-knot hairstyle. This signifies his retention of cultural affiliation with Indian traditions alongside outward markers of modernity. Through this texture, Chandu Menon reveals the negotiated identity straddling the past and the present within Westernised intelligentsia like Madhavan, who pioneered new paths without fully relinquishing age-old customs.

- ▶ Persuading instead of confronting

Similarly, the strong willed heroine Indulekha cherishes her fiercely protected education and personal autonomy, which align her with progressive views on women's empowerment. Yet she continues to respect her traditionalist grandfather enough to gently persuade him towards her viewpoint rather than rebelliously confronting her elders. Indulekha's ability to blend modern thinking with respect for her family's traditions shows Chandu Menon's balanced approach. He avoids radical extremes and favours gradual positive change through understanding different ways of thinking.

- ▶ Combining traditional and progressive ways

The complex depictions avoid simply showing tradition as totally backward and modernity as always better. Instead, Chandu Menon shows characters who combine both traditional and progressive ways. They blend old and new ideas based on their life experiences. This realistic mix makes the characters and story relatable beyond political agendas. For example, Madhavan sometimes supports Indulekha's independence, but other times he gets jealous and controlling, showing his inner conflict between modern and traditional views of gender.

Though he believes in Indulekha's mental strength, even the progressive Madhavan struggles to fully give up traditional assumptions that men should dominate women's choices.

▶ Indulekha's bravery and inner conflict

Similarly, while praising Indulekha's bravery in opposing the arranged marriage, Chandu Menon also shows her being ostracised for going against customs, leading to inner distress. This shows that there was no easy path beyond a binary choice. Through their hardship, Chandu Menon conveys the difficult psychology of social change, where new attitudes exist alongside old beliefs, creating unclear transitions that are not neatly resolved. This human fallibility makes the characters lifelike.

▶ Author's middle path

The complex way Chandu Menon depicts the characters matches his balanced criticism of customs like child marriage and restricting girls' education. He speaks out against practices that limit human potential. However, he also disagrees with radical demands to completely abolish all traditions as overly extreme reactions without looking at the positive value of keeping some, which can offer continuity. So, Chandu Menon takes a nuanced middle path. He champions social reforms to stop seriously harmful customs while also cautioning against destroying important traditions and cultural identity in the name of modernisation. Through this balanced view and complex characters, he advocates gradual change rooted in compassion over confrontational cultural splits.

▶ Preservation of tradition and adaptation of the present

Like Madhavan wearing traditional *mundu* while speaking English, Chandu Menon supports keeping some cultural identity while modernising. He warns against losing connection with generations old values through excessive modernisation. His moderate view criticises stubborn conservatives unwilling to update outdated customs as well as militant reformers who meet reasonable traditions with angry opposition. Instead, Chandu Menon advocates balancing the preservation of meaningful tradition with the adaptation of helpful new ideas - keeping beneficial roots while allowing growth. This connects to Madhavan blending both Indian heritage and modern education to show that sustainable cultural evolution arises from understanding the wisdom in both past and present changes.

Through his balanced view, Chandu Menon shows the complex transitions that occur when major social changes shake up existing power structures and institutions, bringing as much worry as freedom. By avoiding extremes and highlighting the



► A realistic view

tensions between changing attitudes, Chandu Menon adds a realistic depth beyond a shallow tale of good versus evil. In many ways, the complex lead heroine, Indulekha, represents Chandu Menon's message. Moving forward positively requires neither totally abandoning helpful traditions nor rigidly ossifying past negatives. Rather, gradual and kind evolution focused on human dignity and understanding different views offers an enlightened middle path.

► Criticising *sambandham*

Though usually cautious about advocating major social reforms, Chandu Menon forcefully condemns the feudal beliefs still held by some high caste Hindu groups of his era. In particular, he strongly criticises the practice of *sambandham*. This marital custom allowed upper caste Namboothiri Brahmin men to have sexual relations with lower caste Nair women without recognising them as equal partners or spouses. Through the despicable character Suri Namboothiri, Chandu Menon condemns the feudal ethics that entitled such elite men to treat Nair women as objects purely for their pleasure and ego, with no consideration for the women's autonomy or feelings.

► Suri Namboothiri and Indulekha

The elderly Suri shamelessly expects the young and beautiful Indulekha to marry him in a *sambandham* arrangement solely to satisfy his sexual desires and reinforce caste privileges. Showing no concern for their vast age difference or Indulekha's dislike for him, Suri demands that she consent to this arranged marriage. After all, he argues, what greater purpose could she have than to serve as a Brahmin man's wife, as had been the custom for ages?

► Forcefully condemns oppression of women

Through Suri Namboothiri's loathsome character lacking empathy, Chandu Menon forcefully expresses his contempt for such outdated justifications that sustain institutionalised oppression and degradation of women under the guise of religious customs. By paralleling Indulekha's defiance against Suri with her resistance to an arranged child marriage, Chandu Menon highlights the common root of domination linking child marriage and *sambandham*—the arrogant male assumption of privileges over female dignity enabled by unequal customs that pamper elite men. Suri's outraged fury at Indulekha's refusal to submit despite his graciousness in overlooking her education underscores how easily men used to interpret feudal obedience, interpreting even polite self-assertion from women as offensive ingratitude deserving punishment. Such visceral reactions reveal Chandu Menon's keen understanding of how unjust power perpetuates itself through internalised privilege and normalised dehumanisation. Through Suri, Chandu Menon

thus demolishes the worldview upholding *sambandham* as nothing but disguised subjugation. By portraying principled opposition through heroines like Indulekha, he frames such detestable arrangements as affronts to natural justice that no progressive society should accept.

- ▶ Indulekha chooses Madhavan

In a climactic victory affirming ethical progress, Indulekha defiantly rejects the arrogant Suri's sexual proposition and oppressive paradigm, choosing the egalitarian Madhavan instead as her life partner—significantly based on the love and understanding absent in *sambandham*.

- ▶ Women choosing their life

By drawing parallels between Indulekha's bold rejection of Suri and her opposition to child marriage with an elderly Namboothiri man, Chandu Menon sharply conveys how such practices commonly subordinate women's rights to male authority and pleasure. Through his articulate, independent heroine Indulekha and her refusal to be a pawn for male caprice or caste status, Chandu Menon establishes that women freely choosing their own life path is an ethical necessity in a fair society.

- ▶ Concepts of gender equality and consent

Through this portrayal, Chandu Menon responds to critics questioning the "loose morals" of independent English educated heroines like Indulekha, stressing that moral resistance to unjust customs seems rebellious only from the viewpoint of privileged oppressors. By framing Indulekha's defiance as a principled self-reclamation in accordance with natural law, he reclaims discussion of women's empowerment from critics depicting progressive heroines as cultural deviants who assert gender equality and consent as radical concepts.

- ▶ Madhavan replacing Suri Namboothiri

In many ways, Chandu Menon presents Indulekha's climactic refusal to boost Suri's ego through subjugation as a decisive break from the feudal notions of masculine dominance underlying *sambandham*. Instead, by pursuing an intellectual and spiritual connection with like-minded Madhavan as equals, Indulekha represents Chandu Menon's vision of ethical modernity based on mutual understanding, replacing hierarchical power with partnerships enabling human potential beyond gender, caste, or creed.

- ▶ Exceptions

Through this artistic contrast between Suri's oppression and Madhavan's liberation, Chandu Menon explores complexities like whether exceptions exist among traditionalists like Indulekha's kind hearted uncle Matthan, who, despite accepting customs like *sambandham*, demonstrate genuine benevolence through flexible reformism when confronted.



- ▶ Blending forward-thinking with cultural roots

- ▶ 19th century of reforms

- ▶ Reevaluating caste hierarchy through literature

- ▶ Chandu Menon as inspiration

By differentiating strict authoritarians from compassionate traditionalists, Chandu Menon shows a range rather than just two opposing sides. Without approving unfair practices, he suggests that there is potential for cooperation between egalitarian reformers and open-minded conservatives to replace lingering traces of feudalism with enlightened and inclusive progress. This is embodied through Madhavan, who blends forward thinking beliefs with cultural roots to guide positive change. Through these morally nuanced portrayals and clashes, Chandu Menon pushes for reform while recognising ethical intricacies across viewpoints. By condemning exploitation while avoiding personal attacks, Chandu Menon mirrors the enlightened approach to upholding human dignity that he promotes through *Indulekha*.

3.1.3 *Indulekha* as a Pioneering Malayalam Novel

The latter part of the 19th century was an era characterised by massive upheaval and reform sweeping all through India, and the state of affairs was no different in the region of Kerala. The advent of British colonial rule and the Western system of education they had introduced began functioning as catalysts for change, with the educated Indian people starting to question and challenge prevalent social norms, including their own deep rooted and traditional customary values and beliefs.

Literature represented one of the most formidable conduits of change and transformation during this period. Still, it would have been impossible to foresee that a romantic novel, which happened to constitute the ‘first’ such novel authored in the Malayalam tongue, could gently prod common folk to interrogate and reevaluate the rigid system of caste hierarchy that governed and dictated the very structure of Kerala society.

Chandu Menon’s novel managed to do precisely that, thereby catalysing something equivalent to a literacy and narrative fiction-fuelled social revolution while concurrently inspiring numerous other Malayalam writers who would soon follow in his groundbreaking footsteps. Menon, himself the product of Western-style education and a civil servant employed by the British colonial government, took the radical step of utilising literature’s ability to hold up a mirror to the realities experienced by his own Nair community. Unearthing the tangled story constituting how and why, he elected to deploy the medium of the novel in order to illuminate truths standing as a riveting and fascinating tale unto itself.

3.1.3.1 The Backdrop of the Novel

- ▶ Fractures in caste-defined societal foundation

During this significant period when Chandu Menon catalysed change, Hindu society entrenched within Kerala embodied profound orientations around the caste system, consisting primarily of two highest-ranking castes – the Brahmin Namboothiri priestly class and the martial and noble Nair community – together they were solidly situated at the pinnacle of the caste hierarchy. An intricate matrix of numerous feudal traditions surrounding pivotal institutions, such as conventions ordering marital relations, kinship patterns, asset inheritance etc., shaped the modes of connectedness linking the Nair and Namboothiri groupings. However, despite initial impressions of enduring stability, small fractures subtly emerged, lightly fracturing the facade of this largely cohesive caste-defined social foundation cemented for generations.

- ▶ Hierarchical rigidity

The complex transfer system of assets like land across generations of Namboothiri families stated that the first born son singularly inherits all ancestral property while also solely keeping formal entitlements to find and make a marriage alliance with an elite woman inside the enclosed Namboothiri caste boundaries of endogamy. On the other hand, younger Namboothiri sons typically engaged in conjugal partnerships and *de facto* marital pacts with Nair caste women; so, any children from those relationships would reflexively take on the caste label of the maternal heritage, namely the Nair identity. In contrast, the Nairs followed a matrilineal and matrilocal family structure, where assets such as land, gold, farming means *etc.*, were directly passed from a mother to her daughters. Furthermore, the mother's brother (known as *Karanavar*) was given administrative authority over not just his sisters' riches but also to decide on asset matters for all female members across an entire extensive matriclan.

- ▶ Internal dissents emerge

Cracks in this seemingly enduring structure slowly emerged as murmurs, rumblings and overt dissent with the hierarchical *status quo* began intensifying, especially amongst the more progressive Nair factions. Concurrent with the large scale introduction of English education in the 1800s, an educated class of Nair men actively disputed established social order, targeting two profoundly impactful customs - *marumakkathayam*'s intricate regulations governing matrilineal inheritance, asset transfer and succession traditions alongside vehement questioning of *sambandham* – the long accepted custom enabling elite Namboothiri men to marry and live with Nair women.



► Chandu Menon's interventions

As such, the fabric of this supposedly unshakeable society seemed profoundly ripe for potentially huge, deeply rooted revolutionary change. It was against this backdrop that Chandu Menon, later respectfully called Oyyarathu, came in 1847 amidst simmering, yet unharnessed tensions. Raised in a small rural north Kerala village in what is now Kozhikode, young Chandu Menon received a traditional village education at first before getting an English medium education at the famous Basel Evangelical Mission run Parsi High School in Thalassery, founded by 19th century German missionaries. Starting his career within the middle class as a salaried clerk, Menon relentlessly advanced over decades, even rising to the esteemed community role of adjudicating local disputes as a judge. At the same time, he used his multilingual skills to greatly help the British colonial administrator and amateur ethnographer William Logan in Logan's huge undertaking of creating a sweeping work encompassing precise details explaining Malabar's socio cultural customs, economic modes, geography and communities titled the *Malabar Manual*.

► Menon's translation of *Henrietta Temple*

As an avid book lover with a deep passion for the written word, Menon voraciously read English novels, summarising the intricate plot outlines encapsulating the narrative arc for his wife Kamamma, who generally tended to lose interest hearing these elaborate second hand recapitulations rapidly. However, to Menon's surprise, his wife shockingly asked for a more extensive exploration of the entire romantic novel titled *Henrietta Temple* penned by the Anglo-Jewish politician Benjamin Disraeli. Suddenly struck by inspiration seeded by this completely unexpected positive response, an intrigued Menon conceived an innovative idea – why not try directly translating an English novel to make it understandable and potentially appealing to other Malayalam speakers who may show equal or even greater appreciation for characters and narrative as his wife clearly did? Embarking eagerly on this ambitious creative translation mission, Menon immersed himself in the complex yet deeply rewarding task of attempting a full Malayalam rendering of Disraeli's *Henrietta Temple*.

► Menon's doubt led to a switch.

Certainly aware of his writing skills, Menon, during the mission, started doubting if Malayali readers could fully understand and appreciate a narrative heavily focused on Victorian-era English cultural customs, social norms, traditions and daily habits. This concern arose midway through the lengthy process, making him question whether such content might feel alienating or esoteric for indigenous communities unfamiliar with the cultural practices of a distant land like

England. In that crucial moment of self-doubt and realization, Menon had a new idea. Instead of continuing to translate material from a very different culture, he thought about taking on the challenge of creating a completely original novel in his native language, Malayalam.

► *Kundalatha* or *Indulekha*?

While histories of the Malayalam literary novel often position Menon's pioneering 1889 work *Indulekha* as the 'first' Malayalam novel, this claim is inaccurate. Appu Nedungadi's overlooked 1887 novel *Kundalatha* was published two years earlier, making it the first Malayalam novel. However, *Indulekha* had an unparalleled impact and almost wholly eclipsed Nedungadi's seminal work. Many historical narratives about Malayalam novels notoriously skip over *Kundalatha* entirely, focusing analytical attention exclusively on Menon's landmark *Indulekha*.

Summarised Overview

Published in 1889 amidst major upheavals in Kerala society, O. Chandu Menon's pathbreaking Malayalam novel *Indulekha* occupies a seminal position as the first major fictional work in that language. Set against the backdrop of rigid caste hierarchies and feudal marital traditions governing Namboothiri - Nair relations, the novel depicts the love story of an educated Nair woman, Indulekha, who defies conventions by rejecting an arranged marriage to an elderly Namboothiri suitor in favour of her affection for the progressive hero Madhavan. Through nuanced social commentary encoded within its sympathetic portrait of trapped women and arrogant male authority figures, the text highlights the stifling impact of practices like child marriage and initiates conversations about female empowerment and social reform. Blending tight narrative plotting imbibed from English fiction with sociological critique targeting indigenous customs, Chandu Menon produced a pioneering novel that sparked far-reaching dialogues about Kerala's future while inspiring countless writers to nurture Malayalam's rich fictional legacy.



Assignments

1. What key social customs and marital traditions governing Nair-Namboothiri relations does Chandu Menon critique in *Indulekha*?
2. By depicting female characters like Indulekha, analyse how Chandu Menon highlights the psychological toll and wasted potential caused by restricting women's autonomy.
3. Does *Indulekha* seem to be focused more on promoting inter-caste alliances or gender equality? Analyse.
4. Situate *Indulekha* amidst the wider backdrop of 19th-century Indian fiction.
5. Analyse Chandu Menon's balanced critique of both blind conservatism and radical modernity.
6. Does *Indulekha* seem abolitionist about traditional customs, or more reformative towards gradual change?

Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

Unit 2

The Second Turn

- M. T. Vasudevan Nair

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the unit, learners will be able to

- ▶ Understand M. T. Vasudevan Nair's life, works and contribution to Malayalam literature.
- ▶ Examine the concept and technique of "Perspective Writing" used in *The Second Turn*
- ▶ Analyse the plot structure and major characters of *The Second Turn*
- ▶ Critique M. T. Vasudevan Nair's reinterpretation of the *Mahabharata* through *The Second Turn*

Background

The ancient Hindu epic *Mahabharata* has directly inspired or virtually birthed entire artistic traditions including classical dance, music, theatre and lately, cinema, television and literature. It has spawned adaptations across India in various regional languages. Notable renditions include *Andhra Mahabharatamu* by Kavitravam (Trinity of poets), consisting of Nannayya, Thikkana and Yerrapragada, and Bhisham Sahni's iconic Hindi television series. However, M. T. Vasudevan Nair's *Randamoozham* remains the most referenced and celebrated modern re-imagining that clinched India's highest literary honour, the Jnanpith Award. It retells the grand mythology from the perspective of the marginalised middle Pandava, Bhima, bringing an unusually gritty and realistic tone.

The *Mahabharata*'s labyrinthine epic storyline and minute details make it well-suited for modern reinterpretation through M. T. Vasudevan Nair's "Perspective Writing." This continues the rich tradition of retelling mythology in Malayalam literature. Examples include Ayyappa Paniker's masterpiece poem "Kurukshetram," which depicts the battle through Karna's eyes, or Kumaran Asan's "Karuna," which adopts Radha's perspective on events. M. T. Vasudevan Nair also penned screenplays reimagining Northern Kerala's martial lore, like *Oru Vadakkan Veeragadha*, which similarly adopted the viewpoint of characters treated negatively as villains. Such renditions restore voices excluded from mainstream narratives by highlighting diverse outlooks based on one's situation.



Keywords

Perspective Writing, *The Second Turn*, *Mahabharata*, Bhima, Yudhishtira, Draupadi, Kunti.

Discussion

3.2.1 M. T. Vasudevan Nair

M. T. Vasudevan Nair is an exceptionally talented writer, critic and filmmaker. Born in 1933, he has enthralled the Malayali literary community and impacted the mainstream public with his artistic works. By portraying his vision through the popular medium of cinema, he has allowed the common working class individual to see aspects of their own life experiences and struggles represented on screen. M. T. Vasudevan Nair has exhibited brilliant versatility across an impressively wide range of themes in his works - existential struggle, alienation due to modernisation, commercialisation of society, ethnicity, caste oppression, gender bias, spiritual journeys and more. He has illuminated a vast spectrum of issues. Vasudevan Nair pioneered an innovative cinematic screenplay format that has become a celebrated genre, thanks chiefly to his pioneering contributions. His endless innovations, along with his distinctive formal inventiveness in gripping storytelling, paved the way for him to make a lasting impact on elite literary circles as well as achieve huge mainstream popularity, penetrating the Indian commercial film sphere. Due to this, he has earned immense prestigious recognition through awards like the Jnanpith Award, National Film Award for Best Screenplay, civilian honours like the Padma Bhushan and numerous other accolades.

► M. T.'s signature in literature



Fig. 3.2.1 M. T. Vasudevan Nair

► “Perspective Writing” technique

Analysing M. T. Vasudevan Nair's extensive body of work is an intimidating task, given the sheer width and depth of the themes he has explored through his sharp social commentary. He has left virtually no terrain unexamined. However, this unit will attempt to explore his universally celebrated classic, *Randamoozham* or *Second Turn*. This text has immortalised M. T. Vasudevan Nair's genius for generations through its use of his signature "Perspective Writing" technique. Though prevalent across the master creator's works, *Randamoozham* vitally highlights this ingenious narrative device where the viewpoint encapsulates the marginalised, voiceless protagonist's inner world while navigating larger socio political currents.

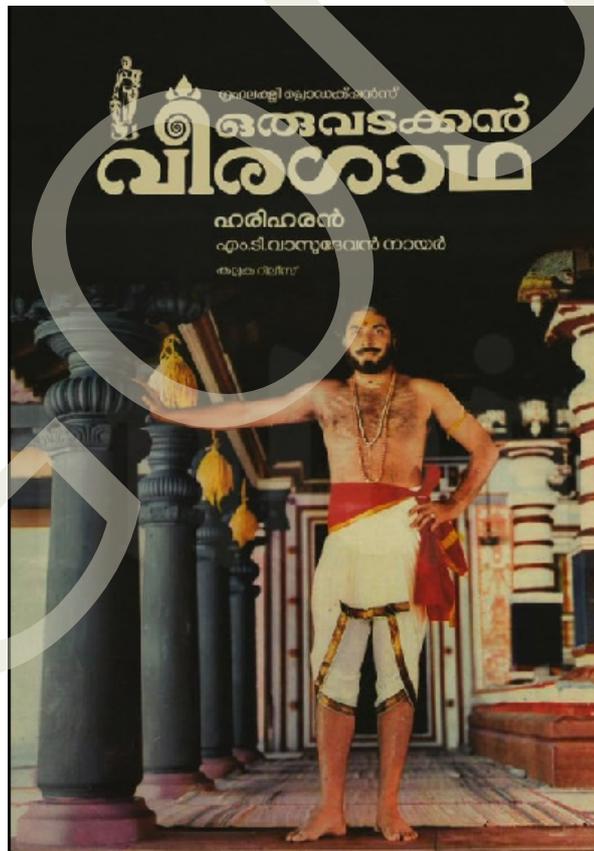


Fig. 3.2.2 A poster of M. T.'s movie *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (1989)

► Treating villains and heroes

By defining the concept of “Perspective Writing”, what is signified is M. T.'s pioneering signature style of retelling or presenting fictional narratives, particularly stories, mythological epics, legends, folklore, momentous historical events and episodes already well known and familiar to audiences through past renderings, but choosing to recast the entire unfolding chain of events under the alternate, unfamiliar viewpoint of a single, given character

who would generally not feature at all or only fleetingly appear in the foreground. This radically shifted angle of perspective thereby illuminates hitherto untouched dimensions embedded within the same collective memories, received histories or mytho-legendary corporeal heritage of a community. M. T. Vasudevan Nair first used his "Perspective Writing" technique in the screenplay for the film *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha*. Usually, these stories celebrate a heroic feudal perspective. But Vasudevan Nair startlingly adopts the viewpoint of characters treated negatively as villains opposing the glorified hero. Yet he movingly evokes sympathy for this "villain" without altering factual details. This restored suppressed voices to the mainstream.

► Bhima's viewpoint

M. T. Vasudevan Nair ambitiously employs his "Perspective Writing" technique in the acclaimed *Randamoozham*. This daringly retells the ancient Indian Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata* from the viewpoint of Bhima. This complex character is little acknowledged in conventional narratives. So, realigning the entire account to Bhima's vantage point casts a revelatory new light by adopting his inner emotional perspective. This sheds unfamiliar insight into the epic.

3.2.2 *Mahabharata* in Literature

► *Mahabharata* as an encyclopaedia

In recorded history, few other literary works rival the spectacular grandeur epitomised by the ancient Indian *Mahabharata* epic. Equally, no composition has matched its immense influence in shaping ideals, customs, beliefs and thought across a substantial fraction of humanity for millennia. The globe's longest poem, at 2,20,000 verses, or 10 times the combined length of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, *Mahabharata* is an encyclopaedia encapsulating India's civilisational wisdom. Ranging across politics, warfare, administration, sciences – physical, chemical, biological, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, logic, ethics / dharma (subtly underlying the plot), psychology, metaphysics, *etc.*, it offers unparalleled coverage of the Indian way of life.

► *Mahabharata* suitable for "Perspective Writing"

Owing to its "Indianness" situated at the cultural core of India, the *Mahabharata* has directly inspired or virtually birthed entire artistic traditions - classical dance, music, theatre and lately, cinema, television and literature. Serving as a font for inspiring outstanding literary works in diverse tongues, it has spawned essays, criticism, poetry, commentaries, plays and most recently, our "Perspective Writing." With a complex storyline, intricate details and subtle personality nuances, the *Mahabharata* is ideal for this style.

- ▶ Reflecting readers' own ideas

- ▶ “Perspective Writing” through Bhima’s viewpoint

- ▶ Rewrites of *Mahabharata*

Mathematically speaking, the narrative structure of the *Mahabharata* contains an “Infinite Dimensional Vector Space” with unlimited dimensions, although most remain hidden to casual readers. Yet scholars willing to analyse more deeply may uncover its concealed dimensions. This allows for infinite interpretative perspectives based on one’s viewpoint. Readers see reflections of their own ideas or the text as they wish. Similarly, “Perspective Writing” also appears in some feminist versions of the *Ramayana* told from Sita’s view rather than the usual male hero Rama’s perspective.

3.2.3 *Randamoozham* (Second Turn)

Literally meaning “the second turn” or “the second chance,” *Randamoozham*, M. T.’s 1984 masterwork, remains his most referenced novel, even credited for clinching India’s highest literary honour - the Jnanpith Award - although that acknowledged his overall contributions. An archetypal case of M.T.’s pioneering “perspective writing” in Malayalam, it retells the *Mahabharata* epic from the point of view of the second born Pandava, Bhima.

Garnering accolades like the Vayalar and Sahitya Akademi Awards while enjoying a wide readership, *Randamoozham* ranks among Malayalam’s 10 greatest novels. M. T. displays exemplary narrative prowess, befitting a classical work without alienating common readers through obscure language. Shunning heavy Sanskritisation, its conversational Malayalam stays broadly accessible. *Randamoozham* was neither the first *Mahabharata* rewrite nor the last. Marathi novelist Sivaji Sawant’s 1975 Jnanpith-winner *Mrityunjaya* recounted events through Karna’s eyes. Later, Pratibha Ray’s *Draupadi* lent voice to that epic heroine’s anguish. Yet, *Randamoozham* retains its unique flair.

3.2.3.1 Structuring and Plot

The work is broadly divided into eight sections, each of which is further divided into various subsections, a condensed form of which shall be presented here. Before starting the novel, M. T. pens down a sort of dedication or remembrance offered to various legendary characters that feature in the epic. This short and mellifluous passage renders beauty and grace to the novel, which can be roughly translated as the following:

“O thou storytellers, O thou citizens of Magadha. Now, we shall sing the lore of the clan of King Kuru. Let us praise Kuru and his son, Pratipa. Let us praise Ganga, who has experienced

- ▶ Remembrance of various characters

birth, love, sin and death and who is the divine life-giver emanating from the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu. Let us praise the brave son Bheeshma, born to Shantanu and Ganga, who, by the power of his penance and celibacy, has even challenged the gods. Let us praise Vichitravirya, born to Shantanu and the fish-smelling Satyawadi. Also, let us praise Dhritarashta and Pandu, who were born through the auspices of Sage Vyasa and conceived by Vichitravirya's widows. Also, let us praise Vidura, an embodiment of virtue, conceived by the maid with the grace of Vyasa. Then, let us praise Yudhishtira. Also, let us praise Kuru, born to Samvarana of the Lunar Dynasty and Thapathi, the daughter of the Sun God. O pals, let us extol the glories of the Solar and the Lunar Dynasties.”

- ▶ Storyteller as a charioteer

It is to be noted here that the author identifies himself with the Suthas, or traditional charioteers, who are also noted for their remarkable storytelling skills. Actually, the epic itself is supposed to have been narrated by one such storyteller at the venue of the performance of a sacrifice by Sage Shaunaka. *Mahabharata*, the gigantic work, is derived from its core, called Jaya or victory, and the humongous volume of the present day work owes its existence to the Suthas, who, by their imagination and additions, contributed to the bulk of the book.

- ▶ 'Jaya' inspired by Indian ancient clashes

M. T. Vasudevan Nair believes that ancient ethnic clashes inspired the original core Mahabharata story (“Jaya”) in India. Later, supernatural elements that obscured the actual events were added. With this in mind, Vasudevan Nair retells the story in *Randamoozham*, removing the divine aspects. Even Krishna is portrayed as a mortal. Vasudevan Nair aims to spotlight what truly happened by cleansing the myths to reveal the realistic historical foundations.

- ▶ Foreshadowing the tragic ending

3.2.3.2 Part I: Yathra (Journey)

The first section of *Randamoozham* differs in using a third-person narrator rather than Bhima's viewpoint. This section gloomily foreshadows the tragic ending by showing the Pandavas surveying the ruins of the flooded, destroyed city of Dwaraka. Only rubble remains of the formerly glorious castle. The passage depicts the pained mental state and inner anguish affecting each of the Pandavas. This section pessimistically sets the tone by portraying the devastation before flashing back to earlier events.

Yudhishtira attempts to console himself through philosophical wisdom and age-old axioms stating that

- ▶ Aftermaths of a tragic event

whatever begins must inevitably end, so periods of decline follow after any peak. Meanwhile, the less ideological Arjuna is plunged into an existential crisis upon realising the futility of his lifelong struggles and guilt over horrendous acts in the war, now that even the purportedly omnipotent Krishna met accidental demise with a mere hunter's arrow, nullifying all glories achieved through his backing. Sahadeva is shocked at the tragic scene beyond anything he expected. He notices that his brother Nakula still retains his graceful youth, even wearing simple bark clothes instead of royal garments. Nakula ponders, calculating how long it will take for a giant pillar to fully submerge in the waves. But he recognises the pointlessness of such mental exercises now that they have renounced everything to seek life's ultimate spiritual destination. Draupadi blankly stares at her feet, possibly to cope with her trauma through detachment. Bhima deeply reminisces about his mace combat training under Balarama in Dwaraka and his teacher's inexplicable favouritism towards his rival student Duryodhana.

- ▶ Bhima's defying of ascetic laws

Convinced that there was no purpose left, the Pandavas and Draupadi set out on their final journey, led by the eldest Yudhishtira. As self-disciplined people, they had to avoid pleasant memories that could distract them from their spiritual path. While travelling, Bhima loudly announces that Draupadi has collapsed. Yudhishtira coldly declares she lacked the moral courage to attain heaven physically, commanding the brothers to keep going without slowing pace or glancing at the fallen ones. With appeals for halting eliciting no response from the detached brothers, a frantic Bhima alone defies ascetic laws by gently raising Draupadi's limp form. As she loses consciousness, struggling to speak through indistinct murmurings, Bhima sorrowfully yet poignantly smiles at her.

- ▶ Bhima turns out to be the protagonist

The first part concludes by depicting only innocent Bhima, with a heart devoid of philosophical convolutions, jealousies or ulterior motives, who displayed genuine, unconditional love and concern for Draupadi even at life's climax. The remaining seven parts unveil the full context of events leading up to the present through Bhima's eyes as the protagonist driving the perspective.

3.2.3.3 Part II: Kodumkattinte Marmaram (Rumblings of an Impending Tornado)

This section, comprising six subsections, as the name suggests, depicts the planting of distrust and hostility between



- ▶ Bhima as a five-year-old storyteller

the Kauravas and Pandavas right from when the latter returned to Hastinapur castle after Pandu's death and his bereaved second wife Madri's self-immolation. Here, the tale is recounted by a five year old Bhima in first person, gaping in awe at the palace and the capital city's splendour surpassing anything previously seen. He eagerly anticipates encountering the various figures he knew only through wandering bards' stories. He observes Dhritarashtra to be extremely sturdy, although below the exaggerations by storytellers. Bhima also reiterates rumours circulated in the court that he had pulverised rocks by crashing over them as a baby. He yearns to don the princes' dazzling jewellery himself.

- ▶ Deceased Pandu and Vayu

It merits noting that the Pandavas still remained oblivious to their divine paternities. On the eve of obsequial rituals for their deceased father, Pandu, Bhima contemplates whether he should offer homage to Vayu, the Wind God and his biological father, invoked nightly before sleeping.

- ▶ Bhima's strength and hostility

Despite being raised together, Bhima developed a rivalry with the Kauravas, especially Duryodhana. Once, when alone, Bhima defeated Duryodhana and Dushasana in a fight, nearly killing them in temporarily unrestrained fury, openly displaying ruthless killer instincts. Later, when a wild boar charged at Bhima, he single-handedly demolished it, again showing merciless savagery. Despite stern warnings from elders against such conduct, his hostility persisted. It nearly cost Bhima his life when Duryodhana's faction deviously plotted to murder him by intoxicating and drowning him, but he narrowly survived solely due to his tremendous physical strength.

- ▶ Bhima as mace warrior

As Bhima grew into a man, his voracious appetite led him to become grotesquely overgrown and disproportionately bulky, moulding him into a formidable mace warrior. At their first competition, Bhima's mace battle with rival Duryodhana quickly escalated until it bordered on a death match. It was fuelled by Bhima's unrestrained aggression as he landed multiple lethal blows, only to be stopped by timely intervention. That night, likely still feeling supreme after defeating Duryodhana, Bhima outrageously celebrated with more intoxicants and devoured a maid's meat dish.

3.2.3.4 Part III: Vanaveedhikal (Paths Through the Forest)

The Pandavas are deceived into retreating to the Varanavata forest through sweet words about an upcoming festival.

► Murder conspiracy

However, the actual festivities fail to match expectations, although Bhima enjoys an elephant race. The sinister motive only dawns later on shrewd Kunti when she recognises flammable construction materials used for their wooden palace, making them vulnerable to being burned alive inside. This murder conspiracy is validated when their well wisher Vidura, sends a spy update.

► Hospitality, ceremony and deception

After the Pandavas had conducted an obsequious ceremony for deceased ancestors involving the ritual sacrifice of a goat, they transferred a portion of the butchered meat to the palace kitchens for preparation as a consecrated food offering to be distributed as sanctified leftovers. Just then, a tribal woman arrived at their doorstep accompanied by five sons, among whom was one youth with a formidable muscular build almost akin to Bhima. Seizing this fortuitous opportunity that seemed like a divine blessing, cunning Kunti immediately welcomed them inside, provided a full meal along with wine, and arranged for them to sleep over that very night. Her plan involved framing the tribal delegation as she and her sons burned the palace with arsonists later that night. This would allow the Pandavas to escape while their enemies mistakenly believed they had perished, providing the necessary time for the Pandavas to observe and plan their next moves secretly.

► Bhima and Hidumbi

Following Kunti's plan, the Pandavas discreetly ignited the palace before midnight. They escaped through a well-hidden underground tunnel crafted by Vidura's miners for such emergencies. During their escape, Bhima avenged himself by brutally killing the corrupt servant, Purochana and disposing off his body in the engulfing flames. In a distant forest, the Pandavas encountered Hidumbi, a young woman from a local tribal community. She greeted them with forest produce. Bhima, drawn to her, engaged in a passionate affair and fathered her child. However, when Hidumbi's brother attacked upon his return, Bhima fiercely defended his family and his pregnant lover, killing the assailant in a violent confrontation.

► Swayamwara and marrying Draupadi

While journeying through villages in exile, Bhima vanquished another menacing demon terrorising the locals. They heard of an upcoming *swayamwaram* for Princess Draupadi, where the one who hit a distant target would win her hand. The Pandavas, disguised as Brahmin priests, had Arjuna compete and, despite some initial chaos, safely brought Draupadi to their forest hermitage. Kunti, unintentionally, suggested equitable sharing without looking. Yudhishtira took it literally, leading to an ethical dilemma as he interpreted it as a directive to collectively



Fig. 3.2.3 Sketching of *Swayamwaram* by Artist Namboothiri

3.2.3.5 Part IV: Akshahrudayam (The heart of the dice)

► Khandava city

When the Pandavas returned to Hastinapur from the forest, they made a claim to half the kingdom, as was their rightful share. However, they were only given a dense forest called Khandava. Through their efforts and administration, they transformed Khandava into a prosperous city with a thriving population.

► Sharing of Draupadi

Draupadi had arranged that Yudhishtira would be her husband for the first year and then the remaining Pandava brothers in order of decreasing age. If any brother encroached on the couple's privacy when it was not his turn, he would be punished with 12 months banishment. Bhima, who often struggled with self-control, managed to restrain himself. Arjuna accidentally entered Draupadi's quarters while she was with Yudhishtira and went into exile for a year as punishment. During that period, he married three other women.

► Draupadi submitted to Bhima

With four months left until it would be Bhima's turn with Draupadi, he was unable to control his desire. He went deep into the forest searching for a lover, ending up in Kashi, where he married Princess Balandhara before returning home with

her. Over the years, Yudhishtira planned to perform the Rajasuya sacrifice, requiring the defeat of all neighbouring kings, including formidable Jarasandha. Draupadi then gave Bhima a jewel and sweetly entreated him to protect Arjuna in defeating their enemies. Bhima killed Jarasandha and later regaled Draupadi with the story of that battle, after which she submitted to him.

► Yudhishtira's staking

Yudhishtira, obsessed with gambling, was enticed into a dice game by Duryodhana, who had the cunning Shakuni playing for him. Yudhishtira staked his jewels, gold, palace, kingdom and everything else until he had nothing left, finally gambling away his brothers and himself into slavery. Draupadi was also gambled away. As the game progressed, Bhima became increasingly angry and restless at his elder brother's reckless actions, but as second in line, he did not have the authority to object. Amidst the turmoil, fearing vengeance, Dhritarashtra freed the Pandavas and returned all that had been lost. But as the Pandavas prepared to depart, Yudhishtira was challenged to another dice game, which he accepted. Once again, disaster ensued.

3.2.3.6 Part V: Panchavarnnappookkal (Flowers with Five Colours)

► Events after exile

The five Pandava brothers and their wife Draupadi, as per the conditions of the gambling loss, went into exile in the forest for 12 years. There, Draupadi would often lament her fate despite being born a princess and having five strong husbands. Krishna and Balarama would sometimes visit and provoke her distress by highlighting her current suffering. In the forest, Bhima defeats Kirmira, a brutal savage. Though mighty, Bhima often lost control upon seeing Draupadi's dress torn. She warns him to wait his turn after Yudhishtira. Bhima remembers how even great sages have violated the celibacy norms they had set.

► Kubera's garden and secret exile

Meanwhile, Arjuna leaves to hone his skills. The rest wander from ashram to ashram. Once, Draupadi spots a rare blue lotus and asks Bhima to get it from Kubera's well-guarded garden. Bhima enters it, gets detained temporarily, but returns the next morning with others' testimony. Draupadi remains awed by the garden's splendour that the flowers Bhima got scattered. Bhima also defeats another savage trying to abduct Draupadi and leaves him unhurt. Yudhishtira paradoxically remarks that tribals shall always trouble them everywhere. As their exile period nears its end, they have to spend a year in



hiding. If discovered, their exile would restart. So, they decide to disguise themselves and hide in King Virat's kingdom to fulfil the treaty.

3.2.3.7 Part VI: Virata (The kingdom of Virata)

During their secret exile period, the five Pandavas got jobs in King Virata's royal court, falsely claiming they were servants in Yudhishtira's court. Yudhishtira took the name Kanka and was given the role of entertaining the King by talking and playing dice games. Bhima took the job of a cook named Valala based on his abilities. Arjuna acted as a eunuch dance teacher named Brihannala and taught the princesses how to dance. Nakula was put in charge of managing the horses in the royal stables, while Sahadeva became the caretaker of the royal cattle. Draupadi, disguised as Sairandhri, became the personal attendant of the Queen.

- ▶ Pandavas' roles in Virata's royal court

During that period, a wrestler from a faraway land came and challenged if anyone could defeat him in a fight. He defeated all the mighty soldiers one after the other but was finally defeated by Valala (Bhima in disguise). Once, Kichaka, the army head and brother of the Queen, saw Draupadi and got attracted to her beauty, expressing his immoral desire for his sister. With the Queen's consent, the lustful Kichaka tried to molest Draupadi forcefully, aggressively dragging her right in front of the oblivious King engrossed in playing dice. Even Kanka (Yudhishtira) seemed indifferent and heartlessly scolded Valala (Bhima) when he tried to intervene, seeing Draupadi's plight. Draupadi later urgently meets Bhima, expressing frustration at Yudhishtira's apathy despite being first in line. Bhima consoles her grief and asks her to trick Kichaka into meeting him at a certain spot, where unknown to Kichaka, Bhima himself was hiding, pretending to be Draupadi to attack him. After a fierce fight, the mighty Kichaka was defeated and killed by Bhima.

- ▶ Kichaka tries to molest Draupadi & Bhima kills Kichaka

As time passed, Duryodhana and his men somehow sensed the Pandavas' presence in Virata. On the last day of exile, Duryodhana mounted a surprise attack on Virata, stealing all the royal cattle. Seeing this, the shocked King was left dumbfounded and clueless. Just then, the five Pandavas came forward, defeated the troops, and retrieved the cattle before revealing their identities. The King honoured the Pandavas for their bravery. Their exile period had expired. Krishna was sent to demand the Pandavas' lawful share of the kingdom, which was ignored by Duryodhana. Consequently, war preparations began on both sides.

- ▶ Attack on Virata

► Preparing for Kurukshetra

3.2.3.7 Part VII: Jeernavastrangal (Torn Clothes)

This section is about the epic Kurukshetra war between the Pandava and Kaurava royal cousins. The Pandavas had set up their military camps at Kurukshetra on the eve of the major conflict. They strategically appointed Dhrishtadyumna to lead their forces instead of Bhima's choice of Shikhandi. The Pandava brothers also planned to engage with specific individual opponents from the Kaurava side during the battle. Bhima's son Sarvada, born to Princess Balandhara of Kashi, arrived at the camp along with his mother to assist his father. Bhima felt guilty for having failed even to send them a message all this time. However, Balandhara displayed no bitterness over the neglect, only appearing content upon their reunion.

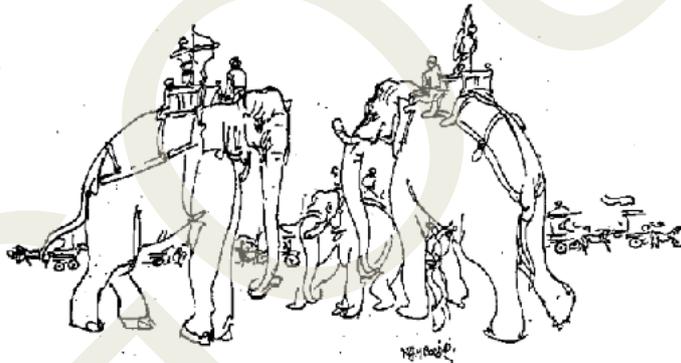


Fig. 3.2.4 *Kurukshetra* war sketched by Artist Namboothiri in *Randamoozham*

► Bhima in the battle-field

Surveying the deceased after the opening day fight, Bhima discovered the young prince Uttara was amongst those killed. He learned that Arjuna was initially overcome with sorrow at the killings until Krishna uplifted his spirit with a profound revelation - that the eternal soul simply sheds mortal bodies like old torn garments and takes on new ones. Restored by Krishna's wisdom, Arjuna regained his resolve to battle. As the clashes progressed, a vengeful Bhima fiercely penetrated enemy formations, relentlessly targeting and overwhelming reputed Kaurava warriors, including Bhishma, Drona, Duryodhana and Karna. At one stage, he even triumphed against ten simultaneous opponents. The body count rose sharply on both sides with each passing day.

Bhishma fell to Shikhandi, Dronacharya to Dhrishtadyumna, and Karna to Arjuna, while Bhima killed all Kaurava princes except Duryodhana. On day eighteen, with just nine combatants remaining, Duryodhana engaged Bhima in a final armed duel.

► End of the war

Despite the initial skilful defence, Duryodhana was ultimately slain by Bhima, who unfairly used a deception that violated proper combat regulations. This concluded the legendary war, leaving just eight survivors - the five Pandavas, Ashwatthama, Kripacharya and Kritavarma. Tragically, all the Pandava sons were also amongst the massive death toll.

► Kunti's revelation and Yudhishtira's offer to renounce the throne

3.2.3.8 Part VIII: Paithrukam (Parentage)

Finally, the Great War concluded, and the victorious Pandavas prepared to conduct the traditional ceremonies for the deceased warriors. Just then, Kunti shocked Bhima by disclosing that Karna, their arch-enemy killed by Arjuna, was, in fact, their eldest brother born prior to her wedding. In her youth, fearing condemnation from society for the premarital pregnancy, she had released the infant Karna to drift along a flowing river. Hearing this, Bhima began questioning his own identity and origins in disturbed puzzlement. The pained Yudhishtira, heavily burdened by having unknowingly caused his elder brother's death, decided to renounce the throne by offering it to successor Bhima instead, who initially seemed pleased by the unexpected prospect. However, Draupadi derisively taunted Bhima that his installation as King would entail Balandhara becoming the principal Queen, forcing Draupadi into subservience to her. Kunti further sternly asserted that the rash and uncultured Bhima lacked the discipline and learning prerequisite for a ruler.

► Bhima's realisation of his origin

After the eventual coronation of the righteous Yudhishtira as Emperor, the elders Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Vidura and Kunti took the drastic decision to depart the palace and retire into secluded forest hermitages. Despite their departure, Bhima remained mentally engrossed by lingering questions surrounding his true origins and identity. Days later, visiting the forest dwellings, Yudhishtira came upon the deceased body of Vidura and later disclosed to the persistent Bhima that Vidura was, in fact, his biological father. Obsessed further by self-doubt, Bhima repeatedly pressured his mother, Kunti, until she finally revealed the truths she had concealed for so long. She confessed that Karna was begotten by Kuntibhoja's charioteer, who had provided her some youthful comfort. Seeking a wise son, she had then turned to Vidura to sire a child. Wanting a strong warrior son, she brazenly tricked a lustful tribal man into getting her pregnant. This resulted in Bhima's birth. With this shocking revelation at the climax, Bhima tragically realises the dark truth about his origins, rather than achieving blissful enlightenment.

3.2.4 Analysis of the Main Characters

The novel features all the pivotal figures from the *Mahabharata* epic. Still, certain characters assume enhanced prominence in M. T.'s re-imagining that differentiates *Randamoozham* from a simplistic retelling. The four primary personas depicted distinctively are:

► Kunti as cunning mastermind

(a) **Kunti:** Kunti is represented as a ruthlessly cunning mastermind, unconstrained by moral limits, unlike her restrained enduring image in the original epic. Kunti deliberately allows innocent forest people to die in a fire as part of a scheme to fake the deaths of her sons. She wrongly claims this cruel plan comes from a religious ritual sacrifice from her ancestors. When Arjuna brings Draupadi home as his wife, Kunti knows who Draupadi is but still tells her sons to share Draupadi equally between them. Kunti later admits to Bhima that her real motive was to unite her sons so they could reclaim their kingdom without fighting each other. Further transgressing all ethical boundaries, she had shamelessly approached a succession of men to sire children with specific desired traits pivotal to capturing power.

► Draupadi's selfish approach

(b) **Draupadi:** Draupadi is chronicled as an acutely jealous, selfish, blood thirsty and discriminating woman preoccupied with satisfying her personal cravings above all else. She recurrently summons Bhima to accomplish critical tasks for her benefit like safeguarding beloved Arjuna from peril against Jarasandha or retrieving the rare "kalyanasaugandhikam" blossom, despite Arjuna being her most cherished spouse. Anticipating violent chaos during her Swayamvara ceremony, she relishes Bhima's grisly chronicles of vanquishing demons and tribal savages, often provoking the Pandavas to wage war to avenge her humiliation. Draupadi is married to the five brothers. Even though she is with each brother at different times, she is actually in love with Arjuna when she is intimate with them. Yudhishtira subtly hints that he notices Draupadi's focus is truly on Arjuna when she is with each brother.

► M. T.'s reinterpretation of Yudhishtira

(c) **Yudhishtira:** Universally exalted as the paradigm of righteousness, Yudhishtira's rendering in *Randamoozham* as a relatively unethical personage highlights M. T.'s reinterpretation. Yudhishtira always claims to uphold dharma (righteousness), but he often twists interpretations for his own benefit. For example, he says it is justifiable that innocent forest tribes died since they were unimportant. Similarly, he skilfully argues Draupadi should be shared equally between the brothers to satisfy his own secret desire for her. Also,



Yudhishtira is extremely proud of his wisdom and insults Bhima by calling him unintelligent or foolish (“manda”). His arrogance allows him to gamble away Draupadi’s freedom in a game, even though he does not fully own her himself.

(d) **Bhima:** Bhima serves as the novel’s protagonist channelling events through his vista. Though often seen as somewhat mischievous, here Bhima is shown through the author’s writing as an innocent, instinctive, bestly savage, possessing great strength. The story’s peak explains what causes these traits. His raw brutality appears when he kills Hidumba and other evil characters in a gruesomely ruthless way. The same brutality drives his horrific public disembowelment of Dushasana to drink his blood in revenge, even gathering some to appease Draupadi.

► Bhima’s ruthless character

► Bhima as second turner



Fig. 3.2.5 Bhima’s illustration in *Randamoozham* by Artist Namboothiri.

Unable to control his carnal urges, denial immediately angers him to violence, once causing him to abandon his wife Balandhara in chasing another’s love. Yet contradictory gentleness also characterises him as a caring and sincere spouse trying to meet Draupadi’s endless demands, although she sees him utilitarianly as a tool. Destined to always rank behind Yudhishtira in royalty and behind Arjuna in Draupadi’s love, and perpetually degraded

to the humiliating queue position of the “Second Turner”, Bhima ultimately finds that his wretched identity mirrors his fate.

3.2.5 A Critique of *Randamoozham*

Randamoozham explores Bhima’s emotional inner world, portraying him as more than just a strong, impulsive character. It also presents Bhima’s experience of neglect that leads to extreme indignation as he feels continually placed second behind his older brother Yudhishtira. Bhima often breaks the wall between himself and the reader to demythify some of the stories about the Pandavas by humanising the epic characters.

Draupadi, the wife shared between the five Pandava brothers, plays a pivotal role. The novel examines the question of male authority and woman’s sexuality in a truly

► Demythifying some parts

- ▶ Draupadi's manipulation

- ▶ Scope for reinterpretation of *Mahabharata*

contemporary fashion. Draupadi manipulates Bhima's desire for her to persuade him to defeat enemies like Jarasandha. Their relationship displays a "fierce dance of the flesh" with "wild sex" and "blood dripping from Bhima's body."

The novel also explores the origins of Bhima's savage instincts, suggesting he may have been fathered by a tribal man rather than a god. This potential non-divine parentage leaves Bhima questioning his identity in the tragic climax. In general, the novel challenges the typical depiction of Bhima as just physicality without intellect. By viewing events through his perspective, Bhima becomes a highly responsive and agile character seething with emotion and indignation. The epic mythology gets dismantled as the characters are grounded in human vulnerability and desire. While largely faithful to the *Mahabharata* narrative, the novel finds spaces for ambiguity and reinterpretation. It gives renewed agency to silenced characters like Bhima and Draupadi, offering a contemporary take on gender roles and power dynamics. This modern sensibility of the novel revises an ancient story for contemporary readers.

Summarised Overview

M .T. Vasudevan Nair's 1984 Malayalam novel *Randamoozham*, meaning "Second Turn", adopts his pioneering "Perspective Writing" technique to retell the ancient Indian epic *Mahabharata* from the point of view of the marginalised protagonist, Bhima. This recasts events from an unfamiliar angle, providing deeper insight. Structured across eight sections, it employs a tragic tone by depicting post war ruins at the start. Bhima is shown beyond his usual "all brawn, no brains" image as an emotional person always neglected. It reinterprets other characters too, like the unusually shrewd Kunti. While largely faithful to the original, *Randamoozham* finds space for reimagination by grounding the mythology in human vulnerability. Bhima's questioning of his origins and identity mirrors his wretched fate.

Assignments

1. How does the perspective writing technique work in *Randamoozham*? Explain with examples.
2. Analyse the major characters like Bhima, Draupadi and Kunti as depicted in *Randamoozham*.
3. Discuss the plot structure of *Randamoozham* across its eight sections.



4. How does *Randamoozham* provide a new interpretation of *Mahabharata* while staying faithful to the original?
5. Examine M. T. Vasudevan Nair's signature style through his portrayal of Bhima as the protagonist.
6. Critically analyse *Randamoozham*'s take on gender roles and sexuality.

Suggested Readings

1. N, Chandrika V. "Bhima, an Emasculated Male; A Close Reading of *Second Turn*". 1 June 2019, www.jetir.org/view?paper=JETIR1907144.
2. Lal, Amrith. "A River Runs Through It: The World of M. T. Vasudevan Nair." *The Indian Express*, 27 Aug. 2023, indianexpress.com/article/books-and-literature/world-of-mt-vasudevan-nair-8910678.
3. Anujan, O. M. "Malayalam Fiction and the New Morality." *Indian Literature*, vol. 21, no. 5, 1978, pp. 21–24. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24158544>. Accessed 29 Jan. 2024.

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2. Kadeekal, Dinil. "Review: *Randamoozham* (Second Turn) by M. T. Vasudevan Nair - Bookish." *Bookish*, 31 Mar. 2015, www.indiabookstore.net/bookish/review-randamoozham-the-second-turn-by-m-t-vasudevan-nair.
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4. Desk, Outlook Web. "Bhima, the Wronged." <https://www.outlookindia.com/>, 1 Jan. 1970, www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/bhima-the-wronged/204603.
5. Vasudevan Nair, M. T., and Namputiri. *Randamoozham*. India, Current Books, 1984.
6. Vasudevan Nair, M. T. *Bhima: Lone Warrior*, Trans. Gita Krishnankutty, India, HarperPerennial, 2018.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Literature and Other Arts

BLOCK-04

Block Content

Unit 1 : *Bhargavi Nilayam* - A. Vincent

Unit 2 : *Kanchana Sita* - G. Aravindan

Unit 1

Bhargavi Nilayam

- A. Vincent

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ Understand the process of adaptation
- ▶ Acquaint themselves with the early history of cinema in India
- ▶ Compare two different texts in the light of adaptation
- ▶ Build awareness on the contributions and style of A. Vincent and Basheer
- ▶ Become familiar with the specificities of short story to film adaptation

Background

“Books and movies are like apples and oranges. They both are fruit, but taste completely different.” – Stephen King

In 1896, the moving pictures by the Lumiere Brothers were screened across the world, including Mumbai. India was soon to follow suit, and the first Indian feature film, *Raja Harishchandra* by D. G. Phalke was released in 1913. It was based on an Indian mythological story. As the fervour of the moving images caught the imagination of many Indians, movies started being made widely, especially in Bengali, Tamil and Malayalam. The storyline of a huge majority was inspired mostly by novels and short stories. This was a trend common to cinema across the globe, mainly because filmmakers realised that to monetise the medium, good plots were needed, and thus, already established stories were adapted into movies. Literature, like other arts, has contributed greatly to cinema's growth as a proper art form.

Indian cinema, though later evolved into different paths as mainstream and off-beat, was initially a commercially popular medium. Mumbai, where cinema was screened by its pioneers, is a city of trade, and the businessmen monetised the art.

Indian cinema, especially commercials, has a unique position on the global scene, mainly due to the intrinsic modifications brought in by dance and song sequences. The essential variety of culture in India, its rich heritage of performance, and various art forms resulted in this innovation on screen. But predominantly, it is the Parsi theatre culture that has had its strongest influence, especially since Parsis were the initial producers of cinema in Mumbai.



The supposedly first Malayalam movie, *Vigathakumaran* (1928), was made by J. C. Daniel - hailed as the Father of Malayalam Cinema. It is said that Daniel consulted Thalassery in Mumbai before producing his film. Unlike the trend of mythological films in Mumbai, Daniel made a realistic film with song and dance sequences. The second film from Kerala, *Marthanda Varma* (1933), was an adaptation of a popular, eponymous novel by C. V. Raman Pillai.

The awakened cultural sphere of Kerala made it a land fertile for arts—fiction, theatre and cinema, predominantly. The interconnection of different art forms enriched Malayalam cinema through amalgamation. This manifested best in the commercial movies produced in the early phase of Malayalam cinema, especially in the 1950s. Social issues were portrayed realistically and were scripted by established Malayalam writers. *Neelakuyil* (1954), directed by Ramu Kariat and P. Bhaskaran, received the President's Medal for its portrayal of social evils like untouchability. The film was scripted by the celebrated writers Uroob and P. Bhaskaran (also a poet and lyricist) and was based on Uroob's short story. Malayalam cinema has since actively produced a rich output of literary adaptations.

Keywords

Adaptation, Supernatural, Romance, Creative Writing, Murder, Horror, Female

Discussion

4.1.1 *Bhargavi Nilayam* - A. Vincent

Bhargavi Nilayam (1964) was the directorial debut of the acclaimed cinematographer A. Vincent. The film is based on the short story "Neelavelicham" by the literary genius of Kerala – Vaikom Muhammad Basheer. It appeared in the collection of stories, *Pavapettavarude Veshya* (1952). *Bhargavi Nilayam* and *Balyakalasakhi* are the only movies that Basheer has scripted, though many of his stories have been adapted into films. In another first, it was for Vincent's *Murappennu* that another doyen of Malayalam literature, M. T. Vasudevan Nair, was initiated into script writing.

▶ A. Vincent

▶ A. Vincent and cinema

A. Vincent, popularly known as Vincent Master (14 June 1928 – 25 February 2015) was a cinematographer and director who has worked in Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi and Telugu films. Until the release of *Bhargavi Nilayam*, the Malayalam film industry was considered technically inferior when compared to other Indian cinemas. His experience as a cinematographer helped Vincent emancipate Malayalam cinema from its early

► Cinematographer

servitude to theatre, thereby resulting in the establishment of proper craft. His longtime associate, Bhaskar Rao, was the cinematographer in the movie. Immediately after *Bhargavi Nilayam*, Malayalam cinema was relieved of the studio culture when *Rossy* was released in 1965.

A. Vincent was trained under and associated with pioneers of Indian cinema. At the age of 19, he worked with Gemini Studios and assisted master cinematographers like Kamal Ghosh and A. Natarajan. Vincent was exposed to the camera from his childhood, as his father owned the Chithra Photo Studio in Kozhikode during the Madras Presidency. His initial lessons in developing film negatives began in the darkroom his father had set up in their house in Kozhikode. Vincent's cinematic output includes shooting around 80 movies and directing 30 feature films.

► Vincent's style

Apart from many accolades and awards, Vincent was given the honorary membership of the prestigious Indian Society of Cinematographers (ISC) for his contribution to cinematography. He was also the founding president of the trade union, SICA (South Indian Cinematographer's Association). Vincent is believed to have a strong disciple following because he was a good teacher and believed in disbursing knowledge. The first independent cinematography by Vincent was for *Neelakkuyil*. Though the movie was shot in a studio, some sequences were outdoors and carried the innovative marks of technical genius by Vincent. He did not follow the redundant rules of lighting but focused on ambiance creation. Vincent was famous for the romantic ambiance that he used to create in his films. He also had a penchant for supernatural themes, which were enchantingly portrayed in his films.

► Vincent and Indian Cinema

As a cinematographer, Vincent had established his identity even before becoming an independent cinematographer. The Shivaji Ganesan movie *Uthamaputhiran* (1958) raised Vincent's fame as a cinematographer. His association with the Tamil filmmaker C. V. Sridhar brought many acclaimed movies. Previously, he was an assistant cameraman to Kamal Ghosh at Bharani Studios. As a director, Vincent produced movies like *Murappennu* (1965), *Thulabharam* (1968), *Thriveni* (1970), and *Sree Krishna Parunthu* (1984) that have received both critical and popular acclaim. His technical expertise is taken as a reference by many new age cinematographers.



► Controversy

The release of *Bhargavi Nilayam* created great commotion in Kerala. It was labelled as a horror movie with a female ghost. The Censor Board had given an ‘A’ Certificate to the film. This caused much contemplation in the public sphere before the movie went on to become a commercial success. The visual grammar of the movie was unlike any previous cinematic experience in Malayalam. Moreover, the film featured blockbuster songs by the music director M. S. Baburaj, and written by P. Bhaskaran. After *Bhargavi Nilayam*, Malayalam cinema had a novel success in playback music. The seven songs in this movie remain all-time hits. In short, Vincent had created a milestone in the history of Malayalam cinema.

► Beypore Sultan

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer (21 January 1908 – 5 July 1994), also known as Beypore Sultan, was a humanitarian and writer par excellence. Basheer was born in Kottayam but later shifted to Beypore, Kozhikode. His simple yet profound stories and astute observation of human beings gave a philosophical depth to his literary output. Basheer was unconventional not only in the thematic concerns but also in the use of common spoken language, which was taboo till then. His path-breaking works were a perfect combination of love, humanity, humour and pathos. Basheer was also noted for his involvement in the freedom struggle. Apart from the various Sahitya Akademi awards, he was also the recipient of the Padma Shri in 1982. *Balyakalasakhi*, *Pathummayude Aadu*, *Mathilukal* and *Shabdangal* are his most noted works.

► Basheer as scriptwriter

When Basheer adapted his short story, “Neelavelicham” into the film *Bhargavi Nilayam*, it served more as an inspiration for the movie. It was the unique, witty style of Basheer that instilled humour even in a ghost story. Though it was Basheer’s first and only attempt at writing for film, the script included all the components required to make the movie a success. The stellar cast of the movie included Madhu, Prem Nazir, Vijaya Nirmala, P. J. Antony, Adoor Bhasi, Kottayam Santha and Kuthiravattam Pappu.

4.1.2 Summary

Bhargavi Nilayam begins with credits in eerie black-and-white shots of an abandoned house on a dark night. Sounds of a female laughing, the barking of dogs, and an owl hooting are heard in the background. The name of the film appears in a gothic manner. When a man with glazing eyes enters the house through the gate, the upstairs room lights up, and the apparition of an angry, beautiful woman appears. The man gets scared and leaves the place. The opening scene sets the

► Introduction

perfect tone for a horror film. After the credits, the film begins with the arrival of a young man to the house named Bhargavi Nilayam (Trans. Abode of Bhargavi, also a house name) – the one shown earlier. The young writer is seen to be in happy contemplation, seated in a moving rickshaw while his luggage is being pulled in another. Here again, the rickshaw pullers are seen visibly scared and do not enter the house. The mood of horror is further stressed by the fact that the writer is not aware of the house being a haunted one.

► Raghu's arrival

Raghu, the writer, incidentally, wanted solitude and since he found the house perfect to engage in writing, he had even paid two months of rent in advance. He falls in love with the atmosphere of the house, despite the lack of electricity. Raghu learns from the postman, restaurant owner and his friends working at a bank that the mansion is haunted. His friends narrate the story of a beautiful and individualistic Bhargavi (who lived in the house) and her failed romance with Sasikumar, a singer. They inform him that when Sasikumar left her to get married to another woman, Bhargavi committed suicide by jumping into the well inside the compound. The restaurant owner tells Raghu that Bhargavi was a haughty woman and that her life had to be doomed, especially because Nanukkuttan had said so.

► Bhargavi's mischief

Despite his fears, Raghu reaches back and tries to ease his fear by engaging in an imagined conversation with the ghost of Bhargavi. Over time, Raghu becomes comfortable in the mysterious house and even plays the gramophone and reads out his stories to the ghost. Meanwhile, a person by the name of Cheriya Pareekanni seeks refuge in the mysterious mansion and works as Raghu's household helper. When he encounters certain strangeness, including objects moving around by themselves, Cheriya Pareekanni believes that Bhargavi is Raghu's wife and that she tried to make trouble for him. This accounts for much humour in the film.

► Bhargavi's story

Raghu tries to ease up his fear by talking to the imaginary ghost of Bhargavi, he slowly gets accustomed to her presence and even starts scolding her for the mischief. This leads to further incidents, like the tearing of Raghu's shirt. His quest for stories leads Raghu to choose Bhargavi as the subject of his next creation. He is told that Bhargavi committed suicide after she received a letter from Sasikumar informing her that he got married to another woman. One day, Raghu sees a pole trying to pull a metal box through the window. On probing, he sees that someone was trying to get hold of Bhargavi's box, which contained Sasikumar's letters, and a photograph of Bhargavi,



among many other things. Raghu adores the photograph and keeps it on his table.

► Probing by Bhargavi

From hearsay and the letters, Raghu tries to write Bhargavi's story. During his early days in the house, Raghu had warned Bhargavi against reading his unfinished manuscripts, which he would later read out to her once they were complete. Meanwhile, at the beach, Raghu encounters a female in an apparition. It is only back home that he understands that it was Bhargavi herself. In another incident, his manuscripts are set on fire. He recognizes these as hints from Bhargavi and finds a newspaper cutting referring to an unidentified male dead body. Raghu voices his concern and tries to find links to Bhargavi in the news. From this point, the movie becomes investigative in nature. Another incident asserts Bhargavi's affection for Raghu. When he falls inside the well during attempts to clean it, Cheriya Pareekanni believes that Raghu is dead. Later, at his friend's place, Raghu reveals that he was magically brought above the surface of water by someone, and he does not exactly remember his escape. Cheriya Pareekanni also realises that the beautiful lady he saw at the house was a ghost and thus refuses to go back.

► Building suspense

One night, Raghu hears strange noises in the yard and finds a ball of fire hustled into the compound. He escapes a knife attack and sees a man outside the compound wall. Raghu doubts if it is the disoriented uncle of one of his friends but also grows suspicious of M. N., aka Nanukuttan, Bhargavi's cousin. At the tea shop, Raghu deliberately inquires about a small toy like thing that was used to create the sounds the previous night and deliberately says that Bhargavi's death was not a suicide but needs to be probed. Meanwhile, Nanukuttan is shown sitting in a dark corner of the shop. Raghu also inquires about Sasikumar's last letter to Bhargavi's mother, who tells him that the letter was found the day after Bhargavi went missing and that Nanukuttan had kept it safe with him.

► The Azure light

Back in Bhargavi Nilayam, while Raghu busily tries to finish his story, the lamp suddenly turns off due to a lack of kerosene. Raghu declares to Bhargavi that the story is almost finished, but he had to get some kerosene for the lamp first. On his return, Raghu is followed by someone in the dark. As he is about to enter his room, he sees a bright light coming from inside. He opens the door to find a fully lit room and realises that Bhargavi was in a hurry to listen to her story as Raghu had written it.

► Budding of romance

Though incomplete, Raghu starts reading his story and says that whatever he must write will be narrated. He starts narrating the beauty of a night scene. From here, the film is shown in flashbacks in Raghu's narration. A vivacious young woman is shown dancing to the music flowing in through her window. Bhargavi was a strong, individualistic woman with her own opinion. Her passion for music leads her to meet musician-singer Sasikumar, who comes to live near her house. Bhargavi, with her two friends Suma and Latha, visits Sasikumar, the singer-dancer director next door, and requests that he tutor her for a college dance event. Slowly, they fall in love with each other. Bhargavi realises his love for plantains and sends them through her house help, acted by Kuthiravattom Pappu.

► Crisis in romance

While young romance buds between the two, Nanukuttan, the nephew of Bhargavi's father, plots to separate the lovers, as he wants to marry Bhargavi, and thus starts haunting their lives. Bhargavi is a woman with an opinion, and she rejects Nanukuttan's marriage proposal. Meanwhile, he reads a romantic note sent between the lovers. Sasikumar decides to leave for Lucknow before asking Bhargavi's hand in marriage. And he resolves to leave, seeking better artistic pursuits, and promises to return to Bhargavi. While on the train, Sasikumar encounters M. N., who offers him a packet, saying that it was sent by Bhargavi. When the train starts, Sasikumar is shown lying reclined on the seat while M. N. alights with the same packet, though opened, in hand.

► Revelation and the second murder

Bhargavi had promised to wait for Sasikumar, and she does so with strong conviction, though she is saddened by the separation and lack of communication from her lover. Bhargavi even decides to wear only white saris, as Sasikumar used to wear only white attire. M. N. keeps pestering Bhargavi and her mother about their marriage. One day, as she bereaves her lover by a swing near the well, M. N. makes fun of the lyrics of her lament. He tells her that she will never meet him again, as he killed Sasikumar by giving him poison laced plantains while on the train. The evil M.N. also tells Bhargavi that she does not have the right to live if she cannot be his wife. After a scuffle, he pushes her into the well and flees. The flashback ends here.

In the next scene, Raghu stands near the well with the manuscript in his hand. M. N. enters the scene and applauds him for reaching the truth of the matter, but also mentions that there was a slight error. M. N. reveals that he alighted only at the next station after strangling Sasikumar to death and that

► Final encounter

he wanted to kill Raghu now that he knew all the secrets. The writer is willing to hand over the manuscript to M. N., but the latter is determined to kill Raghu as he knows the truth, and, in the brawl, M. N. falls into the well while Raghu mysteriously escapes. Raghu tries to call out and help M. N. but fails. Finally, in Basheer's enchanting philosophical dialogues, Raghu bids adieu to Bhargavi.

► Adaptation and addition of characters

4.1.3 Characterisation

To suit the adaptation, *Bhargavi Nilayam* features more characters than in the short story "Neelavelicham." The additional characters are required to develop the plot into a film. Moreover, the original characters are also given more dimensions.

► Raghu - the writer

Raghu: A dynamic writer who loves solitude and has a humble heart. His compassion towards all beings is visible in the way he considers the character of Bhargavi and tries to understand her dreams and desires. At the same time, though he finds out that M. N. is a cold-blooded murderer, he tries to save him when the latter falls into the well while attempting to kill Raghu. His universal humanism extends to the character of Cheriya Pareenkanni when he gives the latter refuge. Basheer's humanism is telescoped into the character of Raghu. In the short story, Basheer used a first-person narrative, and that personal touch is maintained in the film as well. His dedication to writing is what led him to investigate the death of Bhargavi. The final unravelling of the truth behind Bhargavi's death is proof of Raghu's intelligence. Raghu's character might appear artificial to some, but the artificiality is justified by the plot. The leading Malayalam actor, Madhu, played the part of Raghu. Madhu is an alumnus of the National School of Drama and was associated with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), one of the earliest revolutionary theatre groups in India.

► Bhargavi - the woman

Bhargavi: A strong young woman with dreams and desires. She is a confident, talented dancer-singer and is passionate by nature. She does not hesitate to approach Sasikumar, to whom she feels attracted. Like any spirited young woman, Bhargavi is full of fun and frolic. She teases Sasikumar before the romance gets intense. Though the extremely rich M. N. constantly proposes to her, Bhargavi is not materialistic, pursues her heart and wishes to get married to her true love, Sasikumar. Her intense emotion strengthens her decision to wait for Sasikumar, even after prolonged periods of absence and lack of communication. Bhargavi's decision to wear only white saris also conveys her strong will and consistency. Since *Bhargavi*

Nilayam was the first horror film in Malayalam, the white sari worn by Bhargavi's ghost in the film became the stereotypical costume of female ghosts in ghost movies in Malayalam after *Bhargavi Nilayam*. Her vulnerability, dedication and strength have led the character of Bhargavi to emerge as the epitome of timeless, strong-willed romance and commitment. Vijaya Nirmala was the actor who played the role that propelled her into stardom. Nirmala was also a director who holds the Guinness record of being the female director to make the most films.

► Nanukuttan, the villain

M. N., aka Nanukuttan, aka Narayanan Nair: A typical, feudal and arrogant representative of patriarchy. Nanukuttan believes that women should not have agency. He is a cold-blooded murderer who is capable only of thinking about his own welfare. His desire for Bhargavi has always been unreciprocated, but he does not acknowledge the need for her consent and pursues Bhargavi's mother to arrange their marriage. Nanukuttan is a representative of the typical feudal male who is inconsiderate of other existences. Though this character does not appear in the short story, he leads the plot in the film. From the beginning, the movie shrouds Nanukuttan in mystery by presenting the character in darkness. His dark skin and crystal eyes are examples of typical villain stereotyping that early Malayalam cinema could not understand as politically incorrect. At the tea shop, Nanukuttan is a silent observer and the perpetrator of hatred against Bhargavi. It is from him that the villagers develop an image of Bhargavi as a haughty woman who had to be doomed. It is only her friends and mother who have good words for Bhargavi. Nanukuttan, as a true blue murderer, was immortalised by P. J. Antony, the first Malayalam actor to receive the National Film Award for Best Actor (for acting in *Nirmalyam*(1974). Antony was closely associated with the theatrical wing of the Communist Party of India - the Kerala People's Art Club (KPAC).

► Sasikumar, Bhargavi's lover

Sasikumar: A vulnerable artist with deep emotions. His artistic susceptibility made him effortlessly fall in love with Bhargavi and become easy prey to Nanukuttan. Sasikumar wanted to prove his artistic calibre before committing to Bhargavi in marriage. Moreover, for him, his artistic pursuit was sacred. This is visible in the scene where the audience is first introduced to Sasikumar. He is not enticed by the visit of three young women but is dedicated to composing a dance drama that he has been trying for some time. Sasikumar is a character who only appears and is instrumental in the movie. The role was portrayed by the romantic hero of early



Malayalam cinema, Prem Nazir. Nazir is one of the most influential actors in Malayalam cinema and was honoured with Padma Bhushan in 1983.

► Comic interlude

Cheriya Parikanni: Serves mainly for humour, but also helps in asserting the essential humble, although humorous nature of Bhargavi, even as a ghost. She keeps teasing Cheriya Parikanni but never harms him. This role was excellently handled by Adoor Bhasi, the stage name of K. Bhaskaran Nair. Bhasi was an excellent orator and the recipient of the Kerala State Film Awards for his acting prowess.

► Another comical character

Kuthiravattam Pappu: Another comical character with dreams of being a playwright. Though it is a minor role, Pappu is prominent in the plot due to his role as a messenger between the lovers. The actor (Padmadalakshan) was later known by the name of his character in the film. Pappu's nuanced style became his signature "Pappu style," and he is one of the best comedians in Malayalam cinema.

► Female identity

Mother of Bhargavi: Unlike traditional maternal figures, Bhargavi's mother considers her daughter an individual and does not interfere unwantedly in her life. Even when Nanukuttan pursues her to arrange for his marriage with Bhargavi, her mother expresses strongly that it must be Bhargavi's decision. Even when M. N. scorns her for considering the opinion of Bhargavi, her mother stands strongly by her daughter's right to decide. The role of Bhargavi's mother was portrayed by Mala Shantha.

Suma and Latha: The two friends of Bhargavi who trust her and believe in the truth of her romance with Sasikumar. The famous character actor Kottayam Santha played the role of Suma.

► Adaptation

Bhargavi Nilayam - The Movie and the House: The name of the movie, which was the name of the house, became synonymous with a haunted house and is used popularly in everyday speech, even today. The name of the movie alludes to the ideal, eerie structure of a haunted house. But while the elements of ghost, murder and evil are prominent in the film, *Bhargavi Nilayam* shatters all preconceived or even existing notions of a typical horror story. Raghu's conversations with the invisible ghost are like those between two friends or even lovers. This is beautifully achieved by the narrative employed by Basheer in dispersing the character of the writer, both in the short story and the film. Basheer's feat as a writer was portraying both realism and the supernatural with equal

elan. *Bhargavi Nilayam* remains unrivalled in this perfect amalgamation of realistic human experience and supernatural intervention, which is organically portrayed in cinematic language.

► The short story

“Neelavelicham”: Basheer’s short story has limited characters and does not elaborate upon Bhargavi’s past. “Neelavelicham” (trans. Azure Light), without much probing, ends with the proof of a supernatural interference. The writer, in the story, goes to fetch some kerosene but returns to find his room lit in stunning blue light, and the story ends there. This ethereal experience of a lone writer in a haunted house is expanded into a romantic horror movie by Basheer himself. When “Neelavelicham” was decided to be adapted into *Bhargavi Nilayam*, the craft of both short story and cinema was properly considered, and thus, beyond comparisons, both art forms were truly justified, and it could be said that both are excellent in themselves.

► Basheer’s literary style

The literary quality of the dialogues, and more importantly, the description that Raghu voices, is deeply philosophical and thought provoking. In the adapted movie, apart from “Neelavelicham,” Basheer also included bits and fragments from his two other short stories, “Nilaavuniranj Peruvazhiyil” and “Ekanthathayude Apaaratheeram.” The latter forms the initial lines of an immortal song in *Bhargavi Nilayam*. Basheer, as a writer, was a path-breaker, especially in dealing with the mundane and the ordinary. Through humour he represents the harsh realities of everyday human life. Compassion and empathy are the trademarks of Basheer’s writing, and this has accounted for the wide popularity and acceptability of Basheer among the common public. When he adapted his own short story into a film, Basheer made sure that the visual expression was as enjoyable to the audience as possible. The intricate relationship between a living man and a female ghost is enticing. The narrator’s engagement as a writer and the process of creative writing become an important theme in both the short story and the film. This theme of a writer at work has ever since been widely depicted.

► The additions

The film elaborates on Bhargavi only in the second half of the movie, after the audience is acquainted with a fun loving yet harmless ghost. The first half shows Bhargavi only through the imagination of Raghu and Cheriya Parikanni, while the second half shows her in flesh and blood, along with her mother, friends, and lover. “Neelavelicham” is a pure ghost story without much dialogue, but the movie adaptation gives

a human form to the ghost and is rich in artistic articulations. The vocal nature of the movie does not spoil its visual quality, which is compensated by the cinematography. Though the story remains a supernatural experience, the movie takes the form of an investigative thriller.

► A. Vincent as a director

A. Vincent, as mentioned above, was an excellent cinematographer. He chose to avoid the flat, soft lighting that was popular in his times, and instead employed contrasts that were more defining of the frames. In *Bhargavi Nilayam*, the various moods, that is, love, revenge, pain, horror, comedy, and compassion, are portrayed with equal brilliance. The director K. G. George once said that it was A. Vincent who brought the structural design to Malayalam cinema, which was until then used only in Western cinemas. His directorial genius is visible in the mise-en-scene details Vincent curated. Adapting the short story into film was affected by visual communication, though much of the description used in “Neelavelicham” is maintained for its literary quality. The seamless editing by G. Venkitaraman brings clinical precision to the movie.

► Music as narrative

As a director, Vincent not only knew the craft of cinema but also understood the elements that would make it a commercial success by instilling other elements into the plot. M. S. Baburaj, the music director and singer, was Vincent’s choice. The background score and songs remain timeless classics. M. S. Baburaj has since become the doyen of Hindustani music in Malayalam cinema. P. Bhaskaran’s lyrics were voiced by the exemplary singers K. J. Yesudas, P. Susheela, S. Janaki, and Kamukara Purushothaman.

► Rendition

The same song, with slightly modified and opposing lyrics, differently composed, and sung in two contrasting contexts, is another highlight of the movie. “Pothithakarna Kinaavu...” is the first song in the movie when the writer starts living in the mansion. It talks about a shattered romance, instills fear both in the writer and the audience, and sets the mood for a horror movie. The last song, “Pottatha Ponnin...” which is about a strong-willed romance and painful separation, features modified lyrics. It also serves as a proper closure to the story of *Bhargavi*. Both songs, though only slightly modified, communicate two intense emotions and are delivered intensely by the master singer, S. Janaki. “Ekanthathayude Aparā Theeram...”, sung by Kamukara Purushothaman, is considered to be one of the best romantic songs in Malayalam and, at the same time, is also one that generates horror. The lyrics of the song have been written, inspired by Basheer’s short

story, “Anargha Nimisham.” The music and background score accentuate the narrative of a romantic-horror-investigative movie.

T. K. Pareekutty, the owner of Chandrathara Pictures, was the producer of *Neelakuyil* (1954). It was during the tenth anniversary of this film that the producer decided to make another movie that would surpass the merit of *Neelakuyil*. Thus, the cinematographer of the movie, A. Vincent, became part of the project and directed *Bhargavi Nilayam*. As mentioned earlier, Vincent’s genius is stamped on every scene of the movie, making it a visual fiesta. Achieving such an intricate play of light and shade, which holds the attention of the viewers, in black and white is due to Vincent’s expertise. The purpose of the producer in making *Bhargavi Nilayam* was exemplarily achieved, as the film, in perfect doses of romance, humour, music, horror, and pain, was a chartbuster and remains one of the most important chapters in the history of Malayalam cinema. *Bhargavi Nilayam* is also a testimony to an exemplary adaptation of a short story to film.

► Chandrathara
Productions

Summarised Overview

The culturally and politically awakened public sphere of Kerala saw the arrival of cinema immediately after it was introduced in India. Literature-to-film adaptations were the obvious result of a strong literary culture in Malayalam. A. Vincent’s *Bhargavi Nilayam* is an adaptation of Basheer’s short story, “Neelavelicham.” The script for the movie was written by Basheer himself. The film was a critical and commercial success and narrated the story of the revenge of a woman named Bhargavi. It is the first horror film in Malayalam. Though labelled so, it is also a film about love and creative writing. The process of writing also forms an important aspect of the film. The film is a proper example of a literary adaptation.

Assignments

1. Analyse the process of adaptation in *Bhargavi Nilayam*.
2. Comment on the gothic elements in the movie.
3. Examine the interplay of the elements of horror and romance in *Bhargavi Nilayam*.
4. Compare “Neelavelicham” and *Bhargavi Nilayam*, and evaluate the adaptation.
5. Discuss *Bhargavi Nilayam* as an adaptation more reformative towards gradual change.



Suggested Reading

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2. Basheer. “Neelavelicham”. kslc.kerala.gov.in/vayana/res/books/nilavelicham.html. Accessed 3 March. 2023.
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4. Iravankara, Madhu. *Malayala Cinemayum Sahithyavum*. DC Books, 1999.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ Comprehend the process of stage-to-screen adaptation
- ▶ Understand the history of film societies and Parallel Cinema in Kerala
- ▶ Discern the anti-establishment nature of early Parallel Cinema in Kerala
- ▶ Develop an understanding of the craft and philosophy of G. Aravindan and C. N. Sreekantan Nair
- ▶ Realise the politics of re-interpretation of Classics

Background

“Film has nothing to do with literature; the character and substance of the two art forms are usually in conflict.” – Ingmar Bergman

Cinema, in its initial stages, was modelled upon the theatre. Almost the same mise-en-scene of a stage play was recreated for the camera. The changes in lighting, camera movements and the ease of transition, made possible through editing, were the major differences. Early cinemas across the globe were linear narratives. But as it was released from the limitations of studios, cinema became more dynamic. This at the same time, was a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge was to communicate more through visuals than dialogues. The opportunity that cinema found in this detachment redefined the art form. Limitations of space and time were easily overcome and this led to further growth in the craft of cinema.

Cinema is a predominantly visual medium, though sound and other paraphernalia add to the art form. Traditional Theatre, on the other hand, is predominantly vocal, though both art forms are essentially audio-visual. Usually, in a play, dialogue is employed for primary communication. When these two literary forms interact through adaptation, the most common limitation is the vocal “stagy” nature of the play. When a play is adapted into a movie, more scenes and locations are used, and employs more visual language.

King John (1899) was the first stage-to-film adaptation and was based on William Shakespeare’s play. This was just the beginning of the many stage-to-screen adaptations that were to follow. Film-to-theatre adaptations are also popular, especially in Hollywood. The highlight of this adaptation is the live performance of the movies that

the audience experiences. Moreover, its live nature gives it scope to improve constantly. Despite this, the popular adaptation is the one from the stage to the screen, mostly because of the accessibility that a film provides in comparison to a play. There are even adaptations where the film does not change even a single element from the play. The absence of a live audience is, usually, the only change. Yet, there are adaptations that totally change the play. G. Aravindan's adaptation of C. N. Sreekantan Nair's play *Kanchana Sita* (1961) was one such adaptation.

During the early stages, though commercial cinema in India developed its aesthetics, the parallel cinema here was modelled upon the European movements of Italian Neo-realism and French New Wave Cinema. It began with film societies based in Calcutta that screened European classics, following the pattern of the cine clubs in Paris. These film societies were anti-establishment in nature. They evolved through a three-tier system – the first was screening cinema of Italian Neo-Realism and the French New Wave; the second phase added discussions to the screenings; and the third phase was when the societies grew into producing films. During the third phase, Indian cinema had fully developed into commercial melodrama.

Cinema that evolved from the film society collective was political and realistic, as opposed to commercial cinema, thereby becoming “Parallel Cinema.” It was initiated by directors like Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak. The unrest in India contributed to the growth of alternate movements, including the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), and moulded the parallel culture of cinema in India, resulting in the establishment of the Third Cinema.

In the 1970s, Malayalam cinema shifted its production base from Madras to Kerala. During the same time, a culture of parallel cinema was initiated in Kerala through various film societies. The film-literate Malayali population started getting involved in film production. In 1972, *Swayamvaram* by Adoor Gopalakrishnan propelled the new wave of parallel cinema in Malayalam. Adoor - an alumnus of the prestigious Film and Television Institute of India, had brought the realistic film wave to Kerala. This was followed by *Uttarayanam* (1975) by G. Aravindan. Thereafter, Malayalam cinema has always produced a rich repertoire of political alternate cinema, and lately the boundaries between commercial and art-house cinema are getting increasingly blurred, and Malayalam cinema is considered one of the best in India.

Keywords

Stage-to-screen, Malayalam Parallel Cinema, Mythology, Retelling, Power, Rama, Sita, Tribal, Visual aesthetic



Discussion

4.2.1 *Kanchana Sita* – G. Aravindan

► The play

G. Aravindan's film *Kanchana Sita* (1977) was an adaptation of C. N. Sreekantan Nair's play, which was adapted from the "Uttarakanda" of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The play, *Kanchana Sita* (1961) was part of Nair's *Ramayana Trilogy*, the other two plays being *Lankalakshmi* and *Saketham*. C. N. Sreekantan Nair received the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Drama in 1962 for *Kanchana Sita*. The play was performed by the theatre group, Kalavedi, formed by N. Krishna Pillai. Nair was involved in cinema by writing stories, screenplays and dialogues for *Archana*, *Kamuki*, and *Theerangal*.

► G. Aravindan

G. Aravindan presented deep philosophical inquiries through his movies and maintained a perfect distance between melodrama and realism. Before engaging in cinema, Aravindan was an acclaimed painter and cartoonist. His *Cheriyā Manushyanum Valiya Lokavum* (The Small Man and the Big World) was a cartoon series that was a thought-provoking social commentary and a philosophical intervention into human social behaviour. Aravindan was also a screenwriter and musician. His training and exposure in the above-mentioned visual arts and music are reflected in his unique craft of filmmaking. Unlike Adoor, Aravindan was not trained in filmmaking, and this led him to experiment with the medium, thereby exploring the intrinsic quality of cinema. His films broke the conventional rules and refuted the vocabulary of cinema used until then.

► The artist - Stage to screen

Kanchana Sita is the second film by G. Aravindan and is a testimony to his unique aesthetics. Though an adaptation of C. N. Sreekantan Nair's play, the film treats the subject with entirely different aesthetics. Aravindan's films possessed a documentary sensibility, with loose plots and discarded abstract symbolism. His films were edited through association, not plot. But this made him capable of exploring the various possibilities of the cinematic medium.

► Aravindan's cinematic craft

Pan shots of natural landscapes abound in Aravindan's movies and ascribe meditative and evocative qualities to the visuals. His training in painting and cartooning is visible in his flat and balanced frames set against the horizon. The human subject is mostly positioned in Aravindan's films on

► Moods and modes

► Politics of existence

► Music

► Probes into Rama's dharma

► Contributions to theatre

the ground, against the elements. Another feature is the recurrence of various movements like ripples on water, swaying of trees and walking. These focus on asserting the grandeur and boundlessness of Nature.

Silence and stillness are also employed with equal regularity. This is used to emphasise the internal mobilities and contemplation of characters. Mid-length shots are employed by Aravindan to portray reflection by characters. Another feature of Aravindan movies is the repeated feature of criss-crossing shadows. Aravindan's visuals promote self-awareness and reflexivity through slow-paced long takes. Eye-level filming positions the subjects in full vision while maintaining their privacy.

Aravindan's films are political but not limited to the human subject but pertaining to the symphony of Nature. His films combine spiritualism, satire and mysticism. A renewed perspective of age-old myths is presented in newer lights in Aravindan's films. Another important aspect of his filmmaking is that Aravindan restrained from using a regular narrative, script or screenplay. This allowed him to constantly experiment with the storytelling.

Aravindan used to be involved in all areas of film production, from sound to editing. His profound knowledge of music is visible in the harmonious soundtracks of his movies by Rajeev Taranth, a Classical Musician. Due to his lack of training in formal filmmaking, Aravindan exploited the medium and gave birth to an alternate cinematic vocabulary, which explored the visual nature of the medium. It is obvious that when such an unconventional filmmaker adapts a play into a movie, the result would, at the same time, be unconventional.

C. N. Sreekantan Nair's (1928-1976) *Kanchana Sita* was a product of an age of critical awakening in Kerala. The plot of the play is one of rational inquiry and probes into Rama's dharma from multiple vantage points. Editor, short story writer, and playwright, Nair was born in Kollam in 1928, when Kerala was in the first wave of the Renaissance.

The concept of indigenous theatre - "Thanathunatakavedi" was introduced by C. N. Sreekantan Nair. He was instrumental in redefining theatre from Kerala to newer heights in the post-independence era. C. J. Thomas and Nair were inspired both by Western and Indian theatre traditions, including both Sanskrit and folk theatre. His



published works include *Nashtakkachavadam*, *Aa Kani Thinnaruth*, *Aettile Pashu*, *Madhuvidhu*, *Sindoorappottu*, *Thilakkunna Ponnu*, *Pichippoo*, *Puliyilakkara Neriyaath* and *In the Shade of Sahyadri*.

► Re-reading and sub-version

The play *Kanchana Sita* was a landmark in Malayalam theatre tradition. The essentially political nature of theatre was explored to its best in the post-independence era with a sudden surge of creative and innovative perspectives. *Kanchana Sita* by C. N. Sreekantan Nair approaches the mythical concept of Rama from a human perspective and raises questions regarding duty and justice. The play is an introspection of Rama's decisions by Urmila, Hanuman and Bharatha, among others. When Rama is advised to conduct the Ashwamedha Yaga, it is suggested that a golden sculpture of Sita be made and placed in the yagamandapa near Rama, in the place of his consort, without whom the yaga would not be complete. This sculpture emerges as the central dilemma and question in the play.

► Character portrayal

Aravindan's film adapted the dialogue-rich play into a visual manifestation with scarce dialogues. Sita does not appear as a human character but as a force of Nature. The profound manifestation of the over-familiar slice from "Utharakanda" in Aravindan's *Kanchana Sita* did raise a few eyebrows. Further discussion is possible only after watching the film, as the film is essentially a visual manifestation.

► Vast expanse and humanity

4.2.2 Summary

Kanchana Sita begins with a panoramic shot of a dried-up river bed with sparse water around it. The shot zooms out to reveal the vast landscape fringed with trees. Classical music with percussion beats intensifies with the zooming out. In the next ground-level shot, the legs of two barefoot men, in dhoti and holding bows, are shown walking into the frame. Without revealing their faces, the next shot, in extreme wide angle, shows them walking across the frame from left to right, and disappearing behind the trees.

► Establishment of characters

In the next shot, the two men, with beaded neckpieces, the sacred thread worn by Brahmins, and feathered headgear, walk through a forest, upon dry leaves and finally, led by the cries of a bird, reach a place where a man observes penance, hanging down from a tree (Shambuka) and a woman lighting a fire underneath. When the senior here, Rama, tries to aim at Shambuka, his wife falls at the feet of Rama, pleading him not to kill her husband. Lakshmana averts his gaze, while Rama

melancholically stares up to a mysterious music. This is cut to another shot of the afternoon sun from between rustling leaves on trees.

► Rama's dilemma

Later Rama and Lakshmana traverse across vast expanses of Nature between, water, hillocks and sand. A pensive Rama sits down by a fallen tree trunk, immersed in thought, gazing at his reflection in the water, and says, "A king should not dream." Back home, the brothers encounter Urmila's introspection pointing to the abandoning of her sister and Rama's wife, Sita. Rama proclaims that Sita's husband is only a servant to his subjects. This scene is followed by a shot of Rama walking at the foot of a hill to sit at the base of a rock, against the setting sun. This cuts to repeated shots of a man, in silhouette with unruly hair, heading on the camera, crying out Sita's name. It ends with Rama's calm profile against the sun. It shows Rama's deep-rooted and repressed sorrow.

► Glory of the kingdom

Tension builds up with the background percussion music against rainfall. The scene cuts to the actual instrument being played, and then back to a calm landscape with three men – a saint and his disciples, walking across the frame, holding a flag and blowing a conch. On arrival at Rama's abode (a cave-like, rocky structure), they are received with due respect. The saint, identified as Vasishta, advises Rama to hold Ashvamedha Yaga to sustain the glory of Rama's rule. Rama's doubt at the absence of his consort (as the Yaga demands the presence) is countered by the Saint's suggestion of Rama's remarriage. Rama refutes the idea and immerses deep in his thoughts of bereavement.

► Man in Nature

Pan shots of Nature follow the action again to be cut to the playing of percussion beats and men walking in lines. The celebration is reminiscent of tribal festivities. It gives way to various sounds of Nature – crying of birds, rustling of leaves, and flowing of river water, in pan shots. Bharatha is introduced walking across the landscape and respiting to drink water from the free stream. Urmila reckons the conscience of other characters by constantly evoking the betrayal of Sita. Her question, if Purusha (man) and Prakriti (Nature) are not one and the same, is left unanswered.

► Bharatha's introspection

In the next scene, Rama welcomes Bharatha into his arms, while the latter pronounces his allegiance to Rama. Urmila smiles while the brothers walk across the previously shown riverbed, banks and the woods. Rama says, "She was a jewel to the throne of Ayodhya." It is easily understood that the



person is Sita. Rama mentions the Yaga and vests Bharatha with the responsibility of guarding the shelter. On probing about Truth, Rama says that for a King, Truth is his Subject. Bharatha enquires if Rama believes in the chastity of Sita, to which the reply is that she cleared the test of fire. Since the answer does not satisfy Bharatha, he says that it was the same answer Rama gave him twelve years back.

► The interference

Rama asks Bharatha to position himself in the former's place. Bharatha replies that in such a situation he would have slit the throats of those who defamed the chaste Sita. Rama adheres to his sense of duty and the concept of Ramarajya. A dispute breaks out between the brothers and they take up arrows. But then, Rama hears the same music that fell upon his ears when Shambuka's wife fell at his feet. Rama looks up in the same manner as before, to be followed by Bharatha. Again, the music intensifies with the rustling of leaves becoming violent movements in the wind. It subsides with the sound of soft rustling and the flow of the stream.

► The sons

Wide-angle shots of Nature, with the voice-over of chants, move from soft pans and tilts into a panic shot that ends up on the frame of an arrowhead. Two boys in saintly garbs move around playfully with bows and arrows in Valmiki's hermitage. This is followed by a shot of a horse left to roam around from the Yaga. While looking at the horse, Rama visualises the glorious victory of the kingdom. The vision includes horses running in unison while flags sway in the wind, by the seashore. Violent drum beats accompany the scenes, which cuts to the visage of Rama with a silent backdrop.

► Reciting Ramayana

Under a huge tree, Valmiki chants the story of *Ramayana* which is repeated by the two boys shown earlier. They run to the neighing of a horse and are enticed by the white horse of the Yaga. The background sound hints at the mischief and curiosity of the boys. While one boy tries to tame it, the other runs away. In another panic shot, a guard is shown running to Lakshmana to report the missing horse. Background music intensifies as Lakshmana runs across, but silence prevails when he meets one of the boys holding a bow and arrows.

► The boy challenges Lakshmana

Though Lakshmana smiles, he warns the boy against holding the horse, to which the boy responds with an arrow that hits a tree. He challenges Lakshmana to defeat him, who is also a *Kshatriya* and wins the horse. When Lakshmana aims the arrow, the same music is heard to which Lakshmana and

the boy lift their heads to the sky, like Rama previously did. Trees rustle in the same manner as before. Valmiki arrives with the other boy, rebukes the one who took to arrows and sends them both to the hermitage.

► Valmiki, the keeper of secrets

Lakshmana enquires about the boys. Valmiki replies that the ways of the world are surreptitious. Lakshmana accepts awareness and seeks his pardon. Shots of a pensive Valmiki are shown repeatedly against those of swaying grass with melodious background music. Chants are heard in the background across various shots of the setting sun and other landscapes. A profile of Valmiki in dim light cuts to a daylight shot of the horse with Lakshmana and the guard following.

► The Yaga begins

Rama is shown walking with measured feet. The next shot shows the falling of big trees. Later, Vasishta brings Rama to the place of Yaga where Bharatha is shown guarding. The Yaga begins in a procession with a saint holding a golden sculpture of a female. It is understood to be that of Sita, as previously it has been mentioned that the Yaga requires the King to be accompanied by his consort. As the Yaga proceeds, Valmiki walks with the boys reciting the story of *Ramayana*.

► Murder of Dharma

As the chants proceed, a cow and an ox are shown tied outside. From inside the shed, the Yaga shifts to the outside, near the horse. Intense drum beats sound when Rama is informed of Shambuka's repeated attempt at penance. This is followed by shots of bloodied Shambuka lying in the lap of his bereaved wife and the horse on the ground, with blood on its mouth and neck. The Yaga continues with only the sounds of birds in the background. Valmiki's stroll with the boys, chanting *Ramayana* passes the bovine duo, reaching the place of Yaga.

► Sita's passage

Valmiki and Vashishta enter a verbal duel about how a state should be. Rama hugs the boys and thanks the saint. A music of rejoicing plays in the background of wind-blown vegetation, to which Rama looks above. The camera tilts to a blurred shot of a tree. As the fire burns the Yaga shelter, Rama cries out Sita's name while the boys cry "mother." Later the shelter collapses and ash flies in the wind.

► Resolution

Holding a burning torch, Rama, with unruly hair and no headgear, walks across the river bank, and into the stream. In a wide-angle shot, Rama is shown walking away from the camera which follows him till a point. When the camera is still, Rama walks away and disappears into a blur, with the saffron colour of his dress, becoming one with the white shade



of water, alluding to Rama's "Jalasamadhi" in Valmiki's Ramayana.

4.2.3 Analysis

Kanchana Sita could be seen primarily as a political film, which takes ahead the inquisition of C. N. Sreekantan Nair's play. The film was shot in the forest near Bhadrachalam, Andhra Pradesh, where a tribal community of the "Rama Chenchu" group is located, who claim to be the descendants of Rama from Hindu mythology. Aravindan chose actors for his adaptation from this tribe of dark-skinned population. The short stature and pot-bellied Rama, along with other characters, were in stark contrast to the fair-skinned characters in Ramanand Sagar's popular *Ramayana* serialised on Doordarshan and many later mainstream versions. The casting has also helped in conveying the positioning of Rama in the film as an ordinary human caught between binary virtues.

► Tribal *Ramayana*

While the play is crowded with characters, the adaptation uses elision, and some characters are avoided in the film. The film follows the play in construing Rama as a human, bereft of divinity. The emotional encounters of Rama with Urmila, Kausalya, Bharatha and Hanuman were employed by Sreekantan Nair in the play. These are replaced by the single character of Urmila (in the film), who, through her scarce dialogues, awakens the conscience, not only of Rama but of the audience, as well. While the film focuses on the themes of exile, injustice and societal expectations, Sita herself is not physically present. Instead, her presence is evoked through the moods of the forest, the elements of nature, and the internal struggles of the other characters.

► Rama as the erroneous human

The title of the film is used ironically to denote the marginalisation faced by Sita. The decision taken by Vasishtha and Rama to place a golden statue of Sita in the *yagamandapa* represents the lack of agency of Sita. The absence of a physical persona in the movie metaphorically emphasises this lack of agency and the way Sita was unseen by others (for one reason or another), thereby the absence of justice.

► Absence of Sita

The portrayal of Sita as Nature is not one of indifference but of a presence that reckons with the conscience, especially of Rama. It prompts justice and interferes with acts of injustice. The killing of Shambuka despite this reckoning appears ominous, leading to the final passage of Sita (through the burning of the *yagamandapa*), finally leading to Rama's *Jalasamadhi*. Though some context is required for audiences

► Sita as the guiding force

who are unfamiliar with the story of the *Ramayana*, the film could also be enjoyed on its own.

► Samkhya-Yoga Philosophy

Aravindan uses the Samkhya-Yoga Philosophy, which believes that human life is an interplay of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*; the former is Nature or matter, while the latter is the conscience or spirit. The film is built on Urmila's dialogue from the play, where she asks if Sita is not Nature /*Prakriti* herself. This is the manifestation of *Nari*, who equates Sita with Nature. The same dialogue is repeated in the film by Urmila herself. Aravindan adapted this concept by showing Sita as Nature herself in the film. The final shot, where Rama dissolves into the elements (the all-pervading Nature) exemplifies the concept of communion—both of Sita and Rama and *Prakriti* and *Purusha*.

► Absent presence

The concept of incognito from Indian philosophy is employed in this movie by focusing on silence and absence. It is the absence of Sita in the film that voices the invisibility or marginalisation she faced in the name of *dharma*. Sreekantan Nair's play, through the lengthy debates and dialogues of Urmila, Hanuman, Kausalya and Bharatha, put Rama's abandonment of Sita under scrutiny. On the other hand, the film treats the same, less with dialogue and more with visuals. Silence is employed to communicate the dilemma faced by Rama, which extends over to the other characters as well as the lavish use of silence.

► Nature's glory

With scarce human conversation, the sounds of Nature dominate the film, emphasising the omnipresence of Sita. In the film, whenever Rama is encountered with quandaries, Sita's presence is felt through movements in Nature accompanied by soothing music. Thereby, Sita (as Nature) acts as conscience. By conceptualising Sita as Nature, the film presents an eco-feminist reading of the *Ramayana*. The subaltern perspective is emphasised by casting tribes in the film. The tribal essence is highlighted with the detailed panoramic shots of Nature / forests, the substitution of human characters, and lengthy dialogues. The forest acts as the canvas upon which the whole interaction occurs.

► Brahminical conditioning

On the other hand, adhering to the Brahminical customs and even making the tribes wear the sacred thread of Brahminical belief across the body reveals the innate conditioning that Aravindan has. Even while deconstructing caste hierarchy, Aravindan has been accused of being imprisoned under the social constructions of Brahminical cultural hierarchy.

The visual poetry of documenting Nature is the signature style of cinematography in the films of G. Aravindan. The



► Visual poetry

accompaniment of music emphasises the poetic quality of the visuals. His films are testimonies to Aravindan's interest in classical music. *Kanchana Sita* uses music as a narrative. Every minute change in mood or narrative is marked by nuanced changes in music, under the expertise of Rajeev Taranath.

► Experimental film-making

The experimental nature of Aravindan's films includes their documentary nature. In *Kanchana Sita*, the documentary quality is enhanced by the inclusion of actual documentary footage of a tribal celebration. It gives authenticity to the narrative line the director had envisaged for the film. The films of Aravindan are marked by their experimental quality, which is visible in the nature of the scripts used. He used to work with fluid scripts that were constantly improvised on location and edited to perfection by Ramesan. Walking has been employed by Aravindan as a mode to represent both physical and mental mobility. His first film, *Uttarayanam* suggests movement. The Malayalam meaning of the word "ayanam" is movement. Thus, his perception of movement as a form of evolution and continuous becoming has been employed in *Kanchana Sita* to manifest the metamorphosis of Rama.

► Creative freedom

Ashish Rajadhyaksha has observed that the experimental quality of Aravindan's films could be attributed to the artistic freedom he experienced from the producer K. Ravindran Nair of General Pictures, who was a connoisseur of the arts and encouraged creative pursuits. Shaji N. Karun was the cinematographer of *Kanchana Sita* and many other movies of Aravindan. Karun later established himself as an independent director, following and building upon the craft of Aravindan. The perfection of art direction by Artist Namboothiri, famous for his line arts, amalgamated properly with the cinematic philosophy of Aravindan.

► Interpretations

C. N. Sreekantan Nair's play, which led to Aravindan's *Kanchana Sita*, though an entirely different manifestation of *Ramayana*, paved the way for many other re-interpretations, including Sarah Joseph's *Ramayana* stories.

4.2.4 Characterisation

Kanchana Sita is an example of Aravindan's minimalist craft of filmmaking. While the play is crowded with characters and dialogues, the film features minimum characters with scant dialogues. The lead characters were performed by members of the Rama Chenchu tribe in Andhra Pradesh.

▶ Rama - the human

Rama: Unlike the Rama in popular imagination, G. Aravindan's character is dark-skinned, pot-bellied, of short stature and tribal. The highlight of the play was the human perspective given to Rama, as well as the feminist perspective. Aravindan's Rama is also positioned in the same manner.

▶ Rama's abandonment

In the film, Rama is susceptible to all human emotions, though he must stick to the dictums of dharma. The very human emotions of love, separation, helplessness, responsibility and guilt are shown to be experienced by Rama. Despite his attempt to kill Shambuka, in the name of dharma, his conscience – in the self of Sita, manifested as Nature – prevents him from the murder. He is swayed by the wind that appears to evoke Sita. The pain of separation and yearning to be united with Sita preoccupy his thoughts, especially in deliberate moments of solitude.

▶ Interrogations

Rama in the play is consistently questioned by other characters, refuting a ruthless system that downplays humanity. In the film, this is limited to the brief interrogation by Urmila and Bharatha; meanwhile, Rama's inner turmoil and pain are portrayed. He is preoccupied with thoughts about Sita and his actions plead for salvation. Rama, in the film, is vulnerable, yet tied to the system.

▶ Helplessness

Having abandoned his full-term pregnant wife in the forest, Rama is drenched in guilt. The longing for his successors makes Rama devoid of a divine position. He is represented as a man caught between emotion and duty. In the film, Rama is always in a pensive or melancholic mood. He is a person who regrets that a King can never dream, thereby, declaring the dilemma faced. The role was played by Ramadas from the Rama Chenchu tribe.

▶ Lakshmana - the silent follower

Lakshmana: The character of Lakshmana is the least evocative in both the play and the film. His existence is only that of the mute subordinate of his elder brother Rama. The character was portrayed by Venkateswarlu - a member of the Rama Chenchu tribe. Lakshmana refutes the allegations raised by others against Rama.

▶ The prober

Urmila: The strongest character in both the play and the film is Urmila, who does not fear to question the ideal persona of Rama. Her sense of justice and love for her elder sister, Sita unsettles Rama and others, though Rama does not acknowledge it to her. Urmila acts as the conscience-keeper



and effectively rips off Rama's divine image.

In the film, Urmila and Bharatha are the only characters who reckon with Rama's conscience. Even when Lakshmana approaches her with love, Urmila is restless and in despair due to the fate meted out to her sister. The initial joy at seeing her husband vanishes with the thought of her abandoned and wronged sister. The second time Urmila is happy is when she finds Rama in the company of Bharata, whom she understands as her ally in questioning the injustice. Shobha Kiran portrayed the character of the beautiful Urmila in the film.

► Unsettled

► Bharata's righteousness

Bharata: Like Urmila, Bharata, too, questions the injustice committed by Rama in the name of dharma and system. His unflinching dedication to his brother Rama, when he was exiled from his kingdom and Bharata's response against Rama when he abandons the pregnant Sita, shows the integrity of his character. For Bharata, righteousness is above blood-relation. Bharata's role on screen was played by Chinna Pulliah – also from the Rama Chenchu tribe.

► Benevolence and affirmation

Sita: The casting of Sita in the film is one of the most experimental and innovative ones in the history of cinema. The character of Sita as the compassionate, tolerant and sacrificing female is best exemplified by equating her with Nature. Sita is the conscience keeper of the characters, especially Rama, and guides him through. Her thoughts are manifested through the changes in Nature. She also reflects on the mental mechanisms of other characters.

► Sita as Nature

Though Sita, from the point of view of the auteurs in both the play and film, is meted out injustice, she is compassionate. Representing Sita as the benevolent Nature confirms this trait in character. Sita's invisibility is a political and humanitarian concern addressed specifically from the Feminist perspective. This was first dealt with in the play and later magnified in the film. Though Sita had to suffer subjugation and marginalisation, she remains a mute spectator while others debate and question Rama – the primary perpetrator.

► Lack of agency

The title of the film translates to, "golden Sita" and alludes to her position. Sita is highly revered like the value of gold and is also portrayed as "pure" like the metal. Despite this, she suffers exile. Thus, the golden sculpture of Sita positioned in the "Yagamandapa" appears paradoxical. Sita represents all women who are marginalised and denied their rights but are celebrated for their depravity, thereby, naturalising the exploitation.

► The successors

Lava & Kusha: The twin sons of Rama and Sita are shown in saintly attire as they are brought up by Sage Valmiki in his hermitage. The brothers are aware of their caste and are trained in the use of weapons as well as tactics. The roles of both Lava and Kusa were played by members of the Rama Chenchu tribes – Pottiah and Rangiah respectively.

► Capable heirs

In the film, as in the play, Lava stops the horse of the yaga and prepares to fight Lakshmana. The daring comes from Lava's understanding that he belongs to the warrior class. Both the brothers are trained in the scriptures. This is visible from Lava's statement that, as a Kshatriya it is his duty to prevent the horse from amassing the land where he lives. On the other hand, Kusha runs to Valmiki to prevent Lava's impulse to fight. Once they realise that Rama is their father, the boys follow their duty, while grieving their mother.

► The Guru

Vasishta: The Guru of Rama's kingdom counsels him on matters about religion, especially for the well-being of the State. He is the one who advises Rama to conduct the Ashvamedha to assert the authority of his rule and to bring prosperity to the kingdom. When Rama asks if it would be incomplete to conduct the yaga when his consort was absent, Vasishta does not think before suggesting that Rama as a king has every right to remarry and that it is not a sin for a king to do so.

► Substitute to Sita

When Rama discards the idea of remarriage, Vasishta suggests that a golden idol of Sita could be a substitute for her physical presence. Vasishta represents the rigid system that creates the margins and demands that Sita be abandoned. The character was portrayed by Krishnan.

► The caretaker

Valmiki: The bard saint Valmiki is credited with the creation of the *Ramayana*. Kesava Panicker played the role of Valmiki in the film. Valmiki is a passionate and learned hermit who gives refuge to Sita after she is abandoned by the duty-bound Rama. Valmiki tutors the twins Lava and Kusha, moulding them into able warriors. He also trains the boys in scripture to make them capable enough to rule the kingdom, as Valmiki knew that they would be united with their father, who would choose them as the rightful heirs to the throne. Valmiki is the connecting link between duty and emotions.

► The marginalised

Shambuka and his wife: The couple, through Shambuka's penance, appear as Rama's foil. It is only by killing Shambuka that Rama could reassert his status as the ultimate hero. He serves as an agent to attain denouement. Shambuka also



represents marginalised identities against the mainstream system. Shambuka's wife accompanies him and supports him in his pursuits. She, finally, remains the mute witness to the cruelty meted out to her husband.

Summarised Overview

The stage-to-film adaptation in the post-independence period was not only related to the nuances of craft but also the political nature of theatre during the period. The growth of the film societies from the interventions of the IPTA resulted in the anti-establishment Parallel Cinema. G Aravindan's *Kanchana Sita*, an adaptation of C. N. Sreekantan Nair's play by the same name, was immensely political and the product of the times. Both the play and the film are milestones – both in theme and craft. G. Aravindan received the Kerala State Film Awards for Best Director for *Kanchana Sita*. The film is visual poetry, with scarce dialogues and alluring music. It positions Rama from a human perspective while making Sita appear as Nature through her absent presence. The film is also an exemplification of the Samkhya-Yoga Philosophy.

Assignments

1. Discuss *Kanchana Sita* as a stage-to-screen adaptation.
2. "Music is the soul of G Aravindan's *Kanchana Sita*." Comment.
3. How does the title justify the theme of *Kanchana Sita*.
4. Analyse *Kanchana Sita* as a poetic tale of quest.
5. Evaluate *Kanchana Sita* from a subaltern perspective.
6. Comment on the cinematic grammar of G. Aravindan with reference to *Kanchana Sita*.

Suggested Reading

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8. *Uttarayanam*. Dir. G. Aravindan. Ganesh Movie Makers, 1974. Film.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

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