

**MULTIPLE RAMAYANAS:
A STUDY OF SELECT RAMAYANA NARRATIVES
IN MALAYALAM LITERATURE**

*Thesis submitted to
the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy
in
English Language and Literature**

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March 2023

Declaration

I, Aswathi M.P., hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Multiple Ramayanas: a Study of Select Ramayana Narratives in Malayalam Literature** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature, is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. Janaky Sreedharan, Professor, Department of English, University of Calicut, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or similar titles.

University of Calicut

Aswathi M.P.

27th March 2023

Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Multiple Ramayanas: a Study of Select Ramayana Narratives in Malayalam Literature** submitted to the University of Calicut for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature is an original bona fide work of research carried out by Aswathi M.P. under my supervision and guidance. It has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree, diploma or similar titles.

University of Calicut
27th March 2023

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Preface

In this thesis, the Ramayana is perceived as a cultural text that imparts insights across generations, spanning centuries, thereby aiding in the comprehension of human life and existence. It offers a deeper understanding of philosophies, morals, human archetypes, imagery, narrative structures, and more. The Ramayana tradition is enriched by various Ramayanas including Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Buddhist *Daśaratha Jātaka*, *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, Bhavabhuti's *Uttararāmacarita*, Kamban's *Irāmavaṭaram*, Krttibas Ojha's *Krittivasi Rāmāyaṇ*, Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*, Chandrabati's *Candrabati Rāmāyaṇa* as well as folktales from many parts of the world. This perspective, therefore, critiques the primacy of Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* or Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas* as the authentic sources of the story of Rama, Sita, Ravana, and others. Influenced by the socio-political transformations in Kerala during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the Ramayana narratives written within the cultural context of Kerala challenge and reconstruct the narrative, deviating from the established ethos propagated by earlier narratives. This thesis attempts to analyse the diverse dimensions of the story as depicted in select texts of Malayalam literature, revealing intriguing patterns within the Ramayana. By celebrating the plurality of the Ramayana, many of these texts provide insights into and give a voice to the marginalized characters within the narrative.

This thesis is designed to serve both general readers and Ramayana scholars. To enhance accessibility for general readers, the diacritical marks are used sparingly i.e. the diacritics marks are used only for the titles of the books written in languages

other than English. When non English words appear in the titles with English words, the thesis followed the pattern maintained by the authors i.e. if the author used diacritics marks, here also the marks are used. Anglicized spellings are used for the names of characters, places, caste/ community names and authors and terms that have become familiar in the English discourse in India. So, Dasharatha, Ayodhya, Sita, Brahmin etc. are not italicized and no diacritics marks are used for them. Other non-English words within the thesis are italicized with no diacritics marks. For example, the words such as Dharma, Satyagraha etc. are italicized with no diacritics. Very often I refer to the Ramayana to denote a story. The word, Ramayana, is not italicized and used without diacritics unless it is used to refer to any specific text such as *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. In this thesis, we initially refer to the mythical characters as Rama and Ravana. However, as we delve deeper into the texts, you will encounter variations like Raman, Raghavan, Ravana, and others. These variations are used to better align with the Malayalam language's usage in the selected texts. Footnotes are strategically placed to provide clarifications and to indicate that the translations of quoted passages are my own. The use of footnotes, as opposed to endnotes, aims to facilitate ease of reading.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Ramayana: A Pluralistic Narrative Tradition

Indian literature is basically diverse in nature. Plurality of Indian languages makes it impossible to identify a single literature as Indian literature. The literary text produced in a particular Indian language bears imprints of specific contexts of its production. So, the understanding of a text lies in the recognition of various overlapping contexts and social tendencies that are connected with particular languages and historical data. Aesthetic, ethical, ideological and historical factors play decisive roles in the making of the content of a text. The interpretation of the text also depends on the period of production, the context, ideology, gender and perspectives of characters and author, and above all the perspective based on which the text is interpreted as well. This understanding is vital to recognize the reductive approach that canonizes certain texts and standardises literature excluding or marginalizing many narratives.

The Ramayana is a popular cultural text that is widely read, interrogated, interpreted and explicated by the elite and laymen. People use the Ramayana either to answer the fundamental queries of existence or for academic purposes. Spread across continents and centuries, the Ramayana has wide circulation with variations in forms, languages, locales of occurrence of events, names, relationship of characters, focus, perspective and ideology. From time to time, creative interventions of the writers bring constant renewal to the content and style of the

Ramayana narratives. This makes the Ramayana tradition as a one comprising multiple Ramayana narratives. The Ramayana narratives have contributed rigorously to the religious, political, ethical, moral, democratic and gendered queries that manifest the power equations. Obviously, the Ramayana is a collection of narratives in various languages rather than a canonical narrative as it has been popularly understood. Hence, despite the occurrence of pan-Indian movements such as Bhakti movement, irrespective of the influence of Sanskrit poetics, the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature are plural and unique, and they, in fact, are the products of literary responses to the historical periods of their production.

In the Introduction to *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, Paula Richman establishes a significant argument about the purpose for which the society employs a literary work. According to Richman, the variant accounts of the mythical, historical and fictional expressions of the Ramayana are utilised “in order to accuse, justify, mediate and debate, and more” (Richman 12). Richman affirms that numerous Ramayana narratives written in different languages in verse and prose formats are not innocent aesthetic exercises designed to delight and gratify the readers’ urge of appreciation. Rather, several narratives are works meant to challenge the ideological commitments and veiled intentions to discipline and homogenize the thought process by highlighting *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* as the source of the epic, ur-text. Many of the Ramayana narratives negotiate with the usual patterns of the celebrated elitism of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. They, in turn, re-examine the intricacies of the phenomenal manliness projected by the authentication of the deeds of Rama, the titular hero of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Camille Bulcke displays inferences from “Bāla

Kānda” of Valmiki that it is Sage Narada who tells the writer the abbreviated untold narrative of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (Bulcke 691). In “Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇas*: Five examples and three Thoughts on Translation”, which is a critique of the tendency to homogenize the epic, A.K. Ramanujan shares a valuable insight that democratizes the epic interpretation and assesses the stories of Rama spread across, South Asia, Indonesia, Nepal, Myanmar, Ceylon and several other places, not as the variant version of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, but as self-contained narratives existing independently (Ramanujan 44). The argument of the current thesis focusing on the multiplicity of the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature is derived out of this remarkable viewpoint of A.K. Ramanujan. The varied cultural imprints and articulations have directed the study to pursue how different historical contexts intervene in the making, rewriting, rejecting and revising the epic characters’ life and struggles that are having universal and regional significance. The power dynamics of different historical periods, along with promoting literary inquiries into the Ramayana limit such investigations too. Analysis of this aspect also comes under the purview of this study.

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa is widely considered as the first full length recognized work that depicts the tale of Rama with the title, the Ramayana, meaning Rama’s journey. In undoubted terms, the narrative elaborates on the story of Rama, elevated to the status of the king of the kingdom, Ayodhya. In principle, the tale unravels the different dimensions of virtue: virtue in association with man, king, queen, woman, wife, father, husband, brother and every human being. The story of the narrative is built on prudence and sacrifice, though sometimes these idealized notions produce

unjust equations and incomparable paradoxes. It is believed that *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* had three popular recensions: Bombay recension printed by Nirnaya Sagar press, Gaudiya or Bengal recension reprinted in the Gorresic edition and Western Indian recension of Dayanand Mahavidyalaya (Saklani 58). Narrated through seven sections named as “Bāla Kānda”, “Ayōdhya Kānda”, “Āranya Kānda”, “Kīṣkinda Kānda”, “Sundara Kānda”, “Yuddha Kānda” and “Uttara Kānda”, the work portrays the extraordinary struggles that the characters, Rama and Sita, witness in their life.

“Bāla Kānda” begins with Narada narrating the tale to Valmiki. The story is that of an ideal man, Rama. Once a dacoit, Valmiki leads a wicked life until he receives an eye opener from the family members who are unwilling to shoulder the responsibility of the crimes that he has committed for their welfare. Living a life of penance, he acquires a boon of sage-hood from Lord Brahma, on whose direction Valmiki writes the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*.

In the story, Dasharatha, the king of Ayodhya, who belongs to the clan of Ikshwaku, has no progeny to preserve his legacy. His only daughter Shanta is adopted by King Lomapada and is married off to Rishyasringa. Under the instructions of Rishyasringa, Dasharatha along with his three wives, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra conducts a ritual to be blessed with fertility. As a result, Kausalya gives birth to Rama, Kaikeyi to Bharatha and Sumitra to Lakshmana and Shatrughna.

When the children attain expertise in the use of weapons, Sage Vishvamitra visits the court with a request to hand over Rama to him so that Rama can destroy the two evil incarnations, Subahu and Mareecha. Fearing that Vishvamitra would

curse the country, unless he allows Rama to accompany him, Dasharatha reluctantly permits Rama and Lakshmana to accompany the sage. On their way to the hermitage of the sage, they meet a Rakshasa woman, named Tataka. Rama kills Tataka, Subahu and Mareecha and, thus brings peace to the forest regions.

Vishvamitra takes Rama and Lakshmana to Mithila, ruled by King Janaka. Janaka, at the moment, is seeking the right partner for his daughter, Sita, whom the king has found in the field. In order to marry her, the suitor has to string a bow which Janaka has obtained from Lord Shiva. While it was a herculean task for the other princes who aspired to marry Sita, Rama, with no gesture of difficulty, succeeds in stringing it. The act ends up in the breaking of the bow and is considered as an invincible act of heroism. Thus, Rama marries Sita, Lakshmana, subsequently her sister Urmila, Bharatha and Shatrughna, Mandavi and Shrutakirti, the cousins respectively.

On the way back, they meet the proud Parashurama, who is not willing to accept another 'Rama'. When he challenges to raise the Vaishnav bow, Rama shows that he is capable of using that too. Consequently, Parashurama recognizes his foolishness to perceive Rama as an ordinary prince and accepts him as someone having divine qualities.

Preparations are made for the coronation of Rama to be the king of Ayodhya. "Ayōdhya Kānda" discusses the conspiracy of Kaikeyi, Dasharatha's third wife and Manthara, Kaikeyi's confidant, about utilising the boons that Dasharatha had offered to Kaikeyi, to crown Bharatha instead of Rama and to send Rama into exile in the forest for fourteen years. Being a loyal son whose responsibility is to uphold the

word of the father, Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana move into exile. Bharatha, who is not aware of Rama's exile, is shocked to know about this incident and the resultant demise of the father. Since he is guilty of what has happened, he scolds his mother and rejects the kingdom. His mission to bring Rama back to Ayodhya turns unsuccessful, though he visits Chitrakoot, where Rama lives then. Eventually Bharatha takes the sandals of Rama, places them as emblematic of Rama's presence/absence and rules Ayodhya on his brother's behalf.

Dandakaranya and Panchavati are the settings of "Āranya Kānda" where Rama meets and kills Viradh, the demon and happens to meet the sixty thousand year old giant bird, Jatayu, the friend of Dasharatha. A confrontation takes place between Rama and Shurpanakha, the sister of Ravana who later turns to be Rama's enemy by abducting Sita. Infatuated with Rama, Shurpanakha makes sexual advances towards Rama and when he turns her down and suggests Lakshmana's name, she approaches Lakshmana. Agitated, Lakshmana mutilates Shurpanakha by cutting her nose and breasts. This incident is enough to provoke Ravana, her brother, who decides to do revenge on Rama. Ravana makes plans to keep Rama and Lakshmana away from Sita and directs Mareecha, a demon, to attract Sita under the disguise of a deer. On Sita's request Rama follows the deer to catch it and later Lakshmana follows Rama as he notices delay in his return. Taking advantage of this situation, Ravana, in the guise of a hermit, deceives Sita and abducts her. While they travel across the sky, Jatayu, a bird resists this devilish venture and, in an encounter, loses its wings. Still, Jatayu informs Rama about Sita's abduction. Another demon named Kabandha becomes instrumental in initiating friendship between Rama and

Sugriva. Sabari's hermitage on the bank of Lake Pampa is eagerly waiting for Rama's visit. Sabari, the old spiritual woman attains enlightenment at their meeting.

“Kīṣkinda Kānda” elaborates upon the union of Rama and Sugriva, who is exiled from his kingdom by his brother, Vali. Rama promises the kingdom and the return of Sugriva's wife, Ruma, from the clutches of Vali and in return Sugriva offers his assistance to find Sita. After Vali's slaying, the army of monkeys under the leadership of Hanuman, the devotee of Rama, proceeds to Lanka in search of Sita.

Sita's captivity and Hanuman's initiatives to convey the message of Rama to her form the theme of "Sundara Kānda". With a single long leap from the mountain named Mahendra, Hanuman reaches Lanka. The power to reduce the size of the body helps him to approach Sita. He convinces her of his mission by showing the signet ring from Rama. After getting an ornament to acknowledge the meeting, before he escapes from the clutches of Indrajit, Ravana's son, Hanuman sets the entire luxurious land of Lanka on fire. Ultimately, the section ends up with the news of relief to Rama about the possibilities of rescuing Sita.

“Yuddha Kānda” depicts the furious battle between Rama and Ravana. Nala, a monkey, is the architect of the bridge that connects Kishkinda with Lanka through which Rama's army reaches Lanka. Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, persuades Ravana to set Sita free and hence he is subjected to Ravana's aversion. Becoming a supporter of Rama, Vibhishana contributes to the victory of Rama by providing support and directions to tackle the issues of the land and people of Lanka. Eventually, Ravana is beheaded using Brahmastra and Vibhishana is crowned as the

new king of Lanka. There is an apparent misconception that Sri Lanka is the Lanka of the Ramayana. An article titled “Ramayana in Sri Lanka and Lanka of the Ramayana” states thus:

One may be tempted to take Lankapura as the Rajadhani or the capital of the Raksasa king - Ravana. It is possible that the name may have been suggested to the author through the name of the Raksasa city in the epic, and in the language of the Mahavarṇsa we clearly notice the influence of the Sanskrit epics. But it is only the name and nothing more. Lankapura (Nagara) is a city of the Yaksas and not of the Raksasas. (Godakumbura 60)

Before she is taken to Ayodhya, Sita has to face a fire ordeal to prove her chastity. Insulted, Sita seeks to sacrifice her body. The God of fire rescues her stating that she is pure and, eventually, Sita along with Rama return to Ayodhya after fourteen years.

“Uttara Kānda” is considered as an addition to *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* which ends on a happy note. “Uttara Kānda” narrates the grief stricken story of Sita who has to go in exile and surrender her dignity to safeguard the honour of King Rama when the subjects of the country express their doubts about Sita’s purity. Rama asks Lakshmana to abandon the pregnant Sita near Sage Valmiki’s hermitage and thus Valmiki looks after Sita and her children, Lava and Kusha. Later, when Rama organizes *Ashwamedham*, Lava and Kusha tie the horse and instigate a confrontation with Hanuman. This incident paves the way for the reunion. Unfortunately, again Sita is asked to prove her chastity. Since it is as an act of compromising her dignity, Sita sacrifices her body by moving into the mother earth.

Lakshmana, due to his unsolicited interference during the meeting between Rama and Kalapurush is abandoned by Rama and relinquishes his life on the banks of the river, Sarayu. Rama, after entrusting the reign in the hands of Lava and Kusha ends his life in river, Sarayu. Eventually, Rama's journey is completed with his death.

Now, there exist two pertinent questions: firstly, whether there is any substantial evidence on the matter of authorship of the Ramayana ; that is, whether Valmiki's name has been recorded as the author of the Ramayana , and secondly, whether the Ramayana stories existed before Valmiki in oral or written format. These two fundamental queries must be answered to establish the fact of multiplicity of the Ramayana. According to Camille Bulcke, "Bāla Kānda" and "Uttara Kānda" of the Ramayana and "Drōna Parva" and "Śanti Parva" of the *Mahābhārata*, carry substantial evidence about Valmiki, as the writer of the Ramayana narrative.

¹*Phalasaruthy* of "Yuddha Kānda" also carries proofs about this (Bulcke 47, 53). But Valmiki cannot be considered as the exclusive creator of the story, since in his own story rather than making claims about the sole authorship, the writer admits that he heard the concise version of the tale from Sage Narada. Since the writer occupies a position in the story and participates in the development of the events, it would not be wrong to assume that he is the authentic story teller who is a contemporary of the protagonist, Rama.

Another version about the source of the Ramayana tells about the narration of Hanuman, the faithful follower of Rama. After the death of Rama and Sita,

¹ The lines that show the importance of chanting a rhyme and its usefulness.

Hanuman lives a desperate life and he records the story of Rama on the rocks. When Valmiki who reads this story expressed his intention to write it as a book, Hanuman hides the rocks under water as he does not mean to convey his story to anyone else. (Tharuvana 208).

Analysing Vedic Literature, it is to be observed that Rama was a popular name before Valmiki mentioned the same in the Ramayana. Camille Bulcke has noted that the word Rama was used in *Taitirīyāranyaka* to represent the idea of ‘son’ (Bulcke 28). But *Rigveda* does not contain evidence to link the Rama mentioned in it to the character whom Valmiki depicts in his *Ādi Rāmāyaṇa*. Not only the name, Rama, but also the names such as Sita, Janaka, Dasharatha etc. are used in *Vedās* and *Āranyakās*, though the connections between the characters and between the characters and time, place and circumstances are different. In this context, it will not be wrong to assume that the characters mentioned in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* have attained the first significant entry in *Ādi Rāmāyaṇa*.

When identifying the period of production of the Ramayana, there exist controversies regarding the work of Valmiki: whether there are two works titled as *Ādi Rāmāyaṇa* and *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and which is the work in current use. In addition to this, there is not much consensus among the scholars regarding the specific period of production of the different sections of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, and most of them reach a conclusion that “Uttara Kānda” of the Ramayana was combined with Valmiki’s edition long after he wrote the original. Hermann Jacobi, the German indologist, in the work, *Das Rāmāyaṇa*, highlights the existence of three important recensions of Valmiki’s text: Northern Recension, Bengali Recension and

Western Recension (Jacobi 3). He argues that *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* was written around fifth century BC (Jacobi 100). The period was calculated by comparing the speculations about the period of Valmiki. Proceeding with this hypothesis led the scholars to further complexities as Valmiki was a popular name among the laymen and sages of the olden times. Variant versions of the stories about Valmiki establish the idea that he is a contemporary of Rama and Dasharatha; he provides shelter and support to Sita when she gives birth to Lava and Kusha and takes her along with her children to the court of Rama. Regarding the caste of Valmiki also, scholars have taken different views. Most of the scholars on the Ramayana go with the narrative that depicts Valmiki as a bandit who later receives the revelation when he is about to attack a group of sages. The sages warn him of the sinful act and challenge him by saying that although the family members share the monetary benefits of his action, they would be reluctant to partake of the results of his sinful deeds. On recognizing the truth of the words of the sages, he leads a life of renunciation and finally gets elevated to the position of a great sage. The narratives use two names, Vyadhan and Rathnakaran that have been assumed to be the names of Valmiki prior to his becoming the sage. *Rāmcaritmānas* and *Adhyātma Ramayana* have used these different names respectively to indicate Valmiki's existence in the pre-renunciation period i.e. before 563 BCE, which can be conceived as a period of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* too.

In *Āranyakaparva* of the *Mahābhārata*, during the debate between Bhima and Hamunan, the latter describes the entire life of Rama in eleven *Slokas*. This shows that the maker of the *Mahābhārata* seems to be familiar with the stories of Rama. Though the *Slokas* are inadequate to convey the complete story and miss

some of the crucial instances such as *Lankadahanam*², the incident is remarkable for Hanuman's contribution to the victory of Rama. The inclusion of the Ramayana stories in the Mahabharata is indicative of the presence of the Ramayana before the Mahaabharata. A reference to the life of Rama is made in the *Drōṇaparva* too when Sage Narada consoles Yudhishtira by narrating the adventures sixteen emperors who left the world after having contributed significantly to the respective kingdoms. Another rendering of Rama's plight is seen when Markandeya comforts Yudhishtira when the latter is afflicted with severe mental agony. The inclusion of the Ramayana tales in the Mahabharata suggests two factors: one, the Ramayana existed prior to the Mahabharata and two, the Ramayana, at the time of writing of the *Mahabharata*, has been considered as an important text worth discussing in an equally significant epic, the Mahabharata. So, this underlines the notion that the *Rāmāyana* can be *Aadikavyam*, the first great epic poem.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, though literary texts, are celebrated as sacred texts. Sacred texts are generally recognized as single unique texts. But in the case of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, there are many subtexts, revisions, adaptations or variants. In fact, the collections of stories that they contain change from time to time depending on the place where the stories are circulated and depending on the philosophical, ideological, sociological or spiritual function they execute. The first among the two major categories of the Ramayana are the stories that have additions, deletions, manipulations, highlighting, and compressing, but still spread as if they are the original stories. The second category comprises of the

² The burning of Lanka by Hanuman

adaptations or renditions that select a particular voice, character, incident, idea, group, location, and period and focus on these specificities. This chapter discusses both these categories of the Ramayana, but gives priority to the first of these two. Regarding the factors which contribute to the occurrence of these variants, the prominent cause is the geopolitical factors. The power structures, whether it is the ruling tribe, or the majority that holds the strength to control the literary productions, have a pivotal role in the productions of the mainstream Ramayana texts. But a parallel tradition that dissented from the celebrated stories emerged from the ancient times. Oral texts are treated as a major contributing force to the alternative culture that the second category of texts generated. Accordingly, any reading of the Ramayana can be placed against these two seemingly contradictory and contesting traditions. For the same reason, the Ramayana tradition can be described as a tradition of divergent possibilities.

The glory that the Ramayana attained in Asian countries has been the outcome of the commercial adventures of Indians across Asia. Historians agree that people of Indo-China have identified Valmiki, not only as the first poet but as one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu (Tharuvana 163). The roots of the Ramayana tradition spread across the soils of Indonesia, Tibet, Thailand and so many other Asian countries with regional modifications in the content of the story. Expeditions of the merchants are instrumental in circulating the oral narrative of the Ramayana in different lands.

Islamic versions of the Ramayana are quite rampant in Java and Sumatra. This makes the Ramayana from the Indonesian region as unique and versatile.

Among the two popular texts on the Ramayana prevalent in the regions, the older one is categorized as a true appropriation of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and the newer one is known as different from this in a number of ways. *Ramayana Kakawin*, written in the tenth century AD is an available version of the Ramayana in the region. This has noteworthy deviations from *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*: it talks about a letter that Sita has given to Hanuman in addition to *Choodamani*, the ornament, Sabari's request to Rama to touch her skin to regain fairness, and the information about the seven wives of Indrajit who have taken part in the battle and died. (Tharuvana150).

Hikayat Seri Rāma is a remarkable Malay version of the Ramayana in which the story is extended to Seri Rama's life in Lanka for seven months after the death of Ravana. In the article titled, "Rama of Adam's Family: Arshia Sattar Reviews 'Hikayat Seri Rama: The Malay Ramayana ', Translated by Harry Aveling" Arshia Sattar remarks:

Although the Southeast Asian versions undoubtedly have their roots in the period between 7th and 13th centuries when Hinduism had a strong influence in Malacca Straits, the Malay version of the Hikayat that has mostly survived was finalised well after Islam was firmly established in the region, most specifically in Indonesia and Malaysia (Sattar).

The context of its production made *Hikayat Seri Rāma* as holding Muslim names and cultural traditions in it. In the story, Rama, on suspecting Sita's extramarital relationship with Ravana orders Lakshmana to kill her. Lakshmana, after abandoning her in the forest, convinces Rama that he has killed Sita. Ravana, who is

exiled from his country, due to misdeeds, lives an ascetic life in Lanka, and later when persuaded by Adam and Nabi, pleases Allah and attains the blessing of power and wives from four different worlds (Bulcke, 265). The names in the work are also slightly different. The writer uses Vardan instead of Bharatha and Mandoodari, for Mandodari. Mandodari in Valmiki's version, is portrayed as only Ravana's wife; whereas in *Hikayat Seri Rāma*, she is the wife of Dasharatha too. Contrary to many Indian versions *Hikayat Seri Rāma* is a happy ending story.

Sri Rāma Pathayani Rāmāyaṇa, *Rāmakelinga* and *Serath Kāndam* are a few of the written Indonesian Ramayanas. In addition to these, umpteen numbers of folk songs based on the Ramayana that reject the spiritual or religious prototypes and follow pure aesthetic functions of the stories, flourish and widely circulate in the region. In the work titled, *Archaeology: Indonesian Perspective*, it has been stated that the version titled, *Kotani Rāmāyaṇa*, believed to have been written in the ninth century AD, resembles the Tibetan version of the Ramayana, which portrays Sita as the daughter of Ravana (Festschrift 363). Kotan being identified as a region where polyandry is legitimate, the story is revised to have a Sita as having two husbands, Rama and Lakshmana.

The temple built by Raja Prakasha Dharma of the seventh century AD has carvings that contain inscriptions about Valmiki (Bulcke 269). Temple carvings of the eleventh and the twelfth century AD inform archaeologists about the currency of the Ramayana in Thailand. Cambodia's most aesthetically exciting literary creation is *Rāmakerti*, which has Buddhist undertones embedded in it. The most notable among the descriptions in it is the use of Buddhist terminologies, especially the use

of Bodhisattva to denote Rama. Though *Rāmakerti* seeks to blend the important elements of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* and *Hikayat Seri Rāma*, it has more resemblance to Valmiki's edition. *Hikayat Seri Rāma* portrays Hanuman as the son of Rama whereas the two other texts introduce him as the son of the Vayudeva and Anjana. Again, *Hikayat Seri Rāma* mentions that Shurpanakha's son is accidentally murdered by Lakhshmana and in the encounter that happened after this incident Lakshmana mutilated Shurpanakha.

Thailand celebrates Rama stories by producing plays based on them, from ancient periods. *Rāmakien* is an important text for analysis, in the study of the stories from Thailand. *Rāmakien*'s close resemblance to *Hikayat Seri Rāma* ultimately results in creating a work that included a lot of deviant details from *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. Two major variations are: the making of Vali, Sugriva and Anjana as Ahalya's children and Angada, not as Tara's son, rather as the son of Vali and Mandodari (Bulcke 272). In the thirty fifth chapter of *Rāmakien*, Hanuman's erotic stories are given ample space. Mandodari, Ravana's wife too is an object of his erotic games, and to the extreme surprise of the reader, it has been explicated that in order to have an amorous relationship with Mandodari, Hanuman once makes a deal with Ravana, rejecting his alliance with Rama and forming a new association offering his support to Ravana's side in the battle between Rama and Ravana (Bulcke 273).

The dramatic presentations of Thailand are enriched with stories of Rama and these presentations are popular in the region too. Though Rama's birth is considered popularly as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, in Thai Ramayanas, Rama

is the associate of Lord Siva. Furthermore, in Thai versions, there is an emphasis on war, an elaboration of “Yuddha Kānda”, which, probably, is because of the importance of war in the history of Thailand. Santhosh Desai attributes the stress on war as the concern for survival of people of Thailand. (*Many Rāmāyaṇas*, Richman 38).

Tibetan stories on the Ramayana are not simply dealing with Rama and Sita, rather they are intricate oral narratives on Ravana’s birth, life and death. In one of the Tibetan stories, Dasharatha has only two wives. Vishnu incarnates as a human being as the son of the first wife and Vishnu’s son is born to the second wife as Lakshmana. Having understood the dilemma of the father who cannot decide which prince to rule the kingdom after him, Rama, without inhibitions, goes to forest to live the life of an ascetic. Later on, he returns to rule the kingdom and marries Sita. In Tibetan versions, Sita is recognized as the daughter of Ravana.

Burmese recension of the Ramayana is popularly known in the region as *Yama Zatdaw*. Being a dramatic presentation of the story, the performance focuses a lot on the costumes that are slightly exaggerated. Since a part of the performance is made in the Bhakti tradition of worshipping the characters, before it is staged, the actors go through the process of purification. In 1775, U Aung Phyo composed *Rāma Sa-Kyan*, the modern rendition of Rama’s story. This version is derived out of the oral narratives of the war prisoners who reach Barma, from Siam and perform plays based on Rama’s stories. *Loik Samoying Rām*, written in the nineteenth century, is an example of a Buddhist version of the Ramayana popular in the area.

Japanese Ramayanas are considered as the variants of the stories popularized through the interactions and transactions with China and Thailand (Tharuvana 162). There are two versions of the Ramayana that exist in Japan: *Hobutsushu* and *Samboekotoba*. Highly theatrical in nature, most of the Ramayana renditions of Japan take the dance or musical forms. Essentially, these art forms have their roots in paintings.

Western productions of the Ramayana are either based on *Vālm̄ki Rāmāyaṇa* or the abridged varieties of the oral narratives that the western merchants and missionaries heard from Indians during the fifteenth century and after. These renderings include mostly French, Portuguese, and some English works. Abraham Regeius, P. Baledus, O. Dyper, De Fariya, Nobily, Carlemda, J.B Tverniye, M. Sonera, J A Dubae, P. F. Mariya, N. Manuchi, D. O. Gonsalvos are a few scholars who have rendered the Ramayana into the western languages to introduce the classic story to their readers.

Restricting the Ramayana to the Hindu tradition is a way of discrediting the multiple associations of a text that inhabits the cultural arena which accommodates a large variety of religions and ethnicities. When a literary creation becomes a cultural text, it will be open to additions and deletions. Sometimes, the names of the characters are substituted for acceptability so as to not to make it as an alien text in the existing cultural framework, and at other times, the incidents are reframed according to the value system of the new cultural landscape. Ultimately, a new text is born in every culture when the culture assimilates literature and both adapt themselves to the needs of the union.

There are three major texts coming under the category of Buddhist Ramayana: *Dasārata Jātakam*, *Anāmakam Jātakam* and *Dasārata Kathanam*. Buddhism, though against the Brahmanical- hierarchical social stratification, does not shy away from assimilating the stories of Rama, which are admired for various reasons. The Ramayana stories, which come under the Buddhist tradition, are woven together with *Jataka* stories that narrate the numerous incarnations of Buddha as animals and human beings. Each *Jataka* story has three aspects: the aspect that reveals the present scenario of telling, the aspect that narrates the story and the aspect that rationalizes the narrative (Bulcke 74).

The initial part of *Dasārata Jātakam* depicts the necessity of survival when the father dies. This introductory part identifies the context of narration as happening at Jaitavan when Buddha meets a man who has been destroyed by the pain of the death of his father. In order to educate him on the need of continuing a life of responsibilities, Buddha tells him the story of Rama who rules the kingdom when his father Dasharatha dies.

The second section portrays the life of King Dasharatha who ruled Benares, not Ayodhya. His queen consort has three children, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. On the death of his queen consort, the King gives the power of queen consort to another wife who, in addition to this power, obtains a boon from the king. As per this boon, she claims the kingdom for her son, Bharatha, which the king has rejected multiple times. The king is intimidated by the heinous ways of the queen and compels the two elder male children to take refuge in other countries and return to conquer the kingdom on the death of the father. Both the elder sons and the daughter agree to

leave the kingdom. The king asks Rama to return after twelve years as the astrologers predict his death after twelve years. But the king dies earlier and the just Bharatha wants to bring his elder brother back. As there are three more years to be completed to reach twelve years, Rama is reluctant to return. After twelve years, he returns, marries his sister, Sita and rules the kingdom for sixteen thousand years.

In the third section, the narrator explains the story by connecting Dasharatha with Sudhodhana, the king of Benares, his wife with Mahamaya, the queen named Yasodhara with Sita and himself with Rama.

Anāmakam Jātakam is an ancient work translated into Chinese by a scholar named Kang Seng Huyi (Bulcke 76). The work unravels the act of sacrifice done by Buddha who rules the kingdom in peaceful and just ways when his ambitious uncle has a mission to expand the territories of his kingdom by annexing Buddha's land. Though at first he makes the arrangements for a war, on second thoughts, Buddha drops the plan to fight and discards the land to save the lives of soldiers.

Instead of Ravana, Naga abducts the queen when they live in the forest. The leader of monkeys supports the king along with Indra who disguises himself as a monkey to combat with Naga. Finally the king is successful in re-joining with the wife, though he enquires to her about her fidelity which may arise when ordinary people discuss her life away from her husband. She proves her chastity and they live happily thereafter. In the epilogue, Buddha claims himself to be the king and Gopa as his queen. Devadatta is substituted for the uncle and Maitreya for Indra.

Dasārata Kadhanam has innumerable similarities with *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* with the only difference that the narrative of *Dasārata Kadhanam* completely veils

the existence of the character Sita. After the life in exile, on Bharatha's request, Rama returns and rules the country peacefully. The story ends in such a way that Sita is an insignificant character in the story of Rama. *Shyāma Rāmāyaṇa* and *Kotani Rāmāyaṇa* showcase Rama as Buddha's incarnation. But these works are not recognized as simply the representatives of Buddhist cultural and literary tradition.

Of the factors that differentiate the Jain Ramayanas from the Buddhist works, the most prominent is the way how the characters in the Ramayana are positioned in the foundational roles of the religion. Ravana is not demonized in any of the Jain texts. Rama, Lakshmana and Ravana are located in Jain texts as the *Thrishastimahapurush* i.e. as the eighth Baladeva, Vasudeva and Prativasudeva respectively (Bulcke 80). Ravana as Prativasudeva is killed not by Rama, but by Lakshmana who is called as Vasudeva as per Jain terminology. In Jain Ramayanas, deeply saddened by the incident of brother's death and the subsequent degradation of his soul due to the slaying of Ravana, Rama takes the Jain belief, lives an ascetic life and attains salvation.

As different from Buddhist stories, the Jain versions are said to have derived from *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* with a couple of deviations. In Jain stories, before the plot is revealed, the character descriptions are detailed. This detailing makes Jain stories as appropriations of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. H. Jacobi identified *Paumacariya* written in the third or the fourth century AD by Vimalasuri as the first full-fledged Jain Ramayana that reallocates Rama's story in the context of Jain tradition (Bulcke 82). Vimalasuri named Rama as Pauma [Padma] and titled the Ramayana as *Paumacariya*. The work is divided into six parts: Genealogy of Ravana, Birth, life

and marriage of Sita and Rama, Journey through the forest, Abduction of Sita and the search, War and *Uttara Charitam*. There is no reference to ³*Agnipareeksha* till *Uttara Charitam*. In *Uttara Charitam*, it has been stated that Sita is forced to show the evidence of her chastity and leads an ascetic life thereafter. A.K Ramaujan, in “Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas: Five examples and Three Thoughts in Translation”, observes the difference in the sensibility with which Jain versions of the Ramayana are composed:

...since the Jainas consider themselves as rationalists-unlike the Hindus, who, according to them, are given to exorbitant and often bloodthirsty fancies and rituals- they systematically avoid episodes involving miraculous births(Rama and his brothers are born in a normal way), blood, sacrifices and the like. They even rationalize the conception of Ravana as the Ten headed Demon. When he was born, his mother was given a necklace of nine gems, which she puts around his neck. She saw his face reflected in the nine fold and so called him Dasamukha, or Ten-faced One. The monkeys too are not monkeys but a clan of celestials (*vidyadharas*) actually related to Ravana and his family through their great grandfathers. (Ramanujan 35)

In another Jain work titled, *Sita-Rāvāṇa Kadhanakaṃ*, written by Hemachandra, *Uttara Charitaṃ* is not included. A third work based on the Ramayana in the Jain tradition is Gunabhadra’s *Uttara Purāṇa*. In Gunabhadra’s work, Rama is the son of the king of Benares and Subala, whereas Lakshmana is the

³ Fire ordeal

son of Kaikeyi. Sita is the daughter of Ravana and Mandodari, whom they abandon after hearing a prophecy of an astrologer who cautions them that the daughter will be the sole cause of the death of the father. Rama marries seven women in addition to Sita and Lakshmana is wedded to sixteen women. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana do not go to forest and Sita is abducted from Benares. In this work too Lakshmana is the slayer of Ravana. The work is a deviation from Valmiki's version as it does not portray the abandonment of Sita. Again, Rama is not mentioned as the worshipper of monogamy as he marries some eighth thousand women after winning the war at Lanka. To state another difference, in this version Sita has eight sons. In the end, Rama and Sita live an ascetic life and finally reach heaven in *Uttara Purāṇa*.

Islam, though a monotheistic religion, could not resist the cultural influences of other religious traditions. From Philippines, the most celebrated *Hikayat Seri Rāma* states that Ravana secures boons to rule the four worlds from Allah. In Indonesian Ramayanas, the genealogy of Dasharatha is described as follows: "Adamnabi, DasharaTaraman, Dasharatha, the ruler, Dasharatha" (Tharuvana 180). Characters with Islamic clothing, Islamic actors, reading of the Ramayana in Muslim homes, and incorporating the Ramayana renditions in cultural festivals are quite common in Indonesia and Malaysia making the Ramayana as a text of cultural amalgamation.

Māppila Rāmāyaṇam is a poetic rendering in tune with the *Mappilappattu* tradition of Muslims in Kerala. Rama, Sita, Hanuman and Shurpanakha are kept in the cultural dynamics of Kerala Muslims in this text. Words like *Nikah*, *Veedar* etc. are included in the conversations in the text as examples enough to convey the

Islamic rendering of the story. T. H. Kunhiraman Nambiar discovered this anonymously written text. Significantly, M.N. Karasseri's contributions to popularize *Māppila Rāmāyaṇam* have resulted in John Rich Adman Freeman's English translation that gives more visibility and universal exposure to the work. In *Māppila Rāmāyaṇam*, Rama is named as Lama. *Māppila Rāmāyaṇam* projects the attraction of Shurpanakha towards Rama, and Ravana towards Sita. The linguistic appropriations and innovations make this text as a unique contribution to the Ramayana literature from Kerala.

Tribals across India claim the lineage of Rama and the other characters by referring to the myths stating so prevailing in different regions. A close reading of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* reveals that the monkey clan of the Ramayana is not actually monkeys, but tribals with their distinctive patterns of life and rituals. Again, Valmiki is not a Brahmin; he was a forest dweller before he wrote the Ramayana. Also, a caste named Valmiki exists among Dalits. Most of the tribal stories are affiliated to the telling about Sabari, the pious woman, who satiates the hunger of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita and thereby receives a boon of prosperity to her family and succeeding generations. The stories of Sabari also emphasise the magnanimity of Rama who willingly accepts the fruit half eaten by Sabari.

Santhals in Bihar and Bengal, Birhors in Bihar, Pardhans around Narmada, Agariya in Madhyapradesh and Irulas in Kerala narrate divergent stories resembling incidents from the Ramayana with minor digressions. In the Santhal version, Dasharatha's wives become pregnant by eating mangoes that a sage offers to the king. In the Birhor version, Dasharatha has seven wives. Also in Birhor's Ramayana

rather than drawing Lakshmana rekha, when Lakshmana departs to the forest in search of Rama, he entrusts Sita with some mustard seeds and asks her to throw one seed to make the trespassers unconscious for an hour. Ravana cunningly asks Sita to throw all the seeds so that he will be reduced to ashes. When Sita does it, after being reduced to ashes, he resurrects and abducts her (Tharuvana 192).

The Pardhan stories of the Ramayana describe the battle that Sita foresees through a dream. The castes named Baiga and Bhoomiya have Sita in their myths as the goddess of cultivation and fertility. Sita is the slayer of Ravana in the version popular in Agariya tribal community in Madhya Pradesh. Manavalan and Manavatti Theyyam, the ritualistic art forms in Kerala also emerged from the allusions to Rama-Sita myth.

Folk tradition also contains a large number of oral narratives based on the story of the Ramayana. But mostly, these stories exist in the folk realm as independent songs. In a Kannada oral rendering, Ravana as Ravula acquires a boon from the God; Lord Siva approaches him as a mendicant and offers a mango for Mandodari. Ravula deviates from the directions of the mendicant. After taking the flesh of the mango to satisfy his hunger, he gives only the seed to Mandodari to lick. As a result, he becomes pregnant instead of her, and finally Sita is born when he sneezes. As per the suggestions received from astrologers, he leaves the daughter in a box in Janaka's field. Though the rest of the story shows its similarity to the Valmiki's version, A.K. Ramanujan observes that the first part of the story renders a new meaning to the birth of Sita and the oral renditions display a tendency to return to the character, Sita. He suggests the following reading: "the male envy of womb

and childbirth, which is a frequent theme in Indian literature, and an Indian oedipal theme of fathers pursuing daughters and, in this case, a daughter causing the death of her incestuous father” (Ramanujan 37).

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa (2nd Century B.C.E. to 2nd Century C.E.) and *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (13-15 C.) are the two prominent texts that narrate the story of Rama and Sita in Sanskrit. Among these, the first one is marked as written as a part of epic tradition whereas the second one highlights the Bhakti tradition. Kamban’s *Irāmavataṛaṃ* in Tamil written in the twelfth century and Tulsidas’s *Rāmcaritmānas* in Hindi composed in the sixteenth century are two other Ramayanas that have attracted the attention of the people.

Vaishnavism has its mission of legitimizing the tradition by linking that with some existing thoughts and literatures. This results in attributing the qualities of an incarnation, *Avtar*, in Rama, the protagonist of the existing text, the Ramayana and locating the Ramayana in the context of emergence of the Vaishnava cult. The theological doctrines incorporated with the Ramayana make the classic a popular text too. Writers, especially the Thenkalai authors interpret ideas of desire, sin, punishment, loyalty, ethos, salvation etc. in the light of incidents from the Ramayana. As per the Vaishnava perspective, Ravana abducts Sita to attain salvation (Bulcke 163). Theological indoctrination of the Ramayana is considered to be the pivotal reason for the compositions such as *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* and *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*. So, obviously these texts and especially the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, depict the Vedantic perspective of the story since they follow Vaishnavism and focus on the devotion to Vishnu who incarnated as Rama. In

ancient Puranas such as *Bhāgavatha Purāṇa*, many references to the tale of Rama and Sita are identified. According to this work, the man who mutilates Shurpanakha is Rama himself (Bulke 167). In the texts of Bhakti literature such as *Kurma Purāṇa*, *Agni Purāṇa*, *Linga Purāṇa*, and *Brahma Purāṇa* and in *Harivamsā*, the stories of Rama are mentioned.

Ramanujan (Thunchath Ezhuthachan is recognized as the author of *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* in Malayalam. Being the most influential work written during Bhakti tradition, one of its stated goals is to make a theological analysis of the *Ramayana*. The entire story is narrated as in the form of a debate in between Parvathy and Siva. Sage Narada hears this story from Lord Brahma. Emphasis is laid on the ideas of Rama and Sita as incarnations of Vishnu and Lakshmi and Valmiki's autobiographical note is incorporated to highlight the theological aspects of the story.

Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa, following the focus of *Devi Mahātmyam*, reiterates Sita's role in killing Sahasramukha Ravana. Divided into three sections, an overall account of the stories beginning with the reasons of incarnations, the briefing of Valmiki's version of Rama-Sita story and the death of Sahasramukha Ravana are narrated in this work.

Not only *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* also is written after the composition of *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. In *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, Ravana not only abducts Sita, but also abducts Kausalya before Rama is born. This work vindicates Ravana by stating that Ravana abducts Sita to attain salvation. There are also intertextual references in this, when it says that Rama who believes in monogamy

has given a boon to console those women who desire to marry him that in the next incarnation as Krishna, he will marry multiple times. *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* leaves the thread of Sita's slaying of Ravana with some additional details regarding the way how Rama fails in the battle with Sathamukha Ravana and Sita enters to defeat him. The work details the events through nine sections.

Uttara Rāmacarita, Thatva Samgraha Rāmāyaṇa , Kālanirnaya Rāmāyaṇa , Mahā Rāmāyaṇa , Mantra Rāmāyaṇa , Samvruta Rāmāyaṇa , Agastya Rāmāyaṇa , Deva Rāmāyaṇa , Duranta Rāmāyaṇa , Sauhārda Rāmāyaṇa , Saurya Rāmāyaṇa , Rāmāyaṇa Cambu, Manjula Rāmāyaṇa , Rāmāyaṇa Mahāmāla and Rāmāyaṇa Maniratnam are a few Ramayanas, written in Sanskrit. Older versions of the Ramayana are dominated by Sringara Rasa than devotion. Kalidasa's *Raghuvamśa* (400 AD) , *Rāvaṇavadha* or *Bhaṭṭikāvya* (500-650 AD), *Jānakīharanam* (800 A D), *Rāmāyaṇa Manjari* (11th century AD) , *Aścarya Cūḍāmani* (9th century AD) and *Kadhāsaritsagaram* (11th century AD) are also coming under the category of works based on the story of the Ramayana.

The most evocative text in Tamil based on Rama-Sita narrative is *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* written in the twelfth century. Kamban depended on three texts to produce his Ramayana. In addition to Valmiki, his contemporary Otakoothan and Kumaradasan of the eighth century are considered to have influenced him. These influences, rather than limiting *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa*, have made it a creative work. The addition of the story of Narasimha incarnation, as explained by Vibhishana to discourage Ravana from initiating a war with Rama, is the unique content of this Ramayana version. M.S. Purnalingam, a scholar on Tamil antiquity, observes that

the Ramayana is a political text written and used by Aryans to destroy the Dravidian culture of South India and replace it with Aryan culture (GangaTaram 883). So, the non-Brahmin intelligentsia of Tamil rejects the story which relegates Ravana as a villainous demon.

Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas has served the fundamental purpose of propagating Bhakti tradition in Hindi literature. Considering the instances mentioned and the explanations given, it can be assumed that the work is partially dependent on *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. No work in Hindi literature based on the Ramayana is as popular as the work of Tulsidas, though a large number of prose texts, poems and plays are produced in Hindi literature taking their roots from the Ramayana.

There are two Ramayana traditions in Kannada literature: Jain Ramayanas which form the ancient literature and Brahmanical Ramayanas which are comparatively modern. *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* of Narahari written in the sixteenth century is an important work in Kannada literature. This work has got significant similarities with *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*. *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* do not limit itself to the information received from *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* or *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*. It contains some creative elements; the name of the son of the sage whom Dasharatha killed is Thandava in *Torave Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, and the corpse of Maya Sita disappears when Vibhishana touches it (Bulcke 231).

The Bengali Ramayana tradition is greatly associated with *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*. Many translations of it got published after the seventeenth century. The classic Ramayana narrative in Bengali is *Krittivasi Rāmāyaṇa* or *Srirām Panchali* of Krittibas Ojha written in the fifteenth century. Following the Gaudeeya version of

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, this text has more affinity to the Shaiva cult of worship than with the Vaishnava belief. A feminist Ramayana rendering from Bengal is *Candrabati Rāmāyaṇa*, an expression of women's feelings and sufferings in the Ramayana. *Candrabati Rāmāyaṇa* has no association with the court tradition or bhakti tradition nor did it gain much attention or recognition during its time of writing (Sen 166). Still, from a critical perspective, it is a noteworthy text as it is one among the very few ancient texts that does not glorify Rama, but makes a critique of the events mentioned in the popular versions through literature.

The Ramayana most popular among Telugu speaking generations is the one titled as *Molla Rāmāyaṇa*, written by a woman during 1600 AD. Based on *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, this work promotes the devotional ideas interlinked with worship towards Rama. The classic work written in Telugu is *Dwipada Rāmāyaṇa* of Ranganadha produced in the fourteenth century AD. The ancient Ramayana narrative in Telugu is *Nirvachanōtara Rāmāyaṇa* of thirteenth century written by Thikkanna. Almost all the Telugu Ramayanas assimilated the content and values of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* as the ideal. The largely revered work of the Ramayana written in Gujarati is the nineteenth century Ramayana of Giridharadasa. Krishna's tales are more popular in Gujarat than Rama's stories.

Based on *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, Ekanathan wrote *Bhāvartha Rāmāyaṇa* in Marathi in the sixteenth century; the work is later edited by Gavab and Jayaramasuthan. Deviating from these three texts and resembling *Paumacariyam*, Ekanathan writes that Bharatha and Shatrughna are the sons of Kaikeyi. The profusion of works based on Sita's selection of the groom is

the striking aspect of Marathi literature. Jaaneejanardana and Bitarenukananda, of the sixteenth century, Ramadasa, Venavayi, Vamana and Jayaramaswami Vadagavkar of the seventeenth century and Anandathanaya, Gosavinandana, Nagesh and Bitai of the eighteenth century are the makers of the Ramayana narratives in Marathi literature based on this theme (Bulcke 255). Sreedhara's *Rāmavijayam* (1703) is the most widely read Ramayana of Marathi literature.

During the reigns of Akbar, Jahangeer and Shahjahan, a large number of translations of the Ramayana in Parsi are published. Albadayuni under the instructions of Akbar translated *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* into Parsi in the sixteenth century. A poet named Mulla Maseeha wrote *Rāmāyana Maseehi* during Jahangeer's time. References to Jesus and Maria are included in his Ramayana. Another deviation is the mention of a son of Sita whose father is Valmiki. *Rāmāyana Faijī* and *Rāmāyaṇa Amara Prakāśam* are the Ramayana narratives produced during Shahajahan's period and after.

In the fourteenth century, a poet named Raman wrote a work based on the war incident in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. This work titled as *Irāmacaritam* is the most ancient among the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam. *Kaṇṇassa Rāmāyaṇa* written in the fifteenth century is a translation of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Keralavarma's Ramayana is another independent translation of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Written in *Manipravalam*, a blend of Malayalam and Sanskrit, *Rāmāyaṇam Cambu* came out in 1500 AD is also considered as having popularity. Still, the most widely read work of the Ramayana in Kerala is *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* written between 1575 and 1650 AD by Thunchath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan. He, for the production of this text

that contributed tremendously to Malayalam language and literature, is called the father of Malayalam language.

The Ramayana has been recognized as a pluralistic text as it contains multiple discourses generated and circulated across the centuries. Though this claim of plurality is a fact, the popularity and acceptability of certain chosen texts based on the tale of Rama, Sita and Ravana such as *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* in Sanskrit or *Adhyātmā Rāmāyaṇam* in Malayalam have enabled them to be considered as the base and hence superior narratives due to cultural, historical and political reasons. This enforced superiority acquired by some narratives is detrimental to the acceptance of multiple Ramayana narratives as equally authentic texts. The set of values and ideologies that many superior Ramayana narratives contain have demanded revisions in the evolution of the intellect of the human race. The fundamental problem of fixing the Ramayana as a single text of singular perspective is that, it prohibits the possible creative interventions in the text and the story. In addition to this, the capacity of the text to act as a vehicle of social transformation is diminished by confining the textual interpretation to fixed reading. Different times demand literature to gratify different needs as per the taste of the readers and the demand of the context. So, for a text to satisfy the real sense of the term classic, the participation of it in the deliberations of the culture, history, geography, politics and ideologies and become a part of the discourse are essential. The Ramayana manifests itself in various divergent art and literary forms in its interactions with various socio-political needs. The current study is an attempt to address the multiplicity of Ramayana narratives which emerged in the cultural landscape of Kerala in

Malayalam language and inevitably articulated the voices of diversity and dissent in Malayalam literature in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries.

The current study aims to look at the variant trajectories of the production of Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature across the period starting with the publication of Kumaran Asan's epoch making poem *Cintāviṣṭayāya Sita*. The socio-political events during the period are recognized as catalysts for the novel approach the writers adopted to explore the Ramayana during the period. Gender, marginality, power and colonization are assumed to be some underlying factors which are decisive in the production of the particular texts in a particular manner at a given point of time. The study looks at the way how the power relations become instrumental in the production of social narratives and counter literary narratives. The texts selected are the Ramayana narratives produced between 1915 and 2015, which mark the voice of dissent to elitisms and homogenization of culture. The broad span of time taken for the selection of books provides ample opportunities to choose the right and relevant texts with resistance as the focus. The theoretical insights of the thinkers of feminism, post colonialism, post-structuralism, cultural studies etc. are utilised for giving more clarity to the ideas stated. Poems, short stories, plays and novels in Malayalam literature based on the Ramayana are analysed in separate chapters. The analysis is further limited to the select texts including Kumaran Asan's *Cintāviṣṭayāya Sita*, Vayalar Ramavarma's "Rāvaṇaputri" and "Tāta Enna Drāvida Rājakumāri", Sugathakumari's "Oru Rāmāyaṇa Rāgam", Vijayalakshmi's "Kausalya", Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri's "Ahalyā Mōkṣam", N.S. Madhavan's "Mandōdari", "Tara

Fernandez” and “Ahalya”, Sarah Joseph’s “Kaṛutta Tuḷakaḷ”, “Tāikulam” and “Kathayilillātat”, T.N. Prakash’s *Kaikeyi*, Sarah Joseph’s *Ūrukāval*, C.N. Sreekantan Nair’s *Sākētam* and K.M. Panikkar’s *Mandōdari*. The common thread that connects all of them is the nonconformist approach that they adopt when they deal with the Ramayana. The contributions of these narratives to the evolving discourse on the Ramayana and the social, political and gendered perspectives that these narratives offer to provide an outlook on the evolution of the culture and literature of Kerala are the proposed outcome of this study titled as “Multiple Ramayanas: A Study of Select Ramayana Narratives in Malayalam Literature”.

The study surveys the narratives of the Ramayana in Malayalam literature which basically mark the voices of resistance. So, the objective of this study is manifold, ranging from identifying the cultural nuances that challenge the existing assumptions on which the literary production is made taking the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam as specimens. The study details the way how the writers of Malayalam literature looked at the Ramayana as a cultural text. Two basic questions of patriarchy and power are addressed by making an extensive study of marginalized characters in the narratives based on their actions, relationships, freedom, fidelity and destiny. The dichotomies are replaced with multiple perspectives as a part of the analysis. The study of them adds more critical perceptions to the discourse on culture of Kerala.

Since the proposed study focuses on multiplicity of the voices of the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature, it situates the texts chosen in the larger social, political and cultural context of change in Kerala society. The study

explains the role of literature in affirming and reforming social ethics. Divided into five chapters, in addition to the Introduction, Conclusion and Recommendations, the thesis analyses select poems, short stories, novels and plays written in Malayalam based on the Ramayana and published between 1915 and 2015. The Introductory chapter explores the diversity of the Ramayana. It is titled as “The Ramayana: A Pluralistic Narrative Tradition”. The second chapter titled “Contexts of Malayalam Literary Cultures' ' outlines the major events in the cultural and literary history of Kerala that contribute to the making of the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature. Social stratifications, power structures, economic uncertainties, various movements, philosophies, reforms etc. function as the agents of transformation in Kerala. The radical changes that they bring to the society pave the foundation for the creation of contemporary Ramayana narratives.

The third chapter titled “Politics of Representation of the Ramayana in Malayalam Poetry”, analyses select poems written in Malayalam based on the Ramayana. They include Kumaran Asan’s *Cintāviṣṭayāya Sita* Vayalayar Rama Varma’s “Tāta Enna Drāvida Rājakumāri” and “Rāvaṇaputri”, Sugathakumari’s “Oru Rāmāyaṇa Rangam”, Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri’s “Ahalyā Mōkṣam” and Vijayalakshmi’s “Kausalya”. Complexities of life, unattainable happiness, traumatic existence, intricate nature of relationships etc. in the texts chosen are addressed in detail in this chapter.

The fourth chapter titled “The Journey of Transformation of the Ramayana Stories in Malayalam Plays” delves into the select plays based on the context of the Ramayana. Exploring the conflicts in K.M. Panikkar’s *Mandōdari* (1951) and C.N.

Sreekantan Nair's *Sākētam* (1974), the study displays the way how plays undertake the journey of revision. Focussing on the dialogues and comments by *Sutradharan*⁴, the plays delineate the emotions of the characters. How the play as a medium of expression responded to the call of revision/ creation of the Ramayana and how societal threats limit the narration form the subject of discussion of this chapter.

The fifth and the sixth chapters focusing on select novels and short stories based on the Ramayana respectively are followed by a conclusion. Titled as "Rewriting the Subaltern: Voices in *Kaikeyi* and *Ūrukāval* ", the fifth chapter addresses the issues faced by the characters Kaikeyi in the novel titled *Kaikeyi* written by T.N. Prakash and Angadan in *Ūrukāval* written by Sarah Joseph. Depicting the perspectives of these characters, the writers showcase different dimensions of the Ramayana. "Palimpsest of the Ramayana: A New Paradigm in Malayalam Short Stories" is the title of the sixth chapter. The chapter explores the Malayalam short stories written by N.S. Madhavan and Sarah Joseph. The stories include the ones that appeared in Sarah Joseph's *Putu Rāmāyaṇam* and N.S. Madhavan's *Pañja Kanyakakaḷ*: "Mandodari" "Ahalya", "Tara Fernandez", "Kaṛutta Tuḷakaḷ", "Kathayilillātat" and "Tāikulam". The way the medium of short story addresses the dynamism of the Ramayana and how short stories open up new vistas of interpretation form the main thrust of the chapter. The concluding chapter, in addition to summing up the major ideas, explains the research journey and the insights derived out of it. The chapter titled, "Recommendations" states the future possibilities connected with the current topic of study. The words of South Asian

⁴ Chorus

languages are presented in this thesis using transliteration. Diacritical marks are not used in it.

Review of Literature

The Ramayana has been explored, analysed and critiqued by creative writers and scholars, across centuries. It is interesting to notice the fact that many of the Ramayana narratives written in diverse languages, from many parts of the world, at different points of time serve the purpose of more than just storytelling. It would not be wrong to say that each Ramayana narrative itself is a study on the myth of the Ramayana from divergent cultural perspectives. This is the major reason for the inclusion of the pluralistic narratives included in the Ramayana tradition here. The three notable Ramayana studies that inspired the current research on the multiplicity of narratives in Malayalam based on the Ramayana are *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (1991) edited by Paula Richman, "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" (1987) by A.K. Ramanujan and *Rāmakatha: Utpatti Aur Vikās* (1950) by Camille Bulcke. The importance of these three works lies in the fact that they establish the idea that the Ramayana is not a singular work derived from a single source. Many of the studies on the diversity of the Ramayana do not address multiplicity from a neutral standpoint. Instead, they explore the variant ideological paradigms through which the diversity of the Ramayana can be contextualized.

E.V. Ramaswami's interpretation of the Ramayana is a compelling study that rejected the North Indian ideology which normalizes the supremacy of Aryans over Dravidians. The interpretation discards the ideal image of Rama and depicts him as

fragile and vulnerable. The work has gone to the extent of portraying Rama only as worthy to be of contempt for his action of doubting Sita and discarding her. Instead of placing Rama as the hero, E.V. Ramaswami identified the heroic qualities in Ravana whom many of the narratives project as the villain. This rejection of Rama is a part of the ideology that E.V. R. maintains that resists the superiority of Brahmins. While actively involved in politics as the spokesperson of Tamilnadu Congress Committee, in 1922, he insisted on the burning of the *Law of Manu* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as these texts promote caste hierarchies and praise Brahmins. Being a staunch critic of orthodox religions, he argued that the Hindu mythological texts demand a critical reading. He believed that only then the follies of the gods portrayed in the myths could be objectively looked upon. He stated his arguments in two works titled, *IRāmāyanappatirankaḷ* and *IRāmāyanakkurippukaḷ*. Published in 1930, *IRāmāyanappatirankaḷ* (Characters in the Ramayana) is a comprehensive interpretation of the myth. The English version of this text published in 1956 is titled *The Rāmāyaṇa (A True Reading)*. According to E.V. R., the fundamental issue with the Ramayana is its elitism: the Sanskritised, caste ridden, Brahminic nature of the text keeps it away from circulating egalitarian philosophies. Also E.V. R. condemns the Ramayana for spreading superstitious principles. In Paula Richman's words, E.V. Ramaswami accuses Rama of greed. He argues: "Rama craved Royal power and acted in a virtuous and affectionate way towards his father, Kaikeyi, and Ayodhya's citizens only to gain power...Rama improperly conspired with his father to have himself installed on the throne before his brother Bharatha returned from his stay with his uncle" (Richman 184).

E.V.R. criticizes the Ramayana for portraying Dravidian heroes as villains emphasizing the virtues of Ravana and Vali. What is new in E.V.R.'s interpretation is the way he conveys it through public performances.

Ranganayakamma's *Rāmāyaṇ Viṣvriṣam* (1976) is a revision of the Ramayana from the Marxist ideological view point. Written in Telugu following the structure of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, *Rāmāyaṇ Viṣvriṣam* (Ramayana, the poisonous Tree) comprises of sixteen stories that depict the incidents of "Bāla Kānda", "Ayōdhya Kānda", "Āraṇya Kānda", "Kiṣkindha Kānda", "Yuddha Kānda", "Sundara Kānda" and "Uttara Kānda". Two long prefaces of it attached to Volume one and two and the long afterword incorporated with Volume 3 mainly contain the critique on culture. The writer argues that the culture of the Ramayana is basically feudal in nature. The tribal nature of the culture proposed by the Ramayana too comes under the purview of Ranganayakamma's analysis. Developing the thread of bonded labour and economic paradigms of life, she makes a Marxist interpretation of the text. In the last chapter, she undoubtedly states that the Ramayana must be rejected on the following ground: being a text which stands by the elite, superior Brahmins, men, civilized etc., the Ramayana does an unjust treatment towards marginalised groups and communities. Thus, she argues that one must make an unbiased assessment on the text and reject its proposals as they are biased (Ranganayakamma 692).

Romila Thapar's 1989 work delineates the political undercurrents behind the making of single story of the Ramayana through the televised version of Ramanand Sagar. The article titled, "The Ramayana Syndrome" examines the reasons behind

the extraordinary reception that the television serial on the Ramayana received from the public. She says that many a critic considers that the collective unconscious to which the Ramayana is associated lies behind the universal appeal of the televised Ramayana. To adults, it evokes childhood memories; to children, it parallels the superman image in the stories that they are familiar with. The ideal concept of *Dharma* it focuses is also a source of the universal appeal of the television series. Romila Thapar sees it as a part of the new culture of the country to propagate the visuals of the Ramayana in a homogenized fashion, eliminating the diversity of the Ramayana. She views it as a state sponsored attempt to monopolize culture. The critique goes to the extent of stating that homogenizing narratives is the best strategy adopted by power structures to control the people. She notes that this tendency of the state is a validation of a certain chosen cultures over the others by the making of a particular Ramayana version as the mainstream one. Thapar states:

The Ramayana does not belong to any one moment in history for it has its own history which lies embedded in the many versions which were woven around the theme at different times and places, even within its own history in the Indian subcontinent. The Indian epics were never frozen as were the compositions of Homer when they changed from an oral to a literate form (“The Ramayana Syndrome”)

Thapar highlights that it is important to cherish the value of tolerance in the cultural realm for the prevalence of harmony and justice. A.K. Ramanujan also underlines this vital fact in his epoch making article titled, “Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation”. Basically seen as an attempt to

conceptualise the relationship between diverse Ramayanas, his essay tries to establish an idea that Ramayanas cannot be seen as independent texts; but at the same time he opposes the reading that many Ramayana stories are the deviations from *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. The essay establishes the potential of each Ramayana story to generate more stories and interpretations. According to him, the Ramayana tradition comprises of a reservoir of signifiers from which the writers take elements which later form “crystallization” as he states: “Every author, if one may hazard a metaphor, dips into it and brings out a unique crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and fresh context” (Ramanujan 46).

Paula Richman in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (1991) addresses the myriad contexts of the expansion of the Ramayana tradition. Claiming to be a text that contest *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, this edited work studies the Ramayana stories related to specific theological, gender, political, or ideological contexts. The text, in addition to addressing this, categorizes the Ramayana studies into two: the articles depicting the unknown aspects of the known stories and the articles that introduce the less popular stories in the Ramayana. *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* and *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition* looks at each Ramayana telling as significant irrespective of the popularity, length or association with any popular text. So, Valmiki’s text is to be placed in the wider framework of Ramayana tradition, not as a source text, but as a text rooted in a particular social and ideological context that contribute to the tradition, as per Richman’s reading. Many studies on the epic dramas and performances included in these works reveal the

capacity of Ramayana narratives in genres other than poetry to show the dynamism of the story. Besides being the stories used for enjoyment, many of the Ramayana stories contain conflicting and debatable politics. One such article is written by Velcheru Narayana Rao titled, “A Ramayana of their own: Women’s Oral Tradition in Telugu” which is an account of Telugu folk songs that threaten patriarchy.

Another study made by Clinton Seely with the title, “The Raja’s New Clothes: Redressing Rāvaṇa in *Meghanāthavadha Kāvya*” reflects on the colonial context in the writing of Michel Madhusudan Dutt and his work, *Meghanāthavadha Kāvya*.

Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition (2000) is edited by Paula Richman in the context of the debates about the boundaries of the Ramayana stories, initiated by the religious violence in Ayodhya during 1992-1993. The major argument of the work is that if we blame the Ramayana as a source of religious conflicts, it tantamount to undermining the tradition of questioning that the Ramayana faces across the centuries. The work underscores the several patterns of questioning utilised by the writers: “Sometimes it is a genre, a framing device, a commentarial tradition, the mediation of a jester, or the sudden return of Valmiki that facilitates questioning” (21). *Rāmāyaṇa Revisited* by Mandakranta Bose, in addition to addressing the variant texts on the Ramayana, highlights the fact that Ramayana scholarship, to a great extent, is exclusively focussed on the Valmiki version and the subsequent narratives that were primarily derived from it depended on it. Fundamentally, the work is produced intending to display the expansion of the narrative transcending the geographical boundaries.

Hasmukh Dhirajlal Sankalia's *The Rāmāyaṇa in Historical Perspective* and studies on the Ramayana translated by Maiithreyan titled as *Rāmāyaṇa Paṭhanangaḷ* in Malayalam translated from English is a significant study on the Ramayana. Sankalia looks at the Ramayana as an epic that takes oral narratives as the source of writing. Using archaeological knowledge, he contests the factuality of many details given in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Taking such evidences into consideration, he remarks that Ravana can be a tribal chief of a region, Lanka, which may be located in central India. The vital information that Sankalia shares is about the nature of the Ramayana : while a dimension to approach the Ramayana is to see it as a story tells the family conflict, another significant reading possible is to view it as a text that fictionalises the rivalry between indigenous tribal Dravidians and invading Aryans (62).

Camille Bulcke's *Rāmakatha: Utpatti Aur Vikās* (1950) translated by Abhayadev into Malayalam is a thesis on the Ramayana narratives. A Jesuit missionary from Belgium, Camille Bulcke devotes himself to the research on the Ramayana. Divided into four sections namely *Pracīna Rāmakatha Sāhityaṃ* (Ancient Literatures on the Story of Rama), *Rāmakathayude Utpatti* (Origin of the Story of Rama), *Ādhunika Rāmakatha Sāhityatinte Simhāvalokanaṃ* (Analysis of the Modern Literary Tradition of the Story of Rama) and *Rāmakathayude Valarcca* (Evolution of the Story of Rama), the work serves as a comprehensive document on the Ramayana. The most important aspect of Bulcke's methodology is the objectivity with which he approaches the content, seriousness with which he handles the regional Ramayanas and the comparison made between different narrative

traditions across periods. *Vayanādan Rāmāyaṇam* of Azeez Tharuvana known as the first study about the oral narratives of the Ramayana in Malayalam throws light on the regional versions of the Ramayana stories. “Influence of Ramayana on the Life, Culture and Literature in India and Abroad Ramayana” by Y. Ramesh utilises the events in the epic to comment on the matter of administration and rule in ancient India.

Exploring the plurality of the Ramayana leads one to reach the following conclusions. Being an open text, the Ramayana has the capacity to produce texts and subtexts of varying focus and perspectives. The texts could assimilate not only the feelings and ideologies of the teller, but also the prerogatives of the recipient- class, caste, gender or religion. Also, the renderings of the Ramayana reflect the dominant ideologies or religious views of the geographical area where it is circulated. Subverting the notions of authentic/inauthentic, the Ramayana sets a tradition of multiplicity that prevails against all odds, survives the test of times and marks a culture of dissent against homogenization. Very few studies in English have been done on the Malayalam narratives of the Ramayana. The current thesis is an attempt to produce a specific study on diverse Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature.

Chapter 2

Contexts of Malayalam Literary Cultures

Knowledge about the cultural environment of Kerala is inevitable for the understanding of the Ramayana narratives written across a century in Malayalam literature, as it facilitates an understanding of the reasons of the emergence of different perspectives on the story of Rama, Sita, Ravana and the other characters of the Ramayana. Hierarchies in the society, political structure, economic sources and distribution, social movements, philosophies emerged, flourished and declined time to time, reformations, changes in the power centres that form rules and supply ideologies, religions, caste and class relations etc. play decisive roles in the transition of thoughts of a land. The current study focusing on select Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature written between 1915 and 2015 attempts to see how the cultural factors pertinent to this period serve as catalysts for the publication of the Ramayana narratives which resist the discourses of superiority. As a part of Kerala renaissance, the consciousness of the people of Kerala became broader to think beyond the boundaries. Literary texts published during this period show the change in the mindset which accommodates thoughts on inclusivity. The current chapter examines the cultural pathways to this transformation.

Culture is the pluralistic and dynamic manifestation of the intellect of human community across regions and eras. Variables such as time, gender, class, belief etc. are decisive in the formation of specific cultures. The definitions of culture vary depending on the perspectives taken to define it. According to Raymond Williams,

culture is one of the most complicated terms among the two-three terms in English. From “the abstract noun which describes the general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development”, the meaning of the word, culture, is expanded to “a particular way of life” and to aesthetic activities (Williams 80). In *Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Science and Art of Comparing the World's Modern Societies and their Cultures*, Michael Minkov commented on the complexities that the term culture warrants, if an anthropological definition is sought:

The etymological analysis of “culture” is quite uncontroversial. But in the field of anthropology, the situation is much more complex. Definitions of culture abound and range from very complex to very simple. For example, a complex definition was proposed by Kroeber and Parsons (1958): “transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic- meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behaviour” (p. 583). An even less easily comprehensible definition was provided by White (1959/2007): “By culture we mean an extra somatic, temporal continuum of things and events dependent upon symboling” (p. 3). (10)

Both these definitions demonstrate the characteristics of culture as a set of principles either transmitted from a generation to another, or as created by a community. Also, the temporality of culture, its capacity to influence human behaviour, the symbolic nature of its manifestations and its affiliation to the objects and events are taken into account to consider culture as a process, not as a product. The sociological concept of culture puts its emphasis on the idea of continuing development that the human

race is achieving in divergent epochs of existence such as education, language, technology, literature, philosophy, religion and so on. Matthew Arnold's proposition of culture as an "inward operation" focusing on knowledge pursuit envisaging perfection through culture as a solution to the present day difficulties is yet another view of culture which he states in *Culture and Anarchy*:

Culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically (6).

Amidst the wide range of interpretations of the term, culture, ranging from the ideal to the ordinary, the concept of culture as a record of transition is conceived as the foundation here to describe the cultural development of Kerala from ancient to the contemporary times. Occupying the South-West coast of India, the state of Kerala, was formed in 1956 combining the states of Madras, Cochin and Travancore as per the State Reorganization Act formed after independence. Divided into fourteen districts across 38863 square kilometres, containing around 3.5 crores of population as per 2011 Census, Kerala occupies a multicultural realm in India unified by the language, Malayalam. The geographical territory of Kerala is perfectly demarcated with Western Ghats on the east and Arabian Sea on the west. The Travancore state Manual stated that "the word 'Malayalam' is its [Kerala's]

Tamil name and signifies ‘mala’ (hill and ‘azham’ (depth) i.e. the hill and dale country, or the land at the foot of the mountains” (Aiyar 1) Karnataka and Tamilnadu, the immediate neighbouring states of Kerala located on the northern and western side of the state are, to a great extent, instrumental in the formation of a peculiar culture in the state. The prominent feature of the culture of Kerala is its diverse nature. This feature is invariably the dominant characteristic of Indian culture too. This chapter is an attempt to analyse the way how human life in Kerala takes its current form and how counter-cultural forces acted upon the knowledge provided by the institutions of power. This kind of an investigation is made possible by dividing the ages to specific periods and by examining the cultural content and transformations during each particular period. This historical understanding of culture offers tools to identify the subtle operations of power in and through literary productions.

Keralōlpatti (1868) , a Malayalam treatise on the origin of Kerala, depicts the traditions existing in Kerala and mentions about the myth of Parashurama, the son of sage Jamadagni and Renuka, associated with the creation of Kerala. As per the myth, being agitated by the murder of his father and self-immolation of mother due to the encroachment of Karthaveeryarjuna’s Kshatriya successors, Parashurama takes an oath to destroy the Kshatriyas in India and executes a series of murders without logic or guilt. Later on, he wishes to repent for the crimes committed. As suggested by the learned Rishis, he gives the land he owned as a free gift to Brahmins and departs to the Western Ghats for penance. God Varuna, pleased by his penance, offers a boon that he can claim the land from the sea to the extent of

throwing his axe into the sea. Parashurama throws his axe from Gokarna and it reaches a place near Kanyakumari. As per the agreement, the sea departs from this place and Kerala emerges from the sea. The land, thus, in common parlance, is known as “Parashurama Kshethram”, the land of Parashurama (Iyer 210-213).

The remnants of the past existence in Kerala are recovered only recently. Most of the ancestors of the tribal communities of Kerala represent the Mesolithic Age which extends from B.C. 4000. Almost during the same period, people started using bows and arrows in Kerala. Anthropologists opine that the racial origin of the ancient inhabitants of Kerala belong to Proto-Australoid while some of them contain the genus of Negrito group. (Iyer 56-57). The ancient tribes lived as a family having specific totems. Though they followed the rule of kinship, the tribes obeyed the principles of socialism and kept the assets as common properties. K. Mammen in *Kerala Culture: Its Genesis and Early History* remarks that the ancient inhabitants before the arrival of Dravidian groups are also instrumental in the propagation and sustenance of the matrilineal system in Kerala (Mammen 167). Cross Cousin marriages, taboos, blood revenge, urn burials, funeral rituals, human and animal sacrifices, Goddess worship etc. were also observed in ancient periods in Kerala. The Mesolithic period extends to B.C. 2300.

The period of Indus Valley civilization is roughly marked as from B.C. 2300 to B.C. 1700. This civilization is basically Dravidian in nature and essence. It is deduced that around B.C. 1800 Aryans came to India and destroyed the civilizations. The Dravidians, comprising of the successors of Mediterranean men and Proto-Australoid men, who created a productive civilization evacuated from their lands

and took resort in Southern parts of India after the arrival of Aryans. P.K.

Gopalakrishnan, in *Kēralatinte Sāmskārika Caritram*, observes that the Bronze Age civilization stretching across South India from B.C 1750 to B.C. 1400 is an evidence of Dravidian presence (31). In the earlier period, though they failed to create a modern civilization that they enjoyed in the Indus valley, the Dravidians successfully resorted to cattle rearing as a source of economy. Gradually, they stepped into the realm of cultivation which, in turn, supported their progress as a civilization. Rather than following the matrilineal order, they introduced patrilineal tradition in South India. The most remarkable contribution of Dravida civilization is the language: many South Indian languages including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam etc. emerged from the ancient Dravidian language.

Though the Nordic race called Aryans arrived in India around B.C. 2000-1000, it was only in B.C. 1000 that Aryan entry into the South Indian regions began. The conquest of Dravidians by Aryans and the following cultural exchanges resulted in the formation of Brahmins in India. The Brahmins of that period comprise of both Aryan and Dravida priests, states D D. Kosambi in *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (96). This period is crucial in history, since it was during this period that the class division was started. The inhabitants of South India were very reluctant to embrace the changes during this period. This stagnation in progress allowed Aryans to assert their supremacy over Dravida groups. Kerala was recognized as a tribal republic with no king or ruler during this period. People lived as tribal families and marked their territories as *Manram*⁵. The governance inside *Manram* was so

⁵ The place exclusively used as a cattle ranch

democratic that there was no place for exploitation in it. During the first, the second and the third centuries BCE, Jainism spread to the Kerala region, followed by Buddhism and Brahmanism. The shift in the spiritual philosophies transformed the life of the inhabitants of Kerala who lived in primitive principles. The resultant development of cultivation as the source of revenue, instead of cattle rearing, assured the progress of the people. When cultivation assumed a prominent position in the way of life of the people, property division emerged as a principal concern. This gradually led to the transformation in the social structure and consequently, the rule of king was established.

While A. Sreedharamenon opines that the Sangam period extends from the first century AD to the fifth century AD, Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai considers AD fifth and sixth centuries as Sangam period. A majority of historians such as S. Krishnaswami Ayyankar, Neelakanta Sastri, Kanakasabha and Seshayyar agree on the period i.e. from the first century AD to the third century AD as Sangam era. *The Cambridge History of India* also maintains the same opinion (Gopalakrishnan 104). Books such as *Tholkāppiyam*, *Puranānūru*, *Akanānūru*, *Patitṛupattu*, *Tirukūṛal*, *Cilapatikāraṃ*, *Manimēkhalai* etc. are collectively known as Sangam literature. The period attains its title from the literature published during the time. Sangam literature was later revised including Brahmanical perspectives and omitting Buddhist and Jain ideas. This revision created trouble when these literary documents were used for historical evidence. Still, the works belonging to the Sangam period reflected the way of life of the people of South India. Until around the tenth century AD, Kerala was a part of Tamil territories and hence these literary documents reveal information

about Kerala too. Tamil territory was divided during the period into five regions: Chera, Chola, Pandya, Kongunad and Thondai Mandalam. Most of the areas of the present Kerala were included in the Chera region. In addition to cultivation, the people of the times resorted to commerce also. Ports such as Muziris played a pivotal role in the progress of Kerala's trade with other countries. Unfortunately, along with the unprecedented progress in the economic status, troubles appeared. Despite the presence of the divide of *Melur* and *Kezhor* indicating the class difference, the hierarchies based on Varna and caste were not prevalent during this period. The Sangam period witnessed the unquestioned authority of kings over tribes.

The Sangam period marked its difference from the previous times by its peculiar order of existence. While the poor continued with *Manram*, the rich started attaining private properties asserting their control over women. The focus on property made men put emphasis on fidelity in marriage: the men wanted their own children to be descendants and inherit their property. So, while rich men enjoyed extra-marital relationships, their wives were forced to observe chastity. This period can be marked as the period of origin of patriarchy in Kerala in its fullest sense, for that matter. The literary works of this period reflect the tendency of the people to worship knowledge. Probably, this worship of knowledge helped the Brahmins to exploit the ordinary illiterate laymen during the time. Still rather than a matter of social interest, religious belief remained as a private affair. Even amid these regressive forces, the Sangam period was a glorious period in history because of the integration of various tributaries of thought that enlightened the people of Kerala.

Though many religions could exist in Kerala without conflicts during the period from the second century AD to the seventh century AD, the most popular religion among them was definitely Buddhism. Jainism was another prominent religion of the period. The philosophical doctrines promoted by Buddhist teachings were the reasons for the unquestioned popularity of Buddhism. Though the period was generally progressive in the aspects of prosperity and peace, the regressive tendencies of subjugating women and emphasising chastity of women, originated during this period. The spreading of such principles and the currency that they gained in the society created serious threats to the liberty that the women enjoyed during the period. Also, the excessive importance that the private property gained in the social consciousness adversely affected the marginalised groups such as slaves. The principles of Buddhism miserably failed to eradicate slave trade normalized during the period.

William Logan in *Malabar Manual* states that the Brahmins established their authority in Kerala during the eighth century AD. The methods and rituals that Brahmins followed were usually based on *Manusmṛiti*, the period of writing of which is marked as between the second century BC and the second century AD. So, this validates the claim that Brahmins came to Kerala and asserted their superiority in the centuries following the second century AD (Gopalakrishnan 209). Because of the influence of Buddhism in the society and ruling circles during the fourth, the fifth and the sixth centuries AD, Brahmins could not raise themselves to the superior position in the social hierarchical structure. Christianity also spread as a religion in

Kerala from the first century AD onwards. Buddhism made significant contributions to the development of education in Kerala during its dominant period.

The period between the eighth century AD and the twelfth century AD in Kerala was a transition period; while the centuries prior to the eighth century were packed with tensions due to religious disturbances, the period after the eighth century was turbulent owing to the constant wars between Chera and Chola kings. The recurrent shifts in the governance produced an atmosphere of instability during the period which gradually gave way to the disintegration of solid structure of governance. In order to safeguard the stability, the Chera kings adopted a decentralised pattern of governance entrusting the power to rule on regional chiefs who, in the passage of time, were also called as the kings. In *A History of Kerala*, K. V. Krishnaiyer mentions that the ritualistic activity of *Mamankam* was meant to strengthen the unity under the rule of the king and it first happened in AD 829, during the period of the Kulasekhara rulers. There was a parallel stream of emergence of Brahmins and the opinions that were passed in their conferences conducted once in twelve years gained momentum and influenced the political climate of Kerala during the eleventh century AD (147). This enabled them to control the major decisions of the chiefs and kings who ruled the land. Buddhism faced a steep decline during the period between the seventh century AD and the twelfth century AD due to the overindulgence of Buddhist monks in the mundane aspects of life. The transition from the superiority of Buddhism and Jainism to Hinduism was marked by bloodshed and murders. The Shaiva cult and the Vaishnava cult of Hinduism crept into the consciousness of South India and it

reached Kerala from Tamil Nadu. Among these two Bhakti pathways, Kerala embraced the Vaishnava cult.

More than any other school of thought, it was the Advaita philosophy of Adi Shankara, who was born in the eighth century AD in Kerala that obliterated the Buddhist influence in the social sphere of India. The success of Advaita lies in its capacity to develop itself as a comprehensive school of thought with arguments and principles comprising the significant views of Buddhism and Upanishads. Even though his philosophy propagated the principles of unity and equality, Adi Shankara failed to reject the Brahmanical order that negated inclusivity of and tolerance towards the marginalised. Thus, Shankara was instrumental in getting caste hierarchies and untouchability legitimised in India along with establishing Hinduism as the prominent religion. In Kerala, Brahmins became more established as they formed a systematic community named Namboothiri assimilating Kerala principles of life while retaining their spiritual path. Even while the divisions based on Varna were not prevalent in Kerala, Brahmins kept themselves as the sole owners of the Vedanta. Also, temples built by kings became the spiritual centres where Brahmins asserted their superiority by becoming priests. In order to please the Brahmins, the kings started donating cultivated lands to them which, in turn, initiated the Feudal system in Kerala. Thus, the Brahmins became an economically, politically and socially superior race in Kerala around the eleventh century AD and started circulating their ideas using various instruments of governance.

The division of the society based on class faded with the superiority of Brahmins and a new structure embedded within the nature of the work that the

individual was doing emerged initially. People could change the caste based on the occupation of the individual in India during the earlier periods of its inception. But, steadily the caste system solidified itself and the conversion became seemingly impossible. The fundamental reason for this solidification is the unbreakable bond created between caste and work. The superiority of Brahmins remained intact as they kept the monopoly of knowledge, denying education to the socially inferior categories. Thus, caste has been developed as a dominant hegemonic structure in which the marginalised were forced to digest the superiority exercised by the dominant groups. The assumed divinity that the Brahmins proclaimed, in addition to the economic dominance acquired through donations, the social dominance obtained by means of establishing untouchability and caste hierarchies and the custodianship the Brahmins gained for knowledge maintained the unquestioned supremacy of them over the other communities without much threats for a few centuries.

In the history of Kerala, the feudal period is marked from the twelfth century AD to the nineteenth century AD. The political dominance of the Brahmins and the rulers affected the social life of commons in several ways: on the one side their economic output was exploited by the superior groups and on the other their self-esteem was threatened due to the favouritism and the bias of the authorities. Kerala was divided into eighteen regions such as Venad, Valluvanad, Eranad, Nedumpurayoor Nad etc. in the twelfth century. Rulers such as Marthandavarma, Ramavarma, Umayamma Rani, Dharma Raja, Veluthambi Dalava and Paliyathachan faced turbulent times as they had to fight against a colonial Britain along with facing the national and regional confrontations and attacks. Still until the eighteenth

century, the regional rulers enjoyed sovereignty though under pressure. After this period the rulers of Kerala forfeited their powers to Karnataka rulers, Haidarali, Tippu Sultan and the British rulers. P.K. Gopalakrishnan, in *Kēralatinte Sāmskārika Caritram* remarks that Pazhassiraja's significant fight in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century against the British imperialism was a noteworthy shift from this trend. The major reason for the failure of his mission was the political instability posed by Feudalism (399).

During the period of feudalism too slavery continued legitimately. Most of the rulers being upper caste, the poverty of the lower caste people was used to keep them as slaves permanently. The political exploitation led to anarchy in Kerala until slavery was abolished in India in 1843 by the British people. Even after this, the slaves remained as the servants to the masters. The Brahmin supremacy which extended from the twelfth century to the fifteenth century is changed to the collective superiority of Nair community and Brahmins. P.K. Gopalakrishnan opines that despite the superior status, the educated people from the Nair community were unhappy about the Brahmin exploitation and they sought a democratic approach from the Brahmins (434).

P.Govinda Pillai in the work titled, *Kerala Navōdhanam: Oru Marxist Vīkṣanam* rightly remarks that Bhakti movement can be considered as what initiate renaissance in India before the beginning of modern renaissance (27). Kerala did not abstain from the Bhakti tradition that spread across India during the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidas was the most notable text written in India during this period. Poets such as Surdas and Kabir Das also contributed to

the Bhakti tradition of the period. Even before this, in the twelfth century, *Gīta Gōvindaṃ* of Jayadevan gained popularity; the seed of Vaishnava tradition was planted in the landscape of India with this work. In *Sāhitya Caritraṃ*, Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer remarks that prominent among the first works that initiated Vaishnava Bhakti tradition in Kerala was *Srīkrishna Karnāmrithaṃ* written by Vilvamangalam in the thirteenth century (185). Poonthanam and Ezhuthachan were the significant poets who sustained the spiritual enlightenment set off by the arrival of *Sreekrishna Karnamrithaṃ*. Ezhuthachan's *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇaṃ* and the *Mahābhārataṃ* gave way to a spiritual as well as a literary revival in the sociocultural atmosphere of the fifteenth century Kerala. Since it was a part of its ideal to democratise religions, and to bring religious amity and tolerance, Bhakti tradition promptly gained currency among the people despite the inherent differences in cultures. Though it idolised the literary characters, Bhakti tradition was fundamentally progressive as it rejected the rigidity of religions, caste and rituals, and emphasised the central principle of equality. It gradually helped to rejuvenate Hinduism which was in a state of decline in Kerala because of Brahmanical supremacy and religious inflexibility. Ultimately Bhakti tradition functioned as a social reformist force in the consciousness of Kerala during the fifteenth century.

Bhakti tradition came out as a solution to the spiritual barrenness of Kerala consciousness. In *Ezhuthachan and His Age*, Chelanat Achutha Menon observes that this phenomenon enabled the Nair community to gain prestige denied to them by the Brahmins for political gains (164). This invited a shift in the social structure: instead

of Brahmin supremacy, there emerged a Savarna Supremacy which attributed superior status to the people of Nair community also. But since Bhakti tradition failed to influence the economic structure of the society, it could not succeed to reach the expected growth of the society it envisaged. Bhakti tradition overemphasised the morality of women while men enjoyed extramarital relationships. This curtailed the freedom of women and made their life, especially the life of the Brahmin women disastrous.

The failure of dominant tradition was evident in the historical fact of mass conversion of lower caste Hindus to Christianity and Islam for better social status in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, Tippu Sultan's reforms made some transformations in the society. But due to religious prejudice, his proposals for changes were not widely accepted in Kerala. The British Government also interfered with the cultural traditions of India and abolished the ritual of Sati in 1829. The orders issued to allow women to wear clothes to cover the upper body parts served a pivotal role in improving the self-esteem of women in Kerala. Also the British rule helped the marginalised lower caste people to gain education and prestige which were otherwise denied to them due to the caste system. P.K. Gopalakrishnan in *Kerala Samskārīka Caritram* states that Sree Narayanaguru once remarked that it was the British Government that gave permission to the people of his caste to act as priest in temples. Gopalakrishnan added that in the culture generated by the myths of the Ramayana in which Rama kills a Sudra for embracing spiritual life, this statement is worthy to be considered as indicating the social transformation. It is also stated that in *Future Results of British Rule in India* written

in 1853, Karl Marx mentioned this revolutionary role of British rule in the Indian Renaissance. (Gopalakrishnan 473-74). But British rule supported the feudal lords to exploit the tenants by providing title deeds to the landlords. British economic policy destroyed all the small-scale industries in India and fatally damaged the existence of the poor.

With the advent of industrial revolution, Britain attained supremacy among the capitalistic nations, and America with its globalised policies expanded the market worldwide. These two transformations in the economic sphere crept into the cultural realm and established a new world order, the repercussions of which were felt in Kerala too in the twentieth century. Lower caste people converted to Christianity saw their confidence improved, which in turn attracted more people to conversion. Spread of education inculcated a sense of independence among the commons. This enlightenment along with the ambition for economic growth produced the renaissance that happened in Kerala society in the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

The moment when Sreenarayana Guru who belonged to the marginalised Ezhava community erected the idol of Shiva in Aruvippuram in 1888 commenced Kerala renaissance in its visible form. It was a proclamation of liberty and equality of the lower caste people. The formation of SNDP Yogam in 1903 and the establishment of *Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham* by Ayyankali who belonged to the scheduled caste community in 1905 were two landmarks in the history of renaissance in Kerala. The changed mode of worship resulted in the establishment of temples by the lower caste people. Another significant incident was *Misrabhojanam*

(Mixed Feast) organized by Sahodaran Ayyappan in 1917. Along with the reforms which occurred among the lower caste, progressive initiatives like the establishment of Yogakshema Sabha among Brahmins in 1907 also ensued advancement. Literary works such as *Indulēkha* of Chandu Menon initiated the changes apparently in the literary realm too. Obviously, in the twentieth century Kerala showed signs of shift to a new normal state of equality in treatment and opportunities.

The temples were still the centres of inequality. Because of this, *Vaikom Satyagraha* was conducted in 1924-1925 under the leadership of T.K. Madhavan was a milestone in the history of Kerala renaissance. The crucial impact of this incident which supported the entry of all the worshippers into Vaikom temple is the arrival of Nationalist movements into the soil of Kerala. The two major results of *Vaikom Satyagraha* include the fraternity feeling generated to meet the common goal of ending inequality and the growing attraction towards the Nationalist movement from the ordinary men. Regressive incidents too happened during the period as the British Government killed the Muslim men who participated in the Malabar riot in 1921. Malabar riot or *Mappila* rebellion was started as a movement against the British Empire in the Malabar region of Kerala as an extension of *Khilafat* movement. In Kerala, it developed as a peasant movement against the Hindu feudal lords and the land reforms by the British. With the support of the military force, the British defeated the Muslim peasants. Salt *Satyagraha* in 1930 and *Guruvayoor Satyagraha* in 1931 were the two resistance initiatives of the people against colonial and national hegemony. In 1936 C.P. Ramaswami Iyer became the Diwan of Travencore. As per his advice the king made the declaration of the entry

for all to the temples irrespective of caste hierarchies. But this was a strategic move from C.P. Ramaswami Iyer whose secret intention was to destroy the spirit of nationalism and democracy. The Communist party had a different stance regarding the Indian freedom struggle. They considered Gandhi as the one holding orthodox religious principles unlike a revolutionary leader. They were reluctant to join hands with Indian nationalist movements.

During the time of the Second World War, different political parties followed different stand points at different junctures. Towards the end of the war, the communist party reached the conclusion that they had to support the antifascist struggles. The post-World war period witnessed Punnapra Vayalar strike against the *Diwan*. Due to the strong threat from the part of the people C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, the *Diwan*, could not continue his undemocratic ways after the independence. There were different ministries established in Kochi and Travancore during that time. These ministries replaced the Feudal authority. So along with the departure of colonial power from India, the departure of feudal culture too occurred in Kerala. Trade unions and peasant movements played vital roles in improving the socio-economic conditions of the poor in Kerala. The unified peasant movement which started in 1935 had its stated agenda of destroying feudalism. Along with peasant movements, the trade unions inculcated the spirit of unity and revolted against injustice. Kerala state was formed on 1st November 1956 and the first government attained power in April 1957. Though the initiatives to implement the land reform act began in 1959, it attained its aims only in 1969. Thus, the feudal system was abolished legally from first January 1970.

Amidst these encouraging results, the social inequality persistently flourished. So the intelligentsia of Kerala found it important to voice dissent so as to fulfil the principles of justice in the social sphere along with the political movements. The reflection of such a thought was visible in the literary productions from Kerala, especially in the ones published in the twentieth century. The mission that the literary productions undertook had multiple levels: on the one side the writers attempted to rewrite the existing narratives against the canons by giving voice to the hidden, submerged and defeated; on the other side, fresh narratives were produced with novel visions. The Ramayana narratives analysed in this study are placed in these two categories.

Malayalam, the language spoken in Kerala, obtained its name from the land, the position of which is close to *Mala* (mountain). It belongs to the Dravida family of languages and has got resemblance with Tamil and Sanskrit due to the association it has in the evolution of language. Still Malayalam is an independent language with its own script and vocabulary. K. M. George in *Sāhitya Caritraṃ Prastānangalilye* observes that the first scholar who mentions the independent nature of Malayalam is the writer of the treatise on grammar titled *Līlatilakaṃ* which was published in the fourteenth century. He states that Hermann Gundert too is of the opinion that Malayalam and Tamil are the two languages derived from the Dravida family of languages (32-33). But the language contains many dialectal variations derived out of regional differences, cultural diversities and religious varieties. The scripts that Malayalam utilised for communication include *Vattezhuthu*, *Kolezhuthu* and *Malyanma*.

The major development of Malayalam as a literary language took place between the tenth and the fifteenth century AD, when the works were produced in the format of *Paattu* and *Manipravalam*. *Keralapāninīyaṃ* (1896) by A.R Rajaraja Varma, *Malayāla Bhāṣā Caritraṃ* (1881) by P. Govindapillai, *Malayāla Sāhitya Caritra Samgrahaṃ* (1922) by P. Sankaran Nambiar, *Bhāṣa Sahitya Caritraṃ* (1936) by Attoor Krishna Pisharody, *Kerala Sāhitya Charitraṃ* (1953) by Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer, *Kerala Bhāṣa Vijnānīyaṃ* (1971) by K. Godavarma and *Drāvida Bhāṣa Vyākaraṇaṃ* (1976) by Robert Caldwell provided insights regarding the historical development of Malayalam language. *Krishnagādha* of Cherusseri written in fifteenth century, and *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇaṃ* and the *Mahābhārataṃ* of Thunchath Ezhuthachan published in the seventeenth century are the seminal works that altered the ancient writing style in Malayalam literature.

As per the information available about the ancient written literature, *Rāma Carithaṃ* of the poet Cheeraman is recognized as the first written work in Malayalam literature. Devotion and valour are the dominant feelings expressed in *Rāma Carithaṃ* which is assumed to have been written between AD1195 and AD 1208. In *Malayāla Kavita Sāhitya Caritraṃ*, it has been observed that the worth of *Rāma Carithaṃ* lies in the emphasis it has given to the style and structure of Malayalam language using which he wrote *Rāma Carithaṃ* (21). The development in Malayalam literature from *Rāma Carithaṃ* to the twenty first century is not a direct and homogeneous one. The historical survey of Malayalam literature until the nineteenth century is rather difficult compared to the survey of post-nineteenth century literature due to the lack of specific literary movements associated with

literature in the earlier periods. The introduction of English literature during the colonial period provided the exposure to world literature and Malayalam literature got familiarised with and assimilated the literary movements across the world consequently.

The significant works in Malayalam literature were written after the tenth century AD even though folk songs existed in Malayalam before that. K.M. George, in *Sāhitya Caritram Prastānangalilūde* remarks that the influence of Tamil literature on Malayalam literature is reflected in the way in which Malayalam literature used or rejected the rules of writing. While *Pattubhasha Sahithyam* inclined to follow the principles of poetry, works like *Bhāṣakautilyam*, *Niranam Kritikaḷ* and *Āṭṭaparakāram* did not adhere to the rules of writing poetry (150). *Rāma Caritham*, a work which is said to have been written by a poet named Cheeraman around the twelfth or the thirteenth century AD is the first work composed as per the guidelines of *Pattu*. Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer in *Kerala Sāhitya Caritram* states that Veeraramavarma, the king of Travancore who ruled during 1195-1208 was the author of *Rāma Caritham*, a Ramayana retelling, focusing on Veera rasa (George 156). The major purpose of this poem, which is recognized as the first work written in Malayalam, is to make the soldiers enthusiastic. The relevance of *Rāma Caritham* lies in the fact that it is the first work written in Malayalam which establishes the Ramayana tradition in Malayalam literature.

Another significant contribution to Malayalam literature is offered by the Niranam poets who lived in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Two notable names among them are Madhavappanikker and Ramappanikker whose works were

basically Bhakti oriented literary pieces. While Madhavappanikker translated *Bhagavatgita* into Malayalam, Ramappanikker wrote *Kaṅṅassa Rāmāyaṇam*. P.K. Narayanapillai observed that Ramappanikker, by virtue of his dexterity in dealing with the content, became a role model even for Ezhuthachan who wrote *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* (George 175). Though they followed the tradition of *Paattu* literature, Niranam poets deviated from the rigid rules of *Pattu*. The language used for literary creation was an artificial mixture of Tamil and Malayalam. *Āṭṭaparakaram* and *Kṛamadīpika* were two other notable works composed by the poet Tholan during the period.

Works written in *Manipravalam* apparently deviated from the Bhakti literature and contained extensive descriptions about life in Kerala with elaborate descriptions of the courtesans of the times, namely Unniyachi, Unniyadi and Unnichiruthevi. In *Līlatilakam*, it is observed that the language of *Manipravalam* is the one in which Sanskrit and Malayalam are combined. *Candrōtsavam* and *Vaisīkatantram* are examples for the literary creations that adhere to the principles of *Manipravalam*. The prominent literary works produced in *Manipravalam* during the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries and after were *Chambu* literary pieces such as *Uṅṅiyacci Caritam*, *Uṅṅicirutevi Caritam* and *Uṅṅiyādi Caritam*. These works showcase the real life of the upper caste people of Kerala rather than depicting the imaginary characters in a world of fantasy. *Sandesakavayam* written in the form of messages differ from *Chambu* in their subject matter and treatment. In *Sandesa Kavyam* dominated by Sringara Rasa fantasy intermingled with fact in a proportionate manner. The entire work is written in the form of messages in

Sandesa Kavyam. *Uṅṅunīli Sandeśam*, written in the fourteenth century, is a notable work in this genre. *Sukasandēśam* and *Koka Sandeśam* were two other important creations in this category.

While *Pattu* and *Manipravalam* works gave excessive importance to the dependence of Malayalam on Tamil and Sanskrit, poets like Cherusseri in the fifteenth century displayed vigour to compose a poem in the pure Malayalam language which belonged to the category called *Gatha*. Cherusseri's *Krishna Gātha* is a popular work which narrates the myth of Krishna. *Krishna Gātha* is remarkable for the simplicity of language, originality and the scholarship implanted in that lines. Unfortunately, the tradition initiated through *Krishna Gātha*, continued with *Bhārata Gātha* and then met an untimely demise due to the contempt and aversion of Brahmin scholars towards the literature written in pure Malayalam.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, a classic literary form emerged giving priority to religious and ethical subjects. The advent of this movement can be conceived in two ways: on the one hand, it can be considered as a development of *Pattu* tradition, while on the other hand it is recognized as a separate movement which is inclusive of the emotions and subjects of all the social groups. The access it has given to the marginalized groups by means of the simple use of language lies behind its popularity to some extent. Three types of poems are generally called *Kilippattu*: poems in which a bird is the narrator, poems containing the animals or other living or non-living entities as narrators or the poems that use the metrical pattern of *Kilippattu*. The narration in the form of *Kilippattu* became an eternal part of poetic creation owing to the peculiar quality of sophistication and ease. Despite

the selection of grand subject, the cultural enthusiasm that the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam Kilippattu* generated lies behind its influential nature of it. The upliftment of the society from the cultural degradation which is reflected in the works such as *Candrōtsavam* was the mission taken up by Thunchath Ezhuthachan through the Ramayana. Utilising *Kilippattu* as a powerful tool, he attempted to emancipate Malayalam from the influences of Sanskrit and Tamil and convinced the reader of the importance of Malayalam as an independent language.

Kilippattu narration continued after Ezhuthachan and became a popular mode of writing. *Keralavarma Rāmāyaṇam* published in the seventeenth century, Kunchan Nambiar's *Pancatantram Padappāṭṭu*, Arnos Pathiri's *Caturantyam* written in the eighteenth century are some significant works in this style. *Kilippattu* elevated the aims of Malayalam poems from production of pleasure to creation of ideals as most of the poems written using this style contain information about virtue.

Based on the story of the Ramayana, Punam Namboothiri wrote *Bhāṣa Rāmāyaṇam Cambu*, a pivotal and comprehensive work depicting the existence of Rama. *Attakatha* was another dominant literary form that emerged after *Kilippattu* in the seventeenth century giving importance to the performance aspect of literature. *Attakatha* was composed in relation to Kathakali performance in Kerala. *Attakatha* comprises *Sloka* and *Padam*. Kottarakkara Thamburan's *Ramanattam* based on the Ramayana was conceived as the first *Attakatha*. In the *Ramanattam* performance, the Ramayana stories were divided into eight sections and performed on eight days. *Thullal*, yet another popular form which got currency after *Kilippattu* in the eighteenth century, was a satirical manifestation of realistic or mythical stories

inaugurated by Kunchan Nambiar. Humorous and satirical depiction of social life kept Kunchan Nambiar's works different from the other works of the eighteenth century.

The prose language in Malayalam had undergone transformations during the period from the ninth century to the seventeenth century. The period was marked by conflict between Tamil and Sanskrit as the elite languages of Kerala. Due to the influence of Christian missionary activities, a unification of language came into effect and prose language got wider currency as a result of the activities of Christian missionaries. An excessive admiration for Sanskrit became an impediment to the development of Malayalam as an independent language. Kerala Varma Valiyakoyithamburan's contributions supported the development of Malayalam as a prose language. An unnecessary sanskritization was one of the limitations of Kerala Varma's language. Overuse of Sanskrit gave way to the advent of a movement called ⁶ *Pacha Malayala Prasthanam* in Kerala. The progress of Malayalam language is the product of disagreements between these two strains of development. Journalistic registers also served as a source for the growth of Malayalam language. The empowerment affected by the profusion of newspapers not only helped the people of Kerala to think beyond narrow perspectives, but also supported them to use the customary Malayalam language for the ease of communication.

The influence of English played a vital role in the transformation in the use of Malayalam language. In 1835 when English education was implemented in India, English language became an integral part of the consciousness of Kerala. The

⁶ Pure Malayalam literary movement which is against the interference of other languages in the use of Malayalam

universities established in Malabar and Madras, the publication of the dictionary of Hermann Gundert, the initiation of the Book Committee in Travancore under the supervision of Ayilyam Thirunal, the printing of newspapers such as *Kerala Mitram*, *Kerala Patrika*, *Malayali*, *Nasrani Deepika*, *Malyala Manorama* and *Swadesābhimani* were instrumental in promoting the use of ordinary language for understanding culture. Influence of English literature resulted in spreading a novel vision about literary production in Kerala.

The development of literary movements in Malayalam literature is undoubtedly the product of this alien influence. Arrival of modernity and the renaissance in Malayalam literature are two divergent turns that are inextricably interconnected. While the period of European renaissance was set between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the advent of Indian renaissance is marked only in the nineteenth century. The new spirit that emerged in Bengal as a part of western education and industrialization took around a few decades to reach Kerala. K.M. George, in *Ādhunika Malayāla Sāhitya Caritraṃ Prastānangalilyde*, significantly opined that the new philosophy of existence evolved out of modernization of Kerala gradually accepted the principles of secularism, democracy, originality and autonomy of the individual, the reflections of which were seen in the literary productions too in the second half of the nineteenth century (13).

In the novels and poems written in the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the dominant influence of English literature was quite visible. But the period after this influence was marked with a broader outlook imbibed from the writings from Europe irrespective of whether the period was called as a modernist period or

postmodernist period. This evolution is observable in the analysis of literature ranging from the works of O. Chandu Menon, C.V. Raman Pillai, Ullur, Kumaran Asan, Vallathol Narayana Menon, Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, M.P. Paul, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, Uroob, M.T.Vasudevan Nair, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, N.N. Pillai, C.N. Sreekantan Nair, V.K.N., Sarah Joseph, O.V. Vijayan, M. Mukundan, T.D. Ramakrishnan, Benyamin, Subhash Chandran and K.R. Meera. An integral force that decided the literary developments was the abundance of the publication industry.

Sensibility, imagination and expression are never static in any period of time in history. The dynamic characteristics of poetry are indeed the reflection of the complex implications of social transformations and politics of choice that the writers expressed through their medium. While the early periods marked the influences of multiple views emphasizing structure and rhyme as important in poetic composition, the later periods especially the distinctive period at the beginning of the twentieth century marked a romantic phase in the sphere of poetry in Kerala. The neoclassical influence in Kerala Varma and the classical notes in A. R. Rajaraja Varma gave way to the subtle romantic undertones in Kumaran Asan's writings. Contrary to Kumaran Asan's inclination to depict the tensions within the individual, his contemporaries, Ullur and Vallathol abstained from the Romantic influence and remained with conventional themes and portrayal. Among the trinity, Vallathol, with his straightforwardness, attracted the readers of the time. The literary path drawn by them was expanded by successors such as Nalappattu Narayana Menon, M.P.

Appan, Sister Mary Baneenja, Bodheswaran, G. Sakara Kurup, Balamani Amma, P. Kunjiraman Nair, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, Idappalli Raghavan Pillai etc.

The later period in Kerala witnessed the mature development of poetry focusing on certain ideals, ideologies and principles giving utmost priority to human existence. Gandhism, Marxism and nationalist philosophies gained currency in the writings during this period as evidenced in the poems of O.N.V. Kurup, Vayalar Ramavarma, Vailoppilli Sreedhara Menon, Edasseri Govindan Nair and Olappamanna Mana Subramanian Namboothiripad. When Romanticism started embracing Modernism, the unrest, realism and disappointment arrived in the realm of poetry, and were particularly reflected in the writings of Ezhacheri Ramachandran, Kureepuzha Sreekumar, Sreekumaran Thambi etc. A parallel strain of humorous poems also emerged from writers like Chemmanam Chacko during this period.

Trauma of world wars, the revolutions caused by science, skepticism in religions, existential crisis and alienation are considered as the reasons for the advent of Modernism in English literature. D. Benjamin, in his article on the evolution of poetry in *Ādhunika Malayāla Sāhitya Caritram Prastānangalilude* observes that these are not the causes of emergence of Modernism in Malayalam literature. Monotony caused by the prevalence of Romanticism for the duration of around forty eight years, the ingenuity offered by the new style of Modernism as seen in the English poetry and the significance and prestige offered by the provocative presentation of ideas in the new format attracted the writers of Malayalam to bring a shift in the literary expression (George 102). Ayyappa Paniker, M. Govindan, N.N.

Kakkad, Aattoor Ravi Varma, Kunjunni, Satchidanandan , Balachandran Chullikad, K.G. Sankara Pillai and D. Vinayachandran are a few notable poets of the movement.

Postmodernism in Malayalam literature unleashed unique voices like A. Ayyappan during its inception. It was during the postmodern period that the poems of the subaltern attained currency and popularity. In short, this period marked the rejection of grand narratives in favour of the discarded voices in literature such as Dalit, women and Transgender. The different strains such as romantic, modern and postmodern coexisted in Malayalam literature due to the peculiar cultural landscape of Kerala. So, the divisions in terms of movements are not rigid and restricted to any particular time period. This coexistence is the fundamental force that marks Malayalam literature as fertile soil for the revisionary writings of classics.

The creative byproduct of enthusiasm and leisure offered by Industrial revolution in eighteenth century England was the emergence of the genre called novel. Novel, which is supposedly articulating the daily travails of humanity, gained an imperative status in the literary sphere making poetry a subsidiary genre very soon. Probably because of the space offered by the novel to elaborately project history, culture, ideology, story and perspectives lie behind the popularity of it. Accessibility to European fiction attained through English education functioned as a motivating force to the early Indian novelists. The notable Malayalam novel, *Indulēkha* by O. Chandumenon is a perfect example to validate this statement. But rather than simply imitating the west, the writers with progressive outlook recognized the potential of the medium to be used as a tool for social transformation. Writers like P. Kesavadev, Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, Thakazhi Sivasankara

Pillai, S.K. Potttekatt and M.P. Paul elevated Malayalam literature to further heights by depicting the multifaceted dimensions of life in cogent fashion. While Uroob and M.T. Vasudevan Nair took a diversion by focusing on individuals, Muttathu Varkey was instrumental in including novels to the area of popular literature. K. Surendran, O.V. Vijayan, M. Mukundan, Malayattur Ramakrishnan, V.K.N., N.P. Muhammed, Sarah Joseph, Anand, P. Valsala, C. Radhakrishnan and K.P. Ramanunni are a few notable Malayalam novelists. From Philosophical questions to the ideological subtleties, from gender issues to caste disparities, from the historical periods to the contemporary times, the Malayalam novels renovate itself to address the diverse questions pertaining to human life. Revisionary novels evolve from this fertile landscape of writing and address various issues such as marginalisation, human predicament, multiculturalism etc.

Though dramatic performances existed before the nineteenth century, the advent of the dramatic tradition of documented plays in Malayalam took place in the nineteenth century. Scholars such as A. Govinda Pillai, Chembakaraman Velayudhan, A.R. Rajaraja Varma and Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Thampuran attempted translations from English and Tamil. From the musical performances, the dramatic tradition in Malayalam shifted to the category of prose drama. Still amidst the progress observed in the making of plays having social and cultural significance, the emergence of commercial theatre made the realm a sphere of dilution. Social activists like V.T. Bhatathirippad consciously produced plays like *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangatekku* with an intention to transform the society for the good. Experimental plays introduced by N. Krishna Pillai and practised by C.J. Thomas, C.N. Sreekantan Nair and G. Sankarappillai can be considered as yet another set of

milestones in Malayalam literature. K.P. A.C. and Sangeetha Nataka Academy have key roles in the development of Malayalam dramatic tradition. While a group of writers followed the principles of Ibsen, N.N. Pillai followed the techniques of Bernard Shaw. C.N. Sreekantan Nair's Ramayana plays provided a new vision to the dramatic tradition of Kerala (George 453).

Emergence of the regional theatrical tradition is a significant turning point in the development of plays in Malayalam. Kavalam Narayana Panicker, G. Sankara Pillai and C.N. Sreekantan Nair envisaged a theatre that fused the ancient Kerala art forms and flavour of regional music. While exploring the popular techniques of absurdism and existentialism, Malayalam theatrical tradition set a novel and ingenious path with imprints of feminist theatre, Dalit theatre and children's theatre. The agility and spirit proclaimed by the proponents of the new waves acted as a pivotal force for the making of plays revising mythical stories.

Evolved from the soil offered by the ancient parables such as *Jataka Stories*, *Aesop Fables* or *Pañjatantram Stories* and influenced by the sensibilities offered by the western literary imagination, Indian short stories cultivated their own unique worlds fundamentally different from the world of novels. As in the way the priorities of other literary genres shift according to the time, the field of short stories in Malayalam literature too witnessed evolution in the sensibilities they expressed. Starting with social issues, Malayalam short stories travelled the realms concerning identity, globalization, trauma, philosophy, existentialism, marginalization, gender justice, caste atrocities drawing from the literary movements that flourished during different periods. From the generations of Vengayil Kunjiraman Nayanar to E.V. Krishna Pillai, the realm of short story reached its glorious point with writers such as

Karoor Neelakanta Pillai, Lalithambika Antharjama, Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, Ponkunnam Varkey, K. Saraswathi Amma, Muttathu Varkey, M. Govindan and Cherukad. According to K.M. George, the advent of *Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishat* made a huge contribution to the arrival of the new spirit reflected in the short stories of the twentieth century (276). European thoughts and philosophies crept into the making of the short stories of the modernist writers in Malayalam. Despite these influences writers such as O.V. Vijayan, Anand, Kakanadan, Sarah Joseph, Gracy, Zachariah, M. Mukundan, Anand and N.S. Madhadavan attempted to bring novelty and ingenuity to short stories. While religiously maintaining fictionality, the writers of the second half of the twentieth century experimented with the themes and form of the short story. Revisiting myth is one such strategy that these writers explored during the second half of the twentieth century.

The Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature are not simply reproductions of the myths. Instead, they are the literary productions set against, and inspired from and sometimes quarrelling with the literary tradition of Malayalam literature of which they are a part. Since no literary creation has its own singular existence, the works chosen for the current study are the inevitable literary reactions of the cultural junctures of Kerala. Utilising the mythical story of the Ramayana, various narratives that hold divergent perspectives, ideologies and vision attempt to unravel the subtleties of the narrative as well as the period and literature as a medium of expression and impact.

Chapter 3

Politics of Representation of the Ramayana in Malayalam Poetry

The Ramayana narratives appear in diverse literary forms and genres. Poetry responds to the times often by taking themes from myths. Undecipherable dilemmas, intricacies of living, delusions of happiness, pathos of servitude, trauma of treachery, truths of birth and death and inexplicable pleasures and pangs of relationships are taken up with focus and brevity in an unparalleled fashion, when the poetic explorations are undertaken with respect to the Ramayana. M. Leelavathi, in her comprehensive study on Malayalam poetry titled, *Malayāla Kavita Sāhitya Caritram* compares the advent of an era in Malayalam poetry initiated by N. Kumaran Asan with the period of Thunchath Ezhuthachan. Thunchath Ezhuthachan set a new literary scenario in Kerala posing an end to *Manipravalam*, a hybrid language containing Tamil morphology, Tamil syntax and Sanskrit lexicon and *Venmani* literature. Similarly Kumaran Asan unearthed a new sensibility in Kerala literary landscape (171).

Not only a poet but also a social reformer attracted by the philosophy of Sree Narayana Guru, N. Kumaran Asan (1873-1924) through Malayalam poems revealed the grim realities of life. Questioning the complacency of people against oppression through subtle but provocative poems, he raised the consciousness of the readers of the initial decades of the twentieth century. He was one among the modern literary triumvirate including Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer and Vallathol Narayana Menon,

and gained the honorific ⁷*Mahakavi*. Asan introduced lyrical poems titled, *Khandakavya*, shorter narrative poems to bring reformist ideas to Malayalam poetry. Malayalam poetry witnessed two phases of renaissance: the first extended through three centuries starting with Cherusseri in the middle of the fifteenth century, sustained through Thunchath Ezhuthachan in the sixteenth century and Kunchan Nambiar in the eighteenth century. The distinctiveness of their works lies in the unique combination of native Malayalam dialects, with the touch of Sanskrit and the use of Dravidian folk meters. The period after the eighteenth century was the time of decadence when erotic poetry containing Aryan diction became predominant. The spread of English education, the printing press and the publication of literary journals are instrumental in setting a scene for reforms in Malayalam literature. Due to the efforts of visionaries such as V.C. Balakrishna Panicker and A.R. Raja Raja Varma, a stage for progress was set in motion by the publication of journals such as *Malayāla Manōrama* and *Cintāmani* in the beginning of the twentieth century. During the second period, along with Vallathol and Ulloor, Kumaran Asan gathered revolutionary ideas that transformed Kerala's cultural and literary landscape.

Though he started his career by writing erotic verses, Asan, inspired by Sree Narayana Guru's philosophy and transformed by the experience of being exposed to the cultural life of Bengal, recognized the responsibilities of a writer towards the society. This realization about the role of the writer as a social reformer directed him to establish *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam* (S.N.D. P) and the journal titled, *Vivekodayam*. In 1907, Malayalam poetry saw the publication of a unique

⁷ Great poet

Khandakavya titled, *Vīna Pūvu* (the fallen flower) by Kumaran Asan. The poem portrays philosophical notions about the ephemeral nature of human existence and transience of pleasure through the metaphor of a fallen flower in a convincing manner, when he concludes the poem: “This then in the ultimate count, is anyone’s fate/ Of what use tears? Sojourn on Earth is but a dream!” (Kurup 182). Love manifested in multiple dimensions as passion, spirituality, compassion, mercy, empathy, anger etc. in Asan’s poems titled, *Nalini*, *Līla*, *Candāla Bhikṣuki*, *Duravasta*, *Karuṇa* and *Cīntāviṣṭayāya Sita*. His aversion towards casteism and empathy towards oppressed and outcastes are evidently stated in poems such as *Chandāla Bhikṣuki*, *Duravasta* and *Karuṇa*. *Cīntāviṣṭayāya Sita* published in 1919 is one of the philosophical poems of Kumaran Asan. The significance of the poem lies in two realms. On the one hand, it reveals Sita’s potential to think critically on the incidents that are of decisive role in her abandonment and exile. On the other hand, it makes the readers of Malayalam poetry to have a serious examination of the thoughts of Sita which speaks against oppression and injustice that women face. Sita’s monologue, in Asan, is a mirror set against the values of Kerala society of the first decades of the twentieth century that silence and exclude marginalized people. Specifically, the poem, in a subtle manner, analyses the patriarchal social framework which is essentially orthodox. The demand of the social and cultural milieu of Kerala yearning for progress is reflected by means of the poems of Kumaran Asan in the twentieth century. In fact, Kumaran Asan is rewriting the ethos of times by informing the reader that the epic omitted to represent the thoughts of Sita.

The rare capacity of the text to carry forward the spirit of Kerala renaissance

and to motivate the writers to put poetic truth against the theological doctrines projects *C̄intāviṣṭayāya Sita* as an epoch-making poem. The modernist sensibility coupled with romantic subjectivity adorns the unconventional surge of thought that hits the mark in *C̄intāviṣṭayāya Sita*. The publication of this work is not a singular event, but a continuum which summoned the onset of a series of poems that challenge the institutions and ideologies functioning as regulatory bodies in the twentieth century Indian cultural epoch in general and Kerala cultural landscape in particular. Also, the new trend established the importance of the individual over society. Negotiating the cultural undercurrents, the poems in Malayalam literature that supplement the multiplicity of the Ramayana focusing on gendered existence of human beings interrogate the perceptions on life and relationships.

This chapter examines the perspectives that appeared in select Malayalam poems. These poems create Ramayana narratives with substantial distinctions from the popular version. Using the methods of discourse analysis grounded in feminist insights, revisionist mythology and subaltern consciousness, this chapter examines the arguments of select Malayalam poems. The questions addressed include what event is elaborated in and what argument is associated with the texts selected and why and how the texts interpret the life of a mythical character whose point of view is blurred or missing in the popular narratives. The chapter also tries to throw light on how the critique of canons and social order is implanted in the texture of the selected poems, what is the significance of identity and ideology that contest the politics of literary productions and how the chosen texts resist marginalization and oppression. Obviously, all the poems selected for this study are the ones stating

dissent against orthodox, elitist and patriarchal outlook maintained by the Kerala society at large. How the meanings are made within the cultural discourses of the twentieth century, and how the poems draw upon Kerala renaissance, freedom struggle and nationalism would also come under the purview of the current study.

Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, the translator of the work, *Retelling the Rāmāyaṇa: Voices from Kerala* written by C.N. Sreekantan Nair and Sarah Joseph, remarks on the general perception of the Ramayana stories across Kerala:

The story of the Ramayanam, one of the two great epics of India, is familiar to most Indians. For people of my generation, it was a story taught to children at a very young age. We saw it as a romantic love story, one in which good won over evil and the central character, Raman, was a role model. The Ramayana m, as told to us, was definitely ‘Raman’s story’. Raman was the evergreen hero, the great archer, the young man who gave up being crowned and went to the forest to fulfil the oath his father gave to his second wife, Kaikeyi. He was also quoted as a great lover, a man who stood steadfast by a single wife and a loving brother. In short, he was the ideal man, a man whom every boy aimed to imitate and every girl hoped to meet when she grew up. (Nair XVII)

Cīntāviṣṭayāya Sita challenges this assumption about Rama. Hence the publication of this book in 1919 initiates transformation in the thought of Kerala’s reading public. This shift, in some sense, is also viewed as a sign of embracing feminist

ideologies contesting the idea of biology as destiny as proposed from the period of Aristotle or even before and followed by the orthodox society (Jenainati 5).

Vallathol Narayana Menon, a contemporary of Kumaran Asan, attempts to portray the relevance of Sita in the discussions on gender equality by introducing Sita as an icon of worship in *Kochu Sīta* (Little Sita) (1927). Being a nationalist poet, Vallathol, following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, finds it essential to get rid of the orthodox systems. *Kochu Seetha* is a poem depicting the poignant story of a girl named Chambakavalli who is destined to be a *Devadasi*, a Temple dancer, dedicated to the service of deity, who must yield to the desires of affluent and powerful men of the region for life and survival. Being a strong worshipper of Sita and her ideals Chambakavalli decides to break the rule by not becoming a *Devadasi*. Her obstinate grandmother often mocks her, calling her "Devi Sita " (Menon 40). In one of her conversations, the grandmother argues thus:

⁸Though Sita remained chaste
 Despite the pleas of Ravana,
 Didn't the lover abandon her in the jungle?
 Even at the climax of her pregnancy!
 Chastity is the golden chain
 Made by the selfish men
 To trap the virtuous women
 To make them play puppetry (79-86).

⁸ Translation of the lines from Malayalam to English is done by me.

These lines carry the understanding about the way Kerala's public view Sita-Rama story in the twentieth century. Along with the spirit of feminism, the progressive viewpoint of the period of Nationalism and renaissance are echoed in the lines. The fact that Vallathol has translated the Ramayana into Malayalam is also relevant while reading his *Kochu Sita*. Along with that, the publication of *Kochu Sita* denotes the continuity of the spirit started with *C̄intāviṣṭayāya Sita*.

Modernity and its responses to ancient civilizations in historical contexts have become the reasons for the production of the Ramayana narratives in the twentieth century. In the midst of the influence of modernity in economy, family, society, politics etc. and the rise of a global culture, the writers attempt to make a critical investigation into their cultural roots. A tendency to use myths and epics is seen in modern Malayalam poetry as the re-presentation of epic narratives, interpretation of specific situations from epics and use of images from epics with a view to narrate them in the modern times. They reflect not only the vision and the politics of the poet but also the historical knowledge and regional wisdom that frame the epic stories at different periods. Kumaran Asan's *C̄intāviṣṭayāya Sita*, Vayalayar Rama Varma's "Tāṭaka Enna Drāvida Rājakumāri" and "Rāvaṇaputri", Sugathakumari's "Oru Rāmāyaṇa Rāgam", Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri's "Ahalyā Mōkṣam" and Vijayalakshmi's "Kausalya" are the works selected for the current study. Rather than functioning as mere narratives of myth, each of them carries the elements of social criticism. Keeping a distance from the conservative standpoints of many Ramayana stories, they manifest an alternative reality, and hence they can be called counter narratives. The threat they engender to the

dominant models of thought and character of the Ramayana, and the manner in which they question the regulation of knowledge that favours a set of ideologies used to subjugate the subaltern are unparalleled. In short, they are invalidating such Ramayana literary productions functioning as cultural intermediaries by serving as models for the social mores against the marginalised.

John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* observes the way patriarchy naturalises domination of men and blames women for the prevalence of such a system: “But, it will be said, the rule of men over women differs from all these others in not being a rule of force: it is accepted voluntarily; women make no complaint, and are consenting parties to it” (16). This viewpoint of the society failed to notice the subtle resistance of women as it remained unarticulated in life and literature. This error is conspicuous in estimating Sita of the Ramayana as a docile individual who can be judged only as an embodiment of patience. Sita’s silence in Valmiki and Ezhuthachan, though seen as normal as per the societal standards and hence divine, cannot find adequate rationale among the informed reader community and hence has undergone critical enquiry. Probably, the context of production of the Ramayana demanded an uncritical acceptance from Sita’s part. Sita’s critical viewpoint which is partly visible in Valmiki is neglected because of the divinity ascribed to Rama. Devadutt Pattanaik explains the evolution of Rama image in *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Rāmāyaṇa*:

Until the fifth century CE Ram was hailed as a great human hero, even though the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa alludes to Ram sensing his divinity, though never revealing it. From the fifth century onwards

Ram was increasingly seen as a form of Vishnu on earth, a model king who valued his word over all things. By the tenth century, there was no doubt about Ram's divinity. In Kamban's Tamil retelling, *Iramavattaram*... Ram struggles with his divinity and gradually slips into silence, as his actions often seem contrary to what is conventionally accepted of the divine. By the twelfth century, following the works of Vedanta scholar Ramanuja, Rama became equated with God himself and this marked the beginning of Ram-Bhakti, where Ram is assumed to be God and does not have to prove he is God. Everyone in the epic knows he is God and approaches him accordingly (81).

Brahmanism and patriarchy reinforced the concept of considering Rama as an unquestionable God. Uma Chakravarti in the article, "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State" states that the upper caste women in India were carefully guarded because the sexuality of lower caste male was considered as a threat to the purity of upper caste. According to her, "the process of caste, class and gender stratification, the three elements in establishment of social order in India" shapes the formation of brahmanical patriarchy (579, 580). Despite the fact that patriarchy is deeply ingrained in its core, twentieth century political context of Kerala provides space for a liberal ambience for poetic production based on Sita's subjectivity which, in turn, functions as a strong critique of Rama. The particular timeframe that Kumaran Asan, the writer of *Cintāviṣṭayāya Sita*, adopts for the narrator to speak i.e. towards the end of Sita's

life, is an informed choice meant to quell the possible criticism of immaturity of her perspective. P. Damodaran Pillai expresses his reservation on this selection of time. He argues that Kumaran Asan's portrayal of Sita reflecting on the events that happened fifteen years ago in her life is less sensible in nature. Sukumar Azhikode, in his seminal work *Āśante Sītākāvyaṃ*, rejects this argument by substantiating that Sita's ruminations reaffirm the critique that she made in the past (65). By making Sita think loudly about her abandonment fifteen years after this incident, Asan provides a mature and experienced outlook of life through Sita. This, in turn, produces a reliable point of view for analysis. Here the writer is not completely deviating from the cultural impositions of codes. Instead, by retaining Sita in that realm, the text is negotiating with Sita's situatedness from her subjective position in *Āśante Sītākāvyaṃ*.

When Sage Valmiki goes to Ayodhya with a view to introduce Lava and Kusa before Rama, their father and the king of Ayodhya, and the days pass without having any message from them, the anxious woman reflects on the circumstances that lead to this painful reintroduction of the children to their father. Here, Sita acts as a source of critical inquiry into the objectivity of the idealised story focusing on Rama. Though the act of rumination is unintentional, Sita in Kumaran Asan's work, does not count her critical reflections as sin or blasphemy. The context of Kumaran Asan's story is around fifteen years after the abandonment of Sita in the forest. So, the woman who speaks is the one occupying the space outside the marital relationship because her husband abandons her. So, Kumaran Asan's protagonist is the victim suffering the trauma of unjust treatment. The cause of the injustice is

public opinion. The result is the loss of security, wealth and privilege. Thus, the portrayal of Sita as an individual with concrete vision and perspectives turns into a realistic one by the solid framework created for Sita's discussions.

Kumaran Asan's intentions behind such a portrayal can be viewed as similar to that of Narla Venkateswara Rao, who wrote the Telugu play *Sita Josyam* (1979) though Kumaran Asan did not seem to have overtly confessed those opinions.

Venkateswara Rao writes:

The Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, the eighteen Puranas- the major aim of all these texts is to protect the caste system; the feudal order. If they continue to be propagated in the way they are now, progress towards a new social order will remain an empty slogan. For about fifteen hundred years, these texts have stood as severe obstacles to our intellectual development and social progress. If we do not remove these obstacles even now, we cannot enter the modern age, nor can we move forward on progressive path (131)

Then the pertinent question why Kumaran Asan does not take the events to a direct confrontation can be addressed with the following justifications: Kumaran Asan's Sita might not be a radical feminist to confront Rama and society directly; she might not believe in winning a debate, rather she tries to situate her dilemma in the wider canvas of human existence and her thoughts speak more powerfully than her words. Moreover, when Kumaran Asan deviates from the conventional, he wants his arguments to be palatable and convincing to the readers of his times. Whatever be the case, Kumaran Asan's Sita is not ready to internalise that her plight is due to fate

and to be gratified with the conformist explanations. Instead, through remembrance and introspection, she is giving a vent to her saddest thoughts on life, revealing the limits and possibilities of female subjectivity during the times of production of the text in Kerala. What is peculiar about this portrayal of Sita is that the writer, rather than utilising his authorial voice to shape Sita's opinions, lets Sita's consciousness to be revealed through her own inner stream of reflections. Thus Malayalam poetry explored the possibility of stream of consciousness to produce powerful narratives following the technique used in novels:

⁹Nothing guarantees certainty in life
 Each stage of life would visit the man and depart
 No one knows the secrets of the world
 Though men wish for the best always (45-48).

Sita's reflections emerge from this generalisation on the uncertain nature of destiny in the life of an individual. This note is a clear indication that both romanticism and realism add vigour to the literary imagination of Kumaran Asan. Scepticism on the attainment of the ideal world envisaged by Kerala Renaissance and nationalistic spirit is seen here in the lines. For a society contaminated with social evils such as casteism, progress is a remote goal. This realisation of Asan about Kerala society is what makes his Sita speak about the uncertainty of life. Recognizing ancient texts as the sources of *Chatur Varnyam*, discrimination based on caste, as in the way they are the sources of inequality of sexes, Asan questions

⁹ Translation of the lines from Malayalam to English is done by me.

the epic through Sita. Thus the argument of Asan through Sita goes beyond the specific context.

To Kumaran Asan, Sita is not an ordinary woman whose grief is due to the loss of the luxurious life in the palace. Sita, here, is depicted as a stoic woman, in whom life inscribes incredible wisdom. The public humiliation is the reason of Sita's traumatic thoughts, which she remarks as one vital cause of human misery (Kumaran Asan 11). Reunion with Rama is not a remote dream for Sita who practises prudence and survives a possible suicide and the pain of abandonment. Satisfied with the status of motherhood, she practises detachment from pleasures; for pleasures are the harbingers of ensuing pain. Pain endured for a long time has been converted in her life as an intimate pleasure that she starts to tolerate without resistance. Time has taught her lessons about the uncertainties of life.

While she exposes her past through the cryptic and unceremonious remarks on Rama such as *Mannavan* (the king), she sharply criticises the priorities of Rama who is a virtuous ruler but an unsuccessful husband who abandons the pregnant wife in the forest. Only Lakshmana's grief-stricken face and tears relieve Sita who remembers the way he observes the commands of the king. This narrative shows the solidarity between Sita and Lakshmana in several instances. Sita, in her reflections, is apologetic towards Lakshmana for the disastrous nature of the words she uses against him alleging him of lust towards her. She regretted her love towards Rama which forced her to utter imprudent words against Lakshmana. This incident is not seen in many other Ramayanas. Obviously, it could be rightly assumed that this thought was Kumaran Asan's improvisation on the story he heard from variant

sources. In the poem, “Cintāgrastanāya Rāman” (1953) by P.V. Krishna Warriar, the editor of *Kavana Kaumudi* magazine, Rama is portrayed as extremely sad that he is forced to abandon Sita to convince the subjects that he is a just ruler. He, in the poem, believes that though Sita’s plight is partly due to his fate, partly it is the punishment fallen on her due to the sin of insulting the innocent Lakshmana (Vallikad 203).

Kumaran Asan’s Sita is not the submissive wife of Rama who does not articulate her displeasures on his action of abandonment. Interestingly, in the 83rd *Sloka*, she raises sharp criticism on the clan of Ayodhya that often abandons its children and wives in the forest thereby criticising Dasharatha too. Thus, Sita considers this predisposition as Rama’s inheritance and thereby mocks the entire clan. Men with false pride compromise the honour of women for that and Rama proves no exception when he forces her into the fire ordeal in Lanka. Sita, in the poem, does not raise herself to the realm of sheer adherence to the ideal wifehood. She rebukes Rama for considering his honour as separate from that of his wife, and for forfeiting the sanctity of the institution of marriage (Asan 22-23). The question that Sita asks her consciousness is vital and intelligent. She judges her abandonment as a merciless and unjust action of the ruler which makes him an eternal sinner. Altering her tone, later in her monologue, she urges Rama to discard his pride that brings suffering to his life. Gaining stable consciousness, Sita turns self-critical and bears the weight of the deaths and destitution of the large number of people on her behalf. Her strong disagreement to be again subjected to the rituals of fire ordeal to prove her chastity is evident when she asks whether she is a doll to play with (Kumaran Asan 36).

Asan's exposure to European literature and his understanding of the reformist thoughts in Ibsen's *A Doll's house* (1879) may be behind the statement asking *Pavayoyival* (whether she is a doll), (Asan 36). The determination of Sita encourages her to reject her body and to be a part of the mother earth when she is to prove her virtue again to regain honour. Ayyappa Paniker's poem titled, *Kuruks'etram* (1958) depicts Rama as the representative of modern anarchic existence. The spiritual vacuum in the poignant life of Rama which is the unavoidable consequence of his deeds including the abandonment of Sita is stated in the poem to make the reader critically evaluate the notion of *Dharma*. In the poem, "Sarayuvilekku" (2001) O.N.V Kurup articulates the voice of a repentant Rama; in the monologue, Rama is depicted as a victim of fear and blind worshipper of power (Vallikad 207). In "Rāmante Vilāpam" (1971) written by Thonnakkal Narayanan also Rama is pictured as sad and apologetic. Gita Hiranyan in "Swargārohaṇam" sharply remarks *Sawrgarohanam*, elevation to heaven, is a euphemistic way of telling about the suicide of Rama who is sorry about the misdeeds committed against Sita (Hiranyan 29-30).

Romanticism in Malayalam literature flourished with the publication of Kumaran Asan's *Cīntāviṣṭayāya Sita*. As different from the objective narration of the content in the epics, Kumaran Asan adopts the vehicle of subjectivity in his poem. The female subjectivity and the effortless, independent and reliable tone of narration have a noteworthy impact on the image of Sita that the work makes visible. Though he has selected an incident that happens on a single day for the poetic content, the technique of mingling introspection with retrospection provides an

overall view about the events that lead to the final catastrophe of Sita's sacrifice of her body in favour of her honour.

The description has got three distinctive stages of developments: in the initial phase, which is replete with philosophical underpinnings, Kumaran Asan universalizes suffering. In the second phase, the unbearable mental suffering compels Sita to get out of the cocoon of philosophy and explore the reasons for her pain that she identifies as the crimes of none other than Rama. This realisation and the resultant condemnation are the inevitabilities of the journey of a character passing through such a mental trauma. To put it bluntly, the writer expresses through the character what he intends to speak about the atrocities done against Sita in particular and against women in general, in this phase. In the third phase, Sita confesses that the emotions disclosed in the earlier phase are the feelings that come out on the spur of the moment and cannot be conceived as the evidence of her hatred towards Rama. Even though her rage gives way to placid state, the rigidity with which she adheres to the importance of respectability of women is inimitable. The world view of the work is undoubtedly feminist. Sita is the spokesperson of the women who are victimised as per the dictates of the power structures based on public opinion. The poem reminds the reader of the meaninglessness of the moral principles and the futility of rituals. In a world where the rules decide human virtue, individual fails to find meaningful bonds with other individuals. This substantial crisis inherent in Kerala society is exemplified through Sita. So, more than a literary character, she is a metaphor for existence of human beings in Kerala society at a specific historical juncture.

In addition to highlighting suffering, Kumaran Asan does not fail to express the emotion of love in the poem. When the epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, highlights masculine honour as its greatest priority, Kumaran Asan's poem emphasises love against all the human follies. Sita considers her affection towards her children as the great healer of her pains. Lakshmana, in the poem, is projected as an embodiment of love who is torn between his admiration towards Rama and affection towards Sita. The writer lays emphasis on the marital love which must compel the male partner to think about the female partner's prestige as equally important as his own honour. Selfishness, inconsistency in behaviour, jealousy and over indulgence in public roles are the threats to love, as per Kumaran Asan's perspective. Here the writer is attempting to identify the reasons for the failure of human existence too.

Ayyappa Paniker in *A short History of Malayalam Literature* opines that Changampuzha Krishna Pillai (1911-48) influenced the young poets in the mid twentieth century with his unparalleled romantic poetic vision and attractive style of writing. The poets of the neo-romantic school continued his dynamism. P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar Rama Varma, Thirunalloor Karunakaran, Puthusseri Ramachandran, O.N.V. Kurup and others incorporated revolutionary ideas into their neo-romantic verse (Paniker 96). On 12th November 1936, Kerala witnessed an important proclamation titled Temple Entry Proclamation by Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma. Being an order that allows the Dalit and tribal people to enter and worship in the temples, the proclamation brought transformation to the Kerala society. *Vaikom Satyagraha* in 1924 intended to establish freedom for the untouchables to travel through the roads near temples paved the way for the Temple

Entry Proclamation. The historical significance of these events lay in their goal to abolish untouchability prevalent in Hindu community in Kerala. The Temple Entry Proclamation is often compared to the abolition of Sati, for that matter. Vayalar Ramavarma enters the literary domain of Kerala with a poem titled, “Vanjīśādīpam” (1946), which praises Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma for his courage (Ramavarma 398). Though he lived during the period of the progress of Communist ideology and peasant revolts in Vayalar (a place in Kerala), Gandhi’s ideologies and the spirit of nationalism inspired Vayalar Ramavarma’s literary writings initially. “Karmayōgi”, “Jīvitagāyakan”, “Manuṣyan” and “Gramagruhangal” are the examples for his poems with a nationalist spirit. In the poem, “Manuṣyan” he portrayed Gandhi as a phenomenal man:

¹⁰In the faraway battlefields of cruel,
 Forbidding ways that crush the freedom
 Lives a Man, a devotee of *Ramarajya*,
 Writing a history of the empire of love! (53-60)

Though he admires Gandhi who is a devotee of Rama’s ways, Vayalar does not keep himself aloof from criticizing Rama who kills Tataka. In the 1940s and the 1950s he wrote poems containing the philosophy of Communism.

One of the fundamental objectives of renaissance is the universalization of knowledge and the spreading of the importance of the study of mother tongue as aptly stated by *P. Govinda Pillai in Kerala Navōdhānam: Oru Marxist Vīkṣaṇam* (Pillai 32). The writers of Malayalam poetry in the twentieth century wrote patriotic

¹⁰ Translation from Malayalam to English is done by me.

or anti-colonial verse and verse intending to put an end to social evils. The path opened by Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee guides them in their attempts. Renaissance in Kerala is the byproduct of conflicting forces of resistance and transformation. Along with the leaders of renaissance such as C.V. Raman Pillai, T. Palppu, Sree Narayana Guru, C. Krishnan and Sahodaran Ayyappan, the writers too start considering writing as a political act meant for the transformation of the society. Transforming Kerala society is not an easy task as they had to fight not only against the inherent cultural conflicts, but also against the hegemonic colonial forces. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* remarks about the malevolent nature of colonialism and the manipulative strategies it adopts to construct the demons out of the natives, the rightful inhabitants of land:

The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming

element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces (41).

While one examines the depiction of demonic characters in the myths, it can be noticed that such a portrayal is similar to the depiction of tribal and similar ethnic categories. So, there is a similarity between myths and the colonisers' narratives on this ground. The elite invaders' depiction of the native embodies hatred, ridicule and mockery. Sometimes, crossing the limits of prudence, the native is projected frivolously using terminologies connected with animals. Attributing promiscuity to the desires of indigenous people, the settlers urge to seek punishment of the natives disregarding the diversity of cultural ethos pertinent to each ethnic community. A postcolonial reading of the tales of Tataka and Shurpanakha, the female characters of the Ramayana expound the injustice done by the superior Aryan invaders against Dravidian community.

M. Achuthan, in *Swātantrya Samaravum Malayāla Sāhityavum* observed that Gandhian philosophies and the nationalistic spirit are the poetic inspirations for Vayalar (329-330). "Jīvita Gāyakan", "Grāma Grihangaḷ", "Karmayōgi", "Manuṣyan" etc. are his poems containing the relentless energy of a patriotic poet. Deeply moved by the sectarian tendencies of the society and the social conflicts in terms of religion and caste, Vayalar finds it as his mission to use his pen as a weapon against inequalities and injustice. The literary discussions he initiates on the characters in the Ramayana labelled as demonic are basically the results of the critical insights accompanied by the social transformations which occurred in the

nineteenth and the twentieth century. It would not be wrong if we say that Vayalar must be influenced by the sociopolitical movement of Dravidians initiated by Periyar in Tamil Nadu. E.V. Ramaswami, popularly known as Periyar, viewed the Ramayana as a text written to assert the supremacy of Aryans over Dravidian communities. Following the understanding that Rama is an Aryan king and Ravana is a Dravidian ruler, he takes it as his mission to promote the idea that Rama is less virtuous than Ravana. With the acts of burning the pictures of Rama and organising the performance of *Ravan Leela*, he argues that it is a part of the politics of Dravidians to fight against cultural invasions. Obviously Vayalar's poems on the Ramayana derive spirit from Periyar's view of the Ramayana.

Kerala renaissance during the period of the struggle for independence, set ground for the liberal and revolutionary outlook for the rejection of Aryan/Brahmin supremacy and caste discrimination in the soil of Kerala. The repercussions of philosophies and slogans generated by the social revolutions shape the twentieth century Malayalam poetry too. Vayalar Ramavarma, one of the leading voices of dissent as stated earlier, took it as his mission to juxtapose his unorthodox standpoints against the social systems and religion through speeches and writings. In order to motivate the laymen to ruminate over the urgency to act against social stratifications, he finds it indispensable to rewrite the canonical narratives of binaries. "Tātaka Enna Drāvida Rājakumāri" (The Dravida Princess named Tataka) (1951) is such a resistance piece on the mythical demonic character Tataka of the Ramayana. Most of his poems supporting resistance and revolution were written between 1946 and 1955. Not only Gandhism, but also communism influences

Vayalar Ramavarma and the aesthetic reflections of this influence can be seen in his writing, especially in the poems written during the above mentioned period. “Tātaka Enna Drāvīda Rājākumāri” is one among those poems that depicts his sharp criticism against violence and stigma.

Rama’s journey from Ayodhya into the forest affirms the fact that he is an outsider with regard to forest who accompanies the sage, Vishwamitra, and enters forest. The scion of Ikshvaku belongs to the Surya lineage. Rama who is the scion of Ikshvaku has been patronised by Sage Vishwamitra. To complete his education and to make the life of sages comfortable, Rama intrudes into the forest without the consent or knowledge of the forest dwelling tribe. Tataka is a woman belonging to the forest dwelling tribe. Vayalar considers her as a princess having Dravidian ethnic roots. So, Tataka’s residence in the forest is a legitimate affair, according to Vayalar, whereas the occupation of Rama and Vishwamitra are illegitimate encroachment that can be compared to colonial settlement.

The Sanskrit Brahmanical texts often conceal this idea to attribute validity to the forest occupation of the sages. They glorify this occupation as a part of their devotional practices. In *Sita, An illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*, Devadutt Pattanaik observes:

Tataka and her rakshasa hordes are often visualized as trouble makers, with the rishis assuming the right to conduct a yagna in their forest. Vishwamitra’s yagna can be equated with the burning of Khandava forest by the Pandavas to build their city of Indraprastha. A Yagna may be the metaphor for clearing the forests, creating fields

for human settlements. It is easy to read this as the incursion of vedic Aryan Tribes from the Gangetic plains into the dense southern forests. The action of the rishis can easily be equated with proselytizing efforts of missionaries and evangelists. European colonizers popularized such interpretations to justify the colonization in India, putting the rulers, landowners and priestly communities of India on the defensive (Pattanaik 41).

Vayalar's poem written during the period when Kerala and India fought against two forms of aggressions, colonial aggression of the British and the caste aggression of the *Savarna* Indians, needs to be read against the context of Pattanaik's observations. The title of the poem designated Tataka as a princess of the Dravidian ethnic community, thereby giving her rights to her occupation of the forest. Her entitlement to the land is affirmed by the writer through the title. In addition to that, the writer is giving indications as to why Tataka approaches Rama without inhibitions. She has superior status in the place, as she is the princess and in their culture the desire of the woman is not considered as a crime, but is treated as a natural instinct. Against the prejudiced portrayals and the distorted truths, when Vayalar makes Tataka as the narrator of the poem, the audience read another significantly different version of her story.

M. Leelavathi in *Malayāla Sāhitya Caritram* highlights the groundbreaking spirit that Vayalar displayed in his poems. Vayalar's poems carry the essence of progressive thoughts including equality, liberation and revolt (340,341, 342). The incident of the murder of Tataka is generalized as a counter attack on the

troublemakers in the forest. Vayalar's argument in the poem is destined to provide an alternative view on this. The poem resists the attempt of many Ramayanas to stigmatize Tataka and her community. Vayalar arguably expounds an idea that Tataka is killed because her words of truth provoke Vishwamitra who directs Rama to kill her. Therefore, to the writer, Tataka's murder by Rama is an act done out of sheer ignorance. Vayalar emphasises the Dravidian lineage of Tataka contrasting it against Arya descent of the Sages and prompts Rama, the scion of Surya dynasty, not to surrender the virtue of Suryas before Aryans. This insightful word of criticism about Rama's support offered to the sages is what provokes the sage who instigates Rama to kill Tataka. The autonomy and cultural consciousness that Tataka upholds which Rama lacks is what resulted in violence against her.

The discourse on imperialism and Brahmanical supremacy that Tataka initiates entails a careful scrutiny. Tataka's actions and words carry the potential to question the conscious negation of the imperialist to understand the idea of true ownership of forest. So, as per Vayalar's poem, Tataka is a martyr for the cause of safeguarding the forest against the invaders and settlers. Vayalar's poem contests with the lopsided views projected by the popular image of Tataka as a cruel and less beautiful *Rakshasa* woman, derived from the canonical Ramayanas. The politics of Vayalar's literary attempt can be analysed in terms of Romila Thapar's argument in *Past and Present*:

Even when nationalist historians in India began to question some of the colonial paradigms, the theory of Aryan race was not among these. It could be argued that as many Indian historians who had been

influenced by the ideology of nationalism, came from the upper castes (brahmanas, kshatriyas, and kayasthas) and from the middle class, the theory of Aryan race appealed to them as it supported their claims to social superiority. It also suggested that Sanskrit Indian culture sprang from the same roots as that of the colonizing power (Thapar 10).

When Vayalar wrote about a Dravidian princess, he was reacting to the supremacy theories associated with colonialism and caste. The poem is a reminder on the truths of history forgotten or hidden in the profusion of grand/meta narratives.

Among the many stories about the birth of Sita, the consort of Rama in the Ramayana, the most popular reading revolves around King Janaka's adoption of the child found in the furrows of ploughed land. It is assumed that since Sita is found alone on the earth without parents to claim her as their daughter, she would be the daughter of the earth. *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* propagates this version about the birth of Sita and is ambiguous on the real father and mother of the child highlighting the foster father Janaka and foster mother Sunaina. The 344-366 verses of *Rāmāyaṇa Manjari*, the Bengal and North West recension of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* identifies Sita as the child born out of Janaka's appeal to Menaka of heaven. In the *Mahābhārata* in the section titled, "Ramōpakhyāna", Sita is identified as the real daughter of Janaka. Vedas equate her with the fertility Goddess.

The Jain version of the Ramayana and in the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* suggested her as the daughter of Ravana whom he abandons as the astrologers predict the imminent threat that the birth of the daughter would cause to the legacy and

prosperity of Lanka. In another story, Sita is recognized as the reincarnation of Vedavati, a pious woman who aspires to be the consort of Vishnu and is attempted to be seduced by Ravana. *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History and Literature* states that Vedavati was the granddaughter of Sage Bruhaspati and the daughter of Sage Kusadhvadaja. Having learnt the Vedas and after becoming an expert in them, Vedavati, as per the advice of her father, determines to have a marital alliance with Vishnu and meticulously practises austerities to make her dream a reality. Ravana, on witnessing the charm of Vedavati approaches her with lust and in order to escape herself from being molested, she commits self-immolation by jumping into a pyre. The resolute Vedavati declares before her death that she will be reborn and will cause the death of Ravana. (Dowson 353).

Juxtaposing these tales together, the conclusion that can be reached is that the vengeful Vedavati might be the symbolic mother of Ravana's daughter who is exiled in the childhood, adopted by Janaka and married to Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu and consummated her vengeance through him. Devadutt Pattanaik in *Sita, An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* states a slightly different theory:

In later versions of Ramayana, Vedavati swears that she will ensure the death of Ravana who tries to molest her. The fire-god does not burn her; he hides her and put her in Sita's palace before Sita's abduction. It is this duplicate Sita that Ravana carries to Lanka. The original Sita returns to Rama after Sita's (Vedavati's) fire trial. (Pattanaik 120)

Ravana, in both the stories, has been carved as a depraved character to make readers wish for his fall. Paula Richman, in *Questioning Ramayanas, A South Asian Tradition* remarks that desire is the cause of Ravana's image as a villain: "...like so many other masculine heroes of Valmiki epic, Ravana's primary flaw is his uncontrolled sexuality, a sexuality that Valmiki never lets us forget. And his downfall, like those of Dasharatha and Valin will stem from his insufficient containment of his desire" (227).

Contrary to this, Vayalar Ramavarma, in his celebrated poem "Rāvaṇaputri" (Ravana's daughter) (1961), rescues Ravana from this allegation by disclosing his final thoughts before he dies. What is seen here is the image of a person regretful about his past misdeeds, gracefully embracing his demise. Ravana, in the poem, dies with the relief that he could tell the woman that she is none other than his daughter. Realising that this misfortune is the unavoidable aftermath of the curse of Vedavati, he dies with the guilt of his deeds and parental affection towards his daughter, Sita. Following *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* and a Tamil folk song, Vayalar retains the idea of Vedavati's curse and the resultant fate. As per Vayalar's version, Vedavati gives birth to Sita, and Ravana, though he has filial affection towards the child, in a fit of ambivalence, caught between fear of death and affection towards daughter, abandons her thinking that she will die. (Ramavarma 340). Devastated by this action and becoming guilty, nothing in Lanka provides satisfaction to him. Neither the sensuous presence of his wife, Mandodari, nor the innocent smile of his son, Indrajith from the cradle, moves him as in the way the thoughts about the abandoned daughter had shaken him. Vayalar specifies that Ravana is aware of the growth of

his daughter and desires to meet her and kiss her. He apologises numerous times to the image of her in his mind and curses himself for his cowardice.

Ravana's actions of Sita's abduction and keeping Sita in Lanka, and inviting his death through the arrows of Rama are not accidental coincidence, in the poem. Instead, embracing his death is a conscious act of redemption of Ravana who purifies himself of the fault of throwing his daughter into the river out of fear. Here, war is no act of retribution against Rama or Lakshmana who mutilate Shurpanakha, Ravana's sister, as there is no such reference in the poem. In the monologue, Ravana confesses that the only concern he has after separating himself from his daughter is how to attain mental wellness and he has gone to the extreme level to gain the peace of mind irrespective of the threats to his country and to his life. The period between Sita's abduction and his death is the period of trials for him: his goodwill is lost when he is called as a womaniser and Lanka, the country meets with its most troubled times after Sita's arrival. It seems that Ravana is aware of these calamities which may befall him in future, but he prioritises his act of doing justice to Sita by allowing her to live some days in her land under her father's care and protection.

It is Ravana's adamant nature that keeps this story a secret is the sole reason for his misfortune. The war could have been avoided with this truth of his claim over Sita. Only during his last visit to the daughter, he considers the disclosure as essential. Meeting Sita, revealing the truth of their relationship and apologizing for the misdeeds, he could gratify his fatherly self. The poet argues that the drops of tears that fell from Sita are indicators of the acknowledgement of this truth and helplessness of both the father and the daughter. Poignantly enough, along with

Ravana's death, the ordeals in the life of Sita commence. The poem ends with this coincidence. In the last lines, the poet takes his audience to the scene where the Vanaras are getting the pyre ready for Sita's fire ordeal. The truth of Sita's abduction dies along with him, leaving no trace of its presence. The oversimplified conclusions that human beings would formulate for the complex human deeds are criticised here. Saving the daughter from the forest exile and offering the pleasures of the country is the just mission a father could undertake. This perspective offers a green signal to the action of Ravana whose deed receives downright criticism from the readers in other Ramayana narratives. Again, the question of human predicament as to when and how to reveal the tale of Sita's new legacy to her is worth pondering. The duration Ravana takes for this revelation and reconciliation is what leaves him helpless and wounded in the battlefield. Probably he acts himself as an instrument in the hands of destiny which could not be altered.

Vayalar's courage to threaten the conventional notions about the scripture is evident in his writings such as *Kontayum Pūnūlum* (1950), *Nāṭinte Nādam*, *Enikku Maramamilla*, *Muḷankāṭu* (1955), *Oru Judās Janikkunnu* (1955), *Ente Mattolikavitakal* (1957), and *Sargasangītam* (1961). Political acumen and reformist zeal that the writer displays in other writings are visible in "Rāvaṇaputri" (1961) also. By depicting another dimension of Ravana-Sita relationship, the writer is, in fact, challenging the rationale of the punishment that both have undergone during their life depicted in the sacred texts. Perhaps he might have the images of partition of India in his mind, when he wrote "Rāvaṇaputri", a poem about separation and union.

Beginning with the end of war, through the first line, “the war has been ended” the reader is taken in the poem to the sight of a catastrophe (Ramavarma 337). The same audience, later in the poem, is enlightened about how Ravana fights against spiritual calamity using physical calamity. The ethical flaw of Ravana which happens due to lust towards Vedavati and fear due to the curse, leads him to a physical calamity, war. Bloodshed, destruction and deaths of thousands of soldiers belonging to two sides are the inevitable consequences of Ravana’s resolution. It is the only option that he identifies to calm down his troubled mind. The virtuous presence of Sita, in some way, offers a solution to the torments of his mind. However, the solution that Ravana identifies is a tragic experience for Sita, to whom Ravana is none other than a demon king who abducts her. Equally tormenting is the disclosure of the reality to her immediately before the death of Ravana, as it leaves her in a dilemma. She knows that none would be able to save Ravana from Rama as the war has already begun. So, Ravana is exchanging his spiritual torments with his daughter who bears them throughout her life.

The times would mostly decide the validity of human actions. Truths pertinent to a particular period would not be apt for other times. The period of happening of the story of the epic justifies wars fought to display affection. The time again validates the wars fought to safeguard honour too. War is justified if it is done to attain something precious too. War is permissible to recapture the lost glory, or lost pride. The poem written in 1961 i.e. after two world wars, partition of India, riots and India-Pakistan conflicts, addresses the futility of identifying physical solutions such as wars and abduction for the peace of mind because the poets of the

twentieth century are those who realised the consequences of two world wars. Equally meaningless is conducting war in favour of honour. Rather than opting effective discussions as solutions to the pangs of conscience, blind execution of Ravana's plan disregarding Sita's present, her choices and her other relationships resulted in the battle and the catastrophe. However, the writer at the end of the poem gives enough clues for the audience to reflect on the final arrangement of Rama and Maruthi (Hanuman), his devotee. The natural way in which the Vanaras make the arrangements for the fire ordeal to confirm the chastity of Rama's consort throws light on the hypocrisy of Rama who prioritises his honour over the honour of Sita and love towards her. Obviously, the patriarchal context of Kerala when the writer writes "Rāvaṇaputri" is being criticised through the poem. Allan G Johnson's remark is significant in analyzing this context:

What drives Patriarchy as a system - what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression - is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control; to fear other men's ability to control and harm them; and to identify being in control as both their best defense against loss and humiliation and the surest route to what they need and desire. In this sense, although we usually think of patriarchy in terms of women and men, it is more about what goes on among men. The oppression of women is certainly an important part of patriarchy, but, paradoxically, it may not be the point of patriarchy (28-29).

This provokes thoughts on the inherent causes of misdeeds and offers a ground for comparison of Rama and Ravana where Ravana can be exonerated as he is repentant and Rama can be convicted as he normalises the offence against a woman. Thus, the writer emphasises that the title best suited for Sita is that of the daughter of Ravana, than Rama's consort, though objectively speaking both these titles blur Sita's individuality. Still, the perspective that the poem carries is not unequivocal. When Sita is placed as the daughter of Ravana, the scar of adultery enforced on her character will be obsolete. So Vayalar's intention is to show Sita as a chaste woman so as to conform her image to what has been already circulated. Among the male characters, Rama and Ravana, in the popular renditions only Rama can claim a legitimate association with Sita, whereas in Vayalar's poem Ravana also makes a similar claim. The writer cannot escape from the way Kerala culture valorizes masculinity. Vayalar could not go far beyond the ideology of the patriarchal society. A generalised depiction of temperament is seen in this narrative also i.e. "aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, "virtue," and ineffectuality in the female" (Millet 26).

Despite the fact that "Rāvaṇaputri" is not a monologue of Ravana, he speaks louder in the poem about his failures and misgivings. The confession of Ravana carries his justification also; cowardice forces him to abandon Sita and love towards her compels him to restore her. The poem particularly showcases the human element of sensitivity in Ravana that shakes the mental frame of the powerful king. The writer uses the word, *Lankeshwaran*, the Saviour of Lanka, to introduce the fallen figure of Ravana (Ramavarma 337). The intensity of catastrophe and the imminent

destruction of Lanka is prophesied through the use of this word. The immediate thoughts of Ravana before his anticipated death are focused on the graceful image of Sita. This idea is given as an introduction to his strange relationship with Sita. Sita, according to Vayalar, was a dream to Ravana. *Manchilamb*, the anklet made of mud, is an expression indicating the tribal association with Sita. The ancestral spirit in Sita is the intoxicating bond that destroys Ravana against his attempt to escape from destiny and death.

Deathbed is crucial when people reflect on their past desires. Since deathbed is the place where one adapts to the reality of death, the secrets and the truths about one's life that may die along with the death may be of prime importance to the dying individual. The loneliness of the battlefield and the physical pain reminds Ravana of nothing other than the mental trauma he suffers due to the curse of Vedavati who he had attacked in his youthful recklessness. He could perfectly remember that way how shocking the curse is to him which destroys the hope about the female progeny. Not only does Ravana recapture the incidents after Sita's birth, but also he could sense the sorrowful state of mind he has when the box containing Sita leaves from his sight.

The writer gradually introduces the monologue of Ravana in which he clearly articulates the action that the world records as lust and greed is actually his atonement. Depiction of the paternal face of Ravana is a counter reading of the Ramayana and the destruction of the binary of virtuous Rama and demonic Ravana. The poem introduces a new discourse in the Ramayana where two male figures, husband and father make claims for a woman. Though he is empathetic towards

Ravana, the writer questions both these claims which are farcial in their essence. When Ravana's claim is based on guilt, Rama's claim is built on honour. Still Ravana's love is shown as more dominant and sincere than Rama's peripheral affection in the poem. The fundamental difference between Ravana and Rama in the poem is projected when Ravana forfeits his honour for Sita while Rama forfeits Sita for his honour. So, the episode that Vayalar contextualises in the poem is an eye opener to the hypocrisies of society where people fail to seek what they really care about in life because of the wrong choices that they make.

Ravana is positioned in a higher realm than Rama because, while Ravana is repentant about the deeds that he commits and considerate towards the woman, Rama being so immersed in the rites of society fails to show consideration towards his wife. While the writer justifies Ravana's failure by sympathetically speaking about his helplessness, Rama's deed against Sita is left with no justification. The poet ends the poem on a poignant note: when the Vanaras, the subjects of Kishkinda ruled by Sugriva who come to fight for Rama, make arrangements for the fire ordeal to test Sita's chastity, Ravana dies. Coupling these two instances, the writer probes the nature of human verdicts: both Ravana and Sita are silent about the relationship between them, and others go for the easy conclusion of adultery and sin by accusing the pious woman. The poem ends on a sad note, when the father who aspires to offer pleasure to the daughter causes the ultimate dishonour to her and the daughter who could provide peace and love to the father remains detached until the truth is revealed. The tragic fate prevents the truths to be revealed to the right people at the right moment, leaving the daughter in a state of ignominy and father sad as he

cannot rescue her from disgrace. There is another discussion about Sita's birth. In the context of the fire ordeal, Rama criticises Sita who was born as a fatherless child.

Bronislaw Malinowski states about the importance of father in a sociological framework in the work titled, *Sex, Culture and Myth*:

...there runs the rule that the father is indispensable for the full sociological status of the child as well as of its mother, that the group consisting of a woman and her offspring is sociologically incomplete and illegitimate. The father, in other words, is necessary for the full legal status of the family. (63)

By deciphering this ambiguity through the poem, the writer is providing legitimacy to the existence of Sita which is essential in a social set up where honour codes are highly rigid. In short, Vayalar's poem seems to have understood the intricacies of the culture of Kerala. The anti-patriarchal stand of the poem definitely reflects the impact of feminist movements in transforming the thoughts of the writer.

The story of Ahalya, the wife of Sage Gautama, in the Ramayana poses innumerable questions about sexual mores and idea of fidelity in marital relationship. As per the popular story, Ahalya, the gracious woman who marries Sage Gautama, is seduced by Indra who meets Ahalya by approaching her in the form of Gautama. The real Gautama, on recognizing this illicit relationship curses both Indra and Ahalya. As a result of the curse, Ahalya is transformed into a stone. She remains in that state until Rama touches the stone with his feet. Through Rama's touch Ahalya gets salvation. Though this version is popularised with a few

differences in details, in all the versions Ahalya is cursed by her husband who imposes the charge of infidelity on her. Some versions acquit Ahalya from the charge of betrayal, by stating that she welcomes Indra by mistake as Indra approaches her in disguise. But criticism against Sage Gautama, for his hasty conclusion of infidelity from Ahalya and his curse that turns Ahalya to live a futile life in confinement as a stone for centuries, is not seen in any of these versions. The epic depicts Ahalya who never questions or criticises the violence done against her. Contrary to this, Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri's character, Ahalya in the poem titled, "Ahalyā Mōkṣam" (1978) criticises the misogyny in the hermit which denies women the pleasures of their bodies.

An Indian poet, scholar, critic and translator, Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri (1939-2021) contributed a lot to Malayalam literature. His poetry collections include *Bhūmi Gītangaḷ* (Songs of the earth), *Mukhamevide?* (Where is the face?), *Chārulata* etc. contain imprints of modernity and tradition. "Ahalyā Mōkṣam" (1978) appearing in *Bhūmi Gītangaḷ* is known for its unconventional stance on Ahalya, the mythical character. Divided into three parts, the poem, in the first part, includes the monologue of Indra who without shame or regret considers the moment of sexual union with Ahalya, the wife of Gautama, as a moment of transcendence as he could enjoy the experience without thinking of the consequences. Allusions taken from the myth of Adam and Eve situate the incident of transgression done by Ahalya and Indra in the wider canvas of the exercise of freedom in a system that prioritises discipline and obedience. The second section of the poem, as stated by Santhosh Vallikad, in *Puravṛttavum Kavitayum* (Myth and Poetry), looks down upon the

human beings who live the life of confinement (Vallikad 183). The third section is the most significant among the three as it portrays Ahalya's resurrection not only from her condition as a stone, but also from the pitiable state of victimisation.

Ahalya in Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri's "Ahalyā Mōkṣam" is not a silent sufferer. Instead she articulates her agency as a woman by talking about her choice.

Valmiki and Kamban have variations in the details of portrayal of Ahalya. In the "Bala Kānda" of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* in Canto XLVIII, the writer mentions that Ahalya could identify Indra though he approaches her in disguise. Being subdued by desire, she commits adultery:

On a day
 It chanced the saint had gone away,
 When Town-destroying Indra came,
 And saw the beauty of the dame.
 The sage's form the God endued,
 And thus the fair Ahalyá wooed:
 "Love, sweet! Should brook no dull delay
 But snatch the moments when he may."
 She knew him in the saint's disguise,
 Lord Indra of the Thousand Eyes,
 But touched by love's unholy fire,
 She yielded to the God's desire. (Valmiki 220)

Thus Valmiki portrays Ahalya who exercises her consent before Indra. So, as per Valmiki's work Ahalya is an active participant in the act for which she was

punished. Thus the punishment of Ahalya is justified in *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. But in *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* Ahalya is a docile woman who could not resist, though she has not exercised her consent:

and she knew.

Yet unable

To put aside what was not hers,

She dallied in her joy, (quoted in *Many Ramayana s*; Richman 29)

Addressing Rama, Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri's character, Ahalya, probes into the very act of her release by Rama, of awakening her to the world of toxic masculinity and confinement of Sages:

¹¹*Rama, why did you awake me

For nothing, from this delightful

Deep sleep

Abounding in dreams? (73-76)

While offering her version of the reality, she reveals that the life with the ascetic is an unbearable life for her in which she forcibly lives a life of recluse. The malicious world of pagan rituals inside the hermitage prevents her from being a true woman. Living a life of detention inside the hermitage without responding to the violence of the sages, she hates the life there. From her description of her life as a stone, one can comprehend that the life of peaceful immobility is the one she prefers, compared to the existence with the sage because in life as a stone she need not compromise at

¹¹* Translation from Malayalam to English is done by me.

least her dreams. Though painful, she can cherish the memories of love and revel in the sweet sorrow of the broken love. In the poem, Ahalya denotes the love between her and Indra. When she uses “broken love”. In the work, *Histories From Below: The Condemned Ahalya, the Mortified Amba and the Oppressed Ekalavya*, P. Balaswamy mentions about other works of literature carrying insights on Ahalya’s agency:

A Tamil poem “Kallikai” (1980) by S.Sivasekaram which argues that the stone motif is perhaps an unconscious yet truthful epiphanic commentary on Ahalya’s existential agony—she must choose between a stony married life with Gautama or a sensitive and sensual encounter with Indira. Similarly, Na. Pitchamurthy, a modern Tamil poet, would like us to look at Ahalya as Uyir magal (Life woman) [1943], whose life is an allegory of the choice between Gautama (mind) and Indira (pleasure). The Tamil Marxist critic/poet Kovai Gnani equates Ahalya with the oppressed class for whom Rama is an ideal future without exploitation, while Gautama stands for feudalism and Indira represents capitalism.(7)

In Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri, Ahalya stands for *Antharjanam*, the Brahmin women of Kerala, whose visibility and mobility were remote dreams in the beginning of the twentieth century. While Brahmin men enjoyed superior status in the society, ironically Brahmin women are denied education and empowerment. Also, they were forced to marry old men in childhood and continued to live in the confined state as widows throughout the life if these old men died. Those women,

who attempted to escape from these brutal practices, would have to undergo *Smarthavicharam*, a trial done by a priest called *Smarthan*. Immediately after this procedure, the Brahmin woman would be ostracised from the family and community and her entitlement over the properties and the right to live in her home would be lost with it. Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri's poem uses Ahalya to comment on the plight of Brahmin women in Kerala who suffer because of the patriarchal and conservative nature of the community. In *Engendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Twentieth Century Keralam*, J. Devika remarks:

Women were called Antarjanam ('inner people'), and had to observe elaborate seclusion....They were subjected to a strict Spartan sartorial code, and as with almost everything else, even bedecking the body was subjected to ritual purposes. Many male reformers have remarked that a naked and brutal sort of patriarchy operated in the *Illam*, and that a powerful if subtle network of reminders worked tirelessly to instill in women a sense of inferiority right from their infancy (1773).

In the poem, Ahalya does not intend to return to the hermit because of her distaste towards the pitiless ways there, and the remorseless manners of Sage Gautama. The poem convincingly reveals her love towards Indra showing that she is not counting her physical union with Indra as licentious and sinful yielding punishment by the Sage. Ahalya focuses on the pleasures of a woman which are denied to her in the ascetic life. Ironically enough, she seeks the support of Rama to take her to her lover, Indra, abandoning her association with Sage Gautama. The

immediate concern of Ahalya is the nature of the world to which Rama makes the awakening possible. The entire concept of *Moksha*, release, is problematized by introducing this alternative discourse of liberation in the poem. Following the monologue, a possible conclusion can be made: release is meaningful only if it is offered in the finest sense of the term, which means that only independence from the chain of relationships and customs can ensure the attainment of *Moksha* (salvation) in the fullest sense. Otherwise, Ahalya's shift, according to her, might be from one mode of captivity to another mode of detention between which she prefers the former. She cannot forgive the reductionist act of Gautama which makes reunion difficult for her.

The discussions that the story of Ahalya generates include the observations on patriarchal discourse of disciplining women and punishing her without questions or trials. Her episode is instructive to Rama as to how a husband should behave while dealing with the involvement of women with other men. This is the brahmanical tutorial given to Rama which he puts into practice without thinking in the case of Sita who is under the custody of Ravana. So Ahalya's story in "Bāla Kānda" is a precursor to the episodes on fidelity coming in the later sections of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The poem is the one envisaging a paradigm shift in the attitude towards women especially the Brahmin women whose plight is similar to the one of Ahalya of the Ramayana. Through the revolutionary stance taken in the poem, the writer challenges the system ridden with unnecessary rituals and rules that threaten the individual freedom, especially the one of women. Again the poem gives vent to the

thoughts of silent women who are portrayed as guilty by the system that entrusts the husband with the power to punish the fallen woman.

P. Kunhiraman Nair makes a different reading in his “Ahalya”, a poem comparing the mythological character with mother India, who is waiting for freedom from colonial rule (Nair 671). As in the way Kunhiraman Nair uses Ahalya to speak on behalf of the suppressed, Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri too makes Ahalya speak on behalf of the oppressed. Ahalya, in Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri’s poem, knows what she lacks and what is denied to her. She identifies the importance to live the life of a real woman rather than clinging to the image of glorified femininity. She is insightful enough to understand the double standards the system maintains and her appeal is for independence. She is frank enough to talk bluntly about her female desire and expresses her intention to seek that against what is called as normal and legitimate. She is, in some sense, questioning the right of the sage to curse her, on the ground that he is ignorant of the urges of a woman. In fact, the poem is a stark criticism raised against the knowledge that the brahmins offer the world which is inadequate to understand the women and the solutions offered by such an education is so crude which is to be questioned for want of refinement. The reformist undertone of the poem is urging a transformation in the perspective of the individuals and institutions such as religion too. In the poem titled, “Ahalya” (1940), Edasseri Govindan Nair, one of the major writers of Malayalam poetry, showcases Ahalya as a meek and submissive woman. In Edasseri’s poem Ahalya is an epitome of patience. Her waiting, as portrayed by the writer, is pathetic. Being a poem that does not revise the mythical story of Ahalya, Edasseri’s “Ahalya” depicts Ahalya as

a stereotypical woman. The contrast in the perspectives of Edasseri and Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri indicates the transformation and the progressive nature of the sensibility that Malayalam poetry has attained in the course of time.

Selection of Rama as the person to release Ahalya in the *Rāmāyaṇa* seems to be a strategic choice made by Valmiki. Considering the episode of the murder of Tataka and the mutilation of Shurpanakha's limbs, it can be assumed that Valmiki wants Rama to stand for the patriarchal cause of disciplining women by making them aware of the consequences of the exercise of the instincts. Whether he punishes the women, or whether he releases the woman from the punishment, the message of the incidents in which he is involved is that women should learn how to restrain their female desire so as to safeguard their life. So, Rama is not simply a human being or God in the Ramayana, but a metaphor for an institution as well. This is the reason for Vishnu Narayanana Namboothiri to choose Rama as the listener of Ahalya's dramatic monologue. Ahalya's words are against a system that treats women wrongly and her protest, though against the sages in the poem, ultimately is meant to shake the system represented by Rama who is educated by the brahmins. By rejecting two respectable standpoints represented by the sage and Rama, and by selecting Indra representing the unorthodox dimension of life, Ahalya invites an alternative perspective on man-woman, or husband –wife relationship. Setting love, desire and pleasure as the criteria of selection, she rejects the security, honour and legitimacy offered by the system placing physical gratification as supreme consideration in a man-woman relationship. This revolutionary stance taken in the

poem could be conceived as the inevitable transformation of thought offered by the enlightenment and Kerala renaissance.

In *Gendering Caste: Through Feminist Lens* Uma Chakravarti explains the historical evolution of the concept of marriage in India. She states that purity of man's *Vansa*, the ethnic lineage, is realised as the ultimate end of marriages in history. According to her, marriage is a patriarchal affair that objectifies women:

Cultural beliefs, derived on the basis of field information, make it evident that what is being gifted as part of the kanyadan is not just the daughter but her woman's 'quality' and 'thing', her femaleness (matr shakti), her procreative power, which is thereafter shared by her sons and daughters. Matr shakti is given to a man so that a vansa may be started. Men are born into a particular line, and matr shakti, in the person of a woman from another line, has to be given to it in order to perpetuate it (30).

Thus women are no active agents in the process of marriage. They are treated as the simple receptacles of man's inheritance. The popular ideas on marital responsibilities and loyalty in a relationship thus mostly would target women. Thus traditional women desperately accept the domestic routine and roles unquestionably. They remain as eternal figures of sacrifice. Usually such an image as the embodiment of sacrifice will be attributed to mothers in particular. Sometimes, the glorification of motherhood leads to a trap for women. Kausalya, the daughter of King Sukaushal and Queen Amritaprabha of Kosala kingdom, is the first consort of the King Dasharatha who ruled Ayodhya. The character, Kausalya, in *Vālmiki*

Rāmāyaṇa seems to have been created for lament as many of the Cantos in it carried the title, Kausalya's Lament. Though she is the principal consort of Dasharatha, she is portrayed in it as a submissive person who remains as a shadow in the development of the story of Rama, her son. Though she has been given the glorifying titles, in the narrative, she is sidelined as she is denied the care of her husband, Dasharatha. She has been trained to observe silence as the best trait of a gracious woman and she, without resistance, yields to the fixed roles. Because of the submissive and peaceful nature, and intentional withdrawal into the state of feebleness, Kausalya is not offered the kind of honour that she deserves. Rather than putting her in the strategic places in the court, Dasharatha prefers to have Kaikeyi, his beloved, along with him. Kausalya, though superior in status, feels inferior because of this rejection. Left without options, she remains in Ayodhya as a silent sufferer.

“Kausalya” (1990), the poem written by Vijayalakshmi, portrays the hidden desires of Kausalya, whom the King Dasharatha does not consider as his lover. A poet from Kerala who was born in the second half of the twentieth century, Vijayalakshmi (1960-) articulates the existential dilemmas of the marginalised through her poems. Introspective in their essence, most of her poems convey pathos of human beings enslaved by rules and responsibilities. She uses concrete images to decipher abstract predicaments of human life in her poems including “Mrigasikshakan”(Animal Trainer) , “Ekalavyan”, “ Kausalya”, “Palayanam” (flight) , “Thachante Makal”(The Daughter of Carpenter) , “ Ashwathama”, “Marananantharam”(After the Death), “Mazhakkappuram”(After the Rain) etc. Her poem titled, “Kausalya” is the monologue of the character, Kauslyya. Her

streams of thought denote the helpless existence she has as her husband seeks motherly affection from her:

¹²Devi, you are mother to me,
 Sheltered I am, as a child on your lap.
 ---even when you seek in me a mother every day, I doubt
 Why my heart still doesn't turn aged and grey (30-33).

Denied the pleasures of marriage as a consequence of the system of polygamy, Kausalya lives a life of betrayal. She has been often glorified as the chief consort, which prevents her from articulating her desire against the respectability the position yielded. Only for the functioning of rituals, Dasharatha seeks her support. While glorifying motherhood in her, womanhood in her is conveniently forgotten by her husband. Saddened by the fact of disloyalty and awareness of her plight as an insignificant person in the life of the husband, Kausalya is pictured in the poem as an incarnation of agony and self-pity. Kausalya's inability to express her anger when her husband shamelessly draws upon the instances of his meeting with Kaikeyi, explaining the beauty of the relationship and the pleasure of the union with her, forms the theme of the poem. In order to detach herself from the loveless behaviour, Kausalya attempts to focus on the moon visible in the early morning. Dasharatha, who trains Kausalya to be magnanimous, does not respect her dignity as a woman and indirectly attacks her for the insufficiencies by highlighting Kaikeyi's talent as a woman. Again, he could be justifying polygamy, by trying to convince Kausalya of his desires beyond Kausalya's capacities so as to keep her silent on his rejection.

¹² Translation from Malayalam to English is done by me

Kausalya can only see the image of Rama in Dasharatha who sleeps peacefully. Here she problematizes the peaceful sleep of Dasharatha and the rest of Ayodhya, representing a system that fails to understand the reason of her sleepless torments. Emphasising the sleep of the world she highlights the magnitude of her distress and trauma. Her intention to see Dasharatha as innocent as a child and exonerate him throws light on her love towards Dasharatha. These words provide the audience with the picture of a tolerant human being in Kausalya who can neither find fault with her husband nor blame Kaikeyi for her influence. Instead she calls Kaikeyi a lucky woman who can enjoy the love of Dasharatha in a limitless fashion. The intended meaning is that Kausalya feels herself as unlucky in the matter of love that is considered as the supreme fortune in the world, according to her. However, she cannot enjoy the affection that Dasharatha showers glorifying the maternal security her lap offers to him whenever he feels tired. Here Dasharatha is described as a man who is incognizant of the feelings of a woman. Towards the end of the poem, she suddenly apologises for shifting her focus from the single purpose of her life. Moving with the current of the times, she admits that her responsibility towards life is to give birth and remain as the mother of Rama, the hero, not as Kausalya, the woman.

The feminist question on society's overemphasis on the idea of motherhood to make women compromise their desires is explicated through the incident of rejection and glorification of motherhood in "Kausalya". The character Kausalya is projected in the poem as a victim of the conscious neglect of patriarchy towards the desire of women. Woman's craving for love and her sadness about the pitiable state

of life are rightly indicated through the monologue of Kausalya. This too is the lament of Kausalya which is not written in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. By making Kausalya the narrator, the writer is giving verbal meanings to the ironical silence of Kausalya, whom the world looks at only through the perspective of her status as the mother of Rama. Here the writer asserts that motherhood is only a phase of womanhood, which cannot be treated as the sole purpose of a woman's birth. In this way, the idea of motherhood is problematised, by detaching it considerably from womanhood primarily built on the body of desire and pleasure. There are two major weapons that society uses to channelize female desires: the first is the matter of responsibility towards the family and the second is the adherence to *Dharma*, the rules of the society. These two are the basic factors that prevent women from verbalizing their instincts which are considered as offensive and imprudent. The Ramayana, a text celebrating *Dharma*, portrays Kausalya as an epitome of prudence, veiling her real self. When the silence of the less resilient Kausalaya is broken through the thought-provoking monologue, Vijayalakshmi, the writer, questions the concept of *Dharma* which is only meant for women to observe in the mythical stories and reality. When Kausalya apologizes in the poem, her apology appears to be the condemnation of a pretentious society. Simone de Beauvoir observation in *The Second Sex* on such women is rightly suited to Kausalya:

In a generous woman, resignation looks like indulgence: she accepts everything; she condemns no one because she thinks that neither people nor things can be different from what they are. A proud woman can make a lofty virtue of it, like Mme de Charrière, rigid in

her stoicism. But she also engenders a sterile prudence; women always try to keep, to fix, to arrange rather than to destroy and reconstruct anew; they prefer compromises and exchanges to revolutions. (729)

The passivity and senility are, for Kausalya, what the society offers in return for the respectability she enjoys. The sleepless mother in Kausalya and the desperate lover in her are the two polarities that Vijayalakshmi successfully links to unravel a different truth connected with the mythical story of the Ramayana.

Sugathakumari (1934-2020), an Indian writer, environmentalist, feminist and activist is known for her sensitive and philosophical poems in Malayalam. Many of her poems published in collections like *Pāthirāppūkkal* (Flowers of the night) (1967), *Pāvam Manava Hridayam* (Poor Human Heart) (1968), *Ambalamani* (The Temple Bell) (1981), *Radha Evide* (Where is Radha?) (1995) etc. remarkably portrayed the pangs and pleasures of female existence. In “Oru Rāmāyaṇa Rangam” (A Scene from the Ramayana) (1995) Sugathakumari undertakes a poetic exploration into the particular instance of Lakshmana’s parting from Urmila, his wife, at the time of Rama’s exile into the forest along with Sita. Urmila, the daughter of Janaka and Sunaina and the sister of Sita is one of the sidelined characters in the Ramayana. When Rama married Sita, his brother married Sita’s sister too. Lakshmana, the husband of Urmila, does not pay much attention to the desires of Urmila to accompany him as in the way Sita accompanies her husband. Due to the admiration toward his elder brother, Rama, Lakshmana finds it his sole responsibility to accompany him and sister-in-law to offer support and protection to

them. While emphasising on this responsibility, he has conveniently forgotten his responsibility towards his wife and parents. Again, he selects Urmila as the person to look after his parents, evading his own responsibility to do so. By denying the desires of Urmila, he insults the self of the woman and neglects the legitimate rights of a wife over the man whom she marries. The poem portrays Urmila's rhetoric which is silent in the other Ramayana texts.

Sugathakumari's Lakshmana does not bear the guilt that the character Lakshmana in Kavitha Kane's debut novel, *Sita's Sister* carry, which is quite evident when he speaks in the novel :

If I am being praised so profusely for being the devoted brother, I fail as a good husband, who is leaving behind his bride. O Urmila, will the world ever know of your inner suffering, your divine sacrifice? But my heart, full of shame and gratitude, knows what you are doing in silence (158).

Lakshmana's aggressive nature and patriarchal adamant ways are quite evident in the poetic description of his response to the news about Rama's exile. When he approaches Urmila to inform her about his journey into the forest, in order to confine her in the palace of Ayodhya, he has entrusted the huge responsibility of taking care of the old women in the palace, neglecting her youthful desires to live with the partner. The most contradictory aspect of his decision is that while he follows his elder brother's path to the forest, he restricts Urmila from following her elder sister's decision to go to the forest along with her husband. Being blind with anger and frustration, in order to discourage Urmila from accompanying him, he

mercilessly makes a remark that the only relative that he has on the earth is Rama for the next fourteen years:

¹³I don't have anyone apart from Rama,
 In the next fourteen years.
 Know that I am not yours anymore
 I live as a devotee of Rama.
 It is wrong to have other thoughts
 And your childish, love to me, a burden (100-105).

Even if she goes with Rama and Sita, she would not get Lakshmana's attention who takes serving the brother as his only task during the next fourteen years. These words are equivalent to the man's selfish strategy of utilising the wife as a household servant, by threatening her with divorce. He rejects her love and mercilessly declares that her love is a burden to him in the times of trial. Here, what the writer problematizes are the needs of the modern Indian family. The modern Indian family system demands equal contribution of both the partners for the smooth functioning of the family. By denying Urmila's requirements, Lakshmana evades from his responsibility as a husband. In fact, he is treating her as a slave. J. Devika in *Engendering Individuals: The Language of Reforming in Twentieth Century Keralam* commented on the problems of Women from Kerala as a collective while discussing an excerpt from a speech delivered by Anna Chandi in 1929 which is relevant here. In the speech, according to Devika, Anna Chandi not only "criticises the denial of modern knowledge and ways of life to a large section of women in

¹³ Translation from Malayalam to English is done by me.

Keralam. What is striking is that it does not endorse the ideal domestic Womanhood as the ultimate goal of female transformation” (2518). So, the text endorses the modern perspective from the context of Kerala through Urmila’s character who decides to move out of the domestic sphere.

It is not because Urmila wants to enjoy the comforts of the palace that she does not accompany her husband. The piercing words of Lakshmana are crucial for Urmila to understand his priorities over her wishes as a wife and woman. Lakshmana’s response and ruthless nature provides a realistic picture about the nature of the man who she marries and the nature of their relationship. The monologue of Urmila after the departure of Lakshmana is very critical and it could be read as her reflections on the betrayal that she faces through marriage. She meditates over the gravity of truth that Lakshmana betrays through his decision. She justifies her wishes by sharing her thoughts about the wedding. As per her understanding stated in the poem, the marital bond is stronger than all the other bonds in life. Contrary to this, Lakshmana considers this bond as a fragile and insignificant one compared to the fraternal bond. Urmila, in the poem, makes a reference to Ahalya, another character in the Ramayana. This is a fine example of the intertextuality of Sugathakumari’s text. In the poem, the poet makes Urmila speak against the injustice in the marriage: Urmila thinks that she could not wait for fourteen years for Lakshmana to come back and love her, knowing that he leaves her, rejecting the love that she offers and denying the affection she deserves.

Ayesha Viswamohan’s statement in the article titled “Urmila: Existential Dilemma and Feminist Concerns” published in *Indian Literature* affirms the

perspective of Sugatha Kumari:

Though her body withered away, she is happy with the realization of her authenticity and self-unification brought about by the exclusion of the forces of *eros* and admittance of *agape*. In this epiphanic moment she becomes conscious of the fact that she has individuality and identity independent of her husband. It is through the growth of this knowledge that Urmila gains an insight and matured vision which is a prerequisite for one's quest for identity (206).

Urmila admits in the poem that she is not an ideal woman of patience to bear insult like Ahalya and wait for a man to come to give her deliverance. By putting Urmila-Ahalya comparison in the poem, the writer highlights two important factors connected to the Ramayana: first, the unfair treatment that women receive from their husbands, which form a point of similarity of the plight of Urmila and Ahalya and second, helplessness of women whose options are limited to passively suffer and obey. Regarding the second factor, Urmila has her own reservations. The traumatised self of Urmila prevents her from observing passivity that the Ramayanas attributes to her, and Sugathakumari's Urmila reacts against this silencing.

Towards the end of the poem, Urmila bluntly states about her complete detachment from Lakshmana, by telling in assertive terms that Lakshmana does not deserve her. Here, the poem deviates from the mythical story that Urmila shares the sleep of Lakshmana to support him to remain awakened for fourteen years to protect Rama. With a great deal of obstinacy, Urmila talks about her future life with no tears on a worthless man. Observing detachment not only from Lakshmana and his

responsibilities, but also from the Ramayana, the abandoned woman disappears from the text. The narrator in the poem doubts whether she also returns to mother earth through the fissures on the surface of the earth as Sita does later. The writer intends to state that Urmila's absence in the text of Ramayana is her conscious choice against the bigotry of the man whom she loved.

In *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, in Canto LXIII Nuptials, a reference has been given regarding the statement of Janaka at the time of Urmila's wedding with Lakshmana:

King Janak's heart with rapture glowed.
Then to Prince Lakshmana thus he cried:
“Take Urmilā thine offered bride,
And clasp her hand within thine own
Ere yet the lucky hour be flown.” (Valmiki 285)

A reference has been made to this passage of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* in Sugatakumari's poem where Urmila remembers the words of her father that she trusts while marrying Lakshmana who violates her faith in him. The poem has a lot of similarities to *Cīntāviṣṭayāya Sita* of Kumaran Asan. Though they have no overt resemblance, these poems maintain similarities that can be observed in the treatment of the subject. Both the characters, Sita and Urmila are reflecting on their plight after being separated from their husbands. Both the characters are abandoned by the men to safeguard their patriarchal intentions. Sita and Urmila are insulted due to the actions of their partners though the quantum of insult varies in degree. Love is what they offer and betrayal is what they receive. Both the characters are critical of the stand of the men who violated the trust. The men in both texts are criticized for

disregarding the honour of women. Both the women are neither ready to forgive the inhuman treatment received nor return to the so-called normal life when offered by the men. Both of them disappear into the earth and while one's disappearance is literal, the other one's disappearance is figurative.

Sugathakumari's poem is significant for the feminist standpoint it has taken to read the untold episode in the life of Urmila. The historical and psychosocial realities of India oppose the voice of women to be heard louder; patriarchy is the reason why Urmila is silent in the Ramayana. Sugathakumari, using the monologue of Urmila to dismantle the hypocrisy of patriarchy, exemplifies the courage of a woman to stand for the cause of dignity of womanhood. There is a popular reading of Urmila as the sleeping princess, who shares her husband's sleep on request and sleeps for fourteen years continuously so that Goddess of Nidra would not disturb Lakshmana in his duty of safeguarding his brother. *Nidrāvathwam*, a play performed by Nimmy Raphel, discusses the consequences of sleep and sleeplessness in the context of the Ramayana taking Lakshmana and Kumbhakarna as the protagonists. The theatrical performance though revisiting the myth of Lakshmana's sleeplessness and elaborates on his perspective on it that it is a curse, seems to maintain the view that Urmila carries the burden of Lashmana's sleep (37:40-38:15). But in the poem, Urmila unambiguously asserts that she could not wait for a man like Lakshmana for fourteen years. Sugathakumari's reading on the mythical character suggests that Urmila might have sacrificed her life immediately after Lakshmana left the palace. She seems to have recognized the trap of domestic confinement glorified as marriage and exercises her will to break it. When the voice

of Urmila is heard, it is as powerful as the voice of Sita, to shake the honour of the Ikshvaku dynasty in which women are repeatedly subjected to discrimination.

The revisionist poems of Malayalam literature focusing on the specific incidents and characters of the Ramayana represent the psyche of the subaltern characters of the epic. Thinking beyond the conventional understanding of the Ramayana and taking a radical stance on the atrocities normalised in the epic that influence the society, the poems mark dissent and invoke a progressive spirit. Commenting on the aspects of love, choice, voice, identity and respectability, the poems expand our understanding on the nuances of the Ramayana hitherto blurred. Dismantling the subjectivity of the marginalised characters, they seek to open a dialectic which is reformist in its essence. Thus, the poems selected for the study creatively contribute to the multiplicity of the Ramayana contesting the politics of homogeneity.

Chapter 4

The Journey of Transformation of the Ramayana stories in Malayalam Plays

Drama is a genre that entered the sphere of Malayalam literature only in the nineteenth century, though some performance forms resembling plays existed even before the advent of play in its entirety. After the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Kerala in 1498, during the sixteenth century when the Portuguese missionaries visited India to popularise Christianity, the Christian plays such as *Jenova Nāṭakam* were performed in the churches. This marked the advent of a new art form titled, *Chavittunāṭakam*, a fusion of the indigenous art and the western art. But with the publication of *Keralīya Bhāṣa Śākuntaḷam* (1883) by Kerala Varma Valiya Koyi Thampuran, a new era was set in the production of plays in Malayalam literature. Despite his knowledge of the western dramatic tradition, he was inclined to translate a Sanskrit play, as he believed that it satisfied the literary urge of the reading public of his times. The first Ramayana play available in Malayalam translation was *Jānaki Pariṇayam* of Ramabhadra Deekshithar, translated by Chattukkutty Mannadiyar in 1888. Due to the influences of Western dramatic tradition, the plays of Malayalam literature followed the conventions of English plays at their inception. Not only had the writers explored the possibilities of producing plays translated from Sanskrit or from foreign languages, but also, they attempted to create plays original in content and in approach. *Mariāmma Nāṭakam* (1867) by Kocheeppan Tarakan is considered as the first social play that imprinted the indigenous culture in the realm of the making of the plays in Malayalam literature. Following the Tamil Theatre groups

who performed plays resembling Parsi theatre in Kerala, independent theatre groups such as ‘Manomohan Company’, ‘Rasikaranjini’ and ‘Paramasivavilasam Company’ started producing plays. *Subhadrārjunam* by Thottekatt Ikkavamma (1891), *Chandrika* by Kodungallur Kunjikkuttan Thampuran (1891) and *Ebrāyakkūṭṭy* by Kāndathil vargese Mappila (1893) are a few plays composed during the early periods.

Popular varieties of plays in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were based on myths and legends, in an independent manner. They fulfilled the desire of the playwrights to explore the cultural roots and creatively translate the ethos and ideals into the contemporary landscape. Since plays were performed on various stages, the popularity of them advanced faster than other literary forms. The profusion of plays meant to cater to this popularity resulted in diminishing of the quality of works. C.V. Raman Pillai and E.V. Krishna Pillai were two notable writers who, with their contributions to the dramatic tradition of Malayalam literature, through the plays titled *Chandramukhivilāsam* (1884), *Mattavilāsam* (1885), *Kuṛupillākāḷari* (1909), *Tentanamkoṭṭu Hariscandran* (1914), *Kaimāḷasāṅṅe Kadaṣṣikkai* (1915), *Doṭṭarku Kiṭṭiya Micham* (1916), *Cheruten Columbus* (1917), *Pandate Pācan* (1918), *Papi Cellunnadaṁ Pātāḷaṁ* (1919), *Kuṛupinte Tirippu* (1920), *Butler Pappan* (1922), *Raja Kesāva Daśan* (1928), *Sitālakṣmi* (1932), *Rāma Rajābhiṣekaṁ* (1932) and *Iravikkūṭṭi Pillai* (1933) became instrumental in uplifting the plays of their time from this deterioration. In addition to the plays based on myths and legends, two major streams of Malayalam drama emerged including social plays and political

plays. Both the social plays and the political plays with their faithfulness to the realities and with a focus on reforming the society became a part of Kerala renaissance. Along with prose, the writers explored the possible incorporation of poetry into their plays resulting in the production of works having the scope of both genres.

In *Malayāla Sāhitya Caritraṃ* P.K. Parameswaran Nair mentions the noteworthy influence of Henrik Ibsen's plays on Malayalam dramatic productions (163). The psychological framework of Henrik Ibsen's plays addressing the human predicament, conflicts and uncertainties, thoughts, desires and instincts provided a distinct pathway for the Malayalam plays created in the first half of the twentieth century to shift the focus from the society to individual and family. When the focus was shifted from the outside world of existence to the inner realities of human beings, the contents of the plays in Malayalam became ripe to address the complexities of human existence rather than revealing either in the superficial analysis of the social issues or the melodramatic representation of life. Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai, in *Malayāla Sāhityaṃ Kalaghaṭṭangalilūde*, (Malayalam Literature across the Times) remarks about the way in which Ibsen's influence is reflected in the twentieth century plays of N.Krishna Pillai (409). Not only Ibsen but also the playwrights from William Shakespeare to George Bernard Shaw influenced the literary imagination of Kerala.

The playwrights who claim to be modern observe the varied norms and techniques offered by the Western dramatic tradition so as to get themselves away from the effect of Sanskrit tradition of elitism that they believed as detrimental to the

literary progress. Still, while they remained detached from the Sanskrit dramatic tradition, the plays they wrote, especially the ones in the mythical tradition, were rooted in the Indian aesthetic principles. In the article titled “Making a Foray into the Uninhabited Grounds of Writing: Thottaikkat Ikkavamma’s *Subhadrārjunam*” Nisha M. observes that Thottaikat Ikkavamma’s *Subhadrārjunam* (1892) based on the myth of *Mahābhārata* depicts Subhadra as an embodiment of Sringara Rasa. The functioning of theories such as Rasa and Dhvani in the layers of production of plays ultimately led the playwrights to focus on emotions rather than on the spectacle. But in the foreword of the PPSNF edition of *Subhadrārjunam* (1892) published in 2002, Sarah Joseph argues that Thottaikat Ikkavamma is quarrelling with the patriarchal method of using sentiments as a tool to ignore the preferences of women. So, according to her, the writer’s intention is to propose a feminist argument through *Subhadrārjunam* (N.Pag.).

Azeez Tharuvana in his notable work *Vayanādan Rāmayaṇam* (2011) surveys the major Ramayana plays in Malayalam (2014). Kodungallur Kunjikkuttan Thamburan’s *Sita Swayamvaram*, K.M. Panikkar’s *Mandōdari*, M.Neelakantan Moose’s *Adbhuta Rāmayaṇam*, N.Sankaran Nair’s *Sītāharaṇam*, M.Govindappillai Chattambi’s *Bhāṣa Rāmayaṇam*, Pallathuraman’s *Rāvaṇaputran*, V. Krishnan Thambi’s *Tātaka*, Matasseri Madhava Varrior’s *Lankam Ravana Palitam*, E.V.Krishnapillai’s *Ramarājabhiṣekaṇ*, Thikkodiyan’s *Puṣpavriṣṭi* and C.N. Sreekantan Nair’s *Kāñjana Sita*, *Lankā Lakṣmi* and *Sākētam* were a few notable plays in this tradition. A few audio plays such as Poojappura Krishnan Nair’s *Tāra*, Kuttanad Ramakrishna Pillai’s *Bharatan* and *Rāvaṇan* and G. Bhargavan Pillai’s

Tātaka can also be included in the Ramayana tradition. As far as the Ramayana plays written in the latter half of the twentieth century are concerned, the subject matter developed as plot was taken with a focus on ingenuity. This choice the playwrights made resulted in the plays categorically different in content in comparison with the content of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*.

The cultural discourses associated with Kerala renaissance and the onsets of nationalistic spirit were instrumental in bringing the playwrights' focus on the plays based on the Ramayana in the twentieth century. The new insights derived from the reform movements that happened in the first half of the twentieth century made people of Kerala to think about the Hindu identity from a new perspective. This transformation is viewed as the influence of colonial modernity on the soil of Kerala. The oppressed people of the state felt it as inevitable to get united under the spirit of Nationalism and they rediscovered the scriptures as a part of this mission. Yet, this rediscovery made people more disturbed as the mythical narratives too contained the elements of oppression, discrimination, biases and marginalisation. So, while in the beginning the Ramayana narratives propagated the religious spirit of Hinduism, gradually they became the secular expressions of progressive spirit. Admittedly, instead of imitating or adapting the content of any popular Ramayana narrative, playwrights like K.M. Panikkar and C.N. Sreekantan Nair articulated their voices differently. This, in turn, converted the Ramayana narratives into political texts with alternative ideologies to propose. By zooming into some specific incidents, by examining the psychology of characters and by evaluating the rationale of the myth through dialogues, the plays created Ramayana narratives that critique

not only the Ramayana narratives which had existed earlier but also the cultural narratives in which the literary narratives are rooted.

The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries witnessed experimentation in the making of the plays. The techniques of ritualism, classicism, romanticism, realism, naturalism, expressionism, surrealism, epic realism and theatricalism were used by playwrights to bring novelty to the expression. N.N. Pillai in *Nāṭaka Darppaṇam* remarks that the techniques were not practised properly while the plays were produced, though there were academic discussions on these techniques. So, according to him, most of the plays in Malayalam adopted the melodramatic technique without being a part of the experimentation (209). The Ramayana plays that are selected for analysis proved N.N. Pillai's statement is right to some extent. But one cannot blame the playwrights for the slowness. The cultural ethos of Kerala transformed with a slow pace. This made the playwrights sceptical about the reception of revolutionary ideas. Being compelled to follow the cultural principles might be one of the reasons for the playwrights to restrict themselves to react to the tastes of the audience rather than attempt to incorporate the knowledge of dramatic techniques in them. In spite of these limitations in the intellectual sphere, the spirit of Kerala renaissance motivated writers such as C.N.Sreekantan Nair and K.M. Panikkar to deviate from the trodden path. Thus retaining the techniques used traditionally in Malayalam plays, they modernised the content. K.M. Panikkar's *Mandōdari* and C.N. Sreekantan Nair's *Sākēṭam* are two significant efforts that played substantial roles in the Ramayana dramatic tradition.

M.S.Poornalingam Pillai in the foreword to his work titled *Rāvāṇa: The Great King of Lanka* published in 1928 made a crucial analytical remark on the cynicism with which narratives on Ravana were received in India:

It is hard to expect that men who have moved in particular grooves for years will ever easily get out of them or that deep rooted prejudice consecrated by time and circumstances will die an easy death. The much maligned Ravana of the ancient Aryan Chronicler and purana writer and of the thoughtless Dravidian echoer of subsequent times cannot have his merits and virtues duly recognized until English Education, now pursued merely as bread-study broadens and liberalises the cramped and idola-obsessed Indian mind and wipes out his slave mentality altogether (Pillai ii)

Preservation of the native culture and the urge to modernise the mindset are the two contradictory forces that ignited the imagination of India in the twentieth century. The predominance of the second idea, i.e. liberating the spirit from the slave mentality is what generated unique perspectives on the mythical story of the Ramayana. The vital understanding of the psychological condition of Indian mindset was what prevented the writers from critically approaching the Ramayana narratives in the earlier periods. The introduction given to the excerpt on Ravana in *World History Encyclopedia* reveals how the various undesirable portrayals of Ravana reinforce his image as a demon:

Ravana is the mythical multi-headed demon-king of Lanka in Hindu mythology. With ten heads and twenty arms, Ravana could

change into any form he wished. Representing the very essence of evil, he famously fought and ultimately lost a series of epic battles against the hero Rama, seventh avatar of Vishnu (Cartwright N.Pag.)

Still the attempts to overcome the inhibition to make a deviant portrayal caused by the social stigma were made at different levels as the times heralded a partial transformation in the social mindset. The yearning to understand the story from the socio-cultural framework of South India was what lay behind the production of the work, *Rāvaṇa: The Great King of Lanka*. It is a fact that the anxiety caused by the popularity of the grand narrative with its religious association made K.M. Panikkar depict Ravana's story without developing it as a critique of Rama. The caution is quite evident in the title of the play *Mandōdari* published in 1941 when the story perfectly demanded one directly related to Ravana. The story depicted the virtuous life of Ravana in the *Rakshasa* kingdom of Lanka. The glorious aspects of the character of Ravana who according to the writer was an erudite person, a pious man, a loving husband and brother and above all a very responsible empathetic ruler are highlighted in the play.

Kavalam Madhava Panikkar (1895-1963) was an Indian diplomat, historian and writer. He was popularly known as Sardar K.M. Panikkar. After being educated in Madras and Oxford, he became the editor of *Hindustan Times*. Later, after independence, he was appointed as the Ambassador of India to China, to Egypt and to France. *Essays on educational reconstruction in India* (1920), *Indian Nationalism: its Origin, History, and Ideals* (1923), *Dhruvaswāmini: Oru Nāṭakam* (1949), *Haider Nāikan: Oru Prabandham* (1941), *A Survey of Indian History*

(1954), *The State and the Citizen* (1960), *The Foundations of New India* (1963), *Caste and Democracy and Prospects of Democracy in India* (1967) are a few notable works of K.M. Panikkar.

K.M. Panikkar's *Mandōdari*, which followed the Sanskrit tradition of plays, is an attempt to see Ravana as the virtuous protagonist of the play. This take indeed contrasts with the usual conception about Ravana as an evil incarnate. In fact, it initiated the discussions on an alternative view later elaborated by C.N. Sreekantan Nair in the play titled *Lankālakṣmi*. The play, *Lankālakṣmi* takes the perspective of *Asura* community and exonerates Ravana from the crimes that the mythical narratives have attributed to him. The cultural ethos of Kerala was providing a fertile soil for the improvisations that these writers tried in their plays, though the magnitude of liberty they took with the known content is varying.

In *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, Ravana is seen as full of desire towards Sita and he is trying to deceive Sita by telling lies about Rama's death and defeat and showing fake heads of Rama and Lakshmana. (Stasik 87). In *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and in many other Ramayanas, Ravana's defeat is the necessity of the plot: the evil has to be destroyed by the virtuous. While strangled in this dichotomy of virtuous vs. vicious, Ravana's true self was shrouded in many Ramayanas. In Canto XXII of Book 5 of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, Ravana threatens to injure and kill Sita if his desire is persistently denied:

Two months, fair dame, I grant thee still

To bend thee to thy lover's will.

If when that respite time is fled

Thou still refuse to share my bed,
 My cooks shall mince thy limbs with steel
 And serve thee for my morning meal (1439).

But in K.M. Panikkar, Ravana's motive is not tinted with desire, but with revenge on Rama who is instrumental for the mutilation of Shurpanakha. Panikkar's Ravana is an embodiment of loyalty towards his wife, Mandodari. Being portrayed as an ideal ruler and husband, desire towards another person's wife would be a scar on his nature which the writer seems not to bring into his play. Again, it could be assumed that having identified revenge and dignity as the key factors of Sita's abduction, the hiding of Ravana's desire towards Sita is a conscious omission as it might be conceived as an Aryan manipulation of the actions of Dravida king. Rama's killing of Ravana goes without objection or criticism based on the idea of the illegitimate desire Ravana held towards Rama's wife. Conversely, this desire thread might be a part of the argument of the myth makers to justify the violent and atrocious ways of Rama and Lakshmana. In order to eliminate the villainous shade on Ravana, the writer has disregarded this aspect and portrayed Ravana in a virtuous light.

The explanation in the text for the defeat of Ravana in the war too is a conscious move not to discredit Ravana of his power and potential for victory. The interpretations can be read as a part of the cultural desire to legitimise the relationship between Sita and Ravana. Here, the writer depends on the Kannada folk narrative mentioning Sita as Ravana's daughter, but with minor deviations. The Kannada folktale narrated by Rama Gauda traces the birth of Sita to Ravana who

eats the mango offered by the God as a boon without giving it to Mandodari who is supposed to eat it to have kids. The abnormal pregnancy humiliates Ravana, who decides to abandon the daughter born out of sneezing (Tharuvana 200). But in the current play, there is no reference to affirm that Sita is Ravana's daughter. But she suddenly appears in Lanka and Ravana and Mandodari have tried to adopt her. Later, they abandon her believing the prediction in her horoscope that her presence in Lanka would bring misfortune to Ravana and Lanka. The text remains silent on the matter whose daughter Sita was, and how her destiny is interconnected with the destiny of Lanka and Ravana. A conscious tendency to erase the sexual and erotic content is visible in *Mandodari* as the aim of the text seems to be to create a hero out of Ravana- a hero who resembles Rama. The societal stigma related to infidelity towards one's wife or husband and the belief in the principles of monogamy are the key dynamics that direct the textual discourse. Probably the writer feels it as a blot on the virtue of Ravana of the story if the tale of Ravana's attempt to assault Vedavati is incorporated into this.

Candrabati Rāmāyaṇa illustrates another tale in which Mandodari humiliated by the extramarital relationships of Ravana attempts to commit suicide by drinking the blood of Rishis that Ravana keeps in custody as a proof of his victories. Rather than killed by that, she becomes pregnant and delivers an egg which is prophesied to have contained the seed of destruction of the clan of Asura in Lanka. Though Ravana aspires to destroy it, Mandodari throws it in the ocean by keeping it in a golden casket. A fisherman named Madhav Jalia gets it and later presents to King Janaka. Interestingly, *Candrabati Rāmāyaṇa* argues that Sita is

Mandodari's daughter without spoiling her image as a chaste woman (Tharuvana 18). Sita's birth remained as a mystery in the play while it establishes the possible but undeveloped thread of Sita as a surrogate daughter of Lanka. Though Mandodari developed a maternal passion towards the child who appears in Lanka, the writer doubtlessly establishes Sita as somebody else's daughter.

In the preface to *Candrabati Rāmāyaṇa*, Dinesh Chandra Sen remarks that Buddhists and Jain believers have a lot of admiration towards Ravana who has been considered by them as pious, erudite and just. (Sen, 313) The Ravana image in the play, *Mandōdari*, also endorses this reading. During the situations which demand courage such as the incident of regaining Lanka from Kubera, the moment of insult suffered by Shurpanakha and the event of defeat, Ravana, in the play, stands for justice. Vibhishanan's warning and his suggestion to yield before Ravana does not shake Ravana who is determined to safeguard the pride of *Rakshasa* group despite the threats. Rather than acting in a selfish manner in the way of Vibhishanan and Kubera, Ravana vows to reinstate the lost prestige of Shurpanakha by doing revenge on the harbingers of violence. Though Ravana is portrayed as a maligned king, Ravana's insistence on meditation is highlighted in the beginning of *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* in the context of stating the inevitability of arrival of the incarnation of Vishnu (Menon 3). *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* also establishes the strong point that Ravana's strength and power are undefeatable. So, K.M. Panikkar is not deviating from many of the Ramayana narratives when he states that Ravana is invincible.

Sita's birth is one of the most mysterious incidents in the Ramayana. The Ramayanas have given different interpretations for the way Sita was found, though a

convincing explanation regarding her real parents is missing. In the Canto LXVI, in Janaka's speech in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* it is stated that the infant who had sprung from the earth while he ploughed the land was named as Sita (261). This reinforces the consideration that Sita can be regarded as the daughter of the earth as valid. A story states that the Rakshasa clan perpetrated horror on the earth and a child came out of the earth who was conceived as the daughter of the earth and became instrumental in their destruction. This also connects Sita and Ravana. The earth responds to the atrocities done against it by the *Rakshasas* by creating a daughter for revenge. The soundness of this argument depends on the assumption that Ravana is vicious. Though this argument of Ravana reaping the effects of the sinful seeds he sowed on earth is legitimate in the perspective of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, K.M. Panikkar denies the assumption that Ravana is a sinner. He establishes that the punishment of the death on him is unjust and either fate or Raman is blameworthy for that. Even after the abduction, ensuring Sita's security, Ravana, in *Mandōdari* proves himself to be an elegant ruler who has kindness towards the associates of the enemy too.

The crux of the play *Mandōdari* centres on the life of Ravana and Mandodari. Obviously, this focus makes Sita a less significant character in the play. Sita does not appear in the play too. Instead, her presence is heard through the dialogues delivered by the other characters. So Sita's presence is a muted presence in the play. This adds to the mystery of Sita-Ravana association. As perceived through the play, Sita is a victim of the misdeeds of the men in her family who ventured to insult women belonging to another clan. Thus, the direct involvement of Sita as the object of desire of Ravana is missing in this play. Though this does not

free Ravanna from the guilt of abduction, it makes Ravana's act less heinous. Even after the defeat, Sita remains invisible in the play. This might be the playwright's intentional act not to develop the play to an out-and-out critical text on Rama. It seems that the writer is anticipating a societal hostility towards his work. This anxiety is evident in his preface to the play which contains an elaborate explanation of the glorification of Ravana that he has been undertaking through the text. By means of the scholastic introduction to the play, attempting to introduce the various Jain-Buddhist portrayals of Ravana as an incarnation of the spirit of God Vishnu in a different form as God's enemy, and as a disciple of Buddha who insisted on non-violence, the stereotypical portrayals are contested. The writer states in the introduction that in *Lakavatāra Sūtra* Ravana is portrayed as a pacifist and excellent disciple of Buddha and in Hemachandra Soori's Jain Ramayana Ravana is not projected as an evil entity (105, 106).

As the title suggests, Mandodari is the heroine of the play, *Mandōdari*, written by K.M. Panikkar. The play comprises seven acts. It begins with the context when Mandodari meets Ravana. Also, it has been observed that Mandodari's story ends with the death of Ravana. The writer has given importance to the emotions in the scenes. Throughout the story, the couple is depicted as having overwhelming affection. Thus, Ravana in the play is characterised by virtues. In a conversation between Rama, Sugriva and Vibhishana, Rama expressed his wonder at the way Ravana ruled his kingdom. He remarks: "How glorious was his life! How ardent and invincible was he, when he fought with spirit until he dies" (208).¹⁴

¹⁴ Translation from Malayalam to English is done by me.

The mythical narratives have highlighted Mandodari's virtue and loyalty as the reasons for the victories of Ravana. There might be many reasons for the implied virtue of Mandodari when one looks at it from many angles: it might be inherent quality, it might be what discipline brought, it might be the virtue produced by fear, it might be due to the intoxication of power, it might be what emanates out of love, or it might be the reflection of the affection and care received from Ravana. Here, keeping the rest of the chances apart, the writer seems to have selected the last two possibilities as the reasons for Mandodari's loyalty. So, the writer is giving a rational explanation as to why Mandodari is portrayed as the alter ego of Ravana in the play.

The play highlights the respect that Mandodari holds towards Ravana. Whenever she mentions his name, or whenever she talks to him, the extreme reverence that she has towards Ravana becomes evident. This is a part of the playwright's portrayal of the Ravana- Mandodari relationship as an ideal one. Several instances in the play reveal the way Ravana discusses matters ranging from politics to love, pleasure and sorrow with Mandodari. The dialogues they exchange are indicative of the complementary nature of their relationship. The depiction of such a relationship can be explained as the writer's technique to indirectly show the patriarchal nature of Rama-Sita relationship in which Rama's decisions are made without consulting his wife in the mythical story.

The epic portrays Shurpanakha as a lustful sexualized female body in contrast to an innocent picture of Sita. *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* labels Shurpanakha as an embodiment of insatiable desire. This makes Shurpanakha a laughing stock in the

epic as desire in woman in popularly conceived as illegitimate and hence elicits insolent response from men. Cruelty done against her is legitimised as an act of disciplining the imprudent female as well. Sara Austin in “Sita, Shurpanakha and Kaikeyi as Political Bodies: Representations of Female Sexuality in Idealised Culture” argues that “Shurpanakha is the cast out and racialized “other” or “demon” who is killed off by Sita the sati “goddess.”” (131). This comment is made in the context of analysis of Anant Pai’s *Amar Citrakatha* and graphic novels such as Virgin Comic’s *Rāmāyaṇ 3392 AD* and *Rāmāyaṇ 3392 AD Reloaded* . The similarity between the graphic narratives and plays is that both of them prioritize visuals. In most of the graphic narratives, and in the televised Ramayana, Shurpanakha is pictured as dark, fat and ugly. The attire that she uses too keeps her apart from the so-called civilised women community. She is more tending to the tribal way of dressing indicating the lack of sophistication pertinent to the time period portrayed. Now, in the play *Mandōdari*, Shurpanakha’s body is not meant to be gazed upon. There is no reference to her body and dressing as well. This is a deliberate act of situating her as less different from the other women. The play depicts Shurpanakha as a widow, a grief which she shares with her sister-in-law, Mandodari. Shurpanakha is characterised by reverence towards her brother and deep affection towards his family. Mandodari in the play states her deep attachment to Meghanadan, the son of Ravanaan (158).

Still Shurpanakha, in the play, is a woman of unfulfilled desire. She expresses her sadness to Mandodari about her barren state. Her comparison of Mandodari’s blessed state with a man and her state as an unfortunate widow, and her

desperate remarks about her loneliness are the subtle references to her desire. Yet contrary to many narratives, the play portrays widow remarriage as a shameful act. Mandodari's answer to the damsel regarding her query on Shurpanakha's remarriage reaffirms this, when she says that Ravanaan who is an ideal king would not agree to the idea of remarriage (160). The solution she proposes to Shurpanakha who is young is that she can spend the rest of her life in piety towards Shivan and take part in the matters of ruling Lanka. Interestingly, the play that appears progressive by glorifying Ravanaan, attempts here to chain an *Asura* woman by enforcing the cultural taboos of the Brahmins on her. In addition to applying it to women like Shurpanakha who are treated as the 'other', the men of non-Brahmin ethnicity such as Ravanaan are depicted as the spokespersons of this idea. It is in this way that the writer makes Ravanaan a heroic figure.

Rather than portraying Shurpanakha's mutilation as an act of violence and misdeed committed by Raman and Lakshmanan, the play makes a conscious attempt to put the blame on Shurpanakha making a reference to one of her earlier comments. As per the argument of the play, Shurpanakha faces the atrocious incident as a reaction to her comment regarding the mutilation of the girl child alleged to be Sita, whose horoscope predicts her becoming instrumental in the destruction of Lanka (160, 161). Shurpanakha's wicked suggestion to cut the nose of the girl child who Ravanaan identifies in the Asoka forest is speculated as the cause of her misfortune in the play. So, in this manner, the crime of Raman and Lakshmanan is approached with less severity. These are some of the pertinent issues worth discussion in the analysis of *Mandōdari*.

K.M. Panikkar in his notes to the play elaborately discusses the history of plays in Malayalam literature. As he did not find it wrong to comment on the theoretical and historical background against which he composed the plays, he reveals that the knowledge regarding the western theories supports the making of the plays. When he constructs the thought in *Mandōdari*, two major aspects are addressed: novelty and acceptability. Ravana's story depicting him as an embodiment of virtue bestows novelty on the subject. Yet, this will hamper the second factor that the writer prioritised-acceptability. In an attempt to achieve this, the writer has apparently transformed Ravana, the Dravida ruler, as resembling Aryan kings. The mellowed behaviour, abstinence from desire towards more than one woman, virtuousness, discipline, lack of cruelty and compassion towards people suggest K.M. Panikkar's creation of Ravana in Rama's mould. The foreword to *Asura: the Tale of the vanquished* contains Anand Neelakantan's substantial claim of Ravana's uniqueness which is lacking in K.M. Panikkar:

He is as good or bad as any human being and as nature intended man to be. Society is unable to curb his other nine faces, as it does in the figure of Rama. So Rama may be seen as God, but Ravana is the more complete man. Our epics have used the ten heads of Ravana to symbolize a man without control over his passions-eager to embrace and taste life-all of it. (5)

When K M Panikkar titles the play *Mandōdari* and propagates the notions that Mandodari might have internalised, but rather in an objective fashion, the writer becomes instrumental in placing Ravana as a stereotype of a virtuous man in stoic

frame. This lapse results in obscurity and omissions in the text. Though these did not affect the unity of text, and though it contributed better to retain the Rasa, *Veera* (courage), throughout during the depiction of Ravanaan, *Mandōdari* fails to undertake the mission of unravelling the complexities of the character of Ravana of the Ramayana.

The complementarity of Raman and Ravanaan is another matter of inconsistency. The work projects Ravanaan as a character with a strong sense of justice. In his preface to the play, the writer demonstrates that this depiction is supported by the Buddhist and Jain Ramayanas (106). The issue lies not in the depiction, but in the conclusion that the qualities that the audience witnessed in Ravanaan do not belong to him, but to Raman. This is established by means of utilising a principle called *Prathiyogabhakti*. There is no wonder in this portrayal as it follows the Vaishnava theory that Ravanaan and Kumbhakarnan are the incarnations of Jayan and Vijayan, the disciples of Vishnu, who seek salvation by being killed by the God (Panikkar 103,104). By following the Vaishnava theory and incorporating its reasons as facts in the play, the writer's intentions seem to be reinstating Ravanaan in the Bhakti framework. This proposes to construct a theory of dichotomy in which Raman serves a superior status as the giver of the boon and Ravanaan, an inferior being who waits for the mercy of Raman. As per the theory of *Prathiyogabhakti*, the individuals born with ¹⁵*Samrambhayogam* attain salvation within a short period by maintaining antipathy towards the incarnation of God. This

¹⁵ The fate of an individual to be born with hatred towards the divine. This hatred towards the divine would eventually help this individual's soul to be liberated. Bhagavata Purana states about this.

instigates and ensures the death of the individuals with *Samrambhayogam* easily. A similar understanding of 'mutual possession' is done in the Buddhist writings on the Ramayana as stated by B.A. Mahalakshmi Prasad in the article titled, "The Character of Rama and Ravana from the Buddhist Perspective of Ten Worlds":

The ten worlds represented by Nichren Daishonin are Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity or Tranquility, Rapture, or Heaven, Learning, Realisation, Bodhisattva and Buddha. The first six (Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity or Tranquility, Rapture, or Heaven) of these life states are called the six lower worlds. All human beings without any effort can experience them and the lives of the people move within six life states that constantly change. At the same time, the four (Learning, Realisation, Bodhisattva and Buddha) higher worlds require effort, the need to want to improve ourselves, mustering our energies and learning to direct them in a worthwhile way that requires patience, tenacity, and concentration....Rama and Ravana both exhibit the positive and negative aspects of the mutually existing ten worlds, however, if one looks keenly into the epic the delicately executed controlled balance of the ten worlds plays a crucial role in Rama achieving buddhahood while Ravana meets his end (355).

Apparently, the caution that K.M. Panikkar maintains to gloss the misdeeds of all the characters to create a story of pure virtue that limits the play from developing it

into a complex narrative. Still the effort to highlight Ravana as worthy of examination is the admirable part of K.M. Panikkar's play.

Paula Richman, in the notes to *Many Rāmāyaṇās*, argues that the Ramayana tradition comprises of all the tellings based on the story of Rama, ruling out the hierarchy existing in the discussions associated with Ramayana tradition venerating *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (17). The work *Mandōdari* can be rightly showcased in this tradition as it upholds the egalitarian ideology that the Ramayana texts cherish. K.M. Panikkar, by writing *Mandōdari*, is adding a chapter to the diversity of the Ramayana tradition. When he wrote the play in the twentieth century intending to provide aesthetic pleasure to the audience in Kerala, his purpose was to create a unique narrative that fits into the Ramayana tradition. The distinctiveness of the play lies in the element of rivalry and revenge it seeks to diminish. Another speciality of the play is the scholarly input the writer incorporated within the play about which he mentions in his notes. The play derives insights from the Buddhist and Jain portrayals of Ravana as a magnificent character. Though gender and social concerns that underline the play lack intensity, their depictions are in conformity with the cultural taboos and norms of Kerala especially the ones associated with widow remarriage, polygamy, horoscope etc. The play reiterates the possibilities and limits of the Ramayana tellings which stand for the victims. So, the work not only celebrates its apparent uniqueness, but also comments on the nuances of the thoughts of Kerala society, its legitimacies, fears, revelations, shortcomings, failures and philosophies.

C.N. Sreekantan Nair's plays titled as *Kāñjana Sita* (1958), *Sākētam* (1965) and *Lankālakṣmi* (1974) belong to the category of Malayalam plays that travel beyond the peripheral readings on characters and incidents of the Ramayana to the complex inner realities of characters having intertwined destinies. As a theatre artist of par excellence, his strategy is, in fact, a part of instilling the spirit of introspection in Kerala society that followed the icons of literary texts religiously. Paula Richman rightly commented on the insight of C.N. Sreekantan Nair that provides fresh vision to the theatrical movements in Kerala, in her article titled, "Sreekantan Nair's Ravana in Lankālakṣmi":

He organized one of the first Malayalam drama festivals, started a group titled Nava Rangam (New Theatre) for play-reading sessions, wrote scripts, and arranged theatre workshops. The main target of his criticism was Malayalam popular theatre of his day, much of which he saw as indebted to Victorian staging notions, filled with melodramatic plots, overly commercial in its inspiration, and lacking in engagement with contemporary life in Kerala. The solution to these flaws, he argued, lay in what he called *tanatu* (indigenous, organic, or rooted) *nāṭaka vedi* (theatre) (113).

So, the plays that he composed dealing with the conflicts and trajectories of the Ramayana are a part of his decisions to revisit the roots to strengthen the indigenous theatre.

C.N. Sreekantan Nair's *Sākētam* (1965) is the second play in the Ramayana series of the author. The play is selected for this analysis because it focuses on the

character of Dasharatha about whom more study seems to be required. The play depicts the incidents taken from "Ayōdhya Kānda" dealing with the story of Dasharatha's agony at the moment of exile of Rama and the circumstances leading to the decision to leave the legacy of rule of Ayodhya on Bharatha. *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* substantiates the idea that the cruelty of Kaikeyi is the major reason for Rama's exile though it later releases her from the crime by mentioning about the boons she received from the king.

Camile Bulke in *Rāmakatha* tries to explain why Kaikeyi insisted on Rama's exile to the forest, one of which is as follows: according to *Balāramadāsa Rāmāyaṇam* a spirit named *Durbalan* (the vulnerable) enters the body of Dasharatha under the influence of which he declares Rama's exile on Kaikeyi's instigation (338). But it can be noted that the play, *Sākētam*, contains the elements of didacticism especially when it portrays the follies of King Dasharathan whose breach of word is the sole reason for his poignant plight. Along with this reading, the writer opens up the possibility of understanding the incidents not simply as the product of human decisions and actions, but rather in a deterministic pattern. Obviously, the writer is maintaining a fine balance between the elements beyond human will and human failure as bringing catastrophe in the life of the protagonist Dasharathan.

Premiered in 1965 under the direction of G. Sakarapillai, *Sākētam* revolves around a plot on sin, remarks Ayyappa Panicker in his introductory remarks on the play. This argument is formed out of two reasons. Firstly, the prologue to the play contains a quotation from Bhagavad Gita:

Adha kena prayukthoyam

Papam charathi purusha

Anichchannapi Varshneya

Baladiva Niyojitha (3:36)

(Why is a person impelled to commit sinful acts, even unwillingly, as if by force, O descendent of Vrishni (Krishna)?)

The *Sloka* emphasises human helplessness in the presence of fate which will lead human beings to indulge in sin. Secondly, Dasharatha in his state of melancholy relieves himself of the charge of committing sin wittingly by finding solace in the statement which he tells Kausalaya: even without the human intentions, one may be destined to follow the path of the sinner under the influence of some unrecognisable forces (13, 54). But when Sreekantan Nair creates the plot, he places the involvement of fate as an excuse which Dasharatha uses to justify his unethical behaviour.

This difference can also be considered as a part of the shift of the story from epic to drama as remarked rightly in “The Transformations of the Fate in Literature” by Mogens Brondsted:

One might say that the tragic hero chooses his lot without knowing it, while the epic hero knows his lot without choosing it. The decisions that determine the action are taken by the gods: by the quarrelling lower gods, by the supreme god, or, above even him, by Fate. This tradition in classical literature goes back to Homer's divine apparatus

formed out of the multitude of deities and demons of popular belief and arranged by a rationalistic artist who was only bound by one thing: the fixed action of the narrative. This constitutes the determination proper. It may be objected that tragedy, too, is built on stories that are fixed and known in advance, but among other differences, there is a different time dimension. In drama we see, in the sacred 'now' of the festival, the action take shape through, human decisions; it is created before our eyes, just as the ancient ritual myths were re-created every year. In the enormously extended epic, revolving time itself becomes a determinant of Fate; it brings hither what must happen in the fullness of time in spite of all digressions and embellishments born out of the rhapsodist's imagination. Epic literature does not so much want to show the events as to explain them, to justify the given actions as inspired by gods and demons, to discuss causes and motives. It is an extended oral art, while drama is a concentrated visual art (177-178).

The plot of the play is divided into three acts: the first depicting the rising action indicating the preparations for the coronations of Raman, the elder prince of Ayodhya, the son of Kausalya. Kausalya is the principal consort of Dasharathan as she is the first one whom King Dasharatha has married. Still Kaikeyi, the third wife, is the favourite one. Being the younger and the most beautiful among the wives and due to the favour she enjoys from Dasharathan, Kaikeyi attains a superior status among the wives of the ruler. Along with that, her father, Asvapati, the king of

Kekaya, on the day of Dasharathan's marriage with Kaikeyi makes Dasharathan agree to the condition that the son of Kaikeyi would be the successor of Dasharathan in Ayodhya. Though he yields to this proposal as he is intoxicated by the charm of Kaikeyi, when the time passes, due to his excessive admiration towards his eldest son, Raman, Dasharathan conveniently forgets to adhere to his words. While Kausalya is worried about the thoughts on Dasharathan's pledge, not only Dasharathan, but also his advisor, Vashishtan, are not bothered about it. The first act unravels the subtle worries of Kausalya who on the one hand wants to crown her son, but on the other carries the dilemma that Dasharathan lacks regarding his word to Kaikeyi.

Though the first act of the play begins with prophecy of the chorus about the impending doom, the scene is set in the central part of the palace where the declaration of the coronation ceremony is released. Both the second and third act are set in the palace of Ayodhya maintaining unity of place, though the second act occurs in the area where Kaikeyi stays and the third in the central part of the palace. The unity of time is also maintained as the play showcases the incidents which take place between two evenings, the evening prior to the coronation and the evening of the failed coronation day. The events depicted in *Sākētam* are the events that come after Dasharathan decides to declare Rama as his legal heir having right to rule Ayodhya which leads to Kaikeyi's refusal to agree for that and the eventual declaration of Rama's journey to the forest and Bharatha's attaining the Kingdom. So, a single day's incidents are elaborately illustrated in the play. The action of the play does not take place in a literal way by shifting the locales of incidents. Instead, the entire body of action happens in the mind of the characters which makes the play

as a psychological one in Ibsen's tradition following the tradition initiated by N. Krishna Pillai (Parameswaran Pillai 409). The play's adherence to the principle of unity does not prevent the audience from understanding the content of the play as a holistic picture of the story is given through the dialogues in the play. By restricting the events to a single day, the writer is presenting an idea of the significant incidents leading to the catastrophe and death of Dasharathan in a focused manner. The classical framework adopted for the development of plot structure consisting of rising action, complication and denouement attribute the quality of control and precision to the plot which is well built. Another peculiarity of C.N. Sreekantan Nair's depiction is the emphasis that he has given to the thoughts of female characters such as Kausalya who is a neglected character in the Ramayana. What is significant in the consideration of the plot of *Sākētam* is its capacity to expose the injustice which leads to the catastrophe with the help of intense dialogues, especially the ones of female characters such as Kausalya, Kaikeyi, Manthara and Sita.

Abhilash Pillai, in his director's note titled, "Sākētam: Myth or Reality" published in the brochure of the production of *Sākētam* at Tokyo in 2001 probed into the fundamentals of the play when he enquires:

Who was Dasharatha? Was Mandhara his super ego? Was the throne of Ayodhya an unending death for Dasharatha? What was it that haunted this noble king? Depression might have been diagnosed as a clinical illness by modern medicine. But here the character Dasharatha is a classic case that suffered three episodes of depression. The first occurred after he accidentally killed the son of the blind couple. The second was triggered by the separation from his

children after they left for the *gurukula* (Teacher's abode) and the final episode set in when Rama left for *Vanavasa* (banishment to forest) with Sita and Lakshmana. (Abhilash Pillai 127,128).

Contrary to this reading, it seems that *Sākētam*, since it is focusing on the tragic plight of Dasharathan, demonstrates the inherent weakness, the tragic flaw or *Hamartia* of Dasharathan as his lack of integrity rather than yielding to depression. He is depicted as a victim of fate, due to the curse received in response to the crime committed unwittingly. The writer's portrayal projects *Hamartia* as the reason for the catastrophe in the life of Dasharathan. Dasharathan is a character who, according to the writer, responds to the everyday priorities, rather than to the ideals. So this nature of his response leaves him with the irresolvable dilemma to choose between Rama and Kaikeyi, both of whom are his priorities. The pragmatic principles which lead him in life guide him to think on behalf of Kaikeyi. The patriarchal principles which govern Dasharathan and his advisor Vashishtan do not leave room for any doubt about Kaikeyi's reaction to the decision about the declaration of Raman's coronation. Both Dasharathan and Vashishtan, in the perspective of Sreekantan Nair, are veiling the truth of the pledge due to their bias towards the elder prince of Ayodhya. Sreekantan Nair is making it clear that the rejection of Bharathan is not an accident, but an outcome of a conspiracy which is spoiled by Kaikeyi's interference at the apt moment.

Compared to Raman, both Lakshmanan and Sita are innocent characters. Both of them show their unflinching loyalty towards Raman by deciding to accompany him. Sita is projected as an epitome of purity and sacrifice who confesses her inability to live in the palace in Raman's absence, in his memories.

She makes her stand clear by deciding to follow Raman wherever he goes without checking the rationale of Dasharathan's decision. She behaves as a stable wife who provides confidence to the husband in his difficult mission and extends sense to the angry Lakshmanan. Her loyalty might be the reason why Raman tells her about his prejudices regarding Bharathan's involvement in Kaikeyi's decision (45). The stoic behaviour and the virtues he projected before Dasharathan and Kaikeyi are not the inherent values he imbibed, but the behaviour indicating his maturity. This truth is revealed in the conversation between him and Sita in the play.

The play, in no way, attempts to idolize Raman. Instead, Raman is a portrayed as a man who acts on principles of prudence, obedience and maturity. But Lakshmanan is true to himself and is extremely loyal to Raman. These characteristics make him believe that injustice is done against Raman from the part of the father who he respects less than the elder brother. So Lakshmanan's ideals are more personal and subjective than Raman's ideals. Lakshmanan does not use his discretion to discriminate between good and bad. He simply follows the words of Raman, his brother. So, here we see the possibility of comparison between Manthara and Lakshmanan in the play. Both Manthara and Lakshmanan are loyal to the people whom they support. Both of them believe that injustice is done against their parties. Both the characters believe that Dasharathan's inconsistencies are the reasons for the imminent atrocity. Both of them are agitated and destined to bring justice by the mechanism of persuasion. The only difference lies in their capacity to attain what they believe as justice as their perceptions of justice differ from each other.

Sākētam, the title, suggests that the focus of the play is Ayodhya, the kingdom. The first title of *Sākētam* is 'Rajyasulkam' (Dowry of the kingdom) when

it was published in the magazines, *Kaumudi* in 1965 and in *Kēsari* in 1973 (Gangadharan Nair 52). The play depicts the way how the politics working within the family of Dasharatha is developed as the politics that decides the destiny of Ayodhya (Sākētam). The family, because of its peculiar nature due to the king's act of polygamy, leaves a different equation regarding the distribution of property and legacy. The inherent stability of the unit is upset because of the plural responsibilities that the head of the family needs to fulfil. The divided loyalty, with which the father has to live, acts as the catalyst of the split inside the family. In addition to the split, the unrelenting desire to attain power is functioning as the central principle and the principal motive behind the proposals and actions of the characters. In Dasharathan's perspective superiority must stand out before all ideals. This perspective, essentially patriarchal, is palatable to the minister and advisor, both representing the patriarchal ideology. Raman is also a character who internalises this perspective. But in Raman's case he extends this to calling it as ideal and believes it to be so. Here comes the contrast between Rama and Kaikeyi.

Kaikeyi believes in a certain sets of ideals. She can differentiate between affection and justice while she is dealing with Dasharathan. She is ready to go to the extent of acting against the wishes of the husband who is the ruler of the country, disregarding the consequences of her words and actions. She is keen on establishing the truth irrespective of the public response to the truth. The playwright shows that neither Kaikeyi nor Manthara are vicious characters. They are the people standing for justice. Manthara, in the play, is keen on resisting the adamant king's decision which is unfavourable to Kaikeyi and her son. Kausalya too is worried about the breach of the promise of Dasharathan and she inquires multiple times about it to

Vashishtan. It seems that though she has the desire to implement her superiority as the first wife and mother of the future king, she considers the assurance of Dasharathan to Kaikeyi as equally important. She even has gone to the extent of asking Vashishtan, what could be the king's response if Kaikeyi claims the throne for her son. Interestingly, though Dasharathan abuses Kaikeyi for her decision Kausalya keeps quiet, in the play, about Kaikeyi's decision. Again, Kausalya is not completely broken when the king meets his tragic fate. One cannot consider her silence and lack of criticism as her nature, when listening to her conversation with Vashisht. She is talking about Rama's coronation as the only light remaining in her dark sky (28). This implies the way how her husband abandons her throughout life though she carries the title as a queen consort. She is represented as a prudent woman who asks about the imprudence of conducting the coronation without intimating Bharathan, his uncle Udhajith and King Janakan of Mithila. She can sense the deceptive nature of the coronation though both Dasharathan and Vashishtan attempt to hide it by glorifying it as the most legitimate act.

Sage Vashishtan stands for the patriarchal hegemonic principles of the power centres. Though he is a sage, he does not insist on virtue or justice while providing advice to Dasharathan. Instead, he is simply functioning as a spokesperson of the thoughts of the unprincipled king's inconsistent decisions. Simply acting a sycophant of Dasharathan, he buries the ideals for which he had to stand as a sage. He even does not advise the king to discuss the matter with Bharathan and Kaikeyi to get their consent, if his desire is to confer the legacy on Raman. He cunningly avoids the presence of Yudhajith or Janakan whose presence may complicate the situation. So, the plan of giving the throne to Raman is the plan of Dasharathan and

Vashishta who intend to secretly implement it before the arrival of criticism from any corners. Kaikeyi's stability and power is the only reason for the failure of this carefully calculated plan. The reason why she can do it is that she is aware of how to play with the desire of king Dasharathan and trap him with questions. So, the work unravels the politics of power and desire, and the counter politics of resistance. Though Kaikeyi is doomed to pay the penalty for standing for truth, she is placed in the play as a martyr standing for the truth that others forgo for convenience.

In the third act of the play, the audience witnesses a scene of tension. This view of disturbance is the essential byproduct of the failure of power to make subjects obedient. The specialty of the crisis here is that it affects the family alone as obedience remains a principle cherished by people. These tensions do not damage the country because of the wisdom exercised by Raman who believes in the ideal of obedience to the words of the father and the king. Still, the atmosphere of anarchy in the family spreads the message of the aftermath of the failure of patriarchal principles. If patriarchy fails, anarchy will prevail: this is the message that the situation conveys by the sentimental reactions of the king who lost respect due to his failure in adhering to the truth of his pledge. The air of anarchy, rather than contributing to the understanding of its prevalence in the presence of manipulations in governance, hides the imposters who sentimentalise the failure and curse the truth tellers. The playwright reveals this contradiction through the presentation of event with focus and clarity.

The chorus/*Sutradharan* in the play serves two major purposes. On the one hand he functions as a mystic who prophesies the downfall of Dasharathan and Sākētam while on the other hand he exonerates Dasharathan of his crimes by

emphasizing the helplessness of the human beings in the play of fate. The chorus plays a participatory role in the play. He functions as a subject of Ayodhya. After describing the prosperity of the country, he makes a remark about the curse befallen on the head of the king due to the murder of the son of Sudra, the old blind sage. He speculates on the reason for Dasharathan's forgetfulness of the curse when he overcomes the issue of infertility through pious observances and rituals. His descriptions are meant to help the audience to understand the context of the play. So, ultimately he functioned as the voice of the playwright who introduces the idea of inherent sadness surrounding the atmosphere of Ayodhya. The fear of gloom awaiting for the right moment to conquer Sākētam is subtly evident in the words of the chorus. Chorus as a stage device occupies a different realm between the characters and playwright though speaks on behalf of the playwright and the central character. In his work titled, *Sreekantan Nair: Vision and Mission of a Theatre Artist* Abhilash Pillai significantly comments that Sutradharan/chorus remains as a "signpost for the character Dasharatha" and "contributed to the backdrop to the events, and echo to the dialogue, and colour to the characterization" (134). The empathetic detachment with which he treats the subject of agony of the country reminds the audience of the parrot in *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* that introduces the inevitability of sorrow in the text of the Ramayana.

The Ramayana plays in Malayalam are classified under three categories, says P. T Thomas in his thesis titled, "The Rāmāyaṇa Dramas in Malayalam: a Study". The first category is the set of plays which show strong affinity with the epic content and the second category comprises the plays which show a significant deviation from the epic narrative by establishing the epic villains as heroes. A third category

of the Ramayana plays, without fitting themselves into any of the above-mentioned categories, exercises autonomy in the content by establishing a connection with the epic at the peripheral level (37). Though the plays selected for the current analysis appear under the second category, it would not be wrong to substantiate that they do not show any kind of affinity to the Valmiki epic narrative content.

When Ravana abducts Sita, *Mandōdari*, the play justifies it as an issue of safeguarding the respectability of the kingdom and clan. Also, the play depicts the way how women are treated with respect in the relationship exemplifying the ideal couple Ravana and Mandodari. It depicts the beliefs that the inhabitants of Lanka hold which results in the abandonment of the child, Sita. It reaffirms the cyclical nature of fate, when revealing Shurpanakha's plan of cutting the nose of the child to make a mark of her identity is returning to Shurpanakha in the form of violence from Ravana and Lakshmana. C.N. Sreekantan Nair also is highlighting the ambivalence of human beings in conflict whether they consider themselves as responsible for their tragedy or whether fate plays a role in bringing catastrophe to the life of men. This may be a manifestation of C.N. Sreekantan Nair's ideas on *Thanathu Natakavedi* (Original Theatre) which he discussed in detail in *Nataka Kalari* in Kootatukulam (Sankara Pillai, 141). Both *Mandōdari* and *Sākētam* attempt to exercise originality to the extent by quarrelling with the camouflage created by Valmiki and the Bhakti poets such as Ezhuthachan. When K.M. Panikkar chooses to elevate Ravana and when C.N. Sreekantan Nair takes an alternative perspective on Dasharathan, they are addressing several sociopolitical issues associated with power, marginalization and ethnicity through the medium of plays.

Chapter 5

Rewriting the Subaltern:

Voices in *Kaikeyi* and *Ūrukāval*

In the world political and cultural scenario, the twentieth century is considered as a period of realisations and transformations. The realisations include understanding fascism and the harmful consequences of wars. The transformation is accompanied by the eradication of colonialism across the world, production and dissemination of knowledge and universalization of education. These effects are marked as an extension of the renaissance which started in the fourteenth century. But in India it is often pointed out that renaissance commenced under the influence of religions such as Jainism and Buddhism and flourished with Bhakti movements during the period between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries AD. P. Govinda Pillai in *Kerala Navōdhānam: Oru Marxist Vīkṣaṇam* (Kerala Renaissance: A Marxist Perspective) sums up the predominant values of Kerala renaissance highlighting the concept of equality it projects. According to him, equality with respect to religious beliefs, tolerance, anti-casteism, rejection of outdated views of tradition, equal opportunities for and treatment towards women in family and society are the most important prerogatives of Kerala renaissance (22). Renaissance, unlike revolutions, has extended for a longer period of time and contains the spirit of many regional, political and individual ideologies and sometimes functions as a critique of dominant mainstream thought. So, it is obvious that the literary works written under the influence of renaissance carry the traces of the above mentioned ideologies.

Consequently they read the cultural texts and myths critically and find new meanings of what is stated earlier. The novels, *Kaikeyi* (2009) by T.N. Prakash and *Ūrukāval (Vigil)* (2013) by Sarah Joseph undertake this critical journey into the text of the Ramayana and produce new text containing original interpretations.

The Ramayana foregrounds the fundamental dilemma of women occupying the ambiguous terrain of being essentially inessential. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* significantly commented that the divide, the woman has to ignore, is between the demand to be inessential from the constituting situation which freezes her as an object, as an ‘other’, and her inner consciousness urging her to be essential, a subject (Beauvoir 37). Depicting incidents from the Ramayana, that turned most acceptable in the course of time as holding a masculine perspective, the patriarchal literary traditions based on it render a biased vision on the female existence.

There are two significant problems about this male perspective that was used to narrate the stories: firstly, it argues out the patriarchal dimension of the context and obliterates the possibility of an alternative, and secondly, the patriarchal outlook of the work discusses the women by deceitfully putting them in social binaries i.e. either as goddesses or as witches. This patriarchal production of mythical narrative has got distinctiveness too: it attempts to protect a masculinity that is privileged. The narrative legitimises its biases, and propounds a homogeneous storyline. This is done by hiding some characters and their versions of the tale. The grand mythical narrative makes this plan possible by persuading the reader’s consciousness, influencing the objective thinking and manipulating the reasoning faculties of the reader with odd justifications. These manipulative ideas seep into society’s

unconscious leading it to form theories and moral codes. Homi Bhabha in the Foreword to *Black Skin White Masks* contemplates on the peculiar association of the individual and society which happens amidst conflicting interests:

The social virtues of historical rationality, cultural cohesion, the autonomy of individual consciousness assume an immediate, utopian identity with the subjects upon whom they confer a civil status. The civil state is the ultimate expression of the innate ethical and rational bent of the human mind; the social instinct is the progressive destiny of human nature, the necessary transition from Nature to Culture. The direct access from individual interests to social authority is objectified in the representative structure of a General Will-Law or Culture where Psyche and Society mirror each other, transparently translating their difference, without loss, into a historical totality.

(Fanon xiii)

The negotiations of the individuals are limited in this sense, in the purview of the interactions mentioned by Bhabha above, as they are governed by the influx of the idea of social sovereignty. In such a society of social sovereignty, the mythical texts will become a political text proposing homogenous moral codes. This transformation is detrimental to independent thinking and heterogeneity of perspectives. The central issue is that the grand narrative proposes a hegemonic system in which the powerful men control the life and thoughts of the subjects. Interestingly, the subjects including the subaltern in the colonial/patriarchal set up adapt themselves to the state of victimisation and start recognizing their state as ideal. Diverse stances in life and

literature are consequently treated as profanity, thereby negating the scope of dissent.

Literature in modern times functions as a medium to support the victims of society to demonstrate the less known visuals of life and society in favour of visibility and inclusiveness of the marginalised. Feminism, as a theory and praxis in the current scenario, expands itself addressing the questions beyond gender divide. The concerns of the human beings occupying the peripheries, ethnic minorities, lower class citizens, stigmatised communities etc. also come under the purview of feminism. The post independent Indian scenario offered the right ambience for the flourishing of thoughts about democracy. The emergence of the notions about socialism and sovereignty along with democracy offered by the constitution made people think about an ideal existence. This offshoot of the values of democracy in independent India motivated the writers to revisit myths. The Ramayana narratives are characterized as independent writings, especially the novels, *Kaikeyi* of T.N. Prakash and *Ūrukāval* of Sarah Joseph serve this purpose of providing voice to the voiceless and hence propagate the vision of intersectionality. Undoubtedly, the productions of these works can be observed as a natural corollary of the recognition of the hollowness of many stories popularised through canonical narratives. In addition to this, one can read these critical narratives as the byproducts of the political consciousness of Post independent India upholding the values of equity. So, these revisions function as the intentional deviation from the tradition set by the popular mythical material so as to produce alternative myths and to get them popularised.

There are other factors too that influenced the publications of these novels. They include the repercussions of renaissance happened in Kerala that refreshed the intellectual capital of Malayalam literature, the eradication of illiteracy and the enlightenment provided by universal education that led people to grab wisdom rejecting orthodoxy, and the political consciousness that crept into the intellectual sphere to question the social evils and injustice. The time of production is another crucial factor for the publication of the works authenticating the voices of Kaikeyi, Tara and Angadan instead of the monumental voices of the poets and the parrot. Another factor is the demand from the community of readers rightly recognized by the authors and the publishers for the diverse takes on the existing myths. The informed categories of readers want to hear the narratives of rhetoric than the superficial tales, to testify her/his recognition of the existence of multiple Ramayanas. Consequently, the novels, *Kaikeyi* and *Ūrukāval*, are released and read in the first decade of the twenty first century as questioning the Ramayana.

What is singular about these works can be stated as follows: *Kaikeyi*, a novel published in 2009 by T.N. Prakash, is written in the first person narrative format in the voice of the female character Kaikeyi and *Ūrukāval*, the novel published in 2008 by Sarah Joseph, is narrating the story from the perspective of a male character, Angadan. So, rather than the identification produced by the gender of the author, the novels are the literary productions of a different level of empathy, i.e. empathy of the authors/readers towards the marginalised, ill-treated and wretched identities. What Romila Thapar says in the talk titled, *Vignettes of Ramayana - Perspectives of a Historian* is relevant in the context of the conscious subjugation of

the other characters of the Ramayana. Thapar remarks that the Books 2 to 6 of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* do not appear to have identified Raman as an *Avtar* (Incarnation of the God) while Books 1 and 7 which were considered as later additions to the existing highlights him as a deity. According to Thapar, this paradigm shift might be a psychological strategy to overcome the threats caused to *Vaishnavism* by the other religious sects such as Buddhism or Jainism from 2nd century BC to 4th century AD by adopting a popular fictional hero of the times and claiming him as a deity of the religion. (Thapar 00:01:10-00:05:00). This devious act of conscious deification lies behind the blurring and demonizing of the characters. T.N. Prakash and Sarah Joseph revisit what was written to reveal the categories of mischaracterization. The purpose of these mythopoeic works is to oppose the erasure of the rational in favour of sacrosanct.

If a character's decision and action are integral to the development of plot, that character can be conceived as the central character of the text. Considering this observation, Kaikeyi can indisputably be estimated as one of the most significant character in the Ramayana narrative. Though her role is decisive in the development of events in the work, her portrayal is one dimensional, as she is understood from the popular portrayals as a less virtuous character. Being characterised as the unrighteous wife of Dasharatha, Kaikeyi's actions are counted as vicious: in order to attain the prestige of the matriarch of the empire by becoming the mother of the king, she deceitfully utilises the opportunity of her control over Dasharatha and becomes instrumental in Rama's fourteen years exile into the forest. This exhaustive story is disseminated under the impression that Rama is the legitimate heir to the

kingdom whereas Bharatha, the son of Kaikeyi is coming as the second one in the lineage as he is born after Rama was born. Another argument that emphasises the tale of Kaikeyi's treachery is that Rama is the son of Kausalya, the first and there by the principal consort of Dasharatha. Using the feminist tools, T.N. Prakash, in the novel titled, *Kaikeyi*, contests the theory of accusations on Kaikeyi.

In an excerpt of Paula Richman's reading of E.V. Ramanswami's ideological position in interpreting the Ramayana titled, "Why Periyar was critical of the Ramayana (and Rama)", she points out E. V. Ramanswami's argument on the unfairness of the North Indian recensions of the mythical story towards the socially inferior categories. Legitimacy, in the claim of Kaikeyi, is quite evident when approaching the context from a rational perspective, according to E. V. Ramanswami, as understood by Richman:

Those seeking to portray King Dasharatha in a sympathetic light have conventionally held his youngest wife, Kaikeyi, to be the real villain of the epic, holding her responsible for the king's decision to deprive Raman of the throne and exile him. In contrast, EVR points out that Kaikeyi was fully within her rights when she asked the king to fulfill the two boons he had granted her when she once saved his life (Richman 1).

In the novel, *Kaikeyi*, the reader is directed to pursue the voice of the character Kaikeyi, who is the daughter of Asvapati, the learned king of Kekaya. Her uncle Yudhajith, the warrior who has taught her the art of fighting, is her best companion as she is a motherless child. The text has given only clues to assume that her mother

can be Saraswati, the Goddess. When the novel opens, one can visualise the sensuous Kaikeyi celebrating her youthful vivacity on the banks of Satadru where she is beguiled by the charm of Nemi (Dasharathan), the king of Ayodhya who later seduces her and calls the incident as innocuous *Gandharva*¹⁶wedding. After the physical encroachment without her consent that leaves her guilty and without options, Nemi approaches her father and requests him to conduct their wedding. The father and the uncle happily agree as the conditions that the powerful king put are very tempting. As per the conditions, Kaikeyi, after becoming the wife of Nemi (Dasharatha), will be treated as his principal wife and this supreme status will enable her son to be the legitimate heir to claim the throne above all the children of Nemi. Satisfied over these enticing proposals, the king of Kekaya allows his daughter to be the wife of the king of Ayodhya. Mesmerised by the attractiveness of Kaikeyi, in order to gratify his haunting passion towards her, Dasharathan put forward this deceptive proposal. The entire turn of events in the Ramayana are the results of the cheating of the king Dasharathan for which Ayodhya, along with the king, cursed Kaikeyi later.

Arshia Sattar in *Maryada: Searching for Dharma in Ramayana* rightly mentions the conflicting *Dharmas* in the text:

Having to choose between conflicting Dharmas is not uncommon in the Ramayana. On the contrary, these dilemmas are the narrative spine of the story. Dasharatha, too, had to choose between his

¹⁶ The type of marriage in which a woman chooses her husband without consulting anyone else.

Dharma as a husband (honouring the boons that he gave to his wife when she saved him from death), his Dharma as a father (honouring primogeniture with Raman as his heir to the throne), and his Dharma as a king (honouring the pledge he had made to his people). When he chose to honour the boons that he had given Kaikeyi, Dasharatha chose his private Dharma, that of being a good husband. So, too, when Kaikeyi had to choose between her Dharma as a wife (acceding to Dasharatha's decisions and wishes) and her Dharma as a mother (securing her son's future), she chose to be singularly a mother rather than one of three queens. (Sattar)

Taking this into account, it can be identified that Kaikeyi's claim for enthronement of Bharata is valid against the dishonest action of her own husband and maternal affection does not form the sole reason for her claim. The politics of motherhood i.e. the possibility of becoming the mother of the king might also have instigated her. Through her son, she wishes to make a claim on the kingdom.

T.N. Prakash adopts stream of consciousness technique to explain Kaikeyi's arguments. His views on the characters are not based on a single Ramayana. They are the products of his readings of many Ramayanas and his own reflections. It is a fact that "in order to augment consciousness-raising, literature should provide realistic insights into female personality development, self-perception, interpersonal relationship, and other "private" or "internal consequences of sexism." (Donovan 22-23). Cheri Register in the book *Feminist Literary Criticism Explorations in Theory* edited by Josephine Donovan argues that literature must enable women to

voice their perspectives. Kaikeyi, as a narrator, not only narrates the events but also displays learning, wisdom, logic, maturity and sensibility to make the reader convinced that the central character's subjectivity is reliable.

In the beginning of the novel, Kaikeyi is suspicious about Dasharatha's plan of conducting their *Gandharva* wedding, in which only the bride and groom participate. She thinks about it as a crooked act as there are better legitimate ways for marriage. She doubts that *Gandharva* wedding theory is to normalise the assault done by the king Dasharatha about which the writer mentions in the story.

Dasharatha is shown as a person who sexually encroaches into the female body without the consent of the woman and calls himself a lover. The novel depicts him as a character who persuades Kaikeyi, the teenage girl, that a lover would be like him and love will be initiated through forced sex leaving women no choice in selection. The text problematizes the precarious concept of love asserted through forced marriage and sex.

Kaikeyi is insecure about the matter of virginity that is lost; she is bothered about her respectability which got compromised as society may consider the rape victim as a participant in the crime who enjoys the pleasures of the union. Also, she is worried and conscious about the question of prudence which would make her a less acceptable person to the father and uncle. Kaikeyi's rationalisation here is vital to understand the feminist stance of the text and her reason which perfectly blends with the reason of the helpless women whose value is not decided by virtue, but by charm. She justifies her action of yielding to the seduction of the imposed lust of the king by thinking that she is left without many choices as her options are limited to

either surrender and be a wife or be conquered and be a sex slave. Hence, she counts her action as an intelligent selection, though later one can see her regretting it.

Misogynistic and undemocratic nature of polygamy has been central to the feminist debates across centuries. Man's virility and hypersexuality are often projected as the arguments in favour of polygamy which is an accepted and not so uncommon practice in so many cultures backed by instances and teachings from scriptures. It is highlighted as an institution against adultery as stated by Van Wichelen (7). Even without any of these justifications, polygamy is legitimate among the scions of Ikshvaku Dynasty despite the issues of rivalry among the wives. Kausalya and Sumthra are the two other wives of Nemi who are much older than Kaikeyi, his third wife. Sustaining the passion of the husband is counted as the responsibility of the wife and the multiple marriages are the justifications for the inability of the wife who fails to sustain the desire of the husband towards her. This anti-woman stance is systemic and unquestionable as the power structure which is heavily patriarchal designates woman only as an object to gratify the sexual pleasure of man, whether she is a queen, an ordinary damsel or a slave.

Kaikeyi, being the chosen among the wives, due to her charm and her capacity to provide tremendous pleasure to the king, has an unquestioned control over Nemi who is later known as Dasharathan. The same capacity she carries as the seductress is what makes the king place her as less chosen when the matter of wives getting pregnant arose. As a solution to infertility, when the rituals are conducted, the husband is asked to serve pudding, the offering, to the wives equally. Tricky enough, Dasharathan gives half of the portion of the pudding to his first wife,

Kausalya and is about to serve the remaining half to the second wife, Sumitra which Kaikeyi prevents with her timely interference.

During the time of pregnancy, the king and his wives are supposed to practise complete abstinence from sex which Nemi is reluctant to observe. In order to gratify his sexual desire, he is attempting to make a scapegoat out of Kaikeyi who is equally anxious to become pregnant. If Kaikeyi is spared of pregnancy, the king could enjoy it on the pretext that though he has to observe abstinence he has to satisfy the husband's *Dharma* (duty) towards Kaikeyi. Since Kaikeyi is clever enough to understand the hypocrisy of Nemi, this crooked plan goes in vain. Kaikeyi who is cheated in marriage with deceptive proposals and deceived in life under the pretence of love is an agitated victim who reacts. The act of Dasharathan can be read in another way too. Kaikeyi is offered the position of principal wife which, in due course, is denied systematically. The second offer given at the time of their wedding was offering the throne of Ayodhya to her son. So, if the possibility of having a child is denied, conflicts on the basis of this second offer can be resolved. In the progress of the story, a Kaikeyi who is hurt without proper justification is seen to have responded as a rational individual who fights against the injustice. These details are denied in the Ramayana in the haste to crucify Kaikeyi.

In the book written by Narendra Law titled *Aspects of Ancient Indian Polity*, it has been stated that the succession theory proposing the installation of Bharatha as a legal heir of Ayodhya was invalid as the commission of such an act of deviation from the crowning of the eldest son was unheard of in the ancient times. He mentions that when King Yayathi of the Lunar race declared his intention to make

Puru, the youngest son as his successor against the will of Yadu, the eldest, there was an outburst of active opposition against the king's act (52). So, when Kaikeyi decides to persuade Dasharathan for a deviation from the rule of succession, she is trying to bring a reform to the rules in favour of justice.

There are more factors that make Kaikeyi less acceptable in Ayodhya among the other women. Firstly, Kaikeyi is extremely beautiful, talented and educated; her excellence makes her an object of jealousy of many women including the queens and servants. Secondly, she receives special attention from Dasharathan and her words are counted even while he makes decisions in the court. In addition to this, he makes public demonstrations about his preference towards Kaikeyi particularly when he chooses to take her along with him when he decides to visit heaven to kill Sambarasura. Kaikeyi, due to her exceptional act of loyalty of inserting her fingers to support the chariot and avoids its fall during the war, legitimately obtains two boons from her husband. From T.N. Prakash's depiction, it is understood that Kaikeyi's ethnic marginality which contradicts her sanctioned superiority in the court is another reason for the resentment of the other characters. Though she is the subject of attacks of rumours, rebuke and ridicule, she survives as she believes in her innate worth. This makes her a relentless fighter among the women who internalize patriarchy and normalize injustice. As with the masculine society, most of the women around her digest the knowledge about themselves as entities with less well developed superego, who "show less justice than men... less ready to submit to the greater exigencies of life...more often influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility" (Jacobs 59) . Kaikeyi, in the epic,

too is subjected to these kinds of prejudiced, oversimplified patriarchal readings. She is often criticised for her adamant ways especially towards Kausalya and Sumitra, the other wives of her husband. Considering the fact that respect is a rare honour to be given to those who deserve it, Kaikeyi rejects the charges against her that she is less respectful towards the other wives of Dasharathan in the novel. She reflects on the unreasonable ill treatment that she receives from them. Her unique rationalisation which stands ahead of the times, when women are subjugated to ill treatment and sexually exploited leaving them as embittered individuals whose destiny was not under their control, makes her a significant human being among the insignificant women in the novel. Also the narrative is developed as a critique of the sexist institution called polygamy. The novelist attempts to state that polygamy is the reason for the conflicts inside the place of Ayodhya leading to serious atrocities.

The prominent offence committed by Dasharathan against Kaikeyi is hiding his issue of infertility from her which left her too as childless when she has the potential to conceive. There are three major reasons for Dasharathan's infertility. He receives a curse from the blind parents of Sravanankumaran, whom he unwittingly kills during hunting. The old, destitute couple who lost their support with the death of the son commit suicide by jumping into the funeral pyre of the son. The second curse he receives is the one from Sage Tarakshan and Gomatha whom he ignored while visiting Indra. The third and the most important reason is that his infertility is a conscious choice that he implements with the support of the court physician. The court physician, upon the order of the king, prepares a medicine that would make the sperms in semen immotile while increasing the volume of semen. This is a part of

the plan of Dasharathan to indulge in erotic relationships with as many women as possible without having the threat of pregnancy and the resultant loss of respectability. Again the medicines that the physician prepares meant to provide sustained pleasure to Dasharathan, in due course, make him impotent (Prakash 93). During the time of pregnancy too, he put Kaikeyi in trouble by making her forcefully succumb to his desires.

Allessandra Lopez y Royo in “Images of Women in the Prambanan Ramayana Reliefs” remarked:

It is significant that Kekayi [Kaikeyi] should be compared to Durga, particularly in view of the known Saivaite allegiance of the *Kakawin*. But here there is a further nuance of meaning. In ancient Java Durga was seen as beautiful, powerful and warrior-like...But Durga was also perceived as terrifying and frightening to behold, a demonic Bhairavi whose power was geared to destruction. Indeed Kekayi's actions will lead to the death of Dasharatha, hence the comparison is suggestive of uncontrolled power. (Bose 48)

Looking at Kaikeyi, portrayed in the novel, from this perspective, it can be seen that the comparison made is a valid comparison in the context offered by the text. If a woman with the capacity to exercise her vision to develop a sense of surroundings and the context is a feminist, the character Kaikeyi has the traits of a feminist though sometimes she is liberal and at other times she is radical in her stance in the novel. She is groomed in a tradition where daughters are considered as the virtue of the family. Though she is the princess of a comparatively small kingdom, she holds a

respectable position in Kekaya by virtue of her birth and lineage. The tradition and culture of Kekaya cultivates in her a strong sense of virtue, vice and morale. The unconventional nature of her wedding, and the undue importance that Dasharathan has given to the bodily pleasures leaves Kaaikyei in the midst of a lot of ambiguities. The recognition that her charming physique is the source of admiration for Dasharathan compels her to restrict herself to a charming body that provides maximum return to the king who invests admiration in her. This, in due course, makes her insecure during the periods when Dasharathan's visits have prolonged intervals. Sometimes, this dilemma makes her doubt her own worth and she is thoroughly devastated due to anger and frustration.

Manthara, the faithful servant, is the subject of the pranks of Kaikeyi in depression. The incidents of infidelity of Dasharathan, his over indulgence in sex, his dishonest demeanor, the history of his rejections of wives on losing interest in them, his hypocrisy at the time of ¹⁷*Putrakameshti* ritual, his biases, prejudices and arrogance produce constant headaches to Kaikeyi who selflessly adores her husband. In addition to these, the ill treatment that she receives from the other wives of Dasharatha and ridicule and spitefulness of the servants in the palace result in creating an adamant woman out of the peaceful and gracious Kaikeyi. The atmosphere of uncertainty that Dasharathan's inconsistent behaviour brings to Kaikeyi's life makes her cautious about the future as she starts expecting betrayal from the very old man for whom she devotes her youth and life.

¹⁷ A ritual conducted for bearing children.

Dasharathan, as he is too self-indulgent, does not pay attention to the transformations of Kaikeyi as his focus is only on her body and not on her mental state. This persuades Kaikeyi to think about her as a sacrificial animal when, at the time of *Aswamedham*, she comes across the violence done against the horse that dedicates itself to visiting lands to spread the glory of the king Dasharathan: “I could understand now. Kaikeyi is nothing more than a *Yagaswam*, a sacrificial animal. She is significant only until she becomes weary. Her life ends with that. In order to get salvation she has to embrace death in a similar way the horse, which is used for the ritual, has embraced it”¹⁸ (97).

The questions that problematize the Ramayana include the ones related to the text’s stance on its women. By contextualising the masculine discourse of the story and focusing on the life of Dasharathan, the scion of the dynasty of Ikshvaku, one can identify the innumerable traces of injustice towards women. The culture of the times is the one which is essentially pro-patriarchal that legitimises polygamy. Kausalya, the first wife of Dasharathan has every right to be the principal wife of the king. When the king offers that position to Kaikeyi, his third wife, being mesmerised by her charm, he is deceiving both the wives as he is aware of the fact that the rightful claim for the principal wife will be that of Kausalya, not of Kaikeyi as per tradition. The story revealed the identity of Shanta the adopted daughter of King Lomapadan, who is the bosom friend of king Dasharathan. Though Shanta is the daughter of Dasharathan and Kausalya, they allow Lomapadan to be the surrogate father of their child. This act of sympathy towards the childless couple cannot be

¹⁸ Translation from Malayalam to English is done by me

conceived as an innocent activity. Instead, it could be treated as an act of discrimination done against a female child. By ignoring the rights and wishes of a female child to live with the parents, Dasharathan has committed a crime against Shanta. The overconfidence of Dasharathan in his fertility capacities may be yet another reason for this betrayal done against his own daughter. Kasulaya seems to be a puppet wife who might be threatened by the loss of her status as the wife of Dasharathan. Again, it seems that she is not consulted when the husband enters into remarriage. This might be a part of the patriarchal technique to make the women remain as insignificant yet privileged in the palace.

The character, Shanta is another silent sufferer in the novel. In addition to being abandoned by her parents, she is wrongly treated by the surrogate father. Lomapadan, the surrogate father, sacrifices her to bring prosperity to the country. Without checking her consent, he married her off to Rishyasrangan, a sage whose arrival to the kingdom will bring prosperity. Kaikeyi is worried about the plight of Shanta, who is Dasharathan's daughter, because Rishyasrangan is a sage with a physical deformity; he has horns on the head as his birthmark. Kaikeyi believes that the misfortunes of Ayodhya are the aftermath of the curse of Santha.

Sumitra, the wife of Dasharathan, is another object of ill-treatment, who holds grudge against Kaikeyi even though Kaikeyi is magnanimous enough to understand the particular mental state of Sumitra. Sumitra too is an object of the use and throw treatment of Dasharathan and she is depressed because of that reason. She is loved by her husband until Dasharathan marries Kaikeyi. This unleashes rivalry between Sumitra and Kaikeyi. Though the character of Sumitra is not well

developed in the novel, one can understand from her encounter with life, the way how women's growth is denied by the culture and society leaving them as shadows of men who fail to treat women as worthy. Ultimately, the social context makes the women believe that their self-esteem is the product of the approval and recognition received from their husbands. This, eventually, leaves those who are married to hypocrites like Dasharathan in a traumatic state where the self-esteem is often compromised due the fleeting affection of the partner. Thus Sumitra's diffidence is partly the contribution of the social perspectives that she assimilated, and is partly associated with the inconsistent behaviour Dasharathan.

Manthara, the character with a hunchback, the alter ego of Kaikeyi, is also portrayed in the work in an unconventional way. While the Ramayana portrays Manthara as an ugly woman with an equally vicious consciousness, T.N. Prakash's novel projects the strong identity of Manthara who has got an exceptionally beautiful visage. Manthara serves the purpose of a mother to Kaikeyi, consoles her in times of trial and provides intelligent suggestions when others attempt to harm her. Probably for Kaikeyi, Manthara turns out to be a trustworthy companion and the solidarity between them is permanent. Manthara is often subjected to physical attacks and verbal abuse simply because of her distorted figure. Manthara is instrumental in revealing the shallowness of human understanding of individuals who judge people superficially on the basis of physical attractiveness. This human folly is exploited in the ancient text that effortlessly constructs a wicked woman out of Manthara. Kaikeyi, in the work, confesses that Manthara is more intelligent than her (147). The writer remarks through Kaikeyi that the treatment that Manthara

receives in Ayodhya is unreasonable as her presence does not bring any ill fortune to Kekayam where she was born and brought up. Kaikeyi rightly recognizes that the normal in Ayodhya is quite abnormal when Manthara is conceived by the majority as an ill omen, as she is born with a physical deformity.

In Sarah Joseph's "Karutta Tulakal", a short story in which the incidents in the Ramayana are looked at from the perspective of Manthara, she is seen as recognizing that Ayodhya is a land of treacheries in which Kaikeyi is a part. But T.N. Prakash takes extreme care when Manthara articulates the intensity of Ayodhya's treachery towards Kaikeyi. Manthara's argument is based on the solid fact of the breach of the word given by the king at the time of wedding to which she herself is a witness. In the novel, Manthara's arguments are so substantial as to convince Kaikeyi about the king's betrayal. The king sends Bharathan to Kekaya to commemorate the coronation of Raman, against his own word given to Kaikeyi. It is the same Manthara who proposes solutions to Kaikeyi's wretched state by reminding her of the boons that Dasharathan offered at the time of war with Sambarasuran. While this is interpreted as a vicious act of the character in the mainstream texts, T.N. Prakash takes it as a timely advice. Manthara's advice is also placed in the context of the inevitable fate from which an escape is impossible. Perhaps, this is a part of acquitting Manthara of the suspicion created by the mainstream representations of her character. Manthara is presented throughout the novel as a virtuous companion of Kaikeyi. Her depiction and her timely intervention into the issue of king's treachery can be read as reflecting her nature.

The purpose of literature is not only to reveal the truth through narratives. Its function includes revising the content produced in the earlier literary renditions to identify the silent and hidden territories, the voices of which may reveal an altogether different tale than the one told for centuries. The writer's mission, in addition to producing creative literature, is to explore the contours of existing literature, to identify omissions and rhetoric to record an alternative dimension of the popular stories. This act, that may be the demand of the times, is discerned as the one marking the voice of resistance rather than an innocent work of creating an imaginary tale of virtue of the hitherto insignificant character, or the marginalised character tagged as an epitome of vice. The act of detailing the incidents will be appropriate on some occasions to provide clarity and hence provide justifications to the actions of certain characters like Kaikeyi or Manthara.

In the novel, T.N. Prakash utilises four techniques as a part of his narration to tell the unheard story of the misery of Kaikeyi. The first among them is giving centrality to the character of Kaikeyi and giving voice to her by adopting first person narrative format thereby making the reader feel that this could be the autobiography of the fictional character Kaikeyi. Secondly, the technique of stream of consciousness has supported the narration of Kaikeyi as it reveals not only the objective content through the portrayal of events, but the subjective content of Kaikeyi's feminist consciousness. Kaikeyi, in the novel, is assertive and she raises arguments against injustice. The third technique is situating the seemingly peaceful and neutral Dasharathan in a different light, as a womaniser and a patriarch with fraudulent ways. The fourth technique is the technique of elaboration where the

writer allows the character to explain as a narrator so as to provide clarity to the incidents.

Narrating the story, written centuries ago, realistically with an added colour of the twenty first century viewpoint is an adventurous act. Demolishing the canonical dimension of the story is equally challenging because the cultural content of the novel is a religious content too. The reader may search for a truth which is more convincing than what is already stored in the consciousness through the myth circulating in the society. T.N. Prakash successfully responds to the doubts of the critical reader who asks questions about the truth. The questions that he attempts to answer include the following. Why does a particular character respond to the generally accepted idea of conducting the coronation of the first born son of Dasharathan who is the son of the principal wife of the king too? Isn't jealousy an oversimplifying reason for such a query? What makes the king surrender his discretionary powers to the ambitions of Kaikeyi even when he curses her for the mission that she undertakes? What is it that Raman safeguards when he decides to follow the father's words, when he has the support and strength to overthrow the power and be the king? What is Kaikeyi's unusual talent to control the decisions of the king? What makes Kaikeyi compromise husband's intimacy and his life for uplifting the son to the throne? If one finds greed as the answer to the final question, is it good enough to contain the complexities of human mind and existence?

The writer has taken extreme care to narrate the events in consistency with the popular content while unravelling the vision through a logical narration. What he has done is to make the story free from the blind worship of and dependence on the

popular version. The accusations raised against Kaikeyi are to be reasoned as mere allegations constructed for the protection of hegemonic power and masculine pleasures. The writer, in his preface states that in his journey towards the tale of Kaikeyi, he read the works ranging from Camille Bulcke's *Rāmakatha* to *Mali Rāmāyaṇam* and recognizes that the route that he had to take is not the one from Valmiki to Ezhuthachan; instead the right direction for a Ramayana enthusiast is the one from Valmiki to Vedas. This path, according to the writer, will enlighten the exploration of the diverse versions of the Ramayana and would give a consistent answer to why Kaikeyi's character must be studied (Parakash 7). The writer identifies, by reading many Ramayanas, that the purpose of the character of Kaikeyi is completed with Raman's journey to the forest. T.N. Prakash ends the life of his character, Kaikeyi immediately after this incident. T.N. Prakash's Kaikeyi, the wife of Dasharathan, is created around the perfect framework of the traditional feminine woman, who believes that the heaven lies in gaining the love of husband. The story portrays the way she develops an independent feminist consciousness. The writer establishes two identities of Kaikeyi which are contradictory and mutually repellent. Though the dominant one projected is that of a mundane practical self of a woman who depends heavily on the husband's affection and care and believes that "authentic documents on wellbeing teaches that a good wife should act as a prostitute in bed with husband", the second self of Kaikeyi interrogates this stance by thinking about the worth of a learned woman in the court of Ayodhya (Prakash 75).

She, in her thoughts, even compares Kekayam and Ayodhya based on their attitude towards women education. Doubting the perception of Dasharathan who might have subscribed to the general notion of the inhabitants of Ayodhya about women that they need a heart to love, a body to gratify lust and desire, a mind to yield before man and to enjoy, Kaikeyi asks questions to make him convinced that she is a learned woman. She often worries about the way the vision of the father who thought that the education given to his daughter would not only change her destiny but that of the entire women community is compromised because of the patriarchal nature of the society. This is a vital observation that the writer makes in the novel that justifies Kaikeyi's actions: a learned woman cannot be marginalised; her learning will keep her away from the submissive nature that people would often misinterpret as arrogance; a learned woman would ask questions and would not surrender until her questions are convincingly answered; she would support the partner in times of trial and would elicit respect through actions; her education would make her capable of asserting her identity and asking for fair treatment; once she realises that her individuality is not recognized irrespective of her actions, she would be disturbed and would be assertive; even if people interpret assertiveness as arrogance, greed and vengeance she is determined to achieve her goal to safeguard her respectability. As a daughter, wife and mother Kaikeyi's selfless love and magnanimity are revealed through the novel. This elaboration, in addition to giving clarity, provides a better view into the story of Dasharatha, his wives and children and hence can be considered as a literary endeavour that has a significant contribution to the multiplicity of the Ramayana.

Ūrukāval, a mythopoeic creation, depicting the destiny of Angadan, the son of Vali and Tara addresses the issues of treachery and marginalisation. Sarah Joseph, a major Malayalam writer has trodden her own unique path in the literary journey by establishing herself as a feminist. Occupying the forefront of feminist struggles across Kerala, Sarah Joseph's imprints in the trajectories of feminist movements have yielded remarkable results in India. Touching upon the intricacies of intersectionality, she has broadened her world asserting her alliance with the subaltern, traversing beyond gender, addressing issues such as class, environment and caste. In the seminal work titled *Ūrukāval*, the insecurities of the helpless Angadan, the son of Vali, who is worried about the deterioration of the land of Kishkindam, a dystopia is addressed in detail. Kishkindam is the country that faces a dilemma with the death of the king, Vali. Along with many of the subjects of the country, Angadan considers this shift as equivalent to the death of the country. Benedict Anderson's comment on nations is pertinent to look at the way how Sara Joseph approaches the decline of Kishkindam. Anderson writes:

Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural. Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography cannot be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time' (Anderson 205).

As commented by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, Sarah Joseph portrays the biography of the land "up time" and leads the narrative from the present

to the past connecting it with Vali's wars and rule contrasting it with Sugrivan's anti-national reforms under the pretext of nationalism.

Angadan, the central figure of the novel, is not simply the voice of the defeated ethnic community of Vanara; he is the spokesperson of Kishkindam, the society, which is transformed as a "constellation of delirium" (Bhabha 43). Everyone in the country is confused whether to embrace the new order that Sugrivan establishes in Kishkindam. So, they became easily susceptible to threats and manipulations of the new ruler. Being the consciousness of a nation, he invites sympathies for the dilapidated condition of Kishkindam in the post-Vali era. *Ūrukāval* (Vigil) symbolises the relics of the decadent nation as well as the inadequacies of the rule of Sugrivan leaving Kishkindam in a quandary. The dominant narrative mode adopted is the first person narrative in the stream of consciousness mode, where the reader is guided by the words and reflections of Angadan. In addition to this, the author too narrates the development of the story, but with empathy towards Angadan.

There are certain peculiarities that one can observe in this method of articulation, among which the prominent is the fluidity with which the time and space are handled. The purpose of this method is to reveal the universal condition of imperialism and subaltern existence, where the powerful subjugate powerless and the helpless majority takes the side of the strongest for survival. Invariably, the question that the writer discusses is that of the dominance and subordination of cultures, of injustice, authority, leadership and control. Angadan's story portrays the cultural trajectories of an ethnic group in general and ethnic violence in particular.

Vanara ethnic community erects a civilization on certain fundamental principles. These rules are identified as perfect for the Vanara tribe for their sustenance and survival as they do not hamper the stability of the natural environment. When Raman, the outsider, encroaches into their territory and treacherously murders Vali, their king, with the intention to do the coronation of Sugrivan, Vali's vicious younger brother, instead of bestowing the power on Angadan, the legitimate heir, Kishkindam faces an unprecedented period of uncertainty. As Frantz Fanon observes in *Black Skin and White Mask*, in addition to the interrelation of historical conditions, the human attitudes towards these conditions complicate the existence of the people under external control (Fanon 84).

The people of Kishkindam are divided into two groups: the followers of Vali who would not return, and the followers of Raman who support Sugrivan. Angada's outlook bears testimony to how the issue of justice is denied to a large group of people who remain without options when the king is killed. Vali's murder is justified by Raman by putting the charge upon him that he married the wife of brother. But in the Vanara community this is a normal practice (Joseph 21). How the question of universal justice turns invalid is what the writer elucidates through the novel by contextualising the follies of justice which are generated as per the knowledge system introduced by the victorious clan. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* Foucault observed:

...it is probably even more profoundly accompanied by the manner in which knowledge is employed in a society, the way in which it is exploited, divided and, in some ways, attributed.... I believe that this

will to knowledge, thus reliant upon institutional support and distribution tends to exercise a sort of pressure, a power of constraint upon other forms of discourse (219).

The knowledge disseminated among Vanara's makes them treat women and children as the mere instruments of pleasure. The term, discipline, is used by powerful men to reaffirm authority. Sarah Joseph reveals the cowardice of the character Sugrivan, who fails to win the heart of his wife Ruma as well as his ideal woman Tara, Vali's wife. The way how Sugrivan is humiliated due to his own hypocrisy before Ruma is quite evident in the following conversation:

“Don't you think that I am handsome?”

“Aren't I powerful?”

“Heroic?”

“Decent?”

Ruma did not respond, neither agreed, nor denied.

... ”Please help me, Ruma”...”Please tell Tara to end this waiting for Vali. He will not come back”...

“How could we assume so? I don't believe that Vali is dead”... “Vali is not weak and cowardly to be killed by an invisible demon” (Joseph 21-22).

Sugrivan is portrayed as a meek, greedy and jealous man who could not even convince his wife about his valour and purpose. Again, his blatant lust towards the inaccessible Tara leaves Ruma in a state of absolute despair that she expresses in metaphorical terms, when Sugrivan asks her about the material that she weaves, as

“the aches of the night” (Joseph 21). In Tara’s presence too he suffers from inadequacy and shame which makes him impotent before her who understands the importance of her bodily being. Tara defeated the pride of Sugrivan by pretending that she is doubtful about the power of his manliness to gratify her desire. She even rises to the level of threatening him about the consequences if he fails to quench her lustful feelings. So, in the work Tara subverts the idea of biological essentialism with her sexuality erasing the images of passive femininity. While women are sexually subordinated by patriarchal men in a male dominated society, Tara bargains using her sexuality. This indicates the feminist supremacy in Tara to control her sexuality and her body beyond masculine violence. Intimidated by the gratification of superior female desire, the inferior consciousness of Sugrivan haunts him. The work depicts categories of men connected with authority i.e., powerful men in authority represented by Vali, and powerless men in authority represented by Sugrivan. Angadan lies beyond these binaries and he resists his victim position too.

In his article titled as “The Ape People”, Antonio Gramsci mentions about the “political incarnation” of fascism through the people who act as the agents of counter revolution. Many inhabitants of Kishkindam, in the novel, prove the validity of this term by undertaking the mission of finding Sita, who is nothing more than their enemy’s wife. The only motive behind the search is the panic atmosphere created by Sugrivan who commands that they have two options, either find Sita or die. Consequently, each obedient Vanara of Kishkindam represents *Oorukaval*, a puppet, which symbolically stands for the sense of the security of Kishkindam. With muted resistance and forced obedience they search for an entity, Sita, about whom

they know nothing. So, the worship story of Vanara who undertakes the expedition of finding out Sita is strategically demolished by the writer in favour of another dimension, of the truth of Vanara, whose ideal life is the one that lived under the rule of Vali in Kishkindam, not the one of wandering under the devotion towards Raman and Sita. As one of them rightly mentions to Angadan, the only concern that they have in this exploration is “whether they will have their head on their neck” (68).

Vali, the king of Kishkindam is depicted as a valiant character in *Ūrukāval*. *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* depicts Vali as a strong Vanara king whom Raman kills using an arrow from hiding when Vali is in duelling with his brother Sugrivan. This act of Raman is against the rules of battles. As Paula Richman argues in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition* that the instance of Vali’s death, which is not justified in the exegesis, “is the initiating point of all debates about *Dharma*, authority, propriety and reign within the Ramayana tradition” (6). However, the act is defended in the scripture with two arguments. The moralistic argument raised against Vali is that Vali had an extramarital relationship with Ruma, Sugrivan’s wife. However, in *Ūrukāval* the validity of this charge sheet is invalidated by emphasising the ethnic convention as per which one cannot find fault with a Vanara having a conjugal relationship with his brother’s wife. Again, Ruma, the woman who is involved in this affair confesses in the novel that she loves and desires Vali better than Sugrivan, her legitimate husband. In the short story titled “Tara Fernandez”, N.S. Madhavan also highlights the preference of Ruma towards Vali about which a detailed analysis is made in another chapter of this thesis.

The politics behind the murder is not essentially Vali-Sugrivan friction in the name of Ruma, but the desire that Sugrivan has for Tara, the wife of Vali. Tara, as per the description, is an extremely gracious and enchanting woman with a lot of power and desire that only Vali can quench. To Sugrivan, she is a transcendental dream, to attain which he is ready to go to the extent of killing his own brother through deceptive methods. Sugrivan prefers Tara to kingdom, but Tara always worships Vali and her admiration towards Vali and her strength as a woman always defeats Sugrivan's desire to manipulate her. Another justification for Vali's slaying is that human beings have authority over all animals as they are superior and hence Raman's killing of Vali is equivalent to what a king would usually do during hunting (96). Angadan who is extremely dejected over this unjust comparison questions Maruthi (Hanuman) about the nature of their tribe: he asks whether Vanara ethnic group who have a civilization can be undermined as mere animals. Though Maruthi defends Raman by criticising the ways of the Vanara community, by giving the explanation that the behaviour and appearance of Vanaras can be reason enough to create such a feeling in Raman, none of the members in the Vanara clan agree to that. But Raman's explanation can be read in the discourse of colonialism, as it enforces the notion of inferiority on the Vanara community. Quite similar to Fanon's statement that "*it is the racist who creates his inferior*", Raman's theory of dichotomy deployed is a trap (Fanon 93). The argument that Brahma Prakash makes in his article titled, "Epic as an Ideology of the Nation Empire: Dominance, Hegemony, and the Imperialist Repertoires of the Ramayana Traditions in India" is relevant in this context:

One is not surprised to see the appropriation of Rajagopalachari's Ramayana and Gandhi's *Ramanrajya* in Hindutva politics. Arguably, Gandhi cannot be blamed for this hegemonic appropriation, however, Gandhi's legitimization and popularization of the *Ramanrajya* cannot be ignored, neither can be Rajagopalachari's readings. I argue that the epic of Raman and the Indian nationalist imperialism cannot be seen in separation. The role that Virgil's *Aeneid* plays in the foundation of the Roman Empire, the *Ramayana* has been playing the similar role in the shaping of the Indian nation and its imperial aspiration (4).

Sarah Joseph's portrayal of Raman as an imperialist can be derived out of an understanding that the Ramayana is a hegemonic text. In the novel, Maruthi, the leader is arguing for a *Ramrajya* in Kishkindam. So, Sarah Joseph's novel problematizes the politics of Indian scenario when she writes *Ūrukāval*.

There are chapter titles in the novel that state about Vali's multiple deaths. In fact, the title stating Vali's first death is about a fabricated story that Sugrivan circulates in Kishkindam to gain Tara and the country. This manipulation cannot achieve its goal when Vali escapes from the cave the opening of which is closed by Sugrivan who accompanies Vali in a fight. Sugrivan observes the final rituals of Vali to convince the wife and subjects about Vali's death even with the awareness that he is putting a verdict of life imprisonment for the undefeatable Vali. Even though Vali can escape from his trap, this incident has left a permanent imprint of trauma in the consciousness of Vali who holds his brother in absolute trust. Vali

who survives this incident turns a sceptical person who cannot even trust the loyalty of his wife or his subject. In this way, the writer addresses the undercurrents of kinship, affection and treachery.

The second death is the real death of the king. When Raman kills him with iron, the use of iron is unknown to the people belonging to the Vanara community. The writer observes this as an instance of civilised savagery where the powerful but innocent leaders of the tribes are threatened and killed by the sophisticated weapons of the civilised hunters. A narrative is also placed in the novel connecting Ravana and Vali. In a story told by the character named Mavala, it has been narrated that the agitated Ravana once visited Kishkinda to attack its king for no particular reason than sheer aggression when Vali was doing his evening rituals. Before he could attack the king Vali, on recognizing the presence of an enemy, Vali held Ravana's head under his fist and finished the ritual. On identifying and congratulating him on the swiftness of his action, Ravana wishes to have an alliance with Vali to which he agrees. This story is not well developed in the work, though certain clues are given in this direction about the association between Vali and Ravana, later in the novel. This story is told to convince Angada that Vali is strong enough to survive the threat caused by the demons. The character Khushi also depicts similar stories of Vali's courage.

In the tale told by Sama about Vali appears Vali's concern and care towards nature (Joseph 24). In her story, Vali is empathetic towards nature. He cultivates forests in Kishkinda to ensure food for his subjects. His knowledge about the association between human beings, stars and trees is quite evident when listening to

her story; she is asked to plant a particular tree named Iruppa to alleviate her anger. The eco-spiritual aspect of the complementary existence of human beings and the environment is dealt with in the work in detail. This is the continuation of the delineation on ecofeminism that Sarah Joseph incorporated in her works such as *Gift in Green*. As per the direction of Vali, Sama cultivates a forest of this tree while fighting the anger out. This story indicates the compassionate and mature temperament of Vali that makes him an exemplary leader. This characterization disclosing an unheard dimension of Vali, the Vanara king, urges the reader to revisit the text of *Ramayana* for a comparison to see how the meaning of canonical texts operate to conceal the truths.

Contrasting with Vali, the powerful, protective and compassionate ruler and the enchanting lover, the character of Sugrivan is depicted as a ruthless, callous and remorseless individual. The major instigating factors for his misdemeanour include his concern over his inadequacies and insecurities in Vali's presence and his desire to achieve Tara, Vali's wife, legitimately. In *Ūrukāval*, Sugrivan is portrayed stripped of all the privileges with which he is depicted in the other Ramayana s due to his association with Raman and Lakshmana. *Ūrukāval* puts Sugrivan as the one guilty of the decline of Kishkindam, who becomes instrumental in the fall of a stable civilization of Kishkindam that reaches the zenith of happiness under Vali's righteous rule. Though downright offensive and irresponsible in his ways, Sugrivan has the privilege of strong supporters like Maruthi, the harbinger of unique and modern thoughts into Kishkindam who inspires the young Vanaras, and the companionship of Raman and Lakshmana, the scions of Ishwaku of Ayodhya. These

affiliations politically support him to conduct his coronation without much resistance from the subjects. The major tool that Sugrivan utilised to control the subjects is creating havoc and generating phobia. The lack of diplomacy from his part made the subjects unwilling contributors to the mission of the monstrous autocrat. During his lifetime, Vali identified the wickedness of his brother that made him absolutely desperate.

After the death of Vali, Sugrivan marks Angadan as his supreme rival, since Angadan's presence "reminded him of the temporary status of his crown" (Joseph 37). The strategy he adopts to expel Angadan is declaring him as the prince of the kingdom and putting him in charge of the southern region in the task of his search for Sita. The rationale of this action is questioned by Taran, the minister of Vali, and the grandfather of Angadan. Sugrivan's annexation of the kingdom is legalised by convincing the subjects that Angadan is too young to be a responsible ruler. Taking that into account, entrusting the responsible task of the search is found biased. The criticism against the unethical resolutions of Sugrivan cannot shake his decision to proceed with Sita's search, with Angadan as the person in charge. Tara, though cannot tolerate Sugrivan's ambitions over her beauty, succumbs to his wishes with the hope of saving Angadan from untimely death. The responses that Sugrivan has given to Tara are not trustworthy enough to convince her that the life of Angadan will be secure in the country ruled by a vicious Sugrivan.

The events following the murder of Vali reveals the anarchical nature of Sugrivan who indulges in intoxication induced by drinks and sex and conveniently forgets the agreement made between him and Raman. It is only when Lakshmana

returns with a revised deadline that he recognizes the danger of his treaty. Rather than acting sensibly, he traps all the male members of the country in his treaty, which is not essentially Kishkindam's agreement with Raman and Lakshmana. His actions neither save him from the insecurities that he has nor create a better human being or ruler out of him. Instead, they bring excruciating experience to the people of Kishkindam whose hatred towards this omnipotent, adamant but brainless ruler leaves them in distressing moments of defenselessness. Sugrivan make the life of the starving people of Muchili which is already miserable more catastrophic by forcefully taking the male folk to join the Sita searching mission. As a ruler and as a man, he fails to impress the people of Kishkindam from whom he seeks obedience by inflicting fear. His wives, both Ruma and Tara find him as unworthy and disagree to offer love and respect which make an aggrieved but desperate individual out of him. At the height of his disappointment, he stoops to the level of raping a servant girl in the presence of his wives which again shows his vicious nature. Tara, Vali's wife often degrades him by highlighting his inferiority as a man compared to Vali and reminds him secretly that his life after Lakshmana's arrival is the one granted due to her mercy.

Sugrivan's inconsistency, impulsive behaviour and thoughtless nature are visible in his reaction when he witnesses Vali's murder. At the sight of Vali's death due to the arrow of Raman, he suddenly feels guilty and insecurity creeps into his veins that make him suddenly feel orphaned. This is an instance that reveals the inner conflict from which Sugrivan cannot escape. Consequently he becomes a traitor of the tribe. It is his unbeatable urge for women and power that he enters into

a conspiracy to kill Vali by using unethical measures. In the text, the writer is giving a clue regarding why Raman seeks the support of Sugrivan when the courageous Vali is ruling Kishkindam. The writer's theory reaffirms the unethical nature of the murder of Vali committed by Raman. The popular texts based on the Ramayana found two propositions as the reasons behind Raman's action: Sugrivan convinces him about the murder as inevitable to use the Vanara army for searching Sita and fighting against Ravana and in order to gain the trust of Sugrivan who promised to help Raman to give force to fight against Ravana. Contrary to this, Sarah Joseph introduces the inevitability of Raman – Ravana feud, which will lead the parties to war in which Raman wins and Ravana loses. Vali's presence in the battle might make Raman insignificant and the victory over Ravana would be heard as Vali's victory over Ravana. In a later occasion in the novel, by reading Raman's comments about why he takes part in the war and regains Sita, the current reading would gain its clarity. Raman tells Sita about the choices she can make, she can either marry Lakshmana or Vibhishana rather than live with him. He expresses his doubt about the chastity of Sita whom Ravana abducts and imprisons. He makes it crystal clear in his declaration that it is not because of his affection or his desire to regain Sita that he conducts war, but to regain his glory that he loses when Ravana abducts his wife. So by connecting these links provided by Sarah Joseph, it is recognized that Vali's presence is a threat to Raman's glory and that is a substantial reason for Raman's murder of Vali. In fact, in Sarah Joseph's perspective, it is Raman who exploits Sugrivan's insecurity and greed to implement his plan of killing Vali.

Ūrukāval depicts Maruthi as the most individualistic among the characters, who with his skill of oratory manipulates the vision of the youth who strongly believes in the culture and conventions of the ethnic group. The writer intends to comment on the conflicts between different ideologies by placing Maruthi in a wider canvas. Maruthi represents the category of people who believe in transformation of the society thinking it as progress. Though he is intelligent enough to understand the consequences of his alliance with Raman, to him Raman is an icon of power and knowledge. Though he is directly involved in Sugrivan's plan to kill Vali, people of Kishkindam believe that he has a superior role in the conspiracy of killing Vali. The quality of intelligence and the skill of rhetoric makes him exceptional compared to Jambavan, Dividhan or Mainthan, the other ministers of Vali. Again, Maruthi is popularly recognized as a person of revolutionary ideas about justice and governance which would considerably differ from the existing order of Kishkindam.

Vali considers his belief in human Gods as against the existing one in ancient monkey God as blasphemy and attempts to discourage him from that. As a ruler, Vali is brilliant enough to identify the potential of Maruthi's perspectives to create fissures in the solid structure of the ethnic group and is against the introduction of these alternate beliefs in Kishkindam. Amidst this resistance posed by Vali, Maruthi is quite successful in gaining the attention of the young and educated people of Kishkindam who gradually follow Maruthi's customs and reject the conventions of the tribe. He systematically destroys Vanara beliefs by replacing beliefs with rational thinking. He urges the followers to overcome the restrictions of orthodox beliefs by exploring truth. Maruthi's teachings are effective in eradicating the

Vanara youths' trust in the community's truths and they begin exploring new types of knowledge than the learning of magic. Maruthi's vital contribution to the creation of Anti-Vali atmosphere in Kishkindam after Vali's murder is this. In one of his discussions with people, a layman asks him about the rationale for Raman's killing Vali. Undoubtedly, Maruthi remarks that "sometimes it would be inevitable to destroy old truths in favour of new" (Joseph 42). In order to further clarify the doubts of the ordinary people regarding the truth of this statement, Maruthi explains: "Vali is an outdated truth. Outdated truths are what you call the vices. Raman did nothing more than destroying the vice" (Joseph 42).

Maruthi symbolises a category of victims who by internalising a sense of inferiority starts worshipping the coloniser. Being a representative of such victims, he cannot find fault with the actions of Raman who symbolises the coloniser. Instead of blaming the oppressor, he accepts oppression as inevitability of the situation and considers oppression as a means of civilising the savage race of Kishkindam. Through a final act of treachery, he keeps Angadan away from Kishkindam under the pretext of his security and safeguards the throne of Sugrivan and thus fulfils the wish of Raman. Not only his speech, but his silence too is deceptive. During the times of Sugrivan's reign, when the entire Kishkindam suffers, Maruthi is ruminating about how to regain Sita than protecting the people of the country against the malicious ruler. Sarah Joseph's Maruthi, shown in this light, is far distant from the portrayal of a consistent, prudent and devout elderly Hanuman in the Ramayana who acted as the pride of Vanara tribe. The term, traitor, is more fitting to Maruthi than to Sugrivan considering the actions of Maruthi that systematically destroyed the

ethnic wisdom along with the ruler leaving the kingdom in intellectual and literal anarchy with no concrete philosophy to hold on, or no unyielding presence or leader to rely upon.

It was Maruthi who first declared that Kishkindam is under the control of Sugrivan. His act is a hasty move sprung from the apprehension that either Tara or Angadan would make the legitimate claim for Kishkindam that the subjects would agree. Obviously, looking at Maruthi's behaviour from the perspective of Angadan, his hypocrisy and bias will be exposed. Taking the sides with the exploiter and imperialists Maruthi is spreading an unethical and corrupt philosophy for the people of Kishkindam to digest. Maruthi is not bothered about the dishonest nature of his plans. Though he once stood against obedience and glorified the philosophies of virtue and truth, later he urged the people to obey. It seems that Maruthi cannot recognize the virtue of his community and he alienates himself from his tribe. He is an eternal victim who internalized his inferiority compared to the imperialist princes of Ayodhya and he acts as a mere puppet.

Sarah Joseph selects the name Maruthi from the multiple names of Hanuman as this name suggests his association with nature. The name Maruthi implies the birth of him as the son of Wind and Anjana. Also, it seems that she wants to keep this character away from divine associations. In fact, the name, Hanuman, indicates the story of Indra's attack on his jaw (*Hanu*) to stop him from moving close to the sun, the resultant strike of his father the Vayudeva and the divine blessings the child gains from Gods to quench the anger of the father.

In “White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and Boundaries of Sisterhood” Hazel Carby remarked on the way how colonialism interferes with the indigenous lifestyle imposing its own models. The kinship patterns existing in indigenous communities before the arrival of invaders provide more power and autonomy to the women. The cultural endorsement on the customs and structure of indigenous life leave the community bankrupt of the equitable ideas of gender, normalising chauvinistic models (Carby 224). So, each subject of colonialism, in one way or the other, struggles to survive in the new order established by it. Sarah Joseph in *Ūrukāval* renders Tara as the matriarch of the Vanara community making her fight against the stereotypes that Raman and his group brought to establish in Kishkindam. Belonging to the ideal category of Panchkanya, Tara is an iconic heroine of the Ramayana venerated to ideal status. Sarah Joseph projects Tara as an authoritative and sensuous woman, and as a distressed mother whose son’s destiny is in trouble. The novel begins with the motherly figure of Tara who tells stories to her children. Also she is making pots using mud. So, the writer’s intention is to make Tara as a woman who lives in a seemingly socialistic land where the queen of the land too must do some work with others. In “Postfeminist Mythopoeia: Oppositional Consciousness at Work in Sarah Joseph’s *Oorukaval*” Shanthi Vijayan identifies that the concept of womanism unfurling through the female utopia, the large world of motherhood which took shape in the solidarity of Tara, Ruma, Kushi, Sama and many Koottammas (446). As against the patriarchal oppression of Sugrivan, they through their rituals attempted to produce a shield of womb to safeguard Angadan. By using their motherly affection and feminist

consciousness, they create a powerful oppositional consciousness against the consciousness generated by Sugrivan and Maruthi.

Tara is an immaculate mother who has unfathomable affection towards her son, Angadan. As she worries about the safety of Angadan in the hands of the wicked Sugrivan, she even moves to the extent of practising the ritual of bringing the son back to the safety of the womb. She cannot trust on the growth or power of Angadan to secure himself and she could very well envisage that the most insecure individual in Kishkindam after the death of Vali is none other than Angadan. Sarah Joseph characterises Tara as a devastated mother who is separated from her son, who finds solace in drinking and nostalgic objects like the toy cart that she and Ruma made for him when he was a child. She serves herself as a shield against Sugrivan's attack on her son. As in the way women are generally considered in patriarchal cultures, Tara too is considered as an enchanting sexual object. Also gaining the love of her is conceived by the male as the supreme victory. There are only one or two instances when Tara's intelligence is revealed. However, in most of the events, Tara uses her body and beauty as a weapon to her advantage.

Tara is the wife of the Vanara king Vali, who during his disappearance and after his death is compelled to occupy the status of the wife of Sugrivan, Vali's brother. Tara's loyalty towards Vali is unquestionable, though the writer states that Vali is suspicious about her intentions after his return from disappearance. Vali considers Tara as a woman with divided loyalties as she has sympathies towards Sugrivan who is exiled from their kingdom on Vali's return. Being an intelligent and learned woman, Tara can foresee the misfortune of Vali and attempts to discourage

him to have duel with Sugrivan whose allies are said to have entered Kishkindam with weapons made of iron. On Vali's death, she makes a desperate attempt to safeguard the young Angadan from Sugrivan's treacherous clasp by allowing Sugrivan to be the king of Kishkindam. Her unflinching fidelity towards Vali can be observed in the manner in which she keeps Sugrivan away from receiving her passion and affection. Pradeep Bhattacharya in "Five Holy Virgins, Five Sacred Myths: A Quest for Meaning" remarks that in "Krittibas' Bengali *Ramayana* , Tara curses Raman to be slain by Vali in a future birth. This is confirmed in the *Mahānātaka* and the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* where the hunter who causes Krishna's death is Vali reborn. In several vernacular versions of the epic, Tara also curses Raman that he will not be able to enjoy the company of Sita for long" (Bhattacharya). The feminist stance she upholds challenges her limitation as a defenceless woman. Revengeful enough, she fills Sugrivan with the feeling of being used. She makes Sugrivan feel that his masculinity is used by Tara to satisfy her sexual desire. Still, Tara's intentions are obscure sometimes. When she gets an opportunity to kill Sugrivan by instigating Lakshmana, rather than watching him die, she pacifies Lakshmana and humiliates Sugrivan by secretly telling him that his life is retained through Tara's mercy.

Her superiority lies mostly in her capacity to exercise her power as a woman by making wicked men like Sugrivan inferior. However, she cannot withdraw herself from the unavoidable plight of remaining as the pleasure object of the king whoever it would be, if he demanded it. Due to this peculiar plight, Tara, though she possesses the privilege of being the queen of Kishkindam throughout, her status as a

thinking woman prevents her from enjoying that, and leaves her in a state of guilt and helplessness. Ultimately, the character, Tara, portrayed by Sarah Joseph is that of a totally devastated woman whose stability gives way to vulnerability in the novel. At the same time, Tara is a powerful metaphor for Kishkindam that the writer employs to unravel the misery of Kishkindam and the misfortunes of the inhabitants of the country.

I do not understand the real pain inside. I heard the story of Raman thousand times. Raman is an ideal son. Abandoning power and the country, he lives in this forest to preserve the prestige of his father. Not for one or two years, but bearing the uncertainty of forest dwelling for long fourteen years- that is his selfless contribution as a son for his father.

What about me? What did I do for my father? Wandering in the forest to find the wife of Raman, who deceitfully killed my father? Both could be termed as forest dwelling. But how could my act be called as virtuous? How could I be an ideal son, who enjoys the royal powers of a prince attained on Raman's mercy? Now I am wandering among in the forests and on the mountains to maintain the alliance and the word of the enemy of my Father. (Joseph 123).

Angadan, the most insecure character of Kishkindam after Vali's death, carries the complexity of an individual who has no option other than obedience and surrender before the assassins of his father. He is the legitimate heir of the kingdom after Vali's death which is denied to him under the pretext that he is too young to rule a

country. Raman, in order to exonerate himself from the guilt of killing Vali for nothing, does the coronation of Angadan as the prince of Kishkindam, the king of which is Sugrivan. Trained in the tradition of Vali's rule, Angadan worships the rules and the conventions that Vali has set. His hatred towards Sugrivan is not simply because he killed Vali, but because he destroys the tradition that Vali set in Kishkindam for the welfare of the kingdom.

None of his actions or dialogues carries, not in remote terms, a design to kill Sugrivan and become the king of Kishkindam. Sugrivan and his vicious ministers consider him as a threat to the peaceful rule of Kishkindam. Instead, Angadan himself feels as responsible, along with Tara, for the word that Kishkindam has given to Raman and holds a grudge towards Sugrivan for offering the word to Raman to find Sita. His trauma and anxiety are the products of his inadequacy to alter the situations to establish Vali's kingdom in Kishkindam again. Sometimes, one may wonder whether the Claudius- Hamlet dynamic is working between Sugrivan and Angadan. However, Angadan being more a reflective personality than a man of action, he cannot identify a plan to execute his vision. Again, he is often challenged, diverted and threatened by the strange logic offered by the elderly Vanara, Maruthi. Sarah Joseph adopts the perspective of Angadan to tell her story as he bears testimony to the pain that the entire Kishkindam suffers. Crushed between affection towards family and loyalty to be offered to the country at the time of trial, the people of Kishkindam lose life, vigour and desire to live.

Angadan remains in the novel as a metaphor for the fear, insecurity and uncertainty that each citizen of Kishkindam carries. The authorities' use of the

weapon of nationalism and patriotism make the subjects act according to the priorities of the country where the individual miserably fails to exercise his vision or choice. From the umpteen numbers of identities, they are forcefully reduced to the identity as a citizen of the country who obeys Sugrivan and takes part in the mission of search for Sita. They are caught between two types of death: death that destiny brings and the death by Sugrivan who orders them to find Sita and return, or come back without her and die. Angadan is an ethical character in the novel. He often resists and acts as a voice of dissent when Maruthi exhorts the group in the expedition about the sense of justice of Sugrivan. Angada is a straight forward man whose decisions are the unique paths led by his wisdom. Though a teenager, he even surprises Maruthi with his strong commitment to the goal and integrity towards the country.

His obedience appears to be diplomatic. Guided by Taran, his grandfather, he courageously rushes into the troubles and escapes because of his strength and power proving his resemblance to Vali, his father, which gains him followers. What is peculiar about Angadan is that he would not defeat opponents such as Maruthi through words. Instead, his silence is strong enough to articulate his conviction in what he is thinking and doing. His courage and his ability to take risks and win make us think why he is not exercising this to regain the kingdom from the meek and cowardly ruler of Kishkindam. Probably he is confused as to whether he is revengeful towards Sugrivan or sad as Vali was, because Sugrivan is a blood relation who should not have instigated Raman to kill his brother. Again, it seems that he himself has accepted the fact that he is too young to rule the country. He does not have a single conversation with Tara to recognize her thoughts about Sugrivan.

Perhaps, along with Vali, Angada too might be suspicious about her peculiar stand. Sometimes, Angada might have thought about Tara too as ambivalent as Vali thought about her. Angada's affection towards mother might be the reason that prevents him from acting against Sugrivan too.

Angadan as different from Maruthi does not accept the divinity or superiority of Raman and he never shows psychological dependence on Raman. When the writer describes alienation he practised, one can note that he is vengeful towards Raman. He is the insightful individual in Kishkindam who identifies the imperial mission of Raman. Angadan does not show devotion towards the princes of Ayodhya and feels it as humiliating to carry them on his shoulders when he was supposed to do so during the war. Being the devotee of ancient Vanara, he could neither accommodate the new human worship nor the worship of Gods whom the human beings revere. It is not his abstinence from Kishkindam as a ruler that worries Angadan, but the destruction that the unnecessary war in which Kishkindam indulges in brings to the environment and wellbeing of the country.

The most significant characteristic of Angadan is his realistic understanding of himself and his context. He is quite aware of his shortcomings to reject the dictates of Sugrivan even with the complete awareness of the crooked intentions behind them. Being obedient to the rules of Kishkindam, he follows the directions of its king though with guilt. The rivalry he maintains is primarily against Raman, for orphaning him and Kishkindam, and for the unjust ways through which he commits Vali's murder for a non-existing cause. He separates Kishkindam from its ruler; while hating the ruler, he loves the country. As different from what Mannoni states

in *Prospero and Caliban: the Psychology of Colonization*, Angadan made peace neither with the enemy nor with himself. He does not make an attempt to find empathy with Sugrivan on the ground of similarities that the perils and misfortunes after Vali's death leave both in a traumatic psychological condition (Mannoni 88). Still, always self-critical and occasionally diffident, he lives the confused life of a hero. It is Taran's logic that shows him the direction as to why he should play the role of Raman's messenger to Ravana: "Bear this in your mind. Irrespective of the rivalry and companionship of Ravana, we should know that what he had done against Sita was terrible injustice. It should not be forgiven, because the earth couldn't exonerate him from that. It is not for Raman, but for Sita that Kishkindam fights against Lanka" (Joseph 162).

It is observed throughout the novel how he retains his revenge against Raman to be executed at the right moment. Even though he cannot receive any reply from Ravana, on his return from Lanka, he has tactfully written the conditions that Ravana might have put with Raman entrapping all the wicked and cruel people and save the environment:

One: Exchange Lakshmana who deformed Surpanakha for Sita to Lanka as he is the sole reason for the war.

Two: Kill Sugrivan as the earth could not tolerate such a treacherous individual.

Three: Vibhishanan should be chained and taken to Lanka.

Four: The renowned 'Nalasethu' which was said to have connected the two sides of the ocean should be destroyed (Joseph 196).

His character gives insights into *Dharma* as his thoughts are worthy, significant and generally ethical. But the counterproductive indecision, and the undue respect that he shows towards Maruthi and the unwanted silence that he maintains produces doubt along with despair. The novel's establishment of Vali as a fallen hero, sees the glimpses of Vali in Angadan.

Often projected as a virtuous character in the Ramayana, Vibhishanan, Ravana's brother, is considered as the righteous son of Kaikasi and Vishravasa and a faithful admirer of Ravana, who after Ravana's death, reigns Lanka with peace and love. Vibhishana is portrayed as a guardian deity of Sinhala Buddhist pantheon in Srilankan Buddhist poetry, while a Srilankan version of the Ramayana is excluded from the Pali chronicles (Henry, 726). Tellingly, Sarah Joseph rejects this well recited theory by providing an alternative view about Vibhishanan from the perspective of Angadan. Vibhishanan first appears in *Ūrukāval* when the Vanaras go ahead with the construction of *Nalasethu*. A Rakshasa who is exiled from Lanka for suggesting that the better decision for Ravana is to return Sita and safeguard Lanka from an imminent war, he seems to be less dangerous, modest and good in his intentions. He speaks to Ravana as if he represents a majority of people of Lanka who are the victims of Ravana's cruelties. Highly hypocritical, he calls his mission of cheating his brother as a philanthropic activity for the independence of Lanka. Being an object of these kinds of verbal deception, Angadan can rightly perceive the hidden agenda behind the cowardly brother who wants to excel and rule the

kingdom by killing his brother with the support of Raman. Angadan once articulates the twin in Vibhishanan and Sugrivan who are too meek to carry out their plans to gain advantage. The novel portrays the war as the consequence of the lack of vision of Raman who follows the vested interests of Sugrivan and Vibhishanan.

In Sarah Joseph's novel, Sita marks her presence only in the final chapters. A lean, fragile and tired woman who carried the burden of confinement and scandal, she stands as an epitome of humiliation. Both Ravana and Raman have humiliated her. In comparison, the shame that Raman hurls at her is much harder than the one imposed by the abduction and confinement in Lanka. Rather than rationalising and exonerating Raman of the crime of ill-treating the wife whom he liberated by sacrificing the lives of a lot of soldiers in war, Sarah Joseph problematizes the typical standpoint that Raman takes. In order to prepare Sita for *Agnipareeksha*, a fire ordeal, after all the ordeals that she has faced in her life after marriage, he throws abuses at her by questioning her chastity and treats her as a fallen woman to whom he offers three options: live with Bharatha or Lakshmana, be the wife of Sugrivan or be the wife of Vibhishanan. The straightforward narration of Sarah Joseph explains the patriarchal nature of the popular story. In the novel she rightly articulates the reactions of empathy and sorrow of the Rakshasa women who resisted *Angnipareeksha* in the land of Lanka whose words fall into the deaf ears of the men of Vibhishanan and Sugrivan.

The interesting idea that can be noticed throughout the novel is Angadan's empathy with women whether it is Sita, Tara, Ruma, Iya, Sita, *Kootammas* (Vanara mothers) or the Rakshasa women. He seems to have recognized the worth in the

wisdom of women which the other male characters fail to capture. Probably this identification with the women lies behind his final attempt to kill Raman from which Sita drives him back. In the work, Sita too is portrayed as a mother whom the empathetic son, Angadan, wants to protect from patriarchy. The most prominent relationship in the work is indeed the mother –son relationship, where many entities including the earth act as mothers.

The novel, *Ūrukāval*, depicts Raman as a hypocrite who is sad throughout because of his excessive self-love that gives undue preference to public opinions than justice. This makes him a war monger in the novel who does not attempt the options to avoid war and establish respect peacefully. As in the case of Vali, Ravana's death is shown as a result of the cheating of his own brother who conveys all the secrets of the army to Raman thereby making his victory over Ravana an effortless one. The reason for Raman's adherence to monogamy too is not showcased as the evidence of his persistent affection towards Sita, but his careful decision made after watching the failed relationships of his father (Joseph 168). He, in the novel, is not a man of peace or stability. Instead, he is a weak man who can anticipate nothing other than defeat, who indiscriminately attacks and utilises the natural resources such as forest or ocean without considering the existence of fish or birds. The novel rejects all the qualities for which the mythical Rama has been worshipped by providing consistent explanations for his actions, which would reveal a man out of the mythical aura with all his biases, follies, hypocrisy, prejudices, insecurities and cowardice. Thus, Sarah Joseph keeps Raman out of divine light and highlights the context of patriarchy and the discourse of power that produces a God

out of a man. The God image is a cultural construct as well as a political act of the less strong who need an image to worship. The God image makes the actions of the Godly man unquestionable and urges the less divine people to digest the justifications of his followers even without proper logic. The class, gender or ethnic privilege a group enjoys relegates the other to a less privileged traumatic state. The crucial point of criticism of this novel is the marginalisation caused by the privileges of a few.

Kaikeyi and *Ūrukāval* commemorate the recounting of the facade of the Ramayana, introducing the untold aspects of the stories. Both the works emerge out of the concept that the Ramayana is not a single text derived out of the homogenous tradition, written by a single omniscient author. Obviously, the aspects of diversity inherent in the texts are taken from the literary imagination of T.N. Prakash and Sarah Joseph. Both works came out in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The publication of these texts during this period can be identified as a part of the global tendency to revisit the mythical traditions and produce innovative narratives based on the existing classics. Set in this global tradition of revisionary writing that rekindles an interest in the altered narratives on the known stories, the works emerge as the novels on the epic. However, both these writers though they picked some basic premises and contexts from the ancient story, followed their ingenuous paths and told unique stories. Their stories are the products of research, reflection and rejection. Postmodern imagination that accepts diversity, the perceptions offered by Kerala renaissance and Communism, the emergence of resistance movements to support the marginalised groups such as women, Dalit and other ethnic minorities,

the new eco spiritual perspective and deep ecological consciousness and the transformation in the understanding of self, identity and existence lie behind the writing of these novels.

Both the works are built around *Dharma*, the ethical frameworks of right and wrong, and problematize the concept of *Dharma* accepted largely across the nation. One of the strategies of looking at the Ramayana is reading it a text on ethics. Both the works *Kaikeyi* and *Ūrukāval* problematize and deconstruct the reading focusing on the Ramayana as an ethical text. They unfold the ambiguities in the ethical framework of the text by analysing the justifications and silences of the epic stories. The works contain the understanding the P.Geetha shares about the Kerala consciousness in nineteen eighties in *Peṅkālangaḷ*. According to her, the people started realising that ideologies with the slogans for equality upheld hitherto were so narrow that they failed to recognize the idea of gender justice (462). Rather than focusing on individuals alone, the works look at the issue of justice from the wider canvas where the complexities associated with family, society, government, nation etc. are discussed in detail. It is thought-provoking to note that the work titled *Kaikeyi* organises the story leading to Raman's forest dwelling, as a culmination of the marital discord and treachery of the ruler whose ethics are ephemeral. Dasharatha's story appeared in the Vedas is silent about the reasons as to why Kaikeyi asked for a boon that Dasharatha cannot favour but execute. Contrary to this, T.N. Prakash shows evidence to release Kaikeyi from the allegations of jealousy and selfishness. Rightly recognizing that the method best suited for this

purpose is to make the story heard through the subjective voice of Kaikeyi, he adopts the first-person narrative mode, putting her as the narrator. Kaikeyi, in the narrative, is seen as reflecting over the actions of Dasharatha and interpreting them as indications of his inability to be trustworthy. This stream of consciousness technique employed by the writer enables the reader to consider the novel as equivalent to an autobiography of Kaikeyi. Though the inclusion of interior monologue at times upsets the chronological pattern the novel maintains, by revealing the thought process of the character, an impression is created similar to overhearing what Kaikeyi thinks. Another challenge to place the work best fit in the tradition of multiplicity is the content of the novel. If the novel simply contained the development of events, however subjective Kaikeyi is, her voice cannot find a place in it. Stream of consciousness technique is what supports the writer to overcome this hindrance. The arbitrary nature of right and wrong are kept for a detailed analysis in the novel. The conclusion derived is that Kaikeyi is more rightful than the other characters in the epic.

Ūrukāval, even though constructed its thread in the discourse of ethics, of right and wrong, questions what is considered as right and justified by the interpreters of the epic. The incident of focus was murder of Vali, the king of Vanara dynasty. Raman's motive for the murder was not revenge, as it was simply the verbal alliance that Sugrivan offered in his search for the missing wife, Sita. His justifications too are very weak: for example, Vali can be murdered by a human being because Vali is an animal. Human beings would usually kill animals in

hunting and there is no sin in it. Another shallow point he raises is that Vali had once married his brother's wife, Ruma which was a sinful act yielding punishment. This is actually attributing a different type of justice to Vanara culture having an entirely different ethical and cultural code. Both these arguments are based on the understanding of hierarchy, the supremacy of one race over another and the superiority of one culture over another. *Ūrukāval* depicts the destruction of a civilization brought out by Raman's redundant action. Also, it highlights the concerns of deep ecology by showing the visuals of deforestation justified under the pretext of war. What is called as right and instrumental in identifying Sita is narrated as a slaughter, leaving a generation in a state of anarchy. Sarah Joseph's vital argument of contempt in the text is that the epic justifies a crime against an individual, Vali and a tribe, Vanara without shame. So, she is making an exhaustive account of the aspect of ethnic violence in the novel.

Ūrukāval substantiates that the action of Raman is disgraceful and he being a man, the action yields infamy to the whole human race. Here also, the writer is building her narrative on conscious assemblages of events, by putting the narrator's perspective closer to Angadan, the most sensitive person in the story. A subaltern due to his ethnic identity, age and powerless state, he is threatened by imminent death because of the danger that he poses to the ruler. Sugrivan hates Angadan for the two significant reasons: Angadan is the scion of Kishkindam and Sugrivan is responsible for Vali's death which could be avenged by his son, Angadan. By placing different cultures side by side she draws the reader's attention to the

inhuman nature of human civilization that categorises honour as two: the significant honour of the men and the insignificant honour of women. Raman, in the novel, without inhibitions, scrupulously safeguards his honour by destroying Sita's glory under the pretext of restoring the status of his partner. The work mocks Raman's excessive indulgence in the discourse of respectability and his self-righteous ways disregarding the relationships. His adherence to the principles discrediting human sentiments is what Angadan finds as a sin deserving death sentence.

Holding a subaltern perspective, Sarah Joseph's work zooms into an ethnic community's travails after the catastrophe of the death of its leader. The writer is not simply putting her focus on the central character, but on all the marginalised characters whose life is nothing better than catastrophic. Showcasing the issues of poverty, forced labour, deception, insecurity, exploitation, death, environmental destruction, indulgence in lust etc. the writer provides an overall picture of the traumatic existence of the victimised individuals. How the new order replaces the old order even if the old one is more democratic than the new, and how the spokespersons of the new order program their principles of operation in the mind of the subjects by making them internalise the notions of obedience and disobedience. The state created thus has only two categories of citizens, patriot and traitor. The machine of control can be operated easily through this kind of categorization. Making the exploitation easy and effecting control effortlessly, this mechanism drives the victims to act as a slave to the exploiter. The system demands and the subject obeys for the common welfare: the articulated slogan blurs the divisions in

Kishkindam. Under Raman's imperial control and Sugrivan's rule Vanaras work as slaves though they cannot digest the motive of the mission, i.e. search for Sita. The only thing that instils spirit in them is the better life in Kishkindam. By portraying the tale of Angadan and his civilization, Sarah Joseph articulates the voice of dissent through fiction. Keeping the crux of the story apart, the novel is replete with the images of the writer's imagination about the land and its inhabitants. By contrasting the human and Vanara rituals, she invokes thoughts on how inhuman the human rituals are.

As in the way the oral narratives or folk offer an entirely different dimension of the tale, the novels provide unique dimensions. When T.N. Prakash depicts the story by justifying Kaikeyi and criticising Dasharathan, he abstains himself from criticising Raman. Instead of adopting blind and sharp criticism against the system of patriarchy, the method the writer follows is one of the mild attacks on selective aspects. The work essentially pursued the patriarchal path by making the character Kaikeyi always worried about the beauty of her body and its capacity to provide sensuous pleasures to the man who legitimately seeks the pleasures using that. Though at times, the work argues out the points related to the education of women and their crucial role in the making of the country, mostly it is silent on the matters of patriarchal order. When *Ūrukāval* focuses on Tara and produces a similar narrative of lust, it goes beyond the perspective of Tara by selecting Angadan as the protagonist. So, while one maintains a radical stand, the other remains a liberal policy. Irrespective of these contrasting portrayals, both the millennial novels

contribute the wisdom of authorial imagination to the tradition of diversity of the Ramayana. These works function as the critiques of history, myth and contemporary ethos of culture. They make a literary exploration on the way how history of hegemony, subjugation and injustice creates myths and produces elitist texts undermining the presence of the subaltern. The kaleidoscopic vision they offer contains the critique of cultural imperialism, social hierarchies, gender disparities and shallow ecological concerns which are discussed in the cultural arena of Kerala in the twenty first century. Making a radical departure from the heard stories of the Ramayana, they gift the nuances of inclusiveness to the Ramayana tradition.

Chapter 6

Palimpsest of the Ramayana: A New Paradigm in Malayalam Short Stories

A group of Malayalam short stories written in the common parlance of the Ramayana, with their complementary and conflicting perceptions on life and prerogatives putting the human existence in polyphonic perspectives come under the purview of analysis of this chapter. The evolution of short stories has been marked through the literary creations including, myths, legends, fables, allegories, parables etc. Along with the emergence of short stories as a genre in the nineteenth century in Europe, in Indian literature also short stories established their popularity. The story titled, “Vāsanā Vikruti” (1891) written by Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar published in *Vidyāvinodini* magazine is considered as the first short story in Malayalam literature. C.S. Gopalappanicker, K. Sukumaran, Murkoth Kumaran and E.V. Krishnapillai are the contemporary short story writers of Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar. The short stories of Malayalam literature written after the 1930s are the products of the renaissance spirit of Kerala. Hence they function as the agents of the changing perceptions of the people of the region. In fact, they transform the consciousness of the generations of the twentieth century. The mission of modernising the consciousness of *Malayalee* through the short stories begins with the efforts of visionaries such as V.T. Bhattathiripad, E.V. Krishna Pillai, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, P. Kesavadev, S.K. Pottekkatt, K. Saraswathi Amma, Lalithambika Antharjanam and Ponkunnam Varkey. Both social

and political events including *Kshethra Pravesana Vilambaram* (Temple Entry Proclamation), the ascent of Communism to power and *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle) have played pivotal roles in the consciousness raising of the people of Kerala. The shift of focus from society to the individual is what can be recognized when reading the short stories of the generation of story writers of the 1950s including M.T. Vasudevan Nair, T. Padmanabhan and Madhavikkutty. Humour and Satire along with realism and existentialism added a unique flavour in the making of the stories of Zachariah and Punathil Kunhabdulla. M. Mukundan, O.V. Vijayan and M. Sukumaran address the reality from varying perspectives rooted in realism during the nineteen sixties and after. Articulating the rebellious voice against the social evils, many of the short stories of Sarah Joseph, Gracy, P. Valsala, Chandramathi and Rajalakshmi implore the readers to act against injustice against women and also shape a different gendered subjectivity. To put it in a nutshell, the short stories written during the transformative period and after are the products of cultural criticism.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines palimpsest as “a parchment or other surface in which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing” (1031). Palimpsest is what contains the traces of the past inscriptions. Considering this notion of the palimpsest, the short stories selected for analysis can be taken as palimpsests of the Ramayana. Depending on the time, place, ideology and politics of the production of the text, the dimensions of the tales take serious divergent pathways. Identity, gender, space and time are the crucial denominators in this study of short stories of Sarah Joseph and N.S. Madhavan directs the reader to a plethora

of mythopoeic possibilities, deconstructing the canonical perspectives and voicing the subaltern trajectories. Rather than underscoring them with a limited framework of revision, here I would go with the assumption that they are the manifestation of creative intervention into the narrative, less constrained by space. They are some of the best examples of autonomy of the writers who deal with mythical content. This argument is made on the assumption that the selected stories do not resemble the Ramayana in magnitude. Yet, the stories fit in perfectly in the relatively large corpus of the Ramayana narratives. With respect to *Vālm̄iki Rāmāyaṇa*, the content of the short stories creates obscure impressions. But they contain analogies of the Ramayana. These signatures of similarity are what we are looking for in this examination of the continuity that they display in the Ramayana. The objective here is to locate the stories in the multiplicity of the Ramayana tradition of Malayalam literature. These stories are distinct in terms of the timeframe they hold, the focus they put, the uniqueness in their perspective, the voice they produce and the impressions they create amid their association with the multiplicity concept. The short stories “Mandōdari”, Tara Fernandes”, “Ahalya”, “Karutta Tuḷakal”, “Tāikulaṃ” and “Kathayilillātat” are the specific texts taken for the study here.

Kancha Ilaiah’s argument in *Why I am not a Hindu* identifies a commonality that can be used as the point of convergence of the mythical characters around whom are built the stories selected for critical evaluation discuss: anti-brahminism and resistance to aggression.

The Ramayana is an ancient account of the aggression aimed at
brahminizing the Dalitbahujan society of South India, turning it into a

brahminizing patriarchy. With this objective the Brahmin rishies came along with Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, attacked the tribal oligarchies and destabilized several independent Dalitbahujan states. Tataki, the famous Dalitbahujan woman, was killed and her state was brought under Brahminism. Then the famous Shambuka was killed, and his kingdom usurped. The major opposition to Rama's aggression came from the ruler of Kishkinda, a tribal king called Vali. The Brahmins befriended Vali's brother Sugriva and his nephew Anjaneya and, aided by their treachery, killed the powerful Vali. When a beautiful Dalitbahujan woman, Shurpanaka, wanted to marry Rama, the latter said she should ask Lakshmana. But Lakshmana in response cut off her nose and her earlobes. This incident enraged her brother Ravana. He kidnapped Sita to teach Rama a lesson. Of course Rama uses this incident to mobilize the same tribal Dalitbahujans to attack Sri Lanka. Somehow he reaches Sri Lanka and kills Ravana. With the killing of Ravana the Dalitbahujans of South India were conquered by the brahmanical Aryans. In fact, what was worse, was after the defeat of Ravana many Brahmin rishies migrated from the North to the whole of South India, which had basically been a casteless society. It was turned into a caste-based society and the Brahmins established their ideological hegemony over the whole of South India (89).

Though these converging factors lie beneath the visible layers of the stories, the

stories under analysis highlighting certain autonomy of production, ultimately value independent thought. Evidently, they develop new images which form a new reality. Through the new spatial/territorial organisation they shed light on the unexpected associations between many worlds which are completely alien to each other (Parr 19). Through these new images, Sarah Joseph and N.S. Madhavan attempt to respond to the social realities of their times where the Ramayana functions as a powerful source for the formation of the social values and mores. Their using the Ramayana as a literary tool to respond to the realities is also a part of the dissent. Obviously, by emphasising the novel dimension of the Ramayana myth, the argument they raise is in favour of discarding the single canonical story. The stories with their conscious detachment from the dynamics of dualism, the Ramayana / the revision of the Ramayana, draw us to the new and multiple interpretations of the text. This does not imply that the stories negate the associations either with the Ramayana literary themes or ideas created in the earlier times or with the existing designs of development of stories. If one seeks a few keywords to explore the questions that the stories address, they are passion, identity, desire, existence and equality.

N.S. Madhavan's entry into the world of short stories is marked with the publication of the short story titled "Sísú" (The Infant). Though he started writing in 1970s, his writing career faced an interruption after the publication of 13 short stories including "Chūlai Meṭile Sāvangaḷ" (The Cadavers in Chūlai Met). In 1990s, when he returned to the field of writing, N.S. Madhavan focused on representing history, politics, ideology, religion and family with a new vision in his short stories.

N.S. Madhavan's short stories are known as excellent pieces of political satire. They not only depict reality, but provide the writer's critique of culture insightfully. His collections including *Tirutt*, *Paryākkadhakaḷ*, *Higuita* and *Pañja Kanyakakaḷ* portray his unique perspectives on the reality. Not only in themes, but also in the treatment, N.S. Madhavan's stories show autonomy. This is what is observed when reading the collection titled, *Pañja Kanyakakaḷ* (2015) based on the immaculate mythical women, Ahalya, Draupadi, Sita, Tara and Mandodari. The stories portray the way how myths affirm the patriarchal construction of sexes and how women in reality struggle and how mythical women suffer even after living in a different environment.

In "Mandōdari", a cosmopolitan Ramayana of subversion set in Goa, an arm-wrestling champion named Reymon marries Sita Johans, a Swedish lady after defeating seven opponents in arm wrestling competition. "Mandōdari", the short story published in the collection *Pañja Kanyakakaḷ* (2015) of N S Madhavan narrates the tale, which though arguably shows connections to the *Ramayana*, is set in a cosmopolitan framework. The resemblance lies in the operation of the forces leading to the events and shifts in the life of characters, in the perceptions and affects. But they function in a multiplicity of contrasts. Contrary to the image of Sita of the Ramayana, here Sita Johans, appears in a single piece red bikini, is a bold woman. Many suitors want to marry her. The story takes place neither in Ayodhya, nor in Lanka, but in Anjuna beach in Goa, where the father of Reymon and Laki are running a restaurant. While she visits the restaurant, Sita declares her intention to marry a man who defeats seven people in arm wrestling. Thus in the story, Sita

exercises her agency, while in the Ramayana the father initiates the hunt for the suitors. Arm wrestling is a competition that became popular in India after the 1970s. The writer not only makes a shift in place, from Ayodhya to Goa, but also he makes a shift in time from ancient periods to the 1970s or after.

In order to win the competition, the participant requires mental strength too, in addition to physical strength. Though moderate in his ways, Reymon demonstrates excellence in the art of Arm wrestling and wins Sita's love. Immediately after the competition is over, a wrestling champion from the Northern region of Goa named Raphel and his wife Mandi reach the spot on a Harley Davidson motorbike. This Harley Davidson motorbike reflects *Pushpakavimanam* (the vehicle of Ravana) of the Ramayana. Being the person responsible for the abduction of Sita, Raphel represents Ravana in the story. Similar to Ravana, Raphel is notorious for his involvement in illegitimate activities. He, a man around fifty, is one of the men who indulge in narcotic business. The sensuous posture of Sita Johans and her wet body arouses desires in Raphel who yearns to defeat Reymon to win her but fails miserably because the game is over before he reaches the location. Desperately, he returns to his house along with Mandi, his wife. Mandodari alias Mandi, the titular heroine, is the major character in the story. Two significant changes include the importance given to the character Mandodari, the wife of Raphel and the exclusion of an event like Shurpanakha's mutilation. Since Mandodari is the focal point of the story, the details about the background of Sita and Reymon are not given. What N.S. Madhavan does in the story is stripping the noble history of Reymon and Sita and presents them as ordinary individuals. This

change helps in evaluating the development of the story from an objective view point.

When the writer diverts the focus and the geographical location, he is utilising the strategy of reinterpreting the classic and becoming a part of the ongoing debate on the literary value of text. Being open to disagreements, the concept of high/low in literature based on moral framework or aesthetic quality of a text is discussed throughout the texture of the story. The many institutions ascribing objectivity to mass subjectivity inscribed in the truth of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* promote a certain discourse offered by the text. This is because the discourse that the text produce is in conformity with the ideological apparatus of the society, let that be patriarchy, class supremacy or caste hierarchy. Dismissing such universal truths in the literary discourse N.S. Madhavan's "Mandōdari" subverts the canon. For example, contrary to the usual method of looking at the story from the perspective of the characters such as Rama or Sita, here the narrative is developed through the perspective of Mandodari. This makes the narrative complex as her story glorifies Rāphel by highlighting his complexities. This is tantamount to exalting Ravana whom Valmiki depicted as a complete villain.

Yet, in the story, the character Mandi neither appreciates the nature of Rāphel's business, nor does she tolerate his undue desire for other women especially Sita Johans who might be of the age of their children. She particularly hates the experience of sex when she suspects that Rāphel has other women in mind when he approaches her. Rāphel though does not deny this charge and tries to convince her that she is very important to him, and his infidelity is for momentary pleasures.

Mandi is quite aware of the multiple sexual behaviours he maintained, and she once expresses the same to him too. But being a very affectionate wife, she cannot leave Raphel, and he also expresses his sadness on her decision to leave which prevents her from leaving him. Thus, amidst the perversions, Raphel is presented as a heroic character, contrary to the popular picturisation. In the ancient Ramayana narratives, Ravana is not depicted as a renowned king. Camille Bulcke in *Rāmakatha* substantiates this by highlighting an incident from *Aranya Kāndam* in which Rama when informed about Sita's abduction asks Jatayu about the details and appearance of the demon who abducts his wife (593). But in the story, Raphel is very popular in the region.

In the story titled, "Mandōdari", Mandi makes an attempt to release Sita Johans from the imprisonment of Raphel. Though Raphel promises that he will not touch Sita without her consent, Mandi is afraid that Sita might fall for Raphel. However, Sita is very adamant that she waits for Reymon to demonstrate his bravery once again by rescuing her from the imprisonment of Raphel. As in the way the character Supanakha is removed from the story, Hanuman too is not included as a savior figure. Mandi herself plays the role of the supporter in the rescue mission in which Sita remains adamant. Mandi tries to discourage her from romanticizing the incident, but fails to shake her rigidity. So, here the writer attempts to make a comparison between two women. Mandodari seems to be more realistic compared to Sita. Rather than being idealistic, Sita romanticises her existence by waiting for Reymon to come and rescue. So, the response of Sita Johans to the support offered by Mandi in the short story and the response of Sita to Hanuman in the mythical

narrative are worth commenting on. What is considered as idealistic in the ancient religious societies is what induces humour and sarcasm in the contemporary scenario. Thus while assuming mythical Sita's action as an expression of propriety, Sita Johans' action is read as irrationality. This reaction of Sita Johans even produces humour in the story. The story also narrates the undeveloped bond between Mandi and Sita who embrace each other in filial affection. When Raphel is about to defeat Reymon in arm wrestling, to win Sita against her will, it is Mandi's tears that discourage Raphel who is about to win. After having failed intentionally for the grief-stricken Mandi, Raphel is killed by the soldiers of Sak for whom Reymon kills his brother. While the dominant thread of the Ramayana is not absent in the text, the text lives a world of liberty of its own, without translating the Ramayana tale. Reymon's victory is projected as the incident of his failure as his success happens due to the support of Sak's soldiers and Raphel's intentional failure for Mandi. Thus the thread that glorifies Rama as the victorious person is abandoned in the short story.

In "Mandodari", the writer unravels the characteristics of Ramayana's character Mandodari through Mandi, set in an entirely different context. Mandodadi appears in "Uttar Kānda" of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* as the daughter of Maya. *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* narrates a story of the union of Ravana and Mandodari by means of blessings of Siva (Bulcke 603, 604). But in the story there is no clue given about the origin of the Mandi- Raphel relationship. Mandi, like Mandodari, is a very loyal wife of Raphel. Raphel tattooed ten faces ranging from Bob Marley, to Che Guevara and Mother Teresa whose habits too are as divergent as the ten faces tattooed. This

tattooing is, in one sense, in alliance with the concept of ten headedness of Ravana. In another sense, it shows a connection of the story to what John McLeod mentioned as worldliness of literary texts. Worldliness refers to the complex engagements of the literary texts with the history, politics and the time of production (147). So Raphael and Mandi, in N.S. Madhavan's story represent the two versions of time: a rigid version and a flexible version. She is particular about two basic things of her life: the safety of her husband and the stability of their relationship as the mythical Mandodari is. Mandi is grateful to Raphael for giving love to her though she often feels abandoned and neglected by Raphael who leaves her for some days without informing her. During one of his returns, she questions him about this behaviour. Mandi shows consistency in her demeanour and that compels Raphael to tell the truths of his actions to her. Being a friend rather than a wife, Mandi often cautions Raphael about the imminent danger that his actions would bring.

N.S. Madhavan, in the story, puts Raphael beyond the limit of binaries such as hero or villain, virtuous or vicious. So, this portrayal is indeed a postmodern depiction of the character. Raphael is presented as a middle-aged man yearning for youth that he can identify in the image of Sita Johans. He is described as a tough masculine anti establishment man, who follows his passions without paying attention to the worldly constrain of religion. Here Mandi, the religious woman, who believes in Christianity, contrasts herself with her husband, Raphael. When Mandi reminds him of the sinful nature of abduction, he arrogantly retorts that he is not answerable to anybody for the deeds he commits. Raphael, is not a loveless man who inflicts violence on his wife. Raphael respects Mandi, but fails to stick to a single

relationship which puts Mandi in trauma. The story is set against various presumptions, dynamics of masculinity being one among them. Raphael, with his association with power in the most naked form, fits into the institutional corpus of masculinity. The problem lies in his relationship with Mandi on fidelity factor. N.S. Madhavan is employing contrapuntal reading suggested by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (59). In N.S Madhavan's work, the narration signifies the writer's awareness of both parallel developments, the development of Ramayana narrative tradition which conforms to the canon, and the diversions that reject the dominant discourse.

Mandi is presented in the story as a helpless ordinary woman. She is in search of love of Raphael throughout the story. She not only quarrels with him for that, but also tries different strategies like rejecting him, releasing Sita Johans and praying to God in vain. But when the story ends, one can see Mandi realising her goal of winning Raphael against Sita. In the story, the final act of Raphael i.e. the intentional failure in the arm wrestling with Reymon is an evidence of her success. Yet, Mandi's success is suicidal for Raphael which the writer accurately marks in his story. The cryptic remark of the writer directs us to reflect on the victory of Reymon at the mercy of Raphael who though has the power to defeat him failed intentionally. Though the writer puts Raphael on an ambiguous level where he cannot be conceived as purely villainous, the later development produces a good human being out of him. The qualities such as abstaining himself from having physical relationship with a woman without her consent, and his attitude towards Mandi keeps him far away from the vicious realm. Contrary to this the character, Reymon, is revealed as a

narrow minded, doubtful and vicious man who murders Sita Johans after burning her alive by spilling petrol over her body and burying the half dead Sita. Without any sort of guilt and fear, by keeping a doll got from the waste bin, he decides to conquer all the beaches in Goa. Here the text negotiates with the epic injustice. The method adopted here is no comparison of the events: the contrast between two masculine figures, Raphel and Reymon, is what brings the equations of justice. While Raphel is kind and understanding, Reymon is brutal in his methods. He does not show sympathy towards Sita Johans and burns her body as Rama does in the epic by means of *Agnipareeksha*.

There are five singular contributions that N.S. Madhavan incorporates here to compose an improvised tale. Firstly, he situates the story in a new place and space and provides a universal framework, by making the people across the world, especially the west as participants. Conceived as a part of reading the Ramayana as a text that spreads beyond limits of space, this rebuilding is quite effortless. Secondly, the most remarkable aspect of this reconstruction of the Ramayana story was that, the characters are basically western in their origin and ethnicity and they united in India and built their small-scale empires in Goa. The writer rejects the attribution of reputable lineage to the characters, especially to Reymon and Sita. Thirdly, though the story begins with the incidents connecting Sita Johans and Reymon, with the introduction of Raphel and Mandi, it is converted as the tale of Raphel and Mandi where the other characters act out the specified roles to make it eventful. Fourthly, even when the contexts are significantly varying, the links and allusions remind the audience of the story of Rama, Ravana, Sita and Mandodari, and by putting

“Mandodari” as the title and selecting the names which resemble the names of the Ramayana characters, it opens up identifying the possibilities of return of the incidents transcending time and space. The fifth contribution is identifying the prospect of the story with a specific line of development deconstructing the entire system, and providing it with the perspective of Mandodari, who can legitimately blame Rama, Ravana and Sita because she becomes a victim of their obstinacy.

The story is a psychological exploration into the obsessions of men in the modern times: youth, competition, power, women and wealth. A particular reference to Harley Davidson bike as the emblem of masculinity and wealth is a metaphor for phallus too. The writer also mentions it as what Raphael keeps between thighs hinting that it is a symbol of phallic power. By using it, he tries to regain his youth. Both men and women are depicted in the story as shallow individuals living the life of disorder, against the profound principles of life that the ancient Ramayana texts project. The writer seems to equate this anarchy with the superfluous values that the ancient texts attempt to glorify. Reymon is attracted to Sita Johans for the reason of her revelation in the restaurant that she is a virgin and she intends to have a relationship with a single man. The character, Reymon, in the story, is not the one who murders Sita Johans for honour, but for the suspicion regarding her virginity and doubt over her loyalty in love. Here, the writer is intending to demonstrate how sectarian and fragile the modern perspectives are. Thus the text problematizes the progress that the contemporary times attained, by contrasting the superfluous progress and deep conservatism. Since the modern incident reflects the ancient incident, the depiction suggests the influence of the classics in the modern life.

Reymon does not have any history of valour against the background of Raphel who is a champion of arm wrestling. So, Reymon's victory against seven people is an accidental one which leaves some sort of insecurities in him when he places himself against Raphel. It can be assumed that he defeats Raphel to overcome his insecurity and his murder of Sita too is an act of his less logical subjective stance. Probably two reasons might be behind his murder of Sita in addition to the theory of doubt. One reason is that Sita, if she continues to live, poses threat to his pride feeling as she has won Raphel's love whom Reymon thinks as superior to him in arm wrestling. The second reason is that perhaps if he does not retrieve Sita, she could start admiring Raphel despite the love towards him, and even if he liberates her, probably, she could be sympathetic towards Raphel and this would cause Reymon to fail after becoming victorious. In both cases, the short story challenges the ideal position that Rama gained in the mythical and contemporary narratives by transforming him as Reymon. It is also a complex construction of masculinity too.

The story depicts Raphel as a man of passions: the ten faces tattooed on his arms ranging from Bob Marley to Mother Teresa literally suggest the ten emotions that he represents. He abducts Sita Johans because that act satisfies his desire towards her. The very presence of Sita beside makes him feel that he is complete and her absence leaves a void in his life. It seems that he is in love with her. Reymon is cruel and detached compared to Raphel. Even Sita's words declaring pregnancy could not shake the decision of Reymon who decides to kill her. By placing Reymon against Raphel, the writer mocks at the superficial judgments that people make on the human character. This can be treated as an indirect comment on the Ramayana

too. The presumed divinity that is attributed to Rama is what keeps him and his deeds unquestionable. Stripping him of this divine aura and recreating him in another background, the truth of his actions is revealed. Obviously, the writer's intention is to make an ethical evaluation of what has happened to Sita in the scripture, and the story is an explicit document of his findings that he presents in the form of analogy to make it more palatable to the reader. The politics of making such a short story is that it overtly comments on the blind nature of worship that justifies all the atrocities especially done against women. By portraying Reymon as remorseless, a logical challenge has been posed to the classical writers who glosses over the character of Rama and his deeds. When the doll replaces Sita Johans in the story, the writer makes a sharp statement about societal expectations about women. Moreover, this instance is linked to *Kanchan Sita*, the golden doll that Rama used as a substitute for a live Sita in the ritual of *Ashvamedha Yaga*. If a doll suffices instead of a wife with flesh and blood, what is the point of relationships and female identity? This is the crucial point that the writer posits before the readers. Again, Lakshmana as Lucky is a simple supporter of his brother, whose intentions do not go beyond the dreams of Reymon. Lucky is manifested as a teenager who is not big enough to question the deeds of Reymon. He is kept away when the last scenes of two murders are depicted. In some sense N.S. Madhavan is exonerating Lakshmana from the crimes in which he is unnecessarily involved due to his worship of his brother in *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. N.S. Madhavan's "Mandōdari" is, in short, a critique of the Ramayana . In addition to that, by problematizing the Ramayana narrative content by detaching it from the context, the writer intends to evaluate the contemporary existence of man and women.

The individuals in N.S. Madhavan's story, "Ahalya", contains multiple forms of desire which generate violence, neurosis and trauma. Though some of them resemble the mythical characters, Ahalya, Rama and Sage Gautama, in the story, they are unique by virtue of the difference in the background. For instance, Ahalya is the wife of a frigid engineer named Gautama in the story, "Ahalya" of N.S. Madhavan who unlike the other children of her age is a mysterious girl from the beginning of her being. Obsession to be a ghost when others aspire to have colourful dreams about future gives Ahalya, the girl, a silent demeanour apart from the rest of the children, Sebastian, Ashraf, Priya, Sitara, Meera and Raghavan. Raghavan is the narrator of Ahalya's story. The impact of his narration is that it contains a lot of justifications of Raghavan. Raghavan is a name used synonymously with Rama. In this story, since Raghavan is the protagonist, the feminist vision is partially compromised in favour of masculine elite perspective when Raghavan is the narrator.

From the perspective of Raghavan, one can realize that Ahalya is considered to be a woman of great sense of independence. Before he leaves for Britain for education, he has an infatuation towards the charming Ahalya. Ahalya, because of her reserved nature, discourages his advances towards her and Raghavan leaves with a feeling of rejection. After becoming a neurosurgeon, having married and divorced a British lady named Iris, he returns to his country and accidentally Ahalya returns to him as a coma patient who needs urgent care. While the story depicts Ahalya's complexities intertwined with desire, it does not undermine the possible explorations into the masculine figures in the story. The masculine figures in the novel are

grounded in history and reality. Their scope can be measured beyond their gender and individuality as stated by R.W. Connell in *Masculinities*: “They (masculinities) are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change” (43). This statement substantiates the actions of Raghavan and Gautaman with whom Ahalya maintained relationships. Gautaman’s attack on Ahalya and Raghavan’s rejection of her finds meaning in this argument of maintenance of balance of interests of the society. Masculine figures in the story are trying to safeguard the established social mores, and in order to do so, they try to discipline Ahalya through posing physical threat and rejection. The relationship between Ahalya and Rama / Raghavan prior to their meeting is a new idea that the writer has incorporated into the text.

Ahalya is attacked by Gautaman when he identifies her illegitimate relationship with Devaraj, a film actor, who lives in the nearest apartment. It is actually the perfume, that Devaraj uses that acts as an evidence of their relationship which provokes Gautaman who strikes her with a liquor bottle causing her a brain damage. Though Raghavan’s treatment supports her to recover a bit, gradually she embraces the fatal coma state for years. Despite other people’s suggestion for mercy killing for her, Raghavan waits for a miracle. As Raghavan expects, finally Ahalya’s desire towards him allows her to regain her consciousness. However, Ahalya endures as a woman whose desires remain unrequited with the final rejection from Raghavan. The names are the links that the writer uses to bring direct connection between the story and the epic. Raghavan’s decision to leave Ahalya is a replica of

Rama's decision to leave Sita when both these women reach the state of recognizing him as a saviour. So, the mythical Rama's strategy of desertion after proving his masculine power is what contemporary Raghavan follows though they are different individuals. On the one hand, the writer affirms the presence of the Ramayana values in the contemporary existence, on the other he cautions the reader about the subtle violence that the text creates that the contemporary society assimilates. The fictional characters located in contemporary times repeating the principles and attitudes of ancient mythological characters are proofs enough for the prevalence of orthodox value system.

The story bears connections with the mythical story of Ahalya in the Ramayana. The mythical character is the wife of sage Gautama, who curses her for having an extramarital physical relationship with Indra of heaven who is enchanted by the beauty of Ahalya. Ahalya has been given the compensation that when Rama touches her, she will regain life from the state of being a stone. She remains insulted for being accused of adultery for many years and gets released from the curse due to the arrival of Rama. So, in the mythical story Rama who was called Raghava too is instrumental in releasing Ahalya of the curse associated with desire. In N.S. Madhavan's story also it is a Raghavan who approaches Ahalya to release her from the seemingly eternal state of unconsciousness.

Ahalya's desire has multiple dimensions expressed through rejection, adultery, neurosis and awakening, in the story. *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* tells the story of Ahalya from a moralistic perspective where Ahalya is established as a sinner for expressing the desires of her body. Body is conceived as the seat of her sins which is

punished in the story with immobility and confinement. In the short story, Ahalya appears to be a person who recognizes the trap connected with the body and probably that may be why she aspires to be a ghost in future. She does not want herself to be imprisoned by the body though she can well imagine that she is often conceived as nothing more than a beautiful body to others. Having her own perceptions about body and desires, she does not find anything wrong in standing for the pleasures of the body too. She is not guilty of her association with Devaraj. In the mythical story of Ahalya, it is Indra, the king of Devas who seduces her whereas in the short story, Devaraj, whose name means the king of Devas, a film star, seduces her. His role as an actor is something that reaffirms the theory of desire, as the actors through acting fulfil the desire of individuals in a cathartic way. In both the stories, no clue is given about Ahalya gratifying her desire with an outsider. So Ahalya's stories are tales based on human instinct and its unquestionable influence on human beings. Her act being considered as adultery, Ahalya is severely punished in both the stories. So, desire is the subject which yields punishment here. However, in the mythical story Gautama punishing Ahalya is considered as so legitimate and nothing is heard about his being on trial for the act. But the modern Gautaman, though acts similarly, is considered at least in the eyes of judicial system as a criminal and has undergone trial for his deed. This shows the contrast between the concept of justice of the times that the law reflects and the idea of justice that individual maintains. The ancient story balances the act of retribution by inflicting punishment on both parties involved in adultery while in the modern story only the woman is thrashed and suffered for the act. So, the writer N.S. Madhavan is revealing that though the times are generally perceived as progressive, are not

essentially tolerant to accommodate women exercising the choice regarding sexual partner. The character Ahalya in the short story is doomed to suffer throughout her life for the single act of having sex with a stranger.

In the characterizations of both Gautamas, the stories uphold resemblance, even though the ancient one is a sage and the modern Gautama is an engineer. Gautamas are mechanical in their attitude towards their wives who seek passion in the marital relationship. Both seem to be vehemently immersed in their profession and treat the wife as nothing more than a physical and social necessity. Being very much indulgent in the ritualistic aspects of everyday routines, Gautaman of the short story considers sex too as an activity which is to be done as in the way a ritual is done with utmost step by step perfection with no element of passion. Though, at first, she is curious about his ways, Ahalya gradually gets weary about this dispassionate bodily exercise with no charm or mutual attraction. Probably, this monotony might have pulled her back from rejecting Devaraj who she knows has never loved her soul. By being associated with Devaraj for some moments, she can elevate herself from the status of a sex toy used by Gautaman for his pleasures. She confesses to Raghavan that she too starts using him as a sexual object that he fails to recognize. The multiple discourses such as gender, family, choice, violence, legitimacy and taboo are discussed in the story. In fact, Ahalya's story reveals the hidden violence in the air of the institutional structure of the family, which appears to be so clean and perfect if looked from outside. The writer problematizes the idea of compatibility which is measured in terms of external factors like money, caste and respectability concerns. How a rigid system of family treats the women's actions

based on her instincts while exonerating men involved is another vital issue reflected in the texture of the short story.

In the short story, in Ahalya's life at the beginning, desire inhabits a clueless terrain, or in some sense it is absent. Ahalya is abstaining from the pleasures of children when she was one among them. She has taken a detached stand always. Though her ambition seems humourous to others, she is very particular in her choice of ambition about future. Her only ambition to become a ghost is sprung from the thought that if one becomes a ghost the worries related to the material comforts such as food or attire will be pointless. This ambition can be conceived as the sublimated expression of her desire the expression of which is prevented due to external factors of morality and propriety. She is not interested to be visible though she is exceptionally beautiful to look at. Her body is a site of desire though she disregards it at the beginning. In the beginning she is no enchantress or seductress in her behaviour. Instead, she presents herself as a moralistic person when Raghavan approaches her with desire on the day before he leaves for Britain. Ahalya is a character with a lot of inhibitions and is trained to be silent. Compared to her sister, Meera, she is more an introvert and introspective in nature. She feels comfortable in seclusion and wants to remain a silent spectator than living a narcissistic life. Still, she remains friendly with the people in her immediate circle. The task that the writer has undertaken is to situate the life and self of Ahalya in the modern context. As a part of bringing Ahalya out of the marginalised terrain, he has elaborated the character of Ahalya and provided the background of her existence. Invariably, the

character's transformations from a meek girl to an expressive woman are portrayed in the short story.

In the short story the inadequacy of Ahalya is connected with neurology whereas in the myth it is about righteousness. In both the stories, it is the presence of the expert, Raghavan, who is instrumental for the release of Ahalya from the state of unconsciousness that is highlighted. The final rejection of Raghavan might have turned Ahalya into a stone again which he does intentionally as revenge against her earlier rejection. In the short story, the stand of Raghavan towards Ahalya is quite ambiguous. Perhaps in Raghavan desire takes the dimension of punishing people. On the one hand he has passion towards her and on the other he keeps a secret grudge against her for her initial act of rejection. Rather than associating rejection with choice, it seems that the character Raghavan connects it with desire, body and supremacy. The reason for Ahalya's return to Raghavan can be her trauma; her life with Gautama makes her relinquish apathy towards desire or probably she turns to be indifferent towards desire because of that toxic relationship. The same Ahalya who rejects Raghavan whom she later needs, accepts the encroachment of Devaraj, the film star, into her body after she attains married status. She maintains many expectations about herself and partner in marital bond which later she found futile after Gautama comes as the partner. The indifference that she suffers during initial days can be reason enough to produce an altered hopeless woman out of Ahalya.

In "Ahalya" desire is the synthesis of past and present. The past is not the individuals past, but the mythical past which takes different dimensions in varying temporal settings. Ahalya analyses the separation between her body and the mind in

one of her conversations with Raghavan. She, in affirmative terms, emphasises the bodily necessities that drives the human being in her without allowing the mind to be involved in it. She justifies herself before Raghavan who is her saviour in the short story. She, in a context, compares Gautaman to a hermit who does not have much concern about the burden of the bodily charm of the wife. He is living a life of recluse and the life with him is monotonous in every aspect. Though Ahalya acknowledges that the predictable nature of Gautaman brings ease into her life, she feels exhausted as there is no scope for any sort of adventure. Here, Ahalya in the short story appears to have lived a life of partial celibacy with all the resemblance to the one led by the mythical Ahalya with sage Gautama. Gautaman, in the short story, is so mechanical in his ways and his attitude towards his desires and the desires of Ahalya too are mysterious. Though she is exceptionally beautiful, he does not show any special interest towards her, other than the one he might have towards a sex toy. Their physical relationship too is decided by his choices. He provides pleasure to her only at the moment when he thinks that she needs it. Ahalya cannot initiate any bond of intimacy with Gautaman because of his stoic behaviour, though he takes care of all her material needs.

Resemblance to the mythical story is seen in Devaraj's entry into the uneventful life of Ahalya too. Devaraj once calls Ahalya over the phone and tells her that he is Gautama and he will come at two O' clock. Ahalya recognizes that it was a fake call, identifies the voice as that of Devaraj. However, rather than resisting his entry into the house she welcomes him to the house in Gautaman's absence and they enjoy physical pleasures. In *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* too one can observe an Ahalya who

passionately yields to the desire of Indra and finally moves to the extent of expressing gratitude to him for quenching her desire. Gautama's response in the story to the revelation of his wife's extramarital affair is somewhat surprising though comparable to the one made by the mythical character Gautama. It might not be the love and the feeling of being cheated that makes both Gautamas resort to punishing the wives. Perhaps the act of Ahalya is more than one of disloyalty; Gautaman counts it as indiscipline and attacks her brutally with a bottle of Brandy with the intention to murder her.

Again, the most significant point to be considered is that he does not disclose adultery as a reason for his brutality in the court. It seems that the patriarchal mindset prevents him from revealing the extramarital relationship of his wife which would damage his respectability in public perception and which would hurt his masculine pride. The consciousness of family in Kerala is built around the body centric discourse proposed by patriarchal society. Elitism and false pride are what decorate the masculine consciousness of the region irrespective of the factors of age, urbanity or financial condition. The double standards of the society are vested in its approach towards women who seek to explore various modes of independence. This framework not only limits women, but also cultivates a kind of fear among men. Gautaman is a prey to that influence. This is the reason why he hides the truth of Ahalya's adultery. By doing it, he systematically makes Ahalya's exercise of her agency and independence invisible.

P. Geetha in her work titled, *Penkālāṅgaḷ* makes an inquiry about the presence of women such as Sita, Mandodari, Kaikeyi etc. in the mythical or

historical documents celebrating the victory of Rama of the Ramayana. She adds that in the path towards power and victory, the women are treated as less significant. The patriarchal rationale fails to see the justice that women need and history affirms the conscious rejection of women as normal (XV). The reason for such rejection is the lack of ability of the masculine society to understand and accommodate the truth about the emotional responses of the women. Rather than taking her responses as representing the trauma of the entire female community against rejection, cruelty, marginalisation, captivity etc., the woman's responses would be neglected analysing it as a context bound one alone. Understanding the possibility of this linear take on women's actions, the writer names the characters Ahalya, Gautaman and Devaraj to create a link between the people of different generations.

Raghavan is just an instrument to arouse Ahalya's instincts. It is in this way that the short story problematizes the mythical understanding of Rama's releasing Ahalya from the curse hurled on her by Gautama. It is essentially Ahalya's desire to gain consciousness to embrace the hedonistic pleasures that makes her return to an active life from a paralyzed state. Thus the writer emphasises women's role in her recovery, than upholding man as the saviour. Invariably, desire, to Ahalya is the force through which she can establish her agency and subjectivity. However, Ahalya's transformed behaviour towards Raghavan and Raghavan's stoic response to the aroused desire of Ahalya leaves the readers with new kind of revelations about what life taught both a man and a woman about their responses. To man pleasure might have associations with many factors: power, destruction, gain, wealth etc. But to a woman like Ahalya pleasure is intrinsic which is beyond shame or anxiety. To

her desire is no stigma, but a reality. Raghavan in the story rejects Ahalya on the ground that she reminds him of his ex-wife Iris who rejects him. But when he rejects her, he is rejecting his own desire. In the end, Ahalya stands for the unattainable desires of man and woman. Also, she is the epitome of the struggles of women for the exercise of physical autonomy. Whether it is the ancient tale or the modern short story, both the narratives convey the solemn truth about how the bodies of women are tamed and punished to maintain patriarchal code of discipline.

Ahalya can be read as a story of female self-expression too. While caught in the institution of marriage and forced to sustain a loveless relationship, Ahalya exercises her will to gratify her bodily desires against the odds, even while she seems to be aware of the reactions of society which will be exemplified by the behaviour of the husband. In the short story, Ahalya reminds Devaraj of the urgency to leave her house as the arrival of Gautaman is imminent. So, it is not an innocent Ahalya who has accidentally fallen into the trap of a Devaraj who has charm, power and stardom. Ahalya, of the short story, is exercising her choice and is not worried when her action is identified by her husband. In fact, it seems that she is rescuing Devaraj from the consequences by warning him to leave the place before the arrival of the husband. Her blunt reaction to the suspicious searches of Gautaman might be what induces anger in him as it threatens his masculine superiority. Ahalya's suffering in growth and the other character's inability to grow due to the fear of future are providing enlightening directions as to how to look at the silences of the women in virtual captivity. So, the writer indicates the way how women learn to reject ideals proposed by myths while men continue to hold the ancient ideologies.

N.S. Madhavan's short stories by revisiting the Ramayana myths widen the scope of the stories by locating the context in Goa. They urge the revision of the myth that the times demand and function as game changers. The short story, titled "Tara Fernandez", has vital associations with the story of Tara, the wife of Vali, the Vanara king of the Ramayana. In N.S. Madhavan's story, Tara Fernandez is the partner of Valory Fernandez, an arm-wrestling champion in Goa. Valory Fernandez has a brother named Sak, with whom Vali maintains competition. Vali, in the story, seems to be a powerful Anglo Indian who has got control in the transport area and narcotic business. Though he marries Tara, he is quite unsuccessful in keeping a strong relationship with her. Detaching himself from others, he always keeps himself as an obscure figure and his frequent disappearance affirms the mystery associated with him. The story is told from the perspective of Tara Fernandez who could not digest the brutal behaviour of Vali towards his brother Sak. The feeble Sak is trained not to resist the power of Vali, who even conquers the attention of Sak's girlfriend, Ruma Gomaz. Vali's unquestioned authority prevents Sak from revolting against him directly. Both Tara and Sak do revenge against Vali who takes Ruma Gomaz too as a partner by having physical relationship.

The story begins with the funeral ceremony of Vali in which Tara narrates the story in flashback. The format of narration is stream of consciousness. Though Tara does not conceive Vali as an utter villain, she cannot grasp the rationale of the actions of Vali. Her attempts to question him of his misbehaviour to his own brother are defeated with his declaration that he will not tolerate any attempt to threaten him. On exploration, Tara and Sak identify a crucial detail about Vali's absconding: Vali

is a failed writer that he has hidden from the world. In order to hide his failure, he keeps his passion for writing a secret. Vali's superiority is a part of his fearless character and his ruthless execution of his will against those who stand against him. The writer, through the character Tara, portrays a woman who aspires peace and filial bond in the relationship that Vali fails to provide. As different from the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, Sak's physical relationship with Tara is not an encounter or encroachment, but an act done with consent. The writer here demolishes the glorified sanctity of marriage, through the characters Valory Fernandez and Tara Fernandez.

In Canto XX of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith, one can observe an entirely contradictory note on the relationship between Vali and Tara. When Vali dies, Tara in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* mourns as if the entire world has collapsed in front of her:

Whelmed in my sorrow's boundless sea,
 There is no joy, no hope, for me,
 When my beloved lord, who led
 The Vánars to the fight, is dead,
 My widowed heart is stern and cold.
 Or, at the sight mine eyes behold,
 O'ermastered would it end this ache
 And in a thousand fragments break (350)

In N.S. Madhavan's story, each character is individualistic. Each of them focuses on individualistic dreams and aspirations and are reluctant to form strong

bonds. Also each carries trauma and lives in it without sharing with the partner. Tara Fernandez is indifferent towards the incident of the death of Vali. Rather than wailing over the death, she critically examines the way how Vali systematically detaches from herself and Sak. Vali, in the story Tara Fernandez, is so self-indulgent. Not only is he absorbed in his own life, but displays an exceptional desire towards success in everything in which he is involved. Tara cannot see peace on the dead face of a stubborn Vali. Her mission is to decipher his true self in which she fails miserably. She remembers that she cannot see the courageous self of the one who controls the motorcycle pilots of the place, the competitive self of the arm wrestling champion, the desperate self of a failed writer, or the cheerful self of a wanderer on Harley Davidson motorcycle on the adamant face of Vali. As different from the complementary selves of Tara and Vali of the epic, N.S. Madhavan projects a Tara who struggles to understand her husband in a life of discord.

The writer, N.S. Madhavan creates the story in Christian culture. Vali of the story "Tara Fernandez" is a Christian. His burial is conducted in a church graveyard. When Tara looks back into the life, she remembers that their wedding too was conducted in a church. From her description what can be recognized is the complex character of Vali and his loveless ways. As a wife, Tara in the story is dissatisfied. Neither can she find a cordial partner in him, nor can she find their relationship fulfilling. The story written from the perspective of Tara focuses more on the relationship and Tara's feelings than on the heroic aspects for which the mythical Vali is celebrated. Sak, Vali's young brother is the only solace she has during the times of detachment. There is no fight or friction in the relationship of Tara and

Vali. Instead, Tara suffers terrible abandonment due to the constant absconding of Vali to a remote bungalow where he nourishes his secret passion for creative writing. Tara remains as a faithful wife as she cannot sense rejection from the part of Vali at the beginning. It is only when Vali enchanted Ruma, the girlfriend of Sak, his brother Tara thinks about another partner. Aggrieved over his moral degradation and shameless behaviour when he takes Ruma declaring that all the best things in the world are meant for him, she drops her inhibitions. Her physical relationship with Sak can be conceived as an act of revenge rather than an act of providing support to the grief stricken Sak. When N.S. Madhavan reimagines the tale of Vali, he conceived Vali as a narcissist. Vali is extremely self-indulgent and individualistic, contradicting the Vanara King of the Ramayana .Also, the eternal bond between Tara and Vali seen in the mythical story is missing here. In addition to this, Sak's betrayal of Vali is justified by Vali's cruelty towards Sak. The idealistic image of Vali is demolished in the story when Tara's voice is heard.

The story depicts the loneliness of the characters Tara, Vali and Sak. Tara fails to realise that Vali suffers from the crisis of articulating his thoughts and emotions not only on the paper but also verbally too. Again he is so engrossed with the feeling of success, and reaches the extreme state where he cannot tolerate defeat on any ground. His life is the one that swings between the normal and habitual one, and the secluded one. Writing appears as a transcendental state to him, for which he has undergone rigorous trials. Tara's narration seems to be a one sided monologue where she situates herself as an ordinary housewife who aspires to have a life of intimacy with the partner. The failure in achieving the expectations leads Tara to the

conclusion that Sak may be a better partner for her than Vali. It seems that the character Ruma, who opts to remain as the widow of Vali can understand the complexities of Vali, than Vali's legitimate wife.

When N.S. Madhavan reimagines the epic story in the contemporary context, the character Tara Fernandez is portrayed as a woman who resembles Vali in the self-absorbed nature, to some extent. Still, in her narration, the dominant aspect observable in her is maternity. Even before becoming a mother, she acts as the surrogate mother of Sak, Vali's brother. When Sak grows old, she becomes the mother of Andrew. Vali wants Tara to be a slave who is obedient to the extent of not speaking out her feelings of dissent. Even her simple queries regarding his rash behaviour towards his own brother irritate him. It seems that he considers it as an insult meant from her part to assert her victory over him which he resists by forcing her to do sex with him. The writer is trying to state that the relationship between Tara and Vali is not an ideal or sensuous one as stated in the epic narratives. On the contrary, it is a relationship of convenience. Vali is not worried about Tara's resistance towards his illegitimate relationship with Ruma. While Sak finds her as a good companion with whom he shares his secret thoughts Vali always keeps a distance from Tara. The question of compatibility puts Tara and Vali on the opposite poles in the story.

The striking resemblance between the Ramayana and N.S. Madhavan's story is in the portrayal of the cowardice of Sugriva and Sak in the short story. Sak is trained to be a coward. It is a part of the selfish plan of his brother, Vali, to have unfettered authority in the family. Again, Vali often considers his brother as a

hindrance to his success and constantly threatens his self-esteem to produce a feeble person out of Sak. Even Vali has moved to the extent of claiming his girlfriend in his presence. It is assumed that Sak finds Vali's intrusion in his love affair as a threat to his masculinity which invoked the feeling of revenge in him towards Vali. Sak, in the story appears to be a helpless, isolated and orphaned kind of character whose only relative, Vali, holds a grudge towards him. Contrary to the mythical Sugriva, Sak's motive is not to obtain Tara or to have control over the fortunes of Vali. Sak is involved in a conspiracy to murder Vali because he identifies it as impossible to attain anything worth of quality if Vali is around. Even if Sak does not want to have competitions, Vali is in endless competition with him. The consequence of the competition is what is depicted in the story as Sak's childhood experience: if Sak succeeds, he can neither enjoy the fruit of his success nor be happy after that, as he would be hurt and his success will not be counted. For example, the big fish that Sak once caught is the object of worry for Vali, as it reminds him of his inability. Vali is trying to erase his success by continuing fishing to catch a bigger one in which he miserably fails. Secondly, he comes up with an allegation that Sak cheats him by occupying a better place and grabs the big fish that Vali hunts. Vali is not ready to give up the whole affair by throwing away the fish that they caught, but in a fit of anger and arrogance, he inflicts physical violence on Sak who is a child of eight years of age. The only resort that Sak has at home is Tara, the relationship between the two is not clearly defined. Sak has fallen in love with Tara only because he has Tara beside him throughout from childhood to console him in the loneliness and abuse. Tara can perfectly understand the insult through which Sak is living his difficult life. So, the physical relationship between them, from the perspective of Sak

in the story is not revenge. But, it is a need for him to prove to himself that he is masculine enough who does not deserve abandonment from a woman and insult from a man. The troubles that Vali brings to the life of Sak make Vali's murder inevitable. Thus the story, though has spoken through the perspective of Tara, is spoken more on behalf of Sak than herself.

Another significant deviation from the mythical story is the erasure of the grudge between Sak and Andrew, the mythical Angadan. Andrew is visible in the story in one or two instances and he does not play any crucial role in it. The story presents two parallel situations on the beach. In the beginning Tara introduces a distant view of Vali and Sak on the beach in which they are in perfect harmony. She guesses that Vali can be a good father, which later proves wrong in the case of Andrew. Towards the end, she sees Sak and Andrew in a similar situation in perfect harmony from the distance. Though the myth depicts Tara as having many insights, the short story shares the writer's doubts about Tara's insights. Also, rather than making Vali deliver a prolonged speech at the end, the writer allows Vali to die a sudden silent death before meeting Tara or Andrew. The only clue given about his thoughts is what Ruma identifies from his notebooks, in that too he does not share any concern about his child or country as in the way mythical Vali does. The similarity observed between the mythical Vali and the character Vali in the short story could be summed up as both of them hold an undecipherable torment, and death might be a reliever of that pain of living.

Since the focus of the story is the relationship of the trio: Tara, Vali and Sak, the story does not extend itself to a criticism on Rama as made by many critics like

R.K. Narayanan who in *The Ramayana : A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* remarks:

Rama was an ideal man, all his faculties in control in any circumstances, one possessed of an unwavering sense of justice and fair play. Yet he once acted, as it seemed, out of partiality, half knowledge and haste, and shot and destroyed, from hiding, a creature who had done him no harm, not even seen him. This is one of the most controversial chapters in the Ramayana (7).

Vali is not an animal in N.S. Madhavan's story. Here, the writer's intention is to unravel the obscurity associated with Vali. Focusing on Vali's ambitions, his identity crisis and trauma, and Tara's psychological and physical reactions to his obscurity, the writer is elaborating the tale of Vali. When Vali and Tara are displaced from the context and time of their depiction in the Ramayana, the writer is throwing a different insight into the story that the context of depiction is crucial in the behaviour, values, priorities and philosophies of each character. Ultimately, it is the perspective that makes a character virtuous or vicious, intelligent or foolish, courageous or cowardly. So, the time of depiction, along with the time in the tale matter in the formation of characters in the stories. Thus time, perspective and culture are instrumental in promoting the plurality of the Ramayana.

Epics mostly narrate the events of the heroes from the perspective of worship. Built around the dualism of good and evil, they put all the characters in watertight compartments with clearly defined characteristics. The ugly, the old women, the servants, the poor starving and the powerless people cannot find a room

in the elitist narratives. Or, if they are visible, their consciousness will be the one of annihilation of goodwill. Sarah Joseph, in her short story collection titled, *Putu Rāmāyaṇam*, imagines the neglected consciousness of the marginal characters such as Manthara. Manthara, the faithful hunchbacked servant of Kaikeyi, accompanies her when Dasharatha marries Kaikeyi and takes her to Ayodhya. Mesmerised by the beauty of young Kaikeyi, in order to marry her, Dasharatha has given a vain promise to her father Asvapati that Kaikeyi will be treated as the principal consort of Dasharatha and her child will be crowned as the king of Ayodhya after Dasharatha. Later, at the birth of four sons, the eldest of them being Rama, he is selected as the future king of Ayodhya. In order to avoid conflicts, Dasharatha keeps it as a secret until Manthara spies on him. Being loyal to Kaikeyi, she secretly sends messengers to Asvapati to enter Ayodhya to prevent coronation, in which she fails as the messengers cannot cross the boundaries of the kingdom. Manthara, who takes it as her mission to bring justice to Kaikeyi, informs her about the news of the deceitful decision of Dasharatha. Finally, Kaikeyi's interference discourages Dasharatha from crowning Rama as the king of Ayodhya, though all the people including Bharatha want Rama to be crowned. Manthara is identified as the chief conspirator in this situation and she is thoroughly beaten up. The short story titled "Kaṛutta Tuḷakal" written from the perspective of Manthara of the Ramayana not only justifies Manthara's actions, but also reveals how she is treated after the failed coronation and how she undertakes the difficult expedition of escaping from Ayodhya to reach Kekayam, her motherland. The story unravels the potential of Manthara's consciousness, like 'black hole' to take the entire Ayodhya to the dark truths.

Manthara's narration in Sarah Joseph's story refutes the assumptions about the ethics of kings as it depicts the nature of existence of the servants whose loyalty to the master is counted as treachery depending on the consequences of their words. Manthara is the object of body shaming and unnecessary criticism due to her hunch back and she has been attributed devilishness only because of this bodily deformity. When she reaches Ayodhya as the servant of Kaikeyi she has been an eyesore to the other people and she remembers the way how she is always under the scrutinising eyes of the inhabitants of Ayodhya. The short story upholds the perspective of Manthara though the narrative mode selected is the third person format. The context of the story is her escape from Ayodhya to avoid lynching and attack of the agitated princes, Bharathan and Shathrughnan. Manthara has the intelligence to understand that her involvement in Kaikeyi's conspiracy against Rama's coronation is not the only reason for attacks against her. Rama's exile into the forest happens because the king Dasharathan wants Raman to do so, to keep his word. The real reason for the atrocities done against Manthara is the fear about the slanderous secrets of the palace that Manthara may reveal to the subjects of Ayodhya to defame the royal family. Manthara's knowledge and her brilliance are the reasons that make her a target of attacks in addition to her allegiance to Kaikeyi who suddenly becomes the inhuman face of woman in Ayodhya.

The dominant emotion that Manthara portrays is not fear exactly. Her consciousness is filled with disdain and hatred for the privileged rulers. This is what makes her the representative of the underprivileged group who though are silent dissatisfied. Undoubtedly Manthara represents the revolutionary spirit emerging out

of the consciousness about class and feudalism. Being one among the people who practise the norms of Kosalam, she reflects on the disgusting fact that loyalty is rare in the mind of the people of Ayodhya. This understanding makes her search for Valaakan, a servant easy. He and his wife offer support for her escape in return to the money she offers. Manthara's ruminations on the attitude of the servants whose only concern is the material benefit for the actions unravel the devastated condition of Kosalam, the glorified country of Surya Dynasty. Everywhere she can visualise betrayal, which has become the trademark of the country. When capitalism overpowers feudalism, betrayal without guilt overpowers fear and loyalty. The emotions such as guilt, fear or shame become secondary to the individuals who prioritise material comfort. This develops as social consciousness in the short story and is quite evident in the behaviour of the servant, Valakan, in the story. Manthara is very obstinate to fulfil her mission to disclose both the ignoble nature of a treacherous Dasharathan blinded by desire and an angry Asvapati with ambitions. Ultimately her intention behind setting this goal is to expose the hypocrisy of the kings to the people of Ayodhya.

Manthara has her own judgments about the people in the palace. She estimates the actions of Bharathan who raises his sword against his own mother as idiotic and as instigated by a patriarchal education. In fact, she can envisage the true reason for it as the knowledge that the power structures offer and the hierarchy they normalise: the mother is lower than the brother in the structure due to the gender bias the society cherishes. She considers the notion of bhakti towards the brother as the one lacking wisdom and considers Bharathan as a victim of this defective learning.

To her, Ayodhya is a perfect stage for superfluous performances. What is common for all the actors is the innocent profile make up which has a peaceful appearance (Joseph 65). Manthara can conceive the effective roles that the characters, Dasharathan and Asvapati played: Dasharathan declares that his intention behind the coronation of Raman is based on the thought about Ayodhya's future, whereas Asvapati considers the intention of Dasharathan as deceitful and he wants Bharathan, his grandson, to be crowned as was offered by Dasharatha earlier. The duty of Vasishthan, the sage, is to prevent the meeting of these two hypocrites holding divergent perspectives. What an innocent Bharathan cannot recognize, according to Manthara, is the deceitfulness of these people. Manthara is quite indifferent to the patriarchal norms that Ayodhya propagated in the minds of young men who will later act as the mere puppets of this rigid system of injustice. She does not have even the slightest of sympathy towards Dasharathan. Obviously Manthara understands the development of the events as the consequences of Dasharathan's deeds. Again, the writer has incorporated the critical class consciousness in the words of the woman who held a secret grudge towards the elite kings. She justifies her political position in her stream of thoughts by generalising the nature of kings whose only priority is gaining power and conveys it as a legacy to their children. She observes that any threat to their power will shake the stability of these kings. They will be ready to act out any tragic role to gain power. MaTara recognizes that hypocrisy is the major reason for Dasharatha's tragedy.

The writer argues that it is Raman's sacrifice that fueled the hatred of Manthara who speaks truths in the short story. Watching the plural faces of vices in

Asvapati, Dasharathan and Kaikeyi and the virtues of Raman, Manthara is filled with hatred. She cannot help but be critical about her own deeds to prove her obligations towards the members of the royal family. Isolating her crime from that of the rest, she finds solace in the idea of helplessness. What she found as inevitable for the association with the cheaters is the ultimate feeling of insecurity. The realisation of lack of safety directs her to escape from the country at any cost.

When Kaikeyi expresses her desire to accompany Manthara, she immediately recognizes it as a threat to her escape from Ayodhya. A significant moment in the story, the incident of conversation between Kaikeyi and Manthara reveals how spiteful Manthara is towards the members of the elite group. Without even a tinge of repentance, she tells her former mistress that she cannot be welcomed by her father who is aggrieved at the loss of Ayodhya for which he can find Kaikeyi as responsible. She is indirectly critical of the selfish nature of Asvapati whose filial affection is a superficial action to expand the territories of his kingdom to Ayodhya. During the curse too she cautions Kaikeyi of the imminent danger and rejection that she might face from Asvapati. She shows a cold face towards the wish of Kaikeyi to reach near her mother.

Manthara's words turn prophetic when she says that "Ayodhya is always a prison to Kaikeyi which now turns into a grave from where it is impossible to escape" (Joseph 69). Manthara seems to have known the bloodshed and violence behind the fame of the emperors, whose actions make a lot of martyrs out of the innocent subjects. Though it offends Kaikeyi, Manthara speaks the truth that she no longer wants to show obligation towards Dasharathan, Asvapati, Raman or Kaikeyi

and her only priority can be money. A revelation appears late to the old woman. Consequently she attempts to rescue herself from Ayodhya, where she cannot find any hope.

Sarah Joseph's short story rightly emphasises the political undercurrents behind the establishment of dynasties and the continuity of rule and legacy. By narrating the history of Ayodhya through the vision of Manthara, an old female servant, with a distorted body, she is trying to give voice to the subalterns who are treated as insignificant but devilish in the grand narratives. What Sarah Joseph highlighted is the intelligence, the critical and analytical skill and the wisdom of Manthara who is just a servant of the third queen of Ayodhya. Again, her potential to safeguard and destroy the respectability of the country is highlighted by the writer. The story reveals Manthara's realisation that she should escape from the imprisonment of Ayodhya to live a peaceful life along with articulating the follies of the kings to the ordinary subjects whose thoughts are also important for the sustenance of the glory of the powerful along with money. The independence that she maintains at least in the thoughts rightly portrays her sense of justice beyond the obligations which resulted in her tragedy. Sarah Joseph's retelling of the Ramayana by articulating the voice of the marginalised and villainous character provides a fresh insight into the Ramayana. While the Ramayana narrates the story making a critique of Manthara's deeds, Sarah Joseph's Manthara defends her stand and provides her dimension of the story. This supports the dynamism of the Ramayana narrative tradition.

Shurpanakha, the sister of Ravana, the subject of abuse of Rama and

Lakshmana, the reason for the abduction of Sita and the war between Rama and Ravana, is a significant character, like Manthara, in the Ramayana. Being an Asura princess whose instincts are not legitimised by rules or rituals, Shurpanakha lives a life of independence celebrating her female exuberance in Sarah Joseph's story. As a woman of prestige in the Asura clan, her stride across the Dantaka forest is not restrained by any man or woman. The teachings of her tribe do not force her to repress the desires. Instead, it makes her internalise the value of nature that desire of the world is what lies behind the nurturing of trees in the forest and behind the fertility of the soil. Having lived in such a tradition, she finds it as paradoxical to abstain from the passion invoked by any stimulant whether it is a man or the fragrance produced from a flower. Her life principles do not fit her in the codified laws of prudence of women internalised by the Aryans. She is not only free from restrictions and inhibitions in terms of gender, body or ethnic background, but also, she is venerated to the position of an immaculate mother figure of the tribe.

In *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* and *Tuḥsidas Rāmāyaṇa*, Shurpanakha's approach towards Rama and Lakshmana is portrayed as an encroachment into the peaceful world of the princess in the forest (Geetha 33,34,35). In fact, her confession of love towards Rama is mocked at by both Rama and Lakshmana, who make a laughing stock out of her by manipulating her to shuttle between Rama and Lakshmana for love. Though they enjoy the game, when Shurpanakha is agitated, rather than understanding their own role in insulting her which lies behind the anger, Lakshmana with the support of Rama mutilates her by cutting off the nose and ears of Shurpanakha in *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* and

Rāmcāritmānas. But in *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* Shurpanakha's breasts are removed along with ears and nose. Paula Richman interpreted that "in Tamil Culture breasts are symbolic of a woman's power, so mutilation of them is a harsh indignity" (*Many Rāmāyaṇas*, 75). Not only in Tamil Culture, but also in many cultures breast is a metonymic part that suggests female power. Sarah Joseph follows this idea of the mutilation of breast and produces a heroine who resembles the Tamil icon Kannaki, full of revenge, in her short story. The story, "Tāikulam" is a sharp criticism on the patriarchal brutality against women. The story narrates the aggressive reactions of Shurpanakha who cannot digest the loss of her feminine organ, breast, in addition to the loss of nose with which she enjoys the scent of the forest in its fullness.

Shurpanakha is the narrator of the story titled as "Tāikulam". The language of the narration is not a standardised Malayalam used by the elite. The language is a mixture of Malayalam and Tamil and it resembles the language used by the tribals of Kerala. The writer portrays Shurpanakha not as a demonic personality. She is a tribal matriarch and the references to her body denote that she has shining black skin and big eyes. Her appearance carries the power of a matriarch and her body and ornaments contribute to the female domination through her body. Sarah Joseph's Shurpanakha is a phenomenal woman if one lends the expression from Maya Angelou. To Shurpanakha, her body is her prestige, which she carries herself in a prolific manner. She does not demarcate body from her identity and she does not discipline or hide it from external glances. In fact, it is the pride of the clan too. The breasts particularly are the ones that feed generations of children belonging to their clan. So, in Shurpanakha's perspective, the attack on her body is the attack on the

confidence of the clan, in addition to the threat it caused to the self-esteem of the individual and the entire women race (Geetha 37). She is intelligent enough to recognize that the mutilation is not simply an accident, but is a conscious act of pushing her to fall into a genderless category. A strong part of the face, the function of which is not only breathing, but to add flavour to food and life, the nose remains as one of the most important organs on the face beyond question.

The intention behind the cutting of the nose is to damage her pride and courage, to discipline her rather than avoiding the threat or nuisance that she causes. Cutting off the nose is a calculated act of destroying the beauty of a woman who is so proud of herself and who is difficult to be controlled. Invariably, it serves the purpose of giving a fatal message to her to spend the rest of her life in a dark room where no one should see her ugliness. In that sense it can be compared to the acid attacks that many women are subjected to in the contemporary situation. Removing the breast is more a violent act than cutting off the nose, as the breast is a metonymic part standing for female identity. Lakshmana's and indirectly Rama's objective is to permanently spoil Shurpanakha, who is proud of her identity. The writer does not mention the names of any of these brutal men who are behind this inhuman activity. Yet, she made references to Ravana with utmost respect by adding *Perumal*, the great man, after his name. In Shurpanakha's narrative, her aversion towards the cheating of Vibhishana is quite evident. References are also made in association with the treachery done against Vali, the Vanara king. Shurpanakha is attempting to reveal the self-interested justifications behind the actions of the proliferated heroes of the myths. Along with that the argument of the writer is that the myth is not

intended to look at the incidents from the perspective of the vanquished. When such a choice is made from the part of the writer, the result would be an entirely different narrative. Sarah Joseph directs the reader to follow the thoughts of Shurpanakha, whose loss is deplorable.

The story begins with the aggressive note of the ruminations of the protagonist. Her concept of fight is varying from the male visualisation of it. When the men use sophisticated weapons to attack, she thinks about using her body, nails, as a weapon to tear the enemy off. This indicates how the female invents her own mechanism to attack the opponent who brought irreparable damage to her mind and body. She envisages a battle in which she expects the women whose hatred and children whose revelations to fuel the spirit. Her hatred is not directed against all the men. It is focused on the ethnic violence that victimises the women belonging to another tribe. She is not ashamed to declare that the power she imbibes is the one instilled by Ravana whose courage and strengths are incomparable. Considering that the attack is not a single incident against any particular woman, Ravana summons war against the atrocious men of Surya dynasty. Obviously one can imagine the reason for Shurpanakha's admiration of Ravana: he takes the insult made to women of Lanka as an offence against the whole country. So, it seems that being a ruler he has the prudence to understand that women are also individuals worth yielding respect. Probably because he can understand the tribe's attitude to the independence of women, no attempt is made to discipline Shurpanakha to save herself against external attacks. Sometimes, the nature of sadism done against her might be an unforeseeable kind of violence.

The writer reveals the intensity of Shurpanakha's loss by emphasising the void created by the breasts removed from her body. She is thoroughly broken by the incident as it not only brings physical pain and damage to her, but is also a cultural assault on the tribe by cutting off the visible emblem of motherhood. She considers it as a part of the conspiracy to destroy the tribe by insulting the women belonging to it. It is really significant to see that she is not belonging to the category of women who are trained to be ashamed of breasts. She is, in fact, proud to have breasts that suggest her passion and motherhood. With the removal of breasts, in a grief-stricken state, she compares the nature of men belonging to her tribe and Rama and Lakshmana. She has an almost definite understanding that the men of her tribe will not defame women in the way Lakshmana did, because they have a different definition for heroism. (Joseph 57). Shurpanakha states that this episode of humiliating women continued when Ayomukhi, the leader of women resistance of Asura met Rama and Lakshmana, she too was subjected to a similar kind of inhumanity. Surpankha is highlighting the extreme nature of ethnic violence against women. In a tribal ritual that followed this violence the queries raised are about the destruction of serenity and peace in the Dantaka forest. The tribal people are particularly worried about the weapons made of iron that will deform nature and the people rely upon it. The fear coupled with helplessness gives way to anger from the part of women.

The eco-feminist vision of the work is evident when the writer shows the complementary relationship between Shurpanakha and the forest. The romantic passions of Shurpanakha towards nature are quite appealing as they reveal the subtle

emotions that fulfil the body and spirit of her in the presence of fragrance of the flowers of Dantaka forest. The trauma of the violence haunts the woman in Shurpanakha. Surpankha's hurling the spear at the Swastika symbol indicates her aversion towards the intolerance of Arya race it represents. She is aware of the intoxication of power that led to the treachery of Vibhishana. Highlighting the sincerity and support of mothers in Lanka to Ravana, she exonerates Ravana of the crime of Sita's abduction. The reason for that is revealed at the end when she laughs at the murder of Sita's virtue done by means of trial by fire. The most despicable deed of the patriarchal men of the Surya dynasty is that they fail to respect the honour of women. Shurpanakha's apt laughter substantiates that she recognizes the nature of violence as not simply ethnic violence but gender violence. Her laughter, though not heard by the enemies, is the one which mocks the hypocrisy of Rama, the ideal man in the popular renditions of the Ramayana. The laughter has the subversive force to establish her power as a matriarch of Asuras. Though Rama and Lakshmana attempt to curtail her confidence, the laughter indicates their failure. Also, it indicates her pride as an Asura princess who has been well treated by Asura men. Moreover, the laughter serves as a weapon against the moral double standards of Aryans that do not spare Sita.

A text is not simply containing the ideas and inputs that it carries in a direct way. The suppressed and suggested matter embedded in the textual content too produces the layers of potential meaning of the text. *Carolyn Heilbrun and Catharine Stimpson* in "Theories of Feminist Criticism: A Dialogue" debate over the new consciousness of the writer revealed through imagination. While for many male

writers the human condition is the motive which finds voice through women, for a feminist writer social justice is the fundamental motive that produces voice. The feminist writer can identify the presence of the absence in the work and fill the caverns and hollow with imagination (62, 63). In the story titled "Kathayilillātat", Sarah Joseph extends the scope of the story of the Ramayana by telling a possible story which could have been associated with the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. Conversely, the writer provokes the thoughts of the reader about the selection of content for grand narratives. Selectiveness of the texts prevents the inclusion of the stories of the marginalised or the defeated. A partial version of the story is what is allowed to be read and understood, in which the victims are mostly depicted as villainous or trespassers. Such a victim is Shambuka in the story of the Ramayana. Shambuka is a political subject when looking at the myth from the perspective of the Dalits. Revisiting Shambuka's plight and making a critique of the Ramayana are inevitably acts of resistance against violence and exclusion based on *Chaturvarnya*, the division of the society based on the classification based on caste as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra, existed in India from ancient periods. Sarah Joseph is, in fact, not rewriting the story of Shambuka; yet she is attempting to state that what happened to Shambuka is still continuing, and the succeeding generations also fail to achieve the visibility or voice that is denied to him.

Shambuka's story appears in Sargas 73 to 76 of "Uttara Kānda" of *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. Shambuka is a lower caste man belonging to Sudra community who is slain by Rama for doing penance. The prevailing belief among the upper caste people is that if a lower caste person does penance it will cause the death of a

Brahmin's son. When Rama comes to know about Shambuka's act, Shambuka is slain. This act of killing does two purposes: firstly it is meant to save the respectability of the king, as the Brahmin whose son died at the age of fourteen raises an allegation that that subjects meet an untimely death due to the evil acts of the king and for that the king should find solutions. Secondly, it is a part of the conspiracy of Brahmins, who can not tolerate the austerities and asceticism practised by a non-Brahmin, and who educate the king to identify the lower caste men practising asceticism to reach heaven. The innocent Shambuka is a prey to the inhuman act of conspiracy of the Brahmins in the court and the Kshatriya king, both being very superstitious and not having the tolerance to let the Sudra learn and practise ascetic rituals. In his seminal work, *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar argues that *Chaturvarnya* as a system of social organisation is impractical and futile. This observation is made by comparing caste, the privilege/marginality due to birth with *Chaturvarnya*, the categorization based on worth (25).

Sarah Joseph's story titled, "Kathayilillātat", includes what is unsaid in her story as a part of her realisation that it is what must be said. The story depicts the meeting of five children, all disturbed by their own self-doubt and tensions. At the beginning of the story, the characters Lavan and Kusan, the children of Raman and Sita, set out with Sage Valmiki to meet their father and tell their story written in *Adikavaya*, to the folk in Naimisharanya. When they depart, being aware of the permanent nature of their separation from the mother, Sita, the children feel sad, while the sage prompts them to continue with the mission as it is inevitable. In the forest, at night, they are moved by a song sung by the children of Shambukan. The

children of Shambukan are in search of *Adikavi* to ask a couple of questions about the rationale for the murder of their father and the non-inclusion of their tales in Valmiki's songs and in the height of desperation, they ask whether it could have been possible to murder them so as to give breath to the Brahmin child. They are repeatedly chanting the slogan about the eternal existence of Shambuka in their minds.

The contradicting versions of the story of the death of Shambukan are unravelled by the singing of the songs of Shambukan, the victim's children and the children of Rama, the victor. Here the writer is enlightening the audience about the possible existence of the multiple renditions of a single story. Thus, the narrative develops to be a meta-fiction. The specialty of these narrations is that both the children are narrating the story from the third person's perspective and both of them are sad about what has happened to Shambukan. The children take a decision to sing both the stories on the platform provided in Naimisharanya, though only the versions of Lava and Kusa were included in *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. The interesting take of Sarah Joseph is the inclusion of the character Unni, the child who is allegedly dead due to the penance of Shambuka, reborn after Shambukan's death. The character Unni is as insecure as the nameless children of Shambukan. He loses cow in the forest, forgets the path to return and is waiting for death in fear when he happens to listen to the other children. Eternally sad and guilty, Unni considers his rebirth as one of suffering from which he wants to get *nirvana*, the salvation. Guilt makes him ashamed to reveal his identity before the children of Shambukan. Compared to the other characters, Unni is the one who is not ready to get rid of his

orthodox ways. Though hungry, he is very reluctant to eat the food offered by the daughter of Shambuka, who finally threatens him to eat the pancake. The most poignant of the characters, Unni, feels his life as very traumatic due to the guilt and blame it carries. Unni seems to have realised that preventing Sudra people from penance may not offer security to his life. Also, it appears that he is partly aware of the fact that the privilege as Brahmin will not help him to meet the everyday challenges. Having lost his way in the forest, he is waiting for his imminent death, amidst the insecurities of loneliness and age. Fear is the only concern he has in the forest, which puts him in a position quite distant from the two other groups of children. Quite grippingly, Unni is not thinking about his family members, where both Shambuka's children and the children of Sita are ruminating about their mothers. Shambuka's presence might have haunted Unni, Kusan and Lavan, who can sense the presence of an unknown spirit while they travel. Later, it is revealed that Shambuka's eternal presence is not an obscure disturbance in the air, but the voice of his legacy that follows, not only the descendants of the Brahmin who initiated the stride against *Sudras*, but the heirs of Raman who kills the *Sudra* for no harm he committed. But in *The Annihilation of Caste* Ambedkar makes an analytical note on Rama's action:

That without penal sanction the ideal of Chaturvarnya cannot be realized, is proved by the story in the Ramayana of Rama killing Shambuka. Some people seem to blame Rama because he wantonly and without reason killed Shambuka. But to blame Rama for killing Shambuka is to misunderstand the whole situation. Ram Raj was a

Raj based on Chaturvarnya. As a king, Rama was bound to maintain Chaturvarnya. It was his duty therefore to kill Shambuka, the Sudra who had transgressed his class and wanted to be a Brahmin. This is the reason why Rama killed Shambuka. But this also shows that penal sanction is necessary for the maintenance of Chaturvarnya. Not only is penal sanction necessary, but the penalty of death is necessary. That is why Rama did not inflict on Shambuka a lesser punishment. That is why the Manu-Smriti prescribes such heavy sentences as cutting off the tongue, or pouring of molten lead in the ears, of the Sudra who recites or hears the Veda. The supporters of Chaturvarnya must give an assurance that they could successfully classify men, and that they could induce modern society in the twentieth century to re-forged the penal sanctions of the Manu-Smriti (26).

The training that Valmiki offers produces compassionate individuals out of Lava and Kusa contradicting the harsh disposition of the princes of Ikswaku dynasty. Probably Valmiki's non Brahmanical identity and identity as a poet might be the reasons for the empathetic behaviour of the children who have grown up under his tutelage. Being worried about the future of the children, Valmiki brings them to Naimisharanya where they sing the songs about Sita. This is a part of his mission to take the children to their father about which he himself is worried. Throughout the story, the characters are worried about a haunting presence. It might be the ghosts of the past from where escape is impossible. The children, though not

the direct participants of the crimes of Rama, being the scions of Ikshwaku, are liable to carry the effects of the deeds of the predecessors. Probably the setting of the scene, i.e. the forest brought back the unconscious memories of the sage, the creator and the participant of the story who also could not evade from the construction of characters and episodes connected with the legitimate sins. The fear of retribution too might haunt the children of Rama and Sita. Invariably, they are haunted by the fear and insecurities produced by the unknown forest. What is to be noted here is the insight shared through Kusa who remarks that the paths in the forest are not the private properties of any. So the selection of the settings, i.e. the forest establishes the notions about the limits of ownership of land and is instrumental in the promotion of egalitarian ideas at least within the boundary of the forest. Lavan is often inclined to follow his ancestors' path and hostility. Lavan and Kusan, in fact, represent two contrasting perspectives: Lavan representing the authoritative, arrogant self of the kings and Kusan, the empathetic and compassionate self of the marginalised. In other words, Lavana represents Rama and Kusan represents Sita. The attitude, though different, does not help any of them, to overcome the apprehensions that the journey initiated.

There are two songs that offer the backgrounds for the entry of the stories, which are not a part of the text: The song of the children of Shambuka set to the rhythm of tribal music and the Slokas that Valmiki taught the children of Rama and Sita. The significant matter in the incorporation of these songs is that they represent two world views: a general view in the form of teaching, offered by a third person, a sage and hence authentic and objective, and a specific view about the education of

the marginalised and the unjustifiable penalties they have to pay for that. The contradictory nature of these songs functions as the key to discuss conflicting ideals about which the writer discusses in the short story. The interest generated in the children by the peculiar song set to tribal rhythm is impeded by the interference of Sage Valmiki, the spokesperson of the normative principles. Valmiki's stand is quite problematic in the text; on the one side he empathises with Sita and Shambuka's children, on the other he does not show the courage as the maker of the story to criticise Rama for the deeds. Not simply lack of courage would be the reason for the conscious silence of Valmiki on the unfortunate deeds of Raman. The two reasons for this could be the internalisation of Brahmanical patriarchal values which prevent him from speaking and the intention to be an acceptable writer might pull him back from the responsibilities of speaking out for the marginalised. Though ambiguous in his critical stands, he is aware of the sadness of Sita, as the necessary consequence of the patriarchal ways of Raman. The children also bear the predicament of the sage: they are aware of the agony caused by the abandonment of their mother, yet they do not take it as reason enough to abstain themselves from the abandonment of the mother for the second time. When children are projected as the central characters, the writer is attempting to share the speculations on the future of the world built and bound by certain ethical codes.

Unni, the character representing the privilege and prioritizations of Brahmins, depicts the self-doubting Brahmins whose opportunities associated with life are the ones enjoyed at the cost of the timid nature of the marginalised or forced silencing of them. The forest offers a kind of equality where the Brahmin, who does

not know how to survive in a commonplace circumstance, struggles more than the children of Shambukan. What Unni loses at first in the forest is the calf attained along with the life regained as a gift. Here, the calf is a metaphor for the supremacy and privilege. In due course, the advantages, the life and the calf gained at the mercy of the system are threatened in the forest, the rules of which are different. The direction of the story is decided eventually by the girl child of Shambukan. From their conversations, it is understood that their journey is the one with an aim. This is where their journey turns different from the one of the children of Raman and Sita. Their purpose is to gain safety whereas the purpose of the other group is egalitarian as they want to ask questions about the injustice to establish justice at least in future. Through this short story, Sarah Joseph is highlighting the importance of reforming the cultural settings where caste division and depravity caused by it no longer can survive. By making children as the characters of the story, the writer shares her optimism in the future generations. Through the story, she suggests the importance of intercultural dialogues, the space for which is denied due to stigma. The end result of such a dialogue is the establishment of equality and nonviolence which are essential for coexistence in a multicultural society with mutual trust.

George Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams in the book *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities* makes a crucial statement about the texts produced by the institutions:

Authority seems to require a stable, unitary text rather than an unstable, multiple one. In establishing the text as authorized by it, authority also establishes itself as authorized by the text....As against

such absolutist claims, recent textual scholarship has instead pressed the case of contingency, in the double sense both of the text itself being historically contingent in its circumstances of production and reception, and of it being contingent in its (re)-construction in the present (2).

The historical situatedness of the ancient text and the modern construction are recognized as the vital factors in the analysis spreading new meaning to the text which may otherwise be considered as a “transcendent monument” or “transhistorical” document (Bornstein 3). When N.S. Madhavan and Sarah Joseph write the short stories against the solid and stable political framework of the Ramayana, they actually follow the palimpsestic nature of the Ramayana which produces the whole spectrum of the Ramayana tradition.

N.S. Madhavan and Sarah Joseph by writing the short stories based on the Ramayana make effective intervention into the text of the *Ramayana*. Along with that they dissect the nature of the society that upholds certain cherished notions from the fictional account of the life of characters. The episteme related to the Ramayana as conceived by the speakers varies across periods. Recognizing this transformation in sensibility both the writers portray the incidents and paradigms to suit the time of the production of the short stories.

The individual characters who are focused in the stories under discussion are struggling to negotiate the realities offered by the Ramayana and the time when they are represented in the short stories. All the prominent characters in the stories, Ahalya, Shurpanakha, Mandodari, Manthara, Tara, the children of Shambukan are

given no space explain their paradigm in the Ramayana. So, the short stories are leading the reader to the inner chambers of the minds of these characters to dig a different truth. They are the characters belonging to different ethnic identities. Still, Mandodari and Shurpanakha are Asura women and Tara, a Vanara woman in the Ramayana and a Christian woman in the short story. Manthara is doubly marginalised as she belongs to the group of servants and she has a physical disability too. Both the writers do experimentation with the form and content. They make the story new and original by using prose to write them. They showcase multiple realities by emphasising subjectivity of the characters. By revealing the subjectivity of the characters, the stories unravel existential dilemmas of the characters such as Vali, Sak, Ahalya, Manthara and Unni. The distinguished feature of all these works is the originality with which they integrate the Ramayana to the current reality. The writers can be called postmodernists because of this. As P.P. Raveendran and G.S. Jayasree have mentioned in the introduction of *The Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Literature*, “they are called so not because they share attributes generally associated with Western postmodernism, but because they represent a new expansion of sensibility that occurred after the decline of modernism” (23). Yet, if one makes a comparison, it is seen that N.S. Madhavan’s works carry the imprints of cosmopolitanism of modernism while Sara Joseph’s characters are deeply entwined with the land and location. Polyphonic imagination and inter textual dialogues are the signatures of the works discussed in the chapter. As strategies of subversion and as modes of experimentation the dialogues they initiate with the Ramayana have relevance.

Situating the marginal characters as centre, exposing the link between power and epic narration, improvising story and background, providing a kaleidoscopic vision of the events, highlighting the essentials of human existence, focusing on passions, desires, identity, ethnicity, violence, crime, betrayal and truth, the stories participate in the celebration of multiplicity in the postmodern context of narration. Thus, the stories showcasing perspectives of the juncture of their production and Kerala background remind that the region and language are ingrained in the stories which breathe new meanings.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Being narratives which have outlived the constraints of time and space, the Ramayana narratives constantly invite the attention of the literary community. The profundity and array of thoughts each narrative contains leave fresh insights, not delimited by the fictionality of the content and of the varied cultural contexts of the content. Though the validity of the Ramayana narratives is not affected by time and space, the period and geography produce strong cultural imprints on the works the nature of which are even decisive in the medium adopted for telling the story. The complementarity between the cultural framework and the Ramayana narratives plays a crucial role in the considerations of the writers whose sensibility goes beyond pure literary concerns. Assimilating the consciousness of the socio-politico-cultural landscapes of production, the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature exercise the liberty to reflect on the prevalent notions of power, caste, gender and marginalisation.

The Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature, by virtue of their adherence to the context and novelty, do not subscribe to the elitist notion that *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* is the original and the other Ramayana narratives, whether they narrate the stories in the epic fashion, or they focus on a single incident, a few incidents, or a character, are the reproductions of the original. Even many of them reject the idea of revisionary writing as the very idea of revision envisages the presence of an original to be revised. This does not mean that all the Ramayana

narratives in Malayalam literature can be situated in this category. Considering the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature, it would be apt to proceed with a broad three-tier classification: the Ramayana narratives that seem to have assumed the apparent superiority of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and narrate the events based on it as the interpretation of this text; the narratives that reject the notion that one Ramayana narrative is superior to another on the basis of length, perspective, author, age or acceptability and hence establish the truth of their story as equally relevant as any other Ramayana narrative and call it as revisionary writing, and the third category which even though retains minimal connection with the Ramayana formulate new stories. The texts based on which the current study is conducted belong to the second and third categories as these two categories mirror the Renaissance spirit of dissent in Kerala than the first category of works.

M. Govindan, in his article published in the work titled, *Indian Renaissance* edited by Ayyappa Panicker, highlights the connection between India and Renaissance by stating that Gautama Buddha is the first proponent of Renaissance (George 272). So, it is not surprising that the Ramayana narratives of dissent written in Malayalam and inspired from Buddhist thoughts contain the spirit of Renaissance. But this being a seemingly less explored area, there is scope for studying the connection between Indian Renaissance and Buddhist thoughts and the role of Buddhist Ramayanas in the spreading of the spirit of Renaissance across India. In this thesis, the term Renaissance is used to denote the transformations in the socio-cultural-political climate of India during and after the second half of the nineteenth century. Still, this study holds the perspective that the transformation in Indian

thought is not something that suddenly happened in the nineteenth century. The progress in science, education, technology, art and literature that happened in the nineteenth century created an ambience for the visibility of the transformed thought. O. Chandu Menon's *Indulēkha* (1889) is an evident example of how literature reflected this change. The influence of modernism is seen in Malayalam poetry when M. Kumaran Asan wrote the poem titled "Vīna Pūvu" (1907). Taking this into consideration, the current study begins the discussions on the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature with Kumaran Asan's *Citāviṣṭayāya Sita* (1919).

The selections under analysis are the works published within a period of a hundred years from 1915. The intention behind fixing such a long span of duration is to choose the works written in Malayalam literature that recounted the ardent spirit of the writers to react to the social system of their times in a critical manner. The two other methods used include dividing chapters based on the genres such as poems, plays, short stories and novels, and focussing on characters that deserve more voice, attention and study. Many texts that fit within the above criteria were not selected for the study for the reason that this study would turn a mere survey of diverse Ramayana narratives without proper focus on the vision that the writers intended to propose as a response to the social fabric of the periods. The strength of the study is that it is made a rather comprehensive one with the inclusion of the texts belonging to various genres and periods. The weakness is connected with the factor of limiting the study to a particular work providing a single perspective, say feminist, post-colonial etc. Again, the foundational framework of multiplicity prevents the selection of a single theoretical orientation for the current analysis

which made the study use the insights of feminism, post-colonialism and cultural studies for interpretation. Since a majority of the texts selected were oriented towards the struggles, confrontations, victimisation, marginalisation and the voices of women, mainly the methodological framework of feminism is utilised for the analysis, though the study draws upon insights from post-colonialism and cultural studies occasionally. The theoretical tools of cultural, feminist and postcolonial literary criticism proposed to identify the various social mechanisms, philosophical paradigms and ideological maxims that were instrumental in the subjugation of individuals or groups in Literature. The observations of thinkers such as A.K. Ramanujan, Paula Richman, Camille Bulcke, Simone de Beauvoir, Allan G Johnson, Bronislaw Malinowski, J. Devika, Frantz Fanon, John Stuart Mill, Benedict Anderson, Homi K.Bhabha, Cheri Register, Alan Badiou, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Kancha Illaiah etc. contributed to the analysis of the chosen texts.

The very act of acknowledging multiplicity of the Ramayana is political as it questions the tendency of the power structures to restrict the scope of the Ramayana by considering it as a religious text alone. The texts selected for study initiate the process of unlearning the knowledge about the dominance of a single Ramayana narrative. The Ramayana narratives of Malayalam literature demand inclusiveness as they function as the critique of socio-political values of the society of Kerala in the twentieth century and the twenty first century. The issues of marginalised groups, individuals and communities threatened by the normalising of subjugation are addressed with empathy in the Ramayana narratives. The attitude to be empathetic towards the marginalised resulted in looking at the story from multiple

perspectives. This change is the reason for the production of multiple narratives based on the Ramayana.

The mind-set of Kerala society has undergone tremendous transformations during the twentieth century. This society was fundamentally caste ridden in the earlier centuries and stood up for the upper caste communities and celebrated their notions about life and existence as standard and normal. So, whatever stood outside this normal were considered as illegitimate and were liable to receive punishment. The hierarchies proposed by Brahminism along with the Vedic teachings established ethical standards in the society that introduced a lot of restrictions on lower caste people and women. With the social transformations that happened during the period of modernity and Kerala renaissance, the social norms were redefined, the boundaries between good and evil were blurred and the rituals and practices of different castes were treated with tolerance. The Spread of knowledge due to the establishment of the printing press and publication of newspapers and magazines along with the universalisation of education brought a paradigm shift in the perspectives about individual freedom and the role of society in social progress. In addition to that, a prominent tendency to consider literature as a vehicle of social progress has promoted realism in literature. Rather than romanticising the subject of literary creations, the writers focus on making critiques of the regressive tendencies of the system. This change redefined literature in general and the Ramayana narratives selected for the study in particular as works with a social purpose. Consequently, the aesthetic standards used to evaluate literature too became more inclusive.

Contrary to this, while a section of the society embraces progressive principles of equality, another section becomes more rigid and conservative. Rejecting the novel ideas and enforcing the Vedic hierarchies, they attempt to establish a system based on ancient hierarchies and principles. For them, the only possibility to read the Ramayana is to imbibe it as a religious text. This hampers the development of progressive thoughts in Kerala. The writers, having recognized the power politics inherent in the regressive nature of the society, initiated acts of dissent by writing counter narratives. These counter narratives propose new paradigms of thinking; they highlight the villains of canonical narratives as heroes, criticize the actions of the heroes using logic, make the silenced characters speak, elaborate on the incidents that remained unexplained in literature and justify the words and deeds of the characters whose actions were tagged as evil acts.

One among the prominent reasons why the system demands unquestioned acceptance of Vedic principles is the tendency of the system to maintain the patriarchal principles on which the Kerala society is constructed. Religion is used as a powerful tool to underline the principles established by patriarchy. Scriptures and myths reinforce the restrictions on women and deny the female agency. Women are silenced, their existence is hidden and their thoughts and desires are not recognized. Along with patriarchal rules, there prevailed rules of caste supremacy too in Kerala society, where lower caste people were treated as uncivilized and untouchables.

Social reforms such as *Aruvippuram Prathishta* (laying of the idol of Shiva by Sreenarayana Guru at Aruvippuram for the lower caste people to worship), establishment of *Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham* by Ayyankali, and establishment

of SNDP for the upliftment of Ezhava community were the fruits of Kerala renaissance spirit. Kumaran Asan who actively participated in SNDP wrote *Cīntāviṣṭayāya Sita*, a book length piece of poetry to establish the voice of dissent. Vayalar Ramavarma's "Rāvaṇaputri, and "Tātaka Enna Drāvida Rājakumāri", Sugathakumari's "Oru Rāmāyaṇa Rāgam", Vijaya Lakshmi's "Kausalya" and Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri's "Ahalyā Mōkṣam" depicts various nuances of thoughts of the marginal characters. The contexts from where they spoke, as crucial as the perspective and the heuristic vision they offer, take the reader out of the landscape of many popular Ramayana narratives. They bring the reader's imagination to the levels where the alternate standpoints of justice become apparent. Thus, literature becomes a visible counter cultural space of resistance. They reject the prevalent notions of Sita as the epitome of patience, Tataka as an ugly forest dwelling creature, Kausalya, Urmila and Ahalya as satisfied with their life. Kausalya, Urmila and Sita are the glorified wives of the men with royal background. Ahalya is the wife of a hermit who prescribes a particular lifestyle for Ahalya which she has rejected. The classic construct of Sita is such that she with her emphasis on virtue and fidelity functions as an object with the help of which Rama's prestige can be eternally preserved. What is subverted in *Cīntāviṣṭayāya Sita* is this classic notion of Sita. The first-person narrative mode of the poem establishes the strong and authentic voice of Sita that interrogates the cultural ethos of marriage. Kumaran Asan's Sita is the one who resists the camouflage of patriarchy. Her portrayal is significant as it unleashes an era of dissent. The exemplary cultural consciousness of Sita and her unparalleled wisdom on the lives of women and her life in particular enables the work to criticise the decisions of others which brought misfortunes to

Sita's life. When the writer allows Sita to speak, the culturally constructed image of Sita gets transformed creating a new nonconformist image of the icon. In other words, a new Sita was born from the subdued, patient, silent, immature Sita.

This change was essentially rooted in the revolutionary spirit offered by the Kerala renaissance at the beginning of twentieth century. Kumaran Asan's politics of empathising with the victims and the downtrodden are the reflections of two of his philosophies: the literary philosophy to adapt himself to the romantic conventions of writing which allows more autonomy to the exercise of will in writing, and the social philosophy to adhere himself to the values that are anti-brahmanical and pro-marginalised. The outcome of the adherence to these philosophies is the Ramayana poem that projects a 'thinking Sita'. Validity of the text lies in its persuasive power to promote the egalitarian message that discouraged society's normalising the atrocities committed against women. Considering the time of production also, it can be seen that the work would perfectly fit in the category of feminist literature that substantiates female agency. The significance of this work lies in its focus on Sita, a cultural icon. Sita's silence in the mythical narrative legitimises the misdeeds done against her in particular and women in general. This is because her silence is interpreted as submission. Sita's image is projected to dictate women to be sacrificing and non-resistant.

As a cautionary tale too, the tale of the Ramayana is used to urge carefulness from women to avoid damage to her and to the respectability of the husband. Also, the dominant narrative is used to threaten the women by using the example of Sita's abandonment. So, the regressive messages against women circulated in the society

using examples from the Ramayana challenged by writers such as Kumaran Asan, Vayalar Ramavarma, Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri, Sugathakumari and Vijayalakshmi. They recognize that the silence of the marginalised characters normalise and justify the patriarchal arrogance. The rhetoric unfolded the trauma behind the complacent images of Sita and Kausalya in particular and the marginalised women of Kerala in general. Honour is what played a decisive role in the lives of these women who suffered abandonment and the resultant trauma. Dasharatha does not count the value of Kausalya whose desires are unrequited though she is the principal consort. Ultimately, the poetic responses of both Vijayalakshmi and Kumaran Asan are against this discourse on the freedom of female.

Sati, the ancient ritual of female self-immolation on the death of the husband, was practised in India as a legitimate ritual. The explanation for such a practice is that the desire of the wife after the death of the husband would bring ignominy to the family. So, the religion disciplined women by cautioning them to hide their desires to survive. The women, because of these restrictions, were compelled to repress their desires in the patriarchal society of Kerala too. So, the poems based on the Ramayana stories, in addition to criticizing this disciplining tendency, portrayed the unhappy state of women and their ambition to gratify the desire. Hence, desire is the common thread that connects the poems selected for the study. Since the society is reluctant to provide room for such a discussion in an explicit manner, the writers, understanding the urgency to make negotiations in Kerala society in this regard, deployed poetry as a medium for such discussions. When Vishnu Narayanan

Namboothiri spoke, his target was the atrocious customs in Kerala Brahmin community that ill-treated the Brahmin women.

Education has transformed the psychology of the women of Kerala to make independent decisions rather than act as subservient individuals. This empowered woman is capable of asking logical questions and redefined the marital relationship. Being unwilling to suffer in a loveless relationship, they opt to quit from the institution of marriage. Such women would be in the mind of Sugathakumari when she portrays Urmila in her poem. Sugathakumari's Urmila, contradicting Valmiki's Urmila, decides to quit the relationship to avoid her own failure. This bold step is what imparts beauty and power to the character of Sugathakumari's poem. Urmila in Sugathakumari has gone to the extent of contrasting herself with Ahalya, implying intertextuality. The masculine selections in the Ramayana do not recognize woman as a human being with thoughts and desires. This fatal flaw ensues psychological torrents from women, be it Ahalya or Urmila depicted by the modern writers.

“Tātaka Enna Drāvida Rājakumāri” characterises the ethnic violence hidden in the layers of the moral framework of the Ramayana. Demolishing the popular demonic attribution on her character, the very title of the poem proposes a nonconformist paradigm on Tataka. Vayalar's Tataka is a Dravida princess who is attacked by the Aryans for two reasons: ethnic variance and gender difference. The predominant among the reasons for the heinous deed committed against them is that she is distinct and powerful. The poet attempts to substantiate the valid point regarding the error from the part of the Ramayana reader/scholar to acknowledge the resistance to plurality apparent in the ancient texts. While Tataka does not express

any guilt on exercising her will to approach Rama, Ravana, in “Rāvaṇaputri” expresses guilt. This guilt is a part of his abandoning the male privilege that justifies the taken for granted treatment of the epic towards the male deeds. Contrary to the male heroes of the Ramayana, Ravana, in the poem, is humble enough to accept his guilt.

Ethnicity is a denominator to define the scale of freedom of the individuals. Whether it is race or caste, people belonging to the margins are often viewed with prejudice. While defining beauty standards, describing the choices and qualities, literature reflects this bias of the society. This is the reason why in many pictorial representations of *Rakshasas* such as Ravana or Shurpanakha, they are portrayed as ugly and evil. This bias is what society maintained throughout history. In Kerala, when upper caste people were considered as noble men, lower caste people and people of tribal communities were considered as criminals or slaves. While the beauty standards are set taking the body of upper caste into face value, the bodies of lower caste people are designated as ugly. Ethnic purity is another popular notion prevalent in the Kerala community where inter-caste or inter religious marriages are recognized as bringing humiliation to the communities and hence they are banned in the society. When the writers wrote the narratives of Ravana and Tataka, these prejudices are questioned. When an alternative truth such as Sita is the daughter of Ravana is established in “Rāvaṇa Putri”, the idea of placing Sita’s birth as enigmatic is questioned along with rejecting Sita as the daughter of Janaka. Thus, the notion of ethnic purity is threatened. When Tataka questions the encroachment of Aryans into the territory of Dravida in “Tātaka Enna Drāvida Rājakumāri”, the message that the

victims started recognizing imperialism and exploitation is established. When taking this story as a political allegory, the poem can be seen as addressing the issue of casteism and exploitation prevalent in Kerala society. This representation is a part of claiming the respectability of lower caste people in general, and lower caste women in particular. So, this portrayal is significant in the history of Kerala too.

Influenced by Communism and the social transformations of the twentieth century, the plays of the twentieth century showcased revolutionary zeal. As different from the previous Sakskrit tradition, in the twentieth century, playwrights such as C.J. Thomas, N.N. Pillai and Krishna Pillai wrote existential and psychological plays. K.M. Panikkar's *Mandōdari* and C.N. Sreekantan Nair's *Sākētam* followed this tradition. Plays based on the Ramayana powerfully transacted the content of dissent to the audience through the visual medium. The plays in Malayalam based on the Ramayana tradition functioned as the vehicles of transformation in the way how the public conceive the Ramayana. Since the stage redefined the imagination of the readers of many Ramayana texts, the change it brought to the perception is enforcing a radical shift in how the epics are viewed. The trilogy, *Kānjana Sita* (1958), *Sākētam* (1965) and *Lankālakṣmi* (1974) by C.N. Sreekantan Nair not only showcase the trajectories of the Ramayana, but also delve deep into the inner realities of the characters utilising introspective and retrospective modes.

Though it emerged only recently, the novel is a medium that gave the Ramayana narratives immense possibilities to develop in the twentieth century and in the twenty first century. Writers such as M.T. Vasudevan Nair, Narendra Kohli,

S.L Bhairappa and Shivaji Savant have attempted to retell the mythological tales in regional languages. Amish Tripathi, Chithra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kavitha Kane, Anand Neelakantan, Volga, Ashwin Sanghi, Krishna Udaysankar and Devdutt Pattanaik are some notable revisionary writers who through their novels made the reading public reimagine the mythical stories. Compared to poetry, short stories and plays, the novels because of the long narrative content addressed the mythical stories in an elaborate way. Either focusing on an event, or focussing on a character, they interpret the myths and depict new dimensions of the story. What they have done is to keep the myth within the realm of fiction by avoiding the religious alliance of myths. This enables them to see the issues from the wide canvas. The transformations in the world view and the core of human values have been portrayed through these creative interpretations. In fact, they bring the complexity of myth to the reality and make logical portrayals of the myths. The Ramayana narratives written in Malayalam also put forth a new paradigm using which, the writers address the myths from the perspective of the marginalised. Themes such as power dynamics, subaltern existence, trauma of women, trajectories of the empowerment of the victims, the rhetoric of the marginalised, new solutions to the old issues etc. are rightly manifested in the Ramayana novels of the twenty first century.

The novels, *Kaikeyi* and *Ūrukāval*, manifest the tales of deception and treachery from the subaltern perspective. Rather than focussing on specific incidents, these novels narrate the Ramayana stories with a changed vision. The perspectives of the author and the character instil polyphonic dimensions on a story which has percolated as a singular grand narrative into the lives of generations. So,

the authorial interventions decide in what way the reader has to perceive the story which the reader thinks as he/she knows. This requires deep penetration into the consciousness of the characters to understand the motives of their actions. The Ramayana novels undertake this seemingly tough endeavour in their own unique fashion. The narrative deviations that reader can find in their texts are not accidental for that matter. Instead, they are the creative deliberations that the individual author is undertaking with the text, the clues of which are exactly the deviations from Valmiki and elaborations. Delving into the question, what lies behind such an autonomous encounter with the text is nothing other than the anxieties of the times. The political and the cultural climate of Kerala imbibes a certain value propagated and widely accepted as imbibed from the text, the Ramayana. Along with cherishing the elevation of a literary text to the realm of a didactic work, the authors from Kerala are sceptical about the interpretation and canonization. This scepticism, the fearless willingness to imagine the incidents from a transformed perspective, the affection towards the text as a vital source for imagination and the belief in the dynamism of the myths are the key factors that invigorate the literary imagination resulting in the production of the Ramayana narratives. The new Ramayanas keep Rama oriented version apart, by allowing the story to evolve around marginalised characters. This enabled the story to see the less legitimate thread in what is considered as normal in Rama-centric narratives. So, this shift in character focus tarnishes the hypocritical images of the protagonist of the Ramayana. Secondly, the characters who share the privilege of being generally perceived as marginal characters who do not actively participate in the development of the Ramayana are kept in key roles in the novels.

The short stories selected for this study are multifaceted in their scope and include the cosmopolitan versions and the unsaid Ramayana versions. The five short stories, “Mandōdari” “Ahalya”, “Tara Fernandez”, “Kaṛutta Tuḷakal” and “Tāikulam” address the discourse of aggression and contribute to the resistance literature acting as the voices of the victims. The pro-hegemonic ideological apparatus of the preeminent moralistic masculine images are attacked in the stories revealing the overt and subtle violence such a mechanism imbibes and allows to be nourished in a society.

The Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature selected for the current study are unique in terms of the content, in terms of the approach to the content, in terms of character behaviour, in terms of the focus and in terms of the perspective or ideology. The uniqueness invariably attributes differences and contradictions to them as well. Contrasting characteristics of the stories while retaining similarities with the Ramayana myth are the proclamations of the autonomy of these stories with the categorical claim that they too are Ramayana narratives. So, autonomy in dealing with the Ramayana is one of the prominent prerogatives of the writers who wrote the Ramayana narratives selected for this study. Secondly, these narratives, irrespective of the genre in which they are written, reflect the possibilities of articulation of ideologies of the times of their production. As the representative literature of the twentieth and early twenty first century, they gather insights from the sociological, theoretical and political intelligentsia of the twentieth and the twenty first century Kerala context and made the narratives. In addition to reflecting the global trends of revisionism in literature, they create new tales out of myths which are tantamount to

demystifying of myths. Thirdly, being radical in nature, the Ramayana narratives seem to quarrel with the canonical narratives and reveal the fissures in what is popular and established. The task that they undertook is manifold: the particular instances from the ancient tale that subjugate, manipulate or attack some specific sects, groups or category are identified; the issue of injustice is addressed either in subtle way or in overt ways; alternative reading, actions and perspectives are drawn with insight and incorporated with the known stories in a convincing manner.

Diversity is the key concern of the Ramayana narratives emanated from the soil of Kerala in the twentieth and early twenty first century, be it verse narratives or prose narratives. The reforms in the socio-political climate of Kerala for a century are reflected subtly in the making of these narratives. They actually have reinvented a tradition of multiplicity of the Ramayana which was in oblivion due to socio-political reasons. The very effort of the Malayalam writers who created Ramayana narratives is to set the norm which is against ignoring the literary nature of the Ramayana. The negotiations that these texts are making are with the ideological paradigm of relegating the Ramayana to a text which promote and circulate the ideas of Bhakti only. The phenomenon of attributing divinity to the characters of this literary text is conceived as the discourse of a particular period; this is the underlying notion of the creations of apparently radical Ramayana narratives of Malayalam literature, be it Kumaran Asan's *Cintāviṣṭayāya Sita*, or Sara Joseph's "Tāikulam".

Among the issues that these texts address, the most pertinent are the ones concerning misogyny and ethnic violence. The texts' deliberations on misogyny are

undertaken by initiating debates by the characters, Sita, Urmila, Mandodari, Tara, Ahalya, Kaikeyi and Shurpanakha in the works, Chintavishtayaya Sita, “Oru Ramayana Rangam”, “Mandodari”, *Ūrukāval*, “Tara Fernandez”, “Ahalyā Mōkṣam”, “Ahalya”, “Kaikeyi” and “Tāikulam”. The texts argue that Shurpanakha and Tataka are ruined for the reasons of gender and ethnicity and Ravana and Vali for ethnicity though the stated reasons are oversimplified justifications of violence such as abduction and arrogance. The works, *Mandōdari* and *Ūrukāval*, substantiate the virtues of these characters thereby directing the readers to think about the ethnic reasons for their murder. While Ravana is portrayed as a hero in *Mandōdari*, he is depicted as a fallen man who repents his sin of misogyny in “Rāvaṇaputri” and “Mandōdari”, the short story. Vali too has got this double layered self when one analyses “Tara Fernandez” and *Ūrukāval*. Both faces of Ahalya in “Ahalyā Mōkṣam” and “Ahalya” express the bold woman in the silent and suffering mythical character; Ahalya in the poem and the short story is unapologetic about the desire and unashamed to reveal the inadequacies of Guathama, the husband. *Sākētam*, *Kaikeyi*, “Kausalya” and “Kaṛutta Tuḷakaḷ” manifest the malicious and treacherous nature of the seemingly innocent Dasharatha though the degree in which the criticism works vary. In comparison with “Ahalya”, the short story “Mandōdari” carries out a critical reading on the character Rama/ Raghavan in a more explicit manner. Kumaran Asan’s *Āintāviṣṭayāya Sita* too looks at the character of Rama from a critical perspective. The similarity in all these texts lies in the fact that the character Rama who is devoid of divine qualities is depicted in them. Thus, the blame that they raise against the character of Rama can be seen as unbiased

evaluation of the actions and priorities of the character. This criticism is very relevant as Rama is seen in Kerala society as a role model for men to form values.

The helpless characters, Angadan, Lavan, Kusan and Unni- the child instrumental in the death of Shambuka- too are captured by the Ramayana narratives explaining the complexities of their existence and the questions that remained unanswered before them. Among the younger generations, the hope and power lie with the children of Shambuka about whom the writer suggests that they are to be included in the grand narrative, by titling the short story as “Kathayilillātat” (Not included in the story). Though the short stories of N.S. Madhavan show least resemblance with the characters and the contexts in the Ramayana, the undercurrents of the incidents and the names of the characters in “Ahalya”, Mandōdari” and “Tara Fernandez” indicate the nuances of resemblance and thereby suggest the contemporary relevance of the Ramayana and the future of the Ramayana narratives.

The exploration of the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature across a century has given an opportunity to identify the plurality of the Ramayana tradition. The study proposes the idea that the Ramayana must be viewed as a dynamic work of culture in a state of evolution. This enables to perceive the text separating it from the narrow constrains of religion. The multiplicity of the Ramayana put forth the notion of inclusivity, a demand of the times. When a classic is presented in new form with temporal signatures, the new work created will become a political text. Such a transformation of politics embedded in the content is noticed when addressing multiplicity of the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam. That politics is

the politics of dissent against the social stigmas and marginalising certain groups or individuals based on their gender or ethnicity.

It is obvious that the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature in the past century have been influential in transforming the thoughts of the Malayalees. Unravelling the trauma of the silent characters in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, the narratives depict the new dimensions of the story which people think that they know. So, what the multiplicity of the Ramayana narratives offer is new knowledge; the knowledge that there is more to learn from the characters whose existence is conceived as self-explanatory in the epic. This makes the texts on the Ramayana complex narratives. In addition to portraying the complexity of the text of the Ramayana, this study attempts to think about the complexity beyond the text: life of Kerala society that has internalised the moral values of the Ramayana is complex. The complexity lies in its conflicting stance about embracing the new values and retaining the old values. Often this rejection or retention depends on the religions' view on the issue. When multiple progressive literary and creative interpretations of the Ramayana are published, the society gains more clarity on the issues of vice and virtue. The Ramayana narratives used for the study perform the roles as social reformers as they reform the thoughts of the reading public. The current study examines the process of this shift by analysing how the literary works dealt with the familiar story.

The most popular reading of the Ramayana is that it is a text written in the Bhakti tradition. To the society that assimilated that the Ramayana is not a literary text, but a historical document, the new literatures propose plurality. Convincing the

reader that this new interpretation based on the literariness of the Ramayana is a valid stance, efforts are taken by the writers to present the characters as human beings, not Gods. The works selected for the study contest with the idealisation of Rama and Sita. For that they made Sita speak in a critical fashion questioning Rama of his deeds. Understanding the difficulties of a dialogue, initially monologues are written. Thus, the monologues of Sita, Urmila, Ahalya and Kausalya establish the fact that patriarchal rules, projected as ethics, ruin their life. Those patriarchal rules are the rules prevalent across the world when many *Ramayana s* are written. So, what the Ramayana reflected were the ideals of the times of production. These ideals are propagated by means of the text of the Ramayana and the society that internalised them. Many *Ramayana s* from 1915 to 2015 communicate alternative knowledge to the readers and convince them that the new Ramayanas are fictional. But they speak the rhetoric of the invisible people of the Ramayana. Hence, the works are rooted in reality. This new reality stands for justice than for norms. So, the multiple Ramayana texts studied here weigh justice more than the norms.

Though the study could not incorporate all the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature produced during the century, the intention to address the queries pertaining to diversity of Ramayana narratives, the nature, the scope, the significance, the possibilities and limits are attempted to fulfil by making the analysis deep. All the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam selected for the study explore the literary possibilities of the Ramayana myth, along with addressing the sociological, cultural, political and psychological implications of the Ramayana myth, and manifest the various possible reconstruction of it that the times demand.

As M.G.S. Narayanan has rightly remarked in the article titled, “Adhinivesám, Vyavasāya Vip̄lavam, Des̄iyata, Vijñāna Visphōtanam” (Imperialism, Industrial revolution, Nationalism and Knowledge Explosion) about Thunchath Ezhuthachan’s attempt at translating the Ramayana with a social purpose, the Ramayana narratives published in the twentieth and twenty first centuries also are the responses to the orthodox tendencies of the period (Varghese 29). The possibility opened by Ezhuthachan is utilised by the succeeding generation of writers. In the work titled, *Nammude Sāhityam, Nammude Samūham 1901-2000* (Our Literature, Our Society 1901-2000) edited by M.N. Vijayan, it is stated that in the beginning of Kerala Renaissance, inspired from its spirit, Kesavadev proposed to set fire of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* as he considered them as hegemonic narratives (Vijayan 75, 76) . But Kumaran Asan proves that it is not a dead narrative and shows the multiple possibilities of the narrative. So, in the twentieth century Kerala existed diverse views on the Ramayana among which the readers and writers choose the view that the Ramayana is an effective tool to challenge power and authority. This journey was not an easy one especially when the act of translation of sacred texts from Sanskrit to Malayalam is considered as blasphemy in the past. Sanskrit was

considered as God’s language in the past. Even scholars like Kochunni Thamburan said that Vallathol Narayana Menon’s deafness is due to the curse of God because of Vallathol’s act of translating the Ramayana from Sanskrit to Malayalam (Vijayan 106). P. Pavithran, in the debate related to the recognition of mother tongue, Malayalam, emphasised in the work titled, *Mātrubhāṣakku*

Vēndiyulla Samaram (The Protest for the Mother Tongue) that Malayalam played a significant role in making Kerala, a land of democracy. He argues that in the formation of Kerala modernity, Malayalam helped the people to form a collective self, surpassing their religious identities (25). These factors underline the importance of the use of Malayalam as the language to write the Ramayana narratives against Sanskrit and provide rationale for the study of the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature.

Chapter 8

Recommendations

The Ramayana, in many countries, is used as a source of entertainment. Many visual, literary and art performances from South Asia draw upon the story of the Ramayana. The televised Ramayana extended the popularity and reach of the text. Ranging from Mahatma Gandhi's concept of *Ramrajya* to the debates around the claims made by political groups on Ayodhya, the epic's imprints are visible in the political landscape of India. The Ramayana, to many, is a devotional text, to some it is a cultural text, to a few it is a text of fantasy, and to some, it is history. This diversity opens the possibilities of research connected with the Ramayana on all these areas. Extensive and serious research has been done on the Ramayana. Paula Richman, Robert Golman, William Smith, Narayan Rao, A.K. Ramanujan, Philip Lutgendorf, Sally Sutherland Goldman and Manakranta Bose are a few notable scholars of the Ramayana. Still, as Manakranta Bose rightly noted in *The Rāmāyaṇa Culture: Text, Performance and Iconography* the areas such as “cross disciplinary or cross genre critiques are few and brief”, and so are the studies on regional texts and performances (3). So, the times demand such ventures to explore the Ramayanas.

When further studies are done on the Ramayana narratives, there is a possibility to go for genre specific analysis and cross genre analysis. Also, there is scope in elaborating the study of each text selected by having feminist, identity oriented, cultural, post-colonial, and regional or Dalit interpretations. Also the

marginalised characters such as Shurpanakha need more attention from the academic point of view. So studies can be done focusing on her alone. Two incidents, the killing of Vali and the slaying of Sambuka, are to be analysed in detail as these two events create problems to many critics who interpreted the Ramayana. Again, there is a possibility to study folk or oral Ramayana narratives and Dalit Ramayana narratives in Malayalam that are not included in this analysis. Linguistic and Cultural studies can be done focussing *Māppila Rāmāyaṇam*.

It would provide vital insights if studies are made setting Ramayana narratives in Malayalam literature against the problematic of religious and caste existence of *Malayali*. Another possibility of exploration is the use of the Ramayana as a tool to teach virtues by the believer and agnostic communities alike during the month of *Karkitakam* in Kerala. How the Ramayana is used as a political text to affirm religious amity and how it becomes instrumental in provoking divisive tendencies also can be an interesting subject to study. Since the Ramayana narratives rewrite the paradigms of existence, history, reading and writing, they are the sources of thought. In short, this study attempts to provide some clues to the future interpretations of the Ramayana in general and the Ramayana narratives in Malayalam in specific. It brings together the fragments of the Ramayana literary interpretations and opens a path to further such explorations.

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