

A Lacanian Analysis of Romantic Poetry in Malayalam

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The most important poet in the Romantic school of poetry in Malayalam was Changampuzha Krishna Pillai. His stature is arguably next only to the classical poets. His poetry, though he frequently strived after effect, using a series of narcotic-induced dream states, has been noted for its absence of Dhvani. Lacanian theory will be used to analyse this 'lack' in Malayalam Romantic poetry. The extreme vitality of Romantic poetry constitutes a full-fledged revealing of being without recourse to a secondary connotative dimension. As poetic construction of innermost belonging of man, Dhvani is essential in Indian poetics. Therefore, the case of Malayalam Romantic poetry is interesting for its relative absence. Does this constitute a poverty of Dhvani in Malayalam Romantic poetry? Does it provide richer senses of Dhvani via Lacanian Jouissance?

Romantic lyrics have had an impact on popular culture next only to the religious poetry of the 17th century. These poems and songs circulated through the medium of films and plays and then went on to replace religious poetry as the major literary influence in popular culture. The popularity of Romantic lyrics in Malayalam points to their subtlety and their ability for connotative signification in literary and popular spheres. Jacques Lacan has described jouissance as the signifying 'lack' in the other. He says in *Ecrits*:

... We could adopt as a reference here what the Hindu tradition teaches about dhvani, defining it as the property of speech by which it conveys what it does not say. This is illustrated by a little tale whose naivete, which appears to be required in such examples, proves funny enough to induce us to penetrate the truth which it conceals... (p. 294)

The spiritual essence of Romanticism constitutes a single unbroken line from the writings of Goethe, A.W. Schlegel and Holderlin to the Indian Romantic poets, this making it possible for them to work in a western idiom. Wider questions of Dhvani and jouissance are embedded within this cross-cultural matrix.

The questions that this research is going to raise are as follow:

- 1 How does Malayalam poetry, particularly that of Changampuzha, figure in the landscape of Romantic poetry and how does psychoanalysis work in Indian sources
- 2 What is the relation between matriliney and Romantic poetry
- 3 How does the performance of a verse drama like *Ramanan*, contribute to the eruption of jouissance in Malayalam Romantic poetry
4. How are romantic songs rendered popular in cinematic networks, acquiring a circulation outside the films themselves

The likely hypotheses that this study will work with are the following

1. The Romantic movement in Malayalam, though not a fleshly school, through its use of ordinary language and events creates a kind of orgasmic jouissance, which also explains the relative lack of Dhvani in Romantic poetry.
2. Anne Mellor has divided Romantic poetry into masculine and feminine: ‘masculine’ is that kind of poetry which defines itself in terms of an ‘other’; ‘feminine’ is the poetry that gently breaks the barriers and identifies itself with reference to what one is not. It is this Mellorsian perspective of Romanticism that enabled a translation of the western sensibility of Romanticism into Malayalam in the early 20th century. This helped the translation of the western sensibility into the matrilineal native idiom.

This study will take up, *Dhvanyāloka* by Ānandavardhana, the primary text on Dhvani, *The Mirror and the Lamp* and *Natural Supernaturalism* by M.H. Abrams and *The Visionary Company* by Harold Bloom, which present an overview of Romanticism in general, *Spandikkunna Asthimaadam*, *Paadunna Pisachu* and *Ramanan*, which give an overview of Changampuzha's work, and *Ecrits* and *Seminar on the Ethics of Psychoanalysis* by Jacques Lacan, which describe the idea of jouissance, as its primary sources. Amongst secondary sources, apart from research on Romantic poetry focused on the origins of the movement and comparative studies with English, French and German Romanticisms, aesthetic and textual critiques specifically on Romantic Poetry in Malayalam like *Romantic Conception of Changampuzha* by Ramachandran Nair K., *Changampuzha – A Study* by K.S. Narayana Pillai, *Kannerum Mazhavilum* by M. Leelavathi, *Rithuparivarthanam* by K.P. Sankaran, and works by Prof. M.N. Vijayan, which have used Freudian literary analysis, will be taken into consideration.

My research will be using Lacanian literary analysis in conjunction with Dhvani and its impact on popular culture. I will also bring a comparative analysis of Romantic literature and Lacanian and Dhvani theories of literature. A study of the Romantic crafting of Malayalam society through popular songs will also be part of the project. Topics to be looked into include the matriarchal social structure in Kerala at the turn of the century and how the fin-de-siecle poetry dealt with impending modernity and renaissance and reform movements. I would like to take the position that Romanticism as a movement is more a reiteration of tradition than its repudiation.

My research will be mostly using secondary source material. I will be reading major texts on the area of research and provide comparative analyses and arrive at desired conclusions. Added to this will be my own 'intuitive' and 'mystical' insights which I will try my best to substantiate. I will also be including an appendix of Romantic poetry in translation. In terms of its structure, after this introductory Chapter1, Chapter 2 will give a description of psychoanalysis in its Freudian, Jungian and Lacanian versions and examine their affinity towards Indian systems of discourse, mostly oral narratives, like myth, etc.; Chapter 3 will study Changampuzha's poetry within a matrix of matrilineal performativity; Chapter 4 will apply Lacanian concepts to the Romantic poetry of Changampuzha; and Chapter 5 will be the 'Conclusion'.

Chapter 2: 'Passions of the Indian Mind' – The Indian Tradition and Psychoanalysis

The story constituting *Chokher Bali* has been made intense by the jolt it is given from within by a mother's jealousy. This jealousy allowed Mahendra's [the son's] vice to expose its tooth and claw in a way that a normal situation would not have allowed it to. As if the doors of the cage had been opened, and out came the ferocious events without any restraint. The method followed in literature of the new era is not one of providing a chronological description of events but of revealing the innermost story to the reader with the help of analysis. This procedure made itself manifest in *Chokher Bali*.

(Tagore, p. 193.)

Thus Tagore writes in his preface to *Chokher Bali*. The author's understanding of Freud, his contemporary, is evident in the use of terminology such as 'analysis' and 'revealing the innermost story to the reader.' As one moves from Freud to Jung to Lacan, there also seems to be a remarkable intensification of affinity with Indian thought and culture. In Freud, the connections are somewhat slim so as to be almost abstruse. The parallels owe more to the work of pioneering Indian practitioners like Girindrasekhar Bose¹ than to Freud himself. Carl Gustav Jung, however, ventures further into the territory of the collective unconscious and the animus and was himself an admirer of Tai chi and oriental mysticism. Lacan, in fact, mentions, less exotically but more significantly, the Dhvani theory of Anandavardhana in his *Ecrits*.

¹ Girindrasekhar Bose was an Indian psychoanalyst of the early 20th century who corresponded frequently with Sigmund Freud himself, often contesting Freud's claims. Bose served as the first president of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society from 1922 to 1953.

This chapter deals with the chronological progression of psychoanalysis, and broadly deals with the ‘big three’ of psychoanalysis viz. Freud, Jung and Lacan. Psychoanalysis no longer offers the clinical possibilities that it promised early on. Our interest is more often focused upon the literary critical perspectives that it affords. Therefore, a preoccupation with the possible interactions between Indian literature and thought and the oeuvre of Freud, Jung and Lacan seems justified. My endeavour is to establish that some kind of affinity exists between Indian literature and psychoanalysis so that any venture to apply or rather conflate Lacanian Psychoanalysis with Malayalam Romantic poetry would appear less Quixotic than Faustian², since writers from Tagore to Changampuzha have been in thrall of this new Teutonic-Jewish method.

Sigmund Freud – the originary myth

Freudian psychoanalysis as a discourse is parasitic upon language and literature and as a therapy it reputedly is a ‘talking cure.’ Freud quotes extensively from literary sources ranging from Scaliger to Shakespeare. From ‘Oedipus complex’ to ‘condensation’ and ‘displacement,’ Freudian terminology is replete with literary connotations. Freud also mentions the mythological resonances of dreams later exploited by his bete-noir Carl Gustav Jung. Less importantly, Freud is said to have kept a figurine of Mahavishnu on his mantelpiece.

² Don Quixote and Doctor Faustus are the two opposing western archetypes, who seek knowledge and truth. Faust ventures towards the big emptiness at the end of his epistemological quest during which he loses his soul. Quixote on the other hand starts from that emptiness where only fantasy exists and ventures out into that world of fantasy.

Just as Romanticism demands abandonment of vulgar rationality, but only in pursuit of a greater rationality, Freud also pursues a parallel dreamwork with distinct literary overtones. While harnessing the irrational in the service of the rational, the descriptions and interpretation of dreams often appears to be similar to orientalist fantasies.

... there are few of us who could not affirm, from our own experience that there emerges from time to time in the creations and fabrics of the genius of the dreams a depth and intimacy of emotion, a tenderness of feeling, a clarity of vision, a subtlety of observation and a brilliance of wit such as we should never claim to have at our permanent command in our waking lives. There lies in dreams a marvelous poetry, an apt allegory, an incomparable humour, a rare irony. A dream looks upon the world in a light of strange idealism and often enhances the effects of what it sees by its deep understanding of their essential nature. It pictures earthly beauty to our eyes in a truly heavenly splendour and clothes dignity with the highest majesty, it shows us our everyday fears in the ghastliest shape and turns our amusement into jokes of indescribable pungency. And sometimes when we are awake and still under the full impact of an experience like one of these, we cannot but feel that never in our life has the real life offered us its equal.

(Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 95)

Freud deals with mythical concepts mainly in his works *Totem and Taboo*, *Civilization and its Discontents*, and *Moses and Monotheism*. In these works he deals with the primordial sins of murder and incest, especially the murder of the primordial patriarch by his sons and the incestuous procreation with the mother and the following apotheosis of the dead patriarch as expiation. Freud in his *Totem and Taboo* quotes F. Atkinson on 'primal law' thus:

After they (the patricides) had satisfied their hate by his removal and had carried out their wish for identification with him the suppressed tender impulses had to assert themselves. This took place in the form of remorse, a sense of guilt was formed which coincided here with the remorse generally felt. The dead now became stronger than the living had been even as we observe it today in the destinies of men. They undid their deed by declaring that the killing of the father substitute the totem was not allowed and renounced the fruit of their deed by denying themselves liberated women.

(Atkinson. F, Primal Law, p. 220, quoted in Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p. 236)

Such mythical symbolism draws parallels with that of Saturn devouring his children in Greek mythology as well as that of Peter's sense of guilt as he denounces Christ thrice before his crucifixion. This tension between a Semitic pastoral imagery and Greek myth is not without interest and will be further dealt with in the third chapter where I will also deal with this topic within the framework of non-matrilineal societies:

Malinowski has criticized Freud's patrilineal explanation of the origin of religion by comparing such systems with matrilineal forms of Trobriand islanders. In the west patrilineal forms are understandably associated with the Oedipus complex, but matrilineal societies show no feelings of hatred for the father while the infant's feelings for the mother are spontaneous and non-incestuous. (Tripathi, p. 293)

Freud apparently derived his concept of the death drive based on the Indian concept of Nirvana, or the release from worldly pleasure and the cycle of rebirth through an ultimate telos of life in an irreversible death. The Nirvana principle led him to the conclusion that 'aim of all life is death' and thence on to the death drive or thanatos as opposed to the pleasure principle or eros.

Freud acknowledged borrowing the expression 'Nirvana Principle' from Barbara Low, a Sanskrit expert. The notion of the death instinct thus, from the beginning had an eastern touch. Gustav Fechner, the renowned physiologist whose 'constancy principle' had led Freud to the Nirvana principle in the first place, was himself involved in Buddhism. And the French novelist Romain Rolland from whom Freud obtained the related concept of 'oceanic feeling' was an avid reader and biographer of the nineteenth century Bengali mystics Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). It thus seems that the Indian mystical tradition was a background conceptual source for Freud's death instinct. This may have been part of why the concept appeared alien to Western minds.

Take the example of the death instinct concept in Freud's theorizing. Based on observations of children turning passive traumatic experiences into play, certain analysts returning over and over again to painful past experiences, the behaviour of those who must go through similar calamities repeatedly and the frightening nightmares of war veterans, Freud suggested that there might be a 'demonic force' at work in them. This force seemed to work in opposition to the pleasure principle. It is as though these individuals never comprehend the futility of their repetitions. Freud argued that this force was aligned with a fundamental attribute of the mind that involved a search for reduction of all excitation to quiescence. This 'Nirvana principle' was aimed at returning the living organism to its previous, inorganic state. He concluded that the 'aim of all life is death,' and thus gave voice to his celebrated concept of the death instinct. (Akhtar, pp. xviii-xx)

Animal images and myths in the dreamwork of Freud are conducive to Indian thought and literature. The presence of animal imagery is prevalent in Indian mythology as well. Similar imagery and mythological connotations are more abundant in Jung than Freud.

Organisms like snakes, various species of birds such as the eagle, and mythical animals like the Minotaur, Pegasus, unicorn are mentioned in Freud's interpretation of dreams.

Freud's 1913 discourse on the essential kinship between humans and animals is also congenial to Hinduism while being far from the Judeo-Christian and Islamic tenets. With minor exceptions, the Hindu perspective on animals is a much gentler and understanding one. Keeping Freud's important observation that the Western civilization causes a vertical split between the child and his animal surround allows on to think of the fluid shifts in mental representations of the two that are possible at the base of the human psyche. Thus introjective-projective use of animal imagery, far from being primitive and pathological, might be truer to the essence of humanity. Adopting such a viewpoint could minimize the puzzled amusement or mocking horror of the West at the human-animal conflation in Hindu mythology and religious icons. (Akhtar, pp. xviii-xx)

Similarly, W.R. Bion, a contemporary of Lacan, also developed an intricate system of representation of mental states using symbols akin to Indian thought. Various Indian meditative practices such as Vipassana and yogic traditions also overlap with psychoanalytic precepts. Various Indian and diasporaic psychoanalysts have exploited these possibilities. Both Vedic and Buddhist traditions are significant in this context.

Other areas of overlap between psychoanalysis and Indian thought exist as well. Wilfred Bion's recommendation that an analyst meet his patient without 'memory or desire' has striking similarity with J. Krishnamurthi's detached perceptual realism, for instance. Another example is the overlap between the regard British independent analysts especially Nina Coltart, have toward lying fallow and the positive emptiness of the mind and the Vipassana meditation of the Vedantic and Buddhist traditions.

(Akhtar, pp. xviii-xx)

More profoundly, and perhaps precariously, Freudian psychoanalysis also manages to walk the tightrope between the rational and the irrational in its exploration of the Indian mind. The rationalist prejudices of enlightenment thought have sometimes been cast aside to delve into the study of trauma, neurosis, and obsessive behaviour. Just as romanticism rejects base rationalism in its pursuit of greater reason, psychoanalysis also follows on a similar trajectory vis-à-vis Indian thought. The major recurring trope in this regard is that of the myth, which occurs with something akin to a persuading regularity in Freud, Jung and Lacan.

Still other areas open for further investigation are the ways in which the Hindu concepts of punarjanma (reincarnation), Karma (action with its undeniable antecedents and inevitable consequences), and vidhi (destiny) overlap with the psychoanalytic notions of deposited self representations, internalization of parental ego strengths and weaknesses, transgenerational transmission of trauma, 'fate neurosis' and repetition compulsion. While it is tempting to focus upon the different worldviews from which these concepts arise, their courageous juxtaposition might be more heuristically rewarding in the long run. The recent contributions of Indian psychoanalysts, Western psychoanalysts interested in India and the psychoanalysts of Indian diaspora support this point.

(Akhtar, pp. xviii-xx)-

Carl Gustav Jung – the collective unconscious

Jung was a student of Freud who dissociated himself from the master and set up his own school of 'analytical psychology.' The Jungian archetypes and his idea of collective unconscious draw mostly from mythological sources, and have more in common with the civilization of India. A large corpus of work is already available dealing with the Indic

symbolism inherent in Jungian analytical psychology. Perhaps only W.B. Yeats has generated more interest than Jung in creating a cross-cultural current with Indian thought and literature. Jung himself has acknowledged his debt to Indian mythology and thought. Like Freud, he too was not averse to dealing with animal myths and images in analyses. In a letter written in English to E.L. Grant Watson, Jung makes this clear in so many words.

To E.L. Grant Watson

Dear Mr. Watson,

25 January, 1954

Your dream is remarkable. The dream of the horse represents the union with the animal soul, which you have missed for a long time. The union produces a peculiar state of mind, namely an unconscious thinking that enables you to realize the natural progress of the mind as its own sphere. You can understand it as the natural thought process in the unconscious or as an anticipation of post mortal mental life... The dream represents your transmutation from the Western outlook to the eastern realization of the atman=self and its identification with the universal atman. You proceed beyond the ego to ever widening horizons, where the atman reveals its universal aspect. You integrate your animal, your parent, all the people you love (they all live in you and you are no more separated from them. This is the secret of John XVII:20 and at the same time the essential Hindu doctrine of the atman-purusha. Our unconscious definitely prefers the Hindu interpretation of immortality. There is no loneliness, but allness or infinitely increasing completeness.

Such dreams occur at the gateway of death. They interpret the mystery of death. They don't predict it but they show you the right way to approach it.

Yours Sincerely, C.G. Jung

(Jung, *Letters*, p.146)

Such a declaration from the horse's mouth notwithstanding, the interfaces between Jung and Indian thought have been mostly post-facto scholarly constructions. The avenue opened by Freud and later on by Jung has been utilized for the exploration of subjective as well as shared mythical tendencies and poetic experiences within the Indian context. The use of well-hued occidental myth from Plato and the like has been a forte of Freudian psychoanalysis rather than analytical psychology. But the rationalistic claims of a traditional discipline as psychoanalysis are at best dubious if not absent, as the following excerpt makes clear:

Freud maintains that the unconscious consists of nothing but residues of the conscious mind that have become repressed. Simply put this means that the value of the psyche is identified with consciousness or the ego. Nietzsche disagrees with this claim. Unlike Freud, Nietzsche recognizes that the unconscious exhibits contents that are wholly unlike those of consciousness and are ungraspable by the ego. A significant implication of this difference is that in Freud's model the unconscious has no autonomy, for it is simply a product of consciousness, or a container of its remnants. In Nietzsche's model on the other hand, the unconscious is an autonomous entity that can function in opposition to consciousness. The Freudian understanding of consciousness reveals a rigid framework of rationalism that gives primacy to the ego, which is in contrast to Nietzsche's richer framework that recognizes other sources of knowledge considered irrational such as motion, imagination, and intuition. (Huskinson, p. 94)

Jung was a student of comparative religion and therefore his school of analytical psychology is imbued more with the luminosity of religion rather than the sexual economy of Freud. Even the sexual experience acquires tones of religious intensity in Jung.

For Freud, the ego remained in the driver's seat as the most important part of the personality, and that the object of psychoanalysis was to convert the id into ego. It is significant that it was the last chapter of 'Symbols of Transformation' about which Jung hesitated so long; because it is this chapter, called 'The Sacrifice' which has to do with the death of the hero. Jung's wife believed that Freud would accept this chapter, but Jung knew better. For in it is the notion that man may be a creature who has to withdraw some of his emotional investment from the pursuit of the mundane goals of power and sexual happiness in favour of a spiritual goal beyond this world. ...

Though initially recalcitrant towards the oriental mystical predilections of his student, Freud also showed a remarkable shift towards the spiritual realm in his later work.

It is clear that for Freud the pursuit of truth as he saw it became the main goal of the second half of his life; and this pursuit could equally be regarded as 'spiritual.' For Freud however sublimation remained a substitute for the 'real thing,' not an essential part of development. (Storr, pp. 84-85)

Jung also famously took resort to art, especially painting as a sort of analytic tool. In a move that bears uncanny resemblance to similar romantic parallels, Jung used mandala patterns to synthesize the conscious and unconscious minds, the inside and the outside and the shadowy and the luminescent.

The production of mandala patterns became for Jung, a symbolic expression of having reached a new synthesis within himself, a conjunction of conscious and unconscious, of phantasy and external reality, of thought and feeling. Because this experience was so intensely important to him, he felt obliged to describe it in religious terms. And so the mandala became a kind of symbolic representation of the archetype of God.

(Storr, p. 85)

Jung also uses the mandala as an archetype of deity and the ultimate formal device which he then uses for synthesizing the internal subjective world with the external apparently shared universe. Instead of the classical literary erudition of Freud, Jung displays an almost mystical nonchalance with regard to Greco-Latin learning. He would rather quote from the adventure stories of Rider Haggard like 'She' than Scaliger and Virgil, favourites of Freud. The mythical dimension is gradually enlarged in Jung and emerges from the rationalistic compunctions of Freud.

Considering Jung's predilection for personifying unconscious contents, it is remarkable that the most important archetype of all should appear not as a person, but as an abstract pattern. It is at least as convincing to regard a mandala as a rudimentary work of art as it is to look upon it as a religious symbol of deity. For works of art also represent a represent a new synthesis between the inner subjective world of the artist and external reality. (Storr, p. 85)

As the creativity of the artist reaches its apotheosis in this superseding of the deity, analytical psychology joins the cult of the artist as propounded by Romanticism and later tentatively demolished by Michel Foucault as the 'author function'. The connection that I am trying to construct here between Romanticism, psychoanalysis, and Indian thought is contingent upon this investment in the category of 'author' alone.

Īsopaniṣad thus describes the poet-creator as omniscient and omnipotent and self-generating: "kvirmaneeshi paribhu svayambhuyathatathyathorthan vyathadath saswatheebha samabhya." Similarly, Romantic writers, right from Rousseau to Changampuzha, have described the creative experience in words ranging from the flowery to the sublime. For example,

I lose myself, as I
Dipping in the smiling moonlight
Staggering, hazily writes of flowers
The decree, divine, of sweet dreams
Blooming satavali, in fantasy lands
Scaling the mount that is advaita
And embrace the electric fields
Of trembling imagination.

(Changampuzha, “Manasvini”)

Myth in Jung has been explored by among others, Aldous Huxley, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell and the Malayalam writer M. Leelavathi who deals with Jungian archetypes in her seminal “Archetypes in Literature.” The archetypal image and human psychological conundrums and their mythical counterparts have been the subject of many heated debates. For instance, the Jungian all encompassing archetype has been rejected as hubristic by Maurice Friedman.

Aldous Huxley has many profound things to say in his ‘The Perennial Philosophy.’ Yet the first chapter is called ‘Tat Tvam Asi.’ Tat tvam asi is a remarkable formulation, as you know, from the Upanishads, but it really does not cover all mysticisms. There are some real, genuine particularities in mysticisms, and to say they are all really this or anything else – whether it is Joseph Campbell’s ‘Follow your bliss,’ ‘the hero journey,’ Jung’s archetypes, Eliade’s *in illud tempore*, or even Coomaraswami’s ‘dragon and dragon-slayer’ – is wrong. The almost wordless recognition that you have is something priceless. (Friedman, p. 93)

The solar myth of Apollo recurs in Jung as is made evident in his 1954 letter to Arvind U. Vasavada, author of *Tripura Rahasya: Comparative Study of the Process of Individuation* (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi, 1965):

In the guru, I perceive you greet the infinitesimal god whose light becomes visible wherever a man's consciousness has made even the smallest step forward and beyond one's own horizon. The light of the dawn praised by our medieval thinkers as the Aurora consurgens, the rising morning light, is awe-inspiring, it fills your heart with joy and admiration or with irritation and fear and even hatred, according to the nature of whatever it reveals to you. The ego receives the light from the self. (Jung, *Letters*, p.194)

Jung was also an avid student of Holderlin, the writer of the famous Romantic poem, an Apollo hymn, "Hyperion", which is said to have inspired John Keats.

The west betrayed its Greek cultural roots by joining the revolution that turned it away from myth, mystery and the tragic spirit, impelling it instead towards philosophy and rationalism, as Nietzsche describes throughout his work, but especially in 'Birth of Tragedy.' And it betrayed its religious roots through the very fact of its adoption of the new faith. The first Christians – whether Jews or pagans, Greeks or Romans – were in any case heretics and apostates ... (Zoja, p. 35)

Jung, drawing from the German mystic Meister Eckhart that "God is the working function of the soul," also delves on the functions of the soul. One of Jung's major works is "Modern Man in Search of Soul," where he deals with religions of the east and the west. He also propounds the anima theory of libido, and lists the four main human functions as reason, feeling, sensation and intuition. This bears an uncanny similarity to Plato's division of human impulses into spirit, appetite and reason and also the Platonic myth of the good soul and the unity of the soul as elaborated in *The Republic*.

Apart from Freud and Jung, Alfred Adler has also contributed towards the development of depth psychology though he is less inclined than his predecessors to deal with religion and its mythology. His ideas of individuation are relevant in the pedagogical context and in relation to psychoanalysis.

Now that man no longer sees himself as the centre of the world events, he is satisfied with a more meager concretization of the image of God and is inclined to conceive it as casually acting forces of nature. Individual psychology however because of its essential views would have to regard such an unpremiered mechanistic position as an illusion, inasmuch as it is without any goal or direction. In this the mechanistic position is like drive psychology which is cut from the same cloth. (Adler, p. 277)

In fact, not only the contemporary man, who for Adler “no longer sees himself as the centre of the world”, but even the man of antiquity has been conceived of as having invented classical religions from folk and tribal roots, thus showing an inseparable relationship between religion and mythology.

Thus, for instance, behind the cult of the Olympic deities of Greece, or of Amon Ra in Egypt, there was the religion of the folk, older and less developed which had its roots in tribal culture. The old local gods and spirits dear to the tribes proved inadequate to the wants of the larger and more complex society and the national god must have a more determinate character and a more extended sphere of operation. The tribal gods who were connected with the greater phenomena of nature could best be made to meet their demands. Hence in the polytheistic systems of national religions it is very common to find deities who were originally personifications of the powers of nature such as Jupiter, Zeus, Ra and Marduk. (Tripathi, p. 116)

Romanticism as a movement has been widely inspired both by orientalist fantasies as well as eastern fables and epics and the oriental imagination and its colonial centres have been major foci of German, European and American Romanticism from Schiller and Schlegel and Goethe to Emerson and the mystical delights of Blake.

If the Corsican tales of Prosper Merimee and 'Eugene Onegin' of Pushkin and the Eckbert tales of Tieck and similar works of European Romanticism have their roots in the Eastern fables and folk tales, the modernist stories of Zola and Maupassant are based on European morality tales. Popular occidental fables like Boccaccio's 'Decameron' and Oriental tales like Egyptian fables were based on medieval romances and the like. Even though Aesop's and other fables are of this nature they have been accepted as autochthonous western creations and disseminated as such. (Ramachandran, p. 74)

Jacques Lacan – creative mythology

Jacques Lacan (1901-1980) is undoubtedly the central figure of psychoanalysis in the second half of the twentieth century. He not only revolutionized the psychoanalytic practice in his 'return to Freud', he also deployed a global reinterpretation of the entire psychoanalytical theoretical edifice, based on the results of structural linguistics and semiotics. Prior to him there were two main interpretations of Freud, the positivist one (psychoanalysis is a version of determinism, the 'science of mind') and the hermeneutic one (psychoanalysis is a spiritual endeavour, the procedure of discovering the deeper meaning' of spiritual phenomena). Lacan rejected both these readings as well as any reduction of psychoanalysis to simple psychiatry and the tool of social conformism. He reads Lacan as a key figure in the history of human thought, on a par with names like Plato, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Heidegger ...

This leads Lacan to propose the triangle of imaginary-symbolic-real as the elementary matrix of human experience: 'Imaginary' is the deceptive universe of fascinating images and the subject's identification with them; 'symbolic' is the differential structure which organizes our experience of meaning; 'Real' is the point of resistance, the traumatic 'indivisible remainder' that resists symbolization. (Žižek, *Jacques Lacan*, pp. 1-2)

Lacan did not advance any new myths himself. But he refurbished, like Freud earlier myths like those in Plato's *Symposium* in his analysis of patients. Lacan treated the 'myth as the impossible' and as 'responding to the inexplicable nature of the real.' This adds to previous formulations of myth such as 'myth is temporalized essence' etc.

Rather than propounding new myths himself, Lacan was more interested in the pathological mythical situations produced by his analysands, something which can be put to use in the study of Malayalam Romantic poetry. In his treatment of myth and also his famous formulation of 'unconscious is structured like language,' Lacan was deeply influenced by the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, who himself was researching on the double descent theory with respect to myth. This question of double descent and its mythical structure and consequent emanations in poetry form the basis of my study.

Landscape and trees as mythical sources of unity and coherence occur in romantic as well as classical literature. Dante writes in his *Divine Comedy*:

A wood

Marked by no footpath

No green leaves, but leaves dark in colour

No straight clean branches, but knotted, warped

There were no apples there, but thorns with poison

(Dante, *Inferno*, xiii 2-6)

The trees in Dante are suicides who have been condemned to the inferno where they thrive not on water but blood and nested upon not by birds, but harpies. The suicide myth recurs in Romanticism too, both in the canonized poets of European Romanticism, as also in Romantic poetry in Malayalam, as evidenced in *Ramanan* by Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, arguably the greatest Malayalam romantic poet.

The mythical sources are hard to ignore especially in a poet like William Blake. His 'Book of Urizen' and the 'Four Zoas' are instances of creative mythology. The mythical sources and interludes in Romantic poetry serve to underline the Romanticist search for a greater unity beyond the apparent fragmentation of aphorisms, fantasies and that of a stuttering spirit.

If the function of the dream is to prolong sleep, if the dream after all may come so close to the reality that causes it, can we not say that it corresponds to this reality without awakening from sleep? After all there is such a thing as somnambulistic activity. The question that arises, and indeed all Freud's previous indications allow us to produce is – what is it that wakes the sleeper? Is it not in the dream another reality? The reality that Freud describes thus: *Dass das Kind an Seinem Bett Steht*, that the child is near its bed, *ihn am Arme fast*, takes him by the arm and whispers to him reproachfully, *und ihm vorwurfsvoll zuraunt, vater siehst du denn nicht*, father can't you, *dass ich verbrenne*, that I am burning?

Is there more reality in this message than in the noise by which the father also identifies the strange reality of what is happening in the next room? Is not the missed reality of what caused the child's death expressed in these words?

(Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 57-58)

Lacan claims greater reality for the dream even so far as to claim that the dream is the Real. In the 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' Coleridge rips the mask of reality and shows the abyss of the Real via the myth of the wandering Albatross. In the Malayalam poet Poonthanam, such an episode of an infant son's demise, as the one described by Freud and cited here by Lacan, occurs which would be more interesting in the context of Malayalam Romantic poetry and dealt with in the next chapter.

The fantastical nature of reality and the 'Real' nature of fantasy have been pondered upon by thinkers ranging from Lacan to Slavoj Žižek. The incestuous relation between reality and fantasy is for Žižek what produces much of the ethical conundrums, as Wittgenstein would claim in another context about language in use, that like a vehicle in stasis and not in use, language merely throws up conundrums and fallacies. The impossible task of literature would then be to put fantasy where it belongs so that readers can come to grip with the reality of their own 'waking' lives, even as these two are inextricably conjoined as the sides of a mobius strip.

In class struggle the classes themselves are caught up in the antagonism that is inherent to the social system, while for the anti-semitic the Jew is a foreign intruder who causes social antagonism so that all we need to do in order to restore social harmony is to annihilate Jews. That is to say in exactly the same way the Wolf-man as child resurrected the image of the parental coitus in order to organize his infantile sexual theories, a Fascist anti-semitic elevates the Jew into the monstrous thing that causes social decadence.

(Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 74)

According to Žižek, the ultimate Lacanian ethical task would be to awake not only from sleep but from the "fantasy that controls us even more when we are awake." (Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 60) For Žižek, we must come to terms with the fantastical nature of our

own reality and realize that all of us are more or less in the mould of Madame Bovary as Flaubert himself has famously claimed. Jung would claim that the introvert has the anima of an extrovert. The deepest fantasy of the introvert would be to be the heart and soul of parties/gatherings he would not be attending. But in Lacanian terms it is precisely this fantastical aspect – ‘I am handsome,’ ‘she loves me,’ ‘Santa/God exists’ – that makes our lives bearable. So, to deprive someone of his/her fantasy would be not just a rude awakening, but also cruel. Thus literature itself turns into enlightened false consciousness as Terry Eagleton³ would say. Žižek says that a person might have a rape fantasy, but the actual event of rape might be more traumatizing for him/her than for someone who doesn’t have that particular fantasy:

There is a kernel that forever separates the phantasmatic kernel of the subject’s being from the superficial modes of his or her symbolic identifications. It is never possible for me to fully assume the phantasmatic kernel of my being: when I venture too close what happens is what Lacan calls the aphanisis or self-obliteration of the subject; the subject loses his/her symbolic consistency, it disintegrates. And perhaps the forced actualization in social reality itself of the phantasmatic kernel of my being is the worst, most humiliating kind of violence, a violence that undermines the very basis of my identity (of my self-image). Consequently the problem with rape in Freud’s view is that it has such a traumatic impact not simply because it is a case of brutal external violence but also because it touches on something disavowed in the victim herself. So, when Freud writes: ‘If what [subjects] long for most intensely in their phantasies is presented to them in reality, they none the less flee from it,’ his point is that this occurs not merely because of censorship, but rather because the core of our fantasy is unbearable to us.

(Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, pp. 55-56)

³ Terry Eagleton in his seminal *Ideology* speaks of an ‘enlightened false consciousness.’

In the vast oeuvre of Lacan, he also contrives an elaborate and perhaps somewhat abstruse corpus of myths ranging from that of the mirror stage (arguably the most famous of his myths), the Mobius strip and the Borromean knot. In Lacan, myth occurs as the edge of reason occurring absolutely at the end of an overhanging precipice, “as responding to the inexplicable nature of the real,” (Lacan, *Seminar 4, Relation of the Object*, p. 67) as Lacan himself would put it.

Much of Lacan’s significance owes to the linguistic shift that he brought into the mythical-symbolic universe of Freud and Jung. As he famously said in the now clichéd maxim, the unconscious is structured like a language.

In order to free the subject’s speech we introduce him to the language of his desire, that is, to the primary language in which –beyond what he tells as of himself-he is already speaking to us unbeknown to himself, first and foremost, in the symbols of his symptom.

It is certainly a language that is at stake in the symbolism brought to light in analysis. This language, corresponding to the playful wish found in one of Lichtenberg’s aphorisms has the universal character of a tongue that would that would be understood in all other tongues, but at the same time,-since it is the language that grabs hold of desire at the very moment it becomes humanized by gaining recognition-it is absolutely particular to the subject.

(Lacan, “The Function and Field of Language in Psychoanalysis”, in *Ecrits*, p. 243).

Significant hermeneutic effort is required to untangle the mess of Lacan’s abstruse and often sadistically dense and often ridiculously self-indulgent language and references. (Lacan is deservedly lampooned by the hoax artist Alan Sokal in his “Intellectual Impostures” for his gumption in equating the phallus with $\sqrt{-1}$.) It would be pretentious on my part to have understood Lacan in his entirety and there might be slippages between my surmises and what he intended. These slippages might in themselves be Lacanian, in

what would consist a recursive Borgesian labyrinth. But Lacan's consistent thesis that language is some kind of a Trojan horse is evident here. Language and the desire that it brings in a Heideggerian being-towards-death is a Lacanian proxy for the Freudian death drive, which was directly influenced by Indian theories on Nirvana and reincarnation. Heideggerian metaphysical formulations that posit language as the house of being are also not insignificant, although irrelevant for the purpose at hand, which is to adapt or appropriate Lacan somehow in the process of analyzing Malayalam romantic poetry within its social and psychological complexities with as little bullshitting as possible. The direction Lacan takes in this dense passage is not meandering and would fit my purpose.

It is thus a primary language, by which I do not mean a primitive language, since Freud—whose merit for making this total discovery warrants comparison with Champollion's—deciphered it in its entirety in the dreams of our contemporaries. The essential field of this language was rather authoritatively defined by one of the earliest assistants associated with Freud's work, and one of the few to have brought anything new to it. I mean Ernst Jones one of the last survivors to whom the seven rings of the master were passed and who attests by his presence in the honorary positions that are not reserved solely for relic bearers.

(Lacan, "The Function and Field of Language in Psychoanalysis", in *Ecrits*, p. 243)

The primordial ur-language that Lacan tackles here must be the fully fledged fully evolved one that came into being just like that without evolutionary hiccups or fragmentation. This could coincide with the myth also, since the myth is a product of primordial imagination. Interesting in this regard, though self-indulgent it maybe would be Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of the movie 'Alien' whose titular monster he claims is the pure death drive or lamella. Another recent prequelesque version of the same movie is aptly named 'Prometheus' and deals with the primordial question of origins.

In a fundamental article on symbolism, Ernst Jones points out on page 102 that although there are thousands of symbols in the way in which the term is understood in analysis, all of them refer to one's body, blood relatives, birth, life and death.

This truth recognized de facto by Jones, enables us to understand that although the symbol, psychoanalytically speaking, is repressed in the unconscious, it bears in itself no marks of regression or even immaturity. For it to have its effect on the subject, it is thus enough that it make itself heard, since these effects operate unbeknown to him-as we admit in our everyday experience when we explain many reaction by normal and neurotic subjects as their response to the symbolic meaning of an act, a relation or an object.

The symbol repressed in the unconscious, is not immature and it has not regressed. This is possible only if it has the robustness of myth. It is the same myth that imparts coherence and spine to romantic poetry from 'Lamia' to 'Hyperion' and 'Prometheus Unbound.' Without myth Romantic poetry would lose its tradition or in Harold Bloom's terms, the 'anxiety of influence,' and would become pure allegorical intensities in medieval fashion and thus fail to signify anything for the modern reader.

(Lacan, "The Function and Field of Language in Psychoanalysis", in *Ecrits*, p. 243)

The maturity of the symbol, Lacan claims citing Ernst Jones, vouches for the effulgence and full-fledged development of human consciousness and imagination in ancient and primordial times. To separate evolutionary anthropology from literary history would be a parallel task. But when old Priam knelt before Achilles pleading for the release of his son Hector's corpse, or when Duryodhana in the throes of death laments the lot of his parents and sister, the emotion is as whole in its consciousness and expression as during any other period of human evolution. Thus the use of myth in romantic poetry would not be a conflation or yoking together as one resides in the other.

It is thus indisputable that the analyst can play on the power of symbols by evoking them in a calculated fashion in the semantic resonances of his remarks.

This is surely the path by which a return to the use of symbolic effects can proceed in a renewed technique of interpretation.

(Lacan, "The Function and Field of Language in Psychoanalysis", in *Ecrits*, p. 243)

Here Lacan pulls off a grand intellectual gambit by referring to the Indian Dhvani theory, which makes it all the more relevant and easier to relate his theory to Indian poetry in vernacular or mainstream languages. Lacan effects a sort of code-switching from the Freudian tradition to the Indian one which is nothing short of a masterly fete.

We could adopt here as a reference what the Hindu tradition teaches about *dhvani*, defining it as the property of speech by which it conveys what it does not say.

(Lacan, "The Function and Field of Language in Psychoanalysis", in *Ecrits*, p. 244)

It is interesting that, Lacan resorts not to linguistic ambiguities like *gangayam ghosha* but to narrative ambiguities as in the following oft referenced tale:

This is illustrated by a little tale whose naiveté, which appears to be required in such examples, proves funny enough to induce us to penetrate to the truth it conceals.

A girl it is said is awaiting her lover on the bank of a river when she sees a Brahmin coming along. She approaches him and exclaims in the most amiable tones: "What a lucky day this is for you! The dog whose barking used to frighten you will not be on this river bank again for it was just devoured by a lion that roams around here..."

The absence of the lion may thus have as many effects as his spring which were he present would only come once, according to the proverb relished by Freud.

(Lacan, "The Function and Field of Language in Psychoanalysis", in *Ecrits*, pp. 243-244)

In order to undertake a Lacanian analysis of Romantic poetry it is not necessary or sufficient to show that a symmetric correspondence exists between the two in terms of dhvani or mythical connotations, so that the phallic protrusions in Lacanian theory neatly fit into the romantic interstices. But it is the interstices, the slippage between the one and the other that the forbidden thought or its fault lines flit in and out of.

It is not that the forbidden thought is simply disguised, hidden behind the dream material, but that it only exists in a sense as a slippage between the one and the other. Another example can illustrate this principle. A man has two dreams on the same night. In one he loses a blood-soaked tooth and stares at it in absolute horror. In the other his penis is being examined in a medical test and no problems are found. Neither of the dreams represent castration as such, but it is in the relation between the two that the reference to castration is situated. In Lacanian terms it is being half-said. (Leader, p. 44)

Myth as a pedagogic tool in Freud, Jung and Lacan

The purpose of a myth or a collective fantasy is to make an individual fantasy objectively available and shared in the public realm so that it no longer remains a fantasy but rather the basis for religious, spiritual or aesthetic experience. Not just the Indian and Greek myths, the myths of Plato and those of Freud, Jung and Lacan are more relevant since they can be put to use not just in the study of romantic poetry but also the pedagogy of romantic poetry. According to Indian wisdom, philosophy is a bitter pill; it has to be sweetened with the honey of poetry. Such an aesthetics of pedagogy has particular uses for myth. The most extensive instance of harnessing myth to pedagogy can be found in Plato whose *Republic* and dialogues like *Symposium* abound in myths such as those of the cave, Gyngge, the egg etc.

Freud is a master of textual interpretation and his hermeneutics of texts from *Oedipus Rex* to *Hamlet* are well known. Jung on the other hand was more concerned with the symbolic rather than the linguistic or grammatical in his *Symbols of Man*.

It is also worth looking at the prior interpretive model against which Gadamer explicitly defines himself: the Romantic hermeneutics of Frederic Schleiermacher. He defined two key aspects to the interpretation through hermeneutic circle. Understanding of the part (grammatical: text) and the whole (technical: author, context, life). His account was strongly linked to the individuality of the author and the need to try and understand the work of art through attempted re-construction of all the original contexts of authorial knowledge and production in order for understanding to be achieved: ``the task is to be formulated as follows: to understand the text as well as and then even better than the author (Schleiermacher, 1977;112). At the heart of Schleiermacher's account lies what Gadamer calls con-geniality. A kind of affective or psychologically-experienced act of connection with the past. For Gadamer this is not an achievable goal (Bushell, p. 110).

In these post-authorial, post modern times, it might be justified to take a position contra Schleiermacher to claim that the literature of Romanticism at least in part comes from outside and not from the individual subjectivity of the author even though this would be a throw back to the medieval thesis that humans don't generate thoughts, but that thoughts find them, which theory is also found in Walter Benjamin's formulation of shards of 'messianic time.'

Lacan uses his myths of mirror stage and also mathematical formulations and physical puzzles like the mobius strip and Borromean knot.

Does Lacan's use of the myth-as-impossibility model give us a clue to his own use of myth in his seminars? Let us look at two examples, one from the Seminar on *transference*, one from the *Four Fundamental Concepts*. In the first example, Lacan is elaborating his

commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, and discussing the schema in which through an exchange of places, the beloved becomes a lover. "To materialize this in front of you," he tells his audience, "I have the right to complete any image, and turn it into a myth." Love for the object can be compared to "the hand stretching out to reach a ripe fruit or an open flower, or to stoke the log that has suddenly caught alight. But if at the moment that the hand gets close to the fruit or the flower or the log another hand emerges to meet your own and at this moment your own hand freezes in the closed plenitude of the fruit or the open plenitude of the flower – what's produced then is love."

Although Lacan does not cite the reference, this odd metaphor is in fact adapted from the work of the thirteenth century mystic Ramon Lull. The emergence of the other hand may seem miraculous, but what Lacan stresses here is the lack of symmetry in the scene depicted; the hand after all, is not initially reaching out for another hand but for an object (the flower, the fruit). There is thus a basic lack of symmetry behind what seems to be a perfectly symmetric relationship—exactly what Lacan would elaborate in the rest of his seminar, where he is trying to emphasize the disparity between the object of desire and the demand for love. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades may seem to love Socrates, but the latter's intervention in the final scene shows that Alcibiades' desire is in fact directed to the poet Agathon. Likewise, although love may seem to involve the symmetrical relation between two partners, Lacan gives a crucial role to the partial object or the *agalma* as the principle of the dynamics of love. (Leader, p. 44)

In this light, in the next chapter I would like to place Malayalam Romantic poetry within a matrix where it deals with issues of dual-descent deriving from contesting kinship claims of matrilineal and patriarchal systems descent and the more poetic dilemmas of mythological versus pastoral Romantic modes of writing poetry.

Chapter 3: Romantic Poetry in Malayalam

In this chapter, I would like to consider Changampuzha Krishna Pillai as an exemplar of Romantic poetry in Malayalam and his position as the most popular poet in the history of modern Malayalam. The proletarian position that Changampuzha takes is evident in his poems like *Ramanan* and *Vazhakkula*.

In this chapter, I would analyse a theatrical production of *Ramanan* and its debt to the matrilineal tradition of a large section of Kerala society (Nairs, Thiyyas etc), to which Changampuzha belonged. The modernist dilemma of reconciling the conflict between a retreating matrilineal tradition and an emerging patriarchy is evident in the poem *Ramanan*.

Also significant is the way in which Changampuzha gives voice to the class differences. I would like to suggest that the Romantic craft of Changampuzha tried to reconcile these contradictions, by using the genre called the pastoral. The attempt cannot be called a successful one as the fault lines of this radical attempt are present in the divergence from the mythical tradition of Indian and Romantic poetry.

Myth in Romanticism

Mythical references might appear in the realm of classical literature, but romantic literature also abounds in them. Romanticism, with its focus on authorial subjectivity, was far from the kind of cosmic objectivity the myth helps impart to classical and medieval literature.

For early Romantic poets like Blake, myth-making was a natural and unconscious creative activity which was as spontaneous as breathing. But the later Romantics like Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Byron veered away into the more glamorous world of revolutionary filibustering or sensual eroticism. Though Keats used the myths of Endymion, and Lamia and the religious theme of St. Agnes, he was not a myth-maker and his primary preoccupation in treating the ancient or medieval myth is to render them amenable to a sensual interpretation that is at once aural, ocular and kinesthetic.

But Coleridge was an exemption, an egregious black sheep and perhaps the greatest of the romantics. Translating Schiller in 1799, he pleaded the heart's necessity for myth, and insisted on the relevance of the imagination's instinctual thrust toward making natural forms intelligible. His argument also buttresses the German tradition's place as the fountain of romantic inspiration. Both Coleridge and Blake showed a greater affinity towards the Hebraic tradition which they considered more 'alive' rather than the pagan 'myth,' which was overused and abused. Here I quote from that great 'Hebraic' scholar and author of texts such as *Kabbalah and Criticism*, Harold Bloom:

The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
The fair humanities of old religion,
The Power, the Beauty, and the Majesty,
That had their haunts in dale or piny mountain,
Or forest by slow stream, or pebbly spring,
Or chasms and wat'ry depths: all these have vanished.
They live no longer in the faith of reason!
But still the heart doth need a language, still
Doth the old instinct bring back the old names....

For Blake, the old instinct of myth-making no longer brought back the old names. With Coleridge, he believed that in Greek religious poetry all natural objects were dead, but that in the Hebrew poets everything had a life of its own, and yet was part of the one life within man.

Such a belief prevented Blake from anticipating Shelley and Keats in writing poems about Prometheus and Apollo, for to Blake these figures were hollow statues, and the study of the classics only the study of death. In Blake the old instinct brought forward new names and gave the heart and head their proper language by a new grouping of intelligible forms.

He speaks of these, on the third plate of *Jerusalem*, as his 'Giant Forms,' and we are not likely to find a better term for them. They are figures of myth and cannot be interpreted aside from their speeches and activities in Blake's poems. A myth is a story and a mythic figure moves and has his being only within the meaningfulness of his story.

(Bloom, p. 33)

Thus Blake and Coleridge were the most original myth makers among the romantic poets. All the same, they remained averse, unlike the other poets of the group, from borrowing from the mythical tradition, as they were incapable of following its worn out patterns of referencing and re-referencing in the neo-classical tradition which had made even myth and nature into clichés. Thus they received and synthesized the 'giant' traditions, Hebraic or Hellenic, into their own figures of poetic expression. Thus they were titans of traditional craft. The eloquence of the tradition that spoke through them is evident in Coleridge's translation of Schiller.

The point that despite revolutionary postures by Shelley, Byron and even the weathercock-like Wordsworth, it was tradition and not a rupture with tradition that propelled romantic inspiration and creativity is central to my thesis. My concern here is neither English nor German Romanticism. Here I am dealing with Malayalam Romanticism, however apocryphal such a cross-continental cross-pollination might be. But in terms of matrilineal kinship and Indian mythological sources, Malayalam Romanticism is also traditional and Changampuzha was its 'titan.' Even within this edifice, fault lines appear in the form of the emerging patriarchal kinship structures and also the pastoral themes of romantic elegy. The reconciliation between these forms would have been difficult to achieve but how Malayalam Romanticism negotiated these troubled waters of a rapidly modernizing India in the early 20th century, is the central theme of my investigation.

Romanticism as a movement in Malayalam poetry was pioneered almost single handedly by Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, arguably the greatest Malayalam poet of the modern era. Although similar traits can be traced in the poetry of bygone times, they were never precipitated with the same vigour and force achieved by some of the modern poets.

Despite its revolutionary credentials, courtesy Shelley and others like Wordsworth who valorized the French Revolution, Romanticism as a movement can be deeply traditional as shown by Hannah Arendt in the following excerpt:

The strength of this tradition, its hold on western man's thought, has never depended on his consciousness of it. Indeed only twice in their history do we encounter periods in which men are conscious and over-conscious of the fact of tradition, identifying age as such with authority. This happened first when the Romans adopted classical Greek thought and culture as their own spiritual tradition and thereby decided historically that tradition was to have a permanent formative influence on western civilization. Before the Romans such a thing as tradition was unknown; with them it became and after them it remained the guiding thread through the past and the chain to which each new generation knowingly or unknowingly was bound in its understanding of the world or its own experience. Not until the romantic period do we encounter an exalted consciousness and glorification of tradition. (the discovery of antiquity in the renaissance was a first attempt to break free of tradition, and by going to the sources themselves to establish a past over which tradition would have no hold).

Today tradition is sometimes considered an essentially romantic concept, but romanticism did no more than place the discussion of tradition on the agenda of the 19th century; its glorification of the past only served to mark the moment when the modern age was about to change our world and general circumstances to such an extent that a matter-of-course reliance on tradition was no longer possible.

The end of a tradition does not necessarily mean that traditional concepts have lost their power over the minds of men. On the contrary, it sometimes seems that this power of well-worn notions and categories becomes more tyrannical as the tradition loses its living force as the memory of its beginning recedes, it may reveal its full coercive force only after its end has come and men no longer even rebel against it. (Arendt, pp. 25-26)

Here Arendt makes the contentious claim that the Roman invention of the Greek tradition and the Romantic invention of bardic tradition are paradigm examples for conscious and

over-conscious identification with tradition. I would like to go by such an argument, which would foreground Romanticism as a movement in the forefront of the rejuvenation or reinvention of tradition in its true spirit, even more than the renaissance, which essentially was a waking up from the so called 'millennial slumber' of the middle ages.

D. Jayamohan, a writer of interest for us due to the liminal nature of his identity and craft. (belonging to the southern district of Tamilnadu that once belonged to the erstwhile royal principality of Travancore, now a part of Kerala State, and a matrilineal Nair, he learned Malayalam later in life and even now makes errors in his writing.) makes the following contrary observation about Romanticism in Malayalam literature:

Modernism in Malayalam had to face great challenges. Romanticism is very strong in Malayalam. The reason for the popularity of romantic poetry in Malayalam is its absence of a classical tradition. Even the Malayalam poets have no proper understanding of the classical works of the Sanskrit tradition that is worshipped by most Malayalis. Most of them have disowned the Tamil tradition. For them Sanskrit is the patrician language and Tamil a plebian one. A robust classical tradition imparts strength to a language. Especially when in situations where poetry slips into uber romanticism, it is classicism that acts as a balancing influence. The two major sources of Malayalam poetic tradition are romantic in nature. Ezhuthachan⁴ was a Bhakti-romantic and Kumaran Asan⁵ was a romantic of the age of humanism. The rampant spread of Romanticism in Malayalam was a result of the absence of a counterbalancing classical tradition. I would say that Modernism in Malayalam surrendered before romanticism. (Jayamohan, p.23)

⁴ Thunchathu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, the author of the *Adhyathma Ramayanam*, is often said to be founder of modern Malayalam literature.

⁵ Kumaran Asan, one of the 'Mahakavi' trinity of modern Malayalam poetry (the other two being Ulloor Parameswara Iyer and Vallathol Narayana Menon), was also a companion of the social reformer sage Sree Narayana Guru. Asan was a founder member of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham. He wrote poems like *Karuna* and *Chandalabhikshuki*, based on Buddhist legends.

The two early Malayalam poets who display romantic traits in their works are Cherusseri Namboodiri (c. 1375-1475) and Poonthanam Namboodiri (1547-1640). Cherusseri and Poonthanam are notable for their use of the vernacular language and the Bhakti cult in their works *Krishnagadha* and *Jnanappana* respectively.

The magnificent form of Krishna as a divine infant is a Child Archetype and is articulated in the *Bhagavatha Purana*. Cherusseri Namboodiri imparted a memorable Keralaesque quality to it. As a result, it was Cherusseri's Krishna that was the deity which was installed in the heart of the Keralite. (Mukundan, p 72)

Like Cherusseri Namboodiri, Poonthanam was also an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna (Guruvayoorappan) and composed his masterpiece, the *Jnanappana* (Song of Wisdom) under tragic circumstances. He apparently was married for a long time without issue. As a result of long propitiation of Guruvayoorappan, a son was born to him. A sumptuous feast and celebration was organized for the naming ceremony of the child. But amidst the preparations for the event, the child itself was neglected and it died in some freak accident involving the cradle etc.

Poonthanam was disillusioned, lost all appetite for worldly life and devoted the rest of his life composing verses of the *Jnanappana*, in praise of Lord Krishna whom he from then on considered to be his infant son. He touchingly writes in his *Jnanappana*: "while the infant Krishna dances in our hearts, do we need little ones of our own?"

The incident bears uncanny resemblance to the one related by Freud in which the burning son appears in his dad's dream: "*Dass das Kind an Seinem Bett Steht*, that the child is near its bed, *ihn am Arme fast*, takes him by the arm and whispers to him reproachfully, *und ihm vorwurfsvoll zuraunt, vater siehst du denn nicht*, father can't you see, *dass ich verbrenne*, that I am burning?" (quoted in Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 58)

Later Romantic poetry in Malayalam, as pioneered by Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, followed in the vernacular traditional mooring of the early poets. Although the ritual-spiritual Bhakti elements were shed in favour of more radical and fashionable postures, the idealism of the earlier poets was kept alive.

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai was, as it is said, at once the Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, and Coleridge of Malayalam.

Biography of Changampuzha Krishna Pillai

He was born in Edapalli on October 11, 1911 in Changampuzha Tharavadu as the son of Thekkedath Narayana Menon and Changampuzha Bhavanathil Parukkutty Amma. He was educated in the Edapalli Malayalam Primary Shool and then shifted to the Sree Krishna Vilas English Middle School, Aluva St. Mary's School and Ernakulam Government High School and St. Albert's School. He completed his honours degree from Ernakulam Maharaja's College and Thiruvananthapuram Arts College. Legend has it that he suffered extreme poverty as a student and also that Changampuzha had to study his own poems in his honours class as they were part of the curriculum and that classmates knew him only by the name Krishna Pillai and when the teacher reading out from the poem would call out "Changampuzha, please stand up," the entire class would look up at him in awe. These might be though the romantic fluff woven around the biography of romantic poets from Byron to Keats to Changampuzha and may be lacking in veracity.

Changampuzha joined the Army as a clerk for a brief while and performed military service. His first poem to be published was *Pookkalam* (floral design) which was published in the *Mathrubhoomi* magazine on September 12, 1932. His first collection of poems titled *Bashpanjali* (wreath of tears) appeared in 1934. Later Changampuzha joined the Madras Law College, but had to drop out after some time. He also worked as a teacher. He served as Editorial Board Member of the then elite and now defunct *Mangalodayam* magazine. In his short life Changampuzha wrote more than 57 works.

He died of tuberculosis at the young age of 37. But before that in the summer of 1936, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai would write the greatest of his poems, the verse drama *Ramanan* which has sold more than 100,000 copies over the years. It is a long pastoral elegy allegedly based on the life of Changampuzha's intimate friend Edappally Raghavan Pillai. The circumstances surrounding Edappalli Raghava Pillai's death seem so strange that they seem to be unbelievable now. He fell in love with a girl of the same caste and apparently the affection was mutual. But the girl's family, belonging to some kind of minor feudal gentry, was opposed to their union and the girl was forced to marry another man. On the day of her wedding Edappalli Raghava Pillai hanged himself, clad in full wedding gear and make-up. This event of his friend's death was very traumatic (or embarrassing) for Changampuzha. The storyline in Changampuzha's *Ramanan* proceeds almost exactly on the same lines, the only difference being that whereas Edappalli and Changampuzha were struggling poets, the protagonists in the verse drama, *Ramanan* and *Madanan* are shepherds. Changampuzha popularized poetry, bringing it to the masses with his simple romantic style. As the noted critic Guptan Nair rightly says,

Changampuzha's poetry has become part of our history. Not just our literary history but also our cultural history. It can be said that he was the lone voice among the numerous poets of those times who imbued their youthful frenzies, lust and hops with an inborn poetic facility. In the generation previous to Changampuzha's the difficult task was not to be trapped in the aura of Vallathol Narayana Menon. Even before the ebbing of Vallathol's magnificence, the work of G. Sankarakurup captured the hearts of intellectuals and thinkers. Changampuzha entered the scene at this point like a fragrance laden spring breeze. Connoisseurs traversed intoxicating dream worlds on board his lyrical craft. Meaning was not a major concern. That inexplicable bliss oozing into the inner self without any thought was the intoxication of Changampuzha's poetry. The readers had to struggle to free themselves from the soporific 'hangover' of that blissful intoxication. (Guptan)

An extract from a well-known Changampuzha poem may testify to his poetic greatness:

Sparkling rhythms that foam on the surface
Like lotus flowers dancing in rhythmic cadence.

Numberless heavens float into my dreams
As you dance your dances my muse

Frolicsome thy dances, exploring further
Unveil forms of worlds many and minute

Sow seeds of frenzy in me though you may
Ne'er will I forget thee Goddess of dismay

Even a strand of thy hair can on me bestow
Fame and fortune so immense, so endow

(Changampuzha, *Kavyanartaki and Other Poems*, p. 131)

Such lines of Changampuzha might have prompted Guptan Nair and other critics to take a simplistic aesthetic view of Changampuzha's work. But the contradictions are always present in his stance toward feudalism, gender relations, drug use etc.

Case Study – a contemporary stage version of *Ramanan*

A stage version of the verse drama *Ramanan*, directed by Pirappancode Murali was produced in 2011 to coincide with the poet's birth centenary. This verse drama extensively uses Mohiniyattam – Dance of the Enchantress – as interpreted by the Kerala Kalamandalam school.

Romantic poetry in Malayalam played a major role in revitalizing the popular theatre scene in that state which has a rich tradition of performing arts like Kathakali and Kudiyyattam. After the founding of the Kerala Kalamandalam by the poet Vallathol Narayana Menon, the classical art forms have received a boost in the cultural sphere of the state. The founding of Kalamandalam revived and rejuvenated the classical theatre and dance of Kerala, viz. Kathakali, Kudiyyattam and Mohiniyattam. These art forms were fading into oblivion, by the turn of 20th century, facing the threat of extinction under various regulations of the colonial authorities. It was at this juncture, in 1927, that the poet Vallathol, Narayana Menon and Mukunda Raja came forward and formed a society called Kerala Kalamandalam. The verse drama *Ramanan* by Changampuzha, which I would like to call his 'pastoral theatre' due to the theme handled therein, must be seen in this context. Interesting in this regard is Slavoj Žižek's analysis of a stage adaptation of Tristan and Isolde:

But the crucial point for us is the way that Ponelle staged this delirious apparition of Isolde. Because she appears to Tristan, we would expect her to stand in front of him and thus fascinate his gaze. In Ponelle's mis-en-scene however Tristan (dying) looks directly at us, the spectators in the hall, while the dazzlingly illuminated Isolde grows luxuriantly behind him, as that 'which is in him more than himself.'

(Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p 90)

Here, in Changampuzha's *Ramanan*, the love-death of Chandrika does not happen as denouement. Rather it is the suicide of Ramanan. As he dies, the entire matrilineal edifice gathers up above him in all its pride and dignity, and thus he in death throes sees that reflected in our, the audience's, eyes.

The reception of such a finale rests upon the judgement of the audience and the history of aesthetic perception in Kerala. As a society, Kerala has suffered a cultural imbalance that heavily favours literature, thus giving sculpture, painting and the plastic arts a miss. This deficiency is purportedly to be amended with efforts like the forthcoming Muziris Biennale. In this regard, the above production of *Ramanan* is a path-breaking event in the history of evolution of audience perception among Malayalam speakers.

The dependence of poiesis on reception in modern art means that it converges in recent times with the second category of Jauss' aesthetic trinity of poiesis, aesthesis and catharsis. Defined as aesthetic perception, it refers to the receptive side of aesthetic experience. To outline its history, Jauss proceeds to examine a number of exemplary texts in which observation and perception, especially the contemplation of nature, play an important role. In this manner he hopes to circumvent or at least to minimize the hermeneutical problem of trying to perceive what the history of perception has been.

(Holub, p.76)

The 'Proletarian' Pastoral

From the *Eclogues* of Virgil to *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* by Thomas Grey, the history of Western literature is studded with masterpieces that belong to the pastoral elegiac genre. The pastoral has been classified as a proletarian form that expresses the anguish and despair and other complex features of the mental universe of the working class with relatively more felicity. It has also been described as complex thoughts expressed in the simplest possible manner.

In his introduction to the *Collected Works of Changampuzha*, V.C. Harris makes clear the debt that Changampuzha owes to this literary genre that ironically is more occidental than oriental, examples from Kalidasa to Omar Khayyam notwithstanding:

I am not writing this to show that Changampuzha's poetry presents a imaginative world comprising forests, Ramanan etc, but to show that how strong is the presence of 'pastoral elegy' which Changampuzha translates as 'grameenavilapakavya' in his poetry. If the 'elegiac' aspect is overlooked, the 'pastoral' sub-genre manifests its prominence in Changampuzha's poetry in many ways. Maybe Changampuzha's greatest achievement was the development of this new language to articulate the romantic conception of rural life. The preface that Changampuzha wrote to his anthology titled *Sankalpakanti* published in 1942 serves to illustrate that the poet was conscious of the pastoral mode in his work. His deep knowledge of lyric, ode, pastoral elegy, dramatic monologue and other poetic genres is made evident here. But the most notable point is how profoundly the genre called 'pastoral' had shaped even his prose. The preface to *Sankalpakanti* begins thus: "my heart, wounded many a time in confrontations with practical life, has often played the veena in the shade of leisure." (Changampuzha, *Collected Works*, Part 1, p 403). This image that posits his own self as the hero of a pastoral elegy is

Changampuzha's inborn faculty. It goes without saying that playing the veena or flute in the shade points towards a circumstance of retreat. The previously hinted binary of hypocrite world/sincere heart is at the core of this retreat. Terry Gifford writes thus on this topic, "the pastoral is essentially a discourse of retreat ... which may either simply escape from the complexities of the city, the court, the present, 'our manners' or simply explore them." Is the pastoral an escape from or critique of the contradictions of civilization and contemporary life? That is the question at hand. (Harris, pp. 16-17)

It is clear that Changampuzha sets out to use the pastoral form intentionally unlike the 'rejection' and subconscious use of myth by a poet as venerable as William Blake. Changampuzha is not cynical or manipulative in his use of the pastoral; it is just that he is aware of the possibilities that it offers in dealing with the class contradictions and crumbling of feudal edifices and age-old kinship systems such as matriliney and maternal and paternal cross-cousin marriage. Thus whether the pastoral is a mode of escape or confrontation vis-à-vis the social complexities is the momentous issue at hand. In Changampuzha, it certainly takes up the contemporary social issues.

The essential trick of the old pastoral which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between the rich and the poor, was to make simple people express strong feelings, in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way). From seeing the two sorts of people combined in this way you thought better of them both; the better parts of both were used. The effect was in some degree to combine in the reader or the author, the merits of the two sorts; he was made to mirror in himself more completely the effective elements of the society he lived in. (Empson, p. 85)

The 'Pastoral Theatre' of Changampuzha and its Matrilineal Pedigree

Any such formulation of a pastoral theatre with reference to Changampuzha's *Ramanan* can at best be only a post-facto construction. But the storyline in *Ramanan* which proceeds almost on the same lines as Saratchandra Chatterjee's *Devdas*, but for the difference that here it is the male protagonist who belongs to the economically disadvantaged section. Similar stories of ill fated love across class barriers also occur in one of the most important novels of modern Malayalam, *Balyakalasakhi*, written by Vaikom Muhammed Basheer.

In terms of matrilineal kinship, the mythical connotations in *Ramanan* hark back to the 'murappennu' system by which a man is supposed to marry his maternal uncle's daughter whom the term signifies. The kinship term for nephew – *marumakan* – is the same as that of son-in-law throughout Malayalam speaking communities.

It is this failed romance vis-à-vis the maternal cross cousin that is evoked within the matrilineal symbolism of *Ramanan*. The entire mythology of doomed love in matrilineal terms in this stage-adaptation centres around the maternal cross cousin or *murappennu*. This sort of semi-incestuous fantasy has the further dimension of dutiful love, which also preserves the ancestral property from being scattered through marital alliances with other, unrelated families of the same caste. Claude Lévi-Strauss describes the matrilineal cross-cousin marriage thus:

Boys grew up in their father's house but sooner or later they had to go over to their maternal uncle when they inherited his titles, prerogatives, and hunting grounds. Marriage with the matrilineal cousin provided a solution to this conflict.

Furthermore, as has often been found in the case of other societies of the same type, such a marriage made it possible to overcome another conflict: that between the patrilineal and matrilineal tendencies of Tsimshian society, which as we have seen above, is very deeply conscious of the two lines. By means of such a marriage a man ensures the continued existence of his hereditary privileges and of such titles as he might have within the limit of a small family circle. (Levi-Strauss, p. 168)

Thus according to Levi-Strauss, the matrilineal cross-cousin marriage was a valuable kinship mode not only to retain the ancestral privileges, but also to effect a synthesis of patrilineal and matrilineal descent systems, thus solving the question of double descent, which can be pretty schizophrenic otherwise.

But, with the decline and legal abolition of matrilineal descent and the advent of modernity and its medical discourse surrounding incestuous progeny with congenital defects, the mode of synthesis that such a kinship tie used to provide was no longer available. Changampuzha attempts a resolution of this in poetic terms, which will be available for a Lacanian analysis in the fourth chapter.

Misogyny and Romanticism

The fissures laid open by a disappearing matrilineal system in Kerala manifests itself as misogyny of which literature is an index. The natolocal social organization in Kerala and the matrilineal system were overturned in 1933 by legislation, making it the first kinship system in the world to be so abolished.

The following conversation between the star crossed lovers occurs in *Ramanan* with the hero persuading his lover not to accompany him to the forest where he herds his sheep. The passage is infamous for the hero Ramanan's conceited egoism and patronizing attitude towards his lover, which a contemporary audience in Kerala would find hard to digest. The stage version of the play gets over such constraints using the classical dance form of Mohiniyattam, which presents a sort of charadic feminine jouissance on stage.

Ramanan: Forbidden, forbidden, we must not so

Forget ourselves in our deeds in this way.

Chandrika: How many tender creepers must have

Blossomed in yonder blue hills of today!

Ramanan: There is not even a flower in yonder forests,

That you have not seen here in this Ikkili Grove.

Chandrika: What many and many sorts of birds must be,

Singing in their flight right now over there ?

Ramanan: There is not even a bird in the forest,

That doesn't visit this flower garden of your's.

Chandrika: Let your flute sing for this one time alone,

A song that embellishes all of my charms!

Ramanan: There is nothing in this flute of mine, that are not

But songs of thee, thee alone, this day.

Chandrika: Then to hear those good songs,

I would be accompanying you there!

Ramanan: The songs will stay with me forever, and

Any time you can hear them from me dear!

Chandrika: Then why this procrastination,

Take me along with you right now today!

Ramanan: One day I will be taking you there,

But not this day, not this day my dear one!

(Changampuzha, *Kavyanartaki and Other Poems*, pp. 33-34)

Mohiniyattam is a classical dance form and is one of the eight Indian classical dance forms. It is meant to be performed as a solo recital by women, which makes it eminently suited for the individual subjectivity of the pastoral theatre. This classical dance form allows for the eruption on stage of a charadic feminine jouissance that is based on feminine subjectivity devoid of scopophilia. The term Mohiniyattam comes from the words 'Mohini' meaning, enchantress and 'aattam' meaning graceful and sensuous body movements.

As for the origin of the dance form, there are two stories of the Lord Vishnu disguised as a Mohini. In one, he appears as Mohini to lure the asuras (demons) away from the amrita (nectar of immortality), during the churning of the palazhi or Ocean of Milk. In the second story Vishnu appears as Mohini to save Lord Shiva from the demon Bhasmasura. The name Mohiniyattam may have been coined after Lord Vishnu, and the main theme of the dance is love and devotion to God, with usually Vishnu or Krishna being the hero. Devadasis used to perform this in temples. But it also has elements of Koothu and Kottiyattom in it. Mohiniyattam is a drama in dance and verse.

The combination of divinity and androgyny makes Mohiniyattam an ideal platform for the production of the pastoral theatre which is instinctually based on a cross-over between oriental and western genres as well as theatrical traditions. Mohiniyattam has to be situated within the matrix of matrilineal kinship system that existed in Kerala. Thus thinking of Changampuzha's poetry in terms of a dance form like Mohiniyattom is not far fetched as his poetry gives ample scope for doing so, as he very often compares his poetry to a seductive danseuse.

When thinking about Changampuzha's poetic style, it must be noted that it was influenced by dance as well as music. A. Balakrishna Pillai's statement that Changampuzha in his poems imitated a 'nrttasilpa' is to be noted. Poetry appears before him as a dancer. In 'Kavya Narthaki' the poet enamoured of the dance of Malayalam poetry appeals to that goddess thus:

Even a strand of thy hair can upon me endow
Fame and fortune so immense, so bestow
Are thee leaving, stopping thy dancing in midway
Don't ditch me my goddess, don't ditch me, don't ditch me.

In 'Ente Kavita' also the poet imagines poetry to be a dancer. There the danseuse is someone who has 'performed so far without missing a step.' The poet demands her to continue her dance, without being discouraged by obstacles. (Purushottaman, p. 112)

Naalukettu and Matrilineal Symbolism in Kerala

The matrilineal peoples of Kerala followed a natolocal social organization which from the 1930s was overturned by various reformers and legislation.⁶ The present generation might be the last to see remnants of matrilineal Kerala. The matrilineal system had an accompanying architectural style which till recently had survived. Not only was the matrilineal social organization destroyed, but its specific architectural mode, the Naalukettu, was almost razed into extinction, to such an extent that only a glamorous few of these structures remain as shooting locations. The organization of these structures around a quadrangle meant that they could not be renovated, and had to be pulled down entirely. Dramatically, the Naalukettu rendered permeable the inside and the outside, the public and the private.

⁶ G. Arunima in her seminal book *There Comes Papa* examines the matrilineal tradition in Kerala.

The most distinct thing about the conventional Nair Naalukettu was the fact that it mimetically resembled the familial organization, that of an anthill around a matriarch. The central courtyard, pivotal to the structure rendered it permeable to sunlight and outside air circulation and also produced an ambiguity of interiority in terms of space. The house was not just an enclosed space that offered refuge and shut the outside world off, but a receptacle that offered sustenance a la the maternal womb.

If a woman cannot be a part of the temporal symbolic order except by identifying with the father, it is clear that as soon as she shows any sign of that which in herself, escapes such identification and acts differently, resembling the dream or the maternal body, she evolves into this 'truth' in question. It is thus that female specificity defines itself in patrilineal society: woman is a specialist in the unconscious, a witch, a bacchanalian, taking her jouissance in the anti-Appollonian, Dionysian orgy. (Kristeva, p. 154)

It is within this maternal space that the Mohiniyattam performance unveils the feminine subjectivity in the personal, private realm in conjunction with the shared anthropological matrilineal specificity of the society. Thus the symbolic space, the stylized performance and the Dionysian dance form are enabling factors for the romantic eruption of a new sensibility.

A jouissance which breaks the symbolic chain, the taboo, the mastery. A marginal discourse, with regard to the science, religion and philosophy of the polis (witch, child, underdeveloped, not even a poet, at best his accomplice). A pregnancy: an escape from the temporality of day-to-day social obligations, an interruption of the regular monthly cycles, where the surfaces-skin, sight-are abandoned in favour of a descent into the depths of the body, where one hears, tastes and smells the infinitesimal life of the cells. Perhaps the notion that the period of gestation approaches another temporality, more cosmic and 'objective' than human and 'subjective', is just another myth designed to restore time (vn if different) at the very moment when time breaks up, before its product (the child) emerges. The child: sole evidence for the symbolic order, of jouissance and pregnancy, thanks to whom the woman will be coded in the chain of production and thus perceived as a temporalized parent. Jouissance, pregnancy, marginal discourse; this is the way in which this 'truth' hidden and cloaked by the truth of the symbolic order and its time, functions through time. (Kristeva, p. 154)

Any receptacle, even a goldfish bowl can be said to resemble the maternal womb, but the Naalukettu significantly carries with it the corresponding anthropological and traditional edifice called matriliney.

The Naalukettu might not be a magnificent edifice in scale. But it is a self-contained and self-sufficient one. (In this regard too it resembles the womb.) The Naalukettu renders a perfect ontological manifestation and does not resort to an anally retentive withholding of information⁷ that is the crux of a phallogocentric narrative, as this excerpt on reader response theory claims with reference to ancient Greek epics:

In this ancient world where aesthetic and theoretical curiosity were not yet exhausted, separated, aesthesis entailed a presentation of events in the double sense of portraying and making present. Since the ancients did not draw an ontological distinction, between an earlier and later occurrence there was no ranking or hierarchy of moments in this presentation. In the scenes described on Achilles's shield which Jauss takes as his illustrative case, each picture contains its own beauty. 'As the pleasurable lingering in the face of perfect manifestation, aesthesis here represents its highest concept.' (p. 67) In contrast, the aesthesis of Christian middle ages is subsumed under the formula of the 'poetry of the invisible.' Since here the difference between figure and significance constitutes the primary receptive experience. (Holub, p. 76)

⁷ Lalitha Gopalan makes a similar claim in her 'Cinema of Interruptions' that in Bollywood films the interval and song and dance routines delay the resolution and enhances viewer's pleasure.

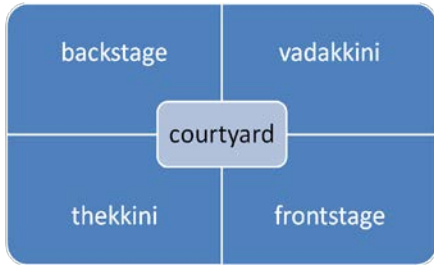
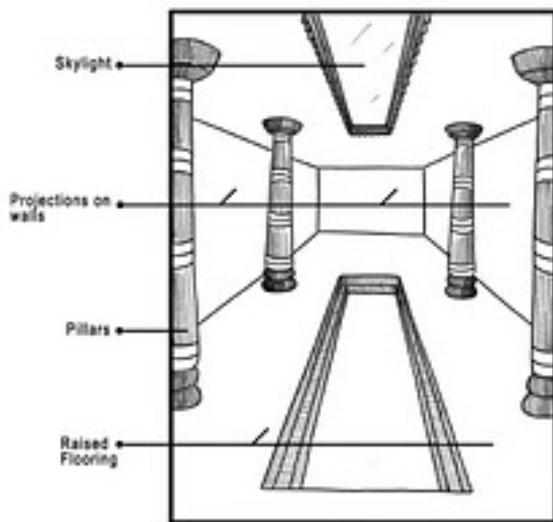


Fig 1 (above): How the Naalukettu space gets used for performance



Fig 2: The inside of a typical Naalukettu

Fig 3 (below): Different facets of a Naalukettu



Inside a Nalukettu

- The room for display will have a skylight in order to recreate the feel of the central courtyard of a Nalukettu. The floor will be raised around a central rectangle to add to this feel.
- Pillars and other structural features from a Nalukettu will be incorporated in the decor of the passageway.
- The central passageway will be surrounded with screens which will have projections of the daily activities of the people in the Nalukettu bringing in the picture of the setup of the rooms in the Nalukettu.



The Naalukettu comprised a house around a courtyard (Nadumuttam) and members of the matrilineal joint family lived in adjoining rooms surrounding the courtyard. This forms an ideal device for mobilization of the dramatic matrix of choreographed narrative, especially in the works of writers from matrilineal milieu, (one among whom was Changampuzha Krishna Pillai.) The matrilineal genealogy is a horizontal one and was mobilized like an anthill around this central courtyard.

Action in the verse drama

The action follows the Aristotelian unities and takes place in a drawing room. The play follows a *dispositif* route, positing a play within another play.⁸ This comprises, within an English drawing room milieu, the confabulations of Changampuzha Krishna Pillai with a fellow writer which then leads to the fictional staging of the dramatic space. This follows the familiar route of prefiguration in which the doomed Romance of Ramanan and Chandrika is reflected in the poet's own predicament. Changampuzha, in the opening act of the play, is seen discussing details of the production of the play with a contemporary, Keshava Dev who was an enormously popular and influential nationalist writer of the time. Also seen are two side-kicks, moneymen who are supposed to finance the project and provide the comic relief. In this act, which is Pirappancode Murali's only substantial alteration to the original version by Changampuzha, Keshava Dev gives vent to his alienation in the midst of British colonial rule: 'you know, we are both of us pariahs within this edifice.'

The central character of Ramanan is constructed around profound images of matrilineal symbolism which cast him as a tribal youth and Madanan as his brother. The maternal figure is absent, only the symbolism of the matrilineal kinship system is present. The Kurichyas are a matrilineal tribe in the Wayanad district of Kerala. They consider themselves 'Hill Brahmins' and follow strict caste rites of pollution and purification.

Following this foregrounding act, the rest of the verse drama plays out within the public-private realms of the Naalukettu and the arboreal tribal *lebensraum*. The Naalukettu could range from the palatial to the mundane, but was functional and simple. As architectural representations of tradition, there is something deeper in the Malayali psyche that the wide dissemination of these structures through dramatic space satisfies. Therefore, the inherent

⁸ 'Dispositif' is derived from the French word meaning 'device'. Foucault uses the term 'dispositif,' 'deployment,' or 'apparatus' to refer to the various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body. According to Giorgio Agamben, *dispositif* has a long etymology that goes back to the Christian trinity of father-son and holy ghost, the tripartite nature of which roused accusations of paganism in Roman times and was hence replaced with the simple *dispositif*.

matrilineal symbolism in these structures and their fulfilling of audience expectations is of interest. The Naaluketu structures could not survive without the matrilineal joint family. They could not be supported by the nuclear family. The Naalukettu represents something that is otherwise not available within a colonial time frame. It is nostalgia in its purest form.

The dances in the verse drama present a carving out of a three-dimensional space or lebensraum from within the fictional space of the literary narrative as a Heideggerian insistence on existence and its dignity among the colonial ruins and arboreal majesty and eruptions of the feminine charadic jouissance of the body, in what should ideally have been a spiritual romance in the drawing room play tradition with Victorian moral tones.

The ontological autonomy and agency of the matrilineal Malayali woman in pre-independent India is foregrounded and complemented by elements of pastoral romance, an evocation of arboreal life and tribal freedom.

In the verse drama version of Changampuzha Krishna Pillai's work *Ramanan* (by Pirappancode Murali), the Naalukettu structure is so interleaved into the dramatic narrative that it almost becomes another character. Mobilised around the Naalukettu are images of its mythical deities and their invocations, chants, the oracle, arboreal hamadryads and the entire life and landscape of rural Kerala. The Naalukettu, the traditional matriarch, the all powerful figure of the maternal uncle, the crumbling of these houses and relations are all deftly presented.⁹

Ramanan by Changampuzha Krishna Pillai is essentially a combination of genres, those of dance and pastoral elegy, verse-drama and dance-drama, creating fissures in the psychological landscape of heterosexual love within a colonised setup in pre-1947 India. Reductively, the verse drama can be said to be in the Romantic tradition and based on the real-life tragedy and suicide of his friend and collaborator Edapally Raghava Pillai.

⁹ The pathos surrounding these crumbling Nalukettus is deftly and most famously captured by M.T. Vasudevan Nair in his *Naalukettu*, translated into English by Geetha Krishnankutty as *The House Around the Courtyard*

Chapter 4: Double descent and Romantic synthesis – A Lacanian Reading

During the period ranging from 1925 to 1940, the entire youth of Kerala had to deal with contradicting issues of two types – on the one hand the passion to enjoy life and on the other the compulsion to earn a livelihood. Two poets, who undertook the passion and compulsion of the youth of that era and gave enrichment or satisfaction to their emotional lives that would otherwise have been gone awry, were Changampuzha Krishna Pillai and Edappalli Raghavan Nair.

(Nair SK, 'Preface' to *Svararagasudha*, 1948, p vi, cited in Purushottaman, p. 112)

Thus even in 1948, the function of romantic poetry especially that of Changampuzha and Edappalli in reconciling conflicting emotional impulses was recognized. In hindsight, such a reconciling role might appear less convincing in view of the massive political unrest and the 'Vimochana Samaram' that ensued after the election to power in 1957 of the first communist ministry led by EMS Namboodiripad and its subsequent dismissal. Though the reconciling mission of Romantic poetry would appear problematic in hindsight, the canvas of its influence can be widened to encompass (i) a retreating matriliney in conflict with an emergent patriliney and (ii) the class divide evident in the use of pastoral genre in poems like *Ramanan* and *Vazhakkula* and the mythological impulses of traditional poetic craft.

In a footnote to his 1959 essay "On Hamlet", Lacan speaks of Schon Seele:

The delusion of the Seele from which we have not escaped, far from it, all our efforts notwithstanding.... Schon Seele – Allusion to Hegel's dialectic of the withdrawn, contemplative 'beautiful soul' which ... denounces the perceived disorder of the world around him without recognizing that the disorder is a reflection of his own inner state.

(Lacan, "On Hamlet", p. 45)

In much of Changampuzha's poetry, the reader is under the delusion of the Seele.

The agenda of reconciling conflicting tendencies is not novel to Malayalam poetry. Since the time of Manipravalam poetry, it has been performing this task. Manipravalam (literally meaning ruby and coral, the vernacular tongue being the coral and Sanskrit the ruby) as a movement existed in Kerala, unlike the other South Indian states where it was merely a passing phenomenon. The texts belonging to this movement range from the liturgical to the erotic. The most famous text of the era is perhaps the *Leelathilakam* which is a manual describing the grammatical and other modalities of poetic craft. But this tradition was mostly rejuvenated in the Romantic poets.

Manipravalam was not a linguistic synthesis peculiar to Malayalam. Such syntheses existed in other Dravidian tongues such as Tamil and Telugu. But in no other language had it developed into a poetic movement. It would be rational to describe Manipravalam as a reflection of the intermixing of Dravidian and Aryan cultural influences that was taking place in Kerala at that time. The force and variety of the energy stream unleashed by the above poetic movement is evident from the fact that its influence in present even in contemporary works. (Kabeer, p. 69)

It has been widely accepted that the present day Malayalam script evolved during the Manipravalam era as a result of the synthesis between the Sanskritic Grantha Script and the local Vattezhuthu script. In Kudiyaattam, one of the oldest performing art forms in the world, the hero uses slokas in Sanskrit while the clown and courtiers often use the vernacular. Thus the synthesis was effected at the performing level. The following lines from Changampuzha's oeuvre could as well have belonged to the Manipravalam era:

Jayasanathana haindavasamskara

Jayapathake visishtapradeepike

(Changampuzha, "Alambakendram", *Complete Works*, p. 48)

These lines are in praise of ancient Indian sanathana dharma tradition whose standard, the poet hopes will reign supreme. The mix of Sanskrit and vernacular in these lines is notable for their uncanny resemblance to poets of a previous era.

Changampuzha also dons the role of a conformist once in a while, as the above lines make clear. The radical stance adopted for the most part notwithstanding, even in *Ramanan* and other poems, the compulsion to conform to the social mores and law is very much present which gives rise to the radical contradiction at the heart of the poem. The following excerpt from Žižek makes clear the maternal super-go that is infinitely more oppressive in its command to ‘enjoy,’ i.e to conform to symbolic social intercourse, courtship and other mating rituals of humans;

He is a radical conformist who paradoxically experiences himself as an outlaw. All this is of course a commonplace of social psychology; what goes usually unnoticed is however is that this disintegration of the ego-ideal entails the installation of a maternal super-ego that does not prohibit enjoyment but on the contrary imposes it and punishes ‘social failure’ in a far more cruel and severe way, through an unbearable and self-destructive anxiety. All the babble about the ‘decline of paternal authority’ merely conceals the resurgence of this incomparably more oppressive agency. Today’s permissive society is certainly not less repressive than the epoch of the ‘organization man’ that obsessive servant of the bureaucratic institution; the sole difference lies in the fact that in a `society that demands submission to the rules of social intercourse, but refuses to ground those rules in a code of moral conduct, that is in the ego-ideal, the social demand assumes the form of a harsh punitive super-ego. (Žižek, *Looking Awry*, pp. 80-81)

The matrilineal male subject suffers the dilemma of being caught between the modern imperative to self-subjectivization and the dependency on the female kinship line for sustenance. He perishes in pursuit of the mirage of autonomy which the maternal super-ego denies. The absence of a symbolic Name-of-the-Father that inducts him into the symbolic circuit is replaced by a maternal Big Other which demands perpetual fealty from not just the heart, but also the soul. This sublime living in the perpetual Real renders the male subject as the victim. It is not feasible that matriliney would function as a symmetric mirror image or contrary to patrilineal descent forms and power structures. Thus it would be difficult to formulate a Name-of-the-Mother symbolic via the argument of Malayali matriliney. All the same the super-ego that is maternal and oppressive is functioning all the while as Slavoj Žižek writes with reference to the imperative command to ‘enjoy.’ Thus in Ramanan and other works of Changampuzha it is the curtailment of this putative ‘enjoyment’ that leads to a romantic resolution. The maternal-super-ego is like a whirring machine that keeps running in the backdrop all the time.

We could therefore say that for Lacan, as for Lévi-Strauss, social myth has always guaranteed the bond between the human being and the law; for both men, symptoms are also individual myths, but Lacan specifies how these stand-ins enable signifier and signified to be quilted. This quilting allows not only symbolic thought to operate, but these operators also enable phobic thought, obsessional thought, psychotic thought—each of which has a different mythic formation— to function.

If the return to father had indeed been as Lacan had announced in 1951, the means of re-establishing in the analytic field, the bridge that connects modern man and ancient myths, we can see that he is now making a more precise analysis, since he reminds us of the mythic genealogy of the paternal function in Freud’s works. Thanks to Lévi-Strauss, he has brought to light the Name-of-the-Father, the operator that is necessary if symbolic thought is to take place. (Zafiroopoulos, p. 189)

The veracity of Zafiroopoulos's claim vis-à-vis Lévi-Strauss can be confirmed by Lacan's own position concerning the paternal function. Lacan's return to Freud could be seen as a mark of his own fealty to the tradition in the same vein as Changampuzha's occasional resort – in the midst of rampant Romanticism – to interludes of Sanskritic Manipravalam.

In fact the image of the ideal father is a neurotic's fantasy. Beyond the Mother-demand's real Other, whose desire (that is, her desire) we wish she would tone down-stands out the image of a father who would turn a blind eye to desires. This marks-more than it reveals-the true function of the father which is fundamentally to unite (and not to oppose) a desire to a law. (Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 824)

Thus in matriliney, we do not have a castrating father/mother, but we have the scepter of an ever present mother, the da-da mother unlike the Fort-da mother of the Freudian infant fantasy game. The eternal presence of the phallic mother figure is the reason for the absence of suggestion or *dhvani* in Changampuzha's poetry. The lyrical immediacy is an effect of the da-da mother, unlike the Freudian liminal maternal figure who is merely a facilitating deity that stays in the margins. Bernard Burgoyne, takes resort to the masculine fantasy of male rejuvenation with reference to Descartes scholar Alexander Koyre¹⁰. The fleetingly sensual maternal universe forms the basis for fantasies of resurrection, replicated in commercial real-world terms by clinical products like Viagra, Revital etc.

These old world views of the sciences had already been weakened when the pathways described by science were given literal and new coordinates by Descartes as he attempted to finally come to terms with this skeptical tradition. Alexander Koyre described the movement that was produced in terms of three shifts, and the organization of his lectures followed the theme of those three moments – a world rendered 'uncertain'; the 'disappearance' of a cosmos; and the consolatory 'reappearance' of a universe. This formulation gives to the succession of these programs of science a 'phallic' structure of

¹⁰ Alexander Koyre was a Descartes scholar who gave three lectures on Descartes' *Method* in Cairo in 1937

loss and repossession. Freud had earlier determined such a structure to be at play-he called it then the Fort-da principle –as his grandchild attempted to create a world of relation to others. The parallelism between the two-from Lacan’s point of view is to be expected. (Burgoyne, p. 79)

Reception of Romantic Poetry and Popular Culture in Kerala

The matrilineal system in Kerala is prevalent among many communities across caste, religious and geographic divides. The extreme popularity of Changampuzha’s poetry owes much to the fact that he reconciled an urgent need to synthesise the patriarchal and matrilineal kinship systems in the wake of modernity and reform movements that carried the fire of enlightenment rationality.

Changampuzha Krishna Pillai’s *Ramanan* sold more than one lakh copies. This was a time when the new literary genre called the ‘novel’ had captured the imagination of the reading public. Starting with O. Chandu Menon whose *Indulekha* is today considered a landmark in the history of Indian literature, and C.V. Raman Pillai, with historical novels *Marthanda Varma*, *Dharma Raja* and *Ramaraja Bahadoor*, the novel in Malayalam has been a robust form over the years. Three of Changampuzha’s contemporaries, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and Ponkunnam Varky were major modernist novelists whose works remain relevant and who constituted a sort of trinity.

It has been claimed by Rosalind Miles that the novel is a ‘female form’ and examples can be cited to confirm this position: from Jane Austen to George Eliot and Daphne du Maurier and Doris Lessing and Gertrude Stein and Arundhati Roy, the league of writers who have used the novel to give voice to their feminine subjectivity is numerous. But in Malayalam such a development is pathetically recent, starting with the novels of Sara

Joseph. The Malayalam novel as a form, though often dealing with woman-centric issues like marriage and divorce and domestic melodrama, it has been for most of the times, male-dominated and male-centered which allowed the female subjectivity to creep in once in a while in a patronizingly reverent or familiar manner by male writers..

It is not the simplicity of language and the particularities of the theme, but market competition is the factor that decided the structure of the popular novel including its characterization and storyline. The first thing to be pointed out here is that our modernity was mostly male-centered and male-dominated. Though the popular novel is a genre that deems patriarchal social ideas to be benign, the story and theme would be mostly woman-centered. That the readership of the popular novel comprises mostly of commoners and women is a factor that decides in favour of this aspect of popular novels. It is now a clichéd argument that the characters in popular novels are stereotypes. Stereotypes modeled on usual styles are repeated in each novel. The impression of ‘familiar stories, familiar characters is generated thus. A predicament where only mainstream publications, mainstream styles and mainstream writers can find a voice is another side of the story.

(Jacob, p. 70)

Mainstream publishers were busy with the predominantly male establishment in Malayalam literature. The Malayalam popular culture including novels, in spite of increased literacy among Keralites, failed to reflect the social contradictions although they often appeared to be progressive in character and foregrounded female characters and domestic issues. Shaji Jacob substantiates this argument by citing the instance of the popular Malayalam novelist Muttathu Varki, whose works in retrospect were sensual and decadent (qualities often ascribed to Romanticism and romantic poets), which despite their avowal of right wing politics failed to grapple with an emergent society.

Later poets like P. Kunjiraman Nair and P. Bhaskaran have been bearers of the popular romantic tradition that significantly emerged with the poetry of Changampuzha. The dissemination of this sort of Romanticism was helped in no small measure by new media like cinema which widely used his lyrics and stories and also used romantic narratives of the intense young writer as the idealist revolutionary etc in films like *Pareeksha*, *Pani Theeratha Veedu* etc. Radical rebellious poetry in the mode of Changampuzha was carried forward by authors like Vayalar Ramavarma and the progressive writers movement (Purogamana Kalasahitya Sanghom) and the Kerala People's Arts Council (KPAC).

The aesthetic faculty of memory serves as a receptacle of tradition in the collective readership. During the colonial times, Sanskrit learning was preserved in centres like Kodungalloor (Muziris) and later on with impending modernity, the reinvention of tradition became imperative and the Kerala Kalamandalam was established by the poet Vallathol Narayana Menon with the aim of preserving Kathakali and temple arts and traditional performative traditions. With decolonization and independence, the field of art and literature was assigned to Akademis viz. the Kerala Sahitya Akademi, Sangeetha Nataka Akademi and the Lalit Kala Akademi, with their own bureaucracy and political functionaries. These drastic changes were reflected in the emerging tastes of the reading public and also in the popular imagination.

A Reader Response narrative of reception

Although a renaissance narrative in the context of the caste and religion based reform movements in Kerala led by Sree Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal, Vakkom Maulavi etc would be a bit far fetched, resonances can be found in the way a readership was forged by their writings, especially by the reformist-Bhakti poetry of Kumaran Asan, a close associate of Sree Narayana Guru and member of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sanghom and also nationalistic poems penned by Vallathol who along with Subramanya Bharathi constitutes a dyad of South Indian school of nationalistic verse.

The autobiographical narratives in Petrarch, unlike those in Dante and Boccaccio, show an emergence of an individual subjectivity and rising Italian nationalism and a nascent romanticism in the medieval warring states of Italy which was split along the papal Guelphs and the royalist Ghibelines. Similarly the Manipravalam texts of Medieval Kerala show a dialectic between the Sanskritic erudition of the patriarchal Nambudiris and the vernacular Malayalam of the matrilineal Nair community. With the fragmentation of zoological and botanical knowledge into micro and cellular realms, as a result of the advent of modern science and scientific education, the task of totalizing the natural aesthetic was ceded to poetry, which circa 1940 was Romanticist in Kerala.

With Petrarch, Jauss says, we can already detect the beginnings of a new form of aesthesis; on the one hand the internal workings of the soul and on the other hand the beauty of the natural world become increasingly important for the receptive side of aesthetic experience. The most significant impetus to this process of changing aesthesis comes with the separation of science and aesthetics: the former in its modern role of categorizer of natural phenomena, no longer deals with the experience of the totality of nature, and this function is ceded to aesthetics. (Holub, p. 76)

Romantic poetry vis-à-vis ancient poetry can be said to be a kind of elegy for a lost innocence. The Christian sense of guilt is ever present in romanticist autobiographical narratives, no matter how much sensual or Greco-Roman or radically proletarian they aspire to become. In Changampuzha's autobiographical poem, "The Devil that Sings", the following lines appear:

Dotted oblongs of glazy mirrors and
Fanned out feathers of a bluish aspect
Glittering spectrum of colour segue
Into a neck unctuous and stretched out;
Hood raising torment, lashing tail
Fatigued jaw open agape,
Flutteringly lightning stings,

Surging, surging and spurting,
Writhing in death agony, a snake.
Bearing it in your beak and thus
With easy, easy steps; sluggish
Rolling red beady fiery eyes;
From where I know not, but stands dancing
Before me as a peacock, oh thee! Sin!

(Changampuzha, "The Devil that Sings", *Collected Works*, p. 132)

Arguably these are the best lines written by Changampuzha, hopelessly mutilated by my flawed translation, "The Devil that Sings" is Changampuzha's most autobiographical work, published posthumously, and packs quite a bit of vitriol against poetasters of the time. He himself has confessed to have written the poem during especially difficult times.

The culmination of this development however occurs during the romantic movement. With the invention of the Augustinian scheme of this-worldly renunciation, landscape and autobiography become two poles that perhaps best capture the span of the new aesthesis. But the increased importance of the contemplation of the external nature should not be understood as an ‘unmediated enjoyment of what is at hand,’ as it had been in the ancient world. Rather, as Schiller¹¹ indicates with his concept of the sentimental, it is now a nostalgic sentiment for a lost naivete. Romantic aesthesis thus gives rise to a new type of experience in the form of remembrance, and this incipient discovery of the aesthetic faculty of memory then serves as a bridge to the most recent alterations in receptive experience. (Holub, pp. 76-77)

The naïve and sentimental poetry intended by Schiller generically must belong to the pastoral mode. It can be said that in the realm of the reader’s imagination and taste, the ontogenetic pastoral landscape (the loneliness and the ‘bliss of solitude’ form the poetic basis for composition of pastoral poetry) and the more phylogenetic autobiography of the myth have been synthesized by Romantic poetry.

The fault line between the myth and the pastoral in Malayalam Romantic poetry parallels the conundrum of double descent. Thus an attempt was made to effect a synthesis between two primordial symbolic worlds (the myth and the pastoral) as well as between two kinship systems. This was to be made possible through a romantic synthesis. How successful the effort was is still open to question, but an index of it is provided by the fact that Malayalam popular culture is still in thrall of its romantic antecedents.

¹¹ Schiller (1759-1805): German poet and philosopher. The reference here is to his work “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry.”

It would be simplistic to claim that the paternal is the mythical and the maternal is pastoral or vice versa since such claims are difficult to substantiate and fly in the face of received wisdom. The pastoral elegies are full of mourning men in displays of homoerotic male longing and the pastoral semitic tales from those of Abraham and Isaac to those of Joseph and the temptress are hardly conducive to a matrilineal tradition. Myth on the other hand is omnivalent and all encompassing and can be interpreted either way, beginning with the Gaia earth mother hypothesis to those of Venus and other fertility myths that can be welded into a matrilineal matrix albeit a bit awkwardly in the present instance. The same can be done within a patriarchal system by interpreting the Oedipal myth of Freud and the phallic symbolism in much of Indian and Greco-Roman mythology as instances of male-centered descent.

It would thus be safe or rather convenient to claim that Romantic poetry in Malayalam fabricated the patriarchal and matrilineal ideals into a Lacanian mobius strip where two apparently discrete surfaces seamlessly segue into one another and thus produce a synthesis between the two.

The liminal nature of poetry as traversing the contours of contemporary contradictions in society are nowhere more evident in Malayalam literature than in the poetry of Changampuzha, as B. Rajeevan says in his essay on gender relations depicted in Changampuzha Krishna Pillai's poems:

Changampuzha, a symbol of revolutionary anarchy, becomes a great poet, because his poems were robust enough to contain the contradictions of his times. It is the movements and conflicts taking place on the real realm of material life that appear in transformed forms in the superstructure of society. The anarchic state that prevailed on the plane of material lived reality in Changampuzha's time and age manifests in his poetry as subjective poetic delight or bliss. Reality with all its contradictions has undergone a qualitative transformation into pure bliss in those poems. Here lies the greatness of Changampuzha's poetry. This is also the reason why poetry as a genre became popular through Changampuzha's poetry. To paraphrase Lenin on Tolstoy, Changampuzha was a great poet who gave voice to the hope and despair of numerous disadvantaged sections of people in Kerala. At the same time he remains a symbol of petit bourgeois anarchism.

(Rajeevan, "Gender Relations", p. 536)

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Kerala at the turn of the 20th century was a society undergoing transformation in social and political realms. The poetry of Changampuzha is not a nostalgic record of those bygone days, but an honest manifestation of the anxieties of Malayalis of that era, especially the poor and the youth and the underprivileged.

Two clichés prevalent about romantic poetry are that it has a grand synthesizing function and also that it is often misogynistic. But the poetry of Changampuzha shows an awareness of the matrilineal traditions of Kerala, especially that of the Nair community. His poetry offers the space and imagination required for the effulgence of a feminine charadic jouissance in its matrilineal dimensions. In this, the poetic oeuvre of Changampuzha itself constitutes a matrilineal edifice. As for the function of synthesis, Changampuzha, intentionally or not, traverses the fault lines between the matrilineal and patrilineal, the mythical and the pastoral, and subjective anarchic bliss and objective popular acclaim.

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