

**THRIVING ON RHETORIC:  
CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY  
POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES IN KERALA**

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

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
in  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

*by*

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JANUARY 2019**

## **DECLARATION**

I, **SRIVIDYA S.**, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Thriving on Rhetoric: Construction of Identities in Contemporary Political and Religious Discourses in Kerala**, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature**, is a bona fide work done by me under the guidance of **Dr. K.M. Sherrif**, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Calicut, and that I have not submitted it or any part of it for any degree, diploma or title before.

University of Calicut,

31<sup>st</sup> January 2019

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Thriving on Rhetoric: Construction of Identities in Contemporary Political and Religious Discourses in Kerala**, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature**, is a bona fide work carried out by **Srividya S.**, under my guidance and supervision. Neither the dissertation nor any part of it has been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma or title before.

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**Srividya S**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Critical Discourse Analysis             | CDA  |
| Discourse Historical Analysis           | DHA  |
| Dalit Human Rights Movement             | DHRM |
| Indian Institute of Scientific Heritage | IISH |
| Jamat e Islami                          | JIH  |
| Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen             | KNM  |
| Kerala Pulaya Maha Sabha                | KPMS |

## Preface

My thesis entitled *Thriving on Rhetoric: Construction of Identities in Contemporary Political and Religious Discourses in Kerala* is precisely an exercise in rhetoric. It tries to persuade the readers that rhetoric is central to the way we, as human beings, perceive the world. It speaks of the different ways in which social realities are constructed through the deployment of words. These ways of perceiving the world exist along a wide spectrum of human relations. It invokes ruminations on the nature of human existence, language, truth, relations of power, the processing of human knowledge, the ever-shifting paradigms of progress, the convergence and dissidence of human communication, the circle of domination and liberation and its rootedness in the spatial-temporal schema. It looks at the nature of human as a being shuttling back and forth between her personal and political quests for a better world, a seeking after better meanings. Identifying oneself with a particular group or categories such as family, region, class, caste, religion, sexuality, politics, culture, nation etc. entails a division too. These margins give individuals a sense of belongingness on a positive note and of solipsism at worst, and these boundaries that fix identities have to be fixed in turn, every now and then, through a rhetorical reiteration for the sake of what only humans are capable of, that is, meaning-making.

This thesis is an enquiry into the perspective of many people within India and abroad regarding Kerala as a state with a history of renaissance ideals and as an extremely diverse, literate, tolerant space for all religious, secular, caste and gender distinctions. My thesis interrogates exactly this perspective as it attempts a study of intersections of power politics, gender, sexuality, religion, caste, nationalism and



spirituality in the rhetorical construction of Kerala. I analyse the rhetoric which has been circulating in Kerala for the past two decades in the form of speeches. The time frame is commensurate with the larger context of India post- Babri Masjid demolition which has altered the political as well as religious equations of the country, and still continues to do so. This thesis is an enquiry into how rhetoric has been employed in Kerala in the fields of politics and religion, how they overlap and blend with each other to establish rhetorical systems within which the power relations are negotiated according to different socio-political contexts. The rhetoric of politics and religion has evolved, readjusted itself according to contemporary needs and strive for a future amending its rhetorical ploys. There you see conflicts between the powerful and powerless, of new equations and spaces being made revealing the pendulum effect or domino effect of these emerging rhetorical systems. These systems deeply ingrained in people's minds die hard.

The primary material for my study consists of speeches collected from books, online sources and CDs. I have also used some comments, responses, interviews from the print and the electronic media as well as sections from select autobiographies to substantiate my arguments. I have made use of transcripts of speeches wherever possible. However, a good deal of the Malayalam speeches are obtained from videos and I have referred either to the full version of speeches or to relevant excerpts from the oration. I have also summarised the speeches or used my own translations of the selected parts of the speech, unless specified. The select speeches cannot be strictly demarcated as political speeches or religious speeches;

instead they are intersections of both. My thesis is divided into five chapters. The documentation of the thesis follows MLA Handbook Eighth Edition.

The first chapter "On Theorizing Rhetoric" which also serves as the introduction to the thesis, discusses the nature of realities as constituted by language and introduces the theory and history of rhetoric by delving into the broad area of rhetorical studies. It attempts to describe the classical view on rhetoric as a branch of knowledge alongside disciplines such as logic and philosophy as well as the contemporary theories on the new rhetoric as a tool to analyse public discourse of all kinds. It traces briefly the history of the emergence of rhetoric from its status as the classic art of persuasion/oratory through the pejorative meaning garnered by it, to the elevation of it as a conceptual lens central to the analysis of human communication in recent times. This chapter also attempts to explain the similarities and differences between Western and non-Western approaches to rhetoric with specific reference to the Indian rhetorical tradition. The next section deals with the contemporary approaches to rhetorical studies followed by an elaboration of the rhetorical fields chosen for this study namely politics, gender and religion. The methodology of rhetorical analysis is also explained.

The second chapter titled "The Political Malayali: Rhetoric of Identification and Division" which functions as the first of the three core chapters is an analysis of the speeches in the political category. These speeches cannot be termed purely 'political' in terms of party politics or mainstream politics of power. They are a blend of the political and the religious and stand for the 'religionization' of politics. Kerala is a society well known for its departure from the national trends in politics, for

spearheading the advent of modernity through caste struggles and it often alternatively votes the Congress and the Communist parties to power. In this chapter I attempt to look at how Kerala which has tried to keep religion out of the political terrain, in the last few years has started following the national trend by turning religion and its discourses, which are linked primarily to the objectives of personal salvation and social well being, into a political narrative establishing reiteratively through the creation of certain antithetical identities, via visual, aural and verbal rhetoric. It also analyses the use of religious symbolism, imagery and myths for the creation of political identities which are negotiated in changing socio political contexts with respect to the three major religions practised in India, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and how they get intersected with the categories such as caste and gender. Building on the historical context of the role of religion in altering the political landscape of the country, the gradual evolution and contestation of the association between religious and political rhetoric which has forged identities in India in the colonial context, and the concomitant paradigm shifts in the use of religious language as used for political purposes in India are analysed. The next three sections consider 'Hate' speeches in Kerala as the exposition of the systemic violence inherent in the society, address the question of Dalit liberation and its link with theology and examine the debates surrounding political Islam focusing on the war of words between the 'Ulema' and the activists.

The third chapter "Malayali Morality: Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, Caste and Religion" takes up gender as an analytical category as I try to look at how notions of gender and sexualities intersect with religion, in a state which is obsessed

with the term morality. The 'Morality of the Malayali' is a central trope around which gendered identities have been problematized even from the days of Kerala's renaissance. It attempts to see through the ways in which the Malayali morality is inextricably linked with social and religious morality. It contests with constitutional morality as it tries to accommodate new versions of gender and sexuality from tentatively coming to terms with the orders of the Supreme Court to the much forced changes in religious impositions amidst a plethora of discourses which propagate an adherence to tradition or a compromise at best. Questions regarding femininity, masculinity, the in-between space of transgender, the rhetoric surrounding the roles of individuals, family and community are addressed in this chapter. It also discusses the genuine fractures in the consciousness of a society brought forward by a rhetoric which yearns for true emancipation from the categories of gender, caste and religion.

The fourth chapter, "Malayali Spirituality: From Personal to Political Salvation" deals with the rhetoric of religion with a focus on spirituality which aims at individual salvation and community well being. It analyses the spiritual discourses to reflect on the basic need of human beings to transcend this world or pursue another world away from the divisions and the misery of the material world. This chapter also traces the roots of spiritual discourses to the respective rhetorical traditions in Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and considers the irony of the rhetoric which negates the very objective of religious piety through a 'politicization' of religion. The attempt is also to point out the paradox inherent in the whole process which perpetuates a value system that negates the philosophy on which it is founded and aids in the manipulation of religion for political purposes.

The conclusion brings together all these contemporary rhetoric and places it against the past of Kerala which prides itself on and refers every now and then to the values of Kerala renaissance and as an egalitarian society. Incidentally, this thesis has come out at a very significant period for Indian constitutional democracy with considerable changes in age-old laws including the decriminalising of homosexuality (Section 377), changes in the adultery law (Section 497) and the rights of women of all ages to enter Sabarimala temple. The profusion, during the past two decades, of the rhetoric of aggression, of self-aggrandizement and of appropriation and the rhetoric of tolerance, of goodwill and of compassion on the other end of the spectrum would, I think, throw some light on the chaos that will ensue from these changes in Kerala's transitional scenario. The thesis also tries to unravel the subtle, non-tangible operation of power underneath the rhetoric of equality. Also presented is the search for some alternate rhetoric which can counter the former. The thesis also attempts to convey that the contemporary Kerala rhetorical scene is moving more towards 'doxastic' therefore, a singular understanding of the world than towards an 'epistemic' evaluation of realities. Apart from the very few takers for the epistemic rhetoric grounded in knowledge and truth, a huge majority of Malayalis are subsumed in the effort to unite themselves under single labels for convenience.

## Chapter 1

### On Theorizing Rhetoric

*What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms -in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.*

*Nietzsche*

Mark Twain's witty and hilarious take on Genesis which appeared in the form of *Diaries of Adam and Eve* is extraordinary in suggesting, perhaps unintentionally, the quaint philosophy behind human being's long term, quite ambiguous and compelling relationship with language. As Adam and Eve try to make meaning out of their lives, of each other and of the things around them, they find themselves, Adam quite unwillingly and Eve, gratifyingly, in the midst of a plenitude of names. Adam is frustrated at Eve's attempt to 'name' everything she sees in Eden as the justification she offers is weird from his point of view. He proclaims uneasily,

The new creature names everything that comes along, before I can get in a protest. And always that same pretext is offered--it looks like

the thing. There is the dodo, for instance. Says the moment one looks at it one sees at a glance that it "looks like a dodo." It will have to keep that name, no doubt. It wearies me to fret about it, and it does no good, anyway. Dodo! It looks no more like a dodo than I do.  
(Twain 1)

This paradoxical predicament towards naming and thereby identifying the world is in fact what humans have encountered all through, in their effort to create a subjective world different from the natural world. As Adam and Eve explore Eden further, they acquaint themselves in hazy ways and bounce headlong into the Babel, the classical dilemma into which the 'jealous God' had thrown the human race. Intimidated by their effort to reach heaven, it is said, God had confounded the single language of the human race and made them inaccessible to each other by introducing different tongues. Inadvertently, as Michel Foucault remarks in the preface of his work, *The Order of Things*, it had also shattered

all the familiar landmarks of my thought-our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography-breaking all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. (xvi)

The ruin of the 'Tower', nonetheless, was also the dawning of the enormous possibilities that language offered human beings. As we live in the midst of these large number of discourses and all the more, as humans living in this age of diverse

media, we are often confused as to whether words "mean" at all. We also have personal doubts regarding whether we are able to put across what we exactly have in our mind. Through the twentieth and now into the twenty first century, it is established beyond doubt, in the academic circles, that language is one of the primary lenses through which we perceive the world. With this linguistic turn of events, the theoreticians have started analyzing every single word and are constantly worried about its 'spillage'. Thanks to the post modern theories of language, we are exonerated because the fault if there is one, lies with the nature of language itself. Starting with Ferdinand de Saussure through J. L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, Erving Goffman, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Ludwig Wittgenstein and the like, we have had numerous debates surrounding the arbitrariness and the fluidity of language, the deferment of meanings and the creation of identities, of realities and of specific ways of seeing through language.

Post modern theorists observe that "being a 'self' is always culturally and linguistically conditioned"(Guignon 118). It is this conditioning and in extreme cases, drugging that puts 'Rhetoric' at the centre stage, though it has intruded to many peripheral territories within a small time span. A lion's share of humanity still believes in the 'word' unlike the sceptic academicians, and is unaware of these discourses on language. Drugging, it is said, of soldiers, is an indispensable part of war. In his book, *Blitzed*, Norman Ohler gives an account of the rampant use of various steroids and narcotics coaxed on soldiers during their times at the Nazi war front which would keep them euphoric and awake for thirty six to fifty hours. Under the effect of these, they would act like unstoppable machines, not bothered about the



havoc and inhumanity they cause. Ironically, they would, if they survive the bombs and bullets come home with terrible withdrawal symptoms and post-traumatic stress disorder. This dehumanizing drugging, he and many other war veterans and psychotherapists avow, was injudiciously used in the Vietnam War, World War II and even Iraq war. Similarly, it could be asked, does rhetorical drugging cause such a delusion? In his brilliant analysis of Hitler's rhetoric, Kenneth Burke reveals the objective behind his pragmatism.

Here is the testament of a man who swung a great people into his wake. Let us watch it carefully, and let us watch it, not merely to discover some grounds for prophesying what political move is to follow Munich, and what move to follow that move etc; let us try also to discover what kind of "medicine" this medicine-man has concocted, that we may know with greater accuracy, exactly what to guard against, if we are to forestall the concocting of similar medicine in America. (Burke, *Philosophy* 191)

John Durham Peters observes rightly that communication theories were very much in vogue " at two points in the twentieth century-after World War I and after World War II"(10). No wonder, as early as 1920's there were lots of thinkers who worked on the possibilities and limits of communication, most notably Karl Jaspers (1919), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1921), Martin Buber (1923), I. A. Richards (1923), John Dewey (1925), Martin Heidegger (1927), Sigmund Freud (1930), Walter Lippmann (1922), Edward Bernays ( 1923), George Lucas (1923) etc.

Now into this meta-modern age, we find ourselves being witness to the re-emergence of rhetoric as central to human enquiry and human interaction. In this chapter I attempt to put a frame around ideas that were already discussed in separate and discrete ways by thinkers from Socrates onwards. The chapter consists of, broadly, two sections- one on classical rhetoric and the other, on the revival of rhetoric in contemporary critical studies. I go through the most significant history on rhetoric, the methods of analysis and discuss three major rhetorical fields in which rhetoric has great implication and which also form the focus of my research. Now, what is Rhetoric? Why do we need to study rhetoric? What images does the word 'rhetoric' bring to our mind? With regard to politics we often hear these words, "That's sheer rhetoric!" or "That's empty rhetoric!" The word rhetoric has a derogatory connotation attached to it because it is seen as a set of manipulative techniques for working out compromises in the political world. When we delve deeper, certain other questions about conceiving rhetoric open before us. Is rhetoric just the classic art of Eloquence? A theory of Argumentation? Or is it a social process which is based on the speaker's understanding of the context and the value system of the audience? One could say, conventionally speaking, it is a linguistic means of persuasion intended to change others, to moot them into action in accordance with the interests of the system. However, from the common understanding of rhetoric as speech that makes use of rhetorical ploys to manipulate audiences to a desired end, it has moved on to the realm of the analysis of persuasion both positive and negative, the question of how negotiations of power happen through the use of language and how people develop, modify or defend their perspectives as a result. Human beings have a great capacity to persuade others

through their words and also to be persuaded by seemingly rational arguments. It is this knowledge that helps them to manipulate discourse in specific ways using specific rhetorical devices that have been handed down to them by the language and culture that they belong to. Therefore an analysis of these rhetorical devices will help us understand the shared assumptions, values and beliefs of a community in the making as well as help us reveal the mechanics of domination through language.

Earlier, this area was part of some rhetoric and composition classes in academic fields with its syllabus mainly dealing with certain techniques for presentation, both in speaking and writing. But then, in the twentieth century there was a burgeoning of interest in rhetorical studies, especially in communication theories. The relevance of rhetorical studies is increasing because when earlier speeches were restricted to a select audience, now discourses are everywhere and in no time, thanks to the new media. The media has also spawned a new area in rhetorical studies called visual rhetoric which studies how images are used to persuade in media, politics and marketing. This is significant both ways: one, that rhetoric spreads fast and influences fast, at the same time, new rhetoric about these rhetoric come into play within seconds. Thus, before us, we have a deluge of discourses which influence each other and us consciously as well as unconsciously and we are often in a confused state as to which one to accept and which to cast off.

When we look at social constructivist theories and the role of language we are often tempted to ask, what sort of reality is being constructed by language? Wayne C. Booth discusses three types of realities where Rhetoric is pertinent: 1) Permanent, Unchangeable, Non-contingent truth. e.g. : The Sun rises in the East,

The Earth is not flat, You will die one day etc. There are also value judgements which again may be controversial such as Rape is a crime, Euthanasia or Slavery cannot be justified etc. 2) Realities changeable but still not created by rhetoric : e.g. Natural disasters/changes in climate or issues regarding population 3) Contingent realities about our lives; created realities subject to change. e.g. We may be born into one religion but may end up practising another; leaders may change our attitude towards nations; we may stop treating our neighbour like an enemy; we may fall in and out of love (12-16). A well known example in recent times is the rhetorical construction of "the weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq by the Bush Administration paving the way for the Iraq War in 2003 nicknamed as "war on terror". Summarising Richard Rorty's arguments in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Charles Guignon observes that

the language we speak, the community we have and our sense of self are all contingent, products of historical event that could have been otherwise. Thus our possibilities for self understanding and personal identity are products of choices of certain metaphors made in earlier times, chance shifts in the uses of words, arbitrary descriptions introduced in the culture and so on. These contingent factors work together to create an all-pervasive background understanding that informs our shared ways of speaking and doing things. (59)

The history and theory of rhetoric comprise a vast body of interdisciplinary work indeed. Perhaps it would be a complex task to bring all these scholarly discourses under a blanket term 'Rhetoric'. Most books on the historiography of

rhetoric start with the Greek tradition and critics during the twentieth century had frowned upon this reification of the Western rhetoric and had insisted it must be stopped unconditionally. It served to exclude the alternate traditions that existed in different parts of the world. Still, I start off in the conventional mode of touching upon the Western classical tradition for three specific reasons: 1) the exploration of the historiography of all the major rhetorical traditions of the world is not within the scope of and the intention of my thesis. Instead, I look upon classical and contemporary traditions of rhetorical analysis in vogue and try to reach my own conclusion in blending the best of these tools in the analysis of my research material. 2) Much of the recent work on the alternate rhetoric, although they do a commendable political job in making visible a hitherto invisible tradition, have some serious methodological issues. This includes the non-availability of the texts, availability of a small number of texts as well as the problems of translation of the same (Lipson and Binkley 2004). 3) In my view, the positioning of the Western classical tradition in the front does not privilege it in any way as one looks at it in a non-western, non-linear, non-hierarchical perspective which negates the binary vision of front /back or high /low.

It is said that the land of origin of the term 'rhetorike' is Greece. In Western Europe, rhetoric was at the centre of educational process for some 2000 years. Thus we again have to pursue Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the Greeks who perceived rhetoric both ways- positively as the art of argumentation and negatively as 'rhetrickery' (Booth), a way to trick the masses to submission. The Greek

perspective on language can be summarized in the words of the Athenian rhetorician Isocrates (436-338 B.C) who observed:

But because there is born in us the power to persuade each other and show ourselves what we wish, we not only have escaped from living as brutes, but also by coming together have founded cities and set up laws and invented arts, and speech has helped us attain practically all of the things we have devised. (qtd. in Harris and Taylor xii)

Critics have found the three functions of language as early as in the writings of Homer- the heuristic: discovery of facts/insights/self-awareness- the eristic: the inherent power of language itself, to express, to argue, to attract or even to hurt- the protreptic- the persuasive power of language (Herrick 33-34). To be an educated one in those times meant one who could deliver his knowledge in an effective manner. So the onus was on speaking well, driving home one's point through solid argumentation. Thus it was a scientific discipline in Greece as early as fifth or fourth century B.C.

Rhetoric as a systematic art and intellectual tradition developed through a group of orators and advocates called Sophists (450-380 B.C.) who taught rhetoric and the art of logos and also helped people in winning careers and wealth by teaching people 'how to argue both sides of the case'. In his *Encomium on Helen*, Gorgias, the Sicilian philosopher toppled the popular opinion about Helen and exonerated her from the blame as the cause of the Trojan war. Instead he argued that Helen was carried away by either physical force, Eros (love) or Logos (verbal force). The two axioms of sophistry then were (1) "Man is the measure." which

meant 'Reality' is made by every single person. (2) Every argument has a counter argument. Corax, Tisias, Gorgias, Protagoras and Isocrates, the popular sophists of those times together, were a formidable force to reckon with for stalwarts like Plato and Aristotle. The Greeks also put forward another type of conversation in philosophy called 'dialektik', a Socratic kind of investigation based on questioning and sincere dialogue in order to arrive at a better view of truth, in place of the egotistic argumentation. Although participatory democracy seemed to have flourished during the times of Sophists, later on they fell out of glory because the traditional Athenians including Socrates and Plato thought their sophistry which is based on construction of reality / truth with the help of language would be dangerous to society. Socrates had attacked the rhetorician Polus for "jingle making, maxim making, image making" (*Phaedrus* 267).

Plato's *Gorgias*, written in fourth century B.C when rhetoric was highly popular in Athens, puts rhetoric in a bad light. Plato's perspective looks at rhetoric as inherently deceptive because he believed in an unchanging fixed truth and rhetoric was considered to be presenting only the speaker's point of view. This is also the contemporary view regarding rhetoric. Sophists were considered mistrustful for various reasons. The prominent among them were: 1) Kairos: that truth is relative to circumstances and therefore it is rooted in false ontology 2) cultural relativism: since the sophists were itinerants they were untrustworthy 3) sceptical about a divine source of knowledge or value 4) epistemically deficient for them, the world could always be recreated linguistically by making the weaker cause appear stronger with the help of a manipulative use of words. Rhetoric, for Plato was amoral because it

was rootless (Gaonkar 5-12). Nevertheless, the peculiar quality of sophism was that it was highly individualistic and could never be institutionalised. Perhaps, this was the specific reason why Plato depicted this profession as detrimental to the interests of his State.

None the less, in *Gorgias*, Plato raises certain questions which are relevant even today. The main question is what happens to a society when persuasion is the basis for law and justice? Think about the ways in which we have public policy debates in India on Uniform Civil Code, Rape laws, Immigration laws and so on. A manipulation of public opinion, what is termed as 'doxa' would be extremely lethal if it is not grounded in episteme/true knowledge. This is exactly where 'rhetrickery' aimed at sheer persuasion is called to trial by Plato. However, in *Phaedrus*, Plato seems to rethink the possibility of rhetoric as a true and useful art in the form of 'dialectic'. He posits rhetoric as an art of influencing the soul through words.

A response to Plato's attitude towards this discipline was given by Aristotle in his work, *The Art of Rhetoric*, a work which gives insights regarding public and private discourse and substantiates his hypothesis that rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic. By doing so he liberated rhetoric from the derogatory meaning that had attached itself to sophistry. Thus the Aristotelian notion of rhetoric, quite distinct from his guru, probes into the persuasive arguments and appeals and investigates into the core of it. By studying systematically, one does not succeed in persuading but is useful precisely because of four reasons: 1. The advocacy of good rhetoricians may be required to spread true and just ideas. 2. sometimes rhetorical strategies are essential to prove our point and convince the audience by connecting our case to the



experience, values and beliefs of the audience. 3. to clarify the opposite sides of a question/counter –arguments. 4. for self-defence (Herrick 79-80). The most significant idea here is what Aristotle calls the enthymeme, a type of syllogism, a deduction in which a partial argument is suspended in order to rouse the audience to a claim which both the rhetor and the audience have in common. Thus, understanding the belief system of the audience becomes crucial in Aristotelian rhetoric and therefore, the success of the enthymeme depends on a democratic as well as a reciprocal process of knowledge through sharing and correction of one's ideas. This is quite similar to the concepts of Coherence and Cohesion in classical rhetoric enunciated by M.A.K Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (1976). When the former quality somehow unified the text by converging the speaker's and audience's experiences and beliefs, the latter made use of linguistic means in order to bring unity to the discourse (Charteris-Black, *Analysing* 55-57).

Aristotle classified oratory into three types: 1) deliberative/legislative which involves decision making for the good of the individual/state. 2) ceremonial/epideictic oratory which holds up certain ethical, just values through praise or blame of the other 3) forensic/courtroom oratory done in defence of past actions and involves issues of justice. The Greeks also envisaged three artistic proofs included in the art of rhetoric- Ethos (human character and goodness), Logos (logical reasoning), Pathos (human emotions). These three artistic proofs and some other inartistic proofs discovered by these Greek rhetoricians continue to be used as indispensable tools in the analysis of contemporary rhetoric.

Ethos meant the practical wisdom, good will and virtue of the speaker which provides credibility to the speaker. It relates to ethics. To give an instance, in Barack Obama's 'National Democratic Convention Speech' given in 2004 he proclaims:

I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible. (par.4)

Obama strongly connects his humble, personal story to the larger American ethos. He evokes the memories of his father, grandfather and his family who, through perseverance and optimism in the "generous America" had achieved their dreams through successive generations. One can also note the use of his Muslim name, his African roots, and how he links it to the collective memory of the crowd, the 'American dream' in a contingency when America was being accused as 'anti-Muslim'. By evoking the memory of Lincoln and Luther he establishes himself as the rightful heir to lead America forward and through ethos restores "a faith in the simple dreams of its people, the insistence on small miracles" (par. 5).

Logos appeals to arguments based on reason. This has two forms, a syllogism and an enthymeme. A syllogism consists of a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion. An enthymeme, an incomplete syllogism, leaves a part of the argument unsaid calling for the audience to infer from the conclusion. The Rhetor seems to speak out what the audience has within; suspending his intellectual faculty in anticipation of what conclusion comes after all. Here the audience instead of waiting for a premise from the rhetor arrives at a conclusion with his own

premise. The best example of enthymeme is found in the popular Marc Antony speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

ANTONY. You all did love him once, not without cause:

What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him? (3.2.101-102)

This enthymeme has a major premise- 'We should mourn those whom we once loved', a minor premise- 'We once had cause to love Caesar' and a Conclusion- 'Therefore Caesar must be mourned'.

Pathos appeals to emotions. When you are persuaded by pathos, you accept a claim based on how it makes you feel, without fully analyzing how valid the claim is. You may be persuaded by fear, love, patriotism, hatred, joy, humour or guilt. The use of pathos can be extremely effective and also manipulative. It can also be quite dramatic as in the case of the first speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Indian parliament. Setting the stage for his display of humility by first prostrating at the steps of the parliament, Narendra Modi continues by modestly rejecting the eulogies of the previous speaker, L. K. Advani, narrates his 'rags to riches' story, a 'chaiwala' becoming the Prime minister of India and is overwhelmed by emotion as he says that as Bharat is his mother, his party BJP is also his mother and that he is determined to render his unstinting services to both ("Narendra" 0:0:18-0:2:14).

Further, classical rhetoric categorized figurative language into two: Schemes and Tropes. Schemes made use of some modification at the structural or grammatical level to bring about stylistic effects to one's language. This included various figures like Anaphora, Exophora, Endophora, Chiasmus, Parallelism,

Repetition etc. The second category, on the other hand, influenced the audience by taking them away from the literal sense of the word to other semiotic aspects beyond normal use. Metaphor, metonymy, allusion, hyperbole etc. belong to the second category of figures. Most popular speakers are said to use a combination of both schemes and tropes to have the intended effect on the audience.

Following Greece, in Rome, rhetoric was considered a means of achieving personal success in politics. It developed into a method of conducting public debates as these skills were thought to be the signs of refinement and wisdom. Rome saw the birth of one of the greatest orators of all times, Cicero (106-43 B.C). He is credited with perfecting the Hellenistic art of rhetoric through his brilliant oratory. Cicero's first book was *De Inventione* (87 B.C.) in which he stressed the union of philosophy and rhetoric. He put forward his five canons of oratory that would persist for centuries in the academic circles:

1. *Inventio*: discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments (the process that leads to the development and refinement of argument).
2. *Dispositio*: the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order and how it should be organized for the greatest effect
3. *Elocutio*: fitting the proper language to the invented material.
4. *Memoria*: the firm mental grasp of matter and words of a speech.
5. *Pronuntiatio*: the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of subject matter and the style. (Herrick 102)

He also talked at length about the use of humour, which when unrestrained may fall flat and deprive the speech of dignity.

Also prominent was the concept of Topical systems or 'topoi' which is still in use as a rhetorical tool in critical discourse analysis. Originally it meant "places" or location and referred to commonplace arguments such as "everything comes to an end", "all people are born equal" etc. We use this concept in contemporary rhetorical analysis too, but in a different way, here it refers to an argument scheme that allows a conclusion to be derived from required premises. This is similar to Stephen Toulmin's warrants. Let us, for instance, take the argument of the American President Donald Trump on immigration in USA:

I was up in New Hampshire the other day. The single biggest problem is heroin that pours across our southern border. It's just pouring and destroying their youth. It's poisoning the blood of their youth and plenty of other people. We have to have strong borders. We have to keep the drugs out of our country. We are getting the drugs, they're getting the cash. We need strong borders. We cannot give amnesty. I want to build the wall. We have some bad hombres here, and we're going to get them out.

The Topoi used here is that of 'abuse'. When interpreted it reads 'If a right or offer of help is abused, the right should be changed or the help should be withdrawn'. Thus here Trump asserts that if the immigrants ill-treat their host by committing crimes, they are naturally entitled to lose their rights.

In *De Oratore*, Cicero's next book, the audience is the central concern. Pathos is central to powerful rhetoric as wit is essential. He stresses that the three functions of oratory are to teach, to delight and to persuade. Quintilian, a great

teacher of rhetoric himself, through *Institutes of Oratory* (93 AD) also took the art to great heights. It was the most important aspect of education and to communicate well through arguments was the best outcome expected of education. Rhetoric at this time was getting more and more divorced from political decision making and becoming a culturally vibrant, important mode of entertainment.

Between 1100 and 1300, medieval European rhetoric came to be codified in the practices for preaching, letter writing and poetry. Rhetoric was adapted to the needs of Christianity and the art of preaching came to have more significance. Preaching at that time was seen not as a theological investigation but as moral persuasion. Interestingly the list of preaching methods included promises, threats, examples and reason. The understanding was that the pious listener of heaven needed promises, stubborn listeners required the use of threats, examples should take the form of stories and parables, and some others like Apostle Paul used reason to persuade his followers.

Rhetoric's greatest degree of pre eminence was seen during the European Renaissance (1400-1700). There was a buzz of social activity around with Gutenberg's printing press, voyages and explorations around the world, Protestant Reformation and the rise of Italian Humanism providing a fertile ground for rhetoric. There was a renewed interest in Greek and Roman rhetoric and rhetoricians. Skill in rhetoric became the hallmark of the Renaissance Man. The Italian philosopher and humanist Vico claimed that rhetoric was essential to understanding the ways of the world. The Italian Humanists claimed that innate human capacity for recognizing or grasping similarities among matters that lie far

apart is central to the linguistic nature of thought. Probably the very concept of metaphor and metonymy must have been put forward by Vico who thought that analogic thinking allows insights into ordering and humanizing the world. Vico was a forerunner then, of the linguists like Saussure, Roman Jakobson and Ernesto Grassi. Scientific method and logical positivism ushered in by Peter Ramus and Rene Descartes, the intellectual effort to bring scientific standards to bear on the resolution of issues rendered rhetoric obsolete. Towards the end of the Renaissance, some scholars "moved rhetoric's substantial elements into the area of dialectic, an apparent blow to the intellectual status of rhetoric" (Herrick 166).

### **Contemporary Rhetoric**

A revival of rhetorical enquiry which was long due was initiated with a different social set up emerging during the twentieth century, a period which had failed to find answers for some unprecedented social and moral issues ultimately ending in the disasters of the World Wars. Scientific methods were found to be inefficient in dealing with basic problems such as "human motivation, the place of values in human choice making, the intricacies of how power is achieved or maintained, or how political leaders come to wield the kind of massive influence that had been a major factor in bringing the world to war" (196). The turning point in the twentieth century intellectual as well academic discourses then, was the notion that even the practice of science is to varying degrees persuasive. This "paradigm shift" (Kuhn 1962) shook the foundations of the history of science which had modelled itself on a undisrupted continuity of science for the sake of greater common good and revealed it as having revolutionary phases. The study of science

from this viewpoint variously examined modes of inquiry, logic, argumentation, the ethos of scientists, publications, the character of scientific discourse and debates. The perspective of Science as a rhetorical activity began with Thomas Kuhn's controversial work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) as well as Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and Mirror of Nature* (1979). Further Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* (1975) had talked about the plurality of methods in science. Rhetoric of science did not look at scientific texts as transparent means of conveying knowledge but as texts exhibiting persuasive structures. The best example of such a persuasion is the famous Sokal affair. The more persuasive the scientist could be, the more accepted his theorem was. Institutionalization of science led to interpreting data and research according to certain human motivation. Even the political commitment and personal interests of a scientist could affect the data selection and analysis. Thus it violated the notion of science as objective. Consequently, the truth that much contemporary social interaction is based on systematically distorted communication came to be analysed through the rhetorical lens.

A number of diverse approaches have been introduced in contemporary rhetorical analysis: Norman Fairclough's work on systemic-functional linguistics, Teun Van Dijk's work on racist discourse, Paul Chilton and Ruth Wodak's work on ideology and political discourse (Discourse-Historical Approach), Jonathan Charteris Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and so on. Putting aside speeches or oratory as only one paradigmatic example of rhetoric, everyday argumentation began to come into the purview of peripheral rhetoric during the twentieth century. Stephen Toulmin, Madame L. Olbrechts-



Tyteca, Chaim Perelman, Kenneth Burke and Jurgen Habermas advanced a theory of arguments regarding contemporary rhetoric. Though scorned upon by many as a utopian dream, the dominant interest of all these theories was the discovery of argument which could assure just and rational discourses.

Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* (1958) was in many ways a phenomenal text in this regard. This text tried to explain how people make arguments in daily life and differentiated between theoretical or analytic argument and practical or substantial argument. His central thesis was that in resolving many practical problems impersonal, analytical argumentation derived from the mathematical field could not be applied. He also rejected the claim of timelessness of the formal logic. The basic elements of a Toulmin model argument would have a claim, evidence, warrants, backing and qualifiers. Similar to the Aristotelian notion of an enthymeme, of “rhetorical syllogism”, he introduced the notion of argument fields or logical types of argument and pointed out the distinction between field-invariant and field-dependent standards. Toulmin also brought forward his famous 'Data-Warrant-Claim' model of argument which became quite popular for structuring everyday arguments thereafter. Apart from this, his major contribution was the focus on the process of humanizing modernity in sciences and philosophy as he asked for a middle path devoid of both complete absolutism and total relativism (Foss 112).

In 1969 the English translation of Chaim Perelman and Madame L. Olbrechts-Tyteca 's work on argumentation, value, and audience analysis called *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* brought in a new understanding of

discourse analysis. Alan G. Gross and Ray D. Dearin stated that Perelman "sought to discover "a logic of value judgements" applicable to the practical affairs of life where decisions have to be made every day without conclusive evidence or formally valid proofs" (7). Perelman discarded logical positivism and the perspective that deduction is the means to all truth. Similar to Toulmin, he established that argumentation was different from formal logic. The rhetorical impact could make an argument look like logic. "Quasi-logical arguments lay claim to a certain power of conviction in the degree that they claim to be similar to the formal reasoning of logic or mathematics" (*The New Rhetoric* 193). He stressed the importance of value in epideictic speaking, and that it is essential for the speaker to be able to relate to or identify with the audience according to society's value hierarchies. Thus the concepts of 'presence' and 'communion' were important terms for him. Significant to Perelman's work was the notion of the 'universal audience' which was criticized by many for positing an imaginary composite audience removed from historical and local contingencies. He brought forward the techniques of argumentation, liaison and dissociation.

Other rhetorical scholars have been drawn to rhetoric's tendency to reflect the language, logic and structure of particular social situations or cultural endeavours. Two important theorists of this method are Kenneth Burke and Lloyd Blitzer. One could even say that before Perelman it was Burke, through his work *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950) who viewed language as symbolic action. Influenced by diverse thinkers from Aristotle to Nietzsche to Karl Marx, Burke's theory of identification and consubstantiality ushered in a new direction in rhetorical theory.

People communicated to identify with each other and to eliminate division. That was surely the paradox of life. His outlook on language as a "resource of ambiguity" (Simons 4) exploited by whomsoever it pleases, paved the way for the understanding regarding the social construction of reality.

Traditionally, the key term for rhetoric is not "persuasion" but identification. All told, persuasion ranges from the bluntest quest of advantage, as in sales promotion or propaganda, through courtship, social etiquette, education, and the sermon, to a "pure" form that delights in the process of appeal for itself alone, without ulterior purpose. And identification ranges from the politician who, addressing an audience of farmers, says, "I was a farm boy myself," through the mysteries of social status, to the mystic's devout identification with the source of all being. (*Motives* xiv)

In *Language as Symbolic action* Burke wrote that "even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology, it must be a selection of reality, and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality"(45). Every set of terms or symbols thus becomes a screen through which we perceive the world. He called them "*terministic screens*"(44), screens which make us see some aspects and ignore others. Thus Burkean theory pointed to the subtle oppression effected through the medium of language. However, his most famous contribution to rhetorical theory was the idea of dramatic pentad. Within every rhetorical narrative there was a story. He brought out five constituent elements for analysis of texts :the act, the scene, the agent, the agency and the purpose. He also saw theology

as an ultimate resource for the study of language as theology used statements exhaustively in the wildest and deepest scope to persuade (Foss 188).

The idea that people act through symbols was very closely connected to the speech-act theory put forward by language philosophers, J.L Austin, John Searle and H.P Grice. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* argued that there are two types of utterances. One, which describes/states things as they are, termed Constative utterances and another, which performs actions through their utterances, termed Performative utterances. Further, he divided language into three types of acts: the locutionary, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary. "The act of 'saying something' in this full normal sense, I call, i.e. dub, the performance of a locutionary act...(Words 94). The illocutionary act is an "utterance with a certain (conventional) force" such as ordering, warning, informing etc. The perlocutionary act is "what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say surprising or misleading"(108). Hence, illocutionary speech acts display the social inequality and oppression when its accessibility and use is called into question. This significant aspect of social relevance of a speech act is examined by Judith Butler in her work, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. Combining Austin's theory with Althusser's notion of interpellation she seeks the semantics of Hate Speech and argues that such speech -act cannot be blamed upon a single speaker because the speaker makes "a linguistic community with a history of speakers"(52). She continues:

The performative is not a singular act used by an already established subject, but one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects

are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject *formation*, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. (160)

Further, Jurgen Habermas' concept of an ideal speech community and the notion of "communicative action"(1987) visualised a people who would move 'towards a rational society' (1970) through critical interaction and argumentation. Habermas held that no aspect of human endeavour is rationally pure or non-rhetorical. Thus philosophy is just as rhetorical as art, which is no more rhetorical than science. As a result every area should engage in critical debates surrounding the same. The testing of propositions and their underlying values must be done through rational argumentation. Michael Billig summarizes these theoretical trends thus:

Foucault was concerned with powers and oppressions of language and looked at discourse as operating to obliterate arguments in favour of domination. Barthes and Gramsci, on the other hand, spoke of the language's encroachment, overflows, leaks, skids and slips...No regime of power can successfully legislate against these kinds (15). In keeping with enlightenment, Habermas is optimistic about dreams of a "rational dialogue" a communicative rationality as the necessary condition of a free and rational society where there would be unconstrained communication. Bakhtin proposed dialogic nature of language in "The Dialogic Imagination"- a continuing carnival of

difference. Those who wish to impose a unitary correct way of speaking...threaten the future of language. (18)

These concepts regarding thinking about human agency in the use of language and the utopian idea of a perfect communication taking place in a rational world was severely criticised by Pierre Bourdieu who suggested that it is the social context, institutional adherence and the delegated power and social position of the speaker that speaks through his speeches and not the human being per se. According to Bourdieu, the limits of Austin's idea of performatives lay in the fact that

...he was in fact working out a theory of a particular class of symbolic expressions, of which the discourse of authority is only the paradigmatic form, and whose specific efficacy stems from the fact that they seem to possess in themselves the source of a power which in reality resides in the institutional conditions of their production and reception. (109)

Judith Butler while agreeing with Bourdieu's stance insists on seeing the insurrectionary power and the political promise of the performative speech act. She claims that while name-calling through a hate speech can be injurious, it also affords a space for counter mobilization through insurrectionary speech. Butler argues:

To take up the name that one is called is no simple submission to prior authority, for the name is already unmoored from prior context, and entered into the labor of self-definition. The word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that

destroys the prior territory of its operation. Such a redeployment means speaking words without prior authorization and putting into risk the security of linguistic life, the sense of one's place in language that one's words do as one says. (163)

From the second half of twentieth century the new rhetoric thus attempts to break away from the formalistic, prescriptive and Neo-Aristotelian analysis which made use of classical canons to make judgements about speeches. These analyses focused on the analysis of text within its context than the analysis of a single speech based on its grammatical and semantic aspects. Building on Wittgenstein's notion of 'language games' (1953), critics began to see language as a set of games, as a form of life, played in accordance with the specific grammar of the game. Thus there is a move away from the close reading of a rhetor's intention to the analysis of the background, the audience, the visual, aural and verbal presentation and the reception of the speech in terms of the public vocabulary repertoire. Thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, Weaver and the feminist critics have examined the uses of language and its connection to power dynamics in terms of discourse. For Foucault (1966), rhetoric was epistemic, the discursive way of producing different knowledge in situations of uncertainty, while for Weaver (1970) all rhetoric was sermonic. Postmodern theories of social constructivism which put language in the limelight also play a significant role in this new rhetoric. They put forward a neo-sophist orientation in broadening the area of rhetoric into many other fields and do not restrict it to political discourse, emphasizing more on dialectic. This has produced great results for contemporary theory in the digitally mediated ambience of the twenty first century.

## **Indian Rhetorical Scene**

As has been said earlier, new trends in thinking about the rhetorical tradition have criticized the obsession of scholars with Western rhetoric (prominently the rhetoric of European -American men) in general and Greek rhetoric in particular. Contemporary scholars attempt to redefine and unearth the non-Western rhetorical traditions, mostly the Eastern traditions of Asia, Africa, and Middle East etc. and strive to problematize the issues of gender, class, ethnicity and the discourses that have been excluded by the dominant intellectual tradition. They challenge the whole rhetorical tradition with the diverse conceptual lenses offered. This paradigm shift in the historiography of rhetoric started around the unravelling of feminist rhetoric and spread to the revival of as different as the Egyptian, Assyrian, Chinese, Japanese and Indian traditions in rhetoric. The feminist challenge to the European male tradition has focused on the revision of rhetorical practices by "the study of sexism in language, differences in communication between men and women, great women speakers and women's communication as a separate culture" (Foss 276).

Talking of the Indian rhetorical tradition, one can observe similarities in the conflict between Athenian philosophy and the Sophists as well as the Vedic and the *Lokayata / Charvaka* (the materialists) tradition in the Indian context. Just as the Sophist rhetoric was pushed to the margins as sheer rhetoric, the *Lokayata* philosophy was obliterated as sheer, useless materialism by the Brahminic orthodoxy. Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay argues that "lokayatas were the first of logicians in ancient India who were branded as employing in useless, tricky disputations". According to him, Vedantic philosophers must have been "pestered by



lokayata arguments, which lured men away from the path to heaven and liberation, orthodoxy found it necessary to deny logic in order to make room for faith" (26). He claims further that the full picture is not of

...certain isolated sophists indulging in useless disputations; it is the picture of clash of two cultures. The exponents of one were preaching God, heaven and immortality, and as a means to this, the efficacy of Vedic sacrifices. The other represented the stand point of the people and was trying to defend their material interests. (30)

Indian history also writes about the Brahmin/ Vedic/ Hindu dialectic which was very prominent during the classic era. Philosophical debating was much in vogue. Within *Brahma sutras* and the *Bhagavata* and many other Indian scriptures we see philosophical enquiries into the nature of being, death, after life etc. in the form of “*samvad*” (debate) between a guru (master) and a '*shishya*' (disciple) or between two saintly characters. 'Vyasa-Narada samvad', 'Shuka-Parikshit samvad', 'Vidura-Mythreya' samvad, to name a few, are instances of the same. Nevertheless, historian Uma Chakravathy speaks about the 'Yajnavalkya-Gargi samvad', the philosophical dialogue between the husband and the wife to expose the power dynamics inherent in the Indian argumentative scheme. As Gargi questions further and further Yajnavalkya hammers her down by saying that if she questions further, her head would literally explode and she falls silent on his threat (*Gendering* 20). Thus Indian dialectical tradition shows the pre eminence of argumentation as is seen in the stories surrounding the Advaita philosopher Sankaracharya who is said to have conquered the non- Advaitic intellectual traditions prevalent in India at that time

through philosophical argumentation and established his "mutts" at Sringeri, Puri, Dwarka and Badri, the four corners of India through what is termed as "Sankaradigvijaya" (Vidyaranya).

Although persuasion is common to all languages and cultures, the Greeks were the ones who emphasized on the significance of rhetoric in epistemology. However, the question that arises is whether we can view Indian rhetoric and realities created by it through a Greek frame? India, in particular, developed two traditions related to persuasive communication—*Nyāya* and *Sadharanikaran*. The *Nyāya* school of thought developed logic and epistemology but differed from the Aristotelian model. "Where in Western rhetoric the speaker utilizes language to move the audience toward the rhetor's ends, in *Nyāya* both rhetor and audience enter into a status-neutral search for practical, sharable truth based in commonly held analogies" (Lloyd 1). In the West, it was Perelman and Olbrechts -Tyteca who brought forward the relationship between the rhetor and the audience. Critics argue that the concept of '*Sadharanikaran*' or simplification has relation to the concept of 'consubstantiality' of Burke. As Wimal Dissanayake, observes, "While Western thinkers fashioned language into an instrument to explore and comprehend reality, the Hindus... avoided logical and discursive language and made use of analogies and metaphors" (43).

Starting with *Sarva Darshana Samgraha* of Madhavacharya, most of the scholars who take a broader view claim that Indian philosophy offers a breadth of philosophical thoughts including *Charvaka*, *Baudha*, *Jain*, *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Mimamsa*, *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* although all these systems possess varied as well

as contradictory view points. This inclusion and discussion of all schemes of thought in philosophy is glorified as the acceptance of plurality and dissent in Indian argumentation even by thinkers like Amartya Sen who in his book *The Argumentative Indian* claims that this history of heterodoxy has contributed to the survival of democracy and the emergence of an Indian form of secularism (16). Though this view is disputed by many eminent critics including and as early as B.R. Ambedkar based on historical evidence and enough reasons, it is true that the view about heterodox schools of thought is discussed and becomes part of the structure of Indian dialectic.

A philosopher had first to state the views of his opponent's case which came to be known as the prior view (purvapaksha). Then followed the refutation (khandana) of this view. Last of all came the statement and proof of the philosopher's own position, which, therefore was known as the subsequent view (uttarapaksha) or the conclusion (siddhanta). (Chatterjee and Datta 4)

### **Fields of Rhetoric:**

Thus what is rhetoric? Conventionally speaking, it is choosing available means of persuasion from the mundane to the specific to make others understand, to make them believe or to agree with us. It is an action humans perform with symbols as well as a perspective they take (Foss 19). And where is persuasion applicable? Practically, everywhere. From basic day to day conversations of our personal life to the power dynamics in public sphere, rhetoric as a way of creating understanding and misunderstanding pervades everywhere. This awareness leads anthropologist

Clifford Geertz to confess that “to let the reader peer over my shoulder as I record my most private observations with no apparent audience in mind is, a rhetorical act”(Herrick 211). Michel Billig promotes the Protagorean notion that every question has two sides which he calls the rhetorical opposition. Billig finds human thinking and therefore psychology as characterized by logos and anti-logos. The study of rhetoric has also moved in new directions with the theories of Austin (1962) and Searle’s Speech Act theory (1969), Grice’s theory of Conversational Implicatures (1981) and the pragma-dialectical theory of F.H. Van Eemeren and P. Houtlosser (2002). These theories have tried to reinvent rhetoric in terms of dialectification which Toulmin had focused on in his work. In this section I discuss how rhetoric functions in the three fields selected for study, politics, gender and religion.

### **Rhetoric and Politics**

Even for a casual observer rhetoric is pronounced in the field of politics the world over. The relationship between politics and language is also the question of asserting legitimacy of political decision making through the use of rhetorical ploys." Every social order requires a widespread acknowledgement of the legitimacy of explanations and justifications for how things are and how things are done"(Fairclough, *Analysing* 219). Political language is so couched in ambiguity that it allows room for contestable meanings when and where required. This is more so in democracies as Lipset argues: "Legitimacy is particularly relevant in the pluralistic democracies, where political power seeks obedience by consent and a crisis of legitimacy may affect the stability of democratic political systems"(86-87).

Theories of post-structuralism and deconstruction and Foucauldian theories about 'discourse' also insisted on the constitutive nature of political discourse. There were equally significant socio-psychological approaches to the analysis of political texts.

However, we have many issues to deal with respect to political rhetoric. One, the ordinariness of the subject itself, since we are more or less adapted ourselves to the fact that political talk involves rhetoric/rhetrickery. Two, the analyst also cannot in anyway escape from predilection. Three, political issues are complex; the decisions to be made are more complicated and involves a lot of variables. Four, it is an accepted fact that even the most sincere politician will have to compromise with truth in order to mitigate or accentuate certain special interests and to accommodate his audience's beliefs. And perhaps, the last one leads us to the point that we are able to come to terms with or empathize with such rhetoric because of the rhetorical nature of day to day conversation/realities. As Goffman's dramaturgical theory and the notion of presentation of self in everyday life suggests, as soon as "...an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey"(3).

Politicians often write their speeches well in advance or appoint speech writers, spin doctors as they are called, to spin these speeches which will function in the market to sell the politician's brand identity. In Derridean terms, these speeches and their interpretations never occur in a vacuum because we are born into a plethora of discourses and our world is constantly shaped by them. There is a constant shuttling forth between past and present as they refer back and forth to past

and future rhetoric. In his critical study of the American "civil religion" Robert Bellah finds its source in the political rhetoric of the American Presidents. He argues that the use of religious symbolism, imagery and myths are rampant more than ever in political discourses. He claims that almost all Presidents of America had used the myths of "Chosen nation", "Nature's nation" and "Millennial Nation" to advance their political campaigns. Furthermore, the biblical narrative of The Exodus has been pervasively used to construct the American Identity (1-21). Thus the interpretation of a political speech includes associative thinking as to how different speeches act and react on each other. Did anybody ever surmise that Jawaharlal Nehru's all time popular "tryst with destiny" speech on the eve of Independence carried marks of "rendezvous with destiny" speech of Franklin Roosevelt? Moreover, the one to one relation between power and politics is re-inscribed as Foucault notes "through a form of unspoken warfare; to re-inscribe it in social institutions, in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies themselves of each and every one of us" (*Power* 100).

Political discourses also exhibit the quality of sensationalism and a kind of blind adherence based on argumentum ad populum. There are two ways to link the linguistic to the political, remarks Schäffner. One is to start from "the linguistic micro-level and ask which strategic functions specific structures (e.g. word choice, a specific syntactic structure) serve to fulfil." The other is to begin with "the communicative situation and the function of a text and ask which linguistic structures have been chosen to fulfil this function" (qtd. in Partington 27). One of the common topoi used by the politicians irrespective of national boundaries is the

statement that the nation is going through a very tough crisis. And the one politician who can very well use his rhetoric to persuade the audience that he is the right person to offer the panacea will be voted to power. Ironically, we hear the same rhetoric repeated next time too. Fairclough goes still further to argue that politics is not just conducted through language, but much of politics is language: 'politics partly consists in the disputes which occur in language and over language' (*Critical* 23).

Let's look at the pro-war rhetoric of George Bush as an example. On 20 September 2001, George Bush, the then President of America announced his "war on terror" by addressing US Capitol, Washington DC in the aftermath of the September 11 World Trade Centre attack.

Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done. On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars-but for the past hundred and thirty six years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war-but not at the centre of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks -but never before on thousands of civilians. All of this was brought upon us in a single day- and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.

Americans are asking: who attacked our country? Americans are asking: Why do they hate us? Americans are asking: what is expected of us?

The course of conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. (Abbott 122-130)

Bush makes use of different schemes like chiasmus (*Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done...*), parallelism (*Americans have known...*), refrain and the use of rhetorical questions to make the speech effective and drive home the point that they are going to fight a moral battle on which God is on the side of America.

Ronald Reid provides an account of the aspects of rhetoric aimed at convincing the audience that war is necessary. Pro-war rhetoric primarily uses three appeals:- 1. Territorial appeal- This appeal is legitimately used as the need for defending one's own territory, especially in the context of a threatened invasion. In this case there is a rightful, moral superiority assumed by the country as in the classic case of the rhetoric of 'weapons of mass destruction' and the 'tyrannical' Saddam Hussein used by the U.S. 2. Ethnocentric appeal - Based on an appeal to the threat to essential ethnicity of a group, an impending cultural invasion is highlighted using the binary angelic 'us' versus evil 'them'. 3. Optimistic appeal - This rhetoric assures and emphasizes that audience victory is inevitable. It makes use of religious imagery and "God is on our side" rhetoric and appeal to fear to persuade the audience (259-286). In a similar vein, Robert L. Ivie proposes three binaries in war



propaganda: Force versus freedom, Irrational versus rational and Aggression versus defence (284-290). This kind of rhetoric finds its place in all fields where there the 'self' is held to be in real or imaginary conflict with the 'other'.

Look at the Indian pro-war rhetoric of two different times, say, of the Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during the Indo-Pak War of 1971 which helped the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country, and of Sushma Swaraj, the current External Affairs Minister of India on the "surgical strikes" of India on Pakistan occupied Kashmir on 29 September 2016. In an interview given to the BBC during this time Gandhi with her tongue in cheek remarks, projects her image as the Iron lady of India and as an opinionated and determined administrator with whom no fuss is possible. She says, "We cannot endanger our security in anyway. Pakistan has moved its troops forward considerable time before we did". She also suggests how India had never attacked any country but was attacked three times ("Indira" 0:00:57-0:02:25). Thus she shows that the impending war that is going to be fought is the legitimate right of India which the whole world cannot stop. Gandhi's image as an unflinching leader is revealed through her talk. Swaraj, on the other hand, talks with an appeal to wronged friendship with Pakistan. She talks about how India had started comprehensive bilateral talks with Pakistan unconditionally and in the last two years (from the time BJP came into power) had extended a very warm hand by visiting Pakistan and wishing them during all festivities. Swaraj asks, "What did we get in return? Pathankot? Uri? Bahadur Ali? ("We wished" 0:01:51-0:02:12). Swaraj's rhetoric projects her image as an ideal mother, an extension of the Bharatmata metaphor, against the background of her act of taking care of the

"Pakistani daughters" who were in trouble in India and places India as the benevolent neighbour who has always loved the way of peace but every time wronged by the mistrustful Pakistan.

Murray Edelman in *Politics as Symbolic Action* had enquired into the symbolic interactions of politics which promote mass mobilization and mass passivity as well and give them a conceptual framework to defend their own actions in front of the world.

In politics, as in religion, whatever is ceremonial or banal strengthens reassuring beliefs regardless of their validity and discourages sceptical inquiry about disturbing issues... ( 3)

Like religion, politics both arouses and assuages anxiety, though people typically think of government as a rational device for achieving their wants and see their own political opinions and actions as the epitome of reasoned behaviour. (4)

Charteris-Black summarises Edelman's enunciation of three particular political myths thus: 1) the myth of the conspiratorial enemy - The classic examples of this myth being Reagen's representation of Soviet Union and Bush' depiction of N.Korea, Iran, Iraq as "an axis of evil" 2) the valiant leader myth - through which the persona of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were elevated by the people to their mental image of the brave leader who is going to lead and rescue them. 3) the United We Stand myth- Banking on the proverb 'United we stand, divided we fall',

this myth unites the people irrespective of their differences in the face of a common enemy, as happened in India during the freedom struggle (*Politicians* 26).

The use of myth is an excellent narrative ploy used to represent intangible experiences that are evocative for the audience because they are unconsciously linked to emotions. Myths establish a neural connection between short and long term memory and since these myths are ideologically marked and part of one's immediate environment, they can be invited when and where it pleases the speaker. They may be empirical but usually not verifiable. "Myth provides a narrative based representation of powerful, intense and often unconsciously driven, emotions such as grief, fear, happiness and joy. Myths are powerful but their origin is in the unconscious" (Charteris-Black, *Analysing* 214). Popular examples of political myths are aplenty. For e.g., the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Dussehra address in Lucknow, launched an offensive at the 'supporters of terror' hinting at Pakistan. Eliciting applause from the crowd consisting of his colleagues, his party and RSS leaders, he evoked the memory of the mythical Jatayu of Ramayana who was the first one to fight against the terrorism of Ravana ("In Dussehra" 0:1:15-0:2:15). This was an obvious reference to the Indian Army's surgical strikes against terrorists in Pakistan to avenge the death of nineteen Indian soldiers in Uri on 18 September 2016. Comparing the religious myth of 'Vijayadashami' to victory over Pakistan was the use of an entrenched religious myth which struck the right chord in the minds of the pro-nationalist audience and elicited strong responses from them.

### **Religion and rhetoric:**

The question of the significance of 'the sacred and the profane' (Eliade) in the cultural life of a people has been amply debated from time immemorial. From very conventional thoughts about religion as the only solace of mankind amidst the adversities of life as well as an unexplainable force as expounded by Max Weber (1904) and Emile Durkheim (1912) to the Marxist interpretation of religion as false consciousness which drugs the masses; contented by the Neo-Marxists with their theory regarding the Janus-faced characteristic of religion having both positive and negative potential for the community; from scientific rationalism to reasonable faith, whether we believe in it or not, we are born into the fabric of religion through its institutions, scriptures, rituals, prayers and more importantly through its discourses. Richard Gombrich categorizes the perspectives on religion broadly into two:

One as practical/communal religion which is concerned with the regulation of communities, the ritual structuring of a person's passage through life, and the successful transition, at death, to another world" and as *soteriology* or the way to personal salvation which involves an element of faith. When the latter is concerned with a particular way or method leading to a spiritual goal, the former is concerned with legitimizing hierarchical social relationships and propitiating deities.

(Flood 13)

The well known Jonestown massacre in USA is an example of how persuasion and oratory works in religion. In 1978, over nine hundred people including children, members of the People's Temple, a cult organisation run by

Reverend Jim Jones, committed mass suicide by drinking cyanide-laced drink called Kool-aid. Social psychologists say that Jones was able to orchestrate this brutal deed in an unusually normal and orderly fashion because of the compliance techniques used by Jones through his oratory fostering herd mentality in his fanatical followers (Griggs 339). One could surely associate such bizarre aspects of religion to Ernest Bormann's study of the rhetoric of fantasy, shared as narratives among small and large groups. It is precisely this phantasmagorical vision that sustains and perpetuates aforesaid acts of fanaticism. Religion is primarily a verbal phenomenon. As Burke says, "Whether or not there is a realm of the supernatural, there are words for it" (*Religion* 7). Be it prayers, rituals or sermons, 'word' is the thing. Words are attributed a divine power and the belief that repetition of certain words can produce the desired result is universal.

The debate on religion is normally termed as a "sensitive" issue, because, one, it involves matters of faith and "personal" choice. Two, this eschewing of any dialogue on religion is at best a kind of practical wisdom and at worst is a threatening strategy, a kind of subtle, 'symbolic' violence propagated by the faithful. The need for religion cannot be disregarded and religious rhetoric cannot be judged in the same way as political rhetoric since there are lots of issues and debates regarding the study of religions such as the insider/outsider problem, logic/faith division or the literal/semiotic aspects. Just as the Sophists would have it, every theoretical approach has a counter approach as we see in the problem of religious language. The basic question is about the validity of statements regarding God or a Supreme Being and there ensues the debate of rationality, validity and truth.

Consequently, there is the realist strand of A. J. Ayer (1936) and a non-realist strand of R.M Hare (1981), Paul Tilich (1951-63) etc. who look at religious language as symbolic, therefore beyond the ambit of falsifiability or meaninglessness. In an agreeable thought, Wittgenstein says:

In religion every level of devoutness must have its appropriate form of expression which has no sense at a lower level. This doctrine which means something at a higher level is null and void for someone who is still at the lower level; he can understand it wrongly and so these words are not valid for such a person. (*Culture* 32)

He held that although as a hypothesis, God's existence is extremely implausible, Christian faith is not unreasonable (Schroeder 86). Religious language operates within the game, within its own rules. From the perspective of those sympathetic to religion this means religious language cannot be judged true or false by the rules of another language game, as that of science. It's true the world has depended on religion for relating the finite aspects of existence to the infinite. Faith has been an important anchor for the people in the face of numerous adversities. The fate of religions, its rise and fall, has depended on the efficacy of its rituals and ideology and the way in which it assures security from the vast unknown. But it is common knowledge that religion is marked as much by falsehood as by truth. In that sense religion fastens faith as well as doubt in the minds of the people. Religions evolved gradually from man's fundamental quest for meaning to means of social cohesion and identity formation around specific sets of ideologies. And identification called

forth great rhetorical possibilities because it was a common ground where people came together shedding their sense of alienation.

Finding a solution to the theoretical impossibility of speaking about the abstract entity called God thus becomes the ultimate task before the rhetoricians. This is exactly where the subliminal potential of metaphors comes to assist the speaker. Metaphors transfer meaning from a sublime, amorphous level to a more material and intelligible level effecting persuasion. The famous St. Augustine of Hippo himself had started off with a dilemma as to how to use the finite words to talk about the infinity. One could say Augustine developed an early semiotic theory by dividing the world into things and signs that point to things. For e.g. A rock could be a rock or St. Peter or Christ himself. In his work *On Christian Doctrine* he set out the need for advancing the gospel through rhetoric as the primary obligation of the Christian ministers.

What happens in the course of a religious sermon is something akin to hypnotism. In such a semi hypnotic state effected by words, the subject begins to feel the same emotions instigated by the sermonizer. This is where the Tertullian dictum “I believe because it is absurd” appears valid as people are overwhelmed by the magic of irrational words because they seem more pleasing just because they fall outside the realm of common sense (Fromm 152). Besides, whatever is “pronounced” in a sanctified atmosphere acquires unpredictable meaning on its own. It is always very easy to be a religious rhetorician since it demands only the rote memorization of some metaphors relating to birth, death, renewal, hope, meaning, eternity, adversity, good and evil and the skill to concoct these with whatever topic

is to be delivered on that day and the extra skill to put on a solemn countenance no matter how incongruous one's argument maybe. The divinity of the rhetorician is assessed on the basis of how abstract he can be.

One could conceive of religion and the need for it in two ways, the personal and the political need of a human. Some religions do harbour within itself a carnivalesque tendency to purge out unnecessary subversive elements within it through certain rituals. For instance, in medieval Christianity there was a Feast of Fools, "Festum Fatuorum".

On New Year's eve and the ensuing four days, members would play dice on top of the altar instead of saying 'Amen', engage in drinking competitions in the nave, fart in accompaniment to Ave Maria and deliver spoof sermons based on parodies of the gospels (the gospel according to Chicken's Arse, The gospel according to Luke's toenail). After drinking tankards of ale, they would hold their holy books upside down, address prayers to vegetables and urinate out of bell towers. They 'married' donkeys, tied giant woollen penises to their tunics and endeavoured to have sex with anyone of any gender who would have them. (Botton 65)

But why do so many people find religious rhetoric persuasive? One of the best strategies in use is the sheer good feeling imparted to the follower with respect to the non-believer. The believer is given a high status in heaven which doesn't suffice. The chief temptation of the deal is in the hellish torment that his adversary, the non-believer, is going to suffer. Nothing can beat the bliss of imagining oneself



chuckling in front of the gates of heaven as one's neighbour descends the gates of hell, hence the long harangues in religious sermons as to the misery awaiting the non-believer than the good. What's more, apparently incongruous, in a specific religion, the pleasure that awaits the believer in his after-life is exactly the same pleasure he is forced to renounce in his life; women, wine, wealth, and valets. Interestingly, we have particular instances of religious discourses in the new media these days which satiate the listener vicariously through a voluptuous description of the "forbidden" pleasures.

Religious discourses could again be classified into spiritual discourses which explicate the teachings of the respective texts intended for an exclusive audience and debates between religious scholars of different religions defending their own faiths fervently as well as establishing a support group among them. In a very humorous exposition on "Why do we do Namaste?" Swami Chinmayananda, the founder of Chinmaya Mission compares the greeting patterns of two other religious cultures, one, the Christian and the other, Islam. Evoking rolling laughter with his speech and mannerisms he explains that the Western way of greeting is based on the history of killing each other for material concerns because the Anglo Saxons never trusted anyone, so by way of greeting they shook hands to see if the other has hid any weapons inside his clothes. The Muslims, on the other hand embrace each other to see if the weapons are hidden on the back. The Indians, however, because they believed in the unity of consciousness and recognised the same spark of life in everyone did 'Namaste' to the God that resided in every individual ("Why" 0:0:44-0:4:30).

In a similar use of comparison and contrast technique, the controversial Islamic scholar of India, Zakir Naik answers a question of why Islam permits four wives for a man. In his reading, other religions like Hinduism and Christianity do not put a limit to the number of wives a man can have. Citing examples like Abraham who had seven hundred wives and Krishna who had sixteen thousand wives, he opines that there is logic behind this option in Quran. Scientifically, women outnumber men all around the globe. So for women there is no option but to marry a man who has a wife or become "public property" ("Why a Muslim" 0:1:10-0:4:50).

The spectrum of studies on women's allegiance and power relationship to religion ranges from the concept of a rejection of a male god by Mary Daly (1973), to the idea of 'divine becoming' of Luce Irigaray (1987) and Grace Jantzen (1998). Deviating from the notion of Lacanian 'symbolic' the male domain into which women have no natural entry or where women remain as peripheral or marginalised Others, Irigaray claims that women use the symbolic in different ways. "For women to develop a women-centred symbolic they must disrupt the male symbolic, displacing its masculinist structures by a new imaginary...based...on new ways of conceiving and being which enable women to be subjects as *women*" (Jantzen 12). Thus women instead of rejecting the patriarchal religion transform it to a new symbolic which makes sense to her as a subject.

### **Rhetoric and Gender**

Although essentially rhetoric is a western, patriarchal enterprise we see some female rhetoricians like Joanna Vaz, Hortencia de Castro etc. although we

have only reports about them. Ironically enough, the one who taught Socrates his Socratic method is said to be a Milesian woman named Aspasia who was a teacher of rhetoric herself. Women have traditionally been excluded from public discourses and one cannot feel the presence of women in the field of oratory. The very few women we see exhibit their oratorical skills as they internalized the male practices. There are prejudices regarding gendered discourses where a woman's speech is often termed irrational, emotional and verbose. Even with leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, the acclaimed socialist who admired the participation of women in Indian Independence Movement and vociferously insisted that women should be more assertive and adamant about their rights in personal and public life, we see certain reservations regarding 'empowering women' as Lolita Sarkar indicates in her essay. She recalls how in 1940, when Nehru was the President, the Congress had set up a women's sub-committee for National Planning and as astounded he was by the radical changes the women had asked for, he was also upset about some recommendations and wrote to the Chairperson to be 'moderate' in their demands.

Many of the subjects dealt with by your committee relate to intimate details of personal life and to all manner of prejudices and customs. It is right that these prejudices and injurious customs should go... But the way to remove them is not always the way of merely denouncing them. One has to approach the subject in a manner which is the least offensive to larger sections of people...there are ways of approach and suggestion...make the approach gently and persuasively. (*Sarkar* 237)

Much work in language and gender research revolves around the themes of difference and domination. Theoretically they depict two paradigms of looking at male and female language: Difference approach which claims that men and women are biologically different and designed by nature for specific purposes and therefore their language is also based on this difference. Again, we have two strands of socio-linguistic research that looks at the difference among speakers. One view projects the difference as arising out of the female and male subcultures. Language is viewed against the larger socio-cultural interactions and is one aspect that needs to be studied. In the other, language is analyzed at the structural level emphasizing on linguistic variation within a population often interacting with class and other social relations. Otto Jespersen (1922) had initiated empirical investigations regarding the same. Another trend in language and gender study claimed that the difference arise largely because of the difference in the 'sociolinguistic subcultures' in which boys and girls grow up. Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand! Women and Men in conversation*, John Gray's *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* are works which reflect this paradigm.

The advent of feminism and women's movement marked a special era of language and gender study especially with the Western Women's movement. Robin Morgan and Germaine Greer theorized on how the semantics of language reflect the female condition. Robin Lakoff in her much controversial text *Language and Woman's Place* explored the gender differences in language to the point of representing women's language as 'deficient' in comparison with men's language. Another pioneering work Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* dealt with the

sexism within English language and of how it contributed to “silencing” of women. Spender observes how men dominate, interrupt frequently and lead to the conclusion in mixed sex conversations. These theorists including people like Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1975, 1983) also worked in favour of the feminist agenda of protesting against the male domination in language.

However, these paradigms have been revised considerably with the post-structuralist knowledge that gender as identity is constructed and that identities themselves are multiple, fluidic and ‘performed’. Building on Goffman, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1999) ushered in new ways of thinking about “gender”. “Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (278-79). Thus gender is constituted through a stylized repetition of ‘acts’. Our costumes, our gestures, our language do not merely express or represent who we are but also construct the identity we want to reveal. Consequently, readings on gender moved more and more away from essentialist and reductionist readings of male and female language to the discursive constructions of masculinity, femininity, and other sexual identities which are fleeting and negotiated in specific socio-political contexts. Also, the concept of speech communities, the influence of the social and cultural sub-groups in which people interact decide the kind of linguistic repertoire they make use of. In Eckert and McConnell’s paper, “Communities of Practice: where language, gender and power all live” this concept of shared practices is elaborated. One continually is in a process of re-inventing one’s identity through interactive behavior within such communities. Culture as a

general pattern of living also contributes as does race, ethnicity, the economic and social standards in which one finds oneself.

On the other hand, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell in her book *Man Cannot Speak for Her, Volume I*, concluded that historically a feminine style has enabled women to overcome restrictive rhetorical barriers and challenges for women in non-traditional contexts. Campbell's theory of a feminine style is discussed in her book, where she attempts a feminist historiography from 1830's to 1920's and observes that they had struggled hard to subvert stereotypes and occupy public podiums and state their historic demand. Several criticisms against Campbell came about for trying to fit women's speech into the male rhetorical tradition and judging them by male standards. Works by Sally Miller Gearhart argue about the construction of masculinity and femininity as rhetorical. More importantly, her work had a provocative assertion that "indictment of our field of rhetoric springs from my belief that any intent to persuade is an act of violence"(Gearhart 195). She argues that male rhetorical tradition has always had the intention of changing others through stirring the passions and moving the will. Rhetoric as theorized by Aristotle and Perelman relies on the model of conquest with the intention to convert others to one's own views. This is fundamentally an act of violence with the implication that the conquest is actually good for the conquered and is what the conquered wanted. As against this she posits a communication where there is a co-creation of an atmosphere in which people if they have an internal basis for change, may change themselves (199). Following Gearhart's analysis, Sonja Foss and Cindy Graffin put forward a term called "invitational rhetoric" (5), a rhetoric that does not function

with the one sided male rhetorical view but is of assistance in building knowledge on their own.

The study of gender normally comprises theorizing around feminism, women and the issues related to patriarchal domination. However, the recent debates have shifted the focus of 'women' centric gender study to include the study of masculinities and the different categories of sexualities as in LGBTQ. It also moves away from the essentializing characteristic of these studies to research on the intersections of other factors like ethnicity, race, class, politics and forms of material production to arrive at the constructed nature of gender as a whole. Apart from the discourses of hetero normativity that is challenged in these studies especially by Butler who terms gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulated frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being" (*Gender* 25), also significant are the discourses and counter discourses of 'power femininity' (Lazar), a neo-liberal, post- feminist identity displayed in global media.

### **Methodology**

The perspective regarding the multimodal nature of discourses has spawned diverse trends in discourse analysis during the second half of twentieth century. The whole branch of discourse studies has grown in breadth and depth by incorporating and adopting approaches, methods and tools from various disciplines including as diverse fields as anthropology, cognitive science, political philosophy, pragmatics and semiotics. Besides, as Teun Van Dijk writes, "The notions of identity, ideology and power are now common in hundreds of discourse studies in the social and

political sciences, as are studies of discursive manifestations of gender and ethnicity (*Discourse* xvi). Further, “The success of Critical Discourse studies shows the fundamental importance of the role of text and talk in the reproduction of power and domination in society, as well as in the discursive challenge of dissent”(xvii). Thus in the latter half of twentieth century we see a move towards scrutinizing discourses, in umpteen ways, as social interaction (conversation analysis), as contextually situated (pragmatics and linguistic anthropology), as tools for negotiations of power (gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality) as communication (cognitive science) as a construct which has complex layers (Rhetorical studies ) and so on.

A traditional linguistic analysis of a speech would analyse the rhetorical strategies, grammatical and semantic aspects, the schemes and tropes, used by the speaker and how they are placed and to what effect. One of the best examples of oratory even today is the Martin Luther King’s 'I've been to the Mountaintop' speech. This speech had turned out to be a prophetic one on account of the Flashback and Foreshadowing that occurred in his speech. Through the brilliant oration, King had exhorted his comrades to fight for social justice and to realize his dream of the Promised Land where freedom and equality for human beings would prevail. Rhetorical scholars identify several schemes like Epistrophe (the Repetition at the end of sentences or clauses) e.g. "But I wouldn't stop there", Anaphora and personal reference, "If I had sneezed", constant reference to the past (to Lincoln) and his impending death and biblical references King had used to relate to people at the lowest level. He had imbued a sense of divinity and mystery through his words: "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But



it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop" (par.51). There are definitely similarities between classical rhetorical analysis and discourse analysis methods. It makes use of rhetorical concepts like Kairos, logos, pathos, mediation etc to analyse the arguments and also, more importantly, to see how it works and understand what rhetorical strategies come into play.

### Critical Approaches to Discourse

The linguistic turn in critical theory highlighted the play of power dynamics inherent in the use of language. This question came to be deemed as crucial in determining social power relationships. Thus approaching language critically meant identifying how differences in power and knowledge are created by inequalities in access to linguistic resources (Charteris-Black, *Analysing* 83). For instance, the more educated you are, the more access you have to linguistic resources and thereby you have a greater stake in policy making decisions of an institutional set up which runs according to the ideas of the ruling class. Thus the focus was on how we can identify imbalances of power by the analysis of language. The methodology adopted here was recording key event details about the speech in terms of 1) when 2) where 3) whom 4) language or semiotic choice 5) interests of the speaker and 6) the audience.

A typical example of how such an approach can unravel the oppression inherent in language systems is the study of *Hlonipha* by Puleng Hanong Thetela. One of the best instances of the mutual interaction of power and language and the disadvantageous position of women is exemplified by her research paper entitled "Sex differences and gender constructions in Southern Sotho." In her path breaking

study of the discourse of rape victims in police interviews, she points out how gendered language identity normalises certain commonly held social values. This exclusive study on *Hlonipha*, a linguistic phenomenon in Southern Africa brings forth the inadequacy of the female language in convincing a male world. *Hlonipha* is a register specifically reserved for women in Southern Sotho which shows respect, politeness, non-usage of taboo words and culturally coded with meanings. Thetela shows how this language which either eschews articulations about sex or uses euphemistic expressions for 'sex' put the rape victims at a disadvantage because the police does not in any way acknowledge the difference between the legal language and *hlonipha*, a language which is mostly silence, hesitation or long pauses or inaudible utterances. Culturally imbricated women never use explicit terms referring to the private parts or the act of intercourse before strangers. Therefore rape in actuality is pathetically articulated more or less as consensual sex in *hlonipha* which exonerates the perpetrators of the crime, thereby undermining justice. Thus women here are victimized not just through physical domination but justice is negated to them through a kind of linguistic domination exclusively capitalizing on the inadequate linguistic code of the female victims involved (Sunderland 159).

Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA is at best an interdisciplinary approach which sees discourse as social interaction and tries to unravel the power relationship inherent in the using of language which usually eludes the common man. Hence CDA operates through three broad steps which includes 1. analysis of speech circumstances, which includes situational circumstance- speaker, location, date, occasion and audience; cognitive aspect–speaker’s beliefs, audience’s beliefs and

their interaction and process –interaction between speaker and audience, speech writers, etc. 2. Identification and analysis of features, linguistic and performance 3. Interpretation and explanation (Charteris-Black, *Analysing* 87-92).The focus on Social Agency and Modality has also made CDA a better methodological choice for researchers because it examines how agency is communicated through naming, i.e., nominal forms and verbal processes; the use of “we” and "them", the questioning of what values are attached to particular groups, the emphasis on 'our' positive characteristics and "their "negative characteristics etc. Van Dijk calls this the ideological square where speakers employ foregrounding and back grounding (*Ideology* 267). The use of active, passive voice and certain modals serve in highlighting and concealing agency. Modality refers to the range of word choices, grammatical and lexical and a series of delivery features such as fluency, volume, and the intensity of expressions used to get across a strong sense of conviction, certitude and authority. Para linguistic features are also operative here as people do expect their leaders to be committed to what they say and sound like they have definitive plans for the future. There must be no scope of 'doubt' in the articulation of an able leader.

The Discourse Historical Approach:

Developed by Ruth Wodak and other researchers under the influence of the Frankfurt school, this approach studies forms and practices of racism, sexism and the like by emphasizing on political power differences and the historical context. The first question addressed by DHA is whether the speech is discriminatory in any manner and whether there is the aspect of intentionality visible in the speech. This

could be problematic because one does not know whether the speech act is conscious or unconscious. Certain research questions are posed by this approach:

1. How are people named linguistically? (Nomination)
  2. Which traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them? (Predication)
  3. from which point of view? (Perspective)
  4. Are the respective discriminatory utterances articulated overtly or are they softened? (Intensification and mitigation)
  5. By what arguments do specific persons or groups try to justify and legitimate exclusion, discrimination and exploitation of others? (Legitimation).
- (Charteris-Black, *Analysing* 129)

#### Critical Metaphor Analysis:

Through *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson were the first to divert our attention from artistic use of language and point out that metaphors are not just figures used in literature but are actually part of everyday language. They showed, for example, that we think about time as being money, as in the phrases "time is money" or "you're running out of time" or "you are wasting your time". These so-called conceptual metaphors are not unusual at all. This is the way we think all the time. Using Lakoff and Johnson's nomenclature, we can also say that 'Arguments are War' as in the phrases "win an argument" or "shoot down my argument." They form a systematic way of talking about the battling aspects of arguing. Similar is the case with 'Love is a journey' as in the phrases "we are at crossroads" or "our marriage is on the rocks" (5-7). This approach revolutionized the way linguists analyzed metaphors. Chomskyan linguist Steven Pinker looks at how people think in

metaphors and since they do, the key to understanding human thought is the deconstruction of these metaphors. Human beings can only think in concrete terms and the rest are metaphorical allusions to these few concrete terms. "A linguistically informed literary criticism is the key to resolving conflict and frustration, from psychotherapy and law to philosophy and politics. It is based on the idea that TO THINK IS TO GRASP A METAPHOR- the metaphor metaphor" (238). He goes on to claim that Western Philosophy is not just a debate on knowledge but "a succession of conceptual metaphors". Descartes' philosophy is based on "Knowing is seeing"; Locke's on "The Mind is a Container", Kant's on "Morality is a strict father" and so on (246). This appears to be true when we see that mystics like the Bengali saint Ramakrishna made use of metaphors to understand their deeply individual, ecstatic mystical experiences. "...one of Ramakrishna's oft-repeated metaphors is of the salt doll which went to measure the depth of the ocean: As it entered the ocean it melted. Then who is there to come back and say how deep is the ocean?"(Kakar 36).

Often we see that the best speakers make best use of metaphors. Expressions like "an iron curtain descending across Europe"(Churchill), the winds of change (Macmillan); "a river of blood" (Powell) etc are part of history. This is because metaphors have got the innate capacity to draw on unconscious, emotional associations of words and assumed values of the audience that are rooted in cultural and historical knowledge. Thus the metaphor analysis seeks to find out what counts as a metaphor. It identifies the source domain, the target domain (vehicle and tenor in literary analysis) and the context of the metaphorical use for a better interpretation

and explanation. Building on the theory of Lakoff and Johnson and theories of human cognition, Conceptual Metaphor Theory identifies a pattern of thought from a number of actual instances of metaphor. The use of a conceptual metaphor which emerges from a set of related tropes used throughout the speech utilises a full range of rhetorical resources to contribute to a politician's image for marketing of a political brand. Rhetorical means for persuasion in political communication makes use of 'Frames or schemata' that make political action and agents intelligible by providing an explanation that fits into the audience's previous experiences and assumptions about how the world works. And most often we see that paradigm shifts that rival speakers engage in are not differences in perception but a different use of frames to signify the same thing, adapting rhetorical choices to pre-existing interpretative frames. To put it another way, a persuasive message anchors on audiences' wants and needs by first exploiting already existing beliefs and values. The persuader is a voice from without, speaking the language of the audience's voice within. Thus most metaphoric mappings show that they are culturally entrenched.

Many political issues are abstract and complicated about which the audience have only a partial understanding, therefore the metaphors activate existing knowledge through image based metaphors. Metaphors provoke affective responses because it draws on value systems by exploiting the associative power of language linked to binary thinking. Thus, the persuasive power of metaphors is accomplished by 1. gaining attention and establishing trust 2. simplifying issues so that they become intelligible 3. implying positive or negative evaluations of actors and issues in a way that makes an argument. 4. arousing feelings that are favourable to the

speaker. 5. creating textual coherence and alluding to respected orators and /of history. 6. representing political actors and issues in a way that reflects, or constitutes a world view 7. creating a political myth (*Politicians* 201).

All these approaches and methodologies in rhetorical studies have their own merits and demerits but they surely help in forming multiple perspectives and save us from a single determinate view about discourses. It depends on the type of speech as to which methodology is more insightful. Seeing rhetoric as a performative act grounded in the materiality of existence, a blending of these methodological tools helps the researcher to seek the potential of polysemic interpretations. This is exactly where it is interdisciplinary in orientation. One could say that although there seems to be much questioning around discourses in India today, especially in the aftermath of digital proliferation of discourses on all issues, the trend is not towards 'epistemic' but 'doxastic' rhetoric, a rhetoric which aims at hiding truths and at creating homogenous mass opinions. Nonetheless, shaking off its pejorative connotations, the theoretical field of rhetoric has also come to signify a quest for meaningful political dialogue and has endeavoured to question eristic dialogues which aim to win an argument, and seek after truths and knowledge building with the help of productive, dialectical debates.

## Chapter 2

### The Political Malayali: Rhetoric of Identification and Division

*In politics, more than anywhere else, we have no possibility of distinguishing between being and appearance. In the realm of human affairs, being and appearance are indeed one and the same.*

*Hannah Arendt*

#### 1. Hindutva Rhetoric: The Historical Context

Indian politics has been a vibrant discursive platform as early as the colonial era. From the time of anti-colonial struggles we have had debates on the significance of Vedas versus the ideals of modernity, the orthodoxy versus the reformers. At a decisive point in the history of India, as a response to the foreign aggression, religious institutions in India had worked towards rectifying superstitious beliefs and rigid, unreasonable, Vedic practices through reform movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (1870-1920) with the help of Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission. It was apparently an effort to raise one's own sails in the face of the imperialist storm that was blowing across the country. Dayananda Saraswathi had made effective use of rhetorical possibilities heralding a new upsurge of the militant Hindutva. The cow-protection movement which continue to prevail even in the twenty first century had come into force as a result of a series of lectures he had delivered during 1877 ending in the founding of Gorakhshini sabha in 1881 (D. N. Jha 2). However, the reform movements had to endure great



resistance from the traditionalists who believed in "the authority of both *sruti* (revealed) and *smriti* (remembered) scriptures" (Mandair 60). Whereas the former believed only in Vedas and cast off what appeared to them as degenerate and deviant. In addition to challenging the rituals associated with the same, it was also mooted as a resource to unify the people of India by working up the concept of nationalism in the face of resistance towards colonial forces in the form of Swadeshi movement.

Indian nationalist discourse and religious language got inextricably linked to each other owing to the influence of the oriental popularity it received in Europe through the works of Indologists like William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Francis Wilford, H.T Colebrook etc. who

...postulated the idea of an Indian Golden Age, from which Hinduism had fallen due to Muslim incursions. The idea of an "original" Hinduism also presented a moral task for contemporary Hinduism, which was fallen, illicit and immoral entity compared to the original Hinduism for which the central principle was the rational adoration of one, true God. (Mandair 63)

While there were many versions and interpretations of the Indian scriptures, they, in effect, consolidated the inseparability of religion in the socio-political life of India. Look at Mahatma Gandhi's speech for instance:

Hinduism has become a conservative religion and, therefore, a mighty force because of the Swadeshi spirit underlying it. It is the

most tolerant because it is non-proselytizing, and it is as capable of expansion today as it has been found to be in the past. It has succeeded not in driving out, as I think it has been erroneously held, but in absorbing Buddhism. By reason of the Swadeshi spirit, a Hindu refuses to change his religion not necessarily because he considers it to be the best, but because he knows that he can complement it by introducing reforms. And what I have said about Hinduism is, I suppose, true of the other great faiths of the world, only it is held that it is specially so in the case of Hinduism. ("Definition")

When Gandhi determinedly affirmed the centrality of religion and caste in the socio-political life of India, glorified its contribution in the organization and management of day to day affairs of the country, Nehruvian thought showed a tentative emergence of secularism without religion. Thus after 1920's there was "...a complete reversal in Indian nationalist discourse where religion and religious traditions are now seen as the basis of division, discord and disunity" (Mandair 54). The speech by which the world remembers Bal Gangadhar Tilak who made a clarion call for India's Home Rule movement through his statement "Swaraj is my birthright" in Nasik, in May 1917, made a lasting impression on India when he connected the idea of freedom to the metaphor of the "eternal" and "indestructible" spirit (Atma) ingrained in the Indian psyche through Vedas. Drawing on the irrefutable authority of verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*, he recreated the narrative of Krishna- Arjuna rallying out:

If one body is worn out the soul will take another; so assures the Gita. This philosophy is quite old. Freedom is my birthright. So long as it is awake within me, I am not old. No weapon can cut this spirit, no fire can burn it, no water can wet it, no wind can dry it. I say further that no CID can burn it. (Mukherjee 75)

The role of *Bhagavad Gita* and its ideologies of "*Nishkama Karma*", "*Sthitha Prajna*", eternity of the soul and "*Dharma samsthapana*" which were used by people like Bal Gangadhar Tilak to bring together Indian freedom fighters against the colonial rule, once the contradictions inherent in the hierarchies became visible, went out of use (Adat, *Hindutvavum* 124). Talking about the historical claims of Hindutva, Partha Chatterjee in his essay titled "History and Nationalization of Hinduism" shows that "many of the themes that run through the contemporary rhetoric of Hindu extremist politics were part and parcel of the historical imaginings of the nineteenth century of "India" as a nation" (112).

V. D. Savarkar, put forward an adversative view, at the twenty-second session of Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Sabha held at Madurai in 1940 when he fervently spoke against Gandhi's principles of non-violence because it was against the law of nature of the will of God. For him relative non-violence was the only virtue which he believed was the concept envisaged by all religions, the Jains and the Buddha himself. He argued further about the fetishization of this doctrine of absolute non-violence as undoubtedly "anti-human". He reiterated:

This apologetic tone must be changed. It raises these prophets of this eccentric doctrine in their own estimation and makes them feel they

had really invented some moral law raising human politics to some divine level. Seeing that even their opponents on practical grounds attribute to them a superhuman saintliness owing to the very eccentricity of their doctrine, they grow, perhaps unconsciously all the more eccentric and have the insane temerity to preach in all seriousness to the Indian public that even taking up of a lathi (stick) is sinful ( insanity /eccentricity). (Mukherjee 87)

Savarkar seemed to sum up the unholy marriage between Indian religion and politics producing a baneful offspring 'Hindutva' which in his words..."defies all attempts at analysis...[it] is not a word but history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people, but a history in full" (Savarkar 11-12). This word '*Hindutva*' in effect, was a metonymical expression of the so called "*Sanathana Dharma*" which was the term introduced for the Hindu religion projected as 'a way of life' which everyone practices naturally as the just way of being human. Nevertheless, the rhetorical construct of Sanathana dharma is not as old as is made out in political discourses. It has a history of say only sixty or seventy years. In his book, Arvind - Pal S. Mandair argues that the concept of Sanathana Dharma was in fact idealized as universal and given the shape of an all-encompassing religion, ironically, by Annie Besant, an English woman who took up the leadership of The Theosophical society. "In short, at the centre of this particular brand of Sanatana dharma ideology was the idea of the Veda not only as the source of all religious experience in the Indian context, but of all historical religions"(171).

The orientalist obsession with the pristine religion and traditions of India which is echoed even in the twenty first century speeches has its ultimate rhetorical impact in the speech of Sister Nivedita, formerly Margaret Noble who, influenced by the spiritual charisma of Swami Vivekananda found her home in the "lovely land of India". In 2 October 1902, she addressed the Hindu Ladies' Social Club in Bombay talking about "How and why I adopted the Hindu religion". She claimed:

I love India as the birthplace of the highest and best of all religions; as the country that has the grandest mountains, the Himalayas; as the place where the sublimest of mountains are located. The country where the homes are simple; where domestic happiness is most to be found; where the woman unselfishly, unobtrusively, ungrudgingly, serves the dear ones from early morn to dewy eve; where the mother and grandmother studies, foresees and contributes to the comfort of her belongings, regardless of her own happiness, and in the unselfishness raises womanhood to its highest eminence. ( Mukherjee 63)

This could be read in tandem with two diverse views on becoming/un-becoming a Hindu in India put forward in the millennium by Kancha Ilaiah in *Why I am not a Hindu* (1996) and Shashi Tharoor's *Why I am a Hindu* (2018). This shows the discourse surrounding Hindu identity has been a recurring motif from the colonial times to the present. The argument that Hinduism does not have the legacy that contemporary Hindutva forces claim it has, is made by Dwijendra Narayan Jha who argues, citing from various sources that the word 'Hindu' has been interpreted and

defined in quite fuzzy and ambivalent terms in the history. He also notes that the concept of *Sanatana dharma* has been fetishized by these forces "by trying to push back the Vedic clock by several centuries in an effort to link it with Harappan civilization." The ambiguity regarding the origin of the word 'Hindu' is established beyond doubt when one knows that the first information about the name "Bharata" and the name Hindu is gathered from the accounts of some foreign travellers and from some other Indian texts. He notes:

This is rooted, to a large extent, in the fact that Arabic and Persian scholarship describes all non-Muslim Indians as Hindus....What possibly added to the ambiguity surrounding the word is the fact that no Indians described themselves as Hindus before the 14th century.

(17)

Apart from rare occurrences in some Sanskrit texts and medieval vernacular Bhakthi literature it is established by historians that the different interpretations and contexts in which the word was used point to the non-existence of a monolithic or eternal, tolerant, non-proselytizing 'Hindu Dharma'. Further the reality behind the word 'Hindu' as an 'imported' concept is suggested by the fact that

The British borrowed the word "Hindu" from India, gave it a new meaning and significance, re-imported it into India as a reified phenomenon called Hinduism, and used it in censuses and gazetteers as a category in the classification of the Indian people, paving the way for a global Hindu religious identity- a process perceptively equated with the "pizza effect", based on how the Neapolitan hot

baked bread exported to America returned with all its embellishments to Italy to become its national dish. (D.N. Jha 19)

However, following Savarkar's ideology, Nathuram Godse defended vehemently his motivations behind the crime in his last speech "Why I killed Gandhi" on 5th May 1949 which although by a condemned man, moved the audience visibly. The ideological basis of his act of killing Gandhi sprang again from the same concept of '*Nishkama Karma*' Tilak had so dutifully used for cohesion. In the speech he exonerated his conscience by likening his criminal act to the moral act of Rama, Krishna and Arjuna irredeemably imprinted in the religiosity of the Indian psyche. Godse said:

I could never conceive that an armed resistance to an aggression is unjust. I would consider it a religious and moral duty to resist, and if possible, to overpower such an enemy by use of force. [In the Ramayana] Rama killed Ravana in a tumultuous fight and relieved Sita. [In the Mahabharata] Krishna killed Kansa to end his wickedness; and Arjuna had to fight and slay quite a number of his friends and relations including the revered Bhishma because the latter was on the side of the aggressor. It is my firm belief that in dubbing Rama, Krishna, and Arjuna as guilty of violence, the Mahatma betrayed a total ignorance of the springs of human action. (Mukherjee 200)

Rajaram Hegde claims that Hinduism was seen as a western concept because with its myriad practices, rituals and gods, scriptures and cults, the religions of India could not be homogenized under the term “Hinduism”.

Along with the colonial needs of domination, a western Christian concept of religion is said to have inspired the description of Indian religions in terms of a pan-Indian Hinduism with a specific set of core characteristics or essences. In other words, the constructionist thesis tells us that Orientalist descriptions made certain features of Indian reality, such as the Sanskrit texts or Brahmanism, into the essence of Indian religion, thereby distorting Indian realities (by taking a part for the whole, an exercise in metonymy). (Bloch 4)

Further, a series of events within India, the rise of Hindu nationalism and an upsurge of violence between Hindus and Muslims also contributed to the Indians consolidating and adopting the Western, Orientalist construction of Hinduism. Taking advantage of the context, 'The Gita Press' which took up the responsibility of spreading 'Sanathana Dharma' also helped by publishing and distributing thousands of copies of Ramayana, Mahabharatha, Gita and other Hindu scriptures throughout the Hindi heartland of India during the 1920s (Mukul). Romila Thapar observes that initiated by Orientalists, Hindu identity was part of emergent national consciousness, a requirement for political mobilization in the nineteenth century. The idea of a Hindu community as politically powerful developed on the grounds since "it was easy to recognize other communities on the basis of religion such as Muslims and Christians, an effort was made to consolidate a parallel in Hindu community (27).



Therefore, the Ramajanmabhoomi movement as late as 1992 was not a sudden uprising of the Hindutva forces. It was a culmination of years of communal mobilizing through propaganda against Muslims and Christians and the evocation of the Hindu religious symbols through strident, political rhetoric.

## **2. The Kerala Context**

Building upon in some ways as well as deviating from these nationalist contexts considerably, in Kerala too we see a huge, unprecedented and a different sort of reform movement spearheaded by Sri Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamikal, Vagbhadananda, Bhramananda Sivayogi, Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyappan and other reformers heralding the advent of modernity through an oratory that stood for a casteless society. Except in some cases like the movements led by Ayyankali and Sahodaran Ayyapan, the reform movement in Kerala was essentially based on religion as in the case of Guru who installed an "Ezhava Siva", as a challenge to the Brahminical puritanism in a temple at Aruvippuram, Thiruvananthapuram. His famous "*oru jaati oru matham oru daivam manushyanu*" (one caste, one religion, one God for humans) came from his scholarship in Advaita Sidhantha. He made a brief speech at Muttathara Pulayamahayogam, Thiruvananthapuram.

All human are of one caste. Amongst them there is difference of status only and not of caste. Some people may have more money, education, while some others less. Some are fairly complexioned while others are not. Such are the only difference amongst the people and not caste difference.

It is a well known irony of history that many of these reformers who have stood for a caste-less, class-less society have now become idols of specific caste organizations, negating the mission that the reformers had espoused so much in their lives. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Trust and the political controversies it finds itself in, is a typical example. The political mobilization that happened in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which was later assigned the tag Kerala Modernity or Kerala Renaissance could not be divorced from the religious and secular domains. Among the leaders, Guru towered over with his integrative approach of removing the paradox between negating the caste and religious differences among people through the blend of egalitarian Buddhism and Advaita Sidhantha, simultaneously maintaining the difference for political reasons, through sensibly blending the spiritual and material. In 1917, Guru had said "From now temple-constructions should not be encouraged. If it's compulsory, small temples would suffice. The most important temple must be educational institution. Collect money to build schools. Temples accentuate caste differences" (Sugatan 162). One cannot go further without accepting the fact that the current of modernity had failed to carry itself forward owing to a lot of socio political reasons.

However, a new kind of ethos has set in now with a pre-occupation of certain sections of society in reviving the Brahminic codes, at the same time, apparently trying to accommodate the caste issue in terms of the emergence of identity politics. There is also an imminent need to reclaim the mythic golden Hindu past of India in the wake of what appears to be the impending menace of Islam and Christianity. This mission, although a part of the divisive religious politics of India, has been put

into action fervently after the insecurity created post- Babri Masjid frenzy and the 'threat' posed by the 'dalitization' (Ilaiah, *Why* 115) of Kerala. The resentment against the reservation policies of the State and the rise of a new force consisting of the minorities to power positions through education as well as welfare schemes directed by the state has created a rift in the society. In a corresponding note Thomas Blom Hansen remarks regarding the upsurge of Hindutva in India thus:

it was the desire for recognition within an increasingly global horizon, and the simultaneous anxieties of being encroached upon by the Muslims, the plebeians, and the poor that over the last decade have prompted millions of Hindus to respond to the call for Hindutva at the polls and in the streets, and to embrace Hindu nationalist promises of order, discipline and collective strength. (5)

Although Hansen's juxtaposing of religious and class categories weakens his argument, it is true that millions of Hindus, predominantly 'Savarnas' have been drawn to the cause of Hindutva agenda. Furthermore, this insecurity has been accelerated by the process of indoctrination through spiritual discourses, which were erstwhile dedicated exclusively to abstract metaphysical longings. We also see these discourses visibly aligning with right wing politics espousing a resurgence of religious nationalism. Moreover, there is a proliferation in the spiritual quest of the Hindu diasporas in Britain, Australia, Middle East, USA etc. as more and more 'sanyasins' visit foreign countries upon their invitation and address the insecurity and identity crisis of the Hindu immigrants with a call to rebuild India as 'Bharat' and retrieve its erstwhile Vedic glory.

Diaspora-transnational hinduisms are projected vigorously by different organizations through rapidly developing new media channels and in different discursive context. This new fascination of diasporas, in effect, provides the financial capital for the propagation of "Hinduism" and gives its political ally an easy ride in India (Zavos 12).

The paradox inherent in this mechanism of educated people holding fast to religious tenets could only be explained through the understanding that education is cultural reproduction and that it recreates the dominant structure and cultural values, thereby pre-empting literacy to critically evaluate this link between the political and the religious. It is also noteworthy that "... the resurgence of Hindu nationalism in the 1980's and 1990's, the growing national and transnational influence of gurus, the simultaneous expansion of transnational capitalism in India and the rapid growth of Indian 'middle class'(both in India and abroad) which provide a fertile recruiting ground for 'guru' organizations" (Warrier 171) have strong affinities to each other. To this effect in Kerala, J. Raghu claims the Malayali of the new millennium lives in an apparent contradiction with 'I pad and Black berry phones' on one hand and amulets and talismans on the other. He notes that it reveals his ignorance of the ideals espoused by modernity as well as the guilt and embarrassment this double existence has brought about (259). Alternatively, Hansen argues that Hindu nationalism has emerged and taken from neither the political or religious sphere but from the public culture in which individuals and communities "imagine, represent and recognize themselves through political discourse, commercial and cultural expressions, and representations of state and civic organisations"(4). He further

observes that "the notion of a single Hindu culture was built on the ideological fantasy and fears associated with an abstract and generalised Muslim"(12).

Simultaneously and ironically in Kerala, labelled 'God's own country' for tourism promotion, there are other strands of propaganda served through and centring on the temples as we see more temples being renovated and rituals and festivals being reinstated and celebrated in a competitive spirit. In addition, there is the invention of new rituals and ceremonies, forceful inclusion and blending of different customs of different schools of ritualistic conventions. The eco-friendly "*kaavu*" which was erstwhile a place of worship belonging to "folk" and "low" culture has been upgraded into "*kshethra*", with the subaltern deities emerging as 'Brahminic' gods . But in reality it is a process of appropriation. "More so, when Abrahamic religions try to absorb others by converting them at a great cost, Hinduism absorbs others by simply claiming for itself what actually belongs to others. Hindu's tolerance is a mere disguise for its narcissist obsession with its own greatness" (Nanda 38-39). One can also note the emergence of some spiritual discourses as "disguised shakhas", training and indoctrination programme of the RSS. These "shakhas" are mostly held in the proximity of the temples and is a regular spectacle for the temple-goers. The change in the selection of the speakers is very much political. When earlier, these stages were 'blessed' with the presence of 'elderly sanyasins' who had dedicated years of their life to the study and propagation of the Hindu scriptures with no visible political affiliation, today we see more political figures like K.P. Sasikala, K. Gopalakrishnan, and other members of the RSS and its fringe groups on these stages. In India and in Kerala, some Hindu

organizations had responded earlier "to the communalization of public spaces, particularly in urban environments, by moving away from identification with Hinduism altogether, preferring instead to emphasize a kind of ecumenical spirituality"(Zavos 12). Nevertheless, with the resurgence of Hindutva agenda in Kerala, these organisations have also started leaning towards supporting virulent forms of Hinduism.

On the other extreme, instances of counter discourses within Hinduism against the fundamentalist Hindutva are offered by Swami Brahmananda Tirtha (0:00:06- 0:23:31) and Swami Sandeepananda Giri who are derided by the right wing political parties. Both these speakers put forward an image of Hinduism based on the Upanishadic philosophy of oneness, attainment of knowledge and pure awareness as the ultimate ideal. Recently, Kerala witnessed a political campaign by the Hindu religious leaders against the scandal brought forward by a book called *Holy Hell* which had allegations against Mata Amritanadamayi. Lining upon both sides of the debate, the spiritual leaders exhibited their political alliances. Sandeepanandagiri, a saint who is known for his "School of Bhagavad Gita" trying to interpret *Gita* as a scientific and management thesis, and for *Salagramam*, a trust established by him, courted both controversy and RSS attacks for defaming Mata. He was attacked by three RSS workers for allegedly blaspheming against Hindu religion as well as Mata through his speeches ("Attack" 0:01:00-0:02:28). In the wake of the attacks, he openly proclaimed his Marxist past and attended meetings organized by DYFI, the youth wing of Marxist party and readily found the similarity between the principles of Marxism and *Bhagavad Gita* as important for the human

cause. On the contrary, we also have secular speakers like Sunil P. Ilayidom, who propagates a Neo-Marxist interpretation of Mahabharata, asking for subversion and appropriation of the same instead of leaving it to the hands of the Sangh forces. He led a series of lectures titled "*Mahabharata Vicharangal*" (Thoughts on Mahabharata) across Kerala in 2017. In the context of such a somersault by the left parties, we see a renewed interest in celebrating religious observances like Sri Krishna Jayanti and Ramayana month especially by the CPI(M). However, accusing *Gita* as "discourse of moral disengagement" (36) and "Hindu Meinkamph" (84), J. Raghu criticizes the Chinmaya Mission in reviving *Gita*, which was a counter-revolutionary attempt against the ideals of Buddhism and propagating domination through hierarchy and violence as quite natural and guilt-free and hence "*dharmik*" for a Hindu. These religious and caste identities are so deeply embedded in the Malayali psyche obfuscating the basic identity of that of a human being and are kept alive by these discourses.

### **3. Hate Speeches and Systemic Violence**

In 1992, Sadhvi Rithambhara exhorted RSS men of North India and helped them revive their Hindu identity by shouting vociferously "Hum Hindu Hain" (We are Hindus) to build 'Mandir' at the same place where the 'Babri Masjid' stood. This rhetoric of "Hindu-Hindi-Hindustani" echoed years later in Kerala in the 'ghar wapsi' speech of K. P. Sasikala proclaiming "Say loudly, I am a Hindu!" ("Sasikala-Uchathil"). Tanika Sarkar has observed how Ritambhara's speech carefully distanced itself from a political address and conventions of Katha mode or recitation were used which had discursive roots in exhortations, homilies, anecdotes and

stories (287). With the rising of right wing politics, India has had its own share of the fiery, anti-Muslim, Hindutva speeches that put the Chief Minister of UP, Yogi Adithyanath, Sadhvi Prachi, Sadhvi Saraswati and others into lime light. In examining the dynamics of Hindu spiritual discourses, one can observe that recently in India and within Kerala, there is an emergence of unexpected platforms for hate speeches which were erstwhile part of party-based political rhetoric. What exactly could be the political function of this blurring of the boundaries between a political and religious speech act? However, unlike Ritambhara's subtle propaganda mentioned earlier, Hindutva speakers in Kerala have adopted an open, argumentative and fearless presentation of their agenda leaving no stone unturned in making it offensive to other communities. This use of violent rhetoric to establish and show power should be read alongside the gradual alignment of Kerala politics towards right wing with consequent support from the BJP at the centre.

Swami Chidanandapuri is the patron of Advaitashram, Kolathur, Kozhikode, Kerala, established in 1992 and engaged ever since in propagating 'Sanathana Dharma' through study classes, publications and annual series of speeches across Kerala and abroad titled "*Dharma prabhashana parampara*" and "*Dharma Samvadam*". In one such event, when he is asked a question on the relevance of family planning in India in recent times he answers that it is "terrible". The condition is even worse because the Muslim religion does not in any way cooperate with the governmental policies regarding family planning and continue to proliferate in large numbers, he opines. He cites his experience of seeing, on his way to this discourse, among lots of purdah- clad girls going to school only a single girl



without purdah. He adds anxiously that the ratio of Hindu children to Muslim children is 1:6. This is a disastrous situation according to him. The Christian community, he adds, realising this trend, sent out the message in November 2008 prohibiting family planning among their members. As a global community, we, Hindus, are a minority, he claims. "This condition should change. Procreation must be according to *dharma* not a product of *kama* (lust) as per the instructions of Vedas" ("Family" 0:01:30- 0:09:45).

In the speech titled "*Bharatam Veendum Bharathamakum*" he confidently sets aside the rumour that Bharat will not be there after some years. According to him no political party or any other religion can separate and destroy our land. He brings in the example of Israel for the commendable effort in launching an offensive against all the Muslim nations in upholding its sovereignty and asks Indians to think in that direction (0:00:50- 0:06:25). The appropriation of Hindu symbols and deities by some Islamic and Christian organizations are rebuked by the speaker. He laughs both at the Christian speakers who say that the *Kalki* avatar is Jesus and the claim of Jamaat e Islami that *Kalki* is in all possibilities, Prophet Muhammad. He superciliously adds if they have dearth of theory in their respective religions they should approach and get the left-over of Hinduism which Hindus would readily donate ("Kalki" 0:01:00- 0:04:10). Regarding the controversial issue on the entry of women to Sabarimala temple, he questions the intention of the Muslim petitioner, argues why he is not petitioning for the sake of Muslim or Christian women. In his view, it is the prerogative of the individual religions and its followers to decide

about changing the rituals. Other religions have no right to intervene in such matters ("Swami-Sabarimala" 0:00:50- 0:03:33).

In a similar call to awaken Hindus of 'Bharat', Dr. Gopalakrishnan, former scientist at ISRO and the founder of Indian Institute of Scientific Heritage (IISH), established in 1999 at Thiruvananthapuram, with a declared aim of "propagating logically and rationally the material and spiritual heritage of India" ("About IISH"), argues that Semitic religions have chosen the policy of 'survival of the fittest'. He continues, both Christianity and Islam have adopted very selfish means to dominate over the whole world, imposing their way as the only right way to God as against Hinduism, the foundation of which is "truth". Communism is another danger. According to him, there are three enemies for *Sanatana Dharma* today: Islam which thrives through "love jihad" and by reproduction in multiples in India and puts forward the agenda sent by sixty nine Islamic countries that by 2050, Islam should be spread in Kerala. Christianity on the other hand, tries through the works of Cardinals and Bishops, God Men whose aim is to spread their religion and are robots who work according to the decrees of the USA distorting Hinduism and denigrating great gurus like Mahesh yogi, Rajneesh, Saibaba and Ravi Shankar. Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh have become incorrigibly Islamic, so much so that no Hindu can visit there anymore, he asserts. He exhorts people to strike back with the ideal of Hindu nation and Sanathana Dharma. "They" are using different means in order to convert Hindus to their religion. There are lot of youth working for the Sanathana dharma cause under the leadership of Mata

Amrithanandamayi, Saibaba, Sri Sri Ravishanker, Brahmakumaris, SNDP and NSS (some parts), he claims ("Dr." 0:00:22- 0:31:00).

Another firebrand sermonizer who visibly proclaims Hindutva with what her adversaries term as 'venom-spitting' speeches is K. P. Sasikala known as Sasikala 'Teacher', the brand ambassador of Hindutva agenda in Kerala and the President of Hindu Aikya Vedi, a fringe group of RSS. Openly and fearlessly critical about Islam and Christianity and controversial movements such as 'Kiss of Love' agitation or the issue of Sabarimala entry of women, she asserts the immediate need for reclaiming Sanathana dharma and fight against all groups which try to tarnish the image of Hinduism. Deploring the debates from cow -slaughter to the paintings of M. F. Hussain she blames the political parties for placating the interests of the other sects for the sake of votes. At Cherukolpuzha convention in Kerala in 2015, she declares:

We need to have more such Hindu conventions, establish local religious units in every district and enlarge this "Haindava Keralam" in 20 years. Fight for justice, Fight for dharma without lethargy with masculinity. So Let us fight the Hindutva cause. Let us dream that the whole world will understand and will be enlightened like Vivekananda. (0:49:52-0:53:56)

Yet another speech of hers organised by the Hindu Aikya Vedi includes ranting against the CPI (M) , a party which according to her, has betrayed the Hindus who stood by the party, for the sake of vote bank. She insists that now CPI (M) politicians are playing the Muslim card. Muslims can form religious and political organizations. However, the word Hindu itself cannot be mentioned under the threat

that secularism will be affected. Hindu religious leaders cannot talk politics while Bishop house decides who will get the political post, she asserts. "There is no divorce between politics and religion in the case of Muslims and Christians. But Hindu can't organize. He will be insulted. If we talk emotionally about our rights, then the mainstream politics term us as venom-spitting snakes. CPI (M) promotes Madani while insulting Sasikala because she speaks out" (0:17:45-0:22:52). Mentioning the criticisms levelled against Hindutva forces in Bihar, Muzzaafarnagar riots, Mumbai terrorist attack or Gujarat riots and blaming it on distortion of history, she says she can enumerate various incidents as far as 1921 which were triggered by Muslims. "Was Babri Masjid responsible for all conflicts in the world? They give reasons. But Hindu should not. The Muzzaafarnagar riots were a protest against 'love jihad'". And she warns the Hindus regarding their kids. Secularists are the real menace. Eliciting a personal anecdote of an acquaintance, she argues that she advocates Uniform Civil Code because she fears that Hindu women will be thrown away by their men when they learn that they can marry four times if they convert to Islam. Thus what happens to Muslims is a cause of concern to Hindus too (0:35:10-01:05:54).

Against the ideological background of comparison with other religions in these rhetoric there is the emergence of the 'generous', 'tolerant' Hinduism that has withstood the ravages of time, a view popularised by none other than Vivekananda himself. In his famous speech on Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda had talked about the way in which other religions had tried to shake off the foundations of Hindu religion, a temporary phenomenon which was

submerged by the deluge of the Mother body which blended all these religions and assimilated it into its body. "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true" (5). In this sweeping statement Vivekananda, unintentionally perhaps, hides the history of religious persecution of the Buddhists and Jains in India by using the word "assimilation" thereby portraying Hinduism as magnanimous enough to accept other religions. Regarding the stereotype that Hinduism is a tolerant religion, D. N. Jha argues:

In any case, contrary to the view of some scholars (Lorenzen 1978; Pinch 1996), the growth of militant ascetic orders indicates the existence of warrior ascetics and soldier sadhus in India before the coming of Islam and their formation of akhadas was therefore not in response to their harassment by the Muslims (Clark 2006:230). They spawned antagonism and armed hostilities between the numerous Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical religions as well as among the various Brahmanical sects in the early medieval and subsequent periods, when several instances of armed conflict between the Saivas and Vaishnavas are recorded. (40)

The image of Hindu religion as the "mother's body" is relevant even now, is used by the Hindutva speakers and is connected to the concept of nationalism endorsed by Vivekananda. He had also popularised the metaphor of 'masculine Hindu' as one who is ready to face challenges and had blended the concept of 'karma yoga' to masculine heroism to be adopted later by leaders like Golwalkar and Hedgewar.

In a transnational context, moreover, it is exceedingly important to consider the rhetoric of Vivekananda's teachings in reference to the opportunities secular modernity offers to a Universal Religion inspired by Yoga and an eclectic understanding of Advaita Vedanta. While relying upon the familiarity of his audience with certain aspects of secular thought (for example, human potential psychology and evolution), as Killingley suggests, Vivekananda "not only sets forth the ideas that are in his mind but also manipulates ideas that are already in the minds of his audience. (Webster 335)

This image of 'masculine' Hindu is invoked at the Second conference of Hindu Aikya Vedi held at London, 2016 by Chidanandapuri when he compares every Hindu to Bhishma who had to spend his last days on the mythical 'bed of nails' (*sharashayya*) waiting for his death. He had to endure this torture because although he was well versed in the *Dharma Sastras*, he did not in any way prevent the Kauravas from insulting Draupadi and through his silence had abetted the crime. Similarly, the *Bharathiya* is not at all concerned about the '*vasthrakshepa*' of the '*mathru dharma*' (mother faith) and will have to atone for his neglect. The Kauravas here is an obvious reference to the other religions which try to insult the mother India and wrench India's pride in its way of life (0:05:00-0:10:15). Thus through the analogy, the nation is elevated to a personal level with a mother-son bond established through a mythological metaphor which was quintessential to the Indian nationalist movement and Hindu ethos. This metaphor sees resurgence in the modern day right wing political discourses too.

Tanika Sarkar's article "Hindutva's Hinduism" explores the paradoxical relationship between Hindutva and Hinduism. While Savarkar conceptualized Hindutva in terms of territory and culture, discarding faith, he nevertheless deployed faith to construct a Hindu identity. Savarkar's ideological heir, the R.S.S, adopts a similar tactic by distancing itself from overt religious activities, yet manipulating Hindu beliefs and rituals through its allies. Sarkar furthers her comment that just as "Hindutva's Hinduism has invented *Bande Mataram* as a new hymn and *Bharat Mata* as the new Goddess; it has also invented the pogrom as a new kind of festival". Hence, she observes a pogrom "can become a collective public ritual- a festival of death, noting that some victims of the Gujarat riots mistook the rioters as a "baraat" (wedding procession)". Thus Hindutva mobilizes Hindus not through Hindu religiosity but through discourses and spectacles of communal violence (260).

Sarkar's opinion that temples have become sites for communal mobilization rings true in the twenty first century Kerala as there is a renewed political activity surrounding temples. Rahul Easwar is a prominent spokesperson of Hindutva in Kerala who suddenly rose to a celebrity status with his appearances on national and local television channels vouching for Hindutva. He gives an outward show of talking logically and statistically in addition to denouncing extremist Hindu positions. In one of his speeches he dwells on the importance of temples in the context of Kerala. Addressing an audience mainly consisting of children, he drives down the relevance of temples in the life of a person by comparing it to energy drinks. Following Swami Vivekananda's idea that *Jnanayoga* or the pursuit of Knowledge must be given predominance in the culture he makes a puerile

comparison of *Bhakthi yoga* to milk, *Karma yoga* to sugar and *Jnanayoga* to “Boost” and *Dhyana /Raja Yoga* as the art of drinking. According to him, in Kerala 25% of the population is Muslim, 19% Christian and 55% Hindus. Taking the toll of suicides committed by Malayalis one sees that while 8% are Muslims, 12% are Christians and 80% are Hindus. He argues that this alarming rate of 'Hindu' suicide is primarily due to three reasons: lack of spiritual education, social disintegration, economic insufficiency. Eswar, asserts that the children of Muslims and Christians are better equipped to meet the challenges of life since they are given spiritual education in Madrasas and Churches while the Hindu children do not have any kind of spiritual training. He claims a lot of scholars and social scientists attest to this fact. This is where, he says, our temples should function and revive itself as centres of rituals as well as knowledge ("Rahul" 0:01:20-0:20:24).

In a book titled *A Philosophical Investigation of Rape*, Louis Du Toit speaks about the "impossibility of rape" within the dominant Western symbolic order. She argues:

The symbolic order denies the full subject status of women to start with and therefore cannot account for rape as rape, that is, as the symbolic destruction of female subject hood. When the actual rape thus dichotomizes, or drives a wedge between female embodiment (sexuality) and female subject hood (selfhood), placing them in a destructive opposition, this cannot easily appear as the essential damage of rape it is because in a sense the whole symbolic order endorses and perpetuates that dichotomization anyway. (6)



I would like to extend Du Toit's argument to the analysis of such hate speeches in that the symbolic violence perpetuated by the speaker in such instances is only the tip of the systemic, violent iceberg that lies entrenched in the society. No wonder, these speeches continue to circulate in the society despite the obvious falsifiability of the claims of the speaker. These speeches, at the superficial level may seem like symbolic violence, an act of sheer domination and criminalizing of another. But it goes beyond and points to the systemic violence that has for centuries perpetuated inequality through various channels. Thus what happens in the course of such a speech act is an outcry and violent protest directed against the person per se thus keeping the systemic violence hidden and safe as the ire of the community is directed against a single subject. Hence the hatred that exudes through these orators is not an individual idiosyncrasy but points to the inherent and persistent violence of the system which refuses to change on account of the power relations in the society. As Slavoj Zizek notes 'Subjective violence' has an agent, it is visible, physical violence inflicted on the victim. 'Objective violence', on the other hand, falls into two categories, viz., symbolic violence and systemic violence. Symbolic violence is the violence inherent in language itself, which doles out varieties of discrimination and exclusion. Systemic violence is the violence perpetuated by the social, political and economic systems which creates different types of hierarchy excluding a group of people from their right to earn and live a normal life (*Violence*).

The inhuman treatment that is exhorted by these discourses presupposes an entirely different moral framework and perspective as these "others" never fall within the ambit of being "human". As the conceptual metaphor of the conspiratorial

enemy which threatens the existence of the self through “proliferation” which runs through all these discourses suggest, they produce "fear" in the self and posit the other as potential threats to one's existence. Religion provides such frameworks for the believer and thus the Hindu philosophy of "*Sarvam Khalidam Brahma*" ("Everything is Brahma"), "*Vasudeva Kudumbakam*" ("The whole world is one family") or "*Tatvamasi*" ("I am that") is made to conveniently embrace the self and its kin into its fold and posit others as animals not worthy of attention. War metaphors are found in abundance in these discourses as the Hindu war is always a "*dharma yudha*", the conflict between the binaries of '*dharma*' (just) and '*adhama*' (unjust) as exemplified by Mahabharatha.

#### **4. The Rhetoric of insurrection and liberation: The Dalit and Adivasi Cause**

Drawing on J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts, Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* explicates the semantics of hate speech and notes that the injurious word while harming the object also enables a possibility of speech act as an insurrectionary act (160). She also argues "...that hate speech calls into question linguistic survival, that being called a name can be the site of injury, and conclude by noting that this name-calling may be the initiating moment of a counter-mobilization"(163). The contradictions, notwithstanding, Dalit theology emerging in the 1980's, can be seen as such a site of counter-mobilization. Balmurli Natrajan notes:

...although merely converting one's religion does not automatically bring about the social, political, or economic changes needed by Dalits, religion still provides a much needed "depth experience" that

offers a "therapeutic dimension" to the other, more materialistic, aspects of liberation. (322)

The enterprise of Dalit theology has been oriented in two directions: one, discarding Hinduism the Ambedkarite way by embracing Islam, Christianity and Buddhism and another, retaining Hinduism by subverting the casteist element in it. A historical instance of the latter would be the growth of the Bhakthi movement in India. Studies on the two prominent methods of devotion extolled by Hinduism; the *Jnana marga* (the way of knowledge) and the *Bhakthi marga* (the way of devotion), says the story of another political negotiation. Hierarchically, the *Jnana marga* is often claimed as the higher of the two, knowledge being the privilege of the upper class and devotion of the lower class. The *Bhagavata* is a celebration of the life between a *bhaktha* (devotee) and *Bhagwan* (Lord) in many planes. From a strictly physical/material level to the level of salvation ending in *Paramananda* (eternal bliss) it runs its course and marks a change from *Jnana marga* to *Bhakthi marga*. In this vein, this 'marga' tries to encompass a mass of people who were hitherto removed from the Vedic inscriptions due to two unsolvable hindrances of Indian life: gender and caste. By redefining spiritual experience in terms of the erotic mystical experience symbolized ultimately by "*Rasaleela*" (physical union and play) between Krishna and the Gopikas, the *Bhagavatas* ushered in a new consolation to these groups and carried forward the task of Vaishnavism in India, at the same time threatening the Vedic supremacy in soteriology in both content and in form. This happened during the last half of the last millennium B.C., elevating a local deity into a pan-Indian deity. In this context Hansen remarks, "The cults of three local deities the Vasudeva-

Vrishni kulajatha, the Yadava Krishna, the tribal God of Abhiras and the cult of Narayana fuse with the form of Vishnu spreading Vaishnavism all over India" (6).

The call for conversion is the continuation of a politics that unravelled with a single instance of the history of a speech, one which could never be delivered, thanks to the efforts of the "casteist" authorities concerned in pre-empting it, one, which though unspoken, remained the best rhetoric ever, to strike at the roots of the hypocrisy behind Hinduism for years to come. This was B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, something that defied the conventions and demands of a speech act, something that accomplished its political goal persuasively, precisely because it was not performed and thus became too lethal a weapon to be destroyed and is now revived by the Dalit movements as a beacon of hope. Gandhi had proclaimed once:

The vast organization of caste answered not only the religious wants of the community, but it answered to its political needs. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the caste system, and through it they dealt with any oppression from the ruling power or powers. It is not possible to deny of a nation that was capable of producing from the caste system its wonderful power of organization. One had but to attend the great Kumbh Mela at Hardwar last year to know how skilful that organization must have been which, without any seeming effort, was able effectively to cater for more than a billion pilgrims. Yet, it is the fashion to say that we lack organizing ability. This is

true, I fear, to a certain extent, of those who have been nurtured in the new traditions. (*Speeches* 336)

In a country in which its 'Father of the Nation' believed in and validated caste as a necessary social categorization for the good of India, the revolutionary attempt to forge a pragmatic rhetoric in defence of a casteless society happened in the case of Bhim Rao Ambedkar who proclaimed rhetorically after announcing his conversion to Buddhism, "By discarding my ancient religion which stood for inequality and oppression today I am reborn" (Keer 500). Ambedkar continued to use his rhetorical activity for reorienting the society, an audience consisting of revolutionaries, untouchables and illiterates, through his speeches, articles and books.

After a series of civil and political battles, including a variety of protests for temple entry by the untouchable classes, Ambedkar's rhetoric began to change in the mid-1930s from one advocating political reforms to one focusing on the reconstruction of religious orientations in his audiences. Even though he continued to agitate for political reforms throughout his whole life, Ambedkar began deploying a pragmatist rhetoric that sought social change through religious reorientation. (Stroud 16)

The print copy of the speech "Annihilation of Caste" which was intended to be presented before a conference of high-caste Hindu reformers to elicit their support for the dalit cause was released in May 1936. Around the same time he also delivered a speech at Dadar, Bombay "What Way Emancipation?" to an audience of untouchables. "Both of these speeches serve as rhetorical attempts to push his

program of democratic conversion to two distinct audiences—an audience of higher-caste reformers that could be persuaded to help lower-caste individuals, and another audience of untouchables that could be convinced to help themselves"(Stroud 17). In this speech he elaborated convincingly, why the caste-ism in Hindu religion is stronger and venomous than in other religions like Islam or Christianity. He argued that the caste system has

... the foundation of the Hindu religion. The caste of the Muslim and Christian religions has no sanction in their religion. If the Hindus proclaim to disband the caste system, their religion will come in their way. On the other hand, if the Muslims and Christians start movements for abolishing the caste system in their society, their religion will not obstruct this. (*Riddles* 31)

He further elaborated on how there was a glaring gap between the ideals of 'Brahmaism' which could function as the foundation of democracy and the oppressive 'Brahminism' which perpetuated the heinous hierarchy (172). Vedanta was being used to popularise one particular world view as the ultimate world view. This world view, talked of dreaming about a conflict-free Bharat where all sects act according to the "pravriti" or action that has come down to them by virtue of his birth. Accordingly, no one is to be blamed for what one suffers because one is responsible for one's actions, endorsed by the concept of "*karmaphala*" (the fruit of one's actions). The exposing of contradictions within the system as done by the recent Marxist thinkers is never a problem for the Vedanta followers as they try to assimilate and appropriate everything within their ambit. From the so called

subaltern gods to the Brahminic gods, Hinduism readily appropriates and makes it a part of itself. In this respect, Sumanta Banerjee recalls Abanindranath Tagore who in 1940's came up with the theory that the Hindu theologians first tried to impose the Vedic gods and their grand ceremonial style of worshipping on the indigenous population, "by crushing the freedom and spontaneity of their efforts and thoughts. Later, these theologians accepted some of their deities and rituals, but transformed them in a way as to pass them off as scriptural in order to preach the greatness of Hindu divinities" (Banerjee 5). Therefore, Ambedkar was sure that there was no scope for ousting casteism by remaining as a Hindu.

Thus Ambedkar's rhetoric could be seen an example of how rhetoric functioned as a revolutionary force and towered over the religious rhetrickery that has been reigning in India since ages. We also see historically the conversion of large groups of Dalit Hindus into Christian and Muslim religions, discarding the caste-ist Hinduism in search of more visibility and equality in social spaces. Peniel Rajkumar in talking about Dalit Christology notes the emergence of four thematic templates that promotes dalit resistance against caste discrimination: "touch as subverting uncleanness codes of purity and pollution; faith as initiative toward wholeness rather than passive acceptance of status quo; conflict and confrontation as pedagogical objects in healing narrations; and compassion as binding both healed and healer into an inclusive community of wholeness"(Clarke, "Review" 2).

Nevertheless, seventy seven years after this, the caste scenario in India has not changed much. On 24 June 2013, four Dalit priests of Tamilnadu wrote to Pope Francis to enquire into the exclusion faced by the Dalit Christians inside Indian

churches. Providing statistics regarding the discrimination shown to dalits in priestly matters, Fr. Lourduswamy of Vellore Diocese in Tamilnadu said that the Dalit Christians in India are "getting disillusioned and getting ready for an exodus" (Mondal). The Dalit Christians in India were constantly shuttling between their local Dalit and Christian identities, to find meaning in their communal and individual life on account of different aspects impinging on their immediate existence such as economy, education and career. Thus they continue to "think as 'dalits' into which the Christian identity must fit. Both identities are essentially determined by religious categories: the Brahminical Hindu system and the religion of the Christian missionaries, yet it appears that the former identity dominates"(Jeremiah).

Talking of a similar situation in the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century Kerala, Sanal P. Mohan in his thesis argues how a Protestant World view offered by the CMS Christian Missionary through "the word" redefined the social selves of the Paraya and Pulaya slave castes in Kerala through conversion to Christianity and through education. The notion of sin and repentance and the redemption epitomised by the suffering Jesus were introduced among the slaves exhorting them to rise against the oppression and to lead a decent Christian life. However, the contradictions inherent in the system exemplified that the caste would not wear easily off their skin, as they faced discrimination from the Syrian Christians, the context which led Poykayil Yohananan, to form PRDS (Pratyksha Raksha Daiva Sabha) in 1910 at Thiruvalla. One of the foremost things Yohannan did was the reclamation of the slave history through ritual speeches linking it to the



Old Testament and the history of persecution of the Jewish tribes (*Searching* 365).

Mohan notes:

...the articulated notion of history became the ideological base on which communities got constituted. Representations of history became important in the formation of the “communitas” because a regular ritual rendering of anything is important in discourses and prayers, everyday rituals and practices of the movement. (361)

In Kerala, the course of dalit movements has gone through various stages after the social reform movement for claiming social space and freedom of movement for the lower castes initiated by Ayyankali, Pambady John Joseph and Poykayil Appachan. After 1940's it took the form of Harijan Welfare movements where the dalits were seen as consumers of governmental aids. Later the dalit cause was taken up by Indian Dalit Federation led by Kallara Sukumaran and Paul Chirakkodu which was essentially anti-Hindu in nature. The "Guruvayur padayathra" led by Kallara Sukumaran was one such movement. As Rekha Raj notes, more than the issue of devotion it was a democratic move to ensure that all people were recognized equally before a temple. He was also part of many protests led by Dalit Christians and made it a main agenda of the Indian Dalit federation (*Dalit* 52). However there was a relapse thereon. But the resurgence of the Dalit land struggle by the Muthanga and the Chengara protests saw a new dalit ethos in the latter part of twentieth century characterised by asserting the dalit self as producers having the right to cultivate and produce in land. Selena Prakkanam, one of the strong Dalit women leaders to emerge in recent times, in her autobiography, *Chengara Samaravum Ente*

*Jeevithavum*, recalls a speech by the leader Laha Gopalan which helped form a group identity and worked as a cohesive force among the dalits (29). At the same time she also exposes the failure of such mass rhetoric in sustaining the momentum of the struggle and opines that they had to go to individual houses and speak personally to the dalits to inspire them to join the dalit cause for land (42).

In a similar vein, the Adivasi leader C. K. Janu hailed by many as an organic leader to emerge from the tribal struggle for productive land, talks about the rhetoric of the party leaders in her autobiography. In a paper on life writing, P.P Raveendran notes down Janu's dilemma:

she says that those speeches were couched in a language that the tribal found difficult to understand. "They were full of strange words with hidden traps," she says. She is also aware of the infiltration of words from the mainstream culture into the language of the tribal and "the rotten new spoken language" that the children of her community use today as a result of cultural assimilation. Appearance of the term "civil society" in her vocabulary can be regarded as an instance of the way in which Janu herself has started assimilating the mainstream culture. Perhaps she does not care to remember that by positing civil society as the dominating other of the tribal communities; Janu's language also betrays her into the suggestion that the tribal society is an uncivil society. (195)

In another narration of similar troubles within the Chengara movement, Prakkanam remembers how the leadership was resolved to keep the news of in-house fights

among a trusted few. Only these people had the permission to talk in public or hold press meets. Thus there was a group which strategically hid the truths about the struggle. Nonetheless, after a period these fissures could not be effectively hidden and that was strategically employed and portrayed as the failure of the struggle by the majoritarian groups in an effort to put it down. The leaders of the groups and the spokespersons also abandoned the movement at different times. However, the suppression of these struggles by the Government and media and the consequent othering of such resistance movements, for instance, the depiction of DHRM (Dalit Human Rights Movement) as terrorist outfits have instilled a sense of paranoia among them. Nevertheless, one can see the revival of the spirit of dalit protest sparked off by the events after the death of Rohit Vemula in Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. A new and vibrant dalit intellectual agitation has been effected all across the country claiming political space and bringing back the figure of Ambedkar as the visionary who can be the guiding light in changing the caste trap of India.

In the political sphere of Kerala, as the dominant Hindutva agenda tries to assimilate the dalits into their cadre in vote bank politics, we see the emergence of distinct dalit voices with political organizations like KPMS (Kerala Pulaya Mahasabha) claiming visibility in public places and new efforts of organizations like DHRM to form political alliances asserting themselves as political resources. Two leaders worth mentioning in this regard are Punnala Sreekumar and Selena Prakkanam. The idolization of Ayyankali as the superhero of Dalits is common to both. While acknowledging the differences within the systems one can observe that

leaders like Punnala Sreekumar makes use of the language and tone of the dominant discourses types. In one of his speeches performed against the backdrop of Ayyankali's painting, he raves at the rebels within KPMS and the betrayal by Communists, claims that Pulayas were the "leaders" in the struggle against 'savarna' casteism and calls his followers the "Punnala faction" ("kpms" 0:03:32-0:07:55). The figure of Ayyankali as the reformer without any religious affiliations has been at the centre of all Dalit political discourses. Speaking about the paradox of conversion, Prakkanam had earlier claimed that there was irresolvable enmity, fear and lack of trust between Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians (*Chengara* 39). Notwithstanding, in the course of Chengara land struggle, she recounts the spiritual union effected among the protestors through a prayer to the "human" gods of Dalit liberation, Ayyankali, Buddha and Ambedkar (55). In 2016, the leader of the Chengara movement, Laha Gopalan who described himself as a "patriarchal " leader ended his relationship with the struggle, accepted the defeat of the struggle and accused his lot of destroying themselves through their addiction to "madyam and pennu" (liquor and women) ("Turning" 0:08:35-40). The crack was also from within owing to the despotic, fascist tendencies alleged on Gopalan consequently paving the way for group-ism within the movement. The purport of many new dalit organizations like DHRM has been to awaken the youth of the dangers of alcoholism and the need for a strict, disciplined life.

The dominant forces, nevertheless, have put parties like DHRM into catch-22 situations by implicating them in political murders and branding them as "terrorists". A recent example is the Varkala murder case in Kerala where the

DHRM members were implicated. J. Devika observes how media had branded them as 'Dalit terror' and 'Black Shirts', though evidences against them were almost nil ("Contemporary" 11). The Dalit voices consequently, are put into a situation where they have to foreground discourses to defend themselves and prove their innocence in the face of the criminal charges levelled against them by the establishment. Thus counter discourses of liberation, equality and the struggle for productive land take a back seat in this process. One of the ways in which they try to overcome this is by narrating the tales of suffering at the hands of the police.

They also destabilise given caste identities, referring to members of the pulaya or kurava caste not with the usual pulayanmar (the pulayas) or kuravanmar (the kuravas), but as pulayaraakkappettavar ('those who have been made pulayas') and kuravaraakkappettavar ('those who have been made kuravas'). (12)

The organization also tries to move towards adopting Buddhism, thereby breaking away from the oppressive Hinduism and discriminatory Christianity. "The DHRM, ironically, appears to be a movement that aims not just to raise an identity but to shape precisely a 'deep self', a new subjectivity through an array of new practices" (12). New rituals of marriage and prayers are implemented. For instance, their marriage is "cheral" (union) and is done in a ritualistic ceremony before the idol of Buddha. The attempt to bring back Buddhism as a spiritual and cohesive force is taken up by the politically-oriented DHRM group. Thus they resort to Buddhism as a refuge for spirituality unlike Hinduism which has superficial claims to an abstract

spirituality and oneness. This is surely a new trend in the Dalit movement inside Kerala and quite productive for the cause as attested by Rekha Raj.

Religion, faith and spirituality were never part of earlier dalit conceptualizations. Ethical life or concept of life was discussed in a language of rationality and materialism or in a language of secularism. Secularist concerns of dalit discourses gets automatically linked to Hinduism - which never gave spaces for those who have a religious or spiritual life and a politics based on theological or spiritual/ religious understanding was not allowed entry to such discourses. These three positions on religion have raised new kind of arguments within dalit discourses which existing frameworks failed to address. Thus, these discourses, in effect broadened dalit discourses in an important way. (*Politics* 141)

Alternately, many Dalit thinkers like Salim Kumar also dismiss the conversion effort as ineffective in achieving a long term goal for the dalit cause. They argue that religious conversion as a solution to the problem of casteism has been tried and tested and found as a failure even by people like Buddha and Ambedkar( "Dalit Movement"). The conversion and social mobility of the lower castes of Kerala had ambivalent results.

Thus the conversion becomes an 'unfinished project' of the political as well as cultural desire of slave community concerned as observed by T.M. Yesudasan. Other subaltern intellectuals agree with this observation. The choice of conversion gave untouchable bahujans at

least a temporary way out of caste hegemony, though it constructed new hierarchies in more paradoxical reality formations within promised spaces of Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. (*Politics* 93)

DHRM has also invited criticisms from some quarters for valorising Ayyankali as the “*yajamanan*” (Master) projecting, inadvertently thereby the master-slave binary from which the Dalits try to liberate themselves. Idealizing DHRM as the raising of Dalit consciousness, according to the Dalit thinker Sunny Kapikad makes us forget the role of the dalits from the time of reformation. He also castigates DHRM for allowing Kerala Congress leader P. C. George to be its chief patron (“DHRM and civil”). However, it is too early to judge the consequences as it is one of the polyphonic attempts towards forging a new dalit rhetoric of liberation. The failure of the Congress and Communist parties in Kerala to address the tribal and dalit issues has also forged many political alliances of organizations like KPMS and the Janu group with the right wing Hindutva forces eliciting disappointment from various circles.

The Dalit discourses in Kerala too have been oriented towards the denial and subversion of dominant myths and the reinvention of certain myths that expose the injustice inherent in the same. "A distinctive feature of this is a rejection of violence-prone Gods of Hinduism who serve Dharma and Christian notions of God who lauds it over creation to bring about subjection. A non-dalit deity cannot be the God of Dalits" (Clarke 25). Thus the festival of Onam in Kerala is reinterpreted in terms of the benevolent "rakshas raja" Mahabali and the ideological narrative behind Onam is exposed. Reminiscent of the language of dalit politics in the Indian Hindi belt,

especially the use of dalit myths by BSP to create group identity and political affiliation, myths are used "a source and vehicle of stories to evoke peoples' memories which provide space for political forces to intervene in it and re interpret them in ways which would suit their political ends" (Narayan 18). Thus in dalit discourses, there is a reversal of the roles of the erstwhile heroes and villains, Ravana gaining a moral upperhand over Rama, Mahabali over Vamana, The Asuras over Devas, the Anaryans over Aryans.

In Kerala, another instance of the dalit assimilation into the Hinduism fold happened when dalits and people belonging to the non -Brahmin community were appointed as priests in various temples. In October 2010, the Travancore Devasom Board appointed thirty six such priests which included six dalits. This had ambivalent results for the politics of Kerala. Interestingly, there was support from the RSS on the one hand as well as attacks against the priests on the other. As O. B. Roopesh claims in his article, "This move is aimed at the formation of a cohesive "Hindu community" through the reconfiguration of caste practices, not the eradication of caste". This is intended to attest the superiority of the Brahmin system, sustain the caste practices and any form of dalit religious movement other than secularism will be appropriated and assimilated into the Hindu fold. One ample example of this attempt would be the propaganda of RSS leader Mohan Bhagvat on the RSS foundation day at Nagpur when he posited the Muslim population as responsible for propagating the caste hierarchy in India (Adat, *Matham* 44). Raghu notes that one of the foremost principles of Indian spirituality has been to relegate "thinking" to "feeling". The Hindu structural fold does not permit any counter



revolution as opposed to the European feudal structure because in place of force it uses spiritual persuasion to maintain graded inequality which remains invisible and non-tangible. Therefore, even after years of constitutional and political reforms, the practice of caste has not been effectively toppled (19-20).

The only Dalit female to rise to the position of a globally accepted spiritual leader is Mata Amrithanandamayi popularly known as "Amma". The speeches of this "hugging saint" abound in analogies and stories. She makes use of simple anecdotes analogous to Aesop's fables regarding the need for love and compassion, converses in simple Malayalam and does not rely on Sanskrit slokas. Her spiritual world is more composed of 'bhajans' and the hugging and kissing of her devotees in line with her image as the divine mother. Commenting on how this dalit woman from a coastal area named Sudhamani transformed herself into the "hugging" saint of Kerala, with devotees the world over who took refuge in her as a mother, Raghu says that it was precisely her lack of education or oratory that made her depend on 'bhajans' and 'embrace' as tools of her ecumenical spirituality which later flourished into a "spiritual entrepreneurship"(253).

What demarcates the dalit rhetoric from the rest especially from the 2000s is the shift from the discourse of an essential dalit identity so characteristic of the seventies and eighties to a multi layered, dialogic interaction which cuts across ethnicity, sexuality, caste, region, politics, religion and even means of material production. Equally striking is the epistemic and fluidic nature of such rhetoric which recognizes itself as part of a continuum and foregrounds the history of a community which offers a counter challenge to the dominant rhetoric as well as

paves the way for not just a community centred revolution but a thorough structural change in the society as well. It also denotes a move away from leader-oriented politics to a politics and a revolution which posits a collective and productive living as evidenced by the Arippa land struggle which began on 31 December 2012. From Muthanga to Arippa one sees a distinct evolution of the Dalit ethos. Gee Varghese Mar Corilos sums it up thus:

To become a theology of future, Dalit theology has to take an intertextual course of poetic imagination, where depositum fidei like Chengara had to be read in juxtaposition with biblical narratives as well as other inspirational memories, symbols and rituals of Buddhism ,and the narratives and legends of Dr. Ambedkar, Ayyankali and others. It is in texts like these at Chengara that Dalit theology has to search for new raw materials for re-envisioning its theological methodology and content because, it is in that we confront the embodied logos-Jesus Christ-who has pitched his tent among the masses. (176)

##### **5. The Others within Islam: the Ulema and Activist rhetoric**

The origin of *Khutuba* (pulpit address) is believed to be in the practice of Prophet Muhammad who exhorted, instructed and inspired people from the courtyard of his house at Medina to follow Islamic values. Earlier preachers used to deliver sermons in the name of the ruler, a practice which has been discontinued, yet it exposes the deep rooted relationship between the religious and the political authority to legitimize their powers and

... helps to account for the shape of controversies in many Islamic lands, where governments may variously, through financial subsidies or censorship, seek control over preachers, while some who contest this assertion in the name of reform or resistance may resort to sermons as effective vehicles for opinion formation and mobilization.

*(Encyclopaedia 395)*

This control over preachers is still exemplified by the ban on the speeches of the controversial Islamic speaker Zakir Naik at the national level and the charges against M. M. Akbar in Kerala and is still an issue of debate as to the extent to which freedom of expression can be granted in religious context. When at one level, propagation of religion is a constitutional right in a secular country like India; the blurring of boundaries between religious speech and hate speech could be a concern for the State and hence have ambivalent results for democracy.

The question of Islam as a political system has been of special interest all over the world especially since the Iranian revolution of 1979. With the evolution of Islamist movements like Salafism and Wahabism in the Middle East and its spread to different parts of the world, the rise of terrorism as a practical corollary to the Islamic fundamentalist principles, the concern of the Islamic State and its attendant paranoia in the Western world, the issue of political Islam has been debated fervently across the academic and political circles. Shadi Hamid argues for the uniqueness of Islam in his book *Islamic Exceptionalism* and finds the roots of Islamist movements in Middle East as an attempt to reconcile the pre-modern Islamic law with the modern nation state. He claims that the Muslims the world over

can never escape from the fact that Islam will continue to be resistant towards secularization because as the founding moment of Islam shows there is an intertwining of religion and politics in the very persona of Prophet Mohammed. Similarly, echoing many others in a sympathetic and non-Western understanding of Islam, Graham E. Fuller asserts "political Islam is not an exotic and distant phenomenon, but one intimately linked to contemporary political, social, economic and moral issues of near universal concern"(xii).

As opposed to the bifurcation of State and Church in the Western world at a particular point in history, Islam has always talked of the impossibility of the divorce between the idea of personal salvation and political justice. When the classical Western, Christian civilization looked upon Government as a man-made institution to punish and remedy the original sin of the body politic, Islam has visualised political authority as divine good operating for the sake of the good of the people. The Islamic concepts like "Umma" and "Caliph" signify that the obedience of the ruler to Allah is central to the governing process. The ruled is under no obligation to the ruler if he is a transgressor against Allah (Lewis 70).

Jonathan Berkey comments on the political nature of *khutabas* even during the times of Prophet Muhammad as he notes that "the political function of *khutuba* as a public acknowledgement of a ruler's authority was one of the standard features of medieval Islamic polities of all stripes"(13). Further, he observes that the contention between Sufism and formal mode of Islam is an age-old issue even in the societies of the medieval Islamic Near East. He notes:

The normative distinction between that which was *sunna*, meaning accepted practice associated with the Prophet and his companions, and that which was *bid'a*, illegitimate innovation, was an old one in Islamic discourse, but some traditionalist scholars addressed it with particular ferocity in the Middle Period and sought to use it to construct defences against certain religious practices of which they disapproved—including that of popular preaching and storytelling.

This resentment of the Ulama and concomitant fight against such popular practices paved the way for "control over a religious tradition that, lacking formal institutions and mechanisms of authority, was inherently vibrant and polymorphous" (94). Earlier, there were four different types of preachers: the '*khatib*', the '*waiz*' (preacher who admonishes or warns), the '*qass*' (story teller) and the '*qari al kursi*' (one who reads from the chair). These categories usually overlap in such discourses. This blending of once different categories was the structural change that happened to preaching, based on its need to give religious instruction to lay men who were professionally engaged in different activities and were a class distinct from the Islamic scholars, the elite ulama who had direct access to Quran discourses and its language.

There are many versions regarding the spread of Islam in Kerala. One of the most prominent ones is that Islam reached Kerala with the onslaught of Arab-Muslim trade which flourished along the Kerala coast propagating Islam, the religion of peace and equality. It showed a different way to God and an afterlife and more importantly, a present life deprived of the ill effects of 'Casteism', the bane of

the Hindus. Owing to the social and political repercussions of the century with the arrival of Portuguese who were antagonistic to the Muslim community, the rise and fall of Tipu Sultan and the disastrous effects caused by the British injunctions, Islam in Kerala travelled through ups and downs finally ending up as a community with lots of confusions regarding its practices and status in Kerala. As Muslims in Kerala began to come to terms with their social degradation, it is said, they organized themselves for a communal identity, through stringently adhering to the norms and conventions of Islam and moved away from the mainstream life by eschewing even English education. Thus, scholars argue that a reform movement within Islam (Islahi movement) became indispensable and consequently paved the way for the influential entry of *Mujaddids*, scholars like Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), Sayyid Sana Ulla Makhthi Tangal (1847-1912), Sheik Hamadani Thangal, Vakkom Moulavi (1873-1932) etc. These scholars are said to have liberated Islam from the many polytheistic practices that had crept into Islam, advocated education for both men and women and helped the entry of the community into the political affairs of the state, urged the Government to take measures for the empowerment of the Muslim community at large.

In Kerala, besides small groups like *Tablighi Jamaat* and *Ahmadiyya*, there are three major groups with the *Sufi/Sunni* sect comprising a majority of the Kerala Muslim population and the rest consisting of the *Mujahid* and the *Jamaat e Islami* groups. While the Sunni group has unstinted support in the village areas, the Islamist groups have stronger holds in the urban areas, claims Abdelhalim (144). The bone of contention in the case of all these sects are certain ideological standpoints which are

reiterated throughout the discourses put forward by them. The questions include: Who is the true believer of Allah? Who among them adheres steadfastly to the principles of Islam? What are the foundational texts? How does it preserve its identity through particular ways of leading a religious life and how does it approach the other religious tenets inside and outside? How far can one deviate from the prescriptions of Allah and what is the "pay" for adhering to the tenets? As Fuller argues,

Once an Islamist movement emerges onto the political scene, it faces an immediate ideological problem: if the group claims a comprehensive vision of Islam, logically it must claim a monopoly on the correct understanding of Islam and is the bearer of truth. Relating to other Islamist organizations thus becomes problematic. (124-25)

It has also created problems of identification with a particular Islamic ideology for the individual believers. However, this has also led to pluralistic views on Islam.

Talking about the ideological diversities in Islam in Kerala, among sects like Sunnis, the Mujahids and the Jamaat e Islami, including matters of politics, the concept of mediation (*Istigatha*), the mode and collection of *Zakat*, burial services etc. one of the first splits within the traditional Sunni Ulama was based on the validity of using loudspeaker for Friday *Khutuba*. The sects also differed on the issue of using vernacular for Friday *Khutuba*. When the Sunnis believed in safeguarding the purity of Prophet's words by conducting the sermon in Arabic, the reformists insisted that except for the *Farz* (prayer), the sermon must be done in the

vernacular so that common people would understand the ideals properly and apply it in their life as elicited in the Holy Quran (Samad 162). Although vociferously denounced by the Sunni faction, Samad is of the view that

The pulpit of many mosques, which were either newly established by the Mujahids and the Islamists or taken over by them, was properly used for enlightening Muslims. The exhortations given in the vernacular, through the *Khutuba*, benefitted the participants a great deal to enrich their knowledge. The impact of the change in the medium of *Khutuba* was so immense that it forced the Imams of mosques under the control of Sunni organizations to adopt a speech in vernacular either before or after the customary *Khutuba* to satisfy popular enthusiasm. (177)

As we peruse the Islamic history, the assumption that the Islam that spread in Kerala owed more to Sufi strain than to any other sect of Islam gets stronger. However, Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella argue that "since the century, South Asian Islam at large has been moulded by various strands of reformism, and that actually Sufism and reformism are not polarised categories to be pitted against each other (although normally appear to be so from ulama and activist rhetoric)"(*Islamic* 140). Further, R. Santosh argues for a non-essentialist perception of Islam in Kerala as one observes the sectarian differences within Islam, political affiliations and nuances of ideological irreconcilability among different groups like EK Sunni, AP Sunni, Mujahid, *Madavoor Mujahid*, Jamat e Islami and the like. Thus a strict categorization of Islamic identities as orthodox and reformists or scriptural and lived



Islam is not possible in the context of Kerala. He further draws a parallel between Hindu reformation at the hands of people like Sri Narayana Guru, Chattampi Swamikal and Ayyankali with the Islamic encounter with modernity and its struggle to redefine itself according to the demands of modernity was also a readjustment with the Islamic contestations within Islam ("Contextualising").

Closely linked to the political bend of Islam is the idea of *Jihad*, a word which has sent tremors across the Western world. *Jihad*, originally meant the concept of the legitimate, regulated and obligatory war against the enemies of Islam, believed to be of four kinds: the unbeliever, the bandit, the rebel and the apostate. Thus, ideally, Islam divides the world into two: the House of Islam and the House of War (the rest of the world) and an Islamist can never rest until the whole of the world is turned into the former, an ideal Islamic world. In this regard, Fuller discusses the political options available to the Islamist in a democratic set up: "*da'wa* (literally a "call"), missionary, preaching, or propaganda work among the Muslim population; the building of Islam-oriented civil institutions, organizations, or NGOs; the establishment of formal political movements; the founding of political parties" (122). Among these, *da'wa*, functions as a proselytizing force establishing Islamism gradually from "below" rather than from "above" through power or violent means and

... maintains the movement as a moral force, a debating platform, and a voice of conscience, a force in civil society, a lobby, but one always keeping to the message and eschewing tactical manoeuvring in transitory political situations. This approach also has the virtue of

avoiding direct confrontation with the state since the challenge is only indirect and long term. (123)

In Kerala, drawing from its international and national counterparts, Tablighi Jamaat, is one such organization considered to be apolitical and exclusively spiritual, which continues with the above mentioned mission by interpreting the idea of Jihad in Islam as internal, slow and unforced change among the masses. They use *Dawa* as a weapon of Jihad, as a means to proselytization. Among the various sects, this organization ensures the incomparability of persuasion as the basic obligation of the believer. Preaching is seen as a way to paradise as it is the obligation of every Muslim, both male and female, to propagate Islam by whatsoever humble means. This has decentralised the sermonizing from the pulpit and put forth itinerant preaching, strictly different from the "ulema" led speeches of the conventional Sunnath faction, in structure as well as in content. Although there are attacks from the orthodoxy doubting on the ability, the competence and knowledge base of an ordinary believer, this group prescribes a period of three nights, forty days and four months for the duty called *Dawa* and firmly goes by the principle that

Islam, with the *Sharia* at its heart, is an intensely ethical religion, and its moral imperatives drive Muslims both to self-improvement within the faith and to encouraging better "Islamic" behaviour among the coreligionists. The Quranic injunction to "command the good and forbid the evil" (*al-amr bi'l-ma'rufwa'l-nahy an al-munkar*) shoulders the believer with the obligation of implementing the religion's moral

concerns and, by implication, with the task of discerning what exactly those concerns are. (Berkey 5)

Nevertheless, the attack against this group comes from the Salafi faction who brands the *dawa* of Tablighi as the "storehouse of weak and false stories and hadiths" ("Tableeg" 0:10:52-59) and contends that it promotes "elastic Islam" (0:24:18-20), is "pure sufism" (0:24:48-50) and equates the tablighi group as performing the "jewish strategy of hiding truth with lies" (0:29:18-21).

The debates regarding the issue of 'political Islam' in Kerala are fuelled by the debates among the *Sunni*, Mujahid and the Jamaat e Islami. Let us take for instance, the divisions within the so called Mujahid movement in Kerala. Leaving the Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen group (KNM) and joining the majoritarian Sunni faction, Muhammad Rashid Moulavi speaks of the propaganda unleashed by his erstwhile organisation from 1920s onwards that Sunnis commit "*shirk*" (idolatry or polytheism). He dwells upon the fact that he himself, misled by the persuasion within Mujahids had propagated this false message for long. After realizing the mistakes in Salafism, he claims he has understood that the "reasoned argument" of the Mujahids is completely out of place in Islam. The sheer dependence of the Mujahids on Quran and *Hadiths* alone for interpretation of Islam is foolishness and unwarranted (Moulavi). The Sunnis on the other hand, believe in Quran, *Madhabi* texts and *Hadiths* for guidance. While appeal to authority of learned people is unquestionable in Sunni faction, the speaker claims that Mujahids put forward various interpretations based on their individual preferences. He also castigates the ways in which the Mujahid texts try to elaborate on Allah's soul, face and hands

which is blasphemy from the point of view of the orthodox community. He argues that it is not possible to interpret the world through just Quran and *Hadith* but they have to depend on *Ijma* (consensus of the Muslim scholars) and *Qiyas* (analogical judgement) for the right guidance. Mujahids, however, emphasise the importance of pulpit speeches in spreading Islam. Although they remain aloof from visible political alliances, Mujahids "cast their votes for the UDF alliance and refrain from voting for the Communist party, due to perceived ideological differences between Communism and Muslim identity" (Abdelhalim 149).

The Mujahid movement insists upon its commitment to *ijtihad* (reasoned argument) and to combat ignorance which, they argue, leads to the unacceptable faults of departure from monotheism, unwarranted alteration in modes of worship and blind following. "A defining trope in Mujahid historical narratives and current rhetoric is the struggle for education in the face of traditionalist opposition" (Osella, "Introduction" 326). However, critics claim that this rhetoric also reveal some of the contradictions or conflicts within.

While Mujahids proudly declare that, "Nowadays there are many Muslim women who are teachers, doctors and government employees" and while a picture of young purdah wearing girls learning to use computers invariably appears Mujahid publications, at the same time they stress that women's employment should not be actively encouraged. (326)

Jamaat e Islami Hind (JIH), Kerala, headed now by M.I. Abdul Aziz has always been criticized by orthodoxy for their double stands over major Quran principles and

practice. This organization also is lauded by various organizations for its progressive stand on many social issues. The discourses of JIH, more or less, are defences of accusation on two grounds. One, they preach the propagation of the unchanging "*Ibadat*" (worship) towards Allah, the sole creator and protector of the universe and two, they find no contradiction in changing the principles according to the needs of present time and context, emulating the prophets who have gone before. Thus emphasizing the true Islam as "neo-Islam" and a complete Islam which does not differentiate between personal and political, it projects Prophet Muhammad who corrected the wrongs of the dictatorial Pharaoh as their role model and advocates for a paradoxical "theo-democracy." Thus it works against the orthodox division of the personal and political as blind imitation of a misguided European Enlightenment principle (Thangal, "ജമാഅത്തെ ആദർശം" 0:54:10-47). The concept of "divine sovereign" put forward by JIH founder Maududi therefore is the guiding light of JIH's transactions.

JIH's involvement in Plachimada struggle in Kerala is likened to Prophet Mohammad's protest against the ownership of water by Pharaoh ("ജമാഅത്തെ"). The JIH, in turn, accuse the Sunni faction of not being able to read the metaphorical language of the Quran principles propagated by their founder. Maududi's controversial idea of "jihad" is misrepresented, they claim, as a call for violence. Similar is the case with terms which have put Maududi and his followers in shades of suspicion. Words like secularism, democracy and nationalism as exemplified by JIH gets newer meanings. The hackneyed criticisms levelled against JIH have also led its spokesmen to relegate their leader Maududi to the background upholding

Islam as their basic foundational principle. JIH also elicits criticisms from their circles for their supposed double stand in issues relating to women's freedom and morality.

The conceptual metaphor of being "paid" for the life on earth is consistently part of all types of Islamic discourses. It presupposes a master-slave/follower binary which is kept intact and unchanging. Rationality remains outside the purview of orthodox discourses. On the other hand, reasoned argument is popular within reformist language with all its contradictions. The sects within Islam face a dual challenge of showing unquestioned acceptance of Islam and Quran as its foundation as well as putting forth a "progressive face" which is at the same time pro-science and anti-western.

Islamic sermons in Kerala seemed to catch the limelight in the mainstream with the counter discourses put forth by Chekannur Moulavi during the 1980's and 90's who through his logical as well as humorous rendition of the faults within Islam and the orthodoxy of Sunnath Jamaat embraced the ire of various factions within Kerala Muslims. By challenging the infallibility of the hadiths, he tried to project through his reasoning, a logical Islam which aimed at the freedom of the soul from the age-old and time consuming rituals which leave no time for rumination or for constructive social involvement. Quran was the only foundational text for him and he exhorted men to "wage a holy jihad against the ulema's lies" ("chekannur 4" 0:00:00- 0:8:00). His style consisted of using rational means of persuasion, use of corrosive satire and pungent humour to laugh at the hypocrisies within Islamic practices. In the issue relating to use of *Parda*, he asked how a contextual advice by

the Prophet to his wives should be invariably and generally applied for all Muslim women regardless of space and time. Islam's only advice was to prevent objectification of women and not a curbing of their freedom to live ("Pardha" 0:00:09- 0:10:14). Chekannur's abduction in 1993 and his consequent martyrdom had stirred up a hornet's nest in the political and religious circles of Kerala but were eventually put to rest by strategic political interventions. His legacy is being upheld by the Quran Sunnath Society which tries to spread "logical" Islam among its followers.

Mujahids and Jamat e islami are often seen to be at loggerheads with each other. The ideological roots of the Jamaat e Islami, so the Mujahids proclaim, lie not in the Quran/Hadith but in the political debates in India during the 1930's. They accuse its leader Maududi of distorting the sermons of the prophets to conclude that the final objective of these were to establish Islamic rule all over the world through a political revolution. For this the Maududi followers, Mujahids claim, interpreted *Ilah, Rabb, Ibadat* and *Deen* in peculiar ways. All the rituals of Islam were equated with the training imparted to officials in government institutions, as a means to the end of an Islamic state. The Mujahids argue that even now, the Jamaat-e-Islami propagates that one of the greatest challenges to *Touhid* (Monotheism) is democracy as democracy is "*shirk*". They also accuse Jamaat e Islami of changing their stands, for instance, the stand regarding voting during the times of emergency had shifted; the same "*shirk*" had become "*halal*" (permissible).

The Sunni sect has a different story to tell. Some Muslims read Enlightenment as the root of all propaganda against Islam. The Sunnis, according to

them have challenged and resisted the imperialistic tendencies reigning in Kerala. They claim that the right reformation started from mosques where priests and moulavis conducted fifty to sixty days of Islamic discourses. They blame the Wahabis and the Jamaat e Islami of propagating the lie that these traditional scholars had no knowledge of Islam as a political and economic policy and argue that it is not possible to evaluate Islamic values using logic since its part of a capitalist agenda to create desire and fulfil the objective of consumerist culture. The role of science in viewing Islam empirically is also seen as a tool of European modernity. Accordingly, political Islam could not be made a pragmatic enterprise by organizations like Jamaat e Islami. The traditional *Samastha* argues that to escape from the tag of being called communalists the reformists had not even thought of resisting real fascist threats against Islam and had ignored them conveniently.

On one hand we have older, conventional, Sunni speakers like Kanthapuram A.P. Abubacker Musaliyar who had created a furore taking a stand against women's equality, by declaring women as 'capable' only of delivering children and nurturing them and that the stubborn stand that boy and girl should sit in one bench inside the classroom is a "hidden arrow" against Islamic culture and more importantly against Humanity ("Kanthapuram"). On the other, there are speakers like Abdul Samad Samadani who opines that women are honoured most in Islam and that new laws must be instituted for the same. Being part of Indian Union Muslim League, he takes a pro-secular stand and talks about the plurality of India, the significance of Vivekananda, Sree Narayana Guru etc. There are also defenders of the former who argue that despite some conventional stands adopted by Kanthapuram, he is the only



Islamic preacher in Kerala, worth mentioning who has successfully and consistently challenged and evaluated the negotiations between Islam and colonial modernity and national identity formation. In a speech titled "Political stand of Samastha" Kanthapuram reiterates the need for a secular government and claims there is nothing wrong in voting for a party which is beneficial to Sunnath Jamath, to Kerala and on the whole, to India (0:00:12-0:01:00).

One recent development in popular preaching is the emergence of debating platforms in Islamic circles. These debates are planned at three levels: one, debates with other religions, Hindu-Muslim or Muslim-Christian debates, with the former being more popular because of the rise of Hindutva forces asserting its religious identity more than ever. These are conducted by specific organizations belonging to both Sangh Parivar or Islamist or by secular organisations like Kerala Freethinkers forum and are overtly political in nature because they are fierce attacks on each other's religious beliefs and inevitably include cross questioning and ensure domination of one over the other. Two, in-house debates within Islamic order Sunni-Mujahid debate or Mujahid-Jamaat e Islami debate etc. which happens with a lot of enthusiasm from the followers. Both sides applaud, support, hoot and even get to their feet and these are videotaped and circulated widely across the internet and the social media with titles labelled as one group "destroyed " the other with the arguments. Three, debates as platforms for religious harmony overtly seen as symptoms of tolerance and understanding but covertly political in character, these debates are dismissed by the orthodox sections as "*shirk*". Mostly one sees the presence of speakers like M. M. Akbar and Mujahid Balussery as a frequent

presence in such stages. The war mongering religious groups however, seem to agree unanimously in cases of upholding patriarchal values, whether it be Sabarimala women's entry, Christian indictment against women wearing jeans or the Muslim mosque entry of women.

Talking about the Islamist reformation in Egypt in the nineteenth century Charles Hirschkind notes that, the creation of a national auditory and ethical listeners attuned to reason and faith was very significant for political reasons too (41). Thus *Khutaba* began to deliberately deviate from adopting topics instilling fear of death or coming of Anti-Christ to more political concerns aligned with the construction of nationhood and a modern public-sphere. Therefore, unlike earlier times when the *khatib's* performance depended on "required elements of sermon, weaving the common cultural stock of Quran verses, hadiths, invocatory phrases and stories in a way that demonstrated his competence in performing a traditional role" he had to assume the role of a "morally neutral art of rhetorical manipulation" (47) aimed at creating an Egyptian national. A similar happening in Kerala during the 1980's is the paradigm shift in the rhetoric of the conventional preachers who were challenged by the atheist movements in Kerala. Ironically, the conventional preachers who banked on stories from Quran and *Hadith* had to search for scientific terms and "insert" science into their discourses and defend the atheistic arguments.

Quite contrary to popular belief of Islam as a monolithic and unquestionable whole, Islamic discourses show a tradition of argumentation and debating unlike the Hindu discourses. It also reveals a plurality of practices among the diverse Muslim sects. While the Hindu discourse, traditionally, eschews and divorces the

materialistic life and debates on the philosophical conundrums, Islamic discourses because of its insistence of a complete way of life in day to day living elicit lots of questions and debates from the audience. Berkey concludes that by the middle period, due to various socio political changes including change in political authority, urbanization and spread of Islam to other countries, certain common structures and patterns of social relationship developed. The emergence of ulama as the chosen ones and the dominance of *Sharia* through them resulted in some attacks on the epistemological status of received religious knowledge, such as involving the alleged "closing of the gates of independent reasoning in Islamic jurisprudence (89-90). According to some traditional academics, by fourth or tenth century it was no longer possible for a scholar to exercise *ijthihad* (independent reasoning ) thus paving the way for a view of medieval Islam as stagnant. On the other hand, some see the debates surrounding *ijthihad* and *taqlid* (imitation of predecessors) as "competing hegemonies that stood in perpetual competition with each other." Further,

... it points to a stratum of medieval Islamic religious thought which understood the character of religious knowledge to be open, flexible, and vibrant and also in that it suggests an effort on the part of the ulema to limit the range of permissible thought as well as the community of scholars privileged to participate in the process of shaping Islam. (91)

Though philosophical argumentation between different schools of thought is said to have been prevalent in India, we do not see such debating in contemporary speeches.

The only debates happen in inter-religious platforms. At the same time Hindu discourses have tried to rise up to the challenges posed by some sects of political Islam and have started instructing people on the rituals to be strictly followed by the Hindu daily. This includes prayers at the time of waking up, eating, and sleeping, the different scientific explanations for ordinary daily rituals and practices (similar to the tablighi ritual of practising strictly the way of life as lived by the Prophet).

Hirschkind's remark that "the nationalist project and mass mediatisation of the popular imaginary has played a key role in shaping the structure and performative space of today's sermons"(153), rings true when we analyse the rhetoric of Abdul Nasser Madani, the founder of PDP (People's Democratic Party) in Kerala. He is an apt example of how rhetoric can make and mar a man's life as well as affect the life of a community tremendously. He also signifies the problematic merging of political as well religious rhetoric and the confusion of the legal code in distinguishing between the two. Madani has been charged and exonerated by the court in several cases of blasphemous and hate speeches delivered during the times of Babri Masjid demolition and its aftermath. The court couldn't prove him guilty because of this thin border between religious and political speech ("Interview" 0:7:05-10). Beginning as a full time religious preacher, Madani's speeches were quite popular for its appeal to emotions and pathos, exhorting people to return to an Islamic life through a heartfelt rendition of the life of Prophet and love and obligation towards Allah. Madani used to elicit strong response from the audience who used to join him in praising Allah,(an act of *Tarqib*). However, Madani catapulted to the public sphere in the 1990's in the context of Babri Masjid

demolition in India when he began to rave at the RSS and BJP led campaign against the Muslim in different parts of India. In this phase, he plunged into a 'holy jihad' through a series of speeches in which he placed the Muslim community in India against the hoary background of violations and torture inflicted on the Muslim community all over the world, in Bosnia, Palestine and Afghan crises. Through a graphic description of the atrocities against Muslim men, women and children, he presented images of bloodshed, rape, abortions, starvation, torture and other forms of gross violence inflicted on the Muslims.

In one such speech titled "Babri Masjid -Karutha Adhyayam", he talks self reflexively about why he raked the issues up again and again when the nation tries to forget the black day in the history of India. It was time for Muslims to wage a holy jihad against these forces. In this phase his style changes from pathos to that of rightful indignation, he starts some speeches with phrases like "Revolutionary greetings of Holy Islam"(0:0:15) instead of his usual chanting Quran verses. 'Abu Ghraib' and 'Guantanamo' are frequent images that suffuse his speech. He also recalls Prophet's war, with just a few emaciated followers against the huge forces of Pharaoh (0:25:03-15). This phase comes to an abrupt end when Madani loses a leg in a bomb blast allegedly by RSS, is arrested in 1998 on Coimbatore bomb blast case and later exonerated after nine and a half years in prison. Later he is framed in 2008 Bangalore blasts and is still under judicial custody. When on bail, he used to attend some events and one sees an entirely different Madani, a specimen of human rights violation as he describes the way the Indian legal system has fabricated him in the cases. He brings up the slogan of "avarnanu adhikaram"/( power to Avarnas) and

"dalit minority union" and posits himself as one supporting Chengara land struggle and other tribal problems. But then, we see a humble, more mature, less virulent and transformed Madani who speaks of compromise, peace and good will and continues to inspire people to Islam. He even expresses his guilt and regret at the ire he had shown towards Hindu brethren and savarna members ("മക്കളെ"). Madani also explicates his political affiliations and differences by sharing his personal experiences while at his prison, the way in which Congress had supported him more than Muslim league during his crisis and how 'savarna' people like VR Krishna Iyer and Mukundan C Menon helped him unconditionally to get him out of prison. His earlier fiery, melodramatic and highly cadenced speeches, he said years later, were a natural response sprung from the "mental turmoil" (0:05:53) he faced as part of a community which had to face helplessly the murders of many of its leaders at the hands of RSS. The conservative Sunni faction had distanced itself from the "fundamentalist" aura of Madani making him claim at some stages that he is a "24-carat Sunni" (MADANI 0:0:20) though he shares some platforms with Mujahid and Jamaat e Islami. Thus a radical cult figure of Islam who rose to prominence through his strident rhetoric had been politically used by the Hindutva forces to assert the fear of the Muslim terrorist, has been used as well as disowned by many political and religious parties leading the person to ameliorate his discourse to a more peaceful mode.

Another hilarious development in the rhetorical scene of Islam in Kerala is the open fights between different sections bordering on abusive language and calling each other names. When Mujahid Balussery rants about the spiritual exploitation of

Kanthapuram through superstitions associated with the controversial hair of the Prophet and calls him a cheat ("കുഞ്ച" 0:11:08) another Sunni Preacher Perod retaliates by calling him a "mason who has no knowledge of scriptures"(ബാലുശ്ശേരി 0:03:00). This defamation sometimes gets frantic with both followers at war with each other over their master's credibility. The clippings of the speeches are manipulated and deployed by the factions in order to win their arguments. On the other extreme we have a set of discourses put forward by rational and secular thinkers like Hamid Chendamangaloor, M. N. Karassery, E. K. Jabbar, Ravichandran, K.E.N Kunjahammed and the like who attack these Islamic discourses logically from an atheistic perspective and is of the view that religion must be controlled by the constitution. They point out the nature of rhetoric which helps politicians to circumvent many real issues by pretending to engage in it through debates. Thus the political debates about secularism, uniform civil code and inheritance keep on going for the sake of deferring as well as maintaining the status quo. Chendamangaloor for instance, agrees that Mujahid has given entry for their women to mosques but have abstained them from power positions in the committees. Just as there is the presence of Islamophobia, he asserts there is a 'liberal' Islamophobia within Islam which fears the liberal Muslims ("Hamid"). However, these discourses have another sort of impact on the religious oratory making the preachers carry on the discourse of humiliation and rake the followers up emotionally. As Karthik Shankar notes,

...the liberal left has long believed that the emancipation of the "other" is a matter of rationality. But the 'other' world view was not

created by the same value system. In addition to polarization of arguments the ridicule of irrationality has personalized the problem. It is now a direct insult to the individual, rather than a mere contradiction of an idea.

The rhetoric presented by both the factions show a convergence of irreconcilable ideas, a combination of orthodox as well as liberal thinking with different degrees of emphasis on both by the respective organizations. This entirely pluralistic ethos in Islamic sermons is summed up as, "After all, one can like sandwiches and want peace, or whatever else, while also supporting death penalty for apostasy as eighty eight percent of Egyptian Muslims and eighty three percent of Jordanian Muslims did in a 2011 Pew Poll" (Hamid 15).





## Chapter 3

### **Malayali Morality: Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, Caste and Religion**

*... ultimate social control is achieved when the subordinated... not only accept their condition but consider it a mark of distinction.*

*Uma Chakravarthy*

The hard-earned repeal of Section 377 of the Indian constitution by the Supreme Court verdict of 6th September 2018 and the discourses surrounding it have averred how difficult it is, in a country like India, to drive home the perspective of gender as fluid. It opens up the herculean task lying ahead in the scrutiny of and a possible revision of gender roles as well as the notion of heteronormativity ingrained in and performed by individuals. At the same time, as pointed out by Nivedita Menon the very term "gender" brought into visibility by the feminist movement in the 1970's in India has been entrenched in a paradox since 1990, of dissolving gender identity, theoretically on one hand, and being used as a synonym for "women" by governmental and developmental discourses on the other (95). Notwithstanding the gross apathy shown to feminist initiatives asserting women's right over their choices during the 1990's in Kerala, the foundations of the gendered Malayali psyche have been shaken over the years, although at least superficially. The perceptive change had started with the Malayali pursuing enlightenment ideals through reformation movements. J. Devika analyses the ways in which the process of engendering had taken place in Kerala during the nineteenth and early twentieth

century through the language of reform which aimed at a self-governed individual who would be adequate to the needs of a rational collective. She argues:

Gender can be seen as implicated in the process of making individuals governable. Because gender seems at once 'natural' (with its reliance upon 'inherent qualities' given at birth) and 'social' (given that it seemed to essentially require training); at once individualised (being dependent upon the endowment of particular bodies) and general (implicating individuals in well-defined social roles), it seemed to link these, enabling mutual adjustment. Perhaps this makes gender a far more effective correlate of Individualising power than, say, self-identities implied by the Jati-differentiation. (*Engendering* 308-309)

She establishes through her study that the gendered identity was not just a continuation of the pre-modern, local ideals. There was a concerted effort through literature and through other legal and political interventions to engender a community which would have a “complementary sexual exchange between Man and Woman” (313) in order to produce new social power equations. A look at the women's magazines or the issues taken up by 'sthree samajams', would indicate how these catered to this reformation project which aimed at educating and politicizing the woman by making her the ruler inside the domestic space, to nurture a new generation and to support man in his reformation project. Thus established religion and politics were considered as essential masculine enterprise and hence, lay beyond the ambit of women's life. The drawbacks of the joint family system practised in

Kerala also paved the way for the revision of it in the form of restructuring it as a nuclear family with the husband as the head. Another instance in which this progressed was the way in which romantic love came to be idealised as platonic love devoid of sexual or bodily needs and the romantic idealization of femininity as seen in the literary works of Kumaran Asan and Changampuzha, one way of restriction and legalization of sex in marriage. A significant argument made by Rajeev Kumarankandath in his thesis is that the very pivot around which the Malayali's subjectivity was centred, still so, was the unavoidable notion of "sadacharam" (morality) which was also part of the nineteenth century reformation agenda. By positing a Kerala entrapped in the sexual anarchy of a pre-modern era in the reformation discourses there was a concerted move towards upholding monogamous, heteronormative sexuality and through it towards patriliney. He observes that when the first half of the nineteenth century dealt with non-normative sexuality the latter half saw the othering of homoeroticism (289-295). Thus although women started entering the public sphere with their participation in trade unions and left political parties, they were largely used as labour force, as allies to men, without much freedom or say in matters that affected their lives. This was similar to the way in which women were made part of the nationalist movement in pre-independent India and were unconditionally coerced to retract to domestic spaces meekly, once freedom was gained.

### **The Feminist Rhetoric**

The Seventies saw the growth of feminist movements in Kerala. However, the writings of K. Saraswathy Amma, Lalithambika Antharjanam and other women

writers, despite being questioned for their 'savarna' exclusivity, were active in broaching up the issue of women's secondary status. Their writings which questioned patriarchy in admirable ways were being published in Kerala as early as the thirties and forties. Though there were other first generation feminist voices which tried to protest against the patriarchal consolidation of women into the domestic sphere in the efforts of Anna Chandy, B. Bhageerathy Amma, Konniyil Meenakshi Amma, Akkama Cheriyan etc, they got drowned in "intense masculinisation of all powerful political movements in mid 20th century Kerala including the left ( Devika and Sukumar 4471) and further it was noted that "neither the attempted politicisation of the category of "women" by the first generation feminists, nor the leftist mobilisation of working class women in trade unions seriously challenged modern gender ideology (4472). The Eighties also saw the rise of strong feminist protests demanding changes in legislation and achieving significant reforms. It began taking up issues of sexual assault, dowry deaths, economic dependence on men, suicides and the misery of the domestic life making the Malayali ethos unwillingly take into account the feminist slogan, "the personal is political"(Hanisch). In the 90's there were vociferous campaigns and concerns regarding sex tourism, of women's reservation bill getting muddled in the politics of caste, the bill against domestic violence and marital rape being thwarted, the deplorable political interventions in sex scandals like 'Ice cream Parlor', 'Vithura' and 'Suryanelli' cases. Events like reclaiming the 'night life' of women, the mobilization of sex workers undertaken by K. Ajitha, the feminist activism of Sara Joseph and many other feminists under organizations like Anveshi, Kerala Sthree Vedi, Manushi, Bodhana, Manavi etc awakened the complacent Kerala to the real

issues faced by women. The issues regarding women's entry into mosques, Muthalaq and the Uniform Civil Code which were frequently dug up by political parties were also fiercely debated but as it got entangled with the concept of religious identity, it had disappointing results for women at large. Simultaneously, Women's movements and Kerala Vanitha Commission were manipulated by the political parties in power (Bhaskaran 79), justice suffered, though the discourses did bring the invisible case of the 'second sex' right in front of the public sphere. Nonetheless, it remains the case that no one could discredit the strong foundation laid by these women's movements for the cause of women's rights in Kerala though were efforts to destabilize the same by the patriarchy.

The feminist activities in Kerala were generally evaluated by the public as impulsive and controversial. They were viewed as challenges to the traditional caste system and the attendant family ideal because it also involved the issue of sexual rights of women and they were attacked on moral grounds. Feminists were interpreted as mis-androus and in turn, social rebels. The animosity between the women's wings of political parties and the independent women's movements, the inability of the feminist movements to follow up the hard earned legal reforms and the rhetoric of backlash by the patriarchal society in Kerala slackened the pace of these movements in Kerala. And this rhetoric continues till date so much so that most of the women evade being branded as "feminists" and new names like 'feminazi' and 'feminichi' are in currency to stereotype them as anti- men and extremists and hence impractical. One only needs to look at the cyber bullying and abuse levelled at women and men who advocate the need for gender sensitivity. The

responses invariably and explicitly are sexual in content. Nevertheless, the period from the 1990s has been hopeful for feminist movements in a different sense with their questioning of the Kerala Model development, the awareness of Masculinist, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Dalit feminist perspectives enriching the contestations of gender in the public sphere.

The idea of gender in India cannot be elaborated upon without reference to the politics of sexuality and the politics of caste which has further complicated as well as opened up new directions of discussion on gender and helped "prevent the full constitution of woman as the stable subject of feminist politics" (Menon 103). One such contesting space is the issue of Women's Reservation Bill which remains on the anvil since 1996 due to the lack of consensus as to the identification women were asked to make. In June 1997 when Sharad Yadav of Janata Dal (U) party had asked, "Do you think these women with short hair can speak for women, for our women?" (Gilani), he was pointing inadvertently to the division that entails identification in Burkean rhetoric. The legitimacy of gender as a political category in India has been quite ambivalent and fluctuating (Lama-Rewal) and has been so from the 1920's when women were given voting rights to Women's Reservation Bill in 1996 and hence a highly problematic 'catch-22' situation. Thus many resort to the incrementalist perspective in gender parity which asks for slow but steady progress towards the ultimate ideal. Even in the twenty first century we are not free from frequent debates over the dress code of women, the issues of teasing, molestation and rape, the domestic and public roles of man and woman, marriage and morality. Typical responses seen even from women themselves would be anti-women as in a

recent discourse on reasons for women harassment by a District Counsellor of a Panchayath in Trivandrum. Jaya Rajendran observes from the cases coming before her that the character formation of woman, who is both the wife and the mother, plays a significant role in saving herself and her kids from harassment ("Reasons"). Thus one observes that the twenty first century views on gender rights and responsibilities are not much different from the previous centuries, as evident from the hordes of women protestors against the Supreme Court Order with respect to Sabarimala entry of women.

By 2000, Kerala had started witnessing more women in the public sphere in terms of women's education and career. However, this developmental model of Kerala when scrutinized revealed certain basic problems which remained unaddressed. It was acknowledged that notwithstanding the gender development indicators that show Kerala as a state practising gender equity, women's employment, education, inheritance, freedom and reproductive rights are still being filtered through a patriarchal lens and is deployed "towards the demands of domesticity" (Kodoth & Eapen 3285). This is attested by the fact that although conventional indicators including literacy rate, education and sex ratio, participation of women at local levels etc. show a positive turn of Kerala's gender equity status, indicators of work participation rate, employment, atrocities against women, political participation at higher levels and decision making show a dismal picture surfeit with socio-economic disparity (Salma 97).



### **The Politics of Desire, Sexuality and Religion**

The first movements to bring the topic of gender as an analytical category in religion were secular in their enterprise and they dreamt of religion-free gender liberation. However, this hope was shattered very easily as they came into conflict with the plural nature of religious beliefs and practices in the Indian context. The Western feminists had long before started interrogating the androcentrism of all religions and had started questioning the position offered to women stating the case for women to join as 'women' eschewing their religious or racial identities. However, this did not bear fruit because though religion was a patriarchal set up, most of the women have been habitually finding solace in negotiating their ways to public sphere through religion. Thus another stream of White and Black Christian women alike tried revisionary re-readings of the Bible by which they could garner religious support or use theology as liberation theology. The Islamic counterpart could be seen in the feminist hermeneutics of Fatima Mernissi (1987), Leila Ahmed (1992), Amina Wadud (1999) and Saba Mahmood (2005) who reinterpreted Quran and exposed the patriarchal conspiracy in hiding the egalitarian, woman -friendly prescriptions in the text. In many cases the denigration of the female and the elevation of the male found in the myths were overlooked by women as religion was a comfortable place for them away from everyday concerns and the subjugation that was normative. It acted as a platform of social cohesion and interaction and in most cases gave them power which they could not hold in a normal, familial set up. The fact that women in most religions were more involved in rituals and practices than theology or philosophy for that matter made it a lived experience for them. The

whole irony of it was that the experiences of women were never recorded as worth it or even as knowledge, as we have few records of the urge to articulate female religious experiences. However, this deprivation theory (Bradley 159) has been criticized as once again privileging man's spiritual need as 'authentic ' and women's religiosity as a sort of 'escape' from material concerns. Though the inevitable significance of religion and other faith -based organizations in the notion of social justice in the world cannot be disregarded, there is the concomitant danger of turning a blind eye to the domineering patriarchal tendencies within, which will overthrow the ideals of compassion and love propounded by the teachings (220).

The questions to be asked then would be: Where does gender stand in relation to religion? How do these intersect with other categories such as class and caste? One of the foremost examples of liberation theology in Kerala was the formation of 'Forum of Christian women for women's rights". Inspired by the Mary Roy Christian Succession Act Case of 1985 whereby Christian women were legally given their share of their father's property, this forum conducted vigorous campaigns when the State government tried to tamper with the verdict of the Case (Devi 196). Manjula Devi claims that the women's movements in Kerala although had spearheaded many reformatory protests and legal changes, they could not proceed well in the implementation process of women's equal rights, political participation and decision making. She further argues that women's movements have "not been strong enough to break the unholy alliance between religion and the state existing for years"(226).

Gender, being a social construct, religion being another, it becomes a major vehicle for preserving gendered identity in specific moral ways. Religion becomes a site for power contestations between genders as women try to negotiate their freedom and power in terms of a religious way of life, by indulging in and by being flag bearers of the strict ordinances of religion within the domestic sphere. Since the religious sphere is the only public sphere legitimately allotted to the female sex by the patriarchy, they make use of it and negotiate power using the very limited freedom accorded to them. This is one of the reasons why older women or spiritually inclined women tend to assume a matriarchal power over the other women and they become the reinforcement agencies of their religious rituals in a very strict, disciplined fashion inside their homes. In India, caste and religion being the two systems which aid in the reinforcement of gender and their irretrievable connection with sexuality and progeny, the duty to preserve the chastity of the tribe is vested with the older women who will have to choose the perfect match for their offspring. Here they are ruled by the dictum of *Bhagavad Gita* which teaches caution against '*varna sankara*' or the mixing up of castes through marriages. As Uma Chakravathy remarks:

The institution of marriage is so constructed as to make women as gate-ways- literally points of entrance into the caste system. The lower caste male whose sexuality is a threat to-upper caste purity has to be institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher castes so women must be carefully guarded. ("Conceptualizing" 579)

In the earlier discourses there was no big necessity to create water tight compartments around gendered beings because normally and naturally the women had no access to the public sphere except under the patronizing gaze of the male members and were more or less restricted to the domestic space. Marriages were an in-house business, a social contract arranged by the elderly family members. 'Love marriages' were generally discouraged even by the liberally-minded pointing out to the malady called 'cultural difference', a euphemism for caste and class differences. One could say, this mind set has not changed much as demonstrated by the surplus of religion and caste-based matrimonial advertisements all over the media. However, with the advent of education, career and consequent economic independence for women, the job of the preachers has increased manifold. They have to react to the various gender issues that prop up every day. This becomes the ideal breeding ground for preachers who argue for the need to go back to the traditions in face of the threat posed by the other. Thus the instructions given in Hindu discourses to the devotees who are also parents of 'new-age' kids is to teach the '*dharmic*' way of life, which is basically a return to the likes of Manu and Tryambaka which restrains the role of women as pure progenitors of their own exclusive tribes. The new-age kids, in turn are sent to 'Gita classes' to imbibe the '*dharmic*' life. This type of discourse has proliferated pointing to the fact that there is a fear in religious strongholds regarding the changes in family structure, morality and the lives led by individuals as distinct from the needs of commitment to be a homogenous community. As the gendered structure of the society is questioned from various corners, the patriarchal structures are put on guard. Now there is only one way, and that is to provoke the religious sentiments and divide them as Hindu, Muslim and Christian men and

women or remain silent and let the questions be unaddressed and consequently forgotten. See for instance the video broadcast in which a woman who portrays herself as educated, sensible and Hindu rationalizes the pathological mob reaction against Deepa Nishanth, a teacher who had taken a progressive stand on the issue of the depiction of semi-nude drawings of a Hindu deity inside Kerala Varma College, Thrissur. According to the former, the Allahabad High Court has given the rights of an individual to a deity and calls it a "legal entity" and thus defaming that entity is like defaming a real woman and therefore the mob reaction was quite natural and justified ("super" 0:05:17- 25).

The influx of women into the male dominated workspaces in Kerala is surely a productive change that has happened but not without accompanying anxieties. The patriarchal matrix operating within the household in totality or in leftovers are still hampering women from participation in a public or a political life. Away from the erstwhile miseries of the unpaid labour inside the household, they run between home and work and under the patriarchal gaze of the husband and the superior at the office. To add fuel to fire, both the Congress and the Communist led governments resort to a 'rhetoric of ambiguity' (Devika and Kodoth) or a stand of appeasement of both parties when it comes to matters of sexual violence at the workplace. This has proved to be quite strenuous for the female and has led her either to silence or new age spirituality as a comfort zone away from the harsh realities of everyday concerns at home and at office. An example of this recent trend would be the large -scale involvement of women from different parts of Kerala in the annual Attukal Pongala Festival in Thiruvananthapuram, which is one of its kind in bringing thousands of

women from varied backgrounds to partake of the divine blessings of the female deity, revering her in the image of the mother (Attukalamma). The commoditization of religion is also another reason behind this phenomenon. The two religious spaces of Sabarimala and Attukal reveal the exclusive gendered nature of ritualistic devotion in the state.

### **Gendered Identities and Hindu Nation**

One of the arguments regarding the emancipated status enjoyed by the Hindu women is that unlike their Muslim counterparts who are juridically controlled by the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Hindu women are not regulated by scriptures like *Manu Smriti* or other religious texts. Moreover, the glorification of empowerment Indian women has reached, through education and career post - Independence has added to the problematic view. It must be borne in mind that Indian women have passed through shifting phases from the exalted status accorded to women in the times of Vedas (of which we have only insufficient proofs), the politicization of the Hindu woman's body as the Self against the colonised Other, the horrendous practices of *Sati*, child marriage and female infanticide, the idolization of women as *Shakthi*, the reformation movements within Hinduism to the new education, career and economic freedom enjoyed by women. However, all through these varied stages the Indian women's life has invariably been "strongly tethered to family norms and regulations."(Chakraborty and Bagchi 125) and it still continues to be "handicapped by deprivation, subordination and absence of educational and employment opportunities" (142).

The new millennium in Kerala was also wrought with anxieties and fears regarding the crossing of boundaries from within and without religions. In the present socio-political context of India, in general, and Kerala in particular, anything connected to "love" brings up reactions enough to disturb the peace of the society. Events like 'Kiss of Love', 'Love Jihad', increasing divorce rates, suicides, conversions etc become the baits to catch the fear of ordinary individuals who are overcome by fear of losing their integral family values. A sense of growing paranoia is created by such rhetoric. Let's take for instance the testimonial of a Brahmin girl Sruthi who had reconverted back to Hinduism saying that she had converted to Islam listening to sermons of Noushad Baqavi and Kabeer Baqavi (Sruthi 00:20:05-55). The allegations of love jihad and conversions, in turn, had catapulted the Hindutva brigade into action through propaganda which portrayed a passive, Hindu woman being lured away by Muslim men just for the sake of adding numbers to their community (Gupta). Some very individual cases of elopement and conversions became the thriving ground of the Hindu right to assert their Hindu male virility (Derne) showing off their prowess by protecting their honour in terms of the Hindu female body and in turn, the motherland, as a dutiful son would do. This reconstruction of the "Hindu Male" is also exhorted by spiritual gurus like Swami Chidanandapuri as in the speech "How to root out Love Jihad" where he says he has no problem in two people belonging to different religions marrying each other but he surely is against the forced conversion through 'love jihad'. Building on the Chief Minister's comment that there were more than 2860 cases of conversions of Hindu girls into Islam (0:1:25-30), he asserts he has himself seen more than 500 cases of women trapped in the gruesome web. This 'must be nipped in the bud 'or if it is

grown 'must be cut off immediately' (0:1:56-59). There is 'a huge network operating' (0:3:14-20) and every parent must be wary of this and act accordingly and the training as to a "dharmic way of life" instructed to us through various scriptures must be instilled in the children from very early ages, he continues. Thus even those who are distant from the religious practices are persuaded to force their kids to adopt and perform religious practices for the sake of establishing religious identities so that they can save their children. Sasikala warns of the "trap" set by the Muslim Other, the dangers of ISIS and drives down the dire need of educating Hindu girls in their culture as "religious fundamentalists are trying to trap communist girls more because they don't have any foundation in Hinduism" ("Sookshichal" 0:1:34-50). Similarly, Rahul Easwar, another speaker for Hindutva cause, vociferously vouches for emulating the Islamic and Christian practice of "catching them young" through Madrasa and Catechism classes and through pre-marital counselling, pushes for similar classes among the Hindu followers ("Rahul"). This rhetoric of fear and violence on one hand and an ameliorative discourse of following the strategies of other religions on the other, have been steadily increasing in India since the ascendancy of the Hindu right. One can also note as critic Ashish Nandy argues, a deep feeling of self-hatred and a subtle admiration of the Christian and the Muslim Other at seeing a Hindu social life devoid of the rigidity and discipline of the Semitic religions ("Ashish" 0:03:14-0:4:41).

These speakers reiterate the roles to be played by an ideal Hindu woman. In most of the speeches the speaker posits the Indian family system which is exclusively India's own and seen nowhere else in the world as the locus of the



Sanatana dharma. The Centre of the family is the mother, one who teaches the gospel of right living. Verses from Chandokhya and Thaitheeya Upanishad "*mathrudevo bhava*"(Mother is deity incarnate), "*matha prathamam daivatham*" (mother is the first God) etc. are regularly quoted as reference. The discourse sublimates mother as Goddess, not as an individual but the creator of the universe. The claim is that Indian culture looks at women as mothers imbued with divinity as opposed to the Western culture which objectifies women and hence the conclusion that the former is superior.

The control of female choice, as suggested by Chakravathy, happens in two ways paradoxical to each other. One is by romanticizing the higher status accorded to them in the Hindu culture. She notes how the nineteenth century Hindu nationalists, who were educated, upper class men, had tried to romanticize the Rig Vedic past and the role of their women in the face of the European cultural domination. She also argues that these men had to establish that their women had a higher social status in the remote past because of the existing reality that the upper caste women then had a very low status. The second way focused on perpetuating that the "fundamental principle of Hindu social organisation is to construct a closed structure to preserve land, women, and ritual quality within it. The three are structurally linked and it is impossible to maintain all three without stringently organising female sexuality" ("Conceptualizing" 579).

As Nira Yuval-Davis points out, "construction of nationhood usually involves specific notions of both manhood and womanhood" (1). Embracing Vivekananda's views, the Hindutva rhetoric has created specific roles for the Hindu

male and female. Paola Bacchetta offers fresh insights into how the Sangh (male wing est. 1925) and the Samiti (female wing est. 1936) of the RSS articulate their ideology in similar as well as different ways. Although the Samiti women think within the broader, patriarchal, nationalist Sangh Parivar discourse where women posit themselves as means to the self-realisation of the dedicated "*swayamsevaks*" (volunteers), the Sangh and Samiti have inherent differences in conceiving the nation, the role of women and the symbols they make use of in this attempt. In the Sangh ideology when nation is symbolised in terms of "Bharatmata", the mother goddess who is abused and victimised by the Muslim 'others' and is seeking revenge through her 'virile' sons who display their male prowess in protecting their Mother from incursions, the Samiti looks up to the image of the virulent, destructive, ferocious, warrior-goddess Kali who is self-sufficient and strong enough to demolish the Other. This firebrand Samiti female has new avatar in Kerala in the form of female speakers like K.P. Sasikala and Sobha Surendran. Bacchetta recalls a dialogue with a Samiti member who lived in Ahmedabad. On being asked about the fate of Muslims in the 1986 riots, the sevika retorts: "...They deserve to die. They should all be killed. They spill our blood. They rape our women. Let their blood be spilled, the bloody bastards. Just as Kali did not spare even one rakshas" (85).

In a similar vein, Sobha Surendran, a BJP leader from Kerala, rakes up a controversial threat by asking a senior CPI(M) leader, Kodyeri Balakrishnan whether he does not want to die peacefully? ("Don't you"). In another speech, she invites the latter charged with many killings, to a duel in his home town and warns him not to make hands wearing bangles take up swords ("Sobha"). The discourse is

suffused with stereotypical notions of manhood and womanhood prevalent in Kerala and brings up the image of a Hindu woman transforming herself into pan-Indian image of Kali or the local image of 'Unniyarcha' in keeping with the Kalari tradition of Kerala for the sake of the nation. This should be read in consonance with the fact that notwithstanding the lack of roots for such a "samiti" project in Kerala, at least in some parts we see more women coming to take up BJP leaderships at the Panchayat and the local levels. Thus one could argue that in addition to pursuing electoral politics they are also giving importance to mobilization at the grass roots level by blending the private and public domains. There are also deliberate efforts by the Sangh forces to conduct discourses and readings of "Devi Mahathmyam", a sacred text extolling the virtues of Devi among the naive female followers of religion appropriating Hindus to Hindutva cause. The activity of Hindu Aikya Vedi and other Sangh outfits surrounding the temples has also been geared towards redeeming the ownership of temples from the *Devaswoms* (autonomous bodies for Temple Administration) which operate under the State Government rules. Political analysts show how from the 1940's the RSS has been trying to remove *Devaswoms* and infiltrate the temples and by 2000 it has more or less made its presence felt in the temples in Kerala. Dhirendra Jha, for example, observes that RSS and its other fringe groups have formed *Kshethra Samrakshana Samitis* (Temple Protection Committees) as a disguise and have entered large number of temples in the State (123).

The "Ready to Wait" social media campaign regarding the Sabarimala entry of women popularized by "*Haindava Keralam*" is another strategy of the Sangh

Parivar to subtly tie religion, politics and women together. The age-old proscription of women at Sabarimala on account of the argument that women with their menstrual cycle could pollute the divine environment, have new justifications from the progressive, religious female lot. One of the arguments put forward by some religious Hindu women and men against the Supreme Court verdict allowing the entry of women to Sabarimala is that the deity Lord Ayyappa is a 'celibate' (*Naishtika Brahmachari*) and the glory and power of the deity comes precisely from his penance of celibacy. Thus the notion of Malayali morality percolates into his idolization with the values of his social life determining his spiritual life and also the qualities of his deity. However, it is well nigh possible to point out the connection between the ban and the role of women as labour force inside the private spaces of the home; considering the facts that the unpaid, dutiful labour that had been given by the women and the moral responsibility of preservation of rituals and culture on their shoulders are the inevitable, but unacknowledged forces that has helped man in his spiritual quest divorced of material concerns. Just as the Gulf war aimed at the extraction of oil resources of the Middle East banked on the rhetoric of 'war on terror', this spiritual marginalization of women has successfully relied on the 'rhetoric of gendered physiological limitations'.

The RSS ideologues construct the content of their texts through a process of selectivity, re-combination, rearrangement, re-prioritization, and reinterpretation of elements from various contending discourses in their context. The materials range from Brahmnical Hinduism to nineteenth century Hindu reformist and

revivalist discourse, to western cultural nationalist theories, to major and trivial events (in the sense of *fatis divers*), to elements of the discourse of its opponents. (Bacchetta 97)

As opposed to Sobha Surendran who is a political leader, Sasikala distances herself from visible political interventions and asserts that she makes use of her speeches to “awaken” Hindus. Sasikala's use of Valluvanad dialect (prominent in the erstwhile Valluvanad regions of Palakkad, Thrissur and Malappuram) is aimed at the upper-caste and, more recently, upwardly mobile lower-caste audience in these districts. It does the job of legitimizing their insecurities with emotional appeals and twisted facts. With her background of being a history teacher at school, she distorts history to suit her needs. The contradiction in her speeches are masked by the use of Brahminical symbols and stories lending it a sanctimonious aura and instils in the audience a hope for reclaiming their lost political power (Jha 113).

The positioning of the Muslim male and female as the Other has specific significance as Baccheta argues,

...the RSS makes strategic use of genre, style and an array of rhetorical devices, finally to represent Muslim women as objects of potential communal and sexual appropriation. The functionality of such representations in the discourse is multiple, contextual: at various points it is to release tension, evoke emotion, reinforce Hindu male solidarity, dis-empower Muslim males or denigrate femininity. (98)

Through these discourses various types of fluctuating identities are created by the RSS. The Hindu male is categorised as the preacher (*Pracharak*), celibate, chaste, masculine and dedicated to the nation and the conscious Hindu male, who is married, yet dedicated to the nation and his Hindu identity. These two "legitimate" categories are opposed to the negative counterparts, the unconscious Hindu male who is westernised, and "effeminate" hence a traitor who appeases Muslims and the Muslim male, the invader, the rapist and the polygamist and a threat to Hindu women. The Hindu women, on the other hand are either chaste mothers who are 'baby factories' for the nation or modern, feminists who are threats to Indian womanhood. Muslim males are eternal enemies, invaders and ex-converts (hence traitors), Muslim women are either prostitutes or potential wives (100-101). Sikata Banerjee supports Bachetta's conclusion with the statement that

a particular vision of Hindu nation informed by representations of hegemonic masculinity- Hindu soldier and warrior monk-and associated ideas of femininity- heroic other, chaste wife and celibate warrior- has been ascendant in contemporary India during the past decade. (15)

This kind of indoctrination is rampant in Kerala under the RSS *shakhas* which give equal practice to kids to become physically powerful and intellectually nationalistic. Though these discourses elicit derision and harsh criticism from various secular quarters they are an instant hit among the masses as the applause of the audience tells us. These ideas also seep into the private sphere of the Malayali through mobile phones and other social networking sites.

Further, trying to explain the large number of women in the Sangh project, Nandini Deo brings in the argument of Amrita Basu that women within the *sangh* are "self-interested" and that most of them enjoy their relative autonomy from the private sphere by propagating the larger patriarchal structure at the cost of genuine feminist concerns( 31). A related trend is the takeover of the administration of a lot many temples which are not under '*devaswoms*' by the women folk, a terrain they used to visit as devotees. This could be read in tandem with the general trends in empowerment of women and the entry of women into male dominated territories. However, the utilitarian nature of the patriarchal, nationalist cause should not be ignored either and makes the relative autonomy of women problematic and reveals that women have really become agents of patriarchy once again. In overturning the fact that "the construction of the private and the public in India was based on an equation of the religious and feminine with the private, and the public with the political and masculine"(Deo 25), the Hindutva forces have appropriated and blended the erstwhile boundaries and strengthened their nationalist cause further in the guise of women empowerment.

This concept is propagated even in the twenty first century through speeches of people like Nirmalanandagiri, a spiritual orator and Ayurveda physician who passed away recently at Ottapalam, Kerala. Take for instance his speech on the women of Ramayana ("Ramayanathile"). Apart from eulogizing epic women like Sita, Urmila and Kausalya as gems (*Striratnam*) who are epitomes of Tryambaka's so called '*sthridharma*' also defined as '*pativrataadharma*', he analyses the "monstrous" women as in the case of Soorpanaka, who enamoured by the beauty of

Srirama requests for a physical relationship with him. Being monogamous and married, Srirama sends her to his brother Lakshmana who also refuses her. The indignant woman turns into the monster she is and tries to attack Sita and is taught a lesson in self-control by Lakshmana who cuts her ears, nose and her breasts. Through the narration, Nirmalandagiri observes that except for the motherhood of a woman she is the "delivery room" (*eetillam*) of intolerance and uncontrollable desires. Her beauty and her charm are complete only in motherhood. If a man has to attain completion, bliss, luck and liberation he has to conceive the motherhood of every woman. In Soorpanaka we have the ultimate example of the reality that if freedom and quality are not bound up with knowledge, then it could bring disaster to her and the society at large, he affirms.

These notions are a reiteration of an eighteenth century translated 'dharmic' text , Tryambaka's *Stridharma Paddhati*, (Flood 66) and elaborated by Manu in *Manusmriti* which delineates the duties and the sexual propriety expected of a woman. It details the innate fickle mindedness of the "*sthrisvabhava*" and its dutiful transformation to "*stridharma*"

...their strisvabhava was constantly enticing them away from their stridharma. That the stridharma, or the pativrata- dharma was a rhetorical device to ensure the social control of women, especially chastity, is now well accepted. As outlined by Manu and elaborated and repeated by Tryambaka in the *Stridharmapaddhati*, the stridharma was clearly an ideological mechanism for socially controlling the biological aspect of women. Women, as biological



creatures, are representatives of a wild or untamed nature. But through the stridharma the biological woman can be converted into woman as a social entity, in whom the biological has been tamed". In contrast in the Kali age especially there is an inversion of the system in which women lapse into unrestrained behaviour disregarding the stridharma and throwing off all morals. The wicked and essential nature of women then must be subordinated and conquered by the virtue of the ideal wife. Once the tension between 'nature' and 'culture' is resolved women can emerge triumphant as paragons of virtue. (Chakravarthy, "Conceptualizing" 583)

In yet another set of discourses the story of the divine love between Gopikas and Krishna is explained as the desire of the individual soul to merge with the "*paramatma*" as described in terms of '*Rasaleela*' (Sharma). The speaker says: "Completely unaware of their unkempt hair, their bodices, they rush to Krishna and he chides them softly for discarding their homely duties. Krishna enamours gopis and plays with them through intimate physical play. It must not be criticised as sheer physical love as questioned by Parikshit. Parikshit asks how the avatars who are supposed to restore dharma into this world engage in such anarchic pursuits. Such criticisms take you away from the essence of *rasakreeda*. *Bhagawan* is one who is accessible to even an ordinary woman" (0:18:28-0:24:56). Thus the desire of women is interpreted in socially acceptable ways. When Soorpanaka's desire becomes unacceptable, is an affront to the sanctity of family, the desire of *gopis* sublimates

itself as divine, a vestige of the Bhakthi cult refashioned in the discourses of the twenty first century.

Desire, thus constructed, are no longer amorphous or inchoate, in fact, we are faced with "desire" which acquires definitional status and in terms of which other manifestations are classified as subordinate, irrelevant or even disruptive. Clearly then, the definition of desire that is codified in the *Kamasutra*, was integrated ideally into relations of power, so that desire could be viewed as an expression of power.

(Roy 326)

Desire or Sex per se therefore becomes the pivot around which the whole construction of society is done. The control of society then is also the control of sexuality by means of a site which here is female and purposefully so, on account of the need for ensuring the purity of progeny. Hence *Kamasutra* becomes an important text read in association with '*Manusmrithi*' and '*Sthridharmapaddhathi*'. Thus the Hindu preacher finds himself in an awkward position where he has to ignore the historical reality that even in early Indian mythology there was not much of a relationship between marriage and progeny as exemplified by the tale of Karna or of Pandavas in Mahabharatha or disown the liberal sexual mores of *Kamasutra* and many other similar Indian texts . The new age guru has to create a moral system in tune with the patriarchal control of female sexuality which is so characteristic of the Semitic religions. Therefore a revision of gender roles ensues in the rhetoric.

When gender ideology is given religious mystification, frequently what one sees is the utilization of gender ideologies within religious

traditions ( and equally this is rearticulated at the rise of the new religion, renewal movements within religions, or reformations of traditional religions) in order to define males and females and their relations, or in order to move against the perceived mores of the larger social body ( or originating tradition)- to call them into question. In the definition of males and females, the religious movement will often simply mimic what are seen to be normative sexual and family relations so as to be perceived as non-threatening and acceptable. (Juschka 164-165)

Kumkum Roy talks about gender-power relations in the early millennium which saw the popularization of two hundred and fifty odd *Jataka* tales which deal with the relationship between man and woman. In her study she reveals that out of two hundred and fifty tales, seventy are stories of seduction and adultery culminating in the view mentioned earlier that women are dangerous and requiring or deserving to be controlled. Stories of "good" women are relatively few and "goodness hinges on chastity or servility to the husband and occasionally on generosity and wisdom"(64). Further 'stri' is a "means of attaining' purushartha', the goal of a man's life especially *dharma* and *kama*- and demands "complete subordination and instrumentality of wife." (72)

Another aspect of the concept of gender as conceived in Hindu spiritual tradition as well as the paradoxical use of it as seen now is worth mention. This is the way in which historically, the '*Jnana*' *marga* and the '*Bhakthi*' *marga*, the two spiritual traditions unequivocally state transcending the very notion of gender. In the

*Jnana marga* even the philosophy of '*purusha*' and '*prakrthi*' as two co-existent and complementary forces, although they are described in terms of the stereotypical notions of male and the female and the seeker's gender is never an obstacle in the process of 'self realisation'. Most prominently in the Bhakthi cult, remnants of which are seen in the new-age guru business, one sees that the only gender binary is constructed in terms of the God as the only male and the "*bhaktha*" (devotee) whether man or woman would be considered as female as seen in the poetry of Surdas and Meerabhai (Hawley 237). "In societal terms, this can be seen as the negation of gender-that is, the gender of the *bhaktha* is unimportant, for it is transcended in the process of worship"( Seshan 75). Nevertheless, inherent in this perspective is a more hierarchical version of gender inequality where God/Krishna is considered superior to all and is the only male and hence assumes power. This is very much similar to the Christian doctrine that 'God is the head of the male' as 'male is the head of female'. Thus historically, we see at least some women like Akkamahadevi, Avvaiyar, Mirabhai and some other Buddhist Bhikunis as evidenced by *Therigatha* who have used religion and devotion as a way to disown and transcend the repressive familial structures, domestic and gendered spheres. Notwithstanding the patriarchal nature of religion itself, they have tried to carve a niche for themselves and have organized protests against the religious structures themselves which have tried to reinstate the gender binary even in spirituality (Seshan). We see this adaptation to a religion as means of a positive change for women's situation even in recent times with women trying to don leadership roles in some ecumenical organizations. Most of the women try to negotiate their need for

spirituality and access to public sphere through socialization by aligning themselves with religious structures.

The evocation of the feminine is also part of many Hindu cults and the highest objective of human life is described in terms of the "Ardhanareeshwara", a divine merging of the feminine and the masculine ideal. This is one aspect highlighted by the new age movements like the Art of Living or Hare Rama Hare Krishna cults in respect of the fact that more women are educated, employed and are visible in the public sphere. They get recognition inside the movements but there are criticisms that once they are inside the movement, they work in tandem with the patriarchal religious system and are forced to shed their womanly identity to become part of the movement.

### **Gender in Islam**

The gender case of Islam is similar to Hinduism in many respects while it also deviates from the latter in considerable ways. But when it comes to the issue of the reign of patriarchy all religions operate on the same fundamental principles of domination via persuasion. However, Islam has been criticised often for its misogynistic attitude. Time and again, the debates over *burqa* , uniform civil code, triple *talaq* or women's dressing styles expose the social insecurities concerning women's emancipation and the concern of religion about its power to hold sway over women's lives via body and sexuality. Since 1990's the warring Islamic sects in Kerala have been unanimous only in one case, that is, in their opinions on women's selection, movement, spaces and freedom. At the same time there is the emergence of a new Muslim woman who questions critically, the orthodox scholasticism and

the local, political power play. Such women fall outside the view of the docile-bodied, pure Muslim women. Although there are women's wings within some of these patriarchal religious structures, they do not, in any way, address the real issue within but get distracted or deliberately turn to seeking ways to become a perfect Muslim.

Margot Badran remarks that the debates regarding the position of a Muslim woman in public places started in the nineteenth century. Although this debate had its roots in the resistance to the image of a "civilized, modern European woman" and came as a corollary to colonialism, it was a cause of concern and quite challenging for the Muslim clergy. This further developed into fervent protests against state and religion as in the *purda* issue. Yaser Arafat asserts that Islam addresses feminism within in two ways. One, out of sheer necessity in accepting and trying to change with the times it promotes the education and free will of women as long as they circumscribe themselves to their religious roles assigned by the patriarchy. Hence in the Islamic world, there is the acceptance of radical, veil-less feminists like Fatima Mernissi and the rejection of feminist like Fayesa Hashemi who ask for revisionary re-readings of Islam. Two, structurally women's wings have not become independent from the male wing (36-43).

Summarily, scholarship on the convergence of Islam and feminism includes first, denying the possibility of a convergence and keeping the two apart, as do Zeenath Kausar, Haideh Moghissi, and Reza Afshari, and second, naming the convergence "Islamic feminism," as have Badran, Miriam Cooke, and Jeenah. Third are those scholars

who challenge how the convergence of Islam and feminism is presented, namely Wadud and Barlas, who resist the easy application of the label “feminist” to their work. Finally, there is scholarship that allows for the convergence by taking Islam for granted in the application of feminist analysis. Wadud and Barlas feature in this latter group, as do other scholars such as Mernissi and Ahmed, though in different ways. (Seedat 30-31)

In Kerala, interesting debates around women began to emerge in latter half of nineteenth century and early twentieth century with reformers including Sana Ulla Makti Thangal, Chaliyakath Kunjahammad Haji and Vakkom Moulavi exhorting women's education, religious education, control and discipline. For a long time women's education was exclusive religious education. Emphasizing the role of secular education and language, especially the need to learn English and Malayalam, in the progress of Muslim population these scholars had projected both modernity and reform in lived Islam. However, even though they advocated women's education they were worried over the thought that though it was

... essential for the moral well-being of the community, there was also the danger that they would over-step particular moral and social boundaries. The primary objective of Makti in women's education was to prepare them emotionally and biologically to satisfactorily perform their roles as mother and homemaker. (Ashraf 20 )

The image of the Muslim woman in Kerala during the colonial era had to struggle with two equally imaginary images: the image of the European woman and the

image of a 'complete' Hindu woman. Hence one finds the images of the wives of Prophet as the perfect Muslim models exhibited in many Islamic sermons. At the same time it can't be forgotten that the secular education opened up before the Muslim women a whole new world of possibilities which reflected in the general social sphere, with Muslim women taking up career and even the choice of dress they made in tune with the modern trends in theatre and cinema. In the fifties and sixties Muslim women also dared to venture into cinema field, but not without struggle. The case of Nilambur Ayisha who had to fight against all odds to become an actress is a typical instance. B. S. Sherin in her dissertation on Islam and Women in Kerala takes a critical view of the general, secular, liberal view of Muslim women as the oppressed ones. She contends that just as the nostalgic vantage point of Kerala renaissance often termed as "*Navothana Moolyangal*" (Values of Reformation) had never considered the role of the Muslim reformation movements it had also completely silenced the participation and leadership of Muslim women in the public, literary as well as cultural life of Kerala (145). By 1980's with the new Knowledge of Arab Islam imbibed through the complexities of Gulf migration familiarising itself with New Salafism there was a dire need to create a new, essential Kerala Muslim identity with the man wearing a beard and woman wearing *purdah*. With the break in Mujahid the fight for the real/pure Muslim identity among the sects got strong and the burden thereon to build it was vested on the shoulders of the newly educated, religious, complete, Muslim house wife. Till the 1980's the issue of the beard and *purdah* were nowhere in the Kerala Muslim psyche.



Thus the starting point of any reformation had to begin with the body of the woman. Women's sexuality as expected becomes a great topic of concern in most of the Islamic sermons. A number of them are directed towards women as to how to become a model wife, how to look after one's husband and make him happy, the qualities required of a good wife, the reservation of heaven for good, faithful wives, the do's and don'ts regarding the act of sex, the consequences of prostitution or illegal relationships, the shielding of a woman's body from other men's eyes, the act of seduction and its consequences and so on. Noushad Baqavi is a popular, conservative Sunni speaker in Kerala, one who performs his speech in a highly dramatic way. Perceived as a new generation speaker, very highly remunerated and well known for his penchant for high performing amplifying system, he uses a musical tone, voice modulations, and refrain "*Allahoo parayukayanu.. Allahunte rasool parayukayanu*" (Allah is speaking, Allah's messenger is speaking) to catch the audience and assert the authenticity of his oration. In one of his speeches with the theme 'a good wife', he says a wife who fears "*rabb*" (Almighty) is the ideal and elaborates on the qualities of such a wife. An example given is one who even sells her body to the public for treating her sick husband ("രബ്ബ്" 0:02:55-0:05:00). In another speech, the remuneration for living a good life here on earth is the restoration of youth and virility for men, along with the availability of beautiful women in heaven for their pleasure. He advises men against the ill effects of pornography and asks for self restraint ("ബറക" 0:03:40-0:07:00). Elaborating on the seductive nature of women, he affirms that the two places where 'Sheithan' (Satan) resides are on the head and hips of women. He calumniates women for using

high heels and proclaims that the beauty lies in the right conduct ("സ്മൃതി" 0:4:30-0:8:00). The speaker does not forget to advise men employed in Gulf to protect their wife's chastity by telling them not sweet romantic words but help them control their mind by enlightening them regarding death, ' *qabar* ' and heaven and instil in them Islamic values. The wife who goes out without husband's permission will face curse from sand, birds and fishes and every other being in the universe. Hair dyeing will cause one's prayer to be disowned by Allah, he continues. He speaks on the Islamic way of life especially for women, from day to day activities included in *Sharia* like covering one's head , serving one's husband, the duty of widows, to the observance of rituals and prayer for the sake of a safe journey to heaven after death.

Another Sunni speaker E.P Abubacker Al Qasimi specializes in speeches on sexuality and Quran helping the believers to control male and female sexuality, and practise it as per the norms in Quran, as no other religion has intelligently spoken about family life ("Ep"). He posits the twenty five year old Prophet Mohammed as a role model because he married forty year old Khadija. Explicitly referring to the sexual acts of a couple in an anecdotal narration amounting to verbal porn, he makes use of "titillating" speeches in a rhythmic tone and makes use of lot of sensual imagery before a male audience (0:00:24-0:02:54). In yet another speech, he proscribes the sexual duties expected of a wife. She is supposed to yield to her husband's sexual needs even when she is on the table awaiting delivery. Ironically enough, he also gives instructions to women for safeguarding their body which is to be displayed strictly for the pleasure of the husband. The speaker provides a lascivious description of the beauty of women's body parts. The reward for such

control of one's sexuality is splendid ("നരകത്തിലെ" 0:02.00-0:03:15). For one who fears Allah, HE will give a lot of pleasure through women. Allah will take away jealousy, and all bad behaviours and provide the company of virgin "*hoori*" (beautiful woman ) for god fearing men, not old women, but beautiful women and of same age. Then the man can select as much women as he needs, he proclaims. The above statements reveal the sexism inherent in these speeches and the fallacious interpretation that polygamy is not a sin per se because Allah himself gives opportunities for the same in heaven, but on earth it will beget sin.

According to the preacher, there are four types of women in heaven, and in hell : 1.one who believes in her Allah, HIS messenger, her husband and cultural heritage 2. one who lives satisfactorily within the resources 3.one who delivers more children. 4. one who suffers all faults of husband and loves him more and one who is coy ("മഹത്വമുള്ള" 0:0:05-0:15:14). In contrast, those women who have a 'long' tongue, one who gets out of home without husband's permission, one who dominates over husbands, one who watches television serials are bound to end up in hell. He states that Allah is more concerned about his restrictions than his prescriptions. Hameed Yaseen Jouhri, yet another Sunni echoes Qasimi in presentation and choice of topic. His major discourses centre on the duties of wife for getting to heaven which include display of body before husband and no other, living within the four walls of her home, giving birth to his kids and nurturing them and being a means to the husband's welfare in the other world ("സ്നേഹമുള്ള ഭാര്യ").

However, the speeches of M.M. Akbar a Salafi/Mujahid speaker like *Women in Islam* which is also the theme of fourth chapter of Quran, present a less stringent

view stating that man and woman have the same origin in God and the same status. Both the responsibilities and rights of men and women are mentioned in Quran (part 1 0:06:32-0:09:17). In his view, Islam prevents objectification of women. The beauty of a woman is the property of the husband and to be protected by husband. He also accuses the consumerist, Western media for misinterpreting Islam. Islam does not advocate equality between men and women but advocates co operation. According to him, the Western lobby promotes Islamic feminism to attack Islamic ideology (part 2 0:01:30- 0:8:59).

A welcome change one sees in the Islamic rhetoric of Kerala is the overwhelming presence of female orators who speak vociferously and with a lot of conviction in a field dominated by male preachers. This change had become prominent with the coming of the activist rhetoric in Islam, mostly with organizations like KNM, JIH and *Quran Sunnath Society*. One can trace this female rhetorical tradition of Islam in Kerala to the Muslim reformation movements and the presence of women including Haleema Beevi, Beefathima, Nafeesath Beevi, Begum T. C. Kunjachumma and others who were also writers and vibrant political activists of their times. After 1930's one can see a gradual shift of interest of these women from political engagements to religious discourses. Haleema Beevi had recorded enthusiastically in a magazine in 1959 about the Cochin Women's Conference which represented Muslim women delivering religious speech, a field dominated till then by male preachers (Sherin 196-202).

Notwithstanding the contradictions within, this visible presence of women in the podium is heartening keeping in mind the reality that women are not given entry

into most of the mosques. Speakers like Ayesha Cherumukku, K. Jamida, Aysha Sajna etc. are seen at various women's conventions across Kerala. This change has been precipitated by the realization of the need for appropriating women into the religious discourse and presenting them as defences against the allegations raised against Islam as a completely patriarchal and oppressive religion. These speakers are faced with a triple challenge of answering back the patriarchal Ulama within their religion, the Western stereotyping regarding gender oppression in Islam and the secular feminists in India who talk of a religion-less gender equity. There are also differences of opinion between these women speakers. For instance, Jamida teacher and her Quran Sunnath society are not considered as Islamic by the rest of the Islamic groups. In the tradition of Amina Wadud who in 2005 became the first Muslim woman to lead a prayer, Jamida also led a Friday prayer at Malappuram district on 26 January 2018 for the first time in Kerala.

Ayesha Cherumukku is a popular *Mujahid* female orator who speaks about how Muslim women were restricted inside the kitchens and how the Islahi movements have brought her to the forefront to wage a war against the patriarchal and domineering tendencies inside the orthodox Islam as well as assert the place of women ("ḥuḍūr"). She asserts women are the carriers of the right Islamic values in the family and in the society and she has a moral responsibility to transform the society ("AYISHA" 0:02:36-0:06:17). Questions about the kind of Islamist society dreamt of and articulated by the *Mujahid* women have led critics to argue that "...educated women"- by which Mujahids generally intend women with high school matriculation plus basic religious (*madrassa*) qualifications-are envisaged as the prop

for the family as a whole, fostering religious morality and promoting the education of the children" (Osella and Osella, "Intro" 329). JIH, Kerala is also no different in this regard. They support the education and participation of women in public life. JIH women's wing is also coming to the forefront by organizing seminars, debates and colloquiums and tries to project their political presence to a great extent in recent years for a sympathetic observer who knows about the slow but consistent progress these movements have made through years of struggle. However, one observes in their rhetoric a fascination for an ideal past and a complete solution to the predicament of the twenty first century Muslim woman in the scriptures. JIH has always been on the scrutiny for its allegiance to the restrictive Maududian stand about women's place and the way in which later followers have questioned Maududi's 'neopatriarchate' and heralded women into public sphere (Ahmad). When they insist that Islam should be studied in the original it is doubtful whether there are any real attempts in this regard. In these discourses the political issues concerning women are addressed only at the peripheral or superficial level. Their arguments many a time fall short of self reflexivity and are defences against the allegations made by others. They project Islam as a pro-female religion as different from other patriarchal, Semitic as well as eastern religions. In Muslim Women's Colloquium held on 25 February, 2017 at Calicut, Kerala, Rahmathunnissa A., Vice President of JIH Women's wing, Kerala dismisses the liberal arguments for women's freedom by saying "There is no problem with lipstick under the burqa. But one has to brush the teeth before putting on the lipstick" (0:12:54-0:13:20). *Lipstick under my burqa* was a 2016 film which raised eyebrows in India for its inflammable content. Thus the best model of female emancipation in Islam still is the Prophet's ten year old 'virgin'

wife, Ayesha who was a "knowledge centre" herself. She is the super woman and the model of feminine grace, one who managed issues of kitchen as well as international affairs with much ease (0:9:16-55).

Most of these female discourses centre around the primary duty of the Islamic woman, which is no different from that of the Hindu woman prescribed by Medathithi, the foremost duty of a woman is to lead her partner and her children to heaven, the duty of a mother (Sharafiya 0:6:40). The duties expected of a wife is illustrated by Amina Anwariya in her speech. She has to be obedient and has to guard herself from other men in the absence of her husband. She has an important mission, to lead a family and through it the society to pursue an Islamic way of life. The question of the position and stand of Muslim woman in the modern world is taken up by various women speakers. Why do Muslim women wear *Purda* and veil asks Ruksana, another speaker. The need to have strong stands against the questions hurled at Islam in the name of veil, polygamy, *purdah* and other issues is brought to notice by her. The discourse of rights of the Muslim woman upheld by the secular paradigms are problematized by these speakers thus exposing the hypocrisy and the political gaming behind limiting the definition of Muslim woman to stereotypical notions. The first task before these female orators is to fight the enemy outside their religion and most of the public rhetoric focuses on that aspect. She also suggests that the study and analysis of Islam has to be undertaken by Muslim women themselves ("Qatar"). As Sylvia Vatuk rightly observes, among its various supporters and detractors these women are to make the wisest choice.

Activists in the movement for Muslim women's rights often find themselves in a position of having to defend themselves against both direct attacks and more subtle, insidious insinuations from the religious leadership and from members of the wider community, including members (especially men) of their own families. The activities they engage in often preclude their conforming strictly to orthodox standards of seclusion and Islamic femininity. They are also vulnerable to criticism for putting their interests as women ahead of the community's need to maintain a united front against the communal forces rampant in the society at large. Since so many Indian women's NGOs rely heavily on funding from foreign aid agencies, they are sometimes the target of suspicion on that front.

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The conundrum in which Indian Muslim women find themselves is hesitantly but clearly articulated by a handful of female speakers at some conferences of Student's Islamic Organization, a feeder organisation of JIH, Kerala. The predicament of these women as critical insiders comes to the forefront as they sincerely but tentatively and emotionally, put forward their points of view on the podium. The questions regarding the position of women in Quranic point of justice, how far Muslim women are represented in positions of power and the ways of battling stereotypical portrayal of Islam outside the religion, the political stand of the Muslim woman in the political climate of Muslim minority rights, the complexity in opening up the gender debates which may drown the minority cause, and how a Muslim woman sees and



articulates about herself and more importantly where is the platform where these problems could be expressed are some rhetorical questions posed by speakers like Najjiya P.P and Marva. The incapability of the feminist movement to understand or find solutions for the predicament of a Muslim female who lives strictly within the framework of the religious concept of woman causes the Muslim woman to disengage with the former (Marva ). As Nalini Rajan asserts,

the truth is that -as happened in the Hindu community a century earlier and continues to till this day-the extremist Muslim voices are more clear headed than the moderate ones. After all, in a growing anti-Muslim sentiment in India and the western world it is very difficult for the moderates to succumb to the rhetoric that they are 'anti-Muslim' and 'anti-tradition'. As happened in the Rakhmabhai case, the Muslim moderates today aim to look for the "correct" interpretation of religious texts or to reform the Shariat, rather than to adopt a straight-forward gender sensitive position. (165)

They have "to confront a triple consciousness"( Kazi 48) along political, religious and gender lines. However what differentiates this rhetoric of women from the male ulama rhetoric is the sheer plurality of views on Quran and the recognition of the need for spaces for honest "*Ijthihad*" (independent reasoning ) in terms of the life of a Muslim woman. This development is therefore commendable and the presence of large numbers of Muslim women on such stages is something one does not see in the Hindu or Christian podiums.

Although women are said to partake of religion more than men, it is ironical that the experiences of women have never been considered as knowledge and one sees closely the working of gendered epistemologies (Juschka 2001) in almost all religions. Except for a few, women do not exhibit the urge to articulate their religious experiences. And almost everywhere, experience is discounted as secondary to the theoretical part. Women also are restricted from doing priestly duties and in religions like Christianity the preaching of women is proscribed by Bible although there are some exceptions as we see female Bishops in churches under CSI (Church of South India) in the country. A public comment under the Youtube video of a famous Pentecostal woman preacher Sr. Mary Kooror who talks of the power of women reveals the majority opinion of the Christendom.

The Word of God proclaims, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” (1 Timothy 2:11-12). In the church, God assigns different roles to men and women. This is a result of the way mankind was created and the way in which sin entered the world (1 Timothy 2:13-14). God, through the apostle Paul, restricts women from serving in roles of teaching and/or having spiritual authority over men. This precludes women from serving as pastors over men, which definitely includes preaching to, teaching, and having spiritual authority. (Varghese)

Thus mostly, women are passive recipients of the male discourses or at best imitators of their male counterparts. However some sects like the Pentecost give

great significance to the testimony of faith, prayer and reward from God in the form of cures and other miracles. These testimonies are more significant than the pulpit speeches and one sees a huge number of women participants in evangelical events among different Christian groups.

### **Ideals of Masculinity and Religion**

Just as the notions of feminization of religious subjects have been put under the scanner the link between masculinity and religion have also been part of Masculinity studies for a long time now. They have focused on the socio-cultural construction of masculinity and the attendant privileges via religion in order to examine the asymmetry in power relations between the sexes. "Critical men's studies in religion could be transformative in reconfiguring gendered identities as in New age holistic spiritualities emphasizing a subjective-sacred inner life" (Kronhofer 203). The conventional dominant discourses on gender in Christianity are quite pronounced, following Torah and New Testament which are redundant with statements like "male is the head and female is the 'helper'", "wives, be submissive to your husbands", "Just as Christ is the head of the church, husband is the head of the family and hence must be served as Christ himself "(Cherivally 0:2:18-0:3:18), "it is the duty of mothers to 'train' their daughters to learn to subject themselves to their husbands whoever they may be outside home or at work"( Eapen 0:2:13-20).

On the other hand in Islam as Lahoucine Ougzane remarks:

dominant masculinity in Islamic cultures has so far remained an unrecognised category that maintains its power by refusing to

identify itself. There are very few studies that make Muslim men visible as gendered subjects and that show masculinities have a history and clear defining characteristics that form-an integral part of the gender relations in Muslim cultures. (qtd. in De Sondy 4)

Etin Anwar rightly observes that "the engendering process of masculinity and femininity in the context of a Muslim life is a lifetime project and is promulgated by Muslim legal scholars, preachers, and mystics through religious media, religious meetings, literature, and speeches" (94). Many of the Islamic discourses centre around the need for being an ideal Islamic man and a complementary Islamic ideal woman in accordance with the principles put forth by Quran. Interpretation of the Quran, *Sunnah* (actions and deeds of Prophet Muhammad), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), local understanding of the Islamic faith, and indigenous norms and customs form the basis for seeking legitimacy and authority in discussions about gender relations (Wario 234). The discourses explain one by one the qualities expected of a man in various roles, of that of a husband, of a father, of a devout Muslim and in respect of women, a wife and a mother. These speeches present the impact of Western ideals as a corrupting influence on the generation and goad its followers to an Islamic life by instilling fear of hell after death as has been illustrated in the previous chapter.

Another aspect of the same is the way in which The Prophet's sexuality is constructed by various cultural traditions. The Christian ideal of celibacy with regard to the prophets makes the Western outlook on the sexuality of the Prophet quite regressive. They dwell on the "licentiousness" of the prophet. However, in defence of the Prophet many Islamic discourses project that Islamic spirituality was

never for repressing sexuality but channelizing it in socially acceptable ways and even sees the virility of Muhammed as the proof of his being human and superhuman at the same time (Rodet 68). The Islamic discourses in Kerala led by men have a characteristic which is not seen in other religious discourses. That is the way in which they address the topic of sexuality, which is not a taboo subject in religious discourses. The issue of what is legitimate and what is not, is described openly in these speeches. There are overt, open references to the subject of sexual intercourse, the do's and don'ts of sex and references even to the private parts of male and female. Nevertheless the female speeches remain mum about the topic and restrict their language to family, motherhood, and issues regarding veil, Sharia and Uniform Civil Code. Also, the rhetoric gives ample tips about the perpetration of power over the women folk. Scholars also point to the notion of Sufism in its mystical form as essentially feminine as opposed to the patriarchal, performative Ummah (Sondy 14).

These theocratic Islamisms idealize an entrenched masculinity defined through familial dominance and shows of power, sometimes expressed as militarism. The rigidity of the masculinity that emerges prompts a certain exodus from religious Islam to a secular, if still in some ways culturally Muslim, identity. Some Muslims who do not agree with narrow construal of manliness feel forced to consider themselves secular and therefore outside the religious community, which Muslims call the Ummah. (1)

Apart from these, we hear responses to contemporary controversies such as 'Love Jihad', the issue of Uniform Civil Code, conversions and events like ' Kiss of Love'.

### **The Transgender Issue**

Deeply entrenched in the Islamic life is the idea that "heterosexuality is natural and essential and heterosexual marriage is the only path to religious and personal fulfilment" (Siraj 214). Building upon this notion Islamic speakers talk of the politicization of LGBT issue and sexual freedom by the Western world as manipulated by fund mongering NGO's in Kerala (Akbar, "WHO" 0:01:10-0:02:10). Accordingly, homosexuality is "haram" and abnormal and being a transgender is a genetic fault followed by the lack of sexual impulse (0:01:40). For still conventional speakers like Al Qasimi the punishment for sodomy is death and Allah's curse ("E P" 0:02:10, 0:03:20). Biologically there is no third gender and *hijadas* suffer illness and not a natural condition, claims Bukhari, although Quran and Islamic *Shariat* talks about the rights of *hijadas* (0:12:20-0:16:56). However, whether it be issue of transgender or any other women's issue the concept is that of searching for evidences in Quran. The issue of transgender, some scholars argue, already has a discursive space within Islamic theology, although Islam operates more with the binary division of male and female. Citing tolerant fatwas issued by Khomeini in Iran and Sheikh Al- Tantawi in Egypt on trans gender surgeries, M. Alipour talks about the personal and political problems of trans gender as not fully resolved but that "there is a discursive space in Islamic textual context which may justifiably underpin an interpretation of third gender within Islamic juridical and theological debate"( 176).

Talking of the ramifications of Hindutva for sexual and gender rights especially in the context of the ascendancy of Hindutva right, Narrain notes that " a complex web of politics, culture and the law is producing incongruous and counterproductive results "(159). The issues faced by the transgender and other sexual minorities have had a long history of forced invisibility in India. As Van den berg observes, "The body that is a contested site in contemporary societies is often the body of a gendered, sexual, religious or ethnic other (e.g., women, LGBT's, migrants, or colonial others)"(181). From sheer ignorance of their condition to indifference and derision, the Indian heterogeneous crowd has 'othered' them in different ways. In Kerala, the situation is no different as explained by LGBTIQA+ activist Anil Chilla who asserts that Kerala has not "seen" transgender before 2013. The protests led by the transgender are now seeing the light of the day though in miniscule ways. The Supreme Court verdict regarding the repeal of Section 377 has been historic. One of the foremost demands put forward by the transgender activists is the right to education and employment. We see a lot of transgender opting out the identity of woman than man by being trans-woman. This non-visibility of trans -men leads us to the relative freedom 'men" have in going out of their homes and choosing their gender identity while "women" who want to be "men" are suppressed within the walls of the home and attests again the secondary position of women (0:10:24-0:38:22). The reports of sexual assaults on trans gender by both the local men and the brutality of the police adds agony to the lot. As one sees in the comments of Sheethal Shyam most of the responses they receive from the society is abusive, violent and sexual. The invisibility showcases the deeply entrenched antagonism towards transgender as they have started questioning the very binary of male and

female in language by pointing to the void where their names should have been. Shyam, a prominent trans gender activist, deplors the pitiable apathy shown even by the Malayalam language which does not have a term for transgender or has derogatory names associated with them. She also questions the naming of the transgender as the "third gender" She asks: "Why are we called the third sex? Who is first sexual orientation and second sex? Men? Ladies? Why are we third?" (0:00:58-0:08:58). There is a need to invent names for them in one sense, alternately they rise above the conventional naming process where language names a person according to the biological sexual aspects they display.

Christian conservative doctrines which operate on the principle that God created human as man and woman and made man as the 'head' looks upon these individuals as an assault on God's creation and had long ignored them. The conservative stand on transgender as non-human and hence deprived is prevalent in Kerala as we see certain priests like Father Daniel Poovanathil using the imagery of "neither male or female" ("Fr." 0:04:40-45) to describe the deplorable process of certain Christian sabhas participating in the festivals of other religions and appropriating their rituals like *vishukani*, *thulabharam* etc. Ironically though, recent awareness on the concept of gender as socially constructed has given the priests an edge over these people who claim that gender is not biological but social and hence a mental orientation or an aberration which could be set right through religion. Thus we see the taboo subject of homosexuality and transgender becoming a celebratory topic in some Christian spiritual discourses. The duty of the preacher cum priest is to guide these people back into the fold and a way of life in Christ. Following Pope



Francis' positive stance on the matter many churches in Kerala have started acknowledging this group and have started advocating 'sympathy' and 'compassion' for this flock. The latest event in Kerala was the place given to two trans-women in a Maramon convention held in 2017 ("History"). The image of Jesus Christ giving a helping hand to the oppressed, women, prostitutes and other fallen people serves as the role model in such an enterprise. The rhetoric of compassion which says that the brokenness of the body and the mind of these sections must be compassionately addressed by the church often mars the real needs of the community to get equal rights as human beings. There are even calls for a separate priest for burying these people. They are branded as people with broken identities which need to be mended by the Church. Thus, in effect, there is a new 'flock' to be tended to, "the transgender flock" and one is left with the question whether the condition of this flock would be any different from the Dalit Christian flock which faces discrimination inside the church.

### **The Subaltern Counter Rhetoric**

The politics of caste has exposed the hazards of reducing the variegated experience of women to a single, universal female experience. It also critiques the relative differences between the experiences of an upper caste, empowered female and a Dalit female. Moreover, the division as well as the privileging of the first in the binary takes on shades of multiple oppression and resistance as seen in the predicament of the Dalit female. Take for example, the life stories of the female leaders of Muthanga and Chengara land struggles. They have been quite different from the male stories and most of the time, even inside a social movement for

equality and justice women are just nameless figures as in the case of many historic women in India. On the other hand, Rekha Raj argues that in the discussions of early feminist movements in Kerala caste was never an "active category" (*Politics* 156). But the twenty first century showed change as

the feminist interventions took notice of the different selves of the female that ranged from queer articulations in Malayali life (Bharadwaj 2007) ; unravelling of issues in Muslim women's selves and the history of Muslim women engagements in Kerala (Shamshad 2009); the autobiography of a sex worker who addressed the complexities of man-woman relationships and critiques of familial relationships in Malayali life (Jameela 2006); the history of the making of 'good women' and 'bad women' in the history of Kerala with an emphasis on various locations like caste and its contributions (Devika 2011). These shifts were concrete enough to challenge the mainstream feminist debates and their binary analysis of women's subordination. But in spite of this development, the subtle mechanisms of caste were largely overlooked while analyzing the women's question and feminist practice. (157)

Raj further notes the influence of the liberation theology in the visibility of the Dalit female during the second half of 1980's in Kerala. The reformation inside the Protestant church, the anti-caste movements and the neo-Marxist ideals were among the many factors that prompted this change ("Dalit women"). Speaking of the 'absence in presence' (*Politics* 241) of the dalit female in the public sphere through

her thesis, she observes that dalit discourses since 1980's have so far gone through two phases. One, which included Dalit movements positing a homogenous, universal, essentialist category with a left view thus initiating a talk on the issue of caste. The second, since 2000s, which problematized the silence of the dalit female within these discourses through intersections of caste and gender (161-162). Decades later, in the millennium with the resurgence of Dalit movements nationwide, the dalit female got inspiration to claim that they have "to talk differently" (Guru "Dalit") to take up a multi-pronged fight, against the Dalit patriarchy, the outer Brahminic ideology and the non-dalit woman talking for the dalit female. A similar process was being initiated in the Adivasi struggles too.

C. K. Janu is the leader of the well-known 'Muthanga' struggle in Kerala which started in 2001 under the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha which organized a relentless revolt against the Government to persuade it to redistribute land to the tribal people. Selena Prakkanam, is another woman leader to emerge out of the 'Chengara' land struggle in Kerala in 2007 after years of work among the subaltern masses who were marginalized by the State and the civil society alike for generations. In both the cases, these two leaders had to engage in a series of power struggles within the movement and outside, being Dalit as well as women. The body becomes a site of struggle and contestation for these dalit women and many like them, in face of the protests against the patriarchy and caste structures. These bodies become the site of repression and rebellion at various phases in their upward social mobility.

Both these movements sprang out of the realization from the subaltern bodies that they have been cheated and used by the governments in the same way, irrespective of their ideological affiliations. They have been used primarily by the left governments as an ensemble of masses mobilized to take part in protests and demonstrations paying them meagre daily wages as remuneration. They were bodies with liminal subjectivities even though the rise of Communism and the Land Reform act of 1963 in Kerala had pushed them into the facade of being a political subject after centuries of oppression from the higher castes in Kerala. They have been disciplined, politicised but still not able to assert their real aims or improve their living conditions and were tools in the hands of the political forces, as vote-banks and as demonstrators. They were powerful, yet deprived of power in the Foucauldian sense.

The Muthanga and the Chengara revolts were different from the earlier anti-caste struggles in Kerala led by Dalit leaders like Kallara Sukumaran and Pambady John Joseph or Poykayil Appachan. The latter had forced the government through their mass organization to take notice of the plight and had been successful in procuring welfare schemes for the harijans and the adivasis. On a positive note we see a drastic change in the political participation of dalit women from passive bodies under a political regime to agents who fight for their rights over productive land, one of its kind in India. This was also an effort to shed their identities as passive recipients of governmental welfare (Devika, "Contemporary") and hence expected to be indebted to the mainstream governmental mechanisms. However, the struggle

was not an easy one and had to endure severe backlash from the Government as well as other political parties.

With the shocking brutal attack on the adivasis in Muthanga in the Wayanad Wild Life Sanctuary that led to a tragic loss of lives on February 19, 2003, the simmering discontent amongst the adivasis of Kerala has reached flashpoint. Post-attack justifications have been pouring in fed mostly by the state with the active assistance of the leaders of the ruling and opposition parties. All of a sudden, links with the PWG of Andhra Pradesh and even the LTTE were conjured up and quite predictably, just as quickly, denied by the police as lacking in substance and evidence but not before they caught the attention of the media-alert masses of Kerala. (Bijoy and Raviraman)

One is convinced that these communities are excluded and included as and when decided by the authoritarian regimes and hence are perpetually in a 'state of exception' (Agamben) throughout their lives. It is in the context of such an ambiguous, deprived state and the branding of the protestors as 'terrorists' trying to overthrow the State machinery that we see the emergence of organic leaders who change the very course of the movement, analogous to the assertion of Kancha Ilaaha in *Why I am not a Hindu*.

The only way to historicize the past and safeguard the future is to create an army of organic intellectuals-men and women-from Dalitbahujan forces. Dalitbahujan organic intellectuals must work out

a long-term strategy, both political and economic, to restructure social relations in a massive way. (132)

C. K. Janu and Selena Prakkanam were two such leaders who engaged openly with the public sphere as political subjects. The visual of C. K. Janu with swollen cheeks and a bruised body as a victim of the police brutality in the Muthanga struggle was all over the media on 19th February 2003. The struggle was reported to have claimed the lives of two people, one a protestor and a policeman and caused many injuries among the protesting crowd. The images of the tribal protestors including women and children equipped with kerosene, bows and arrows, ready to retaliate either with suicide or with attacks were also the nature of the determination with which the tribal people reacted to the broken promises of the Kerala Government who had made a policy decision to redistribute land among the Adivasis as early as October 2001. Nonetheless, the representation of the Muthanga violence was quite problematic. The bodies which were beaten and tortured or raped were not much news in the media. The official records refused to see the actual number of causalities.

After the ambiguous victory of Muthanga struggle with only a few of the strikers allotted land in the first phase, Janu associated herself with similar protests for land such as the Aralam farm struggle under the aegis of the Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha and finally went on to float a party called Janathipathya Rashriya Sabha in 2016. She also courted controversy for disowning the Communist party of which she was an ardent member and upon proclaiming her decision to join the right wing NDA as political alliance although she revoked this decision two years later. C. K.

Janu had then justified her decision by taking the stand that neither the Congress nor the Communist had done anything to improve the status of the tribal. Janu 's name was further drawn into another political controversy when she purchased a car ("കാറ"). The accusation was dismissed by her saying that if a tribal could have adequate land, she could work on it and produce money enough to buy a car of her own. She also derided the 'savarna' mentality of the people in not being able to accept the fact that a tribal female could own a car. She has also had to face criticisms from other Dalit women who were part of the brutal struggle but were still far from the land or life they dreamed of.

Notwithstanding the curiosity of the people in knowing about the financial resources of this 'poor' tribal leader and the criticisms levelled against her for her right wing political alignment one could interpret the urgency of the crowd in judging her in another way. This judgement and criticism are not entirely innocent and differ from the criticisms of other dalit women against her, precisely because it comes from the notion that if you are a Dalit, a tribal or a female fighting for your rights you would be in front of a scanner always and that even a single instance of a mismanagement or misunderstanding of the movement would be unpardonable. Thus even in a fight of the marginalised, you would be judged by the norms of the same mainstream who caused this condition in the first place. The implication is that you should be honest, upright and conform to the moral standards of the elite if you are a fighting Dalit, though the mainstream would flout any rules and is outside the moral compass it has constructed for the others. Thus the destabilising of these Malayali expectations by the dalits is quite pertinent in the media- images of dalits.

For instance, during kudil kettusamaram (making huts and staying ) in front of the secretariat, one of the main allegations against C. K. Janu was that she wore silk saris and appeared on TV channels with full make up, thus exemplifying the fact that she is “funded”! Though the Adivasi struggle succeeded in capturing the attention of the “general” public (possibly with assumptions of being a pure innocent child-like people who need the help of the mainstream to become adults), it exerted an unconscious emotional demand on Janu to mimic the activist model constructed by Kerala’s dominant political practices. (Raj, *Politics* 61)

Prakkanam in her autobiography (*Chengara*) recounts the course of the struggle from the basic level of awakening the Dalit consciousness of the individuals through persistent household campaigns to the organization of a mass protest in the form of Chengara revolt. The Chengara revolt was not a mass mobilization like any other political party- based demonstration. It required precise planning and execution to inhabit the estate and to look after the concerns of hundreds of protestors including women and children. There was starvation, diseases and there was the issue of security. Most importantly, the danger of several coups from within the movement. She recalls a particular day in August 2007 when she was in hospital and was later summoned by the leader Laha Gopalan. He told her that the next day the police force would enter the land as there would be orders from the court to evict the protestors from the protest land. But they should in no way permit that to happen. There was only one way to defend. Prakkanam listened nonchalantly to the mission



that was vested in her as the leader. She was asked to prepare her mind for self immolation. That was the only weapon they had to resist the forces. The next day she along with twenty two male protestors had registered to embrace death. However the court postponed its decision and the immolation bid was stalled (48-49). In this context she queries the reason why when every male had taken decision by themselves to immolate their bodies for the cause, the decision was imposed on her by the movement. She never understood why even her 'choice' of death was taken away from her.

Nevertheless, kerosene cans, stones and their bodies were the only weapons they had and were very much part of their struggle. The images of women and children with kerosene cans in their hands and men with a noose around their necks ready to jump off trees continued to pop up in media but remained unaddressed by the Malayali psyche or by the government. Some prominent political leaders even mocked at this act of suicide as a melodramatic act and having no real intention. Another incident was when police caught a protestor who was bathing in the nearby pond and another woman named Omana Sunil cried out loud to release him and in her attempt to rescue him, poured kerosene all over her body and threatened to annihilate herself. The police was frightened and withdrew, paving the way for the man to run back into the plantation. There were other strong women leaders like Thattayil Saraswathi and Sarojini Valungal who were part of this movement. The outsiders, mostly labourers, aided by the Plantation owners and the tacit support of the ruling party also tried their best in attacking the protestors physically and mentally.

One of the most common representations about the tribal and the dalit women is the notion of them having an amoral life. The stories of the 'unwedded mothers' of the Attapady and Wayanad tribal regions are also a matter of grave concern. Even in the course of such struggles there were sexual allegations levelled against the protestors. Simultaneously 'Four women were raped by some trade union members of the plantations in the presence of the police officers who remained as mute witnesses'. "The complaints of these women were never redressed either by the State or by the Courts or by any other women's organizations and the case was dismissed as lacking evidence" (Sreerekha, "Illegal" 61).

At a later stage in the struggle, Prakkanam begins to see the fissures within the movement and the authoritarian tendencies of the leader Laha Gopalan who seemed bent on producing martyrs for the Chengara cause. She distances herself from the leader and is charged with allegations of financial mismanagement. She asserts people were instigated against her. Disappointed at the double stand of Laha Gopalan, who had become a thorough politician by then and had entered into a compromise with the Government she couldn't work for the cause anymore and leaves the camp and the Chengara revolt to work for the dalit cause in her own way with the help of DHRM .

She is now the President of DHRM, Kerala and has moved in the direction of making DHRM a political force to reckon with in Kerala. She dons a new DHRM outfit which is a black shirt sporting Ambedkar's face, jeans, and a black head cloth. This costume worn by the workers have created consternation in the visual field of the mainstream. They place Dalit icons like Ayyankali and B. R. Ambedkar as their

divine anchors and many have adopted Buddhism as their religion. DHRM, however, as expected, is under close surveillance by the Government who has branded it as a terrorist outfit and they are implicated in political murders and constantly attacked by the authoritarian parties of the State. The DHRM workers desperately try to foreground narratives of personal torture they have to face inside the police stations in the aftermath of being framed by false charges ("*Sudhi*").

Over the years one can observe a change in the persona of this Dalit woman leader who became part of the struggle against the establishment by being an aid to the leader Gopalan to one who shared her experiences, narrated her struggle and the story of the movement for a political purpose to a woman who has realized the importance of creating a knowledge base for the movement. After Chengara, Prakkanam has tried to work among the dalits with this awareness that more than a revolt planned with the bodies of the dalit masses, what the Dalit cause needs are "thinking" bodies. For instance in one speech, she denounces the use of violence to gain rights, not to play into the hands of leaders as she exhorts the audience to be citizens capable of making laws as Ambedkar had suggested than being ruled by and educated by the Savarna intellectuals ("DHRM" 0:0:25-0:06:25).

What Gopal Guru rightly observes in the context of Indian academic spaces may be applied well in this context. He said "Indian social science represents a pernicious divide between theoretical Brahmins and empirical Shudras" ("how egalitarian"). Similarly, as Juschka claims, in the case of a similar gender ideology ,

...to concede to an already existent hegemony the construction of theoretical frameworks, frameworks that describe/create the

knowledge by which one constructs her/his worlds and a world ethos by which s/he situates her/ himself, eviscerates the individual or group of any political and cultural power. (564)

The very notion of the general society that the Dalits, the marginalized should speak about their "experiences" while the mainstream thinkers will "theorise" about it is a symbolic domination on the community, thereby sustaining the 'graded inequality' as such. As much as the male, 'Savarna' body the Dalit female body is also capable of 'producing' knowledge structures which will help them perceive and negotiate the world in their own ways. This annihilation of the binary construction of experience and knowledge, is what we see in the growth of Selena Prakkanam and C. K. Janu as we see them explore the history, foreground single, unknown instances of Dalit resistances inside Kerala and outside from the past. Offering "black revolutionary greetings" ("*Selena*" 0:18:37) against falsification of history, these discourses emphasize accurate study of history, constitution, a self-disciplined life and true democratic thought (0:2:05-30), demystifying the myths associated with the Dalit and significantly, brings forward the attempt to create authentic Dalit histories which are pluralistic in nature for furthering the cause.

The rhetorical construction of the Hindu womanhood in the Hindutva discourses project an image of a self disciplined, highly opinionated, religious and free self despite the categories of caste, class or marital status impinging on their existence. They shuttle back and forth between the patient and compassionate Bharat Mata and the ferocious, destructive Kali image. One also sees women being strong spokespersons of patriarchy. As opposed to speakers such as Sasikala and Sobha

Surendran who show a compulsive inclination towards hate rhetoric directed towards the 'other', C. K. Janu and Prakkanam have based their rhetoric on differing with the other at the same time giving importance to knowledge construction on their own by refusing to buy their history from the Savarna fold. The differences within is not an occasion to hurl abuses as we see in the response of Janu who says that though she has political affiliations different from her earlier comrade Gitanandan, as a group the Adivasi community is still one ("C.K." 0:01:05-15). The speeches of Janu and Prakkanam are suffused with strong demand for land, education, career and basic needs for their community with their knowledge base in the theory and politics of historical figures like B. R. Ambedkar and Ayyankali. They talk to a small group of kindred folk with a specific objective while the former adopts religious symbols and myths as their knowledge base and address large sections of public with a general objective of keeping their voices and thereby their ideologies alive even when there is no contingency. In the case of Muslim women speakers one sees a rhetorical imitation of their male counterparts with occasional counter arguments from some women and men. The image of the female constructed by the extremist Muslim patriarchal positions contradict with the female narratives of the same. Their rhetoric try to establish a Muslim identity which is simultaneously progressive, scientific at the same time traditional, an image that wears burqa and lipstick with equal finesse. However, ultimately it seems that the very notion of discourses on gender in most cases become nothing more than a "site on which competing views of tradition and modernity are debated" (Raj, *Politics* 71) without any desired results.

## Chapter 4

### Malayali Spirituality: From Personal to Political Salvation

*Every era has to reinvent the project of "spirituality" for itself.  
(Spirituality = plans, terminologies, ideas of department aimed at the  
resolution of painful structural contradictions inherent in the human  
situation, at the completion of human consciousness, at  
transcendence)*

*Sontag*

In a country like India with a Constitution which calls for a "secular" state with all the associated ambiguous meanings, where religion seeps into the texture of all social practices, is it possible to divorce religion from other forms of social praxis? What role does language play in the propagation of the religion? Are they inextricably linked to each other? As religions and language evolve, do means of religious persuasion also change? Michael Bakhtin criticized sacred and authoritarian forms of speech for being monological. The sacred word "retards and freezes thought" for it is "inert" and 'is removed from dialogue". This sort of word has "spread everywhere, limiting, directing and retarding both thought and live experience of life" (qtd. in Billig 18). This argument is to an extent true. Yet it cannot be ignored that these monologues function in unfathomable manners to mesmerize the audience into certain ways of thinking about the divine anchor in the context of their immediate realities. What rhetorical ploys do the orators use to talk about the divine and instil respective values in a large audience? Most often than

not, people also demarcate between spirituality as one's personal spiritual quest which may or may not be religious and religiosity which is institutional in character. This chapter looks at how the borderline between the former and latter gets blurred in creating a spiritual politics according to the demands of the age. The main aim of the chapter is to unravel the means by which a new world order is created by the orators banking on the deeply personal quest of the individual for another world of spiritual well being.

Religion is a huge maze in myriad forms and to generalize based on certain logical fallacies in the interpretations of the sacred texts would be a fallacy in itself. Nevertheless, from a rational point of view it seems to be quite absurd that human beings, who are credited with discretion, would be so easily carried away by the power of words as used by and in religion. The whole matrix of religion has been erected on language; especially the metaphorical and metonymic aspect of language and it is not possible to raise a counter argument against the fallacies inherent in it precisely because in the first place there is either no valid argument at all or they follow circular argumentation. This is where rhetorical ploys become very helpful. Binding human faith to an abstract entity requires a glue since normal human beings understand the world through associations. The fact that the very word religion comes from the Latin word 'religare' (to bind) becomes relevant in this context. Sumanta Banerjee points out how the use of

enigmatic language of codes, made up of words loaded with symbolic and suggestive connotations, described as *sandhyabhasha* (often translated as "twilight language", i.e., half expressed and half

concealed, or interpreted as a derivation from *abhisandhi*, which when translated loosely, means a secret plot) reveal the need of the pundits to maintain a language of secrecy and thereby of supremacy.

(13)

One can see a definite pattern emerging in these discourses, a kind of repetition of certain codes or repeated reference to a set of principles, a set of discourses which employ the same type of rhetoric down the ages. Spiritual texts written in a remote past have special possibilities for re-interpretation. Extracted from a different linguistic and social environment they give the orators classic words to put contemporary realities in a new perspective. Myths have always been used by human beings to manipulate contingent needs as they help to legitimize the deeds and transcend the limitations of questioning. Although myths tend to take the appearance of universality, they are used for specific political purposes by the people concerned. Moreover, they help the listeners to get meaning by relating it to certain stories which have become part of their day to day existence or of their childhood memory.

### **Christian Sermons**

One of the first instances of the connection between language and religion in the context of Christianity occurs in the Old Testament. Here God asks Moses, his chosen one, to spread His message to the fellow beings. Moses is insecure about his oratorical skills, worried about whether he would do justice to the responsibility conferred on him and eventually confesses to God who chooses Aaron, Moses' brother and says:



You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it. (Exodus 4.10–17)

In a path-breaking work on religious epistemology Nicholas Wolterstoff claims, based on speech-act theory that God can literally speak. For him God spoke through the double agency of prophets and priests. He saw Bible as the performative speech of God to Israel and the Church, and that God has appropriated human writings of the Bible to form the illocutionary speech of God (Childs 378). Although this theory is considered flawed and is refuted by many including Michael Levine and Brevard S. Childs, this kind of debate is exclusive to the academic circle and significant only for a philosophical debate. Ordinary believers have no doubt that God has communicated to them through the Bible and through the mediators and continue to do so through the shepherds, the priests. The priests and the congregation therefore assume the same roles and attempt to attain in their daily interactions an analogous connect to the relation implied in the metaphor of the prototypical 'shepherd and his flock', i.e. Jesus and his followers.

Studying the homiletic pattern of exempla, conclusion and word-of - exhortation in early Jewish and Christian rhetoric, Lawrence Wills observes that this form had its origin in Greek rhetoric. This pattern seems to have been transferred from generation to generation in homiletics. Moreover, "A congregation has been likened to a group of jugs set side by side and uncorked. The sermon is an attempt to

fill them by splashing a bucket of water in their direction" (Hudson 280). However, this notion of filling up an empty vessel is no more the perfect picture of a sermon. Priests approach the podium with the understanding that mass opinions cannot be changed through an exhortation overnight. This being the case, one of the foremost duties of the sermonizer is to remind the congregation of the divine duty ascribed to them as priests and earn their credibility. The scepticism of the crowd is put to rest by assigning the trait to Satan who would try to shake trust on God and his messengers through various tricks. "Satan tries to distance you from the priests, makes you think that priests come to you for money!" (Vattayil, "Be alert" 0:10:41-0:11:15). The story of Moses who was misled by Satan for some time exemplifies the predicament of the sceptical believer. In a world where Satan assumes the shape of shepherd and kills his own flock, it is a great challenge to be the Lord's authentic shepherd and lead the followers to God's protection and love. Thus a true messenger is the chosen one who shows that his life is his message (Manjaly "Vilikkapettvar"). Thus the authenticity of the preacher is established first by the orator before winning the audience's mind.

As in almost all the religious discourses, the ideal family is the most sought after topic in Christian discourses. What sort of a family would this envisage? It would be a family "where you have a spouse whose presence makes you feel the presence of God" (Abraham 0:16:12-18) or family idealised as "heaven on earth" (Thomas, "Message" 0:02:04) or depicting it as "a workshop of relationships" (0:04:40) and therefore inevitably within the ambit of the counselling of the Church. The forefathers of the Christian community, Adam and Eve, and their sin become

the backdrop for the do's and don'ts of a Christian marriage. Since the conjugal relationship is an after effect of first sin, it is relegated to one objective, that of reproduction. The couple is one who enters into the job of creation for the sake of God. Jehovah has taught the ideal of a good family in his Old Testament, thus the ideal Christian family is one of the aims towards which every pastor works. The Church has a double interest in this regard as they pursue pre-marital and marital counselling with great vigour.

Almost all the sermons function with the help of some binaries, God / Satan, Good/Bad, Death/Life, Temporary pleasure/Permanent pleasure and a lot of models who are antithesis to each other. As a result, the advice is to discard one and accept the other in the long, thorny road to heaven. Self -control is the only weapon in hand. The images of Red apple, Adam & Eve, Samson and Delilah, Sodom and Gomorrah all stand in opposition to the figures of Jesus, Paul and Moses. A man who has no self control is compared to a city without fortress which will be besieged and destroyed by the satanic enemy forces (Vattayil "Abhishekagni" 0:04:57-0:06:00). Thus the preachers will foreground biblical characters whom the righteous believer should imitate or else discard for the sake of a true Christian life. Another speaker, Pastor Tinu George speaks of three types of diseases and troubles confronting man: Satan-made, Nature -made, God -made (0:05.25-0:06:02). The good shepherd will certainly uplift and save one from Satan and his evil doings, provided the person does three things exhorted by God- he must be obedient to God; he must understand God and he must follow God. Then, the speaker says, no one can destroy him ever and he would be granted with eternal life (0:8.50-0:10:13).

The idea of sin and salvation is the thread on which Christian sermons and in turn, institutions function. Therefore, an elaborate description of sins takes the centre stage in every sermon. The seven sins of ego, jealousy, lust, covetousness, gluttony, idleness, and anger are often detailed fully. The significance of confession and repentance is drove in at regular intervals. The examples come from the confessional tables and thus Christian speeches are suffused with anecdotes from daily life, rendition of lives which are destroyed by the seven sins. Without these seven sins the whole structure of Christianity would crumble down; the sins are the problems, Church is the only resolution. This one to one relation between daily life and the Holy Scripture makes Christian sermons quite interesting, hilarious and "material" as against the philosophic sermons of the other religions. The emphasis is on 'here and now' than on life after death or the attainment of spiritual liberation although the 'day of judgement' is a frequent reminder.

Christianity has strict genres for preaching as in expository, evangelistic, catechetical, festal, prophetic etc.

Ronald Allen (1998) explains several patterns, including traditional ones, such as the verse-by-verse exposition, the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model, and the theological, quadrilateral, and more recent ones, like image movement and plot and moves. Similarly, Wesley Allen (2008) describes seven forms: propositional lesson, exegesis-interpretation-application, verse-by-verse, four pages, valley, new hearing and negative to positive. (Gaines 38)

Another type of sermons is termed as "*Roga Shanthi*" or "*Vachana Sushrusha*" (treatment through prayer), sermons where a group of devotees hold prayer collectively under the guidance of a priest and consequently and miraculously are cured of their diseases. The whole programme includes prayers, music, dance and the chanting of Hallelujah. More importantly, a person and his family give a testimony of their faith and the curing of diseases which was given up by the medical community. The testimonials sometimes are performative in that the cure happens on the stage where, for instance, a disabled person miraculously stands up and walks with the help of the priest's prayers. This type of 'medical miracles' is a daily affair at the Pentecost meditation centres and draws thousands of people to the event. These discourses are also mocked at by some other priests saying that these are days of 'special offer' even in the case of devotional life and therefore people flock only to those conventions in which there is the offer of "*Roga Shanthi*"(Thomas, "നീങ്ങട്ട്" 0:00:39-0:01:00).

The dearth of audience and the difficulty in bringing the believers together for the sermon in contemporary, 'digital' times also find their expression in some sermons. Fr. Jacob Manjaly humorously talks of such a situation where in he says he is used to giving speeches in a studio room for the sake of telecast on television. Therefore he has no problem even if there is not even a single believer present before him in the conventions ("Fr. Jacob" 0:10:00-0:13:40). Invariably, the nostalgia attached to a village life with its holistic approach to religion is pitted against the material progress and the spiritual vacuum of the urban life (Thomas, "Repentance" 0:00:42-0:02:24). As a result "Noah's ark is coming back to us

because the young generation is mad after entertainment and pleasure and they live without repentance", the speaker claims (0:11:12-53). The priests usually follow a colloquial style filled with humorous anecdotes from daily life and from the confessions, in addition to reviving the myths of Bible from time to time. The need for Christian values is reiterated throughout. Fear is also instilled through the narration of hell experiences and the warning regarding the coming of Anti-Christ which according to a speaker is a system including government, 'new age religion' which is a one- world pagan religion (a mix-up of all other religious systems), aliens and illuminati producing a one world order ruled by Anti-Christ (Saju 0:10:10-0:12:05). The biblical prophecy regarding this political system enumerated as "No 666" (Thomas "Repent") is often made into an urban myth linked to the digital revolution in contemporary world. This myth which started in America when the barcode was first introduced, has been transferred to and popularized in India by the Christian sermonizers with the prospect of digitalization in terms of ATM, Aadhar card and micro chip. The implication is that man has been reduced to a number by the capitalist, post-human world and it is time to go back to a pristine, natural, human life as inspired by the Bible.

The pastors are given training on the techniques of preaching when they are initiated into the calling. The Protestant church was the first to popularise simple preaching in vernacular which was centred on Bible, Christ and the Church, as opposed to the Latinate preaching of the Roman Catholic Church. They strictly denounced the use of preaching podiums for merry making or entertainment or popular philosophizing. The famous preaching of Martin Luther and Calvin had

brought about reformation of the entire catholic habits and had insisted that "preaching was more than an exercise of churchly rhetoric. Preaching gives voice to God's word" (Soh 66). Nonetheless, Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom, Fr. Poulouse Parekara, Fr. David Chirammel, Fr. Puthanpurackal and many others are famous for combining wit and wisdom and draw lots of people to their speeches. Sometimes the humour crosses boundaries courting controversy with derogatory remarks towards other sects. Some other humorous speeches are discriminatory, sexist or attest the stereotypical notions of the society. These speeches have a pure entertainment value and such pastors are even called by the media in Comedy shows regularly. John Brunt in observing the change in the use of images and metaphors in contemporary American sermonizing asserts that the language of the church has clustered around two aspects of contemporary culture: business and entertainment. While the gospel is marketed at one level, it becomes a spectacular sport at another. The change in the subject of sermons that Hudson observes is applicable to Malayalam Christian speeches too.

During the Medieval period the homilies (kind of sermon) consisted largely of allegorical interpretations of the scripture which emphasized the place of the church, its life, duties, liturgies, and demands; whereas in the Reformation era more emphasis was placed on current sins, controversies over certain doctrines, and the literal interpretation of the Bible. Today, there is an increasing interest in sermons of a psychological nature, dealing with problems of mental health. But it would be easy for the historian to show that these are all

related to and outgrowths of the same human problem-generally speaking, man's vital adjustment to what he considers to be the ultimate of life. (Hudson 284-85)

And in such narratives which problematizes the life of the Other and offers solution, the speaker's self is invariably part of the narrative or his life and past social memories become the foil against which the new vision of life is constructed. A fetishization of the past and a dystopic vision of the future are the common traits in the above mentioned genre of speeches. Others make use of highly cadenced, rhythmic speeches and emphasize on voice modulation to bring in the desired effect on the audience. Heaven, hell and after-life are some of the common themes. Consequently, testimonies surrounding supernatural journeys to heaven/hell and back to earth which are discourses imported from the Western world, are now popular in Kerala. In one highly dramatised version of this theme, a father gives testimonial of an accident that occurred to him years ago and how the guardian angels had guided him through hell, purgatory and heaven and finally led him back to the world (Maniyangat 0:05:06). Surprisingly, his description of experience corresponds exactly to each word uttered in the Bible. One also hears narrations of hell as in the testimony of Sharon Ann George vouching that she had been led by God towards a scene in hell wherein fire statues were waiting for people who had sinned (0:05.38-0:6:07). Rev. Johnson Varughese shouts out loud and hysterically as he describes vividly the heavenly door being opened by God when all possibilities are closed before the desperate believer (0:06:49-0:11:45). As in some Islamic sermons we find the 'word as camera' style adopted by such speakers.



Whereas, we have speakers who add a semiotic dimension to the whole discourse as against the literal interpretation given by some. Fr. Bobby by speaking of Christ as a beautiful possibility of unconditional love, awareness and truth (0:11:17-40) presents such a standpoint. In accordance with the need of the times, the priests bring changes to the perspectives on gender as in disowning the violent, patriarchal tendencies of the Old Testament in favour of the New Testament where the Mother of Christ is deemed as powerful and as the thread that pulls of the whole story fairly well. In a program titled ' GuruCharanam' telecast on Shalom TV he asks the listeners to interpret the symbolism in Christian stories. He also elaborates on Christ having a gendered balance even in his narration stating he had worked for the welfare of women equally well (0:4:40-0:05:23).

Geordie George, a speaker who confronts this religion rationally and exposes the myths and falsities behind it, talks of four types of believers, one, who claims that Bible and Genesis have to be taken symbolically ; two, people like Pentecost who assert the literal meaning of the texts; three, people included in the Catholic sect who claims that it is a combination of myth and reality and four, people who believe that the whole story of Jesus is a myth ("Bible" 0:08:33-0:09:35). He further argues that the Christian morality is part of cyclical reasoning which claims that Morality comes from God; Morality exists in the world; So God exists. The very notion of Jehovah as a punishing, violent God is discussed in detail ("Vishudda"). Biblical morality banks on the metaphor of hunger for interpreting the sin of mankind, a hunger for all things fleshly and material which draws people away from God's love and eternal bliss.

In a sociological survey of the role of Christian priests in Kerala from 1991-2000, it is said that religious belief and practice, value education and counselling attained the highest ranks among various other coordinates. According to the findings of this research, the end towards which priests direct their sermons are "Inspiration of Better Christian Living, Inculcation of a Sense of the Divine and a Life of Prayer, Encouragement of Value-based lives, Teaching of Catholic Doctrine, Fostering of Charitable works, and Renunciation of Bad Habits such as Alcoholism" (Thomas K.O. 168). The confession of sins, and marriage counselling are other aspects of their work. The research also concludes that contemporary sermons are lacking in ardour and resourcefulness as we hear voices of dissatisfaction with these sermons from the laymen.

The Bible is a virtual storehouse of metaphors. When Jesus said "I am the bread of life" a new being was coming to life through the metaphor, a being altered through language.

The rhetorical poetics of scripture is not merely linguistic, but ontological, altering the fabric of being for the believer. Setting aside all differences for a moment, perhaps Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, along with Hinduism and Buddhism, set aside certain texts as sacred scripture because they participate in a phenomenon John's rhetorical poetics helps us understand: somehow moments of new language are moments of new being, during which the world and its inhabitants become other than they were—first metaphorically, then actually. (Crider)

The study on biblical metaphors by John Mcvay is interesting in many respects. He observes five clusters of biblical metaphors for the church: "Corporal: The Church as Body Architectural: The Church as Building/Temple Agricultural: The Church as Plant/Field/Vineyard/Vine Martial: The Church as Army Familial and Marital: The Church as Family and as Bride" (285-315). So, the act of preaching is a way of connecting the Old Testament and New Testament texts to the current historical and social context. This is where certain metaphors are reinterpreted by the speakers. Thus preachers are well aware of their role in interpreting the 'Word of God' situated in a particular historical and cultural ethos, in a contextualised way and "re-performs it so that it can be applied into the specific, continuously changing contexts of their congregants" (Downie 61).

In addition to speaking for a world order based on the Bible, the new Christian rhetoric addresses the atheistic, secular and scientific view of the world put forward by twenty first century philosophers including Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennet, and Christopher Hitchens. Consequently, on the opposite side there is an increasing group of philosophers of religion and Christian theologians who defend their faith in scientific terms. Alvin Plantinga, John Lennox, Ravi Zacharias, William Altson lead the latter group and are readily reckoned by the Christian priests in the digital age. Studying the great preachers of West like John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and John Wesley, James Paton notes how more than doctrinal and dialogic preaching, these speakers had tried to draw their audience to a community formation with Christ as the centre by the use of corporate language and rhetorical questions and hence in the post-

Christian world preachers has to draw upon the resources of these speakers and their Christology and asks for "the need for post-individualistic preaching that emphasizes community, post-rationalistic preaching that validates experience, post-dualistic preaching that is holistic, and post-noetic centric preaching that supplies purposeful knowledge" (178).

What is the stand, then of the Christian preaching in the face of moral issues in the Post -modern world ? Most often than not, the interpretations bank on the biblical concept of sin with regard to homosexuality, abortion and euthanasia. But with Pope John Paul too, trying to find a balance between the matrix of science and the Christian moral matrix in accepting the theory of evolution, preachers have started to think about a frame reflective Christian dialogue because as Barns suggests it can "open up a public space for critical reflection on the doctrinal structure of Christian faith, not as something that is propositionally fixed, but as that which needs to be continually re-articulated within the context of Christian communal life and mission" (162). From the orthodox Christian view of sex as sin, the twentieth century Christian orientation has been to construct a 'sexually healthy faith community as one that promotes the integration of sexuality and spirituality in worship, preaching, pastoral care, youth and adult religious education, and social action programmes in the community" (Yolanda and Stayton 487).

Thus Pope Francis of Vatican in a decree to the priests during the 'Holy Year of Mercy' in 2016 called for forgiving the sin of abortion although the Church considers it an abominable crime. In another landmark pronouncement he approved of Church regulated ways of contraception as acceptable and said Catholics need not

reproduce "like rabbits". He in an eyebrow raising statement welcomed 'divorcees and gays and lesbians to the church and asked for more roles for women in the pastoral activities (Lackey). Following this in Kerala, at the annual Maramon convention in 2017 for the first time, people belonging to transgender community were invited and Dr. Joseph Marthoma Metrapolita asked forgiveness for failing to recognize transgender as their own in the past ("History" 0:01:27-35). Hence the theories of Evolution and Big Bang are no more inconsistent with the Bible and in fact warrant the presence of God and the chemistry of love hormones is explained with much logic by the preacher who asserts the chemical transmitters behind falling in love; dopamine and serotonin are produced by none other than God for the purpose of mankind. In these pronouncements we see that although the Church is forced to accommodate new views, it would have to do that by showing its magnanimity, as shown by Jesus, in accepting the aberrations in the hope to lead them back to a true Christian way of life which in no way would admit such moral transgressions.

### **Hindu Spiritual Discourses**

To look for logic in an institution like religion is itself a futile exercise as this would amount to the fallacious use of the tools of Western rationality to learn something that is so enormously different. Yet the basis on which Indian spirituality anchors, predominantly Hindu in orientation, although shared by other religions, is the dialectical nature of its beginnings, questioning of the existential meanings and the search for the ultimate consciousness which is considered the be all and end all of everything. The term "Hinduism" itself has encountered many critical evaluations

over the years, which problematizes the notion of a blanket term for such a heterogeneous culture. This term encompasses assorted beliefs and systems which are similar, dissimilar and even contradictory as epitomised, broadly though, in the two philosophical systems, Advaita and Dvaita sidhantha. It is also worthwhile to note that these systems cannot be divorced from its historical and social contexts in which they arose and the way in which they are relocated and revived from time to time politically. The very emergence of the concept of 'Hindutva' and its political ally discussed in the second chapter is an ample instance. However the term "Hindu" discourses as elaborated in the first section of this chapter, is used keeping in mind the contradiction the term carries inherently. The discourses presented here include interpretations of Vedic/ Upanishadic or other mythological sacred texts of India, which are primarily aimed at purifying the "*jeevatma*"(individual soul), helping him in his journey towards "*paramatma*" (transcendent soul), the debates between Hinduism and other religions like Islam and Christianity and discourses which talk about a specific Hindu way of life.

In this section I analyse the Hindu religious discourses which are all over the place in contemporary Kerala. They can be broadly divided into monologues based on the Vedic texts, Upanishads, *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Puranas* and those speeches which are answers to the questions raised by Scientific Rationalism, Western modes of thinking and threats from other religions. In Kerala, as in India, spirituality, in addition to the temples and 'devaswom', has been handled by various spiritual organizations inspired by their respective gurus. The most prominent among them are Chinmaya Mission, Ramakrishna Mission (started by Vivekananda), Mata

Amrithananadamayi Math, Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, the Art of Living Foundation etc. While the first two organizations are essentially 'Hindu' in character, the last three seem to distance itself apparently from the extremist Hindu positions and showcase ecumenical character including all the religions in their representation. These organizations have deeper roots in the urban, middle class, Indian as well as the diasporic milieu and continue to act as platforms for social cohesion. These missions spread their messages through a group of sanyasins (saints) well versed in Sanskrit and "sruthi" (scripture) who excel as orators before large groups of devotees. One of the noteworthy developments in the last twenty years is that the visual media has helped these discourses to invade the private spaces of all individual homes in spite of different religious, socio-economic backgrounds and have converged the private religious sphere, hitherto confined to the institutions and hence remote from day to day life, and the public religious sphere. From small family "*satsangs*" (spiritual get together) to uploaded videos on You tube, and a plethora of online sites, these projects of spirituality are all over the place. Some television channels like Sanskar, Aastha, Shalom, Goodness to name a few, are exclusively devoted to propagation of religious discourses and carry the mission forward on a day to day basis.

Although there are a number of major philosophical traditions in Indian culture ranging from The Nikaya Buddhists, *Visistadvaita* (qualified non-dualism) of Ramanuja, The *Dvaita* (dualism) of Madhva to the *Saivadvaita* of Abhinavagupta, to name a few, Hindu discourses build primarily upon Vedanta philosophy as per the interpretations of the Vedas, Upanishads, The *Puranas*, *Ithihasas*, The *Bhagavad*

*Gita* and the *Advaita* philosophy of saint Adi Sankara. This philosophical system which is a medley of all the aforesaid traditions, posits the concept of *Brahman*, the unexplainable, formless, omnipotent, omniscient, quality-less entity as the ultimate truth. All living and non living things in the universe are individual forms of so called *Brahman* and are forced to enter into the formidable cycle of birth and death. This life cycle is basically seen as an illusory state (*Maya*) based on the transmigratory taste (*purva janma vasana*) of individuals until the soul has revelation through "*sadhana*" (spiritual exercise) initiated by the "*Sadguru*" that he and the *Brahman* are not different but one and the same. At this point of *aatma saakshatkara* (self-realisation) in the life of the seeker, the soul is purged of his wrongdoings, is purified and it rises to the state of *Paramananda* (eternal bliss) thereby ending the vicious cycle of *Karma*. This is more or less the quintessence of the philosophical basis of Hindu spiritual discourses which surround us. These discourses invariably denigrate the material, contingent world as not worth addressing in the exclusive path to 'Moksha' (deliverance from the cycle of rebirth based on the principle of Karma).

Indian philosophical system is so diverse and in some cases contradictory to each other in its conception of God or an entity as the cause and energy behind the universe. *Visistadvaita*, *Advaita*, *Samkya*, *Soonya Vada*, *Swabhava Vada*, Buddhism, Jainism and many other systems form an amorphous composite. Yet the spiritual discourses treat them as one identifiable category not even bothered about the disagreements between the basic tenets or concepts envisioned by these varied systems. The very basic idea on which all these systems differ is the idea of '*Iswara*'



(God). Many speakers talk about Krishna and *Brahmam* as though they were one and the same and try to accommodate all icons within the Vedic sphere of knowledge hiding the gross contradiction. That is one way of attaching itself to a constructed tradition which is remote, apparently universal and glorified due to its inaccessibility. More importantly, scholars like Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya (*Lokayata*) have substantiated through research that a lion's share of the Indian philosophical system is atheistic in its conception. This means that only a few systems promote the concept of '*Iswara*' as the creator of the universe. All other major systems are atheistic. Though the atheistic philosophies of India were addressed in the dialectical tradition as *purva paksha* (premise of the opponent) to be countered by *Siddhantha* (theory of the speaker), in the new spiritual discourses there is not even a casual reference to the same. This dialectical scheme of Indian philosophy, which allows room for plurality and dissent and which requires deep study and reflection is totally missing in the contemporary religious rhetoric.

Thus an atheistic and sarcastic perspective on one branch of the Indian philosophy titled '*Advaita Vedanta*' as explained in an article makes excellent use of the same entrenched metaphors used by Vedic theologians to expose what it sees as gross contradictions and cheating:

The central conception of Advaita philosophy and its current evangelism, is more or less, building of elaborate 'castles in the air' around the definition of the Brahman as the one and only unchanging ultimate reality beneath which lies the illusion of constantly changing appearances and motions of the physical and

transient world, where the 'rope and the snake' play the game of 'snakes and ladders' with our deluded senses, where Rishis, Gurus and Swamis play the great 'Indian rope trick' or tighten the hangman's noose of 'Self-Realization' on bewildered devotees and followers, who are made to walk the 'tight rope' of avoiding 'sense-objects' and senseless objects in crossing the 'trans-migratory ocean of existence', then selling such spiritual snake oil concoctions through speeches, books, seminars, study sessions and what not and misguiding and cheerleading innocent, gullible and earnest seekers of religion alike into a grand 'wild-goose chase' of the Brahman.

(Ranganath)

This atheistic counter argument however, cannot be taken but without a pinch of salt and refers to one version of looking at Indian philosophy on the whole.

Strictly opposed to the post modern approaches about the fluidity of words and deferment of meaning, predominant traditions of Indian philosophy adamantly cling on to the centrality of the spoken word through the concepts of "Vac" and "OM". In the formative Vedic texts of Indian Culture, *Vac* (speech, word and by extension, language) is a creative force that acts as the inner power and the essence of things. It is the feminine principle, immortal, true, the womb and support of the entire cosmos as explained by the *Brahmanas*. The Upanishads continue the identification of *Vac* with *Brahman*, the highest reality and result in the conception of the ability of language to transform one's consciousness. All speech is united by the power of 'mantra' that is identical with the cosmos (Olson 33).

According to Sankaracharya, the Vedic consciousness is the ultimate reality and truth has come down to us through "*sruthi*". He places this scriptural knowledge as the centre from which the supreme knowledge in the form of *Brahman* emanates. It is a fixed, everlasting truth, the knowledge of which satiates man's eternal quest for meaning and answers the complex questions regarding the vicissitudes of life. Sankara is convinced that *sruthi* is infallible and a primary source of knowledge, a philosophical position that leads to a denial of the validity of other types of language. Nevertheless, Sankara's attitude towards language is ambivalent. At one end he sees language as the instrument of "*avidya*" or ignorance and at the other end as a means of liberation. He also stresses the significance of the "*Mahavakyas*" (great statements) like "*Tat Tvam Asi*", "*Aham Bhramasmi*", "*Sarvam Khalidam Bhrama*" and the like as helpful in focusing one's attention on one's Self (33-40). This philosophy of Sankara is reiterated through most of the spiritual discourses even now and pre-empts all counter arguments against the fallacies inherent in it.

Further, the symbolization of *OM* as a kind of *mysterium magnum* (Beck 3), the concept of divine as sacred sound (*Nada-brahmam* / word-consciousness, *abdha-brahmam*/sound-consciousness) or the division of language into three levels based on consciousness (*Pasyanti*, *Madhyama* and *Vaikhari*), the use of Mantra as 'applied *Vac*' reveal that Vedic knowledge and its auxiliaries are fundamentally sonic, or oral/aural, in character. Comparing the centrality of word/sound in Hinduism and Christianity, one can see that while in the former *Vac* is *Brahmam*, the sound/word is inextricably bound up with and nearly identical with the ultimate reality, in the latter, the word of God as manifested in the Scriptures takes the

devotee beyond the realm of word to ultimate God realization. In the Vedic tradition, this linguistic viewpoint of the ultimate truth has given rise to two traditions, the *Varnavada* (*Mimamsa/Vedanta*) and *Sphotavada* (grammarians) theories. While for the former school "Ultimate reality" is limited to the eternal and "external" Vedic corpus, the latter represented by the Bhartrhari posit it as "internal" *Sphota* or *Sabda- Brahman*, the very substance of all language, consciousness, and the universe (17).

The tantric and theistic traditions on the other hand look at sound as the female energy, or the energy of Siva and Vishnu in the sectarian Hindu traditions of *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism*. In addition, Bhakthi movements assign sacred potencies to human language and are often accompanied by directives on the manner and frequency of mantra recitation and repetition (*japa*) (209). The religious life of a person aspiring for Moksha, reflecting any particular Hindu sect, is observed to be inaugurated by the founding of a personal interior sonic world, created initially by receiving the sound seed (*bija or mantra*) from the guru. This "sonic world" is then sustained and developed by quotidian practises of *mantra* recitation and *japa*. It is further believed that " at the time of death the accumulated sonic "charge" secures for an individual both release from the material suffering of rebirth and an eternal life of bliss in the kingdom of one's chosen deity, where in the interaction with the sacred sound continues" (213). Thus the sonic world, of which the discourses are an extension, is the basis on which Hinduism is built and draws its sustenance from. Structurally, a Hindu discourse starts with the invocation of *OM* and ends with the *Shanthy Manthra*, insulated from worldly categories of communication.

Hindu religious discourses could again be broadly classified into spiritual discourses which explicate the teachings of the respective texts, intended for an exclusive, in-house audience and debates between scholars of different religions defending their own faiths fervently as well as establishing a support group among themselves. As we analyse these discourses they display a range of topoi or topical systems which are repeatedly pronounced and forms the "common place" from and to which all conclusions are drawn :

1. The Topos of 'Sanathana Dharma' 2. The Topos of ideal caste/gender relations. 3. The Topos of scientific spirituality 4. The Topos of Neo-Vedanta 5. The Topos of consciousness/truth/bliss/moksha 6. The Topos of the Guru.

1. The Topos of Sanathana Dharma: Hinduism is often projected not as a religion but as "*Dharma*", a word which has no semantic equivalent in English. 'Dharma' encompasses the all- inclusive moral, spiritual and physical behaviour expected strictly from a Hindu. It is an obligation whose source is Vedas which are '*Anaadi*' (that which has no beginning) and '*Apaurusham*', (not created by man) and whose negligence will bring dire consequences. It is "the central ideology of orthopraxy Hinduism, believed to be eternal and deriving from the revelation of the Vedas and the secondary revelation of the Dharma literature"( Flood 74). The suggestion is that one is born a Hindu by virtue of the fact that he is born into Bharat. Other religions are imposed on this primary identity later on. Thus the argument is that no matter which religion one is born into, if one is an Indian national then one is a Hindu by default. This argument makes political agendas like "*ghar wapsi*" easier.

In a controversial debate between an Islamic scholar, M. M. Akbar and himself titled 'Manjeri Samvadam', Chidanandapuri explains the concept of dharma as fundamental to the human existence and proclaims that the infinite knowledge of Vedas is scientific. In his view, *Rishis* had emphasised on the importance of practising 'dharma' for achieving Moksha (liberation), the highest end of spirituality. Moksha is not entry into heaven or other world but the liberation from the ignorance to reach self awareness and "*Ananda*"(extreme bliss), he continues. The different Gods of Hinduism, according to him are the various manifestations of the '*Ekam Advitheeya Eeswara*' (single, non-dualistic God) worshipped by the myriad devotees according to their '*gunas*' (qualities).He uses a metaphor to substantiate his argument. Just as with the rising of Sun, darkness is no more, with the rising of '*Aatma jnana*' (self-realisation) a man's '*Ajnana*' (ignorance) is defeated leading him to 'Moksha', eternal bliss, truth- self realization (metaphor). Thus a Hindu's dharma is to lead a life based on '*Upasana*' (worship) and '*Sadhana*' (rituals based on control of mind and body), both of which give the quality of self control ("01 manjeri" 0:03:02-0:10:40).

In a speech titled "*Hindu Dharmathinte Yukthi*", Chidanandapuri insists that values should be instilled in every child by the mother. Eliciting an analogy from the epic Mahabharata, he declares that mothers should not hide their eyes like '*Gandhari*', the Kaurava queen. Children should be sent to 'dharma' awareness classes. If not, the society will have to bear disastrous results. There is danger in delaying the process, the implicit, lurking danger of the other religions like Islam and Christianity spreading fast through *Madrastas* and Catechism classes (0:04:40-

0:09:45). He revisits Vivekananda's Chicago speech which begins by addressing the audience in the name of the "Mother of all religions". Comparing the similarities of religions, he asks a rhetorical question, 'Is Hinduism a Religion?'. "All religions are based on beliefs- in God, in heaven, in Son of God, in Prophet, in the principles of Prophet, in a scripture and the belief that our beliefs are the best. These types of religions have one or more founders and one scripture and they are primarily based on beliefs. Dharma, on the other hand, is based on knowledge, on evidences, on Vedas. Dharma is the system that sustains this whole universe. No one, not even an atom, can violate dharma" (0:13:40-0:19:10). The speaker uses comparison and contrast to drive home his point.

The premise that Hinduism is a way of life and not a religion to be pursued by everyone, including peoples of all caste and creed works to differentiate Hinduism from the rule bound, prescriptive Semitic religions. Thus a quest for the eternal origin in the concept of a monolithic Hindu greatness and an attempt to draw a link between the ancient past and the present form of Hinduism have been the very nature of contemporary Hindu discourses. The new Hinduism, as Romila Thapar argues, which is now sought to be projected as the religion of this community, is in many ways, a departure from the earlier religious sects.

It seeks historicity for the incarnation of its deities, encourages the idea of a centrally sacred book, claims monotheism as significant to the worship of the deity, acknowledges the authority of the ecclesiastical organization of certain sects as prevailing over all and has supported large-scale missionary work and conversion. These

changes allow it to transcend caste identities and reach out to larger numbers. (26)

2. The Topos of ideal caste/ gender relations : The concept of '*Varna*' is derived from the '*Purushasuktha*', a verse in praise of an entity which is described as the universe and named "*Viratpurusha*" in Rigveda. The four categories of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra are said to have taken birth from the head, the arms, the thighs and the feet of this 'Purusha' respectively. "The Brahmin was his mouth ;the rajanya was made his arms; the being (called) the Vaisya, he was his thighs; the Sudra sprang from his feet (Muir qtd. in *Riddles* 107).

The invocation of altruism of the Vedas and the strict demarcation of the different *jati*, though contradictory in its logic, presupposes the validation of a hierarchy in Indian society. Look at how the image of the different groups emerging from the embodied '*Purusha*' naturalises the superiority and inferiority of the different castes. Nonetheless, this hypothesis is questioned in the Upanishads and reinterpreted with the dictum "*Brahmajnanethi brahmana*", anyone, who has acquired '*brahmajnana*' (ultimate knowledge) through his spiritual endeavours, despite his caste status in birth is eligible for the title "*Brahmin*". This interpretation instead of negating the hierarchy solidifies the status quo and restores the superior position of Brahmin, the goal to be desired and achieved. When some acquire it via birth, others belonging to the lesser "*Jatis*" (castes) have to strive to attain that perfection.

This ambiguity in the definition of who a Brahmin is, always helps the orators to defend the question of inequality propagated by the *Varna* system. Here



are some instances of the same. Swami Chinmayananda, the founder of Chinmaya Mission, was a charismatic orator who drove home his point through his exquisite English accent, forceful rendition and humorous illustrations. In explaining about the most misunderstood aspect of the *Bhagavad Gita*'s take on the caste system he talks about how it has been "enormously" and "unimaginably" misappropriated by the colonisers for their imperialistic purpose. '*Varna*' according to him means personality colour. *Satvik*, *Rajasik* and *Tamasik* are universal '*gunas*' (qualities) in people; "Satvik" meant the intelligent, supreme people, the "rajasik" meant the active, engaged people and the warrior class the "tamasik" meant the labour class, 'the lazy, inert people from whom you have to extract work forcefully' (0:00:48-0:11:00). Through this discourse he validates the hierarchy, the ideology behind it and the efficacy of the *Varna* system and establishes it as an identity marker for the efficient functioning of the society and in turn, ends up showing his prejudice.

Gopalakrishnan in his speech titled '*Hindu jati sambradaayam*' (Hindu Caste System) declares that India did not have caste discrimination. It was a classification based on the professions which got twisted by the colonizers three hundred years ago who followed the 'divide and rule' policy, the same technique for religious conversion used by the Christians in Kerala. In his view '*Jaati*' and '*Varna*' are not the same. In The *Bhagavad Gita* the categorization is made based on the three modes of material nature (the *gunas*) and the work ascribed to them, the four divisions of human society were created by the supreme entity (0:03:48-0:06:54).

The discourses project a world view which endorses the ancient dichotomy between matter and spirit and divides the world into two, one to look upon the world

as illusory (*Maya*), therefore not real and secondly to seek 'The Real' which is *Brahmam* (the ultimate consciousness at the realm of which there is no duality). Simultaneously, one is asked to dwell on the differences within the system of the world steeped in and made exclusively of "*Maya*" at the level of daily business of the world (*Vyavaharika*, the material, contingent, practical world) propagating differences based on caste, class, gender and so on, so that the society functions systematically; at the same time meditating on the consciousness which is the final, ultimate, non-dual truth (*paramarthika*, the eternal, transcendental world). Ambedkar in *Riddles of Hinduism* makes a scathing attack on the paradox evident in this theory thus:

We have on the one hand the most democratic principle of Brahmaism and on the other hand a society infested with castes, sub castes, primitive tribes and criminal tribes. Can there be a greater dilemma than this? What is more ridiculous is the teaching of Great Sankaracharya. For it was this Sankaracharya who taught that there is Brahma and that Brahma is real and it pervades all and at the same time upheld all the inequities of the Brahmanic society. Only a lunatic could be happy with being the propounder of two such contradictions. (178-79)

Ironically enough, even when it maintains as the ultimate philosophy the oneness of everything at the ideological level, this system is entangled in the rigid *Varna* system which perpetrates class differences and discriminatory this-worldly life based on caste at the practical level. A very famous anecdote repeatedly used in this

regard by the speakers is the story of Sankara and Chandala, an untouchable who questions the inconsistency between Sankara's Advaita philosophy and his practice of untouchability. The story comes to an end with Sankara realizing his folly and accepting Chandala as his guru. However, this story is later reinterpreted making Chandala an avatar of Shiva to prevent Sankara from falling at the feet of an untouchable. This paradox lies at the heart of Indian spirituality as it tries to accommodate the Brahminic legacy of the four Vedas, the myriad interpretations or *Brahmanas* and the *Dharma Sastras* which include theories and the prescriptive *Manusmriti*, *Arthashastra* and *Kamasutra*, which manifests itself in the multiple discourses of Hindu religion. This ambivalence also has a chameleon like efficiency in defending accusations of discrimination inherent in Hinduism. These discourses also try to grapple with the problem of influencing the masses by appropriating the popular myths and lore surrounding regional deities and elevating them to a *Brahminic* status. Works by scholars such as Debiprasad Chattopadhyay, D.D. Kosambi, Romila Thapar, Uma Chakravarty, Kumkum Roy etc. dig up the historical realities behind this appropriation.

Another movement is to disregard the *Varna* discourse by projecting "*Thanthra*" which is said to have come from the last Veda, the *Atharva* Veda, considered lower in rank and therefore able to be practiced by all the people regardless of caste restrictions. In the speech titled "*Thanthra, Manthra and Yukthichintha*" Girish Kumar, who is the founder chairman of Shripuram Trust in Thrissur established in 2006 to propagate '*thantra*' in Kerala, tries to categorize *Vedantha* and *Thanthra* separately. He claims, there were only two jatis during the

Vedic period: one who thought and one who acted. The hymn of *Purushasooktha*, according to him, brings the concept of Varna and was introduced by people in authority in order to function as a community. *Thanthra*, on the other hand, does not bring *Varna*. It is available to any “*jijnjaasu*”(one who is curious) thus accommodating all Hindus in its fold (0:05:02-0:07:26).

Hindu religious discourses in India take on the additional responsibility of propagating the concept of '*Varnashrama*' thus perpetuating casteism in the Indian society in a subtle way. It functions by relating one's caste to the notion of '*punya*' and '*paapa*', i.e., one is born into a 'lower' caste because of the sins committed during the previous births, therefore one has to bear the fruits of one's sins, expiate them through suffering and earn a higher birth subsequently. The people of the higher birth have no moral responsibility for their treatment or neglect of the so called lower castes because that would be against the law of Karma. The 'lower' castes alternately are forced to internalise and own up to the sins of the previous births. Closely tied to caste hierarchy is the notion of "*Svadharm*a" or one's own duty which should be adhered to at any cost and warning against taking up "*Paradharm*a" (other's duty). This concept works in favour of the 'higher' castes and stalls the choice of the "lower" in taking up careers different from their forefathers. Thus as Flood observes rightly "Hinduism contains a socio political ideology of a chain of being which endorses the social hierarchy, caste and gender roles, alongside an ideology of renunciation which negates those roles at doctrinal and practical levels"(74).

The *Bhagavad Gita* also supports the *Varna dharma*. It has appropriated six Indian philosophical traditions as well as Buddha - Jaina traditions and towards the end is said to have ousted the *Brahminic yajna* culture and reinstated the qualities of humility and submission characteristic of Bhakthi cult and Upanishads, at the same time elevating Krishna as the lord. The Gita at this point although brings in the *Sudras* and the women simultaneously, it does not question the existing hierarchy and demands submission from the same. As pointed out in Gita [1:41-44] :

The Kaliyuga of the future is just such a time when women of the high castes and men of the low castes will regress from their duties. The Bhagavad Gita, the normative text par excellence of the Hindus, outlines the collapse of the social and moral order when there are leakages in the closed structure of marriages. Families are broken, rites are forgotten, women are defiled and from this corruption come the mixing of castes. (qtd. in Chakravarti 580)

3) The Topos of Scientific Spirituality: In one of the funniest expositions of a religious orator regarding science and religion, Swami Udit Chaithanya explains that the horns of a cow are capable of absorbing radioactivity and hence it prevents an FM radio when placed between these horns to receive signals and emit only "mmmm" sound similar to "*Om*", the mantra. Further, he claims that Plutonium is present in cow dung, and cow urine has got ability to cure cancer (0:00:05-0:01:45). In many such cases one discerns an absurd urgency to link science and spirituality. In another lecture '*Sanathana dharma sandhesham*', Swami Chidanandapuri says that science must be the basis of all actions, secular or religious. "*Thasmath sastram*

*pramanam the*" (Therefore, science is the basis of rational knowledge) (0:02:58-0:03:50). Here the speaker links the word "*shastras*" to arrive at the meaning Science, although here the reference is to Vedas. Thus by linking these two words, Vedas are posited to be purely scientific despite its contradiction. According to him Veda is the knowledge of existence and was transmitted for a long time without any corruption(0:06:21-22). But somewhere in the midst of this irrationality, dogmas and superstitions crept in and we were not able to distinguish between rationality and irrationality. He asserts, rationality is the basis of Sanatana dharma. He argues that Indian system of knowledge was essentially based on critical evaluation and understanding. He declaims the various "isms" for its failure to address the problems of the society and asserts the world is looking up to '*Adhyathmika sastra*' (spiritual science). The contemporary, educated audience finds its scientific temper acknowledged and pacified through such linkages adopted by speakers.

Reacting to the controversies surrounding the truth about astrology some speakers have tried to divorce astrology and rituals associated with it from the Scientific Hindu spirituality. One of the organizations which makes tremendous effort in linking Science and Hindu rituals is IISH "undertaking the mission of learning and teaching the ultra ancient heritage of Bharath (India) using ultra modern scientific and technological tools" ("About IISH"). The founder, Dr. Gopalakrishnan, asserts with authority of being an erstwhile scientist at ISRO that the belief in astrology is like tossing a coin before a cricket match which does not signify on its own. "Still as a matter of belief it is not wrong. If astrology gives peace of mind to people then it is not wrong. Astrological signs are like traffic signal

which guide in your direction. But one should never believe or follow anything blindly" ("Prashnam" 0:09:10-0:10:40). The conflict between science and religion is solved through a pragmatic approach of taking what is good and discarding what is bad, suggesting a middle path.

Some others criticize the blindness of Indians in following everything that is Western and claims that all Western scientific thought and innovations had already been there in India since Vedic times. Girish Kumar is such a scholar who talks about the limitations of our senses and the incapacity of men to know the infinite world. "*Thanthra sasthra*", which he translates as science helps here. He claims that after 1970's even atheists do not have the courage to ask whether these beliefs are superstitious because of Abraham Maslow's theory about 'Hierarchy of needs' which talks about self-actualization (*atma saakshatkaara* according to the speaker ) as the ultimate goal. This is not something that "I" or "my maharshis" said. Referring to the Indian obsession with Western world, he satirises 'We' believe in "westerners". Our ancestors had said this centuries ago. We abandoned *Samskara*, by abandoning Sanskrit and by embracing English. "Instead of imparting Indian dictums like '*Mathrudevo Bhava*' to our kids, we make them study English rhymes" he reproaches ("Tantric" 0:15:16-0:40:00).

Quite surprisingly, in this new wave of scientific spirituality even Newtonian Physics, Einstein's Relativity theory and Quantum theory become already inherent part of the Vedic knowledge as the speaker perceives the basics of the *Advaita* philosophy which insists on holistic knowledge (the concept of "*poornathvam*") in all these theories (Potti). In another discourse the origin of the universe as described

in the text *The Bhagavata* is compared with the origin of universe as explicated by modern science. The speaker claims that the first *sloka* of the text refers to the notion that "there was only I in the beginning, only darkness similar to Black holes" (Sambasivan 0:04:23-0:27:25). He ascertains that the idea of black hole was long known to the Rigvedic people. The dire need to merge spirituality with science, something that was thought of earlier as antithetical, in accordance with the demands of the new digital age gets manifested in the discourses as in the lecture by Swami Mukundananda at Stanford University. Touching on Newton's laws of motion, Faraday, Maxwell's Force field, Electromagnetic spectrum, Einstein's theory of Relativity, Rutherford's Atomic theory and Niels Bohr's Quantum theory, he claims that Science has given us material progress but has given half baked views regarding mind and how to control and manage it. Science, according to him had not succeeded in solving the mystery of the absolute truth. Absolute truth is independent of parameters, context and perspective, which cannot be exceeded in quality. In physical sciences we are yet to find the absolute truth, he says. In a speech titled "On confluence of science and spirituality" Nirmalanandagiri, the concept of '*bodham*' (consciousness) as the ultimate truth put forward by seers like Sankara and later on by Narayana Guru is connected to the argument that Max Planck and other scientists have more or less reached this concept through their material work. Science is basically violent, he observes. In his view, the ancient Rishis had made Ayurveda based on this intuitive consciousness not by killing guinea pigs and testing on them whereas Western thinking and modern science is based on experimental analysis which reaches nowhere. 'In Western world there is no concept of family, it is highly individualistic. But in Bharat the concept of family has been maintained by the



*Varna dharma* and *Ashrama dharma*. We travel through a democratic model of governance and legal system based on the western model. Our family values have changed and so is our knowledge system. By imposing a foreign tongue and system we have brought disaster to our tribe culture. In the families now we hear husband and wife calling each other by their names or by casual words. That has caused many hormonal imbalances and are prone to make genetic variations in women leading to thyroid, cancer etc in women.' A comparison between two entities, Indian versus Western using the rhetorical scheme of parison helps this speaker, like many others to drive home his argument regarding the superiority of the former.

Accordingly when the speaker talks about "*sastra*" it is not to be mistaken as science but *Sastra* means scriptures with its authority in the Vedas. In recent times the word *sastra*, science and Vedas have somehow blended with each other and give these speakers the chance to say that Vedas are scientific. The dropping of names of Western philosophers or scientists and their theories give these speakers an authentic appeal to authority. They also pick and choose Westerners who have an oriental outlook on Hinduism and present a glamorised version of India. Meera Nanda claims to this effect that the social constructivist theories regarding science have abetted the right wing fundamentals in asserting the sacred science of Vedas. Hinduism has always perpetuated itself not by suppressing the innovations by force of arms, but by traditionalising what is innovative. She argues further

What the Hindu nationalists are doing to science, is what Hinduism has always done to all that is new, foreign and threatening/; pretend that it has always been part of the tradition thus perpetuating the

worst elements of tradition "(10). We have in India an emerging Vedic science movement (which began in 1893 by none other than Vivekananda) very much like the Creation Science movement in US which began in 1961 whose objective is to establish that there is a scientific basis to every single Vedic law and that the divine laws are natural laws come down to us through the eternal Vedas. Thus "The laws of karma, reincarnation and Varna are taught as natural laws through which the divine will express itself" (16).

4) The Topos of Neo-Vedanta: The emergence of Neo-Vedanta began with the need for reform movements within Hinduism in the face of Colonial religion and culture, to reclaim a Hindu greatness as exemplified in the Vedic Culture and was started off by the reformist Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his Brahmo Samaj. This was supposedly done by warding off the evil and superstitious system Vedic culture had deteriorated into. A rational view of Hinduism was put forward aiming at a renaissance and restoration of Hindu faith. This was continued by Dayananda Saraswati and a sense of national Aryan identity was created by his Arya Samaj, a community based on the idea of an eternal Vedic religion aka 'Sanathana Dharma' and the need for liberation from the sufferings of this world, which was more or less a Buddhist perspective. This was globalised by none other than Swami Vivekananda who envisioned India would lead the world with its spirituality and tower over the futile materiality of the West. Inspired by his mystic guru Ramakrishna, with this theory of Karma Yoga, he became the face of Hinduism in the Western world to be taken forward by

Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan and Gandhi as a synthesis of Western and Eastern religion and spirituality .

In contrast to secular cosmopolitan theories of globalization, the fusion of multiple modernities and diverse patterns of differentiation reveals “loosely organized” networks of Hindu renewal “linking the civilizational home, ‘Mother India,’ with the old diasporic colonial Hindu communities across the former British Empire. (Webster 329)

This project of Indian Neo-Vedanta has been carried forward by many Indian gurus in the West, like Paramahansa Yogananda, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, Srila Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, Sree Rajneesh, Chinmayananda, Sathya sai Baba and a host of others who blended diverse traditions of Hinduism according to the new-age demands. As Webster continues rightly:

While pre colonial discursive traditions do still inspire ongoing revivals among Hindu gurus, and it is true that many claim to “espouse variants of non dualism (*Advaita Vedanta*)” or otherwise “present themselves as promoters of universal religion and true spirituality” (McKean 1996, 12), the actual role of Upanishads (that is, Vedanta) and their use in globalized Hinduism is a lot less certain. (329)

In Kerala, the social reform movements initiated by a host of 'low' caste leaders like Sri Narayana Guru, Vagbhadanandha, Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyapan etc against the abolition of caste and gender discrimination led to a new awakening in the

context of the presence of a colonial enemy dismissing Vedic Brahminism. However this was done not by preaching atheism but by interpreting the Advaita philosophy in more broader ways.

5) the Topos of consciousness/ truth / bliss : "*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti.*" (The Truth is but one, though the learned state it in many ways.) is a popular saying of Rig Veda whose origin is traced to 1000 B.C. The binary division between the real and the unreal, the inner reality and the outer reality, this life and after life, the eternal truth and temporary truths is fundamental to Hindu thinking. The material and the spiritual realms overlap considerably but are independent areas and hence for an ideal Hindu, it is indispensable that he sees through the world of illusion (*Maya*) and eschews the sense of doer-ship. Hence, the advice of Krishna to Arjuna, that he must make use of reason to tide over his emotional crisis and fight and kill his relatives because ultimately he is not the doer, is still part of the age-old wisdom in India. This *Brahminic* world view inherent in the concept of "doer-ship" legitimizes all the actions done by those in power. All the more, the theory of '*Karmaphala*' relieves him off, if at all any, concern for the underprivileged as they are suffering the fruits of their actions in the past. In addition, this explanation functions as a loophole to defend the contradictions within the arguments and aids the process of appropriation which is a basic strategy adopted by Hinduism. It functions with the bait of immortality at the center just as many other religions.

An instance is found in the discourse of Swami Asheshananda who starts by drawing the claim that the realization of truth "*satyam*" is the ultimate aim of every human being. The foundation of "*satyam*" is Vedas. Here material gains are no

significance. Good actions and worship lead to mind control but without the knowledge no one can merge with the *Paramatma*. The *Paramatma* is like the ocean, silent but having ripples within it. This repeated reiteration of the *jeevatma-paramatma* union runs through all spiritual discourses. Since this condition happens at the abstract level, it is not questionable nor is it understood as being within the realm of understanding. Most of the believers think of this philosophy of the concept of the gross body (the normal, material human body made of flesh and blood which stops functioning at death ) and the subtle body (the spirit which lives on even after death ) as a positive way to accept and prepare for the inevitable reality of mortality. The present life is seen as a preparation for a life in the next birth. "The Indian spiritual discourses also have a unique way of preparing for the decaying body. The prioritization of the body is almost absent in Indian philosophy" (Chopra).

6) The Topos of Guru: One of the most significant aspects of Indian philosophy is its insistence on the centrality of a Guru in the journey to self realization. In almost all discourses Guru is elevated to the position of *Parabrahma* (the ultimate reality). He is the one who makes the spark of self realization possible in the listener. When the philosophical "Jnana" school gives more importance to "*Thathva sravanam*" (listening to the philosophy) rather than listening to stories, the Bhakthi tradition epitomised by the Bhagavata readings in temples gives importance to the purification of heart through stories of Gods. Thus in both schools "*sravanam*" (listening) is of prime importance and is to be done with *sradha* (care), *bhakthi* (devotion) and faith (scientific faith). Accordingly, listening is not merely hearing but that which demands intellectual alertness and awareness. The question is not

whether these stories are authentic. They have to take place within a devotee's mind, which means they are symbolic. Consequently, the guru is one who guides the individual and is equated with God himself, the word of Guru/orator thus assumes sacred and divine nature. More importantly, one acquires the 'right' guru only through purification of mind effected through worship. There are certain qualifications needed for a guru, the first one of which is that he should be a *dwija*/twice -born. Though the concept originally meant born again as the real, spiritual self, this concept later on got linked to ritualistic knowledge production of the three upper castes who are initiated through the *Upanayana* ceremony. It is widely believed that Veda mantras were not written but "revealed" to the sages. The Veda mantras when uttered by sages had a powerful sonic effect which normal people would not understand. Here Vedas are posited as the ultimate, unquestionable authority on knowledge.

The question of knowledge production and its relation to power is inherent in this view for any liberal minded thinker. B R Ambedkar had attacked this ultimate knowledge position of Vedas :

As to philosophy, there is nothing of it in the Rig Veda, which is the stock Veda, scarcely any indication or doctrinal or philosophical speculation, no allusion to the later notions of the several schools, nor is there any hint of metempsychosis, or of the doctrine intimately allied to it, of the repeated innovation of the world. The Vedas may be useful as a source of information regarding the social life of

Aryans. As a picture of primitive life, it is full of curiosity but there is nothing elevating. There are more vices than virtues. (*Riddles* 80)

As revealed by this ideology, the authority behind the knowledge production is vested with the higher class, exclusively limited to the *Brahmans*. This discrepancy in preaching and practice is rebuked again by Ambedkar in his much acclaimed *Annihilation of Caste* wherein he laughs at the decision of the caste-Hindu Mandal to elect him as the President. He says,

According to the shastras, the Brahmin is appointed to be the guru of three varnas. "Varnanam Brahmano Guru" is the direction of the shastras. The mandal therefore knows from whom a Hindu should take lessons and from whom he should not. The shastras do not permit a Hindu to accept anyone as his guru merely because he is well versed. (*Annihilation* 208)

The case of Amrithanandamayi, a dalit female saint in Kerala, however, is an exception which proves the rule. Moreover, here too, Amrithanandamayi owes her popularity to her 'consoling mother' image and her Bhakthi tradition than in propagating knowledge based religiosity.

Further, there is this atheistic viewpoint that Vedanta makes use of abstract reasoning for foregrounding its theory and if this is the case then the use of metaphoric language is what aids the speaker. The most dominant metaphors used to put forward the theory of Individual- God merging are the "*ghataakash*" and "*mataakash*" metaphor. As opposed to the Western concept of the divine and the

individual as separate circles and spirituality as the communion between these two circles, the Upanishadic concept foregrounds the concept of “*tat tvam asi*”/ “That you are” with *Brahman* as the bigger circle encompassing the cosmos and '*jeeva*' as the smaller circle which dissipates into the bigger circle. The metaphor is that of the “*akash*” or sky within the pot which when broken, dissipates and becomes one with the bigger atmosphere. Another conventional metaphor is the snake - rope metaphor, a bringing together of two similar things to suggest the difference between the world as illusion (*Maya*) and reality. Another myth that is explored is the myth of the '*palazhi madanam*', the churning of the ocean by the *Asuras* and *Devas* to get the elixir. The most vivid and graphic metaphor that is employed by the texts is the image of the *Virat purusha* with regard to *Varna*. The salt in the ocean, *Purusha-prakriti*, the dirty mirror, *Samsara chakra* (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth), the seed and the egg, the spider-web metaphor, the butter-milk metaphor, two birds on one tree metaphor are some other traditional metaphors used by the speakers. New age gurus have improvised their oration with the use of new age metaphors like electricity, internet, mobile towers and the like to relate to the contemporary audience. They also bank on the classical, creative metaphors to enrich their oration and connect to the audience.

Jonathan Charteris-Black observes that

one of the distinctions between discourses of awe and authority is that discourses of authority adopt symbols of awe for the purpose of self-legitimacy; this phenomenon is best understood as a process by which symbols- with their intrinsic meanings distinct to a particular



ritual system-are transformed into metaphors which enable them to be transported to other discourses, carrying with them the magical power accrued to them through their sacred status. (*Fire* 105)

Thus, these orators argue that Bharata becomes the real sacred name of India, from the root Sanskrit word "*bha*" which means light symbolizing the bliss of knowledge.

These spiritual performances share many structural similarities. The speaker is most often a venerated *Swamiji* or a person titled *Acharya* who brings association with Acharya Swamikal or Sankaracharya. The discourse starts often after a puja performed on the dais and with incantations from various *slokas* instilling a feeling of divinity and sacrality in the audience. The guru also from time to time elicits *slokas* from Upanishads, *Bhagavatha*, *Bhagavat Gita* and other scriptures in Sanskrit and elaborates on the meaning of the same. The sermons are interspersed with stories, narratives from day to day life and humorous anecdotes which relieve the audience of the weight of the philosophical argument. Most of the audience would also take part in reciting the verses and many passages are reiteratively established through repetition in consequent sermons.

### **Islamic Spiritual Discourses**

Hazrath Abdullah, the son of Abbas ( May Allah be pleased with him) relates: When the Ayah "Warn thy nearest relatives" was revealed to the Holy Prophet, he walked out of Makkah city, went up the Mount Safa and shouted as if calling from there. People enquired as to who was calling. The reply was: It is Muhammad! he was

crying out... then he said , "Now when I see you all here, if I tell you that there is an army at the foot of this mountain, would you believe me? They said: Thou hast never told a lie. He said: I am to alarm you of a severe torture awaiting you in the near future. (Al-Quran 26:214 qtd in Faizi 20)

This passage in Quran reveals the fundamental tenets of Islam: the significance of the spoken word, Quran as the last revealed Word of God , the persuasive nature of language, the scepticism of the speaker regarding the effect of his oration, truth and lie, faith and doubt. In addition it accounts for the warning given to the followers and the reminding of the consequence that awaits the near future. The prophet who doles out alarms to rescue his herd has been a common motif that has designed the structure of pulpits ever since. Faith, love and fear of God thus become the three basic principles instilled through Quran discourses. From the perspective of the devout preacher then, Prophet Muhammad is extolled universally as the best orator.

A pre-requisite to the analysis of Islamic rhetoric, which differs structurally and thematically from other religious discourses entails a look at the rhetorical tradition of Islam. The relation of Islam with the art of oratory can be traced back to the Arab-Islamic rhetorical tradition named as *ilm-al-balagha* (the science of eloquence). It was originally meant for the exegesis of Quran. Later on, based on the systematic study and categorization of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Qazwini during fourteenth century, the science was classified into the three main parts: *'Ilm al-ma'ant* (the science of meanings) *'Ilm al-bayan* (the science of clarity [of language]) *'Ilm al-badt'* (the science of ornamentation)( Hallden 21). Critics find

similarity between the paradigms of this Islamic science of oratory and the Aristotelian and Western traditions of rhetoric. The art of public speech, on the other hand, is known as *'ilm* or *fann al-khataba*. It is argued that words like *'khutba*' (sermon/speech), *'khitab*' (public discourse) and *'khatib*' (preacher/orator), were part of the regular lexis among the Arabic-speaking Muslims. Some medieval philosophers are said to have criticised the practice of *al-Khatiba* just as Aristotle and Plato had reprimanded the Sophists. However, Philip Hallden is of the opinion that

While the philosophical attitude rests on the assumption that logic is universal and superior to rhetoric, the ordinary preacher's attitude would be that tradition, including the canon and models of religious rhetorical practice, is superior to human logic and has to be imitated and transmitted. The art of public speech becomes doxological knowledge in contrast to the philosopher's epistemical knowledge. The main purpose in studying *fann al-khataba*, from this perspective, thus has to do with salvational purposes of preaching based on the Sunna of the Prophet. (23)

He concludes that although *al-khataba*, the art of public speaking had a significant impact in Arabia, it was neglected by a focus on *ilm-al-balagha*, the system of tropes and schemes because the former was considered as specific to Greek philosophical tradition and the latter to Islamic tradition. In his study of the homily of the twelfth century A.D., Berkey brings forward the concepts regarding "homily as the product of a multidisciplinary perspective" (39), the inclusion of stories

(*qissa*) (43), admonition (*waz*) (44) and amorous poetry as conclusion (45). Thus one could observe that there were coded frameworks used during the medieval period which has come down to contemporary Islamic public speeches too.

The fundamental text for Islamic rhetoric is Holy Quran and the enunciation of Quran is mostly a speech act which is pre determined by the tradition. The style of argumentation inherent in the Holy Quran is repeated in the sermons. In an exhaustive study of Arabic rhetoric, Hussein Abdul-Raof talks about the centrality of rhetoric and its study of three constituent parts, word order, figures of speech and embellishments as part of the Arab tradition. Linked inseparably to Islamic exegesis, Arabic rhetoric is primarily concerned with efficient discourse. Figures like allegory, simile or metonymy are used effectively and it has a number of criteria such as "the selection of eloquent lexical items, the well-formedness of the proposition; the selection of an appropriate style that appeals to the psychological and ideological state of the audience; the employment of an effective introduction and conclusion; the production of a psychologically influential discourse upon the text receivers"(24).

Michel Cuypers takes up the question of coherence of Quran contending that unlike the Western insistence on *dispositio*-the linear, logical arrangement of parts of an argument to appear convincing, Semitic Quran depends on symmetry expressed in various ways, proving disconcerting to a Western reader. She describes binarity and parataxis as two important features of Semitic rhetoric as well as three figures of composition, namely, parallelism, mirror composition and concentric or ring composition inherent in its style (14). Similarly, as is the case with all religions,

it has been shown that the Qur'anic worldview was structured on the base of a system of conceptual oppositions: God /man, faith /disbelief, Muslim/infidel, visible/invisible, present world/world to come, Heaven/Hell etc. (17). Most parts of Quran are in the form of arguments, constructed in a non-linear fashion so much so that to get the full implication of the premise, the reader has to link it to other premises which occur in different but relevant parts of the text. Thus to reiterate the argument, one has to come a full circle so that all the premises lead to the conclusion as given in the text. Most of the Quran's arguments also contain arguments of comparison and contrast.

From a Eurocentric view, Islamic sermons may look like gross and unrefined use of the aural, where there are chants, repetitions, gestures and use of body in prayers as opposed to the Christian sublimity in prayers. Hirschkind is of the view that unfortunately, contemporary critique of Islamic activism shares many colonial views regarding the superficiality of Muslim practices and

...the susceptibility of the untutored ear to the voice of religious fanaticism. This susceptibility, it is claimed today, is a product of the practices of recitation, audition and memorization at the heart of traditional Islamic pedagogy :in foregrounding the sonic qualities of language and attitude of reverence for the sheer words over and above their signifying content such practices instil credulity rather than critical reason. (15)

Hirschkind observes further that much of these rhetorical techniques used by the preachers come from Sufi tradition and are aimed at elevating the ethical, moral

status of the listener and get him closer to God. Thus sermons are "instruments of ethical therapy" (37) and have been engaged in a historical function of edifying people's hearts through the sensory organ. The '*khatib*' is seen as a mediator who brings God's words to the listener. "Sermons engage in a range of illocutionary acts. The preamble is a collective utterance composed of acts of remembrance (*dhikr*), praise (*thana*) and supplication (*dua*) (83). Listeners are supposed to pronounce the "*basmala*" ("in the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful") each time the *khatib* begins to recite a verse from Quran and the call for prayers upon the Prophet ("God bless him and grant him salvation") each time his name is mentioned (84). The point is that in Islamic sermons, the central character is not the *khatib* but the listener who has a heart fertile enough to receive the seeds of wisdom of God. It demands the worshipper's volitional mind which enables them to understand through sensorial responses in accordance with how it is developed within a particular community.

The fundamental authority of sermon is Prophet Muhammad's words and acts coded in the *Sunna*, the revealed word. *Khutuba* is done before the Friday prayer. Delivered by the *Khatib* from a raised platform, it consists of two sections, one, the opening which includes "the praise of God, Prayer to prophet and testimony of the unity of God and the status of Mohammad as his messenger" (142). There are strict codes in Islam as to the kind of exhortation and the type of audience intended in *Khutuba* or other ways of sermonizing. To guide others in the path of Islam is an obligation of all believers. This has to be done by all and at all times. Accordingly, the awareness programme of "*da'wa jihad*" is to be conducted among different categories such as believers, people who have unknowingly digressed from Islamic

faith, conventional Muslims and modernists, rebels, materialists, non-Muslims, Orientalists, communalists and the tribal. These categories should be inspired using different strategies. The very act of likening spiritual awareness to a type of "jihad" (holy war) and the need to spread it reveal the indispensability of communicative action in Islam.

Islamic sermonising is an obligatory part of the worship in Kerala too. Ever since *Khutuba* became part of the Friday *Juma*, the role of sermons in constructing and sustaining a Muslim identity close to the holy tenets of Quran has been acknowledged by all. The act of 'becoming' Muslim in a socio-political context where the religious identity towers over all other aspects of social identities is taken care of by the sermons. The sermons, in effect, have undergone significant changes, thematically as well as formally, from the introduction of the vernacular in place of Arabic, the use of titles for speeches which was not relevant earlier, the choice of topics related to good living and bad living, the introduction of question answer session, the assertion of supremacy of Islam over all other religions and so on. One of the earliest fights and splits occurred in the Kerala Muslim community over the use of microphones and loudspeakers for Friday *Khutuba*. The question of maintaining sacred authority through secrecy via the language of *Khutuba* becomes a bone of contention even now between Kanthapuram A.P. Abubacker Musaliyar, a popular Sunni scholar and Mujahid Balusseri, a Mujahid sermoniser. While the former insists on Allah's injunction regarding the use of Arabic as the medium the latter asks for the use of local language in *Khutuba*.

The sound effects, presentation, the rhythms and crescendo of speech and the audible responses of the audiences have altered the contours of the Islamic sermons to a great extent. These modalities also determine the likeability of the speaker. Debates on controversial topics, firebrand articulations and titillating sermons are also aplenty. Some Muslims attest to an extra ordinary rhetorical act of an audience being incited to violence which ended up in the stabbing of a Maududi follower by a person sitting nearby, inspired by the fervent speech of E. K. Abubacker Musaliyar, the leader of the traditional '*Samastha jamayat ul ulama*' organization, consequently paving way for the ban of Musaliyar for some time.

Whereas there is also a movement within the Islamic world to use sermons as a means of correcting the prejudices regarding Islam, re -interpreting *hadiths* and exposing the misrepresentations of Islamic *Sharia*. Fraught with tensions of overcoming the negative connotations associated with Islam in the Western world, simultaneously reviving the strong advocacy of peace that Islam stands for, sermons fight their way through the multitudinous counter discourses, struggling to find a place for itself and as a means to go back to the pristine, ideal world that Quran dreams of.

The Islamic rhetoric nowadays have lots of hurdles to cross, as it tries to negotiate with the socio-political changes and the current of modernity in different parts of the world. Gender remains one of them. Trying to explain the injunctions of Quran in the light of modern development is a herculean task for many orators. Islam, according to many critical views, is more misogynistic than all other religions of the world and the orators try to exonerate themselves from these attacks by



appropriating new changes to *Hadiths*. Accordingly the form of "*ibilees*" or the evil forces that tempt people to sin are the "new age" devices like mobile phone or internet or current situations like living in Gulf or other foreign countries, in a culture that is alien to them. Sexuality and discourses surrounding sexuality, therefore, take the centre stage of Islamic sermons which was addressed elaborately in the previous chapter of this thesis.

#### Islamic Values:

The discourses in Islam are often a guide to the believers who attest to the human values of adopting what is good and of shunning what is bad. Strictly abiding by the Word of God, by what is considered Islamic and according to the *Sharia*, the rules of Islam present people with a framework to judge their life before the final judgement day. Therefore, these discourses constantly remind the believers of what they have to do in spite of their rat-race for a comfortable life. This spiritual journey from ignorance to knowledge is presented metaphorically as a journey from darkness to light. Islam and its text thus become the light that spreads human values. Besides being the authoritative text of a particular religious section, Quran's social perspectives are said to be philosophies for every section. The belief is that Quran is Allah's words and it has come down to us through Muhammad, the prophet whom God himself ordained. The belief is that the one who presented Quran, Allah, knows inside out, past and future. Quran is light and it rescues society from darkness and guides it through the right path. Contrastive metaphors such as 'heavens and earth' , death and life', night and day' etc. abound in Islamic discourses juxtaposing an Islamic and un-Islamic way of life. Drawing on Roland Meynet's rhetorical analysis

of Bible, Cuypers points out that one can note the use of binarity through "pairing" and "contrast" in Islamic speeches. "The Qur'an makes frequent use of 'binomes of totality' in order to designate reality in its entirety" (14). The Quran emphasizes the significance of faith and discounts doubt or criticism as detrimental for the believer. Actions without faith are likened to ashes that are blown away in strong wind. Notwithstanding, many believers acknowledge the contradictions within Quran, for instance, the credibility over the story about the death of Prophet Mohammed.

Daily prayer as well as community *Juma* prayer and listening to *Khutuba* are of prime importance in the life of a good Muslim. According to traditional Islamic traditions *Khutuba* is not a speech but a form of worship. Rituals are one way of listening to the dictates of God who will guarantee a place in heaven in the after-life, provided he lives an Islamic life here and now. Speeches of veteran, Sunni scholar, Abdu Samad Samadani titled 'Way to Madina' held annually at Kozhikode beach are popular among other non-Sunni sects also. He delivers a series of speeches during one-month-long Ramadan fasting on myriad 'general' topics detailing ways of submission to God, and propagates the mild, peace loving nature of Islam and the Prophet. Speakers also reiterate the infallibility of *Dua* or prayers in seeking blessings. The prayers cover both the spiritual and material needs of the believer equally well. The most popular "*dua*" ranges from a request for the wellness of all people, living and dead, to "*dua*" for escaping from accidents, mental and physical sickness. The prayers also engage with issues regarding repaying loans, having a good home, family, blessings, even seeking remedies for dental problems. Derided by atheists and other spiritualists for its sheer materiality, these speeches cannot be

dismissed considering the much needed consolation they afford to thousands of believers who are deprived of a good life either due to the socio-political structures or due to larger, unpredictable and unresolved issues of life.

Islamic Family :

Most of the themes in Islamic rhetoric centre around the concept of family. The search for the ideal family, husband, wife, parents and children abound in these discourses. Mostly patriarchal in orientation, they also elicit one after another, numerous episodes from the life of Prophet Mohammed who is seen as the best role model ever in all family matters. The unavailability of *Nikah*, the rules and decorum concerning sexual life of the married man and woman, extra-marital affairs and its dangers, the role of wives in guiding their men and children towards an Islamic way of life, the role of mothers in nurturing girls etc. are the favourite topics. What differentiates Islam from other discourses is the minute detailing and elaboration of every single deed to be performed by man and woman. From the most intimate sexual activity to the collective activity of '*Zakat*', these discourses give guidance for the same quoting relevant '*ayat*' and '*sura*' from Quran projecting the view that there is nothing that has not been mentioned in Quran. The comparison and contrast theme constantly works out in the speeches. The past life and the present are conflicting categories ever in war with each other with a exhortation to get back to the tradition eradicating modernity and its attendant ills. Therefore the Islamic war is "jihad" in which the motto is if you cannot defeat the evil you court death, projected as the highest form of moral and spiritual purification as opposed to the Western, Capitalist, secular, modern degradation.

### Islam and Other religions:

In a context where one's religious affiliations are constantly contested, satirized or mocked at, still further blamed, there is an emergency need to reclaim one's intentions and bind hard to one's religious identity. Thus Islam, in the wake of the tags of "fundamentalism" and "terrorism" attached to it and in the context of thriving in a pluralistic country like India has multitudinous burdens on its shoulders. The superiority of Islam over other religions and the effort of the other to stigmatize Islam by misinterpreting Quran's prescriptions are established over and again in these discourses. For instance, the criticism meted out to Prophet as a man who married several women is defended in this vein.

The portrayal of the Prophet as a lust -driven man has much to do with Christian antagonism towards Islam as Christianity's own skewed perception of sex. Christians consider sex to be evil; a residue of the original sin that led to the expulsion of man from heaven. Islam, on the other hand, considers libidinal energy to be a positive life force that can play a salutary role in society if channelled and harnessed properly. (Thasneem 40)

A contemporary development in Islamic sermonizing is the development of a dialogic and debating platform by orators like M.M Akbar, a controversial scholar who belongs to Salafi/Wahabi/Mujahid sect, progressive in comparison with the traditional Sunni sects but again not very much accepted by even more progressive sects like JIH. When Mujahid sect faced multiple splits recently, he opted to be with the fiercest group in terms of religious correctness. He is also the Director of *Niche*

*of Truth*, an agency to propagate Islam to non- Muslims and also the manager of Peace International School in Kerala. Well known for dialogues with other religious leaders and scholars, a dialogue which he describes as “*Sneha Samvadam*” ( A debate of Love with other religions) he produces CDs of the same and uses it for propaganda. This debate is an occasion not to learn, but to proclaim the supremacy and infallibility of Islam over other religions. In February 2018 he was arrested in connection with a case of inciting communal enmity through the text books at his school. M.M. Akbar explains the significance of religion in human life thus: "We don't need religion or Vedas to understand the existence of God. But to understand the rules, to understand HIS ways, we need the messengers of God". He asserts that , in Hindu philosophy in Mundaka Upanishad, Katopanishad etc. there is a reference to "*hiranyagarbhan*", the one god who created the sun and the moon and the universe and that symbolizes mono theistic faith and is the Islamic god ("Enthinu" 0:03:00-0:04:33).

What is extraordinary about this speaker is that he mouths Vedic phrases in his own way and tries to compare other religions and never disregards them. He also asserts that Jesus and Christian tenets like "Yohannan's gospel, "Mathew's gospel " also talk about trusting the single god, hence in that sense there is no place on earth which is not touched by Islam's monotheistic faith. The prophetic teachings had culminated in and had consolidated this faith into Islam. Quite unlike the other orators who blame and defy other religions Akbar tries to appropriate other religious tenets, reminiscent of the Haindava appropriation, and claims that Islam has consolidated all the teachings of other religions in Islam and thereby becomes the

perfect religion. The debates about the prophecy of Vyasa regarding Prophet Mohammed, references to Muslims in the Hindu text *Bhavishyapurana*, the notion of Adam and Eve in some Hindu texts etc. become debating topics in such platforms.

Another key speaker who negotiates the position of Islam in the pluralistic context by sending the message of peace between religions is Muneer Hudavi. Similar to Akbar's views on Islam's relationship with other religions, Hudavi enriches his oration with Sanskrit *slokas*, instances of Sri Narayana Guru 's attack on caste system, brings up 'dalit' issues with narratives of the poem "Chandala bikshuki" and Channar Revolt and contends that the single god mentioned in the Vedas is the concept of "*tauhid*" in Islam("൧൫൩൪" 0:01:05-0:03:01). In a speech titled "*New generation yugathile Islam*" Hudavi, himself a young man, speaks for communal harmony and for barricading cultural deviations of the "new-generation" believers ("Usthad").

Islam and Death :

Death is an important aspect of remembrance in Islamic sermons linked to the values of humility, fear and love. The virtuosity to move an audience to tears is an important attribute of an Islamic orator. For eliciting the emotions of fear, sadness and terror, the rhetorical techniques of *tarhib*( from the verb *rahhab*, to terrify, to frighten)and *waz* (from *wa'az*, to warn or admonish) are employed. This is done in order to instil fear into the heart of a listener so as to steer him or her toward correct practice. On the other hand, "*Tarhib* ( to awaken desire) offers promise of heaven, progression from fear, to regret, to asking for forgiveness, to repentance and

eventually to a sense of closeness with God akin to tranquillity and stillness" (Hirschkind 94-96). While a description of the horrors of the grave and hell invokes piety and fear in the listener, it also makes one realise the intensity and the significance of the life in hand and instils values of humility, love, care and communal spirit. "*Qabarile Adya Nimishangal*", a speech delivered in conversational style, humorous, musical and performative, narrates the incident of angel Rahman, Allah's employee, who comes and asks the corpse to recount and write the actions of his life. The narrative resembles a horror film portraying scenes when the shroud is made into a chain and put into the neck of the corpse (Thangal). Therefore the warning is to live an Islamic life. Speeches entitled "*Pambu kothi valicha mayyath*", and "Taste of death" available online reveal the dangers awaiting a bad man /woman after death and offer similar, incredible and bizarre stories of what happens to the un-Islamic person after death. Renditions which elicit pathos and sympathy, and mercy of Allah, these speeches remind the believer of the good deeds to be done in fear of the situations after death.

One of the primary tasks of *khutaba* is to afford listeners such a taste of death, to portray death in its manifold dimensions and ramifications with a vividness and moral depth so as to root it in their sensory experience, to constitute it as a habit of thought, heart and body. The tasting of death through continual acts of remembrance enables an ethical orientation in this world, a moral-emotional bearing proper to pious human action. (Hirschkind 176)

### Islam and Science:

The relation between Islamic discourse and science has been a conflicting one for long. We see conventional ways of representing the oppositional positioning of religion as anti-science in many speeches like that of speakers like Rahmatullah Al-Qasimi who interprets the physiological or psychological illnesses as falling unconscious, avoidance of sleep, food and hygiene, love of darkness, obsession with bathing etc. as the symptoms of devil's work ("atmiya" 0:08:36-56). Alternatively, there is the emergence of quite unheard of branches of medical science like "Prophetic cardiology" as explained by Dr Salim Faizy who claims that Nabi has explained the nature of heart, a piece of flesh as the most important organ of the body and that any disease can be treated by treating the heart ("Prophetic"). Most of such discourses interpret Quranic verses to relate to the scientific facts in Quran- the origin of all living things in water; the origin of metal iron in outer space; ozone layer as the protector of sky; the theory of plate tectonics and what not as elaborated in Holy Quran interpreting all this as a sign of God. It relies on the view that all sources "both classical and modern agree that Quran condones, even encourages the acquisition of science and scientific knowledge, and urges humans to reflect on the natural phenomena as signs of God's creation" (Rezania 74).

Abid Hudavi, an Islamic orator argues that physics, physiology, mathematics and all branches of knowledge are dealt with in Quran. So, there is no need to go beyond a science that changes its ways alternatively, every now and then. "Cut your shoes according to your feet, not vice versa", he asserts adding that one has to look for Science as exemplified by the Prophet in Quran (0:16.09-0:17.00). M. M. Akbar



dwells on embryology and its relation to Quran and concludes that new scientific evidences regarding the sex of the foetus attests exactly to the 'forty five day' angel story described in Quran ("Hadith" 0:31:44-56). These sermons also present counter arguments of the rational thinkers in order to defend them to establish their viewpoint. Similarly, Dr. Basheer Moulavi says that though science claims that a girl or boy reaches the age of maturity around twelve years, according to Prophet, a girl becomes mature at nine and that has been proven true when a Brazilian girl got pregnant at nine and delivered a child (0:09.00-18).

E. A. Jabbar, a rationalist discusses the predicament of the new age believer who is forced to converge science and faith in equally absurd ways and how he fails miserably in the attempt (1:52:19-40). This need to show the progressive face of Islam, Muzaffar Iqbal observes, is seen in various post-colonial countries who have started pumping wealth into education and scientific research to show evidence of Quran as having scientific verses. Sponsorship was mainly in such fields as Embryology, Botany, Geology, Astronomy and Cosmology. Among the Indian orators Zakir Naik undertakes this mission of linking science and Islam at the international level while M. M. Akbar does it at the local level. "Two important factors that have shaped contemporary Islam and Science discourse are Islam's encounter with modernity and a deep seated almost insatiable hunger for modern science in Muslim psyche" (Iqbal 187). The Islamic discourses project as their 'science guru', the Canadian Embryologist Keith Moore who in the 1980's concluded in his lectures and writings that Quran contains theories of human development

which proves that Muhammad was the messenger of God. A precursor was Maurice Bucaille, a French physician, whose work established Quran as "scientifically correct". "Quran contains scientifically correct information about the heavens and the earth, human reproduction and certain aspects of the natural world whereas Bible does not."Even the Big Bang theory is appropriated in this manner into the verses of Q21:30,Q41:11" (164). A strong rebuttal to this theory came from William Campbell who in his book, "The Quran and the Bible in the light of History of Science" argued that Quran had got it all wrong while The Bible was scientifically sound.

The project of Islamization of knowledge has been a natural product of Islam's encounter with modernity, especially after the 1950's. This has crept into the realm of science too as more and more scientists try to interpret Quran and Science as mutually enhancing each other. Ziauddin Sardar defended this attempt in his book as the "need for each civilization to produce its own kind of science within its world view"(169) and to think in terms of the project as anti-western, pluralistic and utilitarian view of science for the benefit of mankind. Through such a perspective, Islamic sciences try to project the contribution of "Islamic environmental systems engineering" an innovative phrase with "Humanism, altruistic action, imitative-innovative social change" as some of the dynamics of Quran (Husaini 164). However as S. Irfan Habib queries if it is not important to think about whether what the world needs is Islamic Science or Science in Islam. He observes:

Sadly, today, the authority of science is being used to keep Islam relevant and updated for the believers; however, contrarily, it is harming both. Besides all the rhetoric, which motivates these Islamic interlocutors, no concrete example is yet available where Islamic science is being practiced, including Saudi Arabia, despite its involvement in funding a large number of such projects. ...Unfortunately, this toxic combination of religious literalism and 'science' is now the most popular version of Islamic science. (Habib 47)

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the rhetoric of Kerala in the past two decades reveals that it would not be unfair to call Kerala, 'Rhetoric's Own Country'. We see a lot of rhetorical communities being established collaboratively, churning out fantasy themes about themselves as well as others and getting entangled in the vicious web of 'rhetrickery' in the past two decades. With the resurgence of the right wing politics and its consequent counter discourses from Dalit, minority and women's rights corners, one sees rhetorical excesses flooding Kerala on a daily basis with not much desired results. The most problematic area is the ambiguity in sorting out literal and metaphorical aspects of language in political and religious realms paving the way for much misinterpretation of realities.

At a larger level, India has seen the mission of spiritualization of politics to an extent, successfully carried out by Gandhi as well as the friction between Gandhian religious politics and Nehruvian ideal of secular modernity. The paradox inherent in the oriental construction of the country as the land of the Vedas, Rishis and people free from the entanglements of material progress and the real situation of the common man and woman within the country have also been analysed by critics. This schism between the 'Ideal' and the 'Real' India, then, has been the concern of all rhetoric from the colonial and nationalist era. Notwithstanding the progress in science, technology and other areas of material development, move towards secularizing the public sphere through the Constitution, the shadows of religion and

religiosity have cast a long shadow over the Indian political scene and have culminated in the resurgence of the Hindutva politics now.

The 'politicization' of religion and the 'religionization' of politics are phenomena world wide, more so in India being a country with many religions thriving together. The fervent cries from well meaning critics who have asked to keep the religion as a means of personal salvation and politics as relating to the social sphere apart have proven to be a utopian notion over the centuries. This private/public divide in terms of religion has been theorised by sociologists including Thomas Luckmann who argued for a personal religion which would not challenge instrumental rationality questioned by Peter Berger who vouches for the social responsibility and meaning-construction of religion. Many Indian critics have looked upon the notion of secularism as another religion itself, based on the binary categories of science/religion, reason/faith etc. The dangers of militant secularism with utmost dependence on the primacy of reason which attempts to impose one world view over a pluralistic country like India has its own discontents. However there is no doubt that in the context of rising fundamentalism and communalism, the need for secularism cannot be wholly disregarded. A stand that summarises all these views is spelt out by Avijit Pathak who claims that modernity and religion are not categories to be pitted against each other because "there is a close affinity between the positive meaning of secularism and the profound spiritual truth of oneness" and hence a possible alternative which amalgamates these divergent voices all would be 'soft secularism' (89). But again, this remains a distant dream.

In the core chapter on political rhetoric of identification and division I have analysed the historical context of the development of political rhetoric in India, from the nationalist struggle for independence which saw a clash of interests between the discourses of modernity and that of Indian Vedic culture. The Hindutva movement which tried to homogenize the society through the discourses of Hedgewar, Golwalker and Savarkar culminated in the assassination of Gandhi who was a betrayer in their terms. The failure of the Nehruvian consensus and the lack of leadership at the political level to address the divergent issues of caste, class, ethnicity, gender, regions and the like have been quite fertile for the resurgence of the question of Hindutva in the latter part of the twentieth century, getting a fresh stint with the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the Babri Masjid demolition in 1998. And in the next twenty years we see the rhetoric of "Hum Hindu Hain" re-echoing in the words of a woman orator, K. Sasikala in Kerala. Today, Kerala is competing along with states like Uthar Pradesh in breaking the record of hate speeches. This rhetoric of aggression has polarised the Kerala society and has had silent admirers being converted into vote banks. A resurgence of Hindu nationalism in the diasporas who adopt Hindu identity as a means away from their identity crisis in a foreign country, consequently funding ecumenical organizations catering to them through being spiritual retreat centres from the discontents of globalization and cut-throat corporate culture has made matters worse. Thus we observe the 'sarva dharma sama bhavana' (equality between religions) celebrated by these organizations have started changing colours in the new millennium and has a strong Hindu flavour and millions of people all over India including Kerala have responded to the call for Hindutva nullifying Kerala's tryst with modernity.

The one-time spiritual discourses have become indoctrination programmes of RSS, as we see Sasikala, Sadhvi Saraswati, Sobha Surendran, Dr. Gopalakrishnan and others belonging to fringe groups of RSS and BJP storming the stages - a rhetorical combination of separatist, divisive politics with inclusive religious rhetoric. Therefore Chidanandapuri's speeches alternate between two extremes. There is a total oneness proclaimed by the Indian spirituality as well as a purely political, anti-Muslim, aggressive rhetoric that emphasizes a return to Sanathana Dharma as the only refuge to the mayhem. Dr. Gopalakrishnan is one among many speakers who present a strange combination of scientific rationality and Vedic religious orthodoxy by interpreting all Vedic or Hindu rituals as essentially scientific. His speeches court controversy for the inflammable content against other religions. Spewing anti-Muslim and anti-Christian remarks, Sasikala's *Haindava Keralam* rhetoric is entrenched in slippery slope fallacies, misappropriation of historical facts and appeal to the 'savarna' middle classes with her regional 'Valluvanad' accent. On the other end of the spectrum, we have the discourses of generous, tolerant Hinduism and the image of India as the mother's body, an image which was successfully used during the nationalist movement. This is paradoxically blended with the visual rhetoric of communal violence with temples being sites for communal mobilization creating an atmosphere of paranoia and menace. The conceptual, qualitative metaphor of the conspiratorial enemy and the quantitative metaphor of the 'other' proliferating like beasts or viruses producing fear and hatred are extensive within this rhetoric. The imaginary myths take the form of '*dharma yudha*' versus '*holy jihad*'.

The fiercest resistance to the Hindutva rhetoric has come from the Dalit quarters through a revival of Ambedkarite vision of repudiating Hinduism which is intrinsically made to perpetuate 'graded inequality'. Ambedkar and Ayyankali have emerged as iconic figures in these discourses. There is also a movement to revive Dalit theology as a tool to the liberation process. Nonetheless, religious conversion as a means to emancipation has been tried and tested and the Dalit Christian discourses are suffused with narratives of discrimination rampant inside churches. The use of Dalit myths, stories, songs and the narratives of the struggle are made part of the struggle for productive land. Also, there is a search for role models in 'human' gods like Kumaragurudevan, Ayyankali and Ambedkar. There is also a subversion of the dominant myths associated with Onam, Vishu etc. At the core of the struggle is the demand for equal rights in education, career and dignified living and Indian Constitution is seen as the Bible of these movements. Notwithstanding the fissures within these movements with 'slippery identities and shrewd identifications' (Clarke), the Dalit and the Adivasi struggle have been quite compelling events and have transformed to the narratives surrounding productive land. They also put forward narratives of domination and trauma meted out to them by the majoritarian society and the State leaving the hint that caste practices are going to stay but in a subtle way, the rhetoric of equality through the assimilation into the Hindu fold notwithstanding. New political organizations like KPMS and DHRM although put forward fresh hopes for Dalit empowerment also succumb to certain political manipulations by other parties. Even so, they have their own import in raking up issues that are of importance to the structural changes awaiting Kerala society as a whole.



The personal/political debate with regard to religion and the concept of religion as social bonding reaches its peak with the issue of political Islam, the discussion of Islamic fundamentalism on one hand and Islam as religion of peace and understanding on the other. Only a non-Western reading of the faith can offer some light on the 'Ulema' and the activist tug of war going on. The ideological differences within Islam and the plurality of the practices inside it are revealed on these stages. In most cases the debates between Sunni, Mujahid, Jamaat e Islami become fierce war of words, an essentially argumentative enterprise more than anything else. This irreconcilability is not evident in Hindu discourses on account of appropriation. Among these the Tablighi Jamaat has decentralised preaching from pulpits and made it the moral obligation of every believer. This is challenged by the Sunni as well as Salafi faction. The Salafi factions project their emphasis on 'reasoned argument' while the Sunni priests think of it as an oxymoron as faith is beyond reason and cannot yield fruit unless there is a total surrender of reason. The former discourses also take progressive stand on various issues however not without apparent contradictions. Many of these discourses, unwillingly, become baits for the right wing politics branding them as aiding fundamentalists. Another trend is that the debating platforms are places of eristic argumentation sometimes bordering on verbal abuses, venomous sarcasm, and manipulation of video clips or simply argumentative. The speakers run for cover, they hunt for counter arguments to defend themselves, construct certain types of truths and in effect drown the pure objective of the whole exercise, that of spiritual enlightenment.

The twin failures of the Kerala modernity and the Kerala developmental model to address the grave issues faced by the Adivasis, Dalits, women and other minority groups have contributed to the growth of a very restless crowd which harbours resentment against each other providing fertile ground for separatist identity politics in the State. On the other hand, the ill-will of the middle class against policies of reservation has added fuel to fire making them embark on a discourse of changing the paradigm of reservation to economic terms. It was the feminist movements in Kerala who questioned the society's apathy towards gender issues and brought the issues of gendered nature of societal structure as something to be subverted. They questioned the use of women as either vote bank or labour force devoid of even basic rights like right to public places, travel, costumes, marriage, sexuality etc. In the first section of the third chapter, I have gone through an account of the paths travelled by the feminist discourses, attacks against it and its new orientation in acknowledging the intricacies of caste, class, sexuality and religion seeping into gendered identities as well as various other trends like LGBT movements and Dalit movements working together.

The question of religion as a solace from the oppressive familial structure and religion as a structure which legitimates gendered identities promoting suppression is analysed. As expected, the discourses surrounding family, divinity of motherhood and the control of female desire and sexuality is seen all around and the responsibility of the ideal housewife is maintained through the concept of '*sthriddharma*' and '*sanathana dharma*'. This is further exacerbated by the paranoia created around 'love jihad' and the consequent ramifications of conversions. The

Hindu woman's body, as always becomes a site to be protected by herself and her patrons. Thus gender is maintained as a category through a rhetoric which sustains the secondary, submissive roles of even educated and career oriented women. Alternately, religion is used as in some Islamic discourses as liberation theology by revisiting scriptures and making it more woman-friendly. Also, as seen in some Hindu discourses, the emphasis is on negating the gender binary based on bodily and material existence and embracing the 'genderlessness' of the soul. Women also make use of religion to negotiate power; they become the guards of their religious identity naturally by perpetuating rituals and cultural practices. Simultaneously there is a hesitation within, when the condition of being gendered is in tandem with the caste or class identity and women are at a loss to choose that singular identity which will give them a better living.

The use of gender in nationalist discourse is also part of the study. In the RSS literature we find the notions of the Hindu male and the Hindu female respectively adopted by the RSS Sangh and Samiti workers in conjunction with certain religious symbols and myths and more virulent forms of oratory. The Islamic discourses construct the notion of an ideal Muslim male though it conflicts with the other sects within the religion and continues to change with time and space. The female speakers however, have to defend the Western and Hindu construction of the oppressed Muslim woman as well as fight the patriarchal forces within.

The issue of transgender and other sexual minorities are slowly getting addressed by the Central and the State governments with the inclusion of the transgender in many columns in applications and recently by providing them

reservation in higher education. However, it would be some more time before society accepts them as normal human beings. Hinduism remains mum about the plight of the transgender and Islam projects that there is a discursive space in Islam for transgender. Christian discourse tries to give the impression of assimilating the transgender into their flock. Nevertheless, there is a huge gap still between theory and practice when it comes to the actual living conditions and rights of the transgender.

Notwithstanding the empowerment of Malayali women in education and career, positions where decision making and policy making are involved still elude women. This becomes grave when the category of caste gets entwined with gender. Thus as we observe from the cues provided by the narratives of woman leaders of Muthanga and Chengara, caste and gender become the twin oppressive structures against which they have to wage wars relentlessly. We also see the challenges to the gendered epistemology and their contribution to the construction and access of knowledge through their experiences against the background of a mainstream which always puts them under a moral scanner.

Sermons direct one repeatedly to the values, virtues that one has to practice in day to day life. They take you away from the mundane existence of worries and anxieties to the pristine future world. Christian sermons effectively do that on a daily basis. Human values form a major theme of rhetoric. Apart from instilling values in the listener, the sermons of today have become vast performative spaces for both the priest and the audience. Making use of voice modulations, bodily gestures and actions that create an uncommon, de-familiarised ambience which may look comical

to an indifferent observer, however, have a serious psycho-somatic impact on the believer. The aural and the visual worlds combine to produce an ethereal world of divinity. The negotiations with modernity and science are also made at a regular basis keeping the beliefs intact and untouched.

A Hindu way of life which stresses the control of the senses, presents before the Hindu, two worlds, a real and a mundane. The message is very clear, unlike in Christianity where you have to love your neighbour like yourself, Hinduism allows the Hindu to build walls and keep his material territory intact without any shaking off or renunciation of his present way of life, permits all kinds of "illegitimate" transactions in the name of *Dharma* and persuades him to think that one need not worry about justice in this world because with just one single realization that this is illusion and that you are *Brahma*, all your sins are expiated.

Earlier, the audience of these discourses belonged to the elite class, retired men and women who nearing towards the end of their life cycle find a kind of solace in the eternity of the *atman* and dreams of a much better life in the next "*janma*". But ever since spirituality has been adopted by organizations and with the changing dynamics of the rise of minority religions, the new religious affiliations and practice of Gulf-returned Muslims as reflected in the political leanings of the country, we see a lot of young men and women, with a corporate income who get "settled" early in their lives among the audience.

Hindu spiritual discourses can be categorised as two-pronged, one towards reclaiming the Hindu Self and the other towards repudiating the Hindu Other. The claims are 1) Hinduism is not a religion but *Dharma*. 2) There has been a

misinterpretation of the Vedas in the case of *Varna* and gender. 3) There is a blind imitation of the West 4) the Indian family system is the best 5) Indian values have eroded, leading to more diseases and collapse of physical and mental health of Indians 6) Vedas are more scientific than Western science. 7) There is the danger of *Kaliyuga* compounded with the failure of the secular -isms to address the problems. 8) Hindu Dharma is the valiant hero who will save Bharatmata.

The homogenization of the diverse Indian philosophical system which contains plural, even contradictory world views and concepts of the individual self and the other, body and soul is seen in the concept of Hindutva at the political level and Sanathana Dharma at the ideological level. The appropriation and assimilation of various traditions and regional deities and folklores also happen here projecting Hinduism as a tolerant, generous religion although the hierarchy is strictly and silently maintained within the Brahminical tradition. There is caste among Gods themselves and the question of superiority is asserted time and again. The ambivalent nature towards 'language' adopted by the scriptures as the means of darkest ignorance ("Ajnana") as well as a tool of liberation (as in the mantra OM) also exposes the intricacies of the war between the matter and spirit which is the foremost debate in Indian philosophy.

Another noteworthy point is that globalization, neo liberalism and the digital revolution have changed the paradigms of persuasion at all levels, even at the spiritual level and have converged the private and public spheres of religiosity. A very individual and personal pursuit of transcendence has been changed to a very overt, political deliberation with all the strategic manoeuvring expected of a political

system. Many organizations hitherto showing ecumenical character and drawing in the Indian diaspora as well as the urban middle class have suddenly aligned themselves with the right wing politics. One can also surmise that the political ascendancy of Hindutva forces has been made easy by these discourses.

It is not my intention to claim while enumerating rhetorical traditions and contemporary streams within Kerala that all Hindus, Muslims or Christians are fully influenced by or are persuaded to adopt a life put forward by these injunctions. Moreover, rhetoric flourishes where alternate ways of living are in vogue thereby trying to goad the people to a homogenous, controllable way of living. The impact on the audience in that case cannot be measured within the scope of this thesis. But it can surely pave the way for further researches on this topic. However, the very presence of audience in these venues and the increasing number of such events can be read as the influence of such persuasions and propaganda and this dialectic grows further in a society which is indifferent to or ignorant of minimum constitutional rights and moreover impede the working of constitutional morality.

I have also categorised the Hindu religious speeches as emanating from certain topoi. They include 1) Sanathana Dharma 2) ideal caste/gender relations 3) scientific spirituality 4) Neo-Vedanta 5) consciousness/ truth/bliss) the infallible Guru. These discourses are also replete with conventional and new age metaphors helping in reaching out to the common audience. When some of these show tremendous creativity, others border on sheer absurdity. We also observe that the legitimacy of caste and gender hierarchy is sustained through a very persuasive

strategy of rationalising the notions of caste and gender as natural categories on the one hand and by adopting an ambivalent or silent posture on the other.

In the section on Islamic discourses, I have tried to locate the rhetorical tradition of Arab-Islamic oratory beginning with the Prophet, the different modes of sermonizing like narratives, explication, storytelling, warning etc. combining to form a standard version to be used by *khatibs*, the coherence principle of Quran and the non-linear and the comparison-contrast model of arguments in the Holy text which becomes a model for the Islamic preachers. In Islam, listening to sermons has been at the core of leading an Islamic life by purifying the heart with the help of conventional word of scriptures. In addition to this ethical function of imparting goodness in the follower, Islamic sermons, in contemporary times, also serve to consolidate their faith in the context of secular, local as well as trans-national socio political challenges. The discursive patterns of such sermons have also changed with the times and have appropriated the style of political discourses. In the wake of the "visual" dominating everyday life with its heterogeneity, plurality, insecurity and so on the "aural" becomes a medium to take one back to the cosy interiors of the nostalgic "soundscape", a fascinating life which connects like-minded people and gives security and a sense of identity.

The visual culture has reconfigured the sermons to include "word as camera" style and to attune to cinematic imagination. The sermons compete with the pleasure giving media in describing the scenic aspects of Quran. Through the use of rhythm, crescendo, and sonority, the new age sermons make use of the sonic as well as visual aspect to make the listener forget his worldly worries and concentrate on God.



When reciting the Koran, the orator follows established melodic cadences known as *Tajweed* or chanting expected to bring divine experience into the affective experience of the believer. Further sections elaborate on the responses of Islamic spiritual speeches in Kerala to the concepts of Islamic values, family, rituals, death, monotheism, other religions as well as sects within Islam.

The spiritual discourses have always aimed at imparting values to the audience lot, values which are also recognised by secular forces. The people themselves are also aware of these humanitarian values these discourses are trying to establish. Yet, these speech-acts are drilled in at regular intervals and connect people to a state of peace, absence of conflicts, dreams of a better world and a most wanted escape from the real world suffering. Thus the Marxist injunction to do away with religion or the Neo-Marxist injunctions to re interpret religion in positive ways have not had much impact on the public sphere exactly because they do not guarantee the temporary, weekly or daily flight from suffering that is accorded by these spiritual speech acts. The politics of caste and gender inextricably linked to the Indian spirituality (including Islam and Christianity) is at a paradoxical relationship with the temporal social and political milieu. The efforts to ameliorate the alienation of Dalits and women in turn function as traps set by religion. The theistic view consoles majority public because they seem to offer ready-made solutions to their problems through a revision of their life style and guarantees from above a final consolation in the form of destiny or God's will. The atheistic conception on the other hand, offers nothing of that sort except for a release from fear of God but no solace in after-life or heaven.

If politics and religion were conceived originally and is still looked upon as a harbinger of all good that can happen to humankind it must both share the ideals of equality, freedom and justice to all and it does so to an extent. Nevertheless, throughout the history of mankind we have seen politicians and priests sharing another set of values and aims and that is of hiding certain truths about life and projecting something else as the truth. Time and again, they have tried to homogenize the heterogeneous multitude and have capitalized on the insecurities of the individual and their need for social cohesion. The Self and the interests of the self are bound to the Other and the imagined difference is protracted to sustain the friction between the Self and the Other. Thus there is an inherent contradiction in what it professes to do and what it does. This is where rhetoric functions effectively. The resolution of such a contradiction then would be the ultimate ideal to be sought after. If religion offers one type of rhetorical answers to the eternal, existential questions of life and death, and politics offers another type of solutions to the immediate questions of existence and they cohabit in the realm of rhetoric, it is time to think of what is missing about the whole lot of rhetoric going on in these areas. How can one who is brought up in the philosophy of unity of all beings that all religions advocate at the basic level discriminate in terms of gender, caste, class or practices?

In sum, Malayali politics, morality and spirituality are based on a rhetoric which gives importance to mass opinions without ever giving space for individual deliberations or knowledge building. It is essentially 'doxastic' in orientation with a set of rhetorically constructed truths transmitted from one generation to another.

Although there is a facade of acceptance of plurality in some fields, it is shaken at the moment it nudges the corners of the territory set apart for a group. Identities are constructed as water tight compartments as self reflection takes a backseat due to rhetorical excesses. One of the foremost efforts of such rhetoric has been to stall people from recognising what is right or wrong for them by suffocating them with distorted realities. Thus it is the necessity of the day to foreground the epistemic rhetoric which generates knowledge in every individual as against doxastic rhetoric which is given visibility even by people who oppose it vehemently. Whether it is the personal or the political realm, the possibility of dissent and of dialogue towards understanding and the revival of an ‘ invitational’ rhetorical tradition committed to truth and just dealings is the need of the hour.

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