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Conclusion

Kodungallur Bharani Festival had been analyzed primarily from a historical and religious point of view in the former scholastic studies. However, this ethnography adopts a variety of theoretical stances and undertakes a holistic view of the festival laying more importance on the experience of the performers, placing their transformation at the pivotal point of the study. There is an undeniable connection between performance, ritual, body, space, language, and society. This study is an attempt to deconstruct this network operating in the Kodungallur Bharani Festival and understands how these elements play together in creating the cumulative identity of the performer.

Performance studies is primarily focused on the behavior of human actions, drawing meaning from the points of contact between the performer, performed, and the spectator. The body plays an evident role in performance, being the fundamental site of struggle. Ritual is found to be abounding in performative qualities, as rituals are evidently behaviors that are structured or ordered into a pattern. Turner identifies the liminal quality of the ritual; the body interacts with its space in rituals to attain a transformation. Thus, the 'performing' or 'ritualized' bodies bring about the liminal experience. It is the time and context that decides the ritualistic nature of a performance; it can involve everyday activities to complex orders of existence.

Rituals can be an important element in the psychological growth of its participants; it can offer a space where the repressed desires and dreams can be projected. This fact is underlined by Freud's argument that taboo necessitates the ritual. Rituals had a definite role in the evolution of humans. The first and foremost of it would be the

production of a community through ritual performances forging a community of one's own, after which humans climbed up the ladders of culture. Various studies had been conducted on human ritual dimensions producing theories on sacrifice, violence, fertility rites, social dramas, liminality, and *communitas*, etc. An exhaustive study on these aspects is attempted; analyzing how they tackle, tame, and subjugate the individual behavior and interests to succumb to the interest of a group.

There is a considerable difference in an individual before a performance and after the culmination of a performance. This is particularly evident in rites connected to certain important phases in life, what Arnold Van Gennep (1909) terms as 'rites of passage.' Through the study, we have come to realize that rather than being mere ceremonies of celebrations, they have a grave psychological effect on the person being initiated. These rites allow easy passage from one stage to another, without disturbing the normal structures of the society. Rebellion and intolerance prevailing in the society find expression, in some extreme cases, in anti-social behavior. Rather than using force, rituals allow for accommodation of contrasting moods and feelings, creating a healthier society. This is best viewed in 'rituals of rebellion' identified by Max Gluckman (1954) that exaggerate the social conflicts and by providing a means to stage them, affirms social unity. This can be seen as a social control mechanism that can check the unwanted behavior and keep the balance of society. However, in the hands of the dominant groups, it becomes a tool of normalizing social hierarchies. Indubitably, the Bharani festival can be tagged as a ritual of rebellion; by allowing for a few days of extremities, the moralistic society allows room for disruption and subsequent order. At the end of the day, the moral order of the society prevails; any kind of rebellion if it was there has been died out. In

contrast to the lawless situation of the carnival, Bharani operates within a stringent pattern; the behavior of the participants is controlled by the dominant at every stage. The indispensable role accredited to the royal head points to the nature of Bharani's controlled rebellion; though occasional parody and hate practices against the dominant are displayed.

In rites of passage, the individual is released from the structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic. The postmodern societies, in which rules of law and traditional customs have undergone major upheaval or change, individuals and communities are left in a continually unfixed, destructured, and liminal state of existence, caught between the conventions of customary social practices and the burgeoning social practices of new and radically different social formations. It is in the marginal or liminal phase, between the societal and categorical structures of modern society, that a new creative and collective *communitas*, or unstructured community, emerges and traditional boundaries of class, race, religion, and personality dissolve. Here, liminality becomes not a source of alienation but a communally shared experience as in cultural events such as music concerts or sporting events, wherein everyone who participates shares and revels in the sacredness of community. In another sense, *communitas* is a community without frontiers and is charged with cultural and revolutionary potential; it is through this *communitas*, during which people are removed from the structural order of every day, that the political discourse of liminality becomes most sharply focused.

Kodungallur has been an important place in the history of Kerala; it had witnessed several ups and downs in its evolution. Kodungallur lost its prominence as a port probably due to the natural interferences. It had trade relations with major countries like Greece, Rome, and Srilanka and had been subjected to violent intrusions and colonization by Dutch, France, Portuguese and British powers resulting in a conglomerate culture. It is understood that the past of Kodungallur and the Bhagavathi temple is intrinsically linked, deriving its name and force from the rich heritage of the shrine; now Kodungallur has become synonymous with Bharani festival. There had been many contrasting views about the origin of the temple, the exact time and circumstances of the origin of the temple is still shrouded in mystery. The same uncertainty is evident in the origin myths of the Bharani festival; however, historians assign it to have commenced somewhere around 8 BC, playing a categorical role in the erasure of Buddhism from Kodungallur.

Temples served as important centers of administration in the past, Hindu upper caste groups constantly tried to displace the original inhabitants by securing their groves thereby aligning to the center of the power circuit. To maintain a balance, certain allowances were granted to the lower castes that further allowed them to keep the subaltern under control. The month-long festival evolves through numerous *tantric* rites, enthusiastically participated by people belonging to a different order in the caste hierarchy. Undoubtedly, Bharani supports the economic sphere of Kodungallur apart from the social bonding it creates. The borrowed space is accommodated and becomes a pivotal point of their spiritual growth; also memory of the battlefield is recreated. Bearing a close resemblance to shamans, oracles of the Goddess are central to Bhagavathi rituals. An analysis of the initiation ceremony of the oracles reveals their liminal experience; in

trance, they receive the inner call from the Goddess and ascends to the higher level of communion. *Velichappadu* tradition hints at the massive cultural entreatment that occurred in the past; these non-Aryan groups were later accommodated into the mainstream goddess worship.

An attempt is made to understand how such a contesting tradition as Bharani came into being and how it manages to continue amidst the general discontent of the natives of Kodungallur. The story that it was a festival inaugurated by the Nair community to ward off Buddhist saints from the place might hold true. But curiously enough, even if such an incident had occurred, that would have been buried in the history by the upper castes rather than lending centuries of uncurtailed freedom to lower caste groups. Hence the story must be that of a snatching away, a clever appropriation by the Brahmanical groups, and the compensation of a few days. Whatever be the original tradition, the participants of the festival see it as an occasion of utmost faith and devotion to connect with their mother goddess Bhadrakali. Different narratives are at play in the festival lending color to its popular view.

An analysis of the origin and spread of the Kali Cult and Pathini Cult in Kerala reveal that Kali is originally a goddess of tribal groups but in time adapted into the Great Devi Pantheon. Through a textual analysis of the different versions of Kali-Darika and Kannaki-Kovalan tales prevalent in Kerala, the power relations and the political interventions that have played to create each version of the story is brought out. The tension that has been prevalent between Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism resurfaces through popular narratives. The myth of Darika is unique to Kerala, though it resembles some portions of *Devimahatmyam* which recounts the story of Durga-Mahisasura

combat. The story is believed to have its origin in oral traditions and has been variously interpreted as the symbolic representation of the conflict that occurred between Aryans and Dravidians or Syrians and Assyrians. Bhagavathy is believed to have been a tribal deity in her inception named Kottuvai worshipped by Dravidians; during the Vedic and post-Vedic periods Kali was superseded by Aryan gods and *Darikavadham* is linked to the pre-Vedic period. Therefore, in Kali there is a mixture of Aryan and Dravidian elements, thus forging her dual nature. Kodungallur temple has undergone major power shifts; it has been a site of numerous assimilations and acculturations. Further, the Pathini Cult is centered on the mythical figure Kannaki, which is a dominant form of worship in Srilanka and certain parts of South India. Kannaki was later appropriated into the Kali Cult pointing to the shrine's transgression from Buddhist allegiances to Hinduism. When compared to Kali, there is a relative absence of Kannaki in the folk legends of Kerala; the humane element of the story can be the plausible reason. Also, the heroic nature of the marginalized woman of the tale, Manodari, the wife of demon king Darika is revealed through a textual analysis of the Kali-Darika story. Discerningly, the narratives were seen to be aiding the hidden agendas of dominant groups, and necessary changes were accordingly made retaining the basic form.

Maintaining a separate realm, having a separate goddess, the lower caste communities were independently organizing themselves around a central power. This might have alarmed the elite groups who always wanted the 'other' to be in subjugation. By assimilating their goddess, sovereign groups were proclaiming that even the goddesses of tribes were the protectors of the upper caste groups, and rebelling against them means disgracing the goddess herself. This was a premeditated attempt to bring the

tribal clans and lower castes into the power circuit of elites. Bhadrakali is a virgin menstruating goddess who is seen upon both as motherly and destructive. Her wrath or *ugram* which is believed to originate from her lack of sex and procreation must be satisfied by the devotees by cooling her through songs, offerings, and prayers. Bhadrakali is seen as an anthropomorphic goddess who exhibits the same demands of that of a woman who passes through the experience of a woman like menstruation and sexual desire and who possesses infinite energy which if not controlled can cause a greater imbalance in the natural order. She is referred to as *agnigolam* or 'ball of fire' that can cause much havoc and destruction.

Body and mind have always been treated as separate entities reflected in the notions of Cartesian duality. Feminist studies argue that body dualism is gendered; body with its irrational nature has always been associated with femininity whereas mind being a superior faculty possessing reason and logic was read along with masculinity. The body by acting and sometimes by not acting brings visible changes to the performance. Feminism has suffered a backlash for restricting the choices and advocating heterosexuality and in time it has evolved into a broader realm of gender studies where bodies through performance create their identity. Thus, identity and gender are not fixed categories. This theory gives ample space for homosexuality and other sexually deviant practices that are looked down upon by our society. The body is seen as a site of pleasure and pain and site of radical power shifts. The 'marked' or 'inscribed' body is seen as a door to experience this multifarious world. Feminist theorists argue for binary terrorism of accepted dichotomies of gender that is based upon biological nature. Butler views gender as an 'achievement,' a result of repeated performances, rather than a fixed truth,

and thus ascribes an agency to the performing body. The framework of the festival gives due space for each of the gender groups to interact and share, sexual differences are suspended in the festive time. The distinction between sex and gender forms a major topic of the contest in any discussion of the body; the feminists have always sought to disrupt the idea of gender as a natural extension of one's sex. The body is the microcosm of society; it forms a major link in the interactions of individuals and society. Thus, bodies in action result in the construction of the broader social space, the 'ecstatic' body is seen no longer as the passive instrument of mind but an entity in itself namely 'social person.' Female body bears the brunt of desire and hence is always positioned as impossibility; feminists are constantly striving to make their body 'explicit,' by marking them aim at binary terrorism.

Whatever is unclear is deemed to be polluting by the societies everywhere. Female bodily experiences are viewed with skepticism and disgust and are therefore cataloged as 'pollution' and 'disease.' These pollution and taboo ideas further work towards creating gender separations in society, resulting in the ostracization of women. Sexuality and menstruation are seen as unfavorable phenomena that must be hidden; against these notions, gender studies call for an exaltation of body celebrating its life-giving abilities. In the notion of metaformic consciousness, Judy Grahn goes to the extent of placing menstruation as the root of all rituals and epistemology. These notions of sacred and profane have little value in Bharani, all the restrictions are toppled, and the body is unregretfully celebrated. It challenges the notions of female propriety and pollution; male, female and transgender display similar behaviors, the gender disparities are erased out by the bodies in performance. Further, the Bharani festival appears to be a

‘ritual of power’ where the upper castes assert their superiority through the convenient framework of rituals. Through various rituals, bodies are disciplined to turn them docile as Foucault proposes. Many caste groups interact in the space of Kodungallur Bharani Festival but they all come under the overpowering regal authority now and then. Even when the subaltern exercises power, they become the representatives of the royal power.

The visual technology has considerably changed the festival in recent years. It has been revealed that many layers of space emerge during the festival and each of them ultimately aids the participants in attaining a liminal experience. Through their performance, the body, and space merges to provide a transformation. Space becomes ‘lived space’ where the divinity, humanity, and material world intersect and play. The natives of Kodungallur as well as people who come to watch the festival constitute the ‘accidental audience’ in contrast to the ‘integral audience’ of the performance. They come to watch Bharani, mostly out of curiosity and seeking entertainment. They may not be completely aware of the ritual procedures associated with the festival, but feel content with the fragmentary information they derive. As Bharani comprises of varied performers and practices, the performances are not uniform. Each group has different talents to put forward and thus the experience a spectator gains from the festival is varied and unique. Each performance varies in its passion and intensity; one part may be severely religious whereas in other part, entertainment dominates. Viewed as a whole, Bharani is a spontaneous and versatile festival, each part bustling with different activities, and is constantly in motion; it is amoebic, elongating and spreading out but with the center always fixed at the temple.

The physical body is a representation of the social body. Feminist writers as Luce

Irigaray, Helen Cixous, and Judith Butler are concerned with the 'lived body.' The body is located in its socio-cultural context and the bodies in action are an important key in understanding the space in which it is located. Along with the physical and social side of the body, the relation between the inner and outer world of the individual is also an important element in the production of space. The imagistic city saturates the users and space is seen only as a backdrop of everyday activities. 'Disneyfied' environments simply serve as a spectacle and fail to provide a liminal experience for its viewers as well as participants. A spectacle is an ultimate form of abstraction, where identities, dreams, and memories are contained into fantastic images. We usually view an event visually, whereas the experience it delivers appeals to the whole body. Thus, a gap evidently exists. This can be overcome by 'rhythmanalysis' enabling the viewers to 'see' the performance through a complete bodily experience. Mapping is a process in which the user gathers thematic fragments of the city by 'rhythmanalysis.' The bodies of performers move through the spaces of Kodungallur; temple premises, pilgrim routes, and similar charged spaces, bridge gaps and join pieces, which are projected to construct a complete understanding of the space. In tracings, these spaces as visualized are represented whereas in mappings, the city as experienced is presented. Also, we come across hidden powers operating at the deeper levels in the Kodungallur, in its everyday space. Oracles through the use of their body in space construct a space of power. Though they belong to the lower castes, they have the capacity to exercise control and reconstruct public space through their performing body.

Another major thrust of the study is the question of language, 'abuse,' and censorship in Bharani songs. They are oral, not acceptable in printed formats due to strict censorship.

Nevertheless, they are part of human's indigenous culture and hence must be attended to. Bharani songs are licentious, extremely lewd, and full of sexually loaded terms shocking ethical consciousness. But, these songs reflect humans' need to shout out their suppressed sexuality, humiliations, and pangs. Vulgarized language (curses and abuses) and gestures, self-infliction, and violence are common features of rites and rituals of lower castes groups. This 'hate speech' is a mode through which they give vent to their suppressed anger against the establishment. Seemingly, it is the decided nature of the frames that vulgarize events. It is evident that a detailed description of the Goddess' body is present in *devistrotras* which happen to be acceptable and appropriate. It is the Sanskritization of the language that very cleverly hides the erotic content in these texts and thus they become acceptable to the society. Within the secure framework of high or classic art, these texts are intact and are beyond the reach of any critical analysis. But the *theri* songs sung by the lower castes in their rustic language do not have any such defense and they are open to attack. As seen, a 'binary terrorism' or strategic implosion of binaried distinctions can transgress the space between sacrality and obscenity and appropriate and inappropriate.

Being a native of Kodungallur has given me an extra edge of becoming one among the groups and not being an 'other.' At the same time, a critical distance has always been maintained to not to get lost in its emotional intensity. Linguists are now more into the study of cursing behavior and profanity and a comprehensive study of ribald songs of Bharani footed on these insights can be attempted in the future. Also, the life of oracles and their similarities to the shamans, their psychological and physiological experiences can be a material for potential study. Spatiality is a vast area of study and in my dissertation, I have applied the elemental concepts of space to the Bharani festival.

These arguments can be further extended by bringing in more spatial theories, especially those in relation to architecture and mapping of the space. Such festivals of ‘abuse,’ though rare can be found in many societies across the world. Several of such festivals lie deep, buried in the history. Some might have died out owing to many social pressures and unearthing them would be a rewarding task. Recently, the transgender groups are increasingly making use of the neutralized space of Bharani that is reflected in their growing presence. A more detailed study of their spatial relations can evidently contribute more to the understanding of Bharani.

Kerala is rich in rituals and the rituals of the lower castes had been, as in any other part of the world, is in marked contrast with the rituals of the elite class. While grace, luxury, and subtlety form the key features of elite rituals, the lower class rituals are often ‘primitive’ and pagan, rich in color and throbbing with life. An unmistakable streak of violence runs in through their rituals. Even their gods, we notice, are fiery, loud, and wrathful. Masked by racy tones, rhythm, and beat in their ritual songs they registered their traumas and agonies of oppression. Kodungallur Bharani is no exception and is an interesting site where histories and narratives, cultures and subcultures intersect, interact and complement. Meaning is drawn from a rich storehouse of myths and folklores and the constant interaction of polyphonic voices within these festivals serve to democratize these performances. Here, Bharani is elevated from being merely a festival to the life-force of a generation.

The notion of sacred and profane influences the whole of human activity. Taboo subjects abound in human life; some societies steadfastly adhere to it. Ostensibly, a man’s body and bodily functions are different from a woman’s body. It has been realized

that almost everything connected to female experience is considered taboo; her sexuality, pregnancy, menstruation, etc. This taboo-ness apparently is an invention of the society rather than a naturalistic phenomenon. In the Bharani festival, this notion of pollution is everywhere, in fact, *theendal* is the very purpose of the festival. But it is understood that the pilgrims do not see them as pollutants, for them, the touch is a vitalizing phenomenon, a means of communion with their Goddess. Paralleling the rejuvenation of Goddess after the polluting touch of the pilgrims, the king and the power structures too emerge sanctified. The view of the Goddess as oversexed and her body as dangerous can be identified in the Sanskrit *slokas* depicting her. Possibly, this idea is implanted into the psyches of the subaltern, and by placing the peripheral groups as extremes for placating her lasciviousness; the upper caste groups had tacitly devised both the problem and the solution. In contrast to the popular notion circulated by media that Bharani is defiance staged by the subaltern, Bharani does not get elevated to the level of a rebellion as it occurs in a controlled environment; therein lays the reason of Bharani not serving much to alter the peripheral positions of the performers despite having a longstanding history and tradition.

