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Contents

An Ecocritical Engagement with Forest of Tigers 2
K. Jayanthi

The Struggles Endured in the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary 11
Dr P. R. Subramaniam

Casteless Music? Pa. Ranjith, *Gaana* and Fusion Bands in Tamil Cinema 26
Dr Dickens Leonard

How Not to Get Shot: Voicing Resistance Through Laughter 40
V. Ramakrishnan

Is Stoppard the Last Man Standing up for God?: Religious and Spiritual Undercurrents in the Plays of Tom Stoppard 50
V. Iswarya

Interpreting Interruptions: Image of the Migrant in Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* 58
Dr. Saravanan Mani

Employment of Epic Similes: Homer, Milton and the Sangam Poets 74
Prof. P. Marudanayagam

An Ecocritical Engagement with Forest of Tigers

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Overview

The death of Collarwali, "the super mom" (BBC, 2022) tiger of Pench Tiger Reserve in central India, in early January drew wide media attention. The tiger's claim to fame was that it had 29 cubs in eight litters; it was the first tiger to be fitted with a tracking collar; and it had starred in BBC's wildlife documentary titled *Spy in the Jungle*. People interviewed by the BBC at the reserve ascribed human attributes such as "friendly", "charismatic" and "intelligent" to the animal. Before Collarwalli, the public adulation of Machli, the "queen" of Ranthambore Tiger Reserve, was phenomenal, with posters of the tigress and its cubs adorning railway stations after its "quiet" death (*National Geographic*, 2017). In October 2021, a retinue of forest staff, wildlife veterinarians armed with dart guns and tribal trackers captured alive T-23, a "problematic" tiger that had killed four people and 20 livestock, after a 21-day hunt in the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu. (*Frontline*, 2021)

The swamp tigers of the Sundarbans in southern West Bengal have gripped the public imagination for long as "man-eaters". This attribute finds resonance in the literary imagination. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Nilima tells Kanai that she has been "keeping unofficial records for years, based on word-of-mouth reports. My belief is that over a hundred people are killed by tigers here each year" (240). She explains that while tigers in other habitats "attacked human beings only in abnormal circumstances: if they happened to be crippled or were otherwise unable to hunt down any other kind of prey... this was not true of the tide country's tigers: even young and healthy animals were known to attack humans" (241). She cites an agreed-upon theory that their propensity for aggression "came from the

peculiar conditions of the tidal ecology" (241) and lists the measures adopted to condition the tigers with "clay models of human beings rigged up with wires and connected to car batteries" or confuse them by making people wear "masks on the back of their heads." (242)

From a conservation perspective, the tiger is a highly adaptive animal, occurring across different biogeographical regions and ecosystems. The Sundarbans tiger has evolved to survive in hostile terrain and adapt to a fluid territory as its scent markings are washed away by the rising tides. Human-animal interactions are a major conservation concern in India's Project Tiger reserves and a challenge in inhospitable terrains such as the Sundarbans.

Sense of Place and Sense of Belonging

Annu Jalais *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics & Environment in the Sundarbans* (2010) weaves together the stories of the human and non-human inhabitants of the "active" (23) southern islands of the deltaic region and gathers them into the integrated oikos. The scholar Nirmal Selvamoney's "TiNai theory posits a shared oikos of the inner landscape and outer geophysical space, yoking the environment, the human, the non-human, and the sacred in a seamless continuity" (Rangarajan 74). Jalais delineates the "vast web of connectedness" (24) of the island topography, and the bond the people share with the place and, more importantly, with the forest and the tiger. "If the early South Indians called interconnectedness tiNai, the primal Greeks knew it as oikos. Both speak of a primordial household with human, natural and supernatural (ancestral) members." (Selvamony 12)

Jalais posits that "if in the literature on the region a rather crude opposition is built between tigers and humans it is because the two have never been studied together" (8). "Bioregional inhabitation and ecological restoration have important cultural dimensions that support bioregional values" (Rangarajan, 71). As such Jalais' book focuses on the "people-tiger relation as a tool to understand both social relations in the WB Sundarbans, and to focus on how tigers have been appropriated into urban literature as one of the most prominent

trademarks of global conservation, as well as the absence of humans in the literature on the Sundarbans." (8)

Jalais points out that the islanders view the "media's glamorous portrayal" (9) of the Sundarbans as "potentially jeopardising their very existence in the region" (9). "Empowered local community networks are instrumental in bringing about reinhabitory and sustainable living practices, which have implications for the health of the bioregion." (Rangarajan 69)

In order to understand the place of the people in the bioregion, especially those engaged in "rural occupations such as river or sea fishing, or working as a cultivator or in the forest" (28), Jalais needed to visit the forest first. In an article titled "Unmasking the Cosmopolitan Tiger", Annu Jalais writes, "The tiger has now become the urban middle classes' rallying point—everybody wants to save it or, at least, be seen as espousing the cause of nature and wildlife. Protecting this cosmopolitan tiger is thus a badge of one's own cosmopolitanism, because it is seen as moving beyond the parochialism of one's location, which necessarily rests within the confines of urbanity and one's nation-state . . . This is where the Sundarbans people come in and ask me to look at a more local tiger, their tiger." (33)

The islanders have different ways of positioning themselves *vis-a-vis* the tiger and the environment. Forest fishers believe that they share a "history of displacement and a dangerous environment" with the tiger and this "makes them very protective towards 'their old tigers" (203). They respect the ethos of the forest and desist from depleting or destroying the resources. Prawn seed collectors "see the state's investment in tourism and wildlife sanctuaries as instituting an unequal distribution of resources" (199) and feel that in the environmental discourse the tiger occupies an elevated status, becoming "cosmopolitan" (199) with attention gained from the "bhadralok" (gentle folks) and tourists.

Jalais lists three main occupational groups in the southern islands: landowners, forest fishers and prawn seed collectors. River-side islanders, whose main vocation is prawn seed collection, are blamed for environmental degradation. The activities of honey collectors and woodcutters, which involves "high risk" and "high gain", are seen as going against the principle of peace and equity. Jalais writes,

> During the two-week honey collection period, the forest is closed to all other occupations. The state controls the entire process. The forest officials divide the jungle into plots and decide where each group goes; on certain days 'flying launches' come to collect honey. The amount of honey or wood to be collected and the price at which these items are to be sold are all set by the government. For the forest fishers, such protection compromises the whole ethos of the forest. (163)

E.O. Wilson wrote in *Biophilia* (1984): "Field research consists of hard physical work broken by moments of happy surprise" (104). In her extensive fieldwork Jalais has covered pertinent issues such as peoples' resistance to state policies on conservation, islanders perception of tigers, "the disparity between the amount of public money spent on forested islands versus that spent on the inhabited islands", and, in an increasingly dividing world, was Bonbibi's story still narrated?

In any narrative concerning a bioregion such as the Sundarbans, the tiger's dominant presence will not only illuminate the subjects of enumeration but also illustrate its place in the region's cultural ethos and environmental history. The Bengal tiger, the original inhabitant of the mangrove forests of the tidal country, has its space defined in the Bengali verse narratives, *Raya Mangal*, composed in the seventeenth century and *Bon Bibi Johurnama,* a still popular text written in the nineteenth century.

Jalais highlights several socio-economic and socio-political issues in her work. These include the livelihood struggles of the ecosystem of the people, the absence of basic infrastructure, exploitation of the people's aspirations for social status, unjust distribution of resources and disputes over land ownership.

Inspired by Descola's symbolic approach and Latour's political angle on the non-human, Jalais seeks to show how "economy, religion and politics bring about conceptual and ethical changes in the Sundarbans islanders' multiple understandings of tigers and how this impacts the lived and understood 'relatedness'. Deeply entrenched in the way people understand their relatedness to animals is the way they situate themselves in their environment." (8)

Environmental Determinists

Explaining the genre of landscape non-fiction, David Quammen said in the 2008 interview that "the underlying theme of much of what I do is: the ying and yang of landscapes and human history. That is, I'm interested in the ways landscape shapes human history and the ways human history shapes landscape." (terrain.org)

Jalais' island people feel the environment has completely shaped their emotions. She observes that "the inhabitants of the Sundarbans could be called environmental determinists, strong is their belief that the environment affects them." (8)

> The relative barrenness of the land . . . the constant threat of losing land and homestead, the violent cyclonic storms, and the lack of potable water, they explain, transform them into short-tempered, irritable and aggressive people. What is interesting, however, is that not only is the environment seen as having the potential of acting on their 'mood' and 'character', but also as having an impact on tigers. Moreover, they see themselves as similarly endowed with the capacity to affect the environment and tigers' natures. (8)

This complementarity between human emotions and the tigers results in humans assuming ‘relatedness’ to the non-human and a transfer of attributes: tigers showing “emotions, feelings and thoughts” (10) and humans assuming the bad temper of the tiger. The inhabitants of the islands share “a unique geography, a shared history, and a set of common laws—and, crucially, ‘interactive experiences’,” made possible because those working in the forest “felt they shared with tigers a certain fearlessness but also because they saw tigers as invested with ‘human’ dispositions and emotions”. (204)

Cheryll Glotfelty observes in the Introduction to *Ecocriticism Reader* that “ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the non-human.” (xix)

As a green theorist, Kenneth Burke foregrounded the question of environmental praxis, “of how human beings act in relation to the natural world” (Coupe, 2001). Buell posited that

> the acts of environmental imagination potentially register and energise at least four kinds of engagements with the world. They may connect the readers vicariously with others’ experience, suffering, pain: that of non-humans as well as humans. They may reconnect readers with places they have been and send them where they would otherwise never physically go. They may direct thought toward alternative futures. And they may affect one’s caring for the physical world: make it feel more or less precious or endangered or disposable. (Buell, 2)

Jalais has enriched her study with anecdotes, stories of subsistence, the forest fishers' "pure-hearted" (89) belief in the healing power of the forest, and has introduced an element of magic realism with her description of the tiger charmers' ways in the forest.

Calling for a revalue of nature-oriented text, Glen A. Love posits that "literary studies have been indifferent to environmental crisis in part because our discipline's limited humanistic vision has led to a narrowly anthropocentric view of what is consequential in life." (Glotfelty & Fromm, xxx)

Forest of Tigers is not a forest for tigers. With the discourse on tiger conservation as the backdrop, Jalais engages with environmental issues such as sinking islands, sustenance and sustainability. Buell has observed that "acts of writing and reading will involve simultaneous processes of environmental awakening—retrievals of physical environment from dormancy to salience" (18). The environmental issues foregrounded in Jalais' text and the understanding of the stakeholders' position makes the study a value addition to the environmental discourse.

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The Struggles Endured in the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary

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Almost all the long-term dictionary projects face the problem of finishing the work in time and within the allotted budget. It is a race: a race against time and quality. The quality of the dictionary suffers if it is put under the pressure of time. If the time is extended to do the work, then there is another problem—the problem of funding the project. All these boil down to a race between time, quality, and money. Of course, it is true for all projects that need time and funding to do a work of excellence.

We have been watching the drama everywhere: The Sanskrit dictionary at Deccan College, Pune, inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru is still going on! When I was a Ph.D. scholar under Prof. V. I. Subramoniam in 1964, I watched Surnad Kujan Pillai, the then editor of Malayalam lexicon, in animated discussion with Prof. V. I. S. in the evenings. I know that Volume 9 (pu-pra) of it was published in 2015. So, I guess the dictionary is yet to be completed. When Prof. V. I. S. was the Vice-Chancellor of Tamil University at Thanjavur, he started the Great Tamil Lexicon project in 1983. I was one of its sub-editors, but I left after a three-year stint. The project is still languishing there. Then, the Madras University set up a team to revise the Tamil Lexicon, headed by Prof. Jayadevan in 2003. They have brought out two volumes that cover the words of the first vowel அ.

Against this discouraging and disheartening scene, the History of the Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, which is like a story with twists and turns, is a source of inspiration to lexicographers. In this paper, I try to narrate the agony and the ecstasy of the editorial staff and how they achieved the ultimate triumph.

I

Recently, a friend of mine sent me a book from London. The title of the book is *The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary*. I started reading this 200-and-odd-page book and got fascinated by the inside story of the dictionary. Then, another friend of mine in the English Department of the Madras University brought to my notice two more books on this subject. I also ordered one more book through Amazon.com. Also, some documents pertaining to the Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles (hereafter OED-H) are available on the web. The things I am going to share with you are all taken from these highly-readable and well-documented books.

Now, let me shift the scene to London:

Period of time: 19th century

Place: First, London; then, Oxford

The task: To prepare a New English Dictionary on Historical Principles

Proposed by: London Philological Society and the Oxford University Press

Task assigned to: James A.H. Murray

Task commenced on: March 1879.

The Plan: To be completed within 10 years

Number of pages: approximately 7000

Expected expenditure: £ 9000[1]

This was the plan outlined by the London Philological Society and the Oxford University Press. But the plan went awry. It took 54 years to complete!

When the dictionary was completed, the number of pages ran to 16,000. The expenditure exceeded £ 3 lakhs. The dictionary was first published in 125 fascicles, and later

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[1] Winchester (2003), p.93

in 10 volumes in 1928. The editor, James Murray, was not there to see its completion. He died in 1915. Why did everything go wrong? What was wrong in their planning? Did they underestimate the nature of the work? Before I go into the details, I have to say something about their key concept: a dictionary on historical principles.

Historical Principles

Philology reigned supreme in the 19th century in Europe. Philology, the forerunner of modern linguistics, as we all know, is more concerned with the origin of languages, the study of classical or written texts, the etymology of words, and the original meaning of words.

The principles of philology, when applied in making a dictionary, mean studying the proper etymology of native and loan words, the appearance of the first meaning of a word and its subsequent meanings in the order of their first appearances in a language.

In order to understand a dictionary based on historical principles, I shall take the Tamil verb, pOdu (the prominent meaning is 'to place, to put') for illustration. The verb pOdu is a high-frequency word in the contemporary language. As a main verb and as an auxiliary verb, it is found in almost all the day-to-day contexts. A few examples:

1. காலையில் காப்பி போடுகிறோம், பூரி போடுகிறோம்.
   In the morning we make coffee and puri
2. ஸ்டவில் தோசைக்கல் போடுகிறோம்
   We put the dosa-pan on the stove
3. சட்டையும் பேண்ட்டும் போட்டுவிட்டுக் கிளம்புகிறோம்
   We set out after putting on our shirt and pants
4. விராட் கோலி சென்சுரி போட்டார்
   Virat Kohli scored a century
5. நாற்காலியில் கால்மேல் கால் போட்டு உட்கார்கிறோம்
   We sit on a chair with one leg over the other
6. ஓணம் பண்டிகையில் விதம் விதமாக கோலம் போடுகிறார்கள்
   They draw varieties of kolams during the Onam festival

7. தூங்கும்போது சிலர் பலமாக குறட்டை போடுகிறார்கள்
   Some people snore loudly while sleeping

The above examples show the different meanings of pOdu (போடு) in association with nouns of Tamil and English.

When I started tracking the verb pOdu in the long history of Tamil, I found, to my surprise, that this verb was absent until the 10th century. It first appears in *Tirumantiram* of Tirumūlar[2], a work of uncertain date. The verb appears in Kamban's *Ramayana*[3], which can be dated either 9th or 10th century. Thereafter, the verb begins to make its presence a little more frequently in the works of Siddhars, who adopted spoken idioms in their poems.

Cre-A's Contemporary Tamil-English Dictionary has given more than 50 senses to pOdu besides its use as an auxiliary verb, like 'sattham pOdu' (சத்தம் போடு - 'to shout'). Now, imagine how much work the lexicographers have to put in to determine the first occurrence of each meaning of this word in the vast field of Tamil since the 10th century, and to sort the meanings chronologically.

This is what the editors of OED-H took upon themselves: to trace the spelling variants, the pronunciation variations, the etymology, the different senses, the earliest quotation for each sense, and the continuity or discontinuity of each. If a sense is discontinued, its last possible appearance had to be traced. Further, the definition to each sense should be written in view of its synonyms, so that the difference between them could be brought into the definition. It's no wonder it took them 54 years to complete the OED-H.

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[2] It appears in the form of conditional verbal participle (pOdin) in the sense of 'put something down'.

[3] Kamban used the verbal participle form (pOttu) in the sense of 'having dropped'. It appears that the very first sense of this verb is 'put down' or 'drop'. Kamban also used it figuratively, to mean 'losing one's valour'.

The Beginning

The London Philological Society was established in 1842. There were three prominent members: Herbert Coleridge (who was the grandson of the English poet S.T. Coleridge), Frederik Furnival, and Richard C. Trench (who later became the Archbishop of Dublin). The three, together, formed a committee with a strange but purpose-oriented name "Unregistered Words Committee." In 1857, a circular was issued to organize the collection of materials to supplement the best existing dictionaries. They found even the best dictionary compiled by Samuel Johnson in 1755 inadequate on many counts[4]. Many words from the early Middle English period (1150 AD) that were still in use were not registered in the dictionary. Hence, they set out to find the left out words: they made an appeal to the readers of English to contribute words that were not found in dictionaries.

Soon the members of the "Unregistered Words Committee" found that not only were old words left out, but also that the quotations given as references for meaning were not the first appearance of words. The etymology was unsatisfactory as well. They came to the conclusion that it was of no use to revise any of the best dictionaries or to add new materials to them. Instead, compiling a new dictionary would be the ideal answer to their quest.

In November 1857, Trench, one of the three members of the committee, presented a paper at the London Library, highlighting the deficiencies of the existing dictionaries and outlining what the new dictionary should look like[5]. The London Philological Society came forward to sponsor the new dictionary both academically and financially. The Society entrusted the editorial responsibility to the young, Oxford-educated Herbert Coleridge, the member of the Words Committee.

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[4] Johnson's definition of the animal 'Elephant' is elaborate and encyclopedic in nature, using up 150 words. For 'horse', on the other hand, he is very economical, using only 10 words.

[5] Transactions of the Philological Society are now accessible on the Internet. See the 1858 Transaction.

Coleridge did not enjoy good health. In November 1860, he came to a meeting fully drenched from the rain and sat in the unheated hall for a few hours. It was too much for his fragile health. He died in April 1861. He was only 31 years old. After Coleridge, the responsibility of making the dictionary was entrusted to Furnival, the other member of the Words Committee. He was not as serious as he was expected to be. He devoted more time to 'sculling', a hobby of rowing a small one-seater boat. The people who volunteered to read books and those sent by him to collect words for the dictionary lost their interest when Furnival did not respond regularly. In Furnival's office, the packets of quotation slips sent by the volunteers remained unopened; some of the volunteers took the books along with them when they went for holidays but forgot to bring them back. Some volunteers kept the quotation slips in rooms where old and unused things were dumped.

This is when the London Philological Society was on the lookout for a dynamic, dedicated, scholar to steer the sinking project. Furnival also realized that he was not the right person for the project, and that he had many high-placed contacts who were fit to lead the project. Both the Society and Furnival therefore chose James Murray for the role.

James A.H. Murray (1837–1915)

A native of Scotland with no formal university education, James Murray acquired considerable knowledge in English Philology, wrote a monograph on "The Dialect of the Southern Countries of Scotland," and landed in London. He became a member of the Philological Society and eventually rose to become its president.

The London Philological Society thought it would be a good move to associate with Oxford University. The council of the Society asked Murray to prepare some specimen pages of the dictionary then titled *The New English Dictionary*. Murray diligently prepared the specimen pages and sent them to the University. The University, in turn, appointed a delegate to study the specimen and negotiate with the Philological Society. Max Müller, the famous

German philologist and reputed Sanskrit scholar, reviewed the specimen pages and had a few points of disagreement with Murray on certain etymologies. Murray stood firm on his ground of etymologies of English words. Notwithstanding their differences, Max Müller realized the value of the project and became its supporter. The Oxford University entered into an agreement with The Philological Society and agreed to support it financially. After a prolonged discussion on all aspects of the project, including salary to the editor and other staff members[6], Murray formally took up the editorship in March 1878. The project proceeded slowly after the Society made an agreement with OUP, and James Murray began to work on the *New English Dictionary* (as *The Oxford English Dictionary* was then known).

Murray was a school teacher at Mill Hill, London, when he took up the editorship. He found time for dictionary work in spite of his teaching duties at the school, and diligently spent his week-ends and holidays on the dictionary. He started to set things right, making regular correspondence with the volunteers and promptly answering their queries. He made appeals to more volunteers all over the English-speaking countries. As a result, quotation slips kept coming almost every day.

With the permission of the school authorities, Murray set up a "shed" to work with his assistants, and to keep the quotation slips safe and readily usable. His brother-in-law helped him build wall-high wooden racks that had pigeon-holes to sort slips and arrange them in alphabetical order. While the public called it a "shed", Murray named it the "scriptorium"[7]. In 1888, there were 1300 readership volunteers all over the world, from America, New Zealand, Japan and Canada, besides some countries in Europe. Some of them had read very rare and old classics and collected words according to the queries made by Murray and his assistants.

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[6] For details see, Willinsky (1994), p.38.

[7] "… the name monks gave to the room in which they prepared illuminated manuscripts," as explained by Winchester (2003), p.104.

Murray and his team had to keep track of new words, and new meanings of existing words, while they were also trying to examine the previous seven centuries of the language's vocabulary.

Significant contributions were made to the dictionary by several volunteers: a man named Thomas Austin collected 1,65,000 quotations; another by the name of Dr. Helwich, Vienna, Austria, was able to send 60,000 quotations; Murray's eldest son collected 27,000 quotations, mostly from history books. Murray had 11 children. His wife Ada, in addition to looking after the children, found time to read and collect 2000 quotations. If the teenage son or daughter asked for pocket-money, he or she was asked to sort the slips in alphabetical order. They were paid for their service.

In a dictionary of such grand scale, collecting words from texts of all kinds that appeared from the 12th to the 19th century of the English language is the most challenging task to accomplish. Murray's appeal was met with very good response. The English-reading public came forward and enlisted themselves as reader-volunteers. They came from all walks of life. Some of them contributed to this word-bank or word-corpus for more than 20 years; some continued doing so until their death. The relationship Murray and his assistants had with the volunteers was cordial. There was one particular case that was exemplary in this regard. It is a very strange story, in a sense, so hard to believe.

Minor, William Chester

In 1999 (revised in 2005), a book was published, titled *The Professor and the Madman*. The Professor was James Murray; and who was that madman? What business did a madman have with dictionary-making? Here lies a very strange story that needs to be told.

William Chester Minor, an American whose forefathers migrated from England and made their riches there, was one of the volunteers in the project. Minor was born in Ceylon, where his parents had opted to do Christian missionary work. He lost his mother when he was

three. He spent his adolescent life in Sri Lanka in the company of young girls. He returned to America, enrolled into Yale University, studied medicine, and became a qualified surgeon. At the time of the American civil war, he joined the Union Army as a doctor and was sent to the front where fierce fighting raged between the Unionists and Secessionists. He happened to witness the savages of war, and the pathetic living conditions of soldiers. In his time, if the soldiers who deserted the army were caught, they had to undergo severe punishments such as being branded with a red-hot iron.

On one occasion, Minor was asked to punish one such soldier with a branding iron. Incidents like this, and the terrible living conditions in the battle-field upset him mentally. He was soon sent back to the army headquarters in New York. He started behaving strangely and after a few years, he was released from the army with a pension. He had painting and reading as hobbies. He travelled to Europe and landed in London. In November 1871, he arrived in London with a suitcase in which he kept his books, brushes, canvas, easel, and notably, a pistol.

Three months later, William Minor shot a worker early in the morning, imagining that he was a spy in pursuit of him. The worker died and Minor confessed to his crime. He was arrested and a case of murder was filed. Considering his American nationality and unsound mind, the court ordered that he should be lodged in a mental asylum for the rest of his life. He was brought to the Broadmoor Lunatic Asylum in Crowthorne, Berkshire, near London.

He was given two rooms, one of which he used for his study and painting. He brought books from London often, and it appears that he came across James Murray's appeal in one of the books he bought. He wrote to Murray, expressing his desire to become a reader-volunteer. His handwriting was neat and legible. He read books from his own collection and listed rare words and words whose meanings were not so common. He devised a way to sort words by alphabetical order. Murray and his assistants found his quotation slips very useful.

He simply signed them as Dr. Minor Broadmoor. The dictionary team had no idea that he was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

In the meantime, the Oxford University Press requested James Murray to leave London, give up his job in the Mill Hill School and settle in Oxford to carry out the work more intensively. Murray moved to Oxford with his team and the scriptorium. There was a celebration, with the blessings of Queen Victoria, when the first fascicle of the *New English Dictionary* was published. Invitations were sent to everyone, including Dr. William C. Minor, whose reading of rare books and supply of quotations to their needs were all very much appreciated by the dictionary team.

Since Dr. Minor did not turn up at the party, a curious Murray decided to call on him. In November 1897, Murray travelled to Broadmoor from Oxford. From the station, he got into a horse-drawn coach sent by Minor. It halted in front of a big building and he was led inside. He saw a man sitting behind a table, whom Murray assumed was Dr. Minor.

He said, "And you Sir, must be Dr. William Minor. At long last I am mostly honoured to meet you, sir."

The man replied, "I am the superintendent of Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum. Dr. Minor is one of our longest-staying inmates. He committed a murder. He is quite insane."[8]

Murray was taken aback to hear that one of his most helpful reader-volunteers was not a normal man. Saddened by this information, he went inside and met Dr. Minor. For over 20 years after that, they remained cordial friends.

Dr. Minor's mental health deteriorated steadily. One day, in one of his dark moods of suspicion, he cut off his penis and ran to the out-gate shouting for help[9]. Though he survived,

[8] As narrated by Winchester (1999), p.171.
[9] As narrated by Winchester (1999), p.171.

he lost his interest after that. Back in America, his family initiated a move to bring him home. Murray, for his part, made efforts through his contacts at the ministerial level. In April 1910, Dr. Minor was moved out of the asylum and traveled to London, and from there to New York. Murray and his wife Ada went to bid him farewell. Dr. Minor died at the age of 85.

Finding Ways to Speed Up the Work

According to the agreement made with the Oxford University Press, the dictionary team was required to complete 700 pages a year. Murray and his team never ever reached the target. The work went on at a snail's pace. Sometimes it took several days to finish a word. The prefix 'anti-' ran up to 42 columns in print. That should tell us how long it would have taken for the assistants to establish the meanings, find citations for each (in chronological order) and verify the references, and then for Murray to go through the entire entry and vouch for its accuracy. When the Press sent the first proof back, Murray had to proofread it once again.

By 1886, after a decade since the project had started, they had not even completed the words starting with the letter B. The funding agency, Oxford University Press, took serious note of the slow progress. The Delegates of Oxford University, a watching body of the dictionary project, appointed P. L. Gell as the new secretary. He immediately took steps to speed up the work. He brought Henry Bradely, who reviewed the first fascicle in a balanced way, into the team first as a senior assistant to Murray, and later as the senior editor of independent charge with some assistants. Some letters were allotted to him. Gell created two teams to work together to complete the project.

Although differences and disagreements cropped up now and then, the dual editorship brought a sense of urgency and some speed to the dictionary work, though not on the expected level.

James Murray, the first editor, died in July 1915. It was a year after the First World War had begun. The British government had the power to summon anyone to serve in the army. After James Murray, Prof. Craige became an editor. One of his assistants, George Watson, got a call to serve in the army and along with a few others. This depleted the strength of the dictionary team. Even at the war front, some showed their devotion and dedication to the dictionary work.

George Watson, the assistant of Prof. Craige, was sent to the war zone in France. During the night, Watson hid himself in a dugout captured from the German army, holding a pencil in one hand and the dictionary proofs in another, making corrections. He had a lamp that he had to put out frequently, for it might attract the attention of war planes[10]. Thanks to such exemplary devotion, the dictionary steadily marched towards its goal.

The Publication of OED-H

- Oxford University Press published the dictionary first in fascicles. There were 125 fascicles in all during its completion in 1928. They were bound into ten volumes.
- In 1933, it was issued in 12 large volumes with a single-volume supplement. The work was given its current title, the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- From 1972 to 1986, there were four more supplements. The scope of the Dictionary was broadened to include words from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean.
- All the supplements were integrated into the main dictionary, which proved to be a huge task. The pages of the old edition and the supplements were typed again by 120 keyboarders, and more than 50 proof-readers checked the work.

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[10] Gilliver (2016), p.335-36.

- OUP wanted to bring this dictionary into the modern age by transferring the source materials from print to the electronic medium. The entire dictionary, with the financial aid from IBM Computers, was computerized and made available in a CD-ROM in 1989[11]. Suddenly, a massive twenty-volume work was contained into a slim, shiny disk!

After the demise of James Murray (1915) and Henry Bradley (1923), W.A. Craige and C.T. Onion served as editors for the first edition.

For the four supplements, Robert Burchfield was the editor. John Simpson and Edmund Weiner were responsible for the computerized version, in which the strange phonetic transcription of words was replaced with IPA symbols. In 2002, the entire dictionary was made available online. The entire work was updated. This was the first time the contents written by Murray and other early editors were revised and edited. The editor, Simpson, gave Thomas Murray, the five-year-old, great-great-great-grandson of James Murray, the honour of being the first user of OED online.

After the completion of the project, there was a celebration in June 1928. 150 guests were invited. Mr. Baldwin, the Prime Minister, paid a handsome tribute. He said at the end of his long speech:

> Lord Oxford once said that if he were cast in a desert island, and could only choose one author for company, he would have the forty volumes of Balzac. I choose the Dictionary every time… our histories, our novels, our poems, our plays – they are all in this one book. I could live with your Dictionary, Dr. Craige… It is a work of endless fascination.[12]

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[11] *A User's Guide to the Oxford English Dictionary* prepared by Donna Lee Berg (1991), p.3.
[12] As given in Winchester (2003), Prologue XXIV-XXV

The praise the Prime Minister showered would surely have had a soothing effect on the fatigued minds of the lexicographers.

What Can We Learn?

This is what I have learnt through my reading the history of OED-H:

1. Detailed and meticulous planning is necessary before plunging into a massive lexicographic project.
2. There is no need to stress that language-sensitive people are real assets to a huge lexicographic project. Though a talent search can be made through standard procedures, the editor should be on the alert if he/she stumbles upon talented people even at odd places, just as James Murray discovered Dr. Minor at the Broadmoor asylum.
3. In the Indian context, a long-term dictionary project would certainly run into difficulties in terms of acquiring funds and assembling a team of talents.
4. In my opinion, a dictionary on historical principles has to be broken down into many achievable smaller projects, perhaps short period-wise projects.
5. Then, both the lexicographers and the funding agency may have the satisfaction of seeing solid publications at regular intervals. The public perception that a dictionary is a money-draining bottomless pit or an expensive white elephant to feed would change. A dictionary of excellence, when completed, is the pride of a nation.

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Casteless Music? Pa. Ranjith, *Gaana* and Fusion Bands in Tamil Cinema

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Dalit-themed films in the history of Indian cinema in general, and Tamil cinema in particular are far from normal. Even amidst a majority of commercial films which are generally casteist, misogynistic, patriarchal, and feudal, there is an iconic evolution and treatment of caste after the emergence of the maverick film maker Pa. Ranjith.[1] His films *Attakathi*, *Madras*, *Kabali*, and *Kaala* were produced in a time when these 'contested narratives' are part of a historical 'new wave' in the 21st century, that is arguably described as a hybrid genre (Velayutham and Devadas, 2020: 9-13).

I

The Tamil screen ecology had gone through a drastic transformation that is enabled not only by digital technology but also by platform multiplicity, including the rise of social media. In a sense, one can argue that technology is used in mainstream film-making for changing the structural paradigms, particularly of caste, in the historical transition from celluloid to the digital technologies. While a new future is enabled by digital technologies, it is however true that, at once, caste conflict and politicization of caste, as well as gender violence and inequalities haunt the Tamil life world even today.

It is in this context that Ranjith's contributions have been thought of as not just 'delegitimizing a territorial stigma,' but also 'transforming' Tamil cinema as a cultural

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[1] Pa. Ranjith is a director and producer of films, largely in Tamil language. He debuted with the film *Attakkathi* in 2012. However, the success of his second film *Madras* (2014) sealed his place in Tamil cinema. Hailing from Dalit background, Ranjith is vociferous about caste discrimination and violence within and outside cinema. Ranjith owns a production house named 'Neelam Productions' which makes anti-caste films. He also started a music band called 'The Casteless Collective' which features *Gaana* (a Tamil folk variety of music mainly performed by Dalits), hip hop, and other forms of world music. Moreover, Ranjith established a publishing house called Neelam Publications.

practice, while at once inspiring a new generation of Dalit filmmakers who then bring 'Dalit subjectivities to screen' (Gorringe and Damodaran, 2020: 28). While his latter films–the Rajini Kanth starrers–are also read as addressing the tensions in articulating and refashioning a 'global' Dalit from a Tamil 'location,' outside Tamil Nadu, that moves from "recognition to redistribution" on screen (Manoharan, 2020: 62); however, not much have been foregrounded on how sensibilities can be re-scripted, if not inscribed, in the cinematic landscape of India, generally, and particularly in Tamil Nadu in popular culture that particularly represent, discuss and critique caste.[2]

I propose, here, to understand and study the Tamil term *Magizhchi* that signifies joy, happiness, glee, and excitement, made popular by the Tamil film director Pa. Ranjith in general, and through his films in particular, to understand and evaluate the sensorial signification of his experiments with performance and music (*Aadalum-Paadalum*) in the filmic medium. This paper attempts to foreground the music band that Ranjith initiated, 'The Casteless Collective'—inspired from the 20th century anti-caste Tamil intellectual Iyothee Thass—which features *Gaana* (Tamil music form mainly performed by Dalits in urban slums), hip-hop, and fusions of world music; and, by analyzing the song-performances in his films *Atta Kathi* (Card Board Knife, 2012), *Madras* (2014), *Kabali* (2016), and *Kaala* (2018), we suggest an anti-caste re-scripting of sensibilities—a 'becoming-other-than-itself.' (Nancy 1990).[3] Thus, I wish to demonstrate that Ranjith's interventions not only expose inscriptions of caste but also creatively stage acts of *exscription* against caste in films.

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[2] Though outside the purview of this paper, there is indeed hardly any work that has studied the social role of film music, and its industry, that have extensively contributed to Tamil social history and cultural politics. Such a study would inherently foreground the musical sensibilities that were sensitized by the contributions of eminent musicians such as M.S. Viswanathan, Ilayaraja, A.R. Rahman, and others, like the *Casteless Collective*.

[3] French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy introduces the term 'exscription' to refer to 'becoming-other-than-itself,' whereby writing and reading exposes oneself to the other– to 'exscription.' He states that 'writing, and reading, is to be exposed, to expose oneself … to "exscription." The exscribed is … that opening into itself, of writing to itself, to its own inscription as the infinite discharge of meaning' (Nancy 1990: 64). He differentiates it from inscription thus – 'the being of existence can be presented … when exscribed … where writing at every moment

II

In the year 2018, the *Economic and Political Weekly*—one of the significant Humanities and Social Sciences journals from India—published a series of conversations on a significant debate in its pages, particularly foregrounding the relationship between art and society through the case of Carnatic music. It discussed the viewpoints of four interesting interlocutors on 'caste and music' (Ganesh 2018a and b; Krishna 2018; Subramaniam 2018; and Vajpeyi 2018). The debate started off with T. M. Krishna, the popular Carnatic musician, writer and activist, who raised the issue of 'social composition of those involved in specific art forms,' such as the Carnatic music, and its influences on aesthetics and politics around giving that art form a classical status. He stated, in the name of an articulate critique of the field, that it is being practiced 'for and by' only Brahmins in *A Southern Music* (2014), his book-length work that challenges the existing notions of Carnatic Music in Southern India.

Ganesh, while engaging with Krishna's critique, not only concurs on the Brahmin dominance of the metropolitan Chennai-based Katcheri formats, but also underlines it as a collusion of hegemonic colonial public sphere that stood for a nationalist reform in the cultural domain. She precariously reads the phenomenon as collaboratively reproductive and concludes that 'a caste-based society's art forms' would be apparently 'caste-based.' This syntagmatically, if not crudely, justifies the 'mimesis' argument, where art only merely represents, if not mimics, reality (2018a: 91-3). And therefore, caste-based art-practice is seemingly justified by Ganesh, because it just represents the caste-based society. In a crisp response, Krishna argues, and goes on to contend that 'influential manifestations' of Carnatic

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discharges itself, unburdens itself' (64). Moreover, it 'distances signification and which itself would be communication … they communicate as complete what was only written in pieces and by chance' (65). It is an exscription of finitude, Nancy argues. This could be applied to any 'script' that is against caste and Brahminism, especially, with critical deconstruction and creative reconstructions of caste-less communities–as these scripts would then expose, discharge, and unburden itself to the other of caste.

music today is the concert format. Clearly there is 'very little diversity' in any aspect of Carnatic music, both 'musically and sociologically,' he declares. He concludes that it is necessary to interrogate how this influential manifestation has adapted itself over time to stand for a Brahminical paternalistic and devotional ethos, which 'serves a particular caste' for a '*narrow* idea of the Hindu' (2018: 121). However, Ganesh maintained that the 'classical' will continue to command a dedicated space, and this manifestation could be at once 'devotional and universal' in her curt response, which silently outsources the problem to the 'other' (2018b: 124).

However, historians Subramaniam and Vajpeyi significantly build on Ganesh's important engagement with the social role of music and its practitioners. Subramaniam, on the one hand, states that Krishna's interventions challenge the 'social compact' between performers and their publics, where the musician may accord a 'greater agency' in 'constituting the listening public.' However, she maintains that the domain itself has remained 'isolated' from contemporary social issues such as democratic participation and thus maintaining 'spatial exclusion.' Thus, the practitioners may keep stating that 'caste politics must not interfere with music,' where they just be a '*self*-fulfilling community of listeners.' Staging 'new aural experiments,' for her, would only ultimately create 'creative conversations' across genres, if not spaces (2018: 125-6).

Vajpeyi, on the other hand, foregrounds 'endosmosis,' a very interesting concept that the young Dr. B. R. Ambedkar uses to understand and propose what can be 'an ideal society' in his Graduate student paper at Columbia University titled 'Castes in India' (1916), to study not only music but also to intervene in this debate. She calls for 'a parity of arts, of knowledge systems, (and) of resources,' in a broad stroke, so as to make up for a truly 'egalitarian *vision*' of Indian society. Thus, she celebrates the idea of *vizha*, a festival, at the Olcott-Urur Kuppam *Kalai Vizha* (Olcott-Urur Kuppam Art Festival). She reads into the

cultural programme, which was largely organized by T. M. Krishna at a fisherman's colony in North Madras, that dynamically attempts to open the spatial exclusions of carnatic concerts by integrating differentiated music forms. This wishes to turn the aesthetic regime of caste, a social order, into a *vizha* that integrates by disregarding caste. Vajpeyi goes on to foreground this as drawing a line 'by connecting everything that *moves* us to a social movement for the annihilation of caste,' that Ambedkarite vision of a future society (2018: 125-7).

It is interesting to highlight, however, that without changing the spatial dynamics, or focusing on what is the 'outside' of these concerts, these interlocutors, on the one hand, gave an interesting reading of the experience of music and caste in India. On the other hand, their engaged discussion, which is indeed a self-fulfilling communication between themselves, 'by and for,' which does not recognize, if not engage with, the outside/r of these concerted custodians, and in a way transforms, if not 'reconstitute,' that Ambedkarite force, all 'other' spaces as concert-worthy and valuable. Besides, as it does not treat any *kind* of music as *moving* anyone equally, they narrowly limit their readings of these spaces as belonging to a singular yet differential order only; thus, the music of/by/for castes, extending their discourse, would be singular and different, though brought on to a stage altogether like a museumized spectacle one after other. They can only go back singular and different—diffidently against each other—as these 'concert' discussions.

III

It is in this context, that Pa. Ranjith changed the way Tamil cinema operated in India (Damodaran and Gorringe 2021; Manoharan 2021) so much so not only to change the screen space of Tamil films remarkably after his entry, but also to identify the interventions he has made with sensorial engagement, particularly of art. On 27th December 2017, Ranjith announced the formation of a 'fusion music band' called the 'Casteless Collective' (Rao 2017)—inspired from the anti-caste Tamil intellectual Iyothee Thaasar Pandithar, who in the

early 20th century had called the 'outcastes' to identify themselves as *Sathibethamatra Dravidar/Tamizhar/Bouddhar* (Casteless Dravidians/Tamils/Buddhists). The phrase, a self-identificatory signifier, was in response to the call of colonial census enumerations on religion and caste that the British government had started from the year 1872 onward, in Madras presidency (Leonard 2020). It is worthwhile to state that, amidst the discussions on 'caste and music,' and therefore the caste of music, during the same time in *EPW* pages, Ranjith remembers to call a pragmatic initiative of a 'collective fusion' in music outside the Carnatic corridors as 'caste-*less*,' invoking Iyothee Thassar.[4]

Interestingly insisting on 'independent music' and political fusion so as to create 'cultural effects,' Ranjith ideates this attempt as a 'fusion' of rap and rock (western genres of protest music) along with native *Gaana*. This had to particularly insinuate from musicians who hail from underprivileged backgrounds, largely Dalits, for him. This would then create a 'cultural effect' that has 'human feelings,' which would generate a sensorial scripting of casteless-ness (Rao 2017). This interesting phrase, 'the cultural effect of human feelings,' presumes the paradigm of affect amongst the community of spectators.

Apparently, when called to interview and write about the band members in *The Hindu* on 'Casteless Collective'—the twelve to fifteen members who were selected by Ranjith's *Neelam* cultural centre—T. M. Krishna, who had earlier started the debate on 'music and caste,' describes their music as 'no-holds-barred' (2019). This interview for many imminent reasons is an interesting engagement by someone who had created an intervention in the field of carnatic music and caste. Krishna interviews the members by asking a series of questions

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[4] Iyothee Thassar (1845-1914) organized his community in the name of *Sathi Betha Matra Dravida Mahajana Sabha* (Casteless Dravida Mahajana Sabha), and gave content to the idea of casteless-ness, Buddhism, and Tamil community prior to any contemporary debates on castelessness and merit. His was a concrete agenda that relied not only on self-identification as an emancipatory process, but also on the idea of anti-caste community as a cosmic imaginary, in the early twentieth century Tamil society. It was a Buddhist universal, whose material was local, limited, finite, ordinary and the everyday; yet the untouched.

to each one of them. Starting from the journey of the band, to the social-economic background of the artists, the role of discrimination in their lives, the life-story, the role of music in their life, and of course the caste question. The musician-writer, apart from conducting this interview, also conducts his own self as a recorder of these 'no-holds-barred' performers. The questions themselves demonstrate a 'no-holds-barred' caste unconscious that Krishna exhibits.

For a particular question on how the band members would 'reimagine' the term 'casteless' by their collective experiment with fusion music, especially, when their music is perceived to be located as anything but 'lower' than carnatic music; the band members *deviate discretely*, if not defiantly, and start talking about the distinct aspects of *Gaana* songs as a cumulative genre for everyone. *Gaana* (song in Hindi) is touted as a genre of liberation and freedom, where songs are sung in Tamil by the oppressed community. The instruments connected with it however, the band-members complain, are 'naturally scorned and treated badly' by the mainstream society. Though the *Gaana* musicians sing about the 'hardships of life,' never is this form of sensible singing given profound respect. Thus, practitioners often state that *Gaana* is always sung 'with the body.' It is to state that music is never isolated from the mobilization of the body; it is indeed not a 'distantiation' but a 'fusion' of bodies and minds as performance. Therefore, the band-members often revert that 'it is music only when your body sings' (Krishna 2019), always, collectively.

IV

How do we take this statement, if not as a rebuttal: 'it is music, only when the body sings,' in response to a question on the caste location of *Gaana*? In one of the rare occasions in two different films in his career, Ranjith captures two kinds of communal sensibility, a gathering where the community participates in bodily singing (or music), through *Gaana*. The first case, in the film *Atta Kathi* (Cardboard Knife, 2012), a coming-of-age sleeper hit

from a North Madras locale, *Gaana* songs inscribe themselves within the narratorial space: be it through bus routes, community celebrations, or post-dinner communes. The coming-of-age romance narrates the story of a young college-going Dinakaran (Dinesh), hailing from the outskirts of north Chennai, and his (mis)demeanours with women over the narrative. Not only are the spatial significations picturised by distinct visual imaginary, but also the sound-scape that fills these semi-urban locales on-screen are at the outskirts of the Chennai metropolis—hitherto unheard sounds particularly of *Gaana* fill the air that the spectacle space offers. For instance, the song '*Adi en gaana mayil kuyile*' ('Oh my Peacock and Cuckoo of *Gaana*'), though performed during a public wailing of a death, an *oppari*, the song and dance not only commemorate the end of life, but also reminds one of everybody's death. This song in *Gaana* form communicates a philosophy of life, its beauty and death; however, it also reminds one, the return of any lifeless body back to earth, where it would ultimately decay and stink.

The song works as a performance—where the singer sings it amidst a wave of drum beats by *parai/dappu* players—addressing a beloved, while the protagonist tries to impress the crowd with his dancing and acrobatic prowess. The song cannot be imagined without the performance of the body—including the performance of the *parai/dappu* players. Ranjith had mentioned that it is these 'cultures of performance' amongst the oppressed of North Madras, specifically the Dalits, that were hitherto marginalized in films. Thus, cultural performativity as sensorial scripting within the cinematic screen had to outdo earlier inscriptions of marginalization, if not rejection.

Thus, in a post-dinner family gathering, Dinakaran had to sing '*Nadu kadalula kappala irangi thalla mudiyuma?*' ('Can one push a ship in the middle of an ocean?'), a love ballad in the *Gaana* form accompanied by minimal bodily music, which evokes failed attempts of love, but also on mindless spending, family planning, on death, on desires and acts, but also on the gap between seeing and bodily experience. Sung at night, in darkness, to

a community neighbourhood about an unrequited love, the protagonist Dinakaran evokes a sensorial exscription that rejects and continuously departs from the scores of inscriptions that have marked the narrative space of north Madras as dangerous and deviant. Through a performance of *Magizhchi*, this Dalit space sensorially yield meaning that is not enclosed.

In *Madras*, for instance, the introduction song reclaims *Vada Chennai* (North Chennai) as an 'address' of the people who stay there amidst the sounds of band and tape music, dancing along with *gaana* songs. Though oppressed and discriminated against in their cuckold residences, they lay claim to the iconic landmarks, such as the Ripon building and the High court, of the city-scape as possessing their blood and sweat. The song likens the residents of north Madras to a community that is as evocative as *Satti* and *Molam*, the native percussion instruments, which defy any confinement. Emboldened by music and performance, this anti-caste sound-scape unlike the concert enclosure, generates a joyous up-beat environment. This introductory song of *Magizhchi* (joy and happiness) is as much a claim on the city, as it is a scripting of a sensorium by the most oppressed of the city.

The *oppari*, death wail, becomes part and parcel of this exscription which is an anti-caste re-scripting of sensibilities; as a 'becoming-other-than-itself.' Intriguingly, death perhaps is indissociable from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself, and reciprocally as its other. It is death which reveals the community as a finite reality to its members. The motif of revelation through death, of being-together or being-with, and of the crystallization of the community around the death of its members, around the loss or the impossibility of immanence, all of them lead to a space of 'thinking,' or rather a scripting, which is incommensurable with mere sociality or inter-subjectivity. This mode of scripting community is calibrated on the idea of death, as it is revealed in the death of others, hence, it is revealed to others as oneself. Community, in that sense, is what takes place through others, and for others, revealed by death. Perhaps it was this sense that the band members

reciprocated on the meaning of *Gaana* back to Krishna on his question about caste and *Gaana.*

'*Irandhidava nee pirandhai?*' ('Were you born only to die?'), in *Madras*, inscribes this sharing of the community through death, and the threat to presence of life amongst others, as *oppari*. Through death, and an *oppari* on the life of this death, the community consciously undergoes the experience of its own sharing. Set in North Chennai premises, this song captures a violent death, and the violence of death as murder, in the life of youth in the city. Sitting cross-legged, just wearing a *kaili* or *lungi* (a piece of cotton-cloth wrapped around the waist) with a harmonium and a *dholak* for accompaniment, the performance and lyrics of singer *Gaana* Bala ultimately signifies the meaning of life and death that script the community, by participating and exposing oneself to the death of someone else. Here the singular being undergoes the experience of the community as communication in this lyric.

Scripting becomes a political act, where writing to and communicating the anguish of the community, in solitude, invokes a community that no society contains or precedes; even though, one may punctuate, every society is implied in it. Community, not merely as a collective subject, happens only by scripting, and by sharing the communication of death itself. Therefore, by exposing the limits, writing makes every singular being share their limits and share each other's on their limits—i.e., in death. Thus, in *oppari*, community happens as communication at their limits. It is with this synergic energy that the films *Kabali* and *Kaala* used music to couple along with the star image of Rajini Kanth, where the word *Magizhchi* was pronounced for the first-time on-screen space, in the voice of Kabali as an aged Tamil don in Malaysia.

Kabali's tag line *Magizhchi* is strikingly different from the superstar's history of taglines from earlier movies.[5] Ranjith (2019) notes that he does not want to make films of Dalit suffering and humiliation, instead he wants to present the colourful life-world of happiness and festivities in his productions. This is significantly different from the (*in)tensions* of defining Dalit literature and aesthetics, as Ranjith readily rejects the categorization of 'Dalit Cinema' (Yengde 2018). This anti-caste aesthetics, which rejects any essentialism, by questioning the preconceived notions of Dalit identity, towards an emancipatory future is the philosophy which Ranjith offers through *Magizhchi*, in extension through his films (Edachira 2020).

V

Interestingly, to conclude, the *Casteless Collective* music band released their maiden album titled *Magizhchi* comprising eight songs with a bonus instrumental track. Produced by nineteen members, the album was released on the New Year's Eve of 2019. The title track, performed by almost all the artists, clarifies with a statement on the untranslatability of the Tamil word *Magizhchi*—which can indeed variously express, but cannot exactly, capture the truest joy and happiness embodied in its meaning. The song thus performs and raps a sensorial exscription —a becoming other than oneself—through a truest yet un-captured joy and happiness.

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[5] Rajnikanth is one of the most popular super stars of Indian cinema. His films, and especially his characters, are known for their mass dialogues. Most of his blockbuster films have punch taglines such as '*Nan oru thadavu sonna nooru thadavu sonna mathiri*' ('If I tell once, it's equal to hundred times') from *Baasha* (1995), '*Aandavan solran, Arunachalam seiran*' ('God tells, Arunachalam does') from *Arunachalam* (1997) and '*En vazhi, thani vazhi*' ('My route is a single one') from *Padayappa* (1999). Unlike these dialogues, which enhance the power of his characters, *Magizhchi* is an affect which transforms and inspires one to become human (Edachira 2020).

For instance, filled with colourful conglomeration of smoke in the screen, the performers clad in Ambedkarite suits, rap and dance about *Magizhchi* affirming it as an address and identification of the oppressed communities. Craftily directed by Pa. Ranjith himself, the song is sung by three members of the band, one after the other—Stony Psyko (Tony Sebastian), Arivu (Arivarasu Kalainesan) and Dope Daddy (Rajesh Radhakrishnan). They go on to state what can be the referential meaning of the terms—union beyond differences, where they are slaves to none, celebrating the moment as casteless Tamils. Even as the frame is sprayed with colours, they claim fearlessness to death, realizing their worth as human, neither valour nor fear but forgiveness and love defines them, as a necessary forgetting of the past moves them to be content. They become an address for *Magizhchi*; where music is taken as recourse to change, and the blue flag becomes a tinge of the limitless sky.[6]

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[6] The colour blue is symbolically identified with the Ambedkarite anti-caste movement in the Indian subcontinent. Blue was also the colour of the flags of the Scheduled Castes Federation of India, and the Republican Party later, floated by Dr. Ambedkar in 1942 and 1956, respectively. Thus, the blue-coloured flag (in comparison to the red or the saffron-ones) is often referred to as well as highlighted by Bahujan political movements as well as Dalit socio-cultural activists across the country.

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How Not to Get Shot: Voicing Resistance Through Laughter

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The genre of Resistance Literature has played a central role in the liberation of several countries from the grip of colonialism in the twentieth century. Understanding the significance of this genre in a post-colonial world and expanding its scope to suit the current context, this study analyzes the role of humor in Resistance Literature and observes its function in an audiobook titled *How Not to Get Shot: And Other Advice from White People*. Locating Black writing in the realm of the redefined genre of Resistance Literature, this study attempts to understand how hyperboles help in mounting a resistance through laughter.

Redefining Resistance Writing

According to Barbara Harlow, Resistance Literature typically dealt with the theme of struggle for national liberation and independence from the domination of the Western European and North American countries (xvi). Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, written during Nigeria's colonized period, and Pablo Neruda's poems written during the Spanish Civil war are typical examples of Resistance writings. Thus, 'resistance literature' initially evolved as a corpus of literary writing in the early twentieth century that concerned itself with recording the narratives and struggles of the colonized.

However, care must be taken to avoid reducing the scope of this genre, which could stand for struggles world around, across several spheres, beyond the realms of colonization and imperialism. Resistance refers to the refusal to accept or comply with something. With this simple (yet not simplified) definition in mind, the genre of Resistance Literature can be broadened to include struggles against all kinds of hegemonic political, social and cultural

agencies. With this expanded understanding of resistance, Resistance Writing can be understood as a genre of literature that records the struggle against

i. oppressive political systems like imperialism (or)
ii. hierarchical social constructs like race, gender and caste (or)
iii. cultural hierarchies based on religion, language and customs

Three Phases of Resistance

Generally, any resistance movement goes through two or three phases:

(i) The Articulation Phase: This is the initial phase of struggle where isolated voices are raised in protest against an oppressive force. Literature of this kind is tentative in nature, voicing out the sufferings as those of an individual or a small group. Alan Ginsberg's "Howl" is a typical example of resistance in its articulation phase. The poem is an expression of the distress experienced due to the oppression on one's sexuality—a topic not openly discussed until then. The articulation phase can therefore be understood as a stage of little mobilization or action.

(ii) The Phase of Action: Once a resistance movement gathers support and voice, the actual struggle begins to gain clearly defined objectives. This phase, where the actual action against the oppressive system occurs both in the physical world and the literary world, is the instrumental phase of the movement. Characterized by coordinated support from the masses of the oppressed faction, this phase coincides with the mode of active resistance in function. It is the outcome of this phase that determines if a resistance movement moves into the last phase. Pablo Neruda's writings during the Spanish Civil War serve as a characteristic example of Resistance writing in its action phase.

(iii) The Phase of Dejection: This phase is typically the result of the lack of positive outcomes from the action phase of a resistance movement despite long-running

struggles. Literature of this phase would be characterized by helplessness and hopelessness at the persisting oppression. The tired voices apparent in Black writing (against racism in the USA) or Dalit literature (against the caste system in India) after centuries-long struggles are typical examples of this phase of resistance.

Laughter in Resistance Literature

Speaking of folk humor in the Middle Ages and Renaissance period in *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin points out that "a boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (4). Laughter served as the weapon that effectively countered the 'serious' and 'oppressive' weapon of authoritarian systems. Bakhtin's idea of the medieval 'Carnival' in folklore is that of a social ritual authorized by the very system that it derides and attempts to subvert. This authorization, in turn, provides the Carnival an escape from censorship, a weapon usually wielded by oppressive agencies in stifling voices of resistance.

From the age of Aristophanes, humor has been used as a chief alternative for invectives against authority. Shakespeare used it to great extent in his comedies that fresh interpretations of his puns and innuendos are made till date. Comedies and humorists have adorned the royal palaces of many kingdoms with little censorship of their works despite the presence of subtle yet unmistakable voices against the very authority for whom their comedies were presented. The clowns in Shakespeare's plays serve as an important example of the power of laughter in mounting a voice of resistance.

But, what role does laughter play in the literature whose primary objective is to record the pain, suffering, struggles and hopelessness of the oppressed? The answer lies in the phase categorization we saw earlier in Resistance movement. Unlike the articulation phase of resistance where there is an attempt to record the state of the oppressed, the objective of the dejection phase is to emphasize the hopelessness without falling prey to redundant dirges on

their suffering. This calls for a new mode of narrative, and what better way to resist than with the sanction of the very authority from which one seeks redemption? Thus, laughter becomes a key component in the third phase of a resistance movement—the dejection phase. It is the wry laughter that stems out of helplessness and hopelessness that makes it less threatening to the authority.

***How Not to Get Shot* and the 'Voice' of Resistance**

That a tragedy like the George Floyd incident occurred even after centuries of anti-racial struggle in the USA is a testament to the fact that the resistance movement against race is in its dejection phase. Some events in the recent American political context have served nothing but to stir up unrest among the African Americans. The Unite-the-right rally organized by the White Supremacists in Charlottesville in 2017 is one instance of persisting racist tendency in the USA.

In 2016, D. L. Hughley, a Black activist and stand-up comedian, participated in an interview with Megyn Kelly in the Fox News Channel to discuss the issue of police brutality against Black people in America. Incensed by the show host Megyn Kelly's blind defense of the police during the discussion on a particular shooting, the stand-up comedian later recorded his response in the form of a satirical book and audiobook titled *How Not to Get Shot: And Other Advice from White People.* This work, presented as a collection of useful life advice for Black people to survive in a racist environment, is a scathing satire on the continuing police brutality on Black people. Through his self-deprecating humor, Hughley presents his criticism of actual cases of police brutality, and provides paradoxical tips to escape unfair treatment in the hands of law. It is to be noted that D. L. Hughley chose to record the written text also as an audiobook. The choice of the format is notable for two important reasons: the audiobook form provides room for the rendition of the text in the Blacks' own dialect—the Black Vernacular; since popular Black Vernacular includes several

words that have gone through semantic bleaching, what is prone to censorship in the written text can still survive in oral narration.

Resistance Through the Black Vernacular

Black Vernacular, or African American Vernacular English (AAVE), or Ebonics, refers to the distinctive dialect of English spoken by African Americans. It has become such an identifying factor of Blacks that the Oakland Unified School District in California passed a resolution acknowledging the legitimacy of Ebonics in 1996. The distinctive patterns in this dialect makes it the Black's own tongue, and provides an identity to them, especially ever since they started celebrating their identity.

However, since some common words in Ebonics that have gone through semantic bleaching may be construed as profane in its written form, they may be subject to censorship, and hence may lose the inherent Black nature in writing. It is at this point that the oral medium comes in handy.

Semantic bleaching is the process of a word losing its original meaning when it undergoes a semantic change due to various factors. Although Ebonics has branched from English, the cultural climate that affected the evolution of the dialect resulted in a semantic change of some words in English. When their century-long struggle for equality yielded no improvement in the treatment of Blacks, African Americans began to own their 'Blackness', and preferred being called 'Black'. As a part of this process of owning the differences and identity, their dialect also accommodated slang words that were usually expletives used against them.

Words like "nigga", "shit", "bitch", "fuck" and "motherfucker" have undergone significant semantic bleaching that they have become pseudo-pronouns in Ebonics (Rickford). These words, that would normally be considered as obscenities in English, carry a different semantic purpose altogether, and hence, are acceptable usage in Ebonics. Since

written English is agnostic of dialectical differences, the use of African American Vernacular is still subject to censorship in the US. Oral narratives in Black Vernacular are, on the other hand, do not come under the censorship regulations owing to the clearly distinct dialect.

Where his written text says “This might be the most important book you buy this year, you cheap *mofo*. After all, if you get shot, how the *heck* are you gonna read more books?”, D. L. Hughley presents his oral version as “This might be the most important book you buy this year, you cheap *motherfucker*. After all, if you get shot, how the *fuck* are you gonna read more books?” The audiobook form, in this context, provides the narrator the liberty to preserve the Black Vernacular and stay loyal to the objective of the oral rendering.

Laughter Through Hyperboles in *How Not to Get Shot*

Sarcasm is the predominant mode of humor that D. L. Hughley has handled in this book, and hyperbole is a significant element that helps him in achieving it. The audiobook serves as a perfect example of resistance humor loaded with hyperboles, with the tonal element of the narrator playing a crucial role in its delivery. Here, it is useful to understand two important ways in which comedians use their tone to convey exaggeration and elicit laughter: in cases where the statement made is utterly absurd, the narrator would use a rather sincere or solemn tone so that the absurdity is conveyed through the semantics of the statement alone; and in cases where the statement made has a possibility of being construed as sincere, the narrator adopts a derisive tone to suggest the lack of seriousness in the point made.

For instance, in his introduction to the audiobook, Hughley explains the objective of the book—a how-to guide for black people, full of advice from white people. However, he goes on to say, “And if you’re Asian or Latino, let me be the first black man to give you some advice: buy this book now because once we’re gone, you’ll be next.” Hughley delivers this line with a mock sincerity—a tone that suggests his noble intent behind having authored a

book of advice not only for fellow-Blacks, but also for people of other non-White races in America. The African-American population in the USA has gone up from 10% of the total population of the USA in 1940 to 12.6% in 2010 (wikipedia). So, factually, the Black race in the US is not endangered despite the higher chances of a Black man being killed in an encounter with the police. However, Hughley presents the exaggerated idea of extinction of the Black population as a means to convey the frequency of Black killings in police encounters. In making Asians and Latinos the next victims of the Whites' racial attacks, Hughley makes racism an innate tendency of the Whites, and insinuates that their rampant killing of races they consider inferior to them would continue even if Blacks go extinct. The hyperbole here facilitates the humor to come through despite the sincerity of his tone.

The note at the beginning of the chapter titled "How to Use This Book" is another instance of hyperbole used effectively to express resistance through humor. The case of the shooting of Philando Castile in 2016 is the basis of this note. Philando Castile, a 32-year-old Black American, was stopped by the police who were looking for a suspect of a bank robbery. Castile was traveling in his car with his girlfriend and his child. In an attempt to put the enquiring police officers at ease and to not surprise them, Castile announced that he had a gun and reassured them he wasn't pulling his gun out while he was reaching for his wallet to produce his driver's license. The police, asserting that he matched the robbery suspect's description, and believing that he was reaching for his gun, shot him seven times. Hughley criticizes this thoughtless action of the cops in his own humorous way, and gives the first of several hyperbolized and absurd pieces of advice in the form of a note that says:

> If you're in immediate danger of being shot by the police, put down this book and keep your hands where the police can see them. You're not Luke Cage and this book isn't made of titanium and it won't make you bullet-proof. Cops don't usually shoot people holding books, but they will shoot you if you're

> holding the phone—you never know what might look like a gun. (06:59–07:19)

The reference to Luke Cage is notable here. Luke Cage is one of the few black superhero characters in American fiction. Although there are numerous superheroes with infallible powers, Hughley carefully chooses the one black character to draw a comparison that is at once both relatable and unrelatable for his audience. A more important point here is the exaggerated caution in Hughley's tone with respect to Philando Castile's shooting. Hughley pronounces the words "but they will shoot you if you're holding the phone—you never know what might look like a gun" with a derisive tone, emphasizing the exaggeration in the words that might otherwise be construed as sincere advice.

Later in the audiobook, Hughley analyzes a particular case where the cop had made a statement that the victim he shot was scary. Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old Black man was fatally shot by a police officer after an altercation between them. While the shots were allegedly made in self-defense, the use of deadly force on an unarmed man was severely criticized following this incident. Studying this case, and dwelling into why cops are scared of Black people, he lists reasons such as they live in bad neighborhoods, they are strong and they are different. Focusing on the particular stereotype that black people are strong, Hughley says:

> I blame Marvel Comics. Look at the black superheroes: Black Panther? Black Panther is strong as fuck. Who does that help? And Luke Cage? Luke Cage is bulletproof. Marvel Comics and Netflix are gonna get a lot of people killed! Nobody wants a bulletproof nigga. Even niggas don't want a bulletproof nigga. . . Super strength, being bulletproof—that's all fine for White superheroes. . . The superpower that Black people need is the ability to have

> White people believe them. That's what I want: the ability to have White people go, "That nigga's telling the truth!" (53:46-4:36)

Despite several studies that have stressed upon the baselessness of the stereotype of Black people being strong or brutes, the common fear of Black people still persists (Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman 34). Hughley's take on this matter can be seen as resistance through exaggeration. Hughley sounds earnest in his accusation of Marvel for promoting the Black stereotype, a tone that stands in stark contrast to the absurdity of the allegation made—that fantasy has led to people believing in some stereotypes. Treading more into the realm of fantasy, Hughley touches upon the more pertinent issue: the natural mistrust White people have about Black men. Again, by bringing in a far-fetched concept of a superpower to make White people believe them, Hughley produces a humorous point that it is almost impossible to make White people trust Black men. While the message conveyed is as grave as the tone handled by D. L. Hughley in this section, the hyperbole converts the struggle of the Blacks into a point of laughter.

What Audiobooks are Capable of

Reviving the age-old tradition of oral narratives, audiobooks have given voice to the text, and opened up avenues to preserve the nuances of speech in recorded texts. Serving the purpose of reaching out to literates and illiterates alike, audiobooks also encourage people to get in touch with books, a feat that conventional books couldn't accomplish beyond the reading masses. In the context of resistance narratives, audiobooks help in preserving the differences in dialects and slangs, and providing an identity to the resisting faction. The oral form also helps capture the tonal changes of the narrator more accurately, making it a more potent medium of expression.

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Is Stoppard the Last Man Standing up for God?: Religious and Spiritual Undercurrents in the Plays of Tom Stoppard

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Arguably the greatest living playwright in English now, Tom Stoppard does not immediately evoke for many an association with religion or spirituality. His plays have frequently been praised as well as criticised for being mostly cerebral and detached, seeming to take delight in language for its own sake. While formidable scholars like Paul Delaney have shown that this charge of superficiality against Stoppard is ill-founded, the popular impression of Stoppard often precludes the possibility of deep mystical experience being at the core of his plays. In a discussion with his biographer Hermione Lee, Stoppard admits that there is some truth to the observation that "as a playwright, I'd found my mind early but I found my heart much later" (*Tom* 47:26-35); it may be added that in his latest plays, he seems to have found his soul too.

Although his family roots are completely Jewish, Stoppard grew up mostly in Britain from age eight in a middle-class Christian background and was unaware of his own descent until quite late in life (Hoare). His most recent full-length play *Leopoldstadt* (2020) draws on this family connection for the first time; however it remains rather an emotional exploration of the historical milieu of the Holocaust—the focus on Jewishness in the play has more to do with identity than theology. Incidentally, Stoppard also suggested at the time of its publication that this long-awaited reckoning with his past may in fact be his last play ("Tom Stoppard").

Of course, Stoppard is not overtly religious, certainly not in the way, say, the later T. S. Eliot or C. S. Lewis were. However, throughout his writing career, he has remained something of a nondenominational theist, while also proclaiming his faith in "a moral order derived from Christian absolutes" (qtd. in Delaney 5). The first Stoppard play to dwell on the

metaphysical necessity of moral absolutes was *Jumpers* (1972), which Kenneth Tynan famously described as "a farce whose main purpose is to affirm the existence of God." The protagonist George Moore in *Jumpers* spends much of his time attempting to compose a symposium paper titled "Is God?" to argue against the moral relativism of the logical positivists who have taken over the faculty of philosophy at the University where he works. Clearly Stoppard's sympathies lie with this bumbling hero who valiantly goes against the tide to defend the belief that "there is more in [him] than meets the microscope" (*Jumpers* 58). Stoppard, in fact, repeated the same sentiment as his own in an interview to Mel Gussow. He asserts, "The idea of God is slightly more plausible than the alternative proposition that, given enough time, some green slime could write Shakespeare's sonnets" (15-16).

Many scholars have observed earlier that Tom Stoppard has consistently maintained his stand against both Marxist materialism and moral relativism right from his early plays (Corballis; Delaney). Not much has changed about his convictions since his writing *Jumpers* "to combat the arrogant view that anyone who believes in God is some kind of cripple, using God as a crutch. I wanted to suggest that atheists may be the cripples, lacking the strength to live with the idea of God" (Kerensky 87). Four decades later, he returned in *The Hard Problem* (2015) to the familiar terrain of defending God, this time against the materialists, especially brain scientists dismissive of the possibility of a soul. While philosophers like Ronald Dworkin have argued that religion—defined as an intuitive faith in the existence and importance of value in the universe—need not be predicated on accepting the idea of God, Stoppard has been quick to point out that the dismissal of God stems from a hopeless circularity because "materialism is the premise of Dworkin's argument, not the conclusion" ("First Person" 19).

More than their methods, it is specifically the self-certainty of the atheists that Tom Stoppard takes issue with. When reductive materialism is presented as the whole picture, he

points out, non-volitional chemical processes in the brain could effectively replace our sense of morality. In *The Hard Problem,* he addresses precisely this conundrum: how to explain the existence of goodness in a world order that believes in *The Selfish Gene*? Richard Dawkins, its author, is particularly caricatured in the character of Spike who calls Raphael's *Madonna and Child* "Woman Maximising Gene Survival" (*The Hard Problem* 13). Spike is both perplexed and offended when his student and neuroscience researcher Hilary secretly says a daily prayer to God. Yet, the God she prays to, she explains, is not "someone who created the world in six days and then had a rest," but "some kind of overall moral intelligence" (50-51)—more like the abstract Deity of Spinoza or Śankara than a bearded Biblical figure.

Within the academia, Hilary is an anomaly: she jeopardises her career by publishing a paper with the title "Is God the Last Man standing?" (55). Her reputation, along with her Institute's, is threatened by the fact that she has publicly argued that all other "scientific" explanations of how consciousness came to exist as possessing the same mathematical probability as divine intervention. However, by the end of the play, the miracle she has been praying for comes to pass—confirming and vindicating her belief in God—and she quits her job as a researcher in the brain institute to go away to New York University and study philosophy.

Stoppard has, in fact, remarked that he strongly identifies with her: "I definitely feel close to Hilary. Or she is close to me. Particularly in terms of her questioning what is supposed to be a given, and her questioning this particular given, that there's no more to us than meets a scanner" ("Dimension" 28). The huge coincidence or the miracle—as Hilary sees it—at the heart of *The Hard Problem* is an example to illustrate the mystical aspect that has become far more pronounced in Stoppard's later work. Having given up for adoption the child she had as a teenager, Hilary is tormented at the thought that her daughter Cathy might be uncared for or suffering somewhere. Right at the end of the play, however, she discovers

that Cathy has not only been adopted by the billionaire who owns the Institute she works in, but has also grown up to be as kind and sensitive as Hilary herself.

While Stoppard had always found "mystery in the clockwork" of the universe (*Jumpers* 63), this theme becomes all the more insistent in his 2013 radio play *Darkside*. As if she continues from where Hilary left off, Emily McCoy, the protagonist of *Darkside,* begins as a student of a Philosophy 101 programme and is troubled by the same problems of goodness, freewill, and intuition that haunted Hilary. However, Emily in this play goes much further towards finding a resolution that had somehow eluded Hilary in *The Hard Problem*. Throughout the play, she is seen exploring the true nature of altruism, challenging what she sees as oversimplified and absurd thought experiments taught in her philosophy class by Professor Baggott: The Trolley Problem, Tragedy of the Commons, and Prisoner's Dilemma. To Emily, unselfish goodness is intuitive and spontaneous, an extension of human nature itself, as opposed to the dog-eat-dog ethos that the Prisoner's Dilemma predicates. Both her method and her conclusions (and, by extension, Stoppard's own) carry strong resemblances to classical Indian philosophy.

Traditional Indian philosophy considers the debating method of *purvapaksha, khandana,* and *siddhantha* as a valid means of attaining wisdom. It involves a thorough understanding of the opponent's point of view and one's own restatement of it at the beginning of any argument, before overturning the position by pointing to flaws in it and proposing another alternative (Chatterjee and Datta 4-5). Emily conscientiously grapples with all the philosophical schools Baggott is trying to teach her, while also internally rebelling against them as empty cerebral exercises involving stick figures (*Darkside* 32). She struggles for an answer to the question "What is the Good?" but her professor, with all his training in philosophy, cannot provide her one (47). However, the alternative she arrives at in the play is beyond all argumentative logic; it is a mystical experience that words simply cannot do

justice to. Therefore, her wisdom is conveyed by a song-sermon. In fact, what she attains may be close to the Indian ideal of the soul's liberation from the cycle of rebirths—a state of *samadhi*.

Running away from Baggott's inanities, Emily's first meets the Boy (possibly an imaginary character) who was run over by a train as part of the famous Trolley Problem. He tells her of a "juggler on the radio" who seems to be a stand-in for God (13). Later, when Emily is asked to address a huge crowd waiting to listen to her, he advises her to draw her breath deep and to finally let it go as "sound waves of pure thought" (27). He is confident her wordless message preaching unselfishness would somehow be understood by her audience and much to Emily's amazement, it is! The message that she delivers to the audience within the play is one of cries and ululations, but translated into intelligible words, it becomes a moving plea for kindness:

> We are of a kind, we are
> natural born to kindness, which
> means to act as to our kind, as
> kin to kin, as kindred, which is
> to act kindly. What is the Good?
> It is nothing but a contest of kindness.
> To be unkind is against nature,
> and it makes us feel bad. To be
> selfish is against nature because it is
> against our kindness. We are as natural-born
> to unselfishness as a mother to her baby.
> Her milk is the milk of human kin and kindness.
> But when we live for trickery and gain,

> we turn against nature, and nature
>
> will turn against us.
>
> We will be lords of dust and bones. (28–29)

However, this impassioned sermon is not just confined to her words, but soon reflects in her actions too. Like Hilary, Emily is also faced with her own version of the Prisoner's Dilemma when the Witch Finder interrogates her; however, she proves her innately altruistic nature by confessing that she is the witch rather than betray the Boy. The Boy, in his turn, confesses in order to protect Emily, and soon all of the audience at Emily's sermon turn themselves in as witches to save them both. To live life as if it were "a contest of kindness" does indeed seem Stoppard's message for the world, as he personally confirmed in response to a question by the present writer (Stoppard and Kapoor 56:01-51).

In this collective empathy and generosity of spirit lies the solution to all the challenges ahead of humanity, Stoppard seems to suggest. There is an almost psychic power in Emily's sermon that was able to touch hearts and transform them, but it does not stop there. Earlier in the play she had lamented that the land had become parched and blighted by the greedy exploitation of the people there. When her auditors were moved to rescue her even by risking their lives, a true miracle takes place—a miracle by which human kindness finds a sympathetic response in the nonhuman world as well. All of a sudden, the land that had no sign of vegetation turns squelchy and blades of grass begin to sprout turning the whole valley green. The crowd hails Emily as the servant of God through whom the curse has been lifted. The armed soldiers who had chased her and the Boy until then also disappear immediately.

The idea behind this particular surrealistic stretch of the play seems to be to acknowledge the great web of life connecting all of sentient nature, in which human consciousness becomes an integral part so that our own thoughts and actions are able to influence the objects of nature around us. Advaita holds that all the multifariousness of the

universe is mere appearance or *maya* caused by ignorance; the realisation that there is only the Self and no Other constitutes liberation. In the case of Emily, her communion with the nature around her makes her lose her illusion of a solitary self and become aware of a Universal consciousness or Brahman. In this sense, the last lines of the play might carry a clue to her realisation. The play cryptically ends with what may be a plea for introspection from Emily: "Do you believe in the juggler? When you hear the bell, it's time to go in" (53). The juggler, or God whose play creates the illusion of *maya*, is after all not to be found outside of oneself but only within.

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Interpreting Interruptions: Image of the Migrant in Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan*

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> I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan only in giving or in refusing; I am free to give or to refuse, but my recognition passes necessarily through the interposition of things.
>
> - Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (1991), 77.

Terrorist or Terrorized – The Image of a Migrant

Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* ends with a violent outburst of energy that seems inconsistent with the realist tone and social drama genre of the film. The final scenes of the film depict the titular protagonist's attempt to rescue his wife Yalini who is caught in the crossfire between rival gangs. The sequence plays out like a typical action movie, as the protagonist walks purposefully towards dangerous gangsters armed only with a machete and a screwdriver. As expected of an ideal action hero, he is a reluctant warrior who has kept himself away from the violent world of crime despite being surrounded by it. The camera crouches behind Dheepan and observes his cautious walk turn into a sprint, heading towards violence and rage. The camera avoids his face, and instead focuses on the ground he treads as he crosses a literal line in the sand into enemy territory. Earlier in the film, he had carefully drawn that line to mark his side of the housing project as a 'no fire zone', a line that even the drug dealers had to acknowledge. Dheepan is a 'gardien' (French for caretaker, but could also be translated as 'guardian' or 'protector') who wants to keep the peace in his neighborhood. A migrant tired of his violent past in Sri Lanka, Dheepan strives to make good of his second chance and protect his present circumstances from falling prey to violence. However, his desire to defend the boundary that defines his safe haven can only be achieved by him exceeding it – and the action forces him to return to a violent life that he had sworn off at the

beginning of the film. The scene continues to play out like a video game, as the camera perspective follows Dheepan making short work of the gangsters attacking the building. Despite the odds, he manages to enter the building, knock down the door and come face to face with Yalini. Unlike his past life, his violent acts do not lead a violent end. The film rewards him for this accomplishment and adds a coda where Dheepan and his family are safe in a pleasant suburban paradise.

This convenient ending offers a view of the protagonist as someone who is capable of taking care of himself and his family should the need arise, even if it pushes him towards violence. Not only was Yalini rescued from imminent danger, but all of them were removed to safety of a harmonious and multicultural neighborhood. However, the ending of the film is not as reassuring as it seems, because the protagonist's familiarity with violence is inextricably tied to his former life as a soldier for the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). As a refugee in Paris who gained entry into the country by hiding his past, the viewers consider the implications of his violent ability. The audience cannot help but wonder, what threat does such a stranger pose to the society? Is the refugee who has fled his own violent past, now a carrier of the same brand of violence? In brief, is he the terrorized, or the terrorist?

This question has become central in the 21st century geopolitical arena as conflicts around the world have displaced more people than ever before in modern history. In the Western world, there is a growing backlash against receiving migrants displaced from conflict areas. Xenophobic rhetoric that fans anxieties about the dangers posed by potentially violent migrants has led to self-centered nationalistic views and reactionary politics. The threat of violence that a migrant conjures in the minds of the people, whether real or imagined, is enough for many to call for a total ban of migrants from specific countries. In this combative atmosphere, there have also been many calls to humanity that push back with

a more progressive and optimistic rhetoric about migrants. *Dheepan* expresses this ambivalence in popular imagination by presenting refugees as not only sympathetic and vulnerable, but also haunted by the violent specters of their past. While it could be argued that such a contradictory image of the refugee inhibits us from recognizing our responsibility to them, this chapter contends that the contradictory image interrupts the viewers' own perceptions and prejudices against the migrant. This film reflects the conflicting ideas of responsibility toward and anxiety about the migrant in the viewing audience by refusing to present the migrant clearly as a violent threat or an innocent victim of circumstances. *Dheepan* regards the image of an Asian migrant through its interruption of biases that prescribe and proscribe what the migrant ought to be.

Dheepan's Contradictory Images

The 2015 Palme d'Or winner *Dheepan* presents these opposing anxieties through a Sri Lankan Tamil migrant family that has fled from a war-torn nation to seek refuge in Paris. The family consisting of the married couple Dheepan (35) and Yalini (24), and their child Ilayal (9) is a sham. Dheepan (real name Sivadhasan), a former child soldier for the separatist militant group LTTE, escapes his violent past by seeking fellow strangers from a refugee camp to play the roles of his wife and child. They are banded together to increase the likelihood of being accepted as refugees in France. In their new home, they are settled in a Parisian suburb controlled by warring factions of drug-dealers. Dheepan gets a job as the care-taker for a housing estate, Yalini works as a maid for an infirm neighbor and Ilayal is enrolled in a school. The film follows these characters grappling with the reality of their continued marginal circumstances, as they try to build their lives in a harsh environment. As the characters grow to know and care for each other, they reconstruct their lives that they had lost. However, the desire to improve their circumstances and unwillingness to accept the ruined conditions leads to confrontation with the others in the neighborhood, culminating in a

violent clash where the protagonist Dheepan returns to his violent past in order to protect the ones he loves.

Despite its acclaim, some critics did not take kindly to its hyper-violent ending that seemed to reinforce stereotypes about the strangeness of the migrant. The film's realist tone was held up against real events and statistics and critiqued as being too sensationalist. Sri Lankan critic T.U. Senan accuses the film's sudden outburst of violent action as a betrayal of the film's narrative core. He comments that Audiard's pursuit is a "sort of 'lesser evil' approach in art" which only presents a better image of the migrants when compared to his contemporaries. The film mixes genres to selectively deploy tropes of the Western genre films, revenge thrillers and overcoming-the-odds underdog narratives which are perceived as a jarring deviation in an otherwise realist social drama. Caspar Salmon's extremely critical piece in *The Guardian* savages the film for its lack of authenticity, especially in the depiction of violence. Salmon says that "Audiard is careful not to let facts or verisimilitude get in the way of a punchy story." By utilizing statistics about gun-related violence, Salmon explains that the violence portrayed in the suburbs are implausible. The article cautions against Audiard's sensational style of mixing "an authentic and recognizable world" with a fictional violent world, which further perpetuates the dangerous stereotype of the migrant hoodlum that Nicholas Sarkozy called to be "industrially cleaned out" in 2005. Salmon concludes that such images are "irresponsible and politically dangerous", for they "[burden] the underprivileged with the stigma of lawlessness."

Even sympathetic readings of the film by critics like Anthony Carew and Amelie Hastie make excuses for the change in genre at the end of the film as a "coda" or a fantasy sequence that happens outside the realist narrative's continuity. Critical readings such as these hinge on the question of authenticity to address the ethical value of the film as they focus on the elided time and generous shifting of historical events, and overlook the film's

resistance to fixing the migrant in a simple image. This style of mixing genres responds to a different kind of authenticity that Rudolf Arnheim describes in his seminal essay on photography as "expressing qualities of human experience by any means suitable for that purpose." *Dheepan*'s authenticity lies in its malleable deployment of genre which invites a critical reading that exceeds the narrative within the film. The film's contradictory portrayal of the migrant disrupts the structures that have coded our reception of the migrant's image so far. The two approaches that consider the violent end as something that has to be either accused or excused, both perform the same task of treating the violence as an incongruous moment that exists outside the film's main narrative. The critique against the mixing of genres ignores the many conflicting forces that inform characterization. A call for a positive representation of the migrant disregards the perception of the viewers who presume to conjure that image. The final moments offer a more complex reading where the image of the migrant is fragmented and obscured as it challenges the audience's notions of the migrant.

Interpreting Interruptions

The migrant's image and position in society could be further explored in light of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' work on Alterity and Otherness. Levinas offers a non-normative view of ethics which is not concerned with categorizing right and wrong behavior, but rather focuses on our responsibility to the Other's needs. Hospitality becomes the cornerstone of his relational philosophy, where our response to the Other is not based on preconceived categorizations but their immediate and infinite alterity. By rejecting the tendencies to interpret the Other in the same terms of understanding as ourselves, Levinas calls for an openness to the irreducible uniqueness of the Other. Such a view of ethics as a relational encounter offers an alternative way of thinking to the confrontational binaries that are set up by angry rhetoricians who see the global refugee crisis in terms of opposing values, cultures and strangeness. This is particularly significant in today's context where the general

view of the migrant is shaped by a rhetoric of us and them. Public figures ranging from former US President Barack Obama to the British Secretary of State for Foreign affairs Boris Johnson have used the phrase "just like us" while commenting on migrants. While the meaning in context of their speech maybe different—Obama uses the phrase to champion the rights of undocumented migrant children who were brought to the USA without their knowledge, and Johnson argues for the rights of Australian teachers who do not have the same rights as Europeans despite their shared culture with the British—they both share an eerie exclusivist resonance as they hold up one group to be welcomed, and implicitly calling for the rejection of another group (the undocumented migrant parents in Obama's case, and non-English speaking Europeans in Johnson's). Levinas cautions against such totalitarian use of language due to its tendency to evoke inflexible ordering of the world. He instead presents our infinite and unconditional responsibility to the Other as the ethical alternative, as the self recognizes its humanity only in the face of the Other. Levinas' radical view of ethical responsibility is succinctly captured when he explains that "The relationship between the same and the Other, my welcoming of the Other, is the ultimate fact, and in it the things figure not as what one builds but as what one gives."

Film scholars who ask after the ethics of cinema through a Levinasian lens are not concerned with the morals of the film, but rather the ways in which it resists thematization, or fixing the open and infinite world of history and reality in fixed forms of completed art. Levinas' ethics is not founded on preconceived external rules but the immediate encounter of the Other, and thus, helps us interrogate the relationship through which the viewers encounter the text. In the essay 'The Good of Film Experience', Brian Bergen-Aurand contends that the ethical turn of film criticism "provokes a response exterior to myself rather than return to a self-assuredness" because the other is "irreducibly different", rather than simply "different from me." And since the "arguments about film ethics have become arguments about filmic

uncertainty, or filmic interruption of the status quo" film ethics seeks the ways in which texts interrupt themselves, and resist the thematization of the Other to simplistic categories.

The question of ethics as an interruption of existing categories is very important in a discussion of the image of Sri Lankan Tamils on screen, due to a problematic history of production and representation. The persistent civil war drawn along ethnic lines coupled with nearly non-existent access to film production infrastructure have resulted in very few Tamil films being made in Sri Lanka. Writing about the challenges of making Tamil films, D.B.S. Jeyaraj laments the dearth of quantity and quality in native films despite films being the "most popular form of cultural entertainment." According to him, the experience of Tamil culture for the Sri Lankan Tamil audience is inherently fragmented, as it is mostly mediated through Tamil films of Indian origin – a route that is culturally and politically indirect to their own. Due to their distinct dialect and cultural differences, Tamil films from India rarely represent Sri Lankan Tamils. Although there are Tamil artists and technicians who work in the Sri Lankan film industry, few attempt to reinvigorate the Tamil film scene, due to technical and production difficulties as well as the lack of financial viability of independently produced films. Acclaimed Sri Lankan filmmaker Asoka Handagama comments that the absence of Tamil cinema directly impacts the way Tamil youth perceive their position in the society. These problems have effectively rendered the Sri Lankan Tamil absent from filmic representation, prompting the audience to look elsewhere for their representation and identification. These limitations have resulted in uneven representations of Sri Lankan Tamils in film. *Dheepan* further demonstrates this gap in representation by raising questions about Audiard's use of the image of the Sri Lankan Tamil as a migrant.

Dheepan captures the vulnerability of migrants, who seek refuge to escape from their violent, war-torn homelands, only to end up in equally precarious positions in their new unfamiliar environment. The film also implicitly articulates the threat posed by the unknown

stranger – the refugee who might be violent and dangerous due to his own past. This odd contrast seems at first as an incomplete attempt at picturing a migrant that shows him as a victim and a threat. However, these contradictions simultaneously offer glimpses of both the marginalized position of the migrant and the anxieties and uncertainties of the viewers. The film inverts the position of the migrant by presenting them as care-givers and guardians who try to preserve the community against anti-social elements. The violent end offers another narrative where the migrant is a dangerous outsider. By mixing these genres of hyper-violent action and revenge drama with the redemptive narrative of the migrant, the film interrupts its own narrative of a model migrant assimilation. This interruption prevents the audience from reducing the migrant to either a pitiable or a dangerous character. In a sense, the position of the host opening themselves to the migrant is tested only when these two opposing positions are considered simultaneously. By presenting the tension between the two viewpoints, the film abstains from offering solutions to the crisis of the migrant's image and instead subverts the basis of such questioning. While it may depict familiar images of personal and historical suffering, sympathetic fringe narratives and spontaneous generosity, it resists presenting the migrant's lives as "just like ours", and instead constructs an inscrutable world that remains unfixed in language and action.

The Directorial Vision

The ambivalence of the film's tendency to depict two simultaneous figures of the migrant is not isolated in its violent ending. It resonates throughout the film because the project is conceived with an intention to disrupt established perspectives about migrants in the society. When asked about the genesis of the film at a press conference in Cannes, the director said that his interest in the film "is the other, the perspective of the other, of those people who sell roses on the terraces and who we know nothing about." Audiard seeks to

present a “French film that speaks in Tamil” and anticipates a unique audience experience and response through its strangeness in content and form. The film communicates the difficulty or inability to communicate through this choice of filming in a different language. On screen, this linguistic distance is reflected through the layers of translation that happen between the French and Tamil. The resistance offered by the strangeness of the language is elusive yet immediate in the film. Yalini develops an unlikely friendship with Brahim, a drug dealer, when she works as a care-taker for his uncle. Their conversations remain one-sided due to their inability to understand each other’s language. The privacy provided by their language barrier seems to obstruct any true comprehension. However, it is this opacity that allows them to share so freely, as neither character seeks understanding from the other, just a recognition of their presence. The desire for conversation goes beyond the necessity for comprehension, as they both relate to each other without the expectation of reciprocity. Their response to each other may not bear meaning in itself, but their response itself becomes meaningful as they relate to each other in earnest. The deeper personal experiences they share are meant only to be spoken for their own sake – a personal souvenir that they cannot testify to in the open. In these moments, the director engages with the perspective of the other without trying to rationalize it in terms of the viewers’ world.

The interest in the other’s perspective does not prompt the film to claim to be an authoritative account of the other’s past. The subject Audiard chooses is not just any migrant who merely seeks a better life, but one whose past life is burdened with history – a history that the film never really directly looks at. Instead, it fleetingly glances at the narrative of the Sri Lankan Civil War from the fringe perspectives of a former child soldier without nostalgia or sympathy. The only scenes in which the film engages with that history are those where the characters are attempting to erase their connection to their historical past. One such moment where the narrative comes into contact with the exiled history occurs when Dheepan and his

family attend a social gathering with other Sri Lankan Tamil migrants. Among them is 'the colonel', a grizzled veteran of the LTTE who pulls aside the men to discuss raising funds for the armed resistance in Sri Lanka. Unwilling to participate in that world anymore, Dheepan hesitantly reminds the colonel that the "war is over" hinting at the final surrender of the LTTE in 2009. When the colonel persists, Dheepan clarifies that "[his] war was over", expressing his fatigue, if not disillusionment with the armed resistance. His distancing from the conflict obliquely references the final days of the LTTE after the demise of its charismatic, controversial leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. In this subtle gap between the personal and the historical narratives is a glimpse of the civil war that is felt only as a reflection, a recount of the experience. It records their migration from a world that they are forced to abandon, while disallowing them to fully exit it. These attempts of severing ties with the past are also entwined with the inescapability from the past. Even when the colonel repeatedly strikes Dheepan in anger for his defiance, he solemnly accepts the punishment. However, in the moments that follow, he alternately expresses and suppresses his response to the past as he is seen tearfully singing a revolutionary song by himself in an abandoned flat in the housing estate. The song calls for passionate uprising, but his delivery of it turns it into a mournful elegy to his and his people's struggles.

This moment is bolstered by the casting of Anthonythasan Jesuthasan, a former child-soldier who severed his ties with the LTTE and sought political asylum in France. Under the pseudonym Shobasakti, the actor is a prolific writer who has written fiction and non-fiction in Tamil based on his own experiences of the Sri Lankan Civil war. His works are critical of both the Sri Lankan military as well as the LTTE in their actions and their effect on the Tamil civilians. Dheepan appears for the first time in the film standing in front of a mass funeral pyre with a devastated look on his face. The moment feels too familiar to be shocking in the context of the actor's life. The scene wordlessly observes the protagonist as he sheds his

soldier's uniform and casts them in the same funeral pyre. At this moment, the production codes of the film seem to defer to the personal struggles of the actor.

This is not to say that Audiard's film perfectly represents the amorphous position of the migrant. The attempt to present the perspective of the other inherently runs the risk of selecting stories that offer the most compelling narrative opportunities. Audiard's curiosity does not mitigate his teetering between intentions of excavating fringe narratives and a sanguine desire for sensationalism when he makes the jump from "those who sell roses" to a former child-soldier. This offhand indistinction between the narratives of those who seek a better life and those who are fleeing a war-torn country suggests an exoticism that still drives the production. The question of authenticity becomes an aesthetic flavor rather than an ethical intention.

There are many moments in the film where it is obvious that the characters are positioned to appear 'sufficiently migrant' for the viewers. However, the film also draws attention to the efforts of making them appear so by constantly telling and retelling the story that frames their life. The film may be guilty of seeking the most interesting migrant narratives, but it also interrupts that construction by exposing the artifice of their narratives. The film begins with such a scene, as the unnamed female protagonist frantically seeks a child to pose as her own. She has no stereotypical motherly instinct as she seeks a child only because it could be her passport out of the war-torn country. She finds a child whose parents have died, and walks away briskly with a firm grip on the child's wrist. The rewriting and constructing of her past begin when she tells the child to "not cry or say anything." She enters the camp outpost and announces that the child is her daughter. In the outpost are two men, one in civilian garb and another who is dressed like an army officer. When the officer asks the other man if the girl and the child would do, he simply nods his head without looking at them. The officer reads out information from a pile of passports, giving them details of a

family that had been wiped out six months earlier, creating new identities for a family of strangers. There are no heroic reasons for the assembly of that family, just a practical one. This dispassionate scene sets the tone for the film as the characters rehearse and enact their lives as 'sufficiently migrant', cynically tearing through any melodramatic aspirations. The trope of presenting a 'sufficiently migrant' self recurs at the migration office in Paris where the interpreter assists Dheepan in fabricating a more convincing narrative to be allowed into France. The film destroys the image of a perfect migrant family by repeatedly revealing its architecture.

The aesthetic and narrative choices in the film sometimes illustrate common stereotypes and real problems about the lives of migrants simultaneously. Writing about the vulnerability of migrants, Marie A. Failinger notes that while there are many legal provisions that exaggerate the dangers of the migrant, the threat that the migrant faces from traffickers, drug dealers and gang-members are often downplayed. In the final violent confrontation, the director seems to offer an image of the 'Western' (Parisian) gangsters with their guns unable to match the 'native' warrior who has trained in the tropical jungles, as he easily overwhelms them with melee weapons. At the same time, the scene calls to our attention to the complete absence of law-enforcement in the ghetto, rendering the apparent invincibility of the migrant useless. At the moment when he finally reaches Yalini, still stunned from the violence and anger, Dheepan points his gun at her until she smacks it away, calling him to his senses. They hold each other and have a quiet conversation where he asks her if she is wounded because of all the blood. Almost imperceptibly, she replies that it is his blood. The moment lingers as his eyes widen and hers close, and the screen fades to black. This bleak moment undercuts the heroic escalation of the rescue attempt preceding it. Considering how difficult it was for him to even gain access to the building, their chances of escaping it seem slim. The narrative offers no logical respite to the scenario as the bleeding protagonist seems to lose

consciousness, and yet, the next scene opens in a pleasant English suburb, and Dheepan is shown driving a taxi to a home, his new family and a community that supports them.

Such familiar genre tropes help challenge the image of the migrant not just in the minds of the audience, but also in its creators. The film's inability to resist a clear moment of narrative closure highlights the frame within which the indescribable image of the migrant is presented. Even if the film aims to evoke a gap between the image and the migrant, by virtue of its form, that gap is still represented as an image. By undercutting the authenticity of the closure with a self-reflexively impossible happy ending, the film challenges the fantasy by representing it.

Contextualizing the Anxiety of Terror

Any discussion about the growing anxiety against the prospect of violence from the outsider will undoubtedly be read in the context of the attack on a Christmas market in Berlin, suspected to have been carried out by an asylum seeker. The December 2016 attack on civilians at a famous Christmas market in Kurfürstendamm was perceived to be an attack of German culture, as it targeted a festive location where people were gathered to celebrate their spirit of community. Despite Germany being a country with one of the most welcoming policies towards migrants, this attack strengthened the voices against the influx of migrants from the middle-east. The attack as well as the response it evinced reveals the fragile relationship between precarious migrant and fickle popular imagination. This terror attack is designed not just to affect the victims but also the lives of many migrants that would be made more uncertain in the aftermath of this attack. In the era of an American president who has routinely and openly called for the deportation of migrants and even attempted to enforce a ban on Muslims from entering the US, in the era where the displaced Rohingyas have floated perilously in the Bay of Bengal without any respite from the many nations that could attend their distress calls, in the era of subtle changes in policy that implicitly and explicitly ensure

that migrants do not enjoy the same rights as the natives – one's concerns for the safety of migrants feels inevitable rather than whimsical. Such thoughts do not stem from a disrespect towards the victims of the attack, but from a hope that the actions of a few are not used to indict all refugees.

As such, the migrant occupies a more marginal role in today's world, even as more advocacy groups and progressive political and international policies seek to redress that position. Films like *Dheepan* are a part of that conversation that helps us question our own fears and our complacency by presenting an Other who is completely beyond comprehension and thematization. Instead, it offers a contradictory image of the migrant as someone who could occupy any number of differing social valences within the society. The problematic image of the migrant helps us recognize the thematization of the migrant into an extension of our anxieties, rather than to consider them on their own terms. In this milieu of hatred towards foreigners and vocal protests against migrants, the problematic image delves into the crisis of humanity that the world faces. While it is noble and crucial to uphold the virtues of an inclusive society that recognizes its responsibility to the needs of the Other, the refugee and the disenfranchised, it would be reckless to summarily dismiss the reservations against the migrant by invoking the rule of law or some other external moral authority. Such an outrage-fueled chastisement of a conservative outlook would manifest itself in far more uncharitable expressions of hatred and xenophobia when an unfortunate moment arises. A historically and socially complex issue such as global migration needs to be tackled in a situated manner that fully engages with every stakeholder and build consensus about one's responsibility to the migrant. Trying to convince people that the refugee is "just like them" is disingenuous and counter-productive, as it provokes people to reject anything that falls outside their view of sameness. Instead, we need to enshrine the need to constantly engage in

a dialogue about the Other and with the Other to truly recognize our responsibility stemming from the differences.

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Employment of Epic Similes: Homer, Milton and the Sangam Poets

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If, in the eighteenth century, Johnson said that illustration and ornamentation are the two functions of a simile, more than eight centuries earlier, Ilampuranar, one of the celebrated commentators on *Tolkappiyam*, had observed that a simile must clarify what is not evident and please the hearer by being an object of beauty. It is now emphasized in the west that the images used by a poet should be functional and drawn from life. Shakespeare is praised for using such images and avoiding bookish ones. In fact, that bear-baiting, a common Elizabethan sport, was used effectively by Shakespeare and not by any of his learned contemporaries is said to testify to his poetic genius. Milton is condemned for his lack of visual imagination and Shelley for preferring abstract images to concrete ones. Hulme, Pound and Eliot felt that images are the very essence of an intuitive language. Creating one powerful image is, to Pound, more praiseworthy than writing hundreds of melodious lines of meaningless words, Tolkappiyar's awareness of the prime importance of poetic image is evident in his statements on what are called 'Iraicci' and 'Ullurai'. The Tolkappiyar-Sangam tradition underlined the importance of visual images.

While choosing his images, the poet is directed to keep in mind the character's status, the range and limits of its experiences and activities and the objects with which it would be familiar. It is surprising to note that in addition to the striking similes which remarkably serve the functions of illustration and ornamentation, the long-drawn epic similes, for which Homer and Milton have been long receiving high praise, are also to be found in the Sangam classics. An in-depth comparative study of those would demonstrate that the ancient Tamil poets were

far ahead of their time in their understanding of the nature, function and potentiality of a simile.

It has been stressed by Homer scholars that simile in Homer is not decoration by dynamic invention. Besides simple similes, Homer employs similes that develop themselves. In the section known as 'Watching on the walls' of *The Illiad*, we come across two similes which are complete in themselves and which stop at A is like B and are not developed further in any direction. Describing the elders of the people who are sitting with Priam, the poet writes,

> Now through old age these fought no longer, yet
> Were excellent speakers still,
> and clear as cicadas who through the forest
> settle on trees, to issue their delicate voice of
> singing. Such were they who sat on the tower,
> Chief men of the Trojans. (III 150=153)

There is a simple comparison between eloquent old speakers and the singing cicadas and no details about the latter that are not relevant to the comparison are given. In another passage, Priam compares Ulysses to a ram:

> Truly, to some deep fleeced ram would
> I like him who makes his way through
> the great mass of the shining sheep flocks. (III 197-98)

In the fourth book of the epic, there is a striking simile, direct from the experience of life, to describe Athene's successful attempt at brushing an arrow away from its mark.

> She brushes it away from his skin as lightly as when a mother brushes a fly away
> from her child who is lying in sweet sleep. (IV 130-31)

The noise raised by an army is described through a simple commonly used comparison:

> They rushed to the assembly with such
> a noise as when a wave of the surrounding
> sea roams on a wide beach and the ocean thunders. (II 221-24)

Using an exquisite simile, Achilles gives expression to his poetic condition:

> As a bird brings food in mouthfuls
> to her young ones, when she can find it,
> yet she herself fares ill, so I watched
> through many sleepless nights and
> fought through many bloody days. (IX 340-44)

But in the typical Homeric similes, there is a development of not the thing described but that to which it is referred. In the sixteenth book, for instance, the Myrmidons led by Patroclus are compared to wasps:

> Straightaway they poured forth like wasps
> by the roadside, which boys habitually provoke,
> always taunting them - wasps which have
> their homes by the road;
> Thoughtless boys; they make a common evil
> for many people.
> Those wasps, if some traveller goes by and
> unwittingly disturbs them, summon up all their
> defensive spirit and each one of them flies
> forth and fights in defence of his offspring;

> with heart and spirit like theirs the Myrmidons
>
> poured themselves among the ships. (XVI 259-67)

The enraged soldiers are not compared to lions or tigers but to provoked wasps which are aggressive, scary and wild. This comparison leads to a fascinating picture of the life of wasps. *The Illiad* has many such similes which are based on familiar scenes of life and deal with subjects remote from the heroic world such as small boys beating donkeys, flies clustering around the milk pail, and men arguing over boundaries of their fields and women staining ivory.

At times, even an elaborately worked out double comparison may be used by Homer:

> The assembly stirred like the long waves of the deep, of the Icarian sea, which the East Wind and the South have raised, roaring down upon them from the clouds of Father Zeus. Or as when the West Wind comes and stirs a field of tall grain, swiftly rushing down upon it and the ears nod before the wind, so stirred their whole assembly. (II 150-57)

A simple simile may be followed by a typical epic simile when needed:

> But Patroclus stood beside Achilles, shepherd of the people, shedding warm tears, like a dark watered spring which pours its dusky waters over some sheer cliff. Seeing him, swift-footed, god-like Achilles pitied him and spoke to him winged words: why do you weep, Patroclus, like some little girl, who runs beside her mother and bids her take her up, clinging to her robe and hindering her as she would hurry on, and looking tearfully up at her until she takes her up? like her, Patroclus, do you shed soft tears. (XVI 2-11)

The heart of Odysseus is compared to a dog in a long-drawn simile and the worried hero to a man holding a stuffed sausage in another, both of which would not have been

approved of by the Tamil poetic tradition which censured the bringing together of the great and the mean or the sublime and the ridiculous.

> His heart was fairly howling with fury. As a dog, seeing a stranger, walks around her helpless puppies and barks and gets ready to fight, so his heart howled with anger at their wicked acts. (XX 15-18)
>
> So he talked to himself, and his heart obeyed and remained brave and unshaken. But still he kept tossing this way and that on his bed. As a man holds a sausage stuffed with fat and blood over a great blazing fire and burns it now this way and now that in his eagerness to get it roasted quickly, so Odysseus tossed and turned. (XX 26-32)

Following in the footsteps of Homer, Milton uses a number of epic similes but Milton critics have drawn our attention to "the astonishing complexity and variety of their logical forms". Distinguishing between the Shakespearean and the Miltonic simile, B. Rajan states that in the former A is like B in certain respects which are made clear, whereas in the latter there is a slender resemblance between the objects compared. Cleopatra, for instance, compares death with "the lover's pinch which hurts and is desired". The one serious charge levelled against Milton's similes is that "comparisons sometimes seem curiously thin, with only slender grounds of resemblance between tenor and vehicle". Christopher Ricks contends that Milton often uses similes "with a clear sense of the fact that they don't fit exactly". James Whaler defends them on the ground that they serve the four functions of illustration, ornamentation, aggrandizement and prolepsis. To aggrandize someone means to make him or her seem richer or more powerful or more important than the person really is. To aggrandize something means to make it more impressive than it really is. A simile is said to be proleptic when it prefigures a future event.

The devils thrown out of heaven are compared with leaves and masses of seaweed scattered by powerful winds and with floating corpses and broken chariot wheels in the sea.

> he stood and called
>
> His legions, angel forms, who lay entranced
>
> Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks
>
> In Vallombrosa, where the Etrusian shades
>
> High overarched inbower; or scattered sedge
>
> Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion armed
>
> Hath vexed the Red Sea coast, whose waves overthrew
>
> Busiris and his Memphian chivalry,
>
> While with perfidious hatred they pursued
>
> The sojourners of Goshen, who beheld
>
> From the safe shore their floating carcasses
>
> And broken chariot wheels, so thick bestrewn
>
> Abject and lost lay these, covering the flood,
>
> Under amazement of their hideous charge. (I 300-313)

The comparison makes the fallen angels seem ridiculous. Satan lying chained on the burning lake is compared to a sea-beast.

> that sea-beast
>
> Leviathan, which God of all his works
>
> Created hugest that swim the ocean stream;
>
> Him haply slumbering on the Norway foam
>
> The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
>
> Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
>
> With fixed anchor in his scaly rind

Moors by his side under the lee, while night

Invests the sea, and wished morn delays (I 200-208)

The extended comparison implies that just as the mariner mistakes the huge beast for an island which may provide shelter for him, Eve is going to mistake Satan for a well-wisher.

It is not necessary that the additional details have to be proleptic or essential for a full understanding of the comparison. As T.S. Eliot observes, the reader is always delighted by "the happy introduction of so much extraneous matter." Satan's shield is compared to the moon viewed through the telescope by Galileo, a contemporary of Milton for whom the latter had great admiration.

his ponderous shield

Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,

Behind him cast; the broad circumference

Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb

Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views

At evening from the top of Fesole,

Or in Valderno, to decry new lands,

Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe. (I 284-91)

The fig tree whose leaves Adam and Eve chose to cover their waist is compared to the banyan tree found in Malabar. But there is a pleasing description of the Indian tree, though unwarranted by the comparison.

The fig tree, not that kind for fruit renowned,

But such as at this day to Indian known

In Malabar or in Deccan spreads her arms

Branching so broad and long, that in the ground

The bended twigs take root, a pillared shade

High overarched, and echoing walks between;

There oft the Indian herdsman shunning heat

Shelters in cool and tends his pasturing herds

At loopholes cut through thickest shade. (IX 1101-1110)

There may even be an element of disparity in some similes. Satan, looking up at the entrance to heaven is compared with Jacob.

The stairs were such as whereon Jacob saw

Angels ascending and descending, bands

Of guardians bright, when he from Esau fled

To Padan-Aram in the field of Luz,

Dreaming by night under the open sky,

Ad waking cried, 'This is the gate of heaven'. (III 510-15)

The obvious resemblance is that both Jacob and Satan saw steps leading to heaven's gate. But a deeper similarity of situation may be seen. Satan, like Jacob, is escaping from retribution and come to a critical turning-point. After his vision of the cosmos, his heart will be hardened. But Jacob is awed and repentant and takes a vow.

There are more such similes in which "the vehicle is partially suppressed or compressed into allusive form". There are three similes comparing the garden to Eden to mythological gardens:

Spot more delicious than those gardens feigned

Or of revived Adonis, or renowned

Alcinous, host of old Laertes' son,

Or that, not mystic, where the sapient king

Held dalliance with his fair Egyptian spouse. (IX 439-443)

We come across comparisons with double or triple vehicles. Satan, while tempting Eve, pretends to be full of "zeal and love" for man; he is compared to the ancient Greek and Roman orators.

> As when of old some orator renowned
> In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence
> Flourished, since mute, to some great cause addressed,
> Stood in himself collected, while each part,
> Motion, each act coon audience are the tongue,
> Sometimes in height began, as no delay
> Of preface brooking through his zeal of right.
> So standing, moving, or to height upgrown
> The tempter all impassioned thus began. (IX 670-78)

Milton critics have identified even a few comparisons that appear to have double tenors. After Satan succeeds in his evil enterprise, Sin and Death, leaving hell, follow Satan to the place of man.

> What they met
> Solid, or slimy, as in raging sea
> Tossed up and down, together crowded drove
> From each side shoaling towards the mouth of hell.
> As when two polar winds blowing adverse
> Upon the Cronian Sea, together drive
> Mountains of ice, that stop the imagined way
> Beyond Petsora eastward, to the rich
> Cathayan coast. (X 285-293)

Tolkappiyam, the incomparable grammatical treatise in Tamil, devotes a full-length chapter to the theory of comparison in addition to a chapter on poetics. Stating that explicit comparison belongs to worldly usage and implicit metaphor belongs to poetic usage, *Tolkappiyam* contends that all comparisons, whether explicit or implicit, involve terms of comparison, which may refer to shape, colour, action or result.

In the Puram poem 82, the comparison between King and Cobbler is based on action.

With the festival hour close at hand,
his woman in labour,
a sun setting behind pouring rains,
the needle in the cobbler's hand
is in a frenzy
stitching thongs for a cot:
Swifter, far swifter,
were the tackles for our land
wearing garlands of laburnum,
as he wrestled with the enemy
come all the way
to take the land. (Purananuru 82 Tr. A. K. Ramanujan)

The points of comparison are colour and shape in the following piece:

The bare root of the bean is pink
like the leg of a jungle hen,
and herds of deer attack its overripe pods. (Kuruntokai 68 Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)

They include touch and taste in many similes, as in the following:

Sweeter than milk

mixed with honey from our gardens

is the leftover water in his land. (Ainkurunuru 203 Tr. Ramanujan)

Action and result are present in the description of bees making honey from the kurinci flowers:

Bigger than earth, certainly,

higher than the sky,

more unfathomable than the waters

is this love for this man

of the mountain slopes

where bees make rich honey

from the flowers of the kurinci

that has such black stalks. (Kuruntokai 3 Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)

As a result of the age-old poetic tradition, Tamil has become a supple poetic medium and developed a number of comparison markers, even one-tenth of which are not to be found in any classical or modern language. Tolkappiyar's "Uvamaiyal" lists thirty-six comparison markers like 'anna', 'pola', 'oppa', 'puraiya' but the nurpa ends with the statement that there are more like these. The learned commentator Peraciriyar adds thirty more providing illustrative examples and adds that there are others besides these! It is evident that even during the time of the third sangam, there must have been at least eighty comparison markers profusely used in poems of that period. What is more astonishing is that the contexts in which each of them could be used are said to be varied. In a language like English which now has an incredible vocabulary of five lakh words, there are only a handful of comparison markers including 'like', 'as', 'seem', 'appear' and 'resemble'.

Tolkappiyam speaks of two more devices which also involve direct or indirect comparisons. It gives us cryptic accounts of iraicci and ullurai. These are not included in the catalogue of thirty-four properties of the poem mentioned in 'ceyyuliyal'. Three aphorisms on Iraicci are found in 'Poruliyal' and three more references to it in 'karpiyal' and 'peyariyal'.

> Iraicci is associated with uri (1175)
> Some meaning is born of iraicci too.
> that will be comprehensible to those well-versed
> in Akam convention. (1176)
> Incidents of love will be alluded to in iraicci
> in order to console the lovers pining in separation. (1177)

Iraicci denotes the flora and fauna of a landscape as used in scenes depicting the love of birds and animals in order to intensify the affections felt by human characters.

Iraicci abounds in sangam poems. The following piece by Otatanaiyar is from Ainkurunuru:

> The have come,
> Crossing even the hot forking desert paths,
> Where the sharp-toothed red dog of the jungle
> Waits by the cactus clump to kill a wild pig
> For his mate.
> No suffering pangs of labour,
> All the way
> They've come with you, O heart,
> The gentle ways
> Of the woman you love (Ainkurunuru 323 Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)

The hero tells his heart that the sterling character of the lady he loves has come all the way to the wilderness in which the red dog, in order to feed his pregnant mate, is on the lookout of a wild pig. Separated from his sweetheart, the lover describes his agony and the setting chosen is in accordance with the feeling expressed. The Palai region, a waste land parched by summer being the place, the cactus plant and animals like red dog and the wild pig found in such regions constitute the Karupporul. Here the Karupporul has no hidden meaning though it serves well to express the pangs of separation intensely felt by the protagonist.

The best kind of Iraicci is the one which induces, by its sensuous appeals, feelings of love and affection for one's mate and assumes a connotative dimension. One heroine of the mullai region complains that her husband hasn't returned at the appointed time.

> He hasn't come;
> Jasmines have also bloomed.
> Those holding sheep-hooks
> In their hands
> Having left the sheep,
> The shepherd lad
> Coming with milk and going with food,
> Has his head adorned
> All with jasmine buds. (Kuruntokai 221)

For Mullaitinai, the appropriate theme is separation/patience, the characteristic flower jasmine and the landscape forest/pasture. References to shepherds, sheep and cows are, of course, indispensable. The appeal in the poem is to the sense of smell; its arousal of passionate feelings in the pining heroine is obvious.

Tolkappiyar defines Ullurai, again cryptically, in three different places in "Porulatikaram". He points out the difference between Ullurai Uvamai and the other Uvamai (Enai Uvamai) in "Akaltinai Iyal":

> Ullurai Uvamai (implied simile) and Enai Uvamai (the other simile) are inescapable in the identifying the tinai. (992)
>
> Those who the grammar of poetry say that ullurai will have all the elements of the particular tinai except the deity. (993)
>
> The implied sense which has been designed to correspond exactly to ullurai uvamai is to be inferred from it. (994)
>
> The other simile is self-explanatory. (995)

In 'Uvamaiyal' also, Tolkappiyar speaks of the two types of similes.

> Since the correspondence in the ullurai uvamai is not made explicit but is used by the poet in accordance with the ancient tradition, its real implication can be inferred by those well-versed in the art of interpretation. (1244)
>
> Uvamappoli is of five kinds (1245)
>
> If the excellence of Ullurai Uvamai is sought, it is to be found in the terms of comparison that refer to action, result, shape, colour and birth. (1246)

"Poruliyal" has five more aphorisms that indicate the five types of ullurai:

> The mediators between lovers express their views explicitly. Their utterances will have no hidden meaning. (1187)
>
> Ullurai, a traditionally polite mode of expression is of five kinds: utanurai, ullurai uvamam (inset that serves as a simile), cuttu (metaphorical ullurai), nakai (inner sense hidden in sarcasm), cirappu (aggrandizement). (1188)
>
> Besides conveying a hidden meaning ullurai causes immense delight (1189)

> Ullurai may consist in propitious utterances, words of abuse or contemptuous references to the hero's valour. (1190)
>
> Anger, ignorance, jealousy and poverty may go along with 'cirappu'. (1191)

A.K. Ramanujan's inferences from these definitions are quite illuminating and insightful. Calling Ullurais insights, he attempts a description of their unique nature and function:

> a) An inset is a correlation of the landscapes and their contents (karu) to the human scene (uri)
>
> b) Unlike metaphor in ordinary language, an inset is a structural feature within the poem; it integrates the different elements of the poem and shapes its message.
>
> c) Unlike metaphor and simile, it often leaves out all the elements of comparison and all explicit markers of comparison (e.g. "like", "as"); such an omission increases manifold the power of the figure.
>
> d) The inset is essentially a "metonymy", an in-presentia relationship, where both terms are present, where the signifier and the signified belong to the same universe, share the same "landscape". Both are parts of one scene. Such a metonymy, rather than metaphor, is the favourite poetic figure of the classical Tamils.

Adapting a remark of Kenneth Burke's in another context, Ramanujan adds,

> There is implicit in the quality of a scene the quality of the action implicit in it . . . One could deduce the details of the action from the details of the biting. This kind of "metonymous metaphor", based on an entire formal scheme is a special feature of classical Tamil forms.

In Ulluraiuvamam, the native elements (karu) are carefully chosen to constitute a complex and elaborate simile. In an 'Ainkurunuru' poem, a lady complains against her lover's cruel ways without explicitly stating the wrong he has done to her:

In the fields of his land

fakes flower like real canes;

Shy of proclaiming his cruelty

I say he is good.

But my tender shoulders say,

by weakening,

he is no good. (Ainkurunuru 12)

It is in the ulluraiuvaman that the hero's heinous deed is hinted at. If in his fields, fake sugarcanes flower like real ones and both are treated alike, he, in his heart, has given equal place to his sweetheart and his concubines. Ullurai uvamais are marked by this kind of one-to-one correspondence. In kuruntokai we across more elaborately drawn similes of this nature:

I don't disagree with him,

I do agree with him;

In the hill of his land,

from the Venkai tree,

uprooted by our elephant

gypsies on their feet

pick its flowers

to adorn their heads;

I don't disagree with him

excepting in one matter. (Kuruntokai 208)

This one matter is to be inferred from the inset which serves as a simile. The native elements brought in here are those of Kurincittinai. The Venkai tree thrown down by the thoughtless elephant continues to blossom and its branches are easily reached by the girls. The lady whose grievance is voiced in the poem has had physical union with the hero who is now unaware of the harm done to her because he has been delaying the wedding. She has become an easy victim of public slander.

> In what is called cuttu ullurai, one thing is pointed at to yield a hidden sense:
>
> Hail thee! O Cloud,
> Would you scoop water from the sea,
> bend the dark vaulting welkin,
> thunder like a war drum,
> and glitter like the sword unsheathed
> in a fight against foes formidable
> by kings just and competent,
> Only to end in sound and fury?
> Or would you save by rain
> the millet field
> guarded by the gypsy girl
> moving gaily with her friends
> wearing venkai flowers densely lined with
> fire-like leaves
> scaring parrots by hound and stone? (Akananuru 188)

The heroine's girlfriend asks the cloud if it is going to thunder in vain or will save the millet crop by raining. The message is, in fact, meant for the hero who is expected to say whether the slander caused by his frequent visits will be allowed to continue or whether he

will put an end to it by marrying the lady. Though ostensibly an apostrophe to the cloud, it is addressed to the hero and hence falls within the category of Cuttu ullurai.

Discussing the dhvani theory of Sanskrit poetry, George Hart observes,

> One naturally wonders whether this technique could have been influenced in some way by the poetry of South India, in which it is found several centuries before its appearance in Sanskrit and Prakrit literatures.

On close examination iraicci may be found to be more akin to dhvani than ullurai, the one vital difference between the Tamil and Sanskrit concept being that dhvani may not depend on similes or metaphors. Iraicci is more broadly based than ullurai and for both, karupporul serves as the basic material. In ullurai, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the karupporul items and what they stand for in the implied meaning of the poem whereas iraicci does not demand this kind of correspondence. Iraicci is confined to akam poetry and in Anandavardhana's view the erotic sentiment is intrinsic to dhvani. Most of the examples that he gives to illustrate the different types of dhvani are poems that treat love and lover's moods and emotions. When he says that dhvani may be understood and appreciated only by mature readers, when he speaks of love-in-union and love-in-separation and when he discusses in detail the question of decorum and propriety in erotic poetry, one cannot help concluding that Amandavardhana must have been familiar with and inspired by the Tamil concepts of iraicci and ullurai.

The Sangam writings are a vast storehouse of diverse similes - simple similes common to Tamil poetic tradition, recurring similes that drive home a particular point, recurring similes that are associated with particular characters, negative similes that stress unlikeness rather than likeness, mythological similes, similes from real life situations, similes in which concrete objects are compared to abstract notions, similes using theological and philosophical concepts, similes that stop at A is like B, similes that develop A or B beyond

the point of comparison, similes that indicate A is like B in one respect, and similes that imply A is like B in some or all respects. Even the Homeric long-drawn similes and the Miltonic complex similes serving the functions of aggrandizement and prolepsis are not wanting, as evidenced in several Sangam poems.

In a Narrinai poem, the hero uses a long-drawn comparison to describe his agonised heart when his proposal is rejected by the heroine.

> My heart, you have suffered a lot, going forth to her and coming back to me endlessly, very much like the tireless wings of the mother swan with soft, shining feathers and red legs which strives hard to pick food in the lowlands by the clear-watered sea and takes it to feed its growing fledgelings fondly reared by the celestial damsels living at the lofty, golden peak of the Himalayas. Be assured that a day will come when my beloved would be here by my side one day like the resplendent planet that appears in the eastern sky. (Narrinai 356)

The hero's heart is compared to the swan's wings. In a poem of nine lines, the poet assigns six to a description of the swan!

It is in Patirruppattu, which presents history as poetry, that we come across many similes, more profound and sophisticated than the Homeric and Miltonic ones.

There are, of course, simple similes, which are primarily concerned with stressing the likeness in a few words.

> you are the husband of a bright-bangled lady who resembles the fertile flourishing Chola country with the Kaviri river and the cool fields. (Patirruppattu 90)

> May each day of your life last like a month!
>
> May each month last like a year!

May each year last like an aeon!

May each aeon last like the countless vellam. (Patirruppattu 90)

But we do come across similes that challenge comparison with those of Homer and Milton. In the 59th poem, a king's bounteous deeds are compared with the dispelling of darkness by the sun. What is the nature of that sun?

In the month Maci, when day is short

and night long, animals, unable to bear

the cold of the falling snow, feel miserable.

The wandering bard finds it hard to

cross the desert. Alleviating the suffering of

all these, and ending the harmful night,

the sun, spreading its numerous rays

makes its appearance in the east.

In the 66th poem, the description of the garlands worn by a king's warriors doesn't consist in a simple simile but deviates into a fairly long account of the fragrant flowers that sweeten the garlands.

> The lances lifted by the soldiers above their shields appeared like the rain-bearing clouds floating on the peaks of a mountain. The swords swung by them looked like the swaying garlands on their chests. Every war was, to those soldiers, a festival to be grandly celebrated. White palm flowers and vakai flowers meant for the worship of the goddess of victory were joined together in those garlands. The bees that swarm the mullai bushes which resemble those garlands fly away to the clusters of blossoms on the branches of the pitava trees.

The simile employed in the 67the poem becomes a verbal painting by itself.

> The wounds on the chests of the Chera King's soldier's hide the beauty of the Sandal paste-smeared upper parts, which resemble the wooden boards on which the meat sellers cut the big-eyed, wide horned bulls and other animals of bet necks with their steel knives.

There are two similes which easily attract our attention in the 71st poem, one of them being a long-tailed beauty.

> The ladies that do the harvesting in the cropful fields cut the paddy rice together with the ampal and neytal blossoms. Big-bodied buffaloes are yoked together to tread on sheaths of paddy, the vessels used to measure the paddy heaps, look like bee hives hanging from branched trees
>
> The foes suffered like the children who disturbed the bees and were smitten by them... The small kings whom you fought, feared. hearing of you, send elephants and precious jewels to you. Accepting those girls, you left the place, just as the goddess, worshipped reverentially, leaves after receiving the offerings. (33)

Besides a comparison of elephants with Cows, there is a word-picture of the grazing of the cows.

> Reluctant to be tied to pillars, elephants destroyed the goods of their mahorets, they attack the shadows of the kites that fly above. Those tuskers are as countless as the cow's allowed to graze in the Kongu land by the shepherds.

Blessing the king with a life as lasting as the Ayirai hill, a poet speaks at length of the goddess who resides on top of the hill.

> Fighting the enemy-kings who didn't obey you, you war ruined their drums. A cot the tusks torn from their bodies. May your fame last as long as the Ayirai

> hill! The terrible goddess seated there won't accept any offering other than the bloodshed. by those who have undertaken the tumpai war. (Patinnuppattu 79)

In the 84th poem, the poet, delighted by the war-camp of the victorious Chera King, sings that the shout from the soldiers is as pleasing as the birds.

> overjoyed by the noise made by your victorious soldiers. The feeling that it produces is as heart-warming as the sound made by the numerous birds which are delighted by the clouds which, or after many rainless days, float above the peaks of a hill and do their duty of rains.

The 86th poem praises a Chera King for being extremely merciful and benevolent. He is reported to be much more bounteous than the cool waters of the vani river. This inspires the poet to sing the glory of the river.

> The king is more merciful and graceful and warm hearted and sweeter than the river which uproots and carries away Sandal trees. It's depth can't be measured by bamboos. If the gold ear-rings worn by the ladies swimming in the river fall off their ears, they can be seen through the clear waters of the river.

In the 87th poem, a female dancer clan, wonders at the strength and generosity of an exquisite simile, an object that would have been seen daily by all.

> Lance-wielding soldiers are stronger than sugar-cane branches in helping the poverty stricken. With white foamy waves waters, the river is flooded and flows carrying the sandal trees. Just as the sugar-cane boat can take such a river, the king is certain to give jewels to the bands who approach him singing their songs.

These examples that are adept at employing the similes for their unique success are not far to see. As George L. Hart observes,

> The Tamil poetry was composed by sophisticated poets who had written poems for much of their lives and who used a group of conventions that had been refined and made more sophisticated for many years. They often wrote forms of thirty on forty lines in which many different figures were used and allowed to interact to produce suggestive effects whose people and their permutations are virtually unlimited.

No other language, Classical or modern, can be justly proud of such an ancient and unique poetic tradition.

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