Chapter 4

Loving Conqueror: Surveillance and Psychologization around First Night

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Chapter IV

Loving Conqueror: Surveillance and Psychologization around First Night

1. Marriage, Modernity and the Question of Love

Along with the emergence of modern monogamous conjugality surfaced the idea of romantic love in the late nineteenth century Kerala. Matrilineal joint household gave way to patrifocal small families. Puthenkalam (1977) traces out the trajectories of these changes and observes that by the 1960s the idea of conjugality was stabilized in Kerala. Arunima (1997) analyses two Malayalam novels to show how romantic love created the rationale for the conjugal couple that anchored a number of changes in family structure and property relations. She observes that the idea of the conjugal couple bonded with romantic love is key in the formation of the modern aesthetics. The marriage is presented as capable of erasing the “barbaric promiscuity of matrilineal past” and becomes a civilizing project (Arunima, 1997, p. 275). In the process love and marriage become synonyms, making marriage the natural and the only possible culmination of love. She also observes how endogamous love became spiritual, mutual and monogamous and not carnal. Analysis of other novels such as Parangodiparinayam, Sukumari, and Aphanade Makal also presents romantic love as an important point of negotiation in the project of fashioning the self in a gendered way (Antony, 2013). Ritty Lukose has also observed that “The reworking of community understood either as the overcoming of caste and religious differences in the name of secular modernity or social reform and the
modernization of community norm became an important aspect of romantic love.” (Lukose, 2009, p. 101)

This love was imagined as an \textit{internal force} providing stability to monogamous conjugality (Devika, 2007, p. 68). Devika treats this as an important moment of individuation as this love was “seeking not the body but the internality of the other”. (ibid, p. 69) Here love appears as a regulating force which reserves bodily desires for the realization of them in conjugal relation. She attributes the prominence given to \textit{Anthakkarana Vivaham} (Marriage of inner instruments) in Malayalam novels of the nineteenth century to this notion of love which was circulating along with ideals of stable monogamous conjugality. These novels presented \textit{Anthakaran Vivaaham} as an ideal form of man woman union where love is privileged over every kinship laws and other social indices of match making. This should be understood in relation to the emergence of the new individual who is individuated sufficiently to experience and express love. This love was seen as an inner attribute of the mind and other qualities emanating from the mind. This love was also placed against lust and was more about the mind than about the body (ibid, p. 69). The idea of “love marriage” which was put into circulation almost at the same time is homologous to \textit{Anthakkarana Vivaham}. The analysis of the nineteenth century novels also showed the figure of the female lover as an agential subject who makes choices about her marriage.

Though it did not directly address the conjugal union, the modern Malayalam poetry also used the notion of love as an internal force to understand the man-woman couple. The notion of \textit{anthakkarananam} which is deployed in renowned poet Kumaran Asan’s work
also denotes personal interiority (Kumar, 1997, p. 267). The word *anthakkaranam* is used in a variety of senses by Asan; from the flux of thoughts and the turbulence of emotion to the locus of inner reflection. The word *anthakkaranam* clearly acquires a sense of individualization here. Individuation of *anthakkaranam* allows it to become the seat of self reflection and self possession. In his analysis of Asan’s work Uday Kumar marks the shift in the ways pleasure and eros were conceived. He talks about the modern conception of subjective interiority where “desire shifts its locus from the body to the inner sense, thus internalize the erotic internalize the erotic.” (1997, p.270) He also notices that in Asan the understanding of the inner sense is transformed and it becomes individualized. (Ibid, p.270)

By the beginning of the twentieth century an equally powerful institution called “arranged marriage” emerged and placed itself against the *love marriage*¹. Arranged marriage which was gaining momentum in the early twentieth century was an institution where everything else except love is privileged and this form of marriage is placed diametrically opposite to love marriage.² There were registered matrimonial agencies working from 1940’s and the concerns of match-making revolved around the family

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¹The earlier alliances were dictated by matrilineal norms of kinship, and with the transformation of matriliny the close kin alliances gave way to other familial instruments which ‘arranged’ marriages outside the matrilineal kins. The close kin alliances were repudiated for being primitive. The search for marital spouse used more public measures such as services of matrimonial agencies and advertisements on magazines and newspapers. This new institution of arranged marriage does not displace the kinship laws; on the contrary, it more overtly placed control over sexuality under the male head of the household.

² Whether they are actually two different notions of marriage is not the question addressed here. Osella(Osella, 2012) stresses the need to look at the two as two representational fictions that are placed against each other.
status, wealth, permanent job and character. In contemporary Keralam arranged marriage is one of the major institutions. There is an expanding marriage market in Keralam now and the practice of dowry is getting institutionalized (Kodoth, 2008). And it consciously reproduces caste and class matrices. The logic of private property cemented the ideals of stable conjugalility and lifelong monogamy together and elevated arranged marriage as a major institution. Anthakkarana marriage presented monogamous marriage in a community which lacked ideas of lifelong monogamy. In this marriage love was the force that contributed to maintaining long-lasting couplehood. In arranged marriage love was supposed to bloom only after marriage and marriage was presented as a generative force capable of giving birth to the loving couple. This love is imagined to be strengthened with each passing day and with each interaction between the couple. So arranged marriage even when placed aggressively against romantic love, is not capable of writing an obituary of love. It is more a case of romantic love is dead, long live romantic love!

I would like to argue that the moment of First Night undercuts both these ideas of marriages revealing their inherent fragilities while addressing the questions of love and sexual relation. It reveals an unfinished moment of modernity where all of the founding assumptions around individuation and intimacy are caught in the claustrophobic space of the bedroom. The love proposed by the reformist ethos was devoid of carnal pleasure and

3 The periodicals had started carrying advertisements of matrimonial agencies from the beginning of 1970’s. Most of the agencies were established around 1940’s and 1950’s. These agencies which replaced the close kin networks of matchmaking had faced an initial resistance and slowly received acceptance among the emerging middle class. The discussions in the women’s magazines in the seventies on the appropriateness of depending on matrimonial agencies for match-making reveal this tension.
bodily exchanges and leaves no space for an exchange which First Night represents. And whenever presented, carnal exchanges were cited as potential sites of danger as Uday Kumar (Kumar, 1997) shows in his analysis of Kumaran Asan’s poems. Arranged marriage by definition lacks the notion of love as structuring principle. Love is something which is projected upon the conjugal unit with retrospective effect. The culturally available mode for negotiation of this moment of first copulation was that of ritualization. There were some highly codified ways of going about this moment and this was not the duty of the husband. To accentuate the crisis, all such rituals and ceremonies were absent in the modern marriage. It can be said that the making of the modern marriage resulted in the production of the bedroom as a modern secular space.

The following account articulates these different negotiations where the traces of the old order and the coming of the new order and the impending tensions animate the First
Night scene. The account is taken from a modernist\(^4\) Malayalam novel – *Mayyazhippuzhayude Theerangalail (On the Banks of river Mayyazhi)* (Mukundan, 1974) which is set in a French Colony named Mayyazhi (Mahe) in the mid seventies. The heroin Girija is individuated sufficiently and has entered into a romantic relationship with a person. In her mind she has almost married. Confronting the individualized Girija with her love affair, the novel takes another route, different from nineteenth century novels which presented a steadfast heroin and her unswerving dedication to love. In the novel Girija is forced into an arranged marriage. And this is the first modern marriage in the family. There is no explicit reference to the transformations in the arrangements of sexual relations in the text; but it provides a detailed description of their wedding night and thus reveals the significance of First Night in imagining lifelong monogamy. The text does not recapitulate the wedding scene rather draws its dramatic energy from the wedding night. As mentioned earlier, by the time this novel was written the bedroom was a modern

\(^4\)It is useful to distinguish modernist literature from modern literature in Malayalam. In the academic scholarship around Kerala modernity, novels and poems that appeared in the early nineteenth century is referred to as modern literature. Modernist literature is the corpus of writing which is labelled *Adhunika Sahithyam* in Malayalam and which appeared in the mid twentieth century. Modernism was an influential movement which touched art, literature and cinema in the region. Believed to be influenced by translations of Western modernist literature and French new wave cinema this movement stood for high art and elite literature and pitted itself against commercial cinema and *painkili sahithyam* (a regional genre of pulp fiction). The modernist novels, poetry and short stories were hugely popular and had garnered a strong readership base. It has connection to the print culture of the region, a short discussion of which follows in the next section of the chapter. M.Mukundan is one of the most valued modernist novelist and *On the Banks of River Mayyazhi* is an emblematic modernist novel which received critical acclaim and popularity alike. The novel is still very popular with reprints coming out almost every other year. See PalakeelThomas (1996) for a detailed discussion on modernist Malayalam literature.
secular space devoid of ritualization and ceremonies to face or negotiate through first copulation. Here the man is not only negotiating with the individual female subject, but rather allows the articulation of a series of changes related to the sexual order and his position in it. The three distinct moments of sexual initiation that existed in matriliny converge into a single moment and that is the wedding night. It shows a man and woman caught inside within exchange that creates the patrifocal small family and a monogamous conjugal couple.

Achu was tired by the time the last guest left. His hands were shivering while locking the front door of the house. Finally that day had come – the day when Achu realizes Purushartha.\(^5\) While walking to the bedroom his legs too were shivering. He had not seen Girija after coming to his place. He was busy with the guests. But her face was constantly in his mind. He was eager to smell Girija’s tear-soaked face powder. He wanted to wipe out her tears. It was dark inside. He stood hesitating at the threshold for a moment. He waited without entering the room. He knows she is angry with him. He had been watching her tears. But he had many resolutions- *I will wipe out your tears with my love. I will burn away your past with my love. I will conquer you with love*…He waited for her reply. Moments passed. He entered the room. He did not smell jasmine flowers and powder; instead it smelled of varnish. He lighted the matchbox. The cot which carpenter Raman made was vacant …

(Mukundan, 1974, p. 190)

\(^5\)Purushartha represents the battery of four principles guiding ethical conduct namely – *Dharma, Artha, Kama*, and *Moksha*. This can be considered as a culturally available prescription around the ‘conduct of conduct’. The normative status of this principle is a contentious point.
The narrative places the night and the man at the threshold of a potential relationship which is the culmination of long waiting. The waiting and the fantasies around sexual union place the narrative literally at the doorsteps of an impending amorous encounter. The narrative shows the anxieties involved in imagining a monogamous conjugal unit at the centre where a man is supposed to conquer his partner with love. The woman’s past and memories of a previous relationship appear threatening to the man and is treated as something to be destroyed to ensure her devotion to the conjugal unit. Love becomes the instrument which is employed here with many purposes; conquering being the most important of them. Continuing with the same fictional construction can help to understand the nature of this love which is imagined as a conquering force throughout the narrative:

He found her standing, outside the house, in the backyard, near the tree, under moonlight. His rock solid hands encircled and lifted her as easy as a baby. The man who took the virginity of many girls in Mayyazhi, stormed to the bedroom with Girija in his arms. The door slammed. The night bulbul was Girija’s sobbing was audible beyond the closed doors. But when the Church bells of Mother Mayyazhi rang the next morning, one could hear her laughter along with the tinkling of her bangles. There were no marks of tears when she came out the next morning with a broken hymen. Her cheeks were blushed and eyes were drooping. The most delicate sound or movement distracted her. She was ecstatic. The man named Achu had taken away all her sorrows. Girija’s eyes were not teary after that. (Ibid, p. 191)
If this representation reveals the anxieties involved in imagining a successful or culturally desirable conjugal unit, the narrative resolution offered to this anxiety further reveals the cultural logic of First Night. A duty which was initially performed by a powerful figure - the gods, the king, the Brahmin or even the white man - is now directly transferred to the ‘ordinary’ man or the modern husband. Or this night makes a husband modern by presenting him as someone possessing certain rights over the virgin body. It is by recognizing and exercising those rights over the virgin body that the modern husband is born. The successful resolution of First Night depends on whether he is able to perform the duty of defloration assigned by the modern nation. This night is made possible with the modern nation’s ability to confer legal and juridical authority to the man to deflower a woman but it is not sufficient to provide him with the sensual competence. Here the narrative enforcement of the sexual and sensual pleasure of the virgin retrospectively bestows him with the legitimacy. The narrative starts with the resisting female figure who refuses to enter the bedroom and whose sobbing could be heard outside the closed doors of the bedroom. But it concludes with the ecstatic figure of the conquered female. What Achu felt after the night is absent in the text. It is through a sensual description of the conquered female that Achu’s success as a husband is established. Here First Night reconstitutes the masculine around deflowering the virgin.

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6 This also shows how First Night becomes an important moment to a project that tries to think through the history of the sexual and the intimate and its place in the delineation of the modern subject.

7 The invocation of modern nation in this context demands further explanation as it suggests the presence of law in an intimate domain. It is possible to argue that this bedroom was coterminous with nation where state legality and community defined this ‘private’ space within nation. The thesis addresses this question in the concluding discussion around the constitution of the intimate and for structural purposes, the feeling of cognitive dissonance is kept as it is.
By taking away a woman’s virginity the man conquers her and it is this act which gets referred to as ‘love’ in the text. Here defloration acts as the key structuring principle of love and ensures the woman’s subjection to the newly formed family. This text even when it employs love as a major binding force between the heterosexual couples reveals the nature of this love to be physical. Here love does not shift its locus to the internal but rather employs the broken hymen as a crucial signifier of the love. This broken hymen and the constitutive role it plays in making and managing the conjugal unit is clearly an unresolved issue in the modern reformist discourse around sexuality which projects a sufficiently individuated heterosexual couple and their satisfactorily interiorized love. It also gives a glimpse of the nature of love which comes in arranged marriage as the binding force. The instrument of love, at least in the discourse around First Night, is not mind or qualities that stem from the mind. To the contrary it is the physical act which later gets referred to as love. First Night thus becomes the “surface of emergence” for mind - body dualism to appear for observation and foregrounds the unfinished business of modernity. The next section tries to understand the presence of psychological surveillance around First Night and in light of the present discussion tries to think through the dynamics of the domain of the intimate that legitimizes the psychological gaze.

2. The Surveillance around First Night

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8 Foucault describes ‘Surface of Emergence’ in Archeology of Knowledge (1972) as the discursive field in which an object arises first for observation, description and analysis. He terms this ‘first surfaces of emergence’ (ibid, p. 41) and later modifies it to ‘planes of emergence’ (ibid, p. 42).
Even after the reformist abolition of *talikettukalyanam* and other practices that ritualized first copulation, some ideas of imparting knowledge/awareness floated in the culture. Among all communities and religious groups, except Christians, it was more or less an informal family affair where the elder members, usually the uncle or the aunt would be assigned with the duty of instructing the betrothed man and woman. Initially pre-marital counseling was restricted to the Christian cross sections of the population. And it was more a theological initiation into the Christian idea of family. But the last twenty years have witnessed many changes in the structure of *pre-marital* courses. Now the idea of instruction is more regimented even among non-Christian groups where the familial instruments are replaced with community driven pre-marital coaching classes. The pre-marital counseling services they offer are supposed to equip the bride and bridegroom to face the challenges of being in a relationship. The previously matrilineal communities are very keen to adhere to and maintain the institution of modern marriage. Nair, Ezhava and Muslim groups have recently set up community centers for *pre-marital* counseling. The Ezhava community follow the Christian practice where attending the *pre-marital* counseling and receiving the certificate of successful completion of the counseling is mandatory for couples to get married through the SNDP. The Nair Service Society is also planning to make it compulsory. (Greeshma, 2013). The Muslim community is also beginning to follow this trend and the Kerala Muslim Jamaath Youth Council has started

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9 SNDP has set up a website (www.sndpmarry.com) to encourage endogamous union among the caste group. The website states that the successful completion of the *pre-marital* counseling is mandatory for “marrying as per Hindu laws”. When contacted the local SNDP union in Ernakulam district stated that they have been providing pre-marital counseling from 2002 onwards and allow only those who have attendance certificate of *pre-marital* counseling to marry through SNDP.
taking the initiative to organize pre-marital counseling among Muslim community members. (“Pre-marital Counseling for Muslim Youth” 2009) The community leaders make a plea for the need of such guidance pointing to the increased divorce rates among young couples. The pre-marital counseling is represented as the internal grooming for the bride and bride groom. Pre-marital counseling is hailed as a panacea for the marital discords that pepper the life style and relationship columns of news papers. The Kerala State Women’s Commission recently started providing pre-marital counseling and the move was welcomed by different sections of the society (“Pre-marital counseling move hailed”, 2013). In a more recent move, the Commission had also recommended to the government to make pre-marital counseling mandatory for everyone if they want to get a marriage certificate (Chandrakanth, 2014). The report presents pre-marital counseling as an effective intervention against the increasing divorce rates and domestic violence cases and dowry disputes.

Along with the proliferation of pre-marital counseling, the service itself is going through a range of changes in form and content. There is an increased professionalization of the pre-marital counseling discourse. Now the pre-marital coaching sessions are conducted by experts ranging from medical doctors to psychologists. There is a clear division of therapeutic authority from theological authority and it contributes more to the professionalization of psychology where the confessional root of psychology is invisibilized. Even in the pre-marital counseling courses offered by Christian Dioceses prominence is given to psychologists and other ‘experts’ in the field such as family counsellors. These courses boast the application of psychological techniques such as ‘behavioural analysis’ and ‘personality assessment’ as part of the courses. This added
professional status is in turn projected to the domain under surveillance and becomes the modern and secular solution to a problem which was hitherto dealt with using highly ritualized practices or quasi-religious dictums and norms. It is primarily a Christian idea of family that these psychological discourses present as the norm but with the rhetoric of professional psychology this religious or theological ideas at work escape scrutiny and becomes a secular solution in the process. This is a circular discourse where psychology and theology do a role play where one presupposes the idioms of the other or changes the position of speech.\textsuperscript{10} A discussion on the ‘psy-complex’ in Keralam is essential to understand the current cultural obsession with \textit{pre-marital} counseling and it also helps to answer why the surveillance over the private and intimate takes the form of marital and family therapy and psychological counseling.

3. The Psy-Complex and Keralam

The rationalizing discourse of modern psychology figures in contemporary Keralam as a prominent technology that has been crucial in grafting modern relations. Psychology here does not operate as a repressing force or coercive apparatus. Rather psychology provides “a new rationale of government and entails an attention to human individuality” (Rose, 1998, p. 114). Here psychology is treated not only as a system of knowledge, it is treated

\textsuperscript{10} The television show ‘Sex and You’ telecasted in the popular Christian devotional channel Athmeeya Yaathra (Spiritual Journey) is an example of this shift. Despite being a religious channel with overtly religious content such as Bible classes, Choir songs and televised versions of Holy Mass, this particular show employs a psychologist and not a priest as the subject expert. The psychologist re-phrases the concerns around how to conduct one’s sex life to a psychological language and provides ‘scientific’ answers to these questions. Unpacking the rhetoric of scientificity takes it back to the Christian idea of family.
rather as a discursive constellation where the institutionalized knowledge forms interact with many other dominant categories and networks to create a consensus over the language to describe self. This can be termed as psy-complex where psy-complex becomes the network of theories and practices that include academic, professional and popular psychology (Parker 1994). It covers the different ways in which people in modern culture are categorized, observed and regulated by psychology, as well as the ways in which they live out psychological models in their own talk and experience.

Nikolas Rose notes the shift in the psychological language in the present century. In the contemporary times “psychologists elaborate complex emotional interpersonal and organizational techniques by which the practices of everyday life can be organized according to the ethic of autonomous selfhood.” (Rose, 1998, p.17). The result of this psychological language is the invention of a totally interiorized self that understands and relates to itself in the terms dictated by psychology. This can go up to the extent that “not wanting to talk about our problems in a personal psychological language means to stop being normal in a human way.” (Madesen and Brinkmann, 2011, p.183). The very condition of being human is permeated with this psychological parlance. This relation instituted with the self is a psychologized one. Here psy-complex provides particular signifiers and discursive schemes for looking upon oneself and upon the world. Psychologization makes the socio-economic and political aspects invisible. But psychologization becomes successful by ‘making itself invisible’. It is “the process of the modern subject adopting, not only the terminology of the psy-sciences, but, also this observatory position behind the screen; the point from where one’s gaze looks upon reality, including his/her reality as subject.”(De Kesel, 2011, p. 129)
The pervasiveness of psy-complex in Keralam demands careful attention. Keralam has around 4% of India’s population and about one third of institutions dealing with mental illness and related disorders (Franke & Chasin, 1994). Eight health-related magazines are published regularly with a readership going above tens of thousands and all of them carry ‘advice columns’ and articles related to psychology. There are television shows exclusively dedicated to psychological issues. More than that, there are popular television shows which include psychologists as panellists and as experts suggesting the next level of seepage of psychological language, and the acceptance and legitimacy it enjoys in culture. A psychological culture that understands and relates to life in a therapeutic way exists in Keralam. Psychological culture was restricted to urban pockets during the arrival of psychoanalysis or psychiatry in India in the colonial times (Hartnack, 2001). But in contemporary Keralam psychological language pervades the everyday and provides a common language to present to and relate to problems and experiences of oneself and of other people. Psychological language pervades the commonsense and graft the way people relate to work place, family and to themselves. This has connection to the pervasiveness of the print culture and visual media culture in Keralam.

The print culture of Keralam from the nineteenth century onwards is well-documented and these analyses focused on how print contributed to the making of the Malayali public sphere (Menon, 1994; Jeffrey, 2003). Arunima observes how print culture enabled “co-existing and intersecting communities: based on language, kinship, faith or caste origin.” (Arunima, 2006, p.74). Radhakrishnan (2006) and Maruthur (2010) contend that print culture is privileged in Keralam and it intercuts the sexuality debates. Maruthur argues that print culture “provides an important medium to track the specificities of the sexuality...
discourses in Kerala and its linkages to regional imagination” (ibid, p. 41). Drawing from these analyses I wish to argue that print culture becomes a major medium of the proliferation of psy-discourse. What can be termed ‘psychological writing’ was slowly spreading in Keralam from the 1930’s. Kesari Balakrishna Pillai (1889-1960) was one of the pioneering figures who attempted to translate psychological concepts in Malayalam. He was the editor of Kesari magazine and through the magazine he tried to translate and introduce European thought and literature. Dilip Menon calls him ‘a local cosmopolitan’ who has contributed significantly as a ‘translator of ideas’ from the West. (Menon, 2007) He has written in several magazines on psychological issues and the need to address issues psychologically in that time. For instance, Mahila magazine carried Kesari’s translation of a German psychologist’s article under the heading Vivaaham oru manashaasthra prashnam enna nilayil (‘Marriage as a psychological issue’) (Kesari, 1930, p. 149-153). The article presented a modern categorization and classification system of marriage based on the mental attributes of the people united through marriage. This article shows a complete rupture from the existing classificatory mechanisms and introduces a Western and modern classification. The article tries to compare the notions of trial marriage, companionate marriage and marriage involving more than two people. It privileges monogamy over bigamy and polygamy and says, “Monogamy is based not on law but on a psychological need. …Today we cannot give up the idea of eternal love towards a person.”(Ibid, p. 151) The article tries to connect it with the psychology of emotion. The emotions are transient but the institution of marriage is permanent. Faced with this dilemma the article adds, “Though love is an emotion [thus transient] the institution of marriage insists that it should be eternal. Every institution that ignores the
real nature of emotions and accepts that emotions are unwavering is actually providing a higher rank to emotions. …This has gifted human beings with an idea which is beyond them and elevates them”. Transience of emotions and permanence of love an idea that was hitherto addressed in the domain of literature now enters the rational discourse through the aid of modern Western Psychology. Conjugality is represented as the quintessential domain where the mushy field of human emotions come to a face-to-face encounter with the rational principles that drive family as an institution. The deployment of psychology was treated as a better tool to deal with the reason emotion conflicts inherent in conjugality. This move was considered as providing longevity to the conjugal union. This article further reveals the kind of psychological definition of conjugality which was being circulated in the beginning of the twentieth century. There is an overlap between the language of psychology and the language of modern conjugality as if one anticipates the other. Both conjugality and psychology were deployed together in twentieth century Keralam and contributed to the project of Modernity.

It took more than thirty years from the publication of this article for the first Malayalam magazine dedicated to psychology to appear. The magazine was named *Psycho* and it enjoyed a high reputation and was read adjacent to other works of high literature and art.\(^{11}\) The magazine presented the first psychological advice columns in

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\(^{11}\) The magazine was released by M. T. Vasudevan Nair, one of the major literary figures of Kerala and it competed with *Mathrubhoomi Weekly* for its readership. The cover illustration of the magazine used abstract images. This was done by prominent artists and it resonated with the modern art movement in Keralam. The packaging of the magazine aligned it with the high art-high literature circles. And as mentioned in the discussion on print culture this high literature itself was a popular movement in Keralam.
Keralam and the editor of the magazine, Chelavoor Venu, in a personal interview recounted that this column was the most exciting and thriving section of the magazine.

The letters were not about madness (bhraanth) per se. It was more about the disharmony in relationships, marital discords, relationship problems and how the relationship problem between a husband and wife affects the whole family, so on and so forth. We received hundreds of letter in a week. And we received so many letters which spoke about illegitimate relations; relations that fell outside the prescribed ones, incestual ones, and illegitimate ones. We seldom published them because we did not want to give the impression that such relations are so common. So we give prominence to marital problems and family problems.

This editorial policy reveals how the ideology of monogamous conjugality was informing psychology and how psychology in turn responded to it by spreading and strengthening the rationale of monogamous conjugality.

There were at least six psychological magazines in circulation during the beginning of the 1970s in Keralam and they enjoyed and even competed with the mainstream magazines for readership. Now only two of them are published regularly and they do not enjoy the popularity they once enjoyed. The chapter argues that rather than waning, this shows the proliferation of psy as something that which does not require a special location to inhabit. In contemporary Keralam, psychological language is a diffused one which cannot be contained into specialized locations of expertise. It is the language of expertise which could creep into any moment of life lending it new meaning and prescribing new ways of relating to it. The advice columns and popular psychological writing forms an essential part of almost all other popular magazines such as women’s magazines, health
magazines, lifestyle magazines etc. This clearly shows the proliferation and density of psychological language within contemporary Keralam. There are at least six popular woman magazines and two of them have an official readership that crosses one million - Vanitha and Grihalakshmi. These magazines regularly carry articles that provide a ‘psychological angle’ of the problems or quote a psychologist as an expert to comment on social issues. Another major corpus of writing is the anthologies of psychologists where they recount their case histories and explain the symptoms and treatments of common psychological problems or disorders. These books belong to the self-help genre where the idea is that mastering the techniques described in the book will make you an expert on handling your own problems.

The visual medium is also equally powerful in contemporary Keralam and it is estimated that the per capita media consumption of Keralam is as high as that of developed countries (Koshy, 2012; Franke, 2003). The first television show which presented a psychologist appeared in 1998 in the first Malayalam private television channel Asianet. The show was named Rathisukhasaare (The Essence of Erotic Pleasure) and it was a televised version of the advice column in print media. Its main focus was on addressing the problems in conjugal relationships with a specific focus on sexual relation. Interestingly, as in the case of print, in visual media also psychological language is first deployed along with conjugality. During the time of the field work of this thesis, all major television channels had at least one program where the psychologist appears as part of a panel of judges or as an expert who is placed even above the judging panel. The shows that need special mention are the reality shows where conjugality and psychology come to a face-to-face encounter. The reality show by Mazhavil Manorama channel
Veruthe Alla Bharya (Wife is not worthless) was one of the top five shows in the TRP rating throughout its telecast. The show had many psychologists in the panel and a psychologist was invited other than the panellists in some episodes to do an in-depth analysis of the contestants. The show was referred to in print media as a brand new one employing “personality assessment through exercises in behavioural analysis”. (Athira, “Matters of the Mind” *The Hindu*, April 20, 2012) The rival channel Asianet also had a similar reality show anchored around conjugality namely Bharathakkannaarude Sradhaykku (Attention, Husbands) which also featured a psychologist in some of the episodes. The reality-show Kathayallithu Jeevitham (Not story but Life) telecasted by Amritha Television had an actress who appears as a psychologist while anchoring the show and the expert panel had a psychologist and a judge. This discussion only provides some large brush strokes to suggest how the language of psy-sciences proliferates and grafts the relation one has with oneself.\(^{12}\) This discussion is presented with the assumption that it helps to situate the analysis on the psychological discourse and First Night.

### 4. Documenting the Diagnostic Gaze Around First Night

This discussion tries to document the diagnostic gaze deployed around First Night in popular culture. It engages with self help books as a location of pop psychology\(^ {13}\). This

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\(^{12}\) The chapter does not try to historicize the psychological culture in Keralam and it does not make a claim over the past in a traditional historical way.

\(^{13}\) Pop psychology as used here suggests a particular psychological language which finds its space in the circuits of media production and which adopts a scientific tone while trying to explain the concepts and techne of psychology in an accessible way so that the layman could incorporate the psychological insights into their life. In this writing pop psychology is not treated as simplistic, superficial or pseudoscientific as
documentation tries to analyze how the psychological gaze constitutes First Night as a domain that needs corrective coaching and how the correction offered by the discourse psychologizes the intimate. By providing regulatory systems to codify and calculate human functioning, psychology interiorizes surveillance. The discussion show how the shift in the community’s imagination of virginal deflowering gets translated into an individual subject’s ‘conduct issues’ which demands ‘behaviour modification therapies’.

4.1. ‘First Night Talk’ in Self Help Books

The present analysis focuses on the print culture and engages with locations where the psychological language is reproduced. One such location is self-help books written by psychologists that provide useful tips on how to negotiate through marriage and conjugality. There is a need to foreground self-help books as a distinct location where popular print culture and pop psychology converge. It imagines an individual who is completely autonomous, who is self-contained in finding and resolving his or her problems. The diagnostic gaze presented by the self-help book is not an external gaze of surveillance. Instead it is coming from within the subject, making the subject a detached observer with a distinct psychological gaze. This gaze raises some foundational questions regarding the way in which the modern subject relates to the world. Nikolas Rose places the production of this subject in the genealogies of ‘technologies of subjectification’; the practical rationalities human beings have applied to themselves and others. (Rose, 1998)

critiqued by mainstream or academic psychology rather it is treated here as an ideological position available for psychology to inhabit. De Vos (2015, p. 250) argues that pop psychology and self help books are “adjacent parts of psy complex [which]use and reinforce mainstream psychology”
De Vos considers this as a quintessentially modern problem and asks “Is the adoption of the psychological gaze, which transcends one’s presupposed embedded position, not the very mark of Western Modernity as a whole?” (De Vos, 2013, p. 20) He considers this as “an extra subject, a redoubled subject” (Ibid, p. 21) who arrived with the arrival of modernity where “‘theatricality’ becomes the true marker of this subjectivity” (Ibid, p. 21). He argues that self-help books invent a subject who is quintessentially modern and psychologized in the sense that the subject redoubles to the one who acts and the one who observes the acting from an “objective and neutral position from where things can be assessed.” (Ibid, p. 20)

The self help books written by practicing psychologists make a major location of pop psychology in Keralam. These books address conjugality as an important site which requires psychological help to meaningfully negotiate through the experience. Self-help books discuss a whole range of issues from family disputes to finance management under the ambit of conjugality. However there is primacy for the conjugal unit and the dyadic communication between the husband and wife. The diagnostic gaze falls onto the communications that graft the everyday of the conjugal life while paying special focus to the events that punctuates this every day. First Night is one such event and probably the most important event in these books on conjugality and they are replete with questions and answers on ‘how to conduct First Night successfully.’ First Night is treated as an

14 The hyper visibility of conjugality as a site of psychological intervention might not be accidental. Given the conjugal hegemony or hegemonic conjugal patronage in contemporary Keralam (a point discussed in detail in the introduction) it is unavoidable that this site becomes a major zone of conflict which anchors negotiations around gendering and power. The deployment of psychology in such sites needs to be understood carefully.
‘interpersonal event’ that marks the beginning of the relationship. This is a recurring concern that is addressed by this corpus of writing where First Night is presented as a decisive night that could influence the success and endurance of conjugality. When ‘how to conduct a nice wedding’ becomes a general topic that any women’s magazine or lifestyle magazine would be interested in, ‘how to conduct a successful First Night’ becomes the proper psychological topic where the professional expertise of the psychologist is called for.

In one of the early writings which quote from psychologists’ case diary, First Night becomes *Agni Pareeksha* (Test of Fire) (Nair, 1979, p. 67) where it is considered as setting the stage for the “first performance of sexual dissatisfaction that could destroy conjugality. Some people inaugurate the discord on that night and for some others the discord exacerbates on the First Night itself” (ibid, p. 64). In a recent writing First Night is described as “dream space where thousands of colours bloom” (Basheerkutty, 2001, p.72). It goes on to add:

“For those who await First Night after the engagement, the very thought of it is like a mild electric shock passing through the body. Because the experience of First Night is that important. There is only one First Night in the life of a bride and bride groom. The experiences of this night could affect the person’s entire post marital life in a positive or negative way. So it is the duty of each bride and groom to make this night beautiful.”(Ibid, p. 72)

The article “Vivekapoorvamaaya Samyogam” (Enlightened Union) by one of the most famous psychologist in Keralam Dr. P. M. Mathew Velloor, which appeared in his
anthology of articles *Dampathyam- Bandham Bandhanam* (Conjugality - Bond and Bondage) (Velloor, 2006) shows what happens when people approach First Night without proper psychological coaching. It comes with the subheading *Purushathwam Theliyikkaan* (To prove masculinity). I present this excerpt for its formulaic narration of the problem of First Night and the solution offered.

Rajam’s face went pale when she described her experiences during her First Night. Hate and vengeance flickered in her eyes. Rajam who entered the bedroom with a glass of milk was startled when she saw her husband’s face. He looked so tense. Almost like a hungry Wolf! She was attacked by him for the next fifteen minutes. Though she did not protest explicitly, she felt insulted. The disgust and hatred she felt that night marred their sexual relationship. The threads of marital relation unwound. The few remaining threads were slender enough that they could break off anytime. Thus after six months, to strengthen those threads, Rajam and her husband approached the psychologist (Velloor, 2006, p. 107).

The write up presents a successful resolution of the case where the psychologist indirectly tells the man on the need of intimacy to get ‘inside the woman’. The metaphor of locked door appears in the writing to suggest the anatomy of female body linking it with popular notions of female sexuality and penetrative sex. The psychologist says, “It needs love, sense of security and tender approach to open the door which has been locked for years. Wild and attacking moves will only be helpful to destroy the lock or to bend the key or to tear down the door”. (Ibid, p. 108) The article attributes the violence by the husband to ‘ignorance’ and it is the duty of the psychologist to help the man overcome
his ignorance and to “help the woman realize that it is the ignorance of the man that was causing behavioural maladjustments.” (Emphasis mine) (Ibid, p. 108)

The same anthology contains a number of illustrations where the psychologist P.M. Mathew Velloor himself appears as the psychologist trying to resolve marital disputes. He appears as a fire fighter who pours water on the scene of heated debate among the couple (Ibid, p. 41), as a music composer who conducts a symphony for the married couple (Ibid, p. 116), as cupid who touches the man’s head with his magic wand to invoke love (Ibid, p. 79), etc. The illustration (Figure 1) (Ibid, p. 18) shown below is part of these illustrations and it shows the self perception of the discipline. The illustration presents a woman lying down on a cot, helpless and subdued, and a man approaching her in violent frenzy with a sharp sword. The psychologist tries to pull him back by clamping a piece of cloth on his sword. The psychologist here appears as engaged in a civilizing mission to control and to hold back the savage man who embodies crude and violent impulses. The illustration is titled as Monster’s Cot (Rakhasante Kattil)
Another popular anthology by an equally famous psychologist Dr. Krishna Prasad Sreedhar “Manasasthanjante Marganirdesangal” (Guidance from the Psychologist) (Sreedhar, 1994) carries a subsection ‘In conjugal Life’. This section carries twenty five letters and in twenty letters a reference to First Night is there in either the question or in the answer. In these letters First Night is presented as the founding stone of conjugal life.\(^\text{15}\) The letters reproduce some of the common ideas around First Night. One of the major ideas among them is the one about virginity and first copulation. There are several cases mentioned where the letters from laypersons reproduce the idea that First Night is about testing virginity and that sexual relation on First Night will leave traces of blood on the bed sheet, otherwise the woman is not a virgin (Sreedhar, 1994, p. 129-131, p. 144-148, p. 154-158, p.176-180, p.190-195). This idea provides the backdrop for the appearance of some serious and severe psychological issues later in conjugality such as excessive suspicion (Ibid, p. 130, p.175) and “paranoid disorder” (Ibid, p. 148, 200) among men and infidelity in women as a revenge to the doubting husband (Ibid, p. 155,p. 177) The duty of the psychologist is to debunk the ‘false ideas’ around First Night to rule out the possibility of future disorders and deviations and thus ensure the success of monogamous conjugality. The psychologist’s expertise comes from his ability to analyze people and problems through ‘behavioural analysis’ and by applying ‘behavioural techniques’. Both the books were hugely popular and were believed to be setting the

\(^{15}\) This quantification of First Night as a theme is a preliminary observation and the chapter does not try to do any Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). Also the frequency of appearance of First Night in popular writing is not imagined to be indicative of social reality. Rather it is treated as part of the editorial policy revealing the assumptions that constitute the target group of this writing.
model for accessible psychological writing; writing that employs the same authorial voice while presenting the problems and the psychological intervention. The theoretical orientation is also the same and it is that of behaviourism which transforms the anxieties around virginal defloration palpable in the socio-cultural milieu into highly individualistic ‘conduct issues’.

4.2. The Rhetoric of Psychology in Popular Culture

Here I present two texts for analysis which are coming from locations that are not connected to psychology institutionally. These texts are analyzed with the assumption that they help to understand 1) the rhetoric of psychology in a better way and 2) show the proliferation of this discourse where even non-psychological locations are bound to reproduce psychological gaze. Both the texts reproduce the above discussed psychological discourse of ‘conduct issues’ faithfully. One is a question written to the advice column and the other is an answer given on an advice column. But they are not from the same advice column. The question appeared in a movie that came out in 1989 and the answer appeared in a popular health magazine in 2010. The question in the cinema does not receive an answer in the cinema and the health magazine gives the answer but presumes the question. I take these two disparate texts for analysis and combine them to make a single advice column text for their structural specificity which complements the lack of the other where one misses the answer and the other misses the question. An analysis sensitive to this complementarity might be helpful to show how certain questions and certain answers presuppose each other revealing the contours of certain modes of speech. They together show the success of the logic of advice columns
where even without an answer the subject is healed. It is by seeping into the thinking and
grafting the relation one has with oneself that the logic of advice columns proliferates.
The advice columns provide a language to understand and to relate to one’s self. By
perceiving a crisis or imperfection in the self and seeking the help of an expert as a
corrective measure, one institutes a psychological relation with the self and submits
oneself to the diagnostic gaze. The absence of answer in the narrative is telling of how
the subject has healed even without the direct intervention of the expert. In turn the
answer that comes without question shows a disembodied voice of psyche floating in the
culture where it could inhabit any subject at any critical juncture. This voice clearly
recognizes and revels on the recognition that the subject is ready to be addressed by the
voice and inhabited by the logic of the psyche. Keeping this discussion in mind I first
present the question and then the answer.

4.2.1 Thalathil Dinesan and Will to Therapy

The question appears as a letter written to psychologist by the lead character Thalathil
Dinesan in the film Vadakkunokkiyanthram (The Compass) (Vadakkunokkiyantram,
directed by Sreenivasan (1989). The film was critically acclaimed, won the State Award
for the Best Malayalam film in 1989, and was commercially successful. With the
appearance of television comedy shows in the last two decades the film has received cult
status. The film is telecasted in all major television channels at least once every year

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16 The reception of television comedy programmes which incorporates comedy scenes from Malayalam
films need to be studied as a separate genre. There have been attempts to look at the genre of comedy
shows (Rowena, 2005) but the cinema-based comedy shows forms a sub-section and they are hugely
popular and contribute significantly to popular culture.
and the ‘comedy scenes’ of the film has a life of its own and they are reproduced regularly in comedy shows. The film revolves around the anxieties of Thalathil Dinesan (Sreenivasan) in entering the conjugal union and negotiating it successfully. It starts with a ‘normal’ Dinesan’ who is at the threshold of an arranged marriage. Dinesen tries desperately to make himself suitable for the conjugal relation. This arises from his self awareness that he lacks certain attributes of ideal masculinity that is essential for a ‘successful’ conjugal life. What accentuates this self appraisal is the ‘extreme beauty’ of the girl who is going to become his wife. As the narrative progresses, Dinesan’s masculinity crisis intensifies and after marriage he becomes suspicious of his wife and the narrative ends where he becomes ‘abnormal’. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan has observed that “the pathological male subject is narrativised in 1990s Kerala, not necessarily as a man with a mental illness but as man who is driven to madness by the modern emancipated women.”(Radhakrishnan, 2005, p. 292) (Emphasis mine) Radhakrishnan’s analysis holds true for Vadakkunokkiyantharam, and while his analysis focussed on the ‘crisis in masculinity’, my focus is how the psy-sciences are deployed to address the perceived crisis in masculinity and what are the areas this discourse present as ‘areas of intervention’. This analysis treats First Night as a moment where the figure of the woman appears as threatening to the man and a successful resolution of the moment is crucial so that psychological expertise is called upon. This analysis shows how psy sciences offer a modern solution to a modern problem.

The cinematic image of Sreenivasan and the nature of stardom associated with this image are well documented (Sanjeev&Venkiteswaran, 2002; Rowena, 2004). The stardom of Sreenivasan undercuts questions of caste, subalternity and visuality within the
body of popular cinema. Sreenivasan always comes with a fair male companion or a fair female lover or wife and his blackness becomes a source of ridicule. It has been observed that Sreenivasan is placed as the other of the mainstream Malayalam heroes (Sanjeev&Venkiteswaran, 2002). The making of Dinesan also replicates these elements of the stardom associated with Sreenivasan as a film star. And this character is one of the high points of the kind of realism which Sreenivasan proposed through his auteur cinemas. ‘Thalathil Dinesan’ has a thriving online life with more than 7 facebook fan groups dedicated to him and the jokes of the movie is part of the online Malayalam jokes databases and circuits. There are many online platforms that reproduce film-based jokes and one can find a subsection titled “Thalathil Dinesan jokes” in many of them. For the purpose of the analysis here I would like to reproduce one of these jokes. The actual text of the joke is a letter written by Thalathil Dinesan to the psychologist seeking ‘psychological help’ to face his First Night. This letter is part of Wikichollukal (Wikiquotes) suggesting the popularity and proverbial status it has attained in the given culture.17 The text also circulates on online platforms for sharing jokes. The text appears with Thalathil Dinesan’s post wedding photo in many of these online platforms. It is a common practice to take a studio portrait of the couple shortly after the wedding and it is usually exhibited prominently along with other family photos on the wall of the living

17 Wikipedia Malayalam is a thriving online community and has the most number of pages in any Indian languages, outnumbering Hindi, the official language of India. All aspects of social life are documented in the Malayalam wiki and the number of ‘edit’ each page receives is very high compared to other Indian languages. Wikiquotes is a subsection of Wikipedia which documents what has attained proverbial status in a particular community. This status is generated by the frequency of circulation in different cultural circuits. As in the case of traditional proverbs these modern proverbs also function with the ability to invoke meaning among different groups in a culture. Wikichollukal is the Malayalam version of Wikiquotes.
Dear Psychology Doctor,

Sir, I am totally confused. Please write on women’s psychology as early as possible on your weekly. Because my marriage is fixed. The girl, who is going to be my wife, is extremely beautiful. The thought that I am going to marry a girl whom I don’t deserve, upsets me. I have lived my life so far as per the valuable guidance you have provided through the weekly. Thank you for that guidance. First, let me tell you a naked truth. Doctor, I am not at all beautiful. I am dark. I don’t have height. So I could conquer this beauty, who is going to become my wife, only through a psychological approach. I have to win a space in her heart. I have to do it on the First Night itself. Please advise me all techniques for that. I don’t smoke and I don’t use alcohol either. I have the habit of saving. I think these are the qualities that have attracted the girl’s family. I don’t see any other reason to like me. I am asking you as if you are my elder brother. Is there any technique to increase height? Is there any technique to increase facial beauty? I haven’t used any creams yet. What is your opinion about *Vicco Turmeric*? Does that make you fair? I kindly request you to answer all these queries and save me from this difficult situation.  

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18The original Malayalam letter uses expressions that suggest the status of Dinesan as a layperson. The layperson rhetoric facilitates or demands the intervention from the expert. The translation has tried to keep the tone of the letter and employed literal translation of certain expression for this purpose.
The letter shows Dinesan as someone who perceives himself as lacking certain ideal attributes of masculinity. This self perception needs an extended analysis. The letter places Dinesan firmly in the marriage market and what is perceived as valuable in the market reveals some of the aspects that contribute to the making of the ideal masculine figure. The letter shows that ‘character’ and money management skills are valued highly in the marriage market. This clearly reveals the logic of arranged marriages where concerns related to earnings and saving habits shapes the discourse around the bridegroom and fixes him in the role of the provider. The next concern is ‘character.’ For men it is always connected to abstinence from drinking and smoking, and for women it is their readiness to take up subservient gender roles and sexual inactivity prior to marriage, a point which is discussed in the second chapter. He is an ideal bridegroom who knows how to prioritize family matters and he is aware of that status. He perceives certain shortcomings in himself with relation to the extremely beautiful girl who is going to become his wife. What is to be noted here is the self perception which splits the subject to the one who looks upon oneself, and the one who becomes the object of that gaze. This is the diagnostic gaze and it is through internalizing this gaze that the solution foregrounded to the problem becomes a psychological solution. This splitting or doubling of the self is integral to the psychologized relations one institutes with oneself. De Vos (Vos, 2013) argues:

“…Psychology splits the subject to the one who gazes and the one who is gazed upon. In other words, the subject is hailed into a kind of proto psychologistic position from where it, together with the experts weighs up its psychological double. Psychology’s ‘this is what you are’ creates a vantage point from where
the human subject is called upon to look at itself. In the process, psychology structurally has to deny that this psychological golem only comes to being through the psychological gaze itself”. (De Vos, 2013, p. 9)

The anxieties and concerns around First Night expressed in the letter reproduce the formulaic narrative around First Night. The letter presents the popular idea that the man should conquer the woman and that too on the First Night itself. It is his perceived lack of physical attractiveness which is pushing Dinesan to seek ‘psychological techniques’ that would help conquer his partner. Psychology here is the ally of the man who lacks the physical attributes to conquer a woman.

Psychological advice columns now employ Thalathil Dinesan to invoke a masculine subject who is in need of psychological services to equip him to face and negotiate conjugality. The same subject produced by the psy-complex is re-deployed in the psy discourses to gain authority. For instance an article that appeared in *Mangalam* weekly recently on doubting syndrome (*samsaya rogam*) was titled “Thalathil Dinesan’s whereabouts” (Thalathil Dinesan Ivitokkethanneyundu). The article belongs to the popular psychological write up genre and it starts by recounting the character of Thalathil Dinesan and moves onto what appears to be expert psychological talk.

You might remember the character Thalathil Dinesan played by Sreenivasan in the movie *Vadakkunokkiyanthram*. It is his belief that he is not handsome that makes him suspect his wife’s chastity. His suspicion-driven activities are what generate laughter in the movie, but in real life the acts of such doubting toms most often cross a line. Everyone doubts. But when it crosses a line it becomes an illness. “Others try to hurt me. I have some problems. My colleagues are against me.” These thoughts
are classified under ‘obsessive compulsive disorder’ (English in the original). Statistics shows that at least in three among ten thousand these thoughts develop into suspicion syndrome.” (“Thalathil Dinesan”, 2014).

The return of Thalathil Dinesan in popular culture and the way he is invoked in popular psychological writing shows how the diagnostic gaze creates a pathological subject and how the pathological subject is later deployed to justify or lend meaning to the psychological intervention. This is the circularity of the discourse, where psychological discourse first creates a domain of pathology and a pathological subject through the diagnostic gaze and then the pathological subject is presented as a problem which needs psychological subjection. This could be seen as a high point of psychologization. The psychological discourse not just creates a rationale for its intervention but also reaffirms the psychological authority as an indisputable one. In this move of self-validation psychology presents itself as the only authentic way left to tackle a problem.

4.2.2 Prescriptions: What is it to be a Man?

One of the sample answers to the question aired by Dinesan and which has been echoing in various quarters in Keralam for the past two decades appeared in Mathrubumi Arogya Masika, one of the popular health magazines in Malayalam language.\(^1\) I have taken this up for analysis as it clearly represents the shift in the language used to describe the

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\(^1\) Mathrubumi is one of the leading publishing houses in Keralam which comes with a legacy of being part of the nationalist movement and freedom struggle. Mathrubumi daily and literary weekly are their major publications. The Mathrubumi health magazine is a recent addition which was started in 2000.
masculine in an intimate encounter. Its focus is on the ambivalent moment in First Night -
the defloration. My attempt is to examine how the gendered subject is constructed as an
object within psychological discourse. This discourse provides the prescription for ‘what
is it to be a man in an intimate encounter’ and in this process reconstitute both
masculinity and the domain of the intimate in a single turn. The entire discussion is made
possible through reifying the popular or the dominant idea of First Night that it is about
sex. But it is precisely this idea that psychology debunks in the process of establishing a
diagnostic gaze. Foucault notices the ‘lower epistemological status of psychology’ (cf.
Rose, 1998) and attributes this status as a reason for the careful professionalization of
psychology. This psychological language escapes from being relegated to a complex
know-how by exercising the expertise to avow human ethical virtues. This expertise
comes from the capacity of psychological language and judgments to graft themselves
into the ethical practices of individuals (Rose, 1998). The article under question appeared
as a box within a larger article with the title “Sex – the founding stone of conjugal-ity”.
The layout of the page clearly represents First Night as a subset of problems that a marital
therapist usually encounters in relation to conjugal relations. But this box layout also
suggests the distinctness of this moment and justifies the special treatment given to it.
The tone of the article is one of advice. It is not the usual advice column that presents a
letter and an answer to the problem presented in the letter. It has been observed that such
advice columns present two different voices to make the voice of the expert sound more
authentic where the confessional tone of the letter grant the therapist an authority to
speak. Such texts also work towards the careful production of uni-dimensional and
seamless flow of meaning (Wilbraham, 1997). In the given text such a letter is not
present, but the question is present in the culture and it contributes to the authorial voice of the expert:

Men usually think marital sex is like twenty twenty cricket where one is supposed to aggressively play the initial overs to win the game. But experts of psychology think this is not the right attitude. As per their opinion, First Night is like test cricket where one should know the opponent, know the pitch, anchor oneself at the crease, to slowly build the innings. Most men close the door to First Night with a half anxious and half excited heart. Most of them have got the advice that one has to establish dominance over your mate on First Night itself. Such people will never succeed. First Night is not just jasmine flowers, grapes, milk and intercourse as it is portrayed in films. First Night provides the first opportunity to conquer your partner’s mind. (Emphasis mine)

(‘Adyrathri test cricket pole,’(First Night is like test cricket) 2010, p.37)

It starts with the popular idea that First Night is all about sex. But the psychological or therapeutic authority is established by adopting a rhetorical stance that debunks this very idea. Psychological discourses which privilege the mind over the body pose themselves against the popular discourse on First Night which focuses on the female body and the sexual act. It shifts the locus of action from body to mind. One can see here a shift from the ‘broken hymen’ which is the crucial signifier of a conquered female body to more abstract mental attributes. Clearly mind-body dualism structures these discourses and priority is given to conquering the mind as opposed to the popular belief of conquering the female body. It is interesting to note that conquering as a metaphor does not
disappear. It is the idioms of conquer that changes. The article then explains how to conquer the mind:

The bride and bridegroom will be exhausted by the time of the First Night. Not only that, they might not have had a chance to familiarize themselves with each other and to get to know each other. In such a situation, initiating a sexual relation can even create the feeling of rape within your partner’s mind. Sexual act must be attempted only after creating mutual understanding and intimacy. What is healthy is to view the First Night as an opportunity to open up, to talk and to know each other. That night should be spending to create a hearty, soulful relationship (Ibid, p. 41).

‘Conquering the mind’ here becomes a careful psychological act that can be attained by creating ‘mutual understanding and intimacy’, ‘opening up the mind’, ‘knowing each other’ and by ‘creating a soulful relationship’. This conquering is authentic, legitimate and acceptable. Intimacy is deployed here as a prerequisite to all the exchanges that could be termed sexual or erotic and might happen on First Night. This is a conquering that does not appear to the woman as conquering. The rhetoric of intimacy helps invisibilize the conquering further. The irrational and impulsive male body is displaced through the deployment of psychological language. The vestiges of earlier defloration customs which were present in the practice of First Night is reconstituted here as ‘coercive’ and displaced with a modern notion of intimacy and experientially particularized sexual encounter, where the locus of experience is not the body but two sufficiently individuated minds who understands and touches each other only after adequately knowing each other. This knowing happens by opening up the mind which can be done through the act of talking. This narrativization of self becomes a necessary prerequisite to create the
relation. The chapter does not suggest that this ‘will to discourse’ completely diffuses consummation as an idea. The peno-vaginal sex still remains as one of the crucial signifier that decides the meaning of the relation. But the argument is that the centrality of this physical act has been replaced with a powerful rhetoric of intimacy. Intimacy grants the authority to deflower a woman, not the law directly. The law here takes the form of intimacy and through the deployment of this normative intimacy, the act upon the female body is sanctioned. It is through the deferral of this act that the performance of masculinity is reoriented around the axis of abstract mental attributes. This ‘psychological hermeneutics’ reinvents the domain of intimate where abstract mental attributes and the ability to create intimacy defines the successful man and the success of the night. This psychological hermeneutics recast the domain conventionally imagined to be mediated by body and carnal pleasures. It makes it a site of abstract mental attributes.

It is illuminating that the key term that connects the two independent texts analysed here in their mutual complementarity is ‘conquer’. Dinesan’s letter asked the ‘psychological techniques’ that could be used to ‘conquer’ the bride/the virgin / the future wife and this piece of advice clearly delineates those techniques. Conquer as a metaphor represents anxieties that animate both the texts –anxieties around unbound female sexuality and the need to control it. Dinesan’s letter represents a moment that has the potential to fall out of the domesticated scene of sexuality. And this fear of losing control over a threshold situation makes him think of conquer. The resistance shown by conquer as a concept to yield to the intimacy rhetoric offers some valuable insights towards the psychologization of the domain of intimate and why this psychologization is problematic.
5. Psychologization of Intimate

The chapter has tried to document the surveillance around First Night which reveals that surveillance take the form of diagnostic gaze and the discourse. It has also tried to show by splitting and doubling the subject how this surveillance becomes inherently psychological. But why does it take the form of psychology? And why does the chapter call it psychologization? The chapter started with the assumption that the answer had something to do with Kerala modernity. It has argued that this need for surveillance is stemming from the status of First Night as a site that brings crisis to the modern ideas of love and intimacy by foregrounding body. The corporeality of the event resists the modern accounts of subjective interiority and intimacy. So it is precisely these tropes that should be re-invoked to erase the resisting body, and psychology being conventionally a domain concerned with subjectivity becomes the closest position in the discursive constellation. When confronted with a body that is resistant, modernity deploys a discourse that is primarily concerned with mind and subjectivity.

It is interesting to note that the language of psychology is deployed here. When this language is supposed to work with notions of mind and invoke ideas of love, it works with the notion of consent. In a way this discourse brings back the question to the body and the act that is predicated upon the body. The discourse of psychology works at the slippage between love and consent; sometimes collapsing the distinction between the two and sometimes keeping these two separate. It sometimes posits love as an instrument for eliciting consent and sometimes posits love as consent, confounding the idioms of speech. If God or priests came in between the virgin and the act, the modern relation with
the intimate makes romantic love the sanctioning force. This psychological discourse on the one hand displaces body further from the registers of this romantic love and on the other hand legitimizes normative love as a sanctioning force. This becomes an instance of psychologization because of two reasons:

1) Modern psychology makes a site of pathology out of the cultural anxieties over the possibility or impossibility of man-woman relation and translates it as the individual’s conduct issues. What psychology has to prescribe are behavioural modification techniques. It is precisely by foreclosing an ethical engagement with the self that modern psychology operates. The psychological surveillance makes the subject internalize the norm and here the norm takes the form of romantic love. The notion of consent cannot do away with the power differential involved in the exchange, but rather reproduces the same by providing techne for conquer.

2) The linguistic or narrative construction of this masculinity, femininity and intimacy shows the psychological ‘foldings’ through which gendered subjects relate to themselves. Subject of desire is here referred to as a psychological entity where the ‘autonomous self’ comes as a regulatory ideal that defines the affective relations. Psychology here invents what can be termed as the ‘pedagogies of self’ and it ‘translate the enigmatic desires and dissatisfactions of the individual into precise ways of inspecting oneself, in order to realize one’s potential, gain happiness and exercise one’s autonomy’ (Rose 1998). This is not a religious or political authority. This is the new authority that is profoundly subjectifying by appearing to be emanating from our individual desires. It provides the conditions
under which it is possible to take up the position of the speaking subject and make certain forms of utterances intelligible.

Conclusion

The thesis in its introductory discussion on the ‘deep difficulty of heterosexuality’ has explained how First Night oscillates between the promise of easy relationality and the difficulty of achieving it. This chapter was an investigation into how and why psychological discourse is deployed in such a domain. Starting with a brief discussion on the notion of romantic love as a key element in the modern imagination of the individual, the chapter presented First Night as a moment capable of producing crisis in modern ideas of individuation, interiority and romantic love which is seated in this kind of individuated interiority. First Night brings the body back to the centre of discourse around disembodied interiority and foregrounds the fissures in the rhetoric of love and sexual relationship. The deployment of psychology in such a space, the chapter observed, is not accidental. Conventionally being the domain of subjective interiority, psychology, once deployed, could further displace body from the registers of the promised relation. The documentation of the diagnostic gaze deployed around First Night shows the slippage between love and consent. This chapter further argued that psychological language leads to the psychologization of the intimate where entangled questions of body, desire, sex and love are carpeted under the prescription of romantic love where this love takes the form of the norm. The chapter treated psychologization as problematic as it keeps the deep difficulty of heterosexuality at bay and glosses over the intimate with normative accounts of intimacy.
This question is further pursued in the next chapter, which is an attempt to listen to the psychologised speech, and the discussions therein help to understand the slippage between consent and love in a better way. The assumption driving this attempt at listening is that even the psychologised regimes of speech carry ruptures in that speech. This is the speech that falls outside the discourse. The next chapter makes both conceptual and methodological departures from the previous three chapters of the thesis. The chapters thus far considered subject as ‘discursive effect’; the next one, however, remains attentive to the ‘narrative turn’ and engages with the narratives in an attempt to find the fissures in the psychologised speech where the lived and memoralized accounts of experience and the deep difficulty of heterosexuality re-surfaces for an examination.