Chapter 5

Daughters of Scheherazade: Working through the Narrative Reconstructions of First Night

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Daughters of Scheherazade: Working through the Narrative Reconstructions of the Experience of First Night

1. Scheherazade: A Story of Love

Remember Scheherazade? – the Persian storyteller in *The Book of the Thousand Nights And a Night* (*1001 nights* from here onwards). She saved her own life and the life of the remaining virgins in the country through her skill in telling stories. The story goes like this:

Every day the King (Shaharyar) would marry a new virgin and spend the night with her. When dawn breaks he sends that wife to be beheaded and marries another virgin. This was done as revenge when he found out that his first wife was unfaithful to him. He had killed 1000 women by the time Scheherazade reaches his nuptial chamber. Scheherazade volunteers herself to be the King’s bride, against her father’s wish. On the wedding night, she expresses the wish to bid final farewell to her beloved sister Dunyazade. Dunyazade had been secretly instructed to ask Scheherazade to tell her a story in the night. The King lays awake and listens to Scheherazade’s story. Scheherazade stops the story in the middle and the King entranced by the story asks her to finish it. Scheherazade says there is no time as dawn was breaking. The King spares her life for one day so that she could finish the
story that night. The next night she finishes the previous night’s story and begins another one and ends it in the middle as dawn breaks. The King again spares her from being beheaded. This continues for a thousand nights and at the end of 1001 nights and 1000 stories Scheherazade tells she has no more stories. The King has fallen in love with her by that time and spares her life and makes her his queen.

I would like to invoke Scheherazade when I begin to work through the narrative reconstructions of the experience of First Night. While this story of Scheherazade works as the thread that binds 1000 different stories, as a characteristic of the thread, it is not treated as a story but as a real event that generates the act of storytelling. For the purpose of this inquiry I would like to draw attention to the scene of storytelling which escapes the contours of the story in *1001 Nights*.

1.1. The Scene

The stories in *1001 Nights* are told by a virgin bride to her groom/husband on the wedding night. The qualities of the nuptial chamber provide an extra momentum to storytelling. The bounded-ness and the closure of the physical space of nuptial chamber reminds Scheherazade that she could escape only by weaving/creating stories – making an open-ended space through narrativization. By placing the narrative in an ill-lit space the attention is turned to listening and the King is presented as someone lost in listening. The story-teller’s fate is inter-linked to the story’s ability to entertain the King. An entertaining story makes the King secretly wish to temporarily postpone Scheherazade’s

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1 Almost like in the classical Indian traditions of storytelling where a God or Goddess is invoked to guide the teller of the story through the process
death like a child who does not want the story to end. The act of beheading is deferred by one day every night and Scheherazade negotiates the space and time for the act of storytelling by the very act of telling stories. Each night she re-enacts the bridal act through dress, props and ornaments, making each story the story of the virgin bride told to the groom on her wedding night.

1.2. A Foundational Story

Carol Gilligan in her book *Birth of Pleasure: A new Map of Love* asks why all our famous love stories are tragedies (Gilligan, 2002). She observes that the foundational stories of Western civilization are stories of trauma. She asks why in these stories love always leads to loss and pleasure is associated with death. She finds the answer in the way patriarchy organizes human experiences and urges to tell stories differently to see things differently. Her analysis of foundational stories of the West presents important insights to understand the similarities (and differences) of Scheherazade’s story. Gilligan says:

In these foundational stories, a trauma occurs in *a triangle composed of two men and a woman*. When we focus more closely on what actually happens, we see that *a father or husband’s authority is challenged*. Oedipus is wounded by his father and mother because he is fated to kill his father; Atreus is betrayed by his wife and his brother; Adam and Eve disobey God. What follows *has the cast of tragedy*, as if what happens had to happen. The order of the triangle has challenged (father over son, man over woman), and *a man, wounded in his love, responds by unleashing a cycle of violence*. Perhaps patriarchy, by establishing hierarchy in/at the heart of
intimacy, is inherently tragic, and like all trauma survivors we keep telling the story we need to listen to and understand. (Gilligan, 2002, p.16) (Emphasis mine)

If we listen carefully, the story of Scheherazade has all the basic elements to call it a foundational story. It has a triangle, the man (Shahryar) is wounded in love and is unleashing the cycle of violence. But this story is different in the way trauma is addressed. In the Western stories trauma leads to dissociation and as the story of Oedipus suggests the bearer of trauma will lose the path to self knowledge. Gilligan suggests telling different stories and the same stories differently are acts of making “encoded maps of resistance” and it helps to find a “way of breaking the patriarchal cycle” (ibid, p. 22). My attempt to read Scheherazade’s story is influenced by this feminist endeavour of producing and placing a “radical geography of love” against tragic stories which are the “watermark of patriarchy” (ibid). This reading is also an exercise that reminds me as a researcher about the degree of attention a story needs while listening to it.

This is a psychological story set in a historical and political landscape where the characters need to be presented in a cultural framework. Many have observed the similarity of *1001 Nights* with Indian storytelling traditions. It has been observed that the structure of *1001 Nights* is homologous to the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka* Stories of the Buddhist tradition (Olivele, 2006)\(^2\). The similarity does not end at the use of similar narrative devices in these traditions, some stories appear both in *1001 Nights* and *Jataka*

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\(^2\)Panchathantra shares many stories with the Budhist Jataka tales. Patrick Olivele (1999, p.16) observes that "It is clear that the Buddhists did not invent the stories. [...] It is quite uncertain whether the author of [the Panchatantra] borrowed his stories from the Jātakas or the Mahābhārata, or whether he was tapping into a common treasury of tales, both oral and literary, of ancient India."
Stories (Ashliman, 2004, p. 20). My focus is not on the probable Indian origins of the story. But the presence of similar traditions of storytelling in India helps me to argue for the possibility of a non-Western location of storytelling. Whether Indian or not, the story of Scheherazade can be treated as a foundational story available from non-Western storytelling traditions. Non-western here does not (only) indicate the place of origin, but a location different from that of the West which understands and relates to and even organizes experiences in a different way. It needs further elaboration to see how the origin story of 1001 Nights becomes a foundational story from the non-Western traditions. When compared to the Western tragic stories Scheherazade’s story is foundationally different in outcome. It is a story that privileges life over death and love over violence; I am aware that I shall have to give proof for this claim in the rest of the chapter. It is important to note the changes in the structure of the story that allows it to be a ‘story of love’ when it “has the cast of tragedy” imprinted on it.

1.3. The Triangle

The original triangle is made by two men and woman in this story too - the king, his wife and the wife’s lover. This triangle represents the kind of relations patriarchy permits among human beings. Two men fight for control over the woman and in the process the men lose sight of who they are and what they want. Caught between this fight, their actual object of desire – the woman – loses her life. In this arrangement of human desire both the parties suffer – the men lose the self and enter into a circuit of suffering and the woman loses her life and is no longer there to tell the story. But the story of Scheherazade differs by presenting another triangle to deal with the crisis produced by the original
triangle. This new triangle is not made by two men and a woman instead here the triangle is created by two women and a man - the King, Scheherazade and Duniyazade. Scheherazade starts telling the story not for the King, but for her sister. The story of Scheherazade helps to imagine what happens when there is a sister – a non-competing figure. The secret contract between Scheherazade and Duniyazade is capable of usurping the formal contract brought to effect between Scheherazade and the King. This secret pact which literally gives voice to Scheherazade is capable of unsettling the patriarchal codes of bonding which privileges men’s experiences. This non-competing figure not just saves Scheherazade by providing a platform for the storytelling but in the process also liberates the King from a past wound and introduces him to the other possibility – the pleasure of love. It is the silent presence of Duniyazade in the story that gives Scheherazade her language. In the absence of a listener in the form of her sister, Scheherazade cannot make the risky negotiation with the King for time, space and for her own life.

The second triangle also helps to think about what can be called an ‘analytic situation’. In the process of storytelling, he meets her in stories, in language. Or in other words the process of narrativization provides a space for the subject to inhabit. Scheherazade’s stories vary in themes and plots and include a wide variety of stories from historical tales, tragedies, comedies, love stories, stories of travellers and merchants, burlesque to erotica. Some of the stories are told twice where the plot, the characters, and the main events remain the same, but the story is totally different. “The tale of Seven Viziers” helps to see the point clearly. The story is told twice in 1001 Nights. The first time it is told by Viziers (the word can be roughly translated as astrologers) and stresses the unreliability of
courtesans. The second story is the re-telling of the same plot where it is the courtesan who is telling the story and the focus is on the unreliability of Viziers. In an almost therapeutic move it helps the King reconfigure his own narrative of his first wife’s unfaithfulness. Scheherazade is not telling the stories of loyal wives or faithful daughters. On the contrary all her stories involve women who change their words, men who cannot keep promises, people who lie, and people who love outside marriage. How do these stories help or how do they heal? These stories do not attempt a simple positive depiction of women. Rather it alters the very condition of goodness, beauty and love. It invites the King to give up the script that demands loyalty and faithfulness from women. It shows there are other ways of looking at the experience of what he reads as ‘unfaithfulness’. By offering another way of organizing experience, the stories seem to liberate him from the burden of patriarchy.

The scene has more to contribute to the analytic dialogue that is concerned with the ‘care’ and ‘truth’ functions. The ill-lit space not only helps to turn attention from seeing to listening, it also affects the nature of the stories. The shadowy, nocturnal and oneiric elements of the nuptial chamber confer the space with the ability to fuel the act of storytelling by inviting the person to listen to stories of desire – stories that occur at the (sub)liminal edges of consciousness. Anup Dhar has observed that an analytic dialogue concerned with care and truth functions must be able to imagine a shift from semantic models of intentionality to semantic models of desire. Here the scene facilitates this shift that is essential to imagining the analytic dialogue that has care and truth functions (Dhar, 2009).
The origin story of *1001 Nights* also hints towards a complex process where the man – the ruler – is introduced to the questions of truth and justice in a process that is fundamentally different from the rigid legal processes (which again re-produces the Law of the Father). Is it possible to listen to a collective feminine voice that emerges through stories that seeks justice and affirms life and love over violence and death in the process? Scheherazade’s story shows how a phallic narrative that has a predictable tragic ending is dismantled by a collective feminine voice to create a life-affirming story. This story tells us that the questions of truth, justice and love are intertwined in an inseparable way. And analytic dialogue has much to offer in this project as a process that enables us to listen to each other’s stories, each other’s voices.

1.4. Beheading

As told in the beginning, *1001 Nights* is a collection of stories told by a bride in the face of death. It is no normal death; it is death by beheading. The sword is too obvious a phallic metaphor and it shows how the fear of sexual violence or violation creeps into the body of the woman and thus on to the body of the stories and set them into motion. Each story is told to defer the act of beheading. Beheading as a concept touches upon sexism, patriarchy and phallocentrism. Beheading could suggest the actual physical moments of violence involved in the everyday to the violence of the conceptual kind. Glaser and Frosh show what they call ‘traditional masculinity’ focus on dominance and independence, an orientation to the world which is active and assertive, which valorises competitiveness and turns its face from intimacy, achieving esteem in the glorification of force (Glaser and Frosh, 1988, p. 24). The fear at the heart of this image is of emotion [or
affect]—that which makes us vulnerable and ‘womanly’; emotion is dangerous not only because it implies dependence, but also because it is alien, representative of all that masculinity rejects. This fear of emotion in turn makes sex both over-invested and under-invested in by men. Sex is one of the few socially acceptable ways in which men can aspire to closeness with others, and as such it becomes the carrier of all the unexpressed desires that men’s emotional illiteracy produces. However, this same power of sex to produce emotionality makes it dangerous to men whose identity is built upon the rejection of emotion; sex then becomes split off, limited to the activity of the penis, an (hurried) act rather than an encounter with the Other. It is also a means of taking up a particular place in the world of men: sexual ‘conquest’ as a symbol of male prowess. The link between such a form of masculinity and sexual abuse is apparent: it is not just present, but inherent in a mode of personality organisation that rejects intimacy. Sex as triumph and achievement slides naturally into sex as rejection and degradation/beheading of the Other. Such a subject position does not even inaugurate the two of sexual difference.

There have been attempts to think about the two of a relation. One instance in this thinking can be found in psychoanalysis. In Classical Psychoanalysis every attempt to think about the two invariably involves anxiety of getting beheaded. A classical psychoanalytic reading would be to consider beheading as an inverted fantasy fuelled by castration anxiety. Beheading is always approached through the taxonomy of castration anxiety in this rendition of psychoanalysis. The contemporary attempts to re-visit the classical psychoanalytic formulations on the two of sexual relation or two of the sexual difference is sensitive to the threat of beheading and makes an attempt to open up the
space for two, but it is also not free from the murder. Dhar has shown how Lacanian psychoanalysis “opens up the space for two” and at the same time the phallus emerges as the point de capiton resulting in the “consequent overemphasis on having or not having phallus” (Dhar, 2009, p.179). Thus even in the Lacanian rendition the “second of the two remains as the absolute outside” (ibid, p. 176).

But while listening to the story of Scheherazade it would be useful to temporarily suspend the framework of Western Psychoanalysis (both Freudian and Lacanian) which always privilege the viewpoint of the man. Starting from ‘what the man experienced,’ these conceptualizations as a next step turns to woman to ask the question, “What are you” or “What do you want” and is never able to find an answer. She remains the enigma - the Dark Continent - the abyss - the unspeakable. The chapter would like to see what emerges if we suspend castration anxiety from the explanatory grid for some time. Does that allow the entry of other experiences, other voices, other standpoints and other concepts? Beheading can be a culturally distilled metaphor for a relation of the sexual kind that is experienced by the woman as violating or transgressing her body, psyche\(^3\) and integrity. Beheading stands as an allegory or metaphor for sex that violates the woman – mutilates the woman – leaves her speechless, leaves her lifeless. And Scheherazade moves towards a location where she is alive and let her sisters live. Is she presenting another relation between man and woman which does not kill her – fixes her

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\(^3\) In this story psyche is not just a value-laden concept popularized by nineteenth century Psychoanalysis. Psyche sometimes acts out the role assigned to her in the original Greek myth – a young girl. So ‘violating psyche’ as an expression connotes more than the psychological conception of trauma. It goes back to the very conceptualization of trauma.
in his order – mutilates her – severs the connection she has with her body – strips her of her own pleasures?

Another important way the story differs from foundational stories of the West is that the story of Scheherazade does not have a sacrifice at its heart. What could become a sacrificial narrative saves itself from being that through narrativizing, through presenting the lusting woman, the curious woman, the unfaithful wife, the irreverent woman and all others who break the rule of patriarchy. These are the women who are real and have voice. These are the women who take the story forward. In the Persian myth Scheherazade has three sons. But she is remembered through the innumerable daughters she gave birth to by the process of storytelling. Scheherazade herself is the daughter who disobeys her father (who is a Vizier) when she volunteers to be the King’s bride and her speech is that of the defiant daughter. The very stage for storytelling is created by this disobeying making it the ideal defiant speech. Scheherazade’s story is a story of birthing placed against death. Scheherazade gives birth to many defiant daughters and she

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4 The Western example of the defiant speech is that of Antigone who makes a speech in the wake of the death of her brother. Both Antigone’s and Scheherazade’s speech occur as a response to death. These speeches do not prevent death before it happens. But Scheherazade is alive after the defiant speech, while Antigone’s defiance leads to death. One would have to ask in this context: is this because of the difference in the nature of the feminism of the two women? Or is this because of the difference in the nature of masculinity and patriarchy; is Greek masculinity and patriarchy more brutal? And an attempt to listen to this and other following defiant speeches by women was done by Psychoanalysis but it fails to make sense out of the speech. Western Psychoanalysis revels in its ‘knowingness’ on incest taboo and is unable to listen to the defiant daughter’s speech though it makes an attempt to do so. Butler says that it is only by addressing the “founding function of incest taboo within psychoanalysis as contingent social norm at work” that the West could start its exercise on listening to Antigone’s speech(Butler, 2002, p.30). This thesis would like to ask: does listening to woman’s voices on the experience of First Night require such a Butler-ite turn in ‘theoria’?
manages to be alive at the end of those difficult births. “What I wanted from you, Mother, was this. That in giving me life/You too remain alive” writes Irigaray (Irigaray, 1979) in another context, in another century.

While thinking about a method this project draws inspiration from the story of Scheherazade in many ways. This story shows the endurance of the scene of First Night and the possibility this threshold event holds while thinking about relationality. The story provides an entry point to the answers to questions related to the nature of narrative inquiry that this project adopts. It primarily helps to answer questions related to 1) what kind of narrative inquiry the project wants to adopt and 2) the relevance of analytic dialogue in this inquiry. Put in another way the questions are why a psychoanalytically informed method and which psychoanalysis. The following discussion will try to bring some clarity to the inquiry.

2. Towards a Method: Stories, Narratives and Analytical Ambivalences

This project uses a psychoanalytically informed narrative inquiry to generate and analyse experiential accounts of First Night by Malayali women. While thinking about a method of narrative generation, this inquiry employs the classical psychoanalytic concepts such as ‘Free Association’ and ‘Active Reconstruction’ put forward by Freud\(^5\) and

\(^5\) Freud is believed to have developed these techniques between the period 1911 to 1915. See Deborah Britzman (2013) “Five Excursions into Free Association or Just Take the Train” for a detailed discussion on the technique of free association. Christopher Bollas (2008) explains the technique in *Free Association in The Evocative Object World*. Carol Gilligan (2010) reflects critically on the method in “Free Association and the Grand Inquisitor: A Drama in Four Acts.” A detailed description of the technique of *Active Reconstruction* can be found in *Freud’s Technique Papers: a Contemporary Perspective* (Elleman, 2002).
‘Emplotment’ by Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 2012). It employs the ‘Listening Guide Method’ (Gilligan, 2003) to analyse the narratives generated. It is not that the researcher addressed the field with some well thought out methodological models. But, the inquiry also did not rely on the assumption that the field will generate a new method – a position akin to naïve empiricism. The inquiry evolved with each conversation with the women participants where my own understanding of the field was simultaneously getting re-shaped. My frameworks were crumbling/not fitting and there were moments when I was overwhelmed by feelings of vulnerability. There are certain concerns that shaped this inquiry. This writing incorporates the insights (with which I started my engagement with the field) and some hindsight (as reflections that occur towards the end of the process or after it) while trying to explain the methodological moves.

The major questions that shaped the inquiry (these questions are intertwined and the answer to one presupposes the other) are:

1. What kind of narrative analysis is the inquiry adopting?
2. What is the relationship this narrative inquiry has with psychoanalysis?
3. How does narrative analysis and psychoanalysis affect each other? How do they displace each other?

Narrative inquiry comes to the methodological repertoire of Social Sciences when confronted with questions of experience. When placed between subjectivist first person
accounts and objectivist third person accounts Social Science turned to narratives. This turn has connection to the ‘turn to language’ that was happening in parallel in Western thought. There is a new found interest in narratives and many attribute the coinage “narrative inquiry” to Mishler (Mishler, 1986). Qualitative inquiry in Social Science relies heavily on narratives these days. The primary assumption behind narrative inquiry is that human beings are made through stories, and narratives provide a unique access point to human experiences. Psychoanalysis also offers rich conceptual resources to engage with narratives (of loss, distress, suffering) in a long term sense. As an endeavour, by definition tu(r)ned to language, even psychotic language (see Abraham and Torok, 2005), psychoanalysis brings to narrative inquiry a host of possibilities. The gaps, omissions, silences, cryptonyms (words that hide) are no longer a simple problem but offers instead and paradoxically fertile ground for interpretation. There have been many attempts to use psychoanalytic insights for/in narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995; Bruner, 1991; Sarbin, 1985). This thesis is one more attempt in this direction. The current inquiry tries to draw from the insights generated from the re-formulations of the idea of analytic dialogue while trying to design the research.

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6 See the subsection First Person Methodologies Vs Third Person Descriptions in Dhar (Dhar, 2009) for a detailed discussion on this point. The narrative turn places an inter-subjective exchange against the subjectivism of the first person methods and the objectivism of the third person accounts.

7 There is a popular strand of narrative inquiry that works with the assumption that human beings make stories. Also the inquiries differ in the conception of the narrating subject. Some strands look for a unitary and rational subject and some others look for subject that comes into being through stories. This is a contested terrain and a discussion into its disciplinary moorings and its history is not the focal point of the current inquiry even when it acknowledges that these discussions inform the current inquiry.
The most important among them is the conception of analytic dialogue as *essentially triangular*. This conception is drawn from Toril Moi’s reading of Lacanian understanding of Freud’s dialogue with the hysterical woman (Moi, 2001, p. 348-368). Moi argues that Freudian psychoanalysis can be considered as an attempt to open up the dialogue between knowledge and non-knowledge; and not as two structurally different entities but as two fluctuating positions subjects occupy in speech.

[Psychoanalysis is born in the encounter between the hysterical woman and positivist man of science. It is in this reversal of traditional roles of subject and object of speaker and listener that Freud more or less unwittingly open the way for a new understanding of human knowledge. Inscribing the mad woman’s discourse into science Freud unknowingly starts a process that will transform the very notions of scientificity that he believed in (Moi, 2001, p. 359).]

This is proposed as new understanding, not simply because here the doctor turns listener; that would be a simple reversal, and nothing more, but because, it proposes another relationship with all the traditional binaries that define knowledge. Moi quotes Felman to understand the gravity of the reversal psychoanalysis inaugurates:

> By shifting and undercutting the clear cut polarities between subject and object, self and other, inside and outside, analyst and analysed, consciousness and the unconscious, the new Freudian reflexivity substitutes for all traditional binary, symmetrical conceptual oppositions – that is, substitutes for the very foundation of Western metaphysics – a new mode of interfering heterogeneity” (Felman, 61 cf Moi, 2001, p. 361)
This dialogue replaces the positivist monologue and the reflexive dialogue to an exchange that is “essentially triangular” (Moi, 2001, p. 360) where the subject and object meets each other as the ‘Other(s) in language’. Through its attention to language this dialogue remains open to the constitutive role of exclusions in dialogue. This understanding is different from the usual social-scientific understanding of dialogue where it is reducible to a dual relationship, a relationship of transparency and communicability. In the psychoanalytically informed narrative turn, the dialogue is constituted by a third term that is the meeting point in language. This narrative turn facilitates the shift from narrative and epistemology to narrative epistemology by converting the ‘problem of speculation’ to the ‘possibility of interpretation’. This method moves out of the simple subject/object dichotomy and thus holds a claim for strong objectivity. This is a model of knowledge that is attentive to its constitutive outside(s) – the unknown.

This discussion helps to see why psychoanalytically informed narrative turn now enjoy an immutable status (at least within qualitative Social Science research circles) as the ‘most evolved’ method that would help us attend to human experiences. Then why not embrace it whole-heartedly? But there are some voices of caution. For instance, Ashis Nandy and Sudhir Kakar while thinking through the question of stories, narratives and human experiences have tried to introduce the question of culture difference into the forms of narrativizing. Interestingly both of them have not used the expression ‘narrative inquiry’. Ashis Nandy has expressed resistance towards the expression ‘narrative’ and dismisses it as “clever coinage” (Nandy, 2002, p. 13). Nandy says ‘narratives’ have a
prestigious position in the global culture of knowledge. He insists on calling them stories and cautions that “listening to [Indian] stories can be trying”.

Most of them [stories] lack a proper ending—this is no longer a crime, I am told—but they are also often not new, which is still an unforgivable sin in the global culture of knowledge. As with classical plays and ritual narrations of epics and sacred myths, these stories create their own surprises in the process of being re-told. So I need not apologise if you find my story is not new and lacks a proper ending; I shall apologise only if you find that I have not told it right. (Nandy, 2002, p. 13)

Nandy is shifting focus from what is told to how it is told and in the process is moving away from the modern Western ‘narrative turn’ to a classical tradition of storytelling to equip himself with addressing questions related to “ancient cultures” who have “resilient cultural traditions”. Dhar and Siddiqui observe a similar movement in Kakar where he differentiates between the ‘metaphysical self’ and the ‘biographical self’ and attributes the biographical self to the Western project of introspection and foregrounds psychoanalysis as the emblematic introspective project that could act as the placeholder of narrative (Dhar & Siddiqui, 2013). Drawing from Kakar they observe, “[I]n the Indian context, the narrative frustrates the enquiry since it would seem that ‘the self has been excised’; whereas paradoxically narrative itself seemed particularly suited to the Indian context. It is, as if, the narratival self that in itself (in its manifest self) resists

8 A. K.Ramanujan (1989) also takes a strikingly similar position while addressing the richness of storytelling traditions in India and asks if it is possible to identify ‘Indian’ ways of thinking and storytelling.
narrativisation. It resists the narrative technology generated by qualitative psychology” (ibid, p. 530).

So the methodological stance the inquiry adopts to make it a ‘psychoanalytically informed narratives inquiry’ demands further explanation. The inquiry has a fraught relationship with psychoanalysis. Or in other words, the inquiry is ambivalent in embracing psychoanalysis as a new method that would help it retrieve that which is not yet accessible to sociological inquiries. I will try to briefly engage with the concerns animating this ambivalence towards psychoanalysis.

2.1 Ideological Concerns

1. Take for instance, the ambivalence the inquiry has expressed in relation to psychoanalysis. This can be treated as a very Freudian ambivalence. The postcolonial scholarship helps to anticipate this reading and I would like to invite attention to this reading to hint towards the power psychoanalysis has as a discourse to provide a meta-narrative even when someone does not directly employ the conceptual systems offered by it. Psychoanalysis should be understood as a historically specific discourse offering conceptual resources to understand (Western) culture and the task of the researcher is not to lose sight of the fact that at the same time psychoanalysis is produced by the same culture. Without this understanding the meta–narratives given by psychoanalysis would appear as truth and would urge the subject to produce coherence out of experience.
2. This ambivalence is generated partially as a response to the recent Social Science interest in ‘retrieval’ and the presentation of psychoanalysis as a ‘better tool of retrieval of experience’. It is the retrieval impulse which is at the heart of psychoanalysis that makes it a strong ally in the narrative inquiries. But this retrieval can embody an imperial impulse and it can be used to grasp the feminine and access the unreason. Toril Moi (Moi, 2001) explains this as follows:

At one level, Freudian psychoanalysis can be characterized as an effort to open up and extend the field of rational knowledge. Unlike Charcot, who chose to exhibit his hysterical patients in a gesture of dominance, Freud decided to listen to them: psychoanalysis is born between the encounter between the hysterical woman and positivist man of science. It is in this reversal of traditional roles of subject and object of speaker and listener that Freud more or less unwittingly open the way for a new understanding of human knowledge. But the psychoanalytic situation is shot through with paradoxes and difficulties. For it Freud (and Breuer’s) act of listening represents an effort to include irrational discourse of femininity in the realm of science, it also embodies their hope of extending their own understanding of psychic phenomena. Grasping the logic of unconscious, they want to make it accessible for reason (Moi, 2001, p. 359) (Emphasis in original).

3. Spivak adds another layer to this problem by introducing the “woman elsewhere” to the analytic scene (Spivak, 2014). She asks how one understands the softness of psychoanalytic currency in third world – is it a deprivation or a symptom. She adds, “It seems to me that when one thinks about the question of women and women specifically as sexed subject, either in terms of psychoanalysis or in terms of
counter psychoanalysis what it leaves out is the constitution of women outside psychoanalysis. Then you begin to see how completely heterogeneous the field of woman of elsewhere is” (Spivak, 2014, p. 9).

2.2. Epistemological Concerns

The research setting has an inherent inability in employing the procedural understanding of knowledge. The analyst interprets into the situation; the researcher has to defer the interpretation to the end of the interview. Does this constraint ultimately take away the possibility to see knowledge as an emergent and fluctuating relationship with the unknown – a point that credits psychoanalysis with a claim for strong objectivity? In other words, the question sounds like this: Is it possible to ‘apply’ a psychoanalytic insight to the research settings when the very insight is embedded in the process? Does separating the method from the analytic stance and the related cosmology it produces take away its effectiveness as a new method to engage with experience? These are the concerns that haunt this inquiry, even when it tries to employ psychoanalytic concepts as ‘methodological tools’ in generating and analysing narratives.

But the project would like to ask, in order to resist the ‘retrieval impulse’ whether it should throw away the baby with the bathwater? Does the knowledge that there is imperial impulse at the heart of psychoanalysis sufficient to resist that impulse? Or this project will end up as a classic case of ‘Knowingness and Abandonment’? This inquiry

9The thesis first employed this idea in the introduction while addressing the hyper visibility of First Night and lack of accessibility of the experience of the same. The thesis has argued that there is a slippage between visibility and accessibility, but that might not be the case. The thesis wishes to pause at such
starts with the realization that psychoanalysis in its rethought formulations can offer a method to engage with human experience. But it is equally open to the concerns expressed above. These two positions together fuel the act of storytelling and the impending danger here is nothing less than beheading – conflating the emergent voice of women to an existing voice, to an existing language and losing the text and texture of the language. The challenge of the inquiry in that sense is to emerge out of the nuptial chamber without losing the inquiry’s voice and the voices of the women who have trusted the inquiry with their voices.

3. The Research Design

This inquiry differentiates between generation of narratives and analysis of narratives. Both phases are credited with equal importance. Narrative generation involves the actual physical interview situation which involves a face-to-face interaction between the researcher and the participant(s) where they both engage in conversation on a mutually agreed upon theme. This research employed psychoanalytically informed methods such as ‘Free Association’, ‘Active Reconstruction’ and ‘Emplotting’ while generating narratives. Narrative analysis involves a way of engaging with the narratives generated in the first phase. I have interviewed 22 women for the generation of narratives. This selection raises some questions about the rationale of selection, sample and genralisability. And answers to these questions have connection to the way qualitative methods are adopted in social science research settings.

moments and drawing from the conceptualization of Jonathan Lear (1998) it argues that visibility creates a sense of knowingness which may lead to the abandonment of the inquiry.
There is an inherent tension in adopting qualitative methods in social science/scientific inquiry. Social science, in a classical sense, is concerned with the ‘generalisability’ (at times translating into universality) of the knowledge produced, where qualitative methods are portrayed as defying, at least partially, the impulse to generalise/universalize. Stake (1980) observes that the question of generalisability is perhaps the most anticipated question deployed against qualitative research, and it is deployed along with concerns of ‘lack of objectivity’. Coming from a positivist tradition of conducting the usual kind of scientific inquiry, these two questions together presents qualitative methods as producing ‘inferior’ knowledge. And social science usually responds to this need and diagnosis of positivism by yielding to the demand to produce knowledge that is generalisable. It is observed that it is always connected to questions of ‘respectability’ and institutionalization of social scientific research (Myers 2000). Incapable of addressing the positivist logic behind the demand for generalisability, institutionalised qualitative research responds to this demand by increasing sample size, adopting more representative sampling methods. But in the process the qualitative empirical research has become “disappointingly descriptive” (Hollaway, 2006, p. 544)

Psychoanalytically informed narrative research (this is designated as the ‘narrative turn’ in psychological research) intensifies the tension involved in employing qualitative methods in social scientific research. Psychoanalysis being an unapologetically interpretative venture that too ‘case study-based’, it is not possible to concede to the demand for generalisability. The account(s) it produces are by definition interpretative at an individual level and cannot be descriptive of a larger mass/population. Another productive crisis, psychoanalytically informed narrative research is capable of producing
is the notion of the ‘subject’ that comes along with such an inquiry. The subject of psychoanalytically informed narrative research is neither unitary nor rational foreclosing any chance of producing a straightforward descriptive account out of the narratives; there is ‘contradictoriness’ and ‘ambivalence’, including deeper subject effects like ‘splitting’, at the core of the narratives; there is also a tinge of ‘motivated irrationality’. The difference between a descriptive project and an interpretative project is that the act of interpretation is supposed to unearth the (unconscious) relations the subject has with the Other including on the one hand, internalized Others, and on the other, the dialectic of the larger social and the individualized psychic. And these manifest relations, which in turn, harbours the latent relations, (like latent and manifest content of dreams), might not be available for somewhat rigid codifications; where codification is another site of the giving up of the ‘subjective’ of qualitative study to the statistical.

The challenge in bringing up a psychoanalytically informed narrative method in social science research is that it perhaps unsettles the very assumptions of the transparent ‘social’ with which social science works; it not just renders the individual subject non-obvious and non-transparent; it also renders the social obdurate. The act of interpretation is capable of showing that there is no social waiting out there to be captured by the most advanced survey technique or the most representative sampling method. The social perhaps inhabits the condensed and displaced registers of the individual psyches and the psyche is in productive relations with the social and the cultural, and knowledge production endeavours have to address this dynamic flux to open them to transformatory potentials.
As the discussion so far have suggested, the method deployed in this thesis is not a faithful replication of the psychoanalytic case study method; primarily because the respondents did not come to me with their problems; I went to them, I approached them with my questions. It however employs narrative generation and narrative analysis and both these stages are informed by the psychoanalytic stance. This research generates twenty two interviews. The respondents are selected using snowball sampling method, where the existing participants recruit or recommend future participants from among their acquaintances. This is a non-probability sampling method and the data resulting from this method is most often non-representative. The above discussion helps the project redeem somewhat the non-representative nature of the study; it also sees it as a valuable attribute that is essential to come out of the production of endless descriptive accounts and to think about knowledge that has (latent or unconscious) psychic significance.

3.1. Narrative Generation

3.1.1. Free Association: Free association is a psychoanalytic idea and technique where the assumption is that “the logic of association is a form of unconscious thinking” (Bollas, 2008, p. 21). Freud considered it as the fundamental technical rule of analysis. The method of free association has no linear agenda or pre-planned questions. The interview process that tries to use free association has to be completely unstructured to allow the free flow of the plots, subplots, events, characters and metaphors. These are organized by the participant. The researcher is not supposed to intervene or influence the order of their appearance. The framing question introduced the research as an inquiry around First Night where the researcher is introduced as someone trying to understand
the experience of First Night. The introductory talk specifically mentioned to the participant that there were no specific questions and they could share whatever they think is relevant to the topic. Whenever intervention was needed, the researcher was cautious not to introduce new elements or plots to the story and to reproduce the same phrases and metaphors used by the participant and if possible in the same order.

3.1.2. Active Reconstruction: The method of free association cannot work without some idea of the unconscious. The idea of unconscious in Psychoanalysis functions with the guilt–shame–repression grid. It is this grid which makes and maintains psychoanalysis. But it is precisely this presence of repression that enables psychoanalysis to address the questions about the inaccessibility of experience or to take one step back, to ponder over the question, why there is inaccessibility of experience. It is when faced with the inaccessibility of experience that psychoanalysis comes with the idea of retrieval, again interrupting the transparent self - transparent experience positions. Repression makes retrieval of experience a difficult task. Retrieval of experience can be anxiety-generating. Anxiety fuels defences. Defences colour the retrieval and they become reconstructions. The expression ‘narrative reconstructions’ used so frequently in narrative inquiries employs this psychoanalytic idea of active reconstruction where the past is not just found but created. This research project also uses them in the same way.

There have been attempts to think about the inaccessibility of human experience without getting into the psychoanalytic bandwagon. Nandy makes an attempt not to use Freudian Unconscious and at the same time not to lose sight of the opaqueness of human
experience by introducing the idea of secret selves. In this scheme, the act of retrieval can be interrupted by the secret selves. When confronted with the question of experience the present inquiry works with Freudian unconscious. Though there is an attempt not to give primacy to castration anxiety in the explanatory grid, unconscious comes with all the conceptual baggage and it is not possible to eschew some of them selectively. What is possible is to remain attentive to the possibility of any accounts of experience that could challenge the ‘tenacity of the concept’.

3.1.3 Emplotting: The method of free association used in this research is different from the free association in the therapy settings. In therapy the patient is allowed to bring anything to the clinic. But here it is the researcher who introduces the masterplot. This imposed limitation on freedom differentiates the use of free association in research settings. Ricouer while thinking about emplotting says, “[O]ne makes a plot with what one knows and a plot is by nature ‘mutilated knowledge’” (Ricouer, 2012, p. 170). This brings in an important insight into the inquiry. Researcher brings in the plot – this is the one door through which subjectivity enters the inquiry. This realization relieves the researcher from going on and on about reflexivity. If the selection of plot reveals researcher’s subjectivity, the researcher can put that on the table for further reflection. The expression ‘mutilated knowledge’ also implicates the conversation in the known-unknown game. The researcher approaches the participant with mutilated knowledge and

10 Nandy (2002) says the presumption here is that secrecy is imposed, in this instance, by categories associated with dominance but is also partly internalized. As a result, the socialized self learns to keep double ledgers: one for public or official consumption, the other for private moments or for transmission as unofficial memories or the creation of contraband histories. The thesis while framing First Night as an intimate event with a secret register has employed this notion.
through narrative reconstructions they make an attempt to arrive at knowledge together. This involves a reversal of the analyst-analysed role. This is not just a simple reversal. This hints towards the possibility of developing a non-hierarchical framework where the researcher is not privileged as the knower, but she is the one who suffers from mutilated knowledge and it is the ‘field interaction’ which relieves her from suffering by producing knowledge on suffering. (It also brings back the question of *phronesis* to knowledge production endeavours).

### 3.2. Narrative Analysis

Listening to the recordings of the interviews was a challenging experience. Unstructured interviews which navigate through the process with the concept of free association could generate responses that vary extremely in their content. I have listened to the interviews a number of times. It left me confused and at the same time it was an overwhelming experience where I listened to a multitude of voices where each one tells a different story. In an attempt to make sense of the interviews I have combined insights available from the Grounded Theory Analysis and Listening Guide Method.

Grounded Theory works with the basic assumption that the observations made should be ‘well grounded in qualitative data’ and is acknowledged widely in qualitative research for its ability in generating insightful accounts and contextual explanations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The interpretative stance adopted by this theory is critiqued for its lack of complexity and inability to account for the very act of interpretation (Rennie, 2000). However this theory is helpful to make a primary mental map of data or to find a way to navigate through the totally unstructured data landscape. And once used in combination
with other interpretative methods could generate new insight on the vast amount of material generated in narrative inquiries. I have used this method on the assumption that it would help to maintain open ended nature of the narratives generated at least partly, if not fully. The strong point of this theory is the Open Coding and Focused or Axial Coding. Open coding helps to capture the detail, variation and complexity of the basic qualitative material and Focussed coding engages in axial and theoretical coding of selected codes (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003).

Listening Guide Method is born out of Voice–centred Relational Method that was first introduced by Carol Gilligan in her path breaking work *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan, 1982). Later a number of researchers working on the theme of voice revised the method to make it amenable to psychological research and named it the Listening Guide Method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2003). According to them it is “a method of psychological analysis that draws on voice resonance and relationships as ports of entry into the human psyche” (ibid, p. 157). The concept of voice as it appears in these inquiries treat it as “footprint of the psyche, bearing the marks of the body, of that person’s history, of culture in the form of language and the myriad ways in which human society and history shape the voice and thus leave their imprints on the human soul (Gilligan, 1993)."11 This method presents relationality as a precondition of knowledge

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11 There are many other ways of defining and employing the notion of voice. For instance voice is a familiar concept in Anthropological research. Veena Das (2007) refers precisely to this familiarity associated with the concept in anthropology while thinking about her own difficulty in addressing voice as a concept. In an attempt to define voice she engages in a series of negations, “Voice is not identical to speech; nor does it stand in opposition to writing. Voice, as I understand is not the same as an utterance, nor is writing only graphic –thus I cannot tie voice to presence and writing to absence as suggested by Jacques
when it defines the method as “a pathway into relationship rather than a fixed framework for interpretation” and the efficacy of the method is in its ability to tune into the “polyphonic voice of another person” (Brown & Gilligan, 2003, p. 22, 157). It has also been observed, “The voice centred relational method represents an attempt to translate relational ontology into methodology and into concrete methods of data analysis by exploring individual narrative accounts in terms of their relationships to the people around them and their relationship to the broader social, structural and cultural contexts within which they live” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2001, p. 5). The Listening Guide method is about a series of sequential listening in order to get familiar with the self behind the words and to bring the researcher into relationship with a person’s distinct and multilayered voice. The method has four steps:

1. Listening for the plot - This stage involves reading the transcript of the interview to listen to the stories being told. A mental map of the interview can be made through this which involves the multiple contexts, repeated images, metaphors and the dominant theme. At this stage the researcher is asked to explicitly bring in the thoughts that arise in her mind in response.

2. I poems- This method is intended to follow the free fall of associations. It involves two steps. a) Underline or selects every first person “I” with the verb and the seemingly important accompanying words b) Maintain the sequence in which these texts appear in the conversation.

Derrida” (Das, 2007, p. 7). What she manages to say finally is: “voice may give life to frozen words” (ibid, p. 8). I turned my attention to her struggle with the concept to suggest the complexity of the concept and also to remove the familiarity associated with the concept in Social Scientific inquiries.
3. Listening for contrapuntal voice – This method is drawn from music where contrapuntal voice is a parallel voice that enriches the existing voice. In this step the researcher is supposed to identify, specify and sort out multiple voices. It involves “listening” to the transcript more than twice; each time attending to one voice at a time. Using colour pens each voice must be separated in the narrative.

4. Composing and analysis: Composing is again a musical expression where different elements are combined to produce the melody.

4. Listening to Stories of First Night: What My Sisters Told and What I Heard

I have conducted around 22 in-depth interviews and listened to all of them several times to get a ‘feel’ for the narratives. I was not consciously looking for ‘plots’ at this point. My attempt was to get familiar with the narrating voices in these interviews and I was also looking for the possibility of the emergence of a collective voice. I have selected 10 interviews which I felt have multiple layers and voices and are rich in storyline and plots. I have transcribed those verbatim – indicating incomplete sentences, pauses, silences and incoherent expressions. These 10 interviews were Open Coded as suggested in Grounded Theory Analysis where the occurrence of a theme in the interview and the time code is noted. Open coding allows the researcher to do an experiment with the extent of generalizability without losing the specificity of the individual accounts. A

12 Whether the notion collective voice smuggle with it the idea of generalizability is a point worth pondering upon.

13 I have followed the standard transcription codes. The notation [x] represents a break in the sentence. Pauses and silences are noted and how much time each one lasted and it is also given in square brackets. If the participant restarts talking without the intervention of the researcher it is treated as a pause. If the participant is brought back to the conversation by an intervention by the researcher it is treated as silence. So the same chunk of time can appear as pause or silence in the transcript.
second level Open Coding is attempted to look for the emergence of higher order codes. Twelve codes are generated through this analysis. These codes and the participants’ speech that corresponds to the code are given as appendix 1.  

What is the actual method suggested by Grounded Theory Analysis in conducting data analysis is a contested terrain and there is difference of opinion between Glaser and Strauss who were the first proponents of the theory (Melia 1996, cf Doucet and Mauthner, 2001). I have not written detailed theoretical memos while coding the data, which is prescribed by this method as a key process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) and I have not been able to find a single (overarching) theme that would string the different themes emerging from the different plots to a single plot. I could justify this move by saying that I have improvised on the method as I employed Grounded Theory Analysis as a preliminary tool to organize materials and to generate first impression. But such methodological improvisations are capable of raising more serious questions regarding methods in qualitative inquiries. Doucet and Mauthner observes that such improvisations of a method “engenders a sense of anxiety that we have not proceeded correctly; and rather than be open about exactly what we did and did not do, we might be tempted to simply gloss over the details of data analysis” (Doucet and Mauthner, 1998, p. 6). In this discussion they extend the question to ask, “Is there one particular right way to use a

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14 The engagement with the open codes generated from interview transcripts urges readers to treat it as an instance of ‘connected knowing’ where the “goal is understanding, not proof” (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 183). This move does not try to do away with the whole idea of ‘evidencing’, rather hints at the kind of relations possible or required with what appears as ‘data’ in human scientific studies.
method” (ibid, p. 6) suggesting what is important is to be able to reflect upon the vulnerability of data analysis as a process which is by definition mutable with each instance of application.

Axial codes are generated from the higher order codes and it is presented below for analysis. The four Axial codes generated are: 1) Affect 2) Negotiation 3) Consent and 4) Violation. However I am unable to find a single code that will arrange these four codes in a sequential order and lend new meaning to every narrative.
4.1. Listening to Stories
I have further selected 6 interviews from the open coded 10 and applied the insights from ‘Listening Guide Method’. I have tried to compose an analysis for each one of them separately, combining the ‘plot,’ the ‘I poems’, and the contrapuntal voice registers. The final analysis combined these six analyses with the Axial Codes generated as part of Grounded Theory Approach. I will give an overview of three of these “listening” to present “a trail of evidence” (Tolman, 1994, p. 327) before I proceed to analysis.15

1. Bindhu’s Story

Bindhu is a spirited woman whom I met at my friend’s dance school in Thrissur. She was the office assistant at the dance school. She is 40 years old and has studied till class 7th and is married to an auto driver. She came to office everyday wearing heavy gold ornaments and adorned with a jasmine garland in her hair. She was a quick-witted, energetic woman and was very warm and vibrant in her interpersonal exchanges. I went there to conduct another interview and met Bindhu there. Bindhu expressed interest in talking to me on her First Night experience. That was my first experience of somebody approaching me to share the experience. We had fixed the date and time for the interview, but as the date approached Bindhu was confused and expressed fear. I did not pressurize her told her I would be coming to the dance school that entire week and she could talk to me if she felt like talking. However she turned up for the interview. During the interview, for the first 40 minutes Bindhu was unable to open up. She spoke about everything except her First Night experience – her wedding, her husband’s life as an auto

15 Tolman (1994) considers ‘evidencing’ is important as it leaves room for other interpretations than that of the listener’s and this makes the methodological move “consistent with the epistemological stance that there is multiple meanings in stories” (Tolman, p.327).
driver, their son, and her struggles with her mother-in-law. At this point she described herself as, “I was a quiet girl. I never reacted to her irritating talk. But you know [pause 3 seconds] Now I know. When we work hard for our husband and his family, why does she make these irritating remarks (choriyunna varthamaanam)? But now I react. Now I react a bit much. Everyone here says that I react a bit much. (Laughter)”. But after this candid self-appraisal she went back to the mundane descriptions of her everyday life. There was a brief reference to the First Night of a ‘girl’ in her village where the girl tried to escape from the nuptial chamber. And she concluded the story with the statement that the marriage ended up in divorce and went back to her favourite theme – her everyday struggles. And I did not ask any directive questions. I felt it was pointless continuing the interview and any gesture from me will pressurize her to narrativize. To avoid that situation I formally thanked her for turning up despite her confusions and expressed my own confusion in this way, “I hope it was nothing as you have feared. I told you right, I don’t have any questions. But I definitely thought you won’t turn up, listening to the way you brushed away the idea of interview the day before yesterday. Happy that you came and spent an hour with me.” That was the moment when she started telling the story from out of nowhere. I will first reproduce the exchange between us before proceeding with my analysis.

1. Bindu: “We didn’t know a thing. Since we didn’t know anything whatever is done we will [x]. Now the girls[x] See, Christians even have classes. The children today are not scared. They have laptops. The children today see everything. As we were totally unaware we had no clue what [x]. And what if we run away after marriage? What will be the situation then? What will be in our future (Bhaaviyil enthaakum).
R: Run away?

2. Bindhu: To run away means [pause] not to. Eyes were teary. Couldn’t see. It’s dark. Somehow fell into sleep bathed in tears. I cried. Couldn’t see. After many years I told. This happened. Because of pain[x]. [He]Asked “why didn’t you tell at that time’. I told. “I would have told if I was bold enough to. I could have beaten you to death”. Later we can say anything. That time we can’t say anything. Cried as it was unbearable. We don’t know what it is. And the fatigue. And the darkness. The relief was that can’t see [they] see us. We don’t know what is being done. But can’t see. Can’t see each other. So no problem. [laughter]

Silence 4 seconds

R: When did you feel, I mean remember, seeing each other?

3. Bindhu: It took some time [pause 3 seconds]. See, here we don’t switch on the light. That practice is not here. In his house there is his father and mother. We don’t have freedom. He talked from second day onwards. He told everything. Told about household matters. Told about matters related to his father and mother. And thus our fear went away. We were afraid. We couldn’t say anything to him. Listen to whatever he says[x] Now I ask .Now you talk to me. If you had talked at the time of our wedding “it”(ithu) won’t be there. I ask. If you had talked at the time of our wedding[x].

Silence 3 seconds

R: “If you had talked”? 
4. Bindhu: He had slept by the time I reached. He was lying on the bed when I entered. Who knows whether he was sleeping or not. I was wearing a nighty. No jasmine. Nothing. Nothing was there. I closed the door. It was he who locked the door. Since we don’t know what is[x]

Silence 5 seconds

R: Since we don’t know?

5. Bindhu: Since [we] don’t know [x]. Nothing was told. Made me lie on arms. Positioning my head like this [enacting a position]. Did after that. Hadn’t talked anything. I am telling, if we had talked I won’t have felt pressurized. I won’t have been tense. Came to the house after wedding ceremony. House was crowded. Naturally we[x]. Now girls go and talk. We were not like that. Didn’t talk at all. On the wedding day groom (Cherukkan) said, “If you want, eat the lunch”. I hadn’t eaten lunch. Hadn’t eaten in the morning too. Because of tension. Hadn’t eaten in the noon. Had something at night after reaching home. Was totally starving the entire day. Tension. Crying. What are we? Who are we? Where are we going? We are going to an unfamiliar world. I was tense from morning. Because of not knowing what and who? How would life be after going there? What kind of people are the

16 Nighty is a very popular night wear which is actually a single-piece long frock with round neck and sleeves (with probable origins from the Western style nightwear). This dress became popular in Keralam by the 1970’s and has practically become the uniform of ‘housewives’ and it is usual to spot a woman wearing a nighty in the day time too. Many working women temporarily get into the practice of wearing nighty when they are pregnant and lactating. Nighty as a dress aligns more with the drudgery of housework and mothering. I felt Bindhu mentioned it specifically because, it was so unusual for a woman to wear nighty on her First Night. Usually women wear some variations of the bridal wear on the First Night.
father and mother there? What kind the sisters? How would chettan\textsuperscript{17} react? Is he hot-tempered? There was all these tension. Nowadays I tell, if you had spoken, there won’t have been this much tension. They were not patient that was what was said. [Laughter]. “That’s excellent” I told. Now we can say anything. Then [he] would laugh at me. “You could have told me then about the crying. ...that you were crying”. To urinate[x] I couldn’t go to urinate. I was crying. It needs getting up to go to urinate. I couldn’t get up. I couldn’t get up. I couldn’t stand up. Should I tell? Whom should I tell? See if I had a friend like you we could say, “look, I can’t get up”. We had no one then .We had nothing. We had no elder sisters. I was not in touch with the sisters. Not my direct sisters but daughters of my Vallyamma (mother’s elder sister). And we didn’t talk sex. That’s bad. Now the girls discuss everything in hostels. They see everything. Those days we wouldn’t talk. We girls didn’t talk then.

a) Listening for the plot

The very first listening of the interview gave me the plot of violation. At the same time there was also a voice that had ‘gotten over’ the experience of violation. That voice also came to me as wearing the mark of trauma. I have also noticed two voices – equally prominent in the interview – I and We. I had observed this switching in the daily conversations of Malayali’s where they tend to replace ‘we’ for ‘I’ while talking about a very personal and unique experience. I have attributed the switching to this practice. On further listening I felt Bindhu invokes ‘we’ when she tries to relate her experience with

\textsuperscript{17} This is one of the most common terms to address the husband among Hindus across Kerala and across caste groups. This is the first time this expression was used in this segment of the interview, so I have kept it like that.
other women’s experience. She started the narration with “We” then switched to ‘I’ and came back to ‘We’. I felt she was also trying to rope me in the narrative not just as a listener, but actively demanding my participation. She was implicating me in the known–unknown game. Only in the second listening did I notice the expression, “If I had a friend like you” which in a away opened up the whole story for me - Why she expressed interest in talking to me - whom she was looking for and her need to ‘be heard’.

b) I Poem

Though Listening Guide Method recommends making ‘I poems’. Here I make both ‘I poem’ and ‘we poem’ to make sense of the experience of Bindhu and my own relation to the interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I poem (From the paragraphs 1 and 2)</th>
<th>We –poem (From the paragraphs 1 and 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I cried</td>
<td>We didn’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I told</td>
<td>Since we didn’t know</td>
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</table>

18 I also felt the switching I have observed in many people’s conversation allows this possibility or stems from this need to build a shared experience.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I told</th>
<th>We will</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would have told</td>
<td>We had no clue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I was bold</td>
<td>What if we run away?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could have beaten him to death</td>
<td>We can say</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We couldn’t say</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We didn’t know</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We didn’t know</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We don’t talk</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I Poem (from the para 5)</strong></th>
<th><strong>We poem (from the para 5)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am telling now</td>
<td>We don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I won’t be pressurized</td>
<td>We are not like that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I won’t be tense</td>
<td>What are we?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I haven’t eaten lunch

I was tensed

I tell

I told

I couldn’t go to urinate.

I am into crying.

I couldn’t get up.

I couldn’t get up.

I couldn’t stand up.

Can I tell?

Whom should I tell?

If I had a friend

I couldn’t get up

I am not in touch with sisters

Who are we?

Where are we going?

We are going

We can say

We had no one then

We have nothing

We have no sister

We don’t talk sex

We won’t talk

We don’t talk

We don’t talk

Listening for Contrapuntal voices

I take the same paragraph 5 for this exercise on listening to contrapuntal voices. I was able to listen to five interconnected yet distinct voices in this paragraph. They are: Then
voice, Now voice, I don’t talk voice, I am telling voice and finally a voice concerned with the knowledge of the unknown of the experience. Then voice is highlighted in yellow and Now voice is highlighted in green. I don’t talk and I am telling are the other two voices. Since they go hand in hand with the Then and Now voices respectively, revealing so evidently the loss and recovery of voice, I have not colour coded it again. The voice that struggles with the ‘unknown of the experience’ is coded with turquoise blue.

Bindhu: Since [we] don’t know [x]. Nothing was told. Made me lie on arms. Positioning my head like this [enacting a position]. Did after that. Hadn’t talked anything. I am telling. if we had talked I won’t have felt pressurized. I won’t have been tense. Came to the house after wedding ceremony. House was crowded. Naturally we[x]. Now girls go and talk. We were not like that. Didn’t talk at all. On the wedding day groom (Cherukkan) said, “If you want, eat the lunch”. I hadn’t eaten lunch. Hadn’t eaten in the morning too. Because of tension. Hadn’t eaten in the noon. Had something at night after reaching home. Was totally starving the entire day. Tension. Crying. What are we? Who are we? Where are we going? We are going to an unfamiliar world. I was tense from morning. Because of not knowing what and who? How would life be after going there? What kind of people are the father and mother there? What kind the sisters? How would chettan react? Is he hot-tempered? There was all these tension. Nowadays I tell, if you had spoken, there won’t have been this much tension. They were not patient that was what was said. [Laughter]. “That’s excellent” I told. Now we can say anything. Then [he] would laugh at me. “You could have told me then about the crying. ...that you were crying”. To urinate[x] I couldn’t go to urinate. I was

19 This is one of the most common terms to address the husband among Hindus across Kerala and across caste groups. This is the first time this expression was used in this segment of the interview, so I have kept it like that.
crying. It needs getting up to go to urinate. I couldn’t get up. I couldn’t get up. I couldn’t stand up. Should I tell? Whom should I tell? See if I had a friend like you we could say, “look, I can’t get up”. We had no one then. We had nothing. We had no elder sisters. I was not in touch with the sisters. Not my direct sisters but daughters of my Vallyamma (mother’s elder sister). And we didn’t talk sex. That’s bad. Now the girls discuss everything in hostels. They see everything. Those days we wouldn’t talk. We girls didn’t talk then.

Then Voice – Don’t Talk Voice

Nothing was told. Hadn’t talked anything. Not talked at all. And we didn’t talk. Those days we wouldn’t. We girls then didn’t talk.

Now Voice – I am talking Voice

I tell now, if talked I wouldn’t be pressurized. I wouldn’t have been tense. Now girls will go and talk. I tell if you were speaking, this much tension won’t be there. They were not patient that was what said. [Laughter]. “That’s excellent’ I told. Now we can say anything. Can I tell? Whom should I tell? Now the girls discuss everything.

The Unknown voice

Since [we]don’t know[x] What are we? Who are we? Where are we going? We are going to an unfamiliar world. Because of not knowing what and who? Hows the life after going there. How is the father and mother there? How are sisters? How would chettan react?

Composing an Analysis
The *now* voice is both the I who look back at the experience and the girls of the present generation. The *then* voice is the young girl –the psyche –who lost her voice in the face of trauma. Her analysis of today’s girls is coming out of her own experience of retrieving voice. As she had expressed in the beginning of the interview: “I was quiet. Now I react. ...I react a bit much says people here” gives an entry point to understand the whole interview. She is finding her voice from an experience that silenced her for years. She says in the above excerpt of the transcript that “After many years I told. This happened.” The emphasis on talking too is revealed in the exchange. While describing the moment of “seeing each other”(para 3) she starts her description with the darkness in the room but turns quickly to the moment he has started talking as if suggesting they saw each other through talking –through language. It is interesting to note, how she projects her *now* voice – her ability to speak – of the life of the girls around her. Is it a simple act of projection or projective identification? Or is she presenting ‘talking’ as a future coping mechanism when faced with an impending danger – a possible threat of beheading – no virgin in the land of the King/the Man could escape.

Her account of the actual moment of violation too must be noted. She narrates it in small broken sentences. It lacks the details. “Made me lie on arms. Positioning my head like this. Did after that. Hadn’t talked anything.” This describes how she felt about the action from the part of the man and what is the texture of that experience that gives it the ‘qualia’ of violation. Her sentences lack a proper subject. Who made her lie on whose arms? Who positioned her head? Who did what? Who was not talking? In the entire account she does not acknowledge the person. She experiences only the actions. What follows is the reference to the only verbal exchange they had on the entire day. And in
that account he is addressed as “groom”. Not a plain ‘he’ (pullikaran) or a more intimate ‘chettan’ – the way he was addressed in the other parts of the interview, but the term designating his formal role – groom. This addressal shows the lack of relation and the presence of a formal relation that grants the man consent to have a sexual relation with the woman. And it also shows how or why it is experienced by the woman as violation. Unlike her vivid description of physical pain her description of psychological trauma is very brief.

In the beginning of the interview she had told me the story of the girl in her village who had tried to run away from the nuptial chamber and had ended up filing for divorce. Does the associative logic show a dissociative process? She knew. She was not aware that she knew.

2. **Story of Leena**

Leena is an undergraduate teacher in her late thirties. I knew her from college and when contacted, she agreed to talk to me. She used to write poetry in college and our conversation started with a reference to that. She said she no longer wrote anything with a clear sense of loss. She has stayed in hostels and has access to laptops and in that sense belongs to the girls of the present generation in Bindhu’s story. She married into a respectable family in her locality and her spouse is a bank manager. She described a practice in her husband’s family that she found so strange which gave the entry point for the interview with her. In her spousal family, her father-in-law reads the newspaper first. No one else is supposed to touch it before that. Her family had no such practice in place and whoever had access to the newspaper first read it first. And everyone in the family
read the newspaper every single morning. In the initial years she used to observe the 
unwritten rule in her husband’s family and now she says, “I grab the newspaper when it 
comes in the morning. I have grabbed that space and liberty in the house. No one gave 
me the space. I grabbed it.”

Her First Night story falls into the ‘fear story’ which many other women have told me. 
But she narrated the story in a jovial voice. We laughed at several points during the 
narration as she was describing the whole incident in a humorous way. She used the 
expression, “It was comedy” thrice while describing the night. First she used the 
xpression while narrating how they forgot to bring the milk to the nuptial chamber. “It 
was full comedy. We were confused as to open the door of the bedroom [to get the milk]. 
But they were also confused whether to ask us to open. In fact we could hear people 
milling about outside the bedroom. You know, we could feel the eyes of people. Finally 
they knocked and we opened, they gave us milk [Laughing].” The second is an instance 
of wedding ragging where the cousins left an alarm clock in the bedroom which rang at 
12 o’clock. She ended the narration of this story with the expression “It was comedy”. 
The next “comedy” is the “pre-canon course” – the pre-marital course she had attended at 
the church. A doctor took a sex education class and he told the class that the sexual organ 
of the woman will be violet in colour when it is ready for penetrative sex. Leena said in a 
mocking tone, “I was worried. I thought. God, has it become violet? Oh God, please 
make it violet. I am telling you the truth. I thought of this in the middle of all this. I feel 
sorry for that woman. I was so thoroughly ignorant to think about violet and blue. Now 
when I look back, it is comedy”. But there were moments where she narrated with a sober 
voice. I will reproduce an excerpt from the transcript for the purpose of ‘listening’. 
1. Leena: That night I told him no no no no several times. But he didn’t listen to me. I felt sad. Really sad. I felt rage towards this guy. That was the moment when I thought whether I had married a guy who doesn’t understand me? Because till that moment there was the hope that he will understand me. I didn’t know much about him and so I shouldn’t expect much. That was it[x] On that night[x]. But I expected. Because one enters life with a concept of First Night. I had a wish. No. It should be after it (ithu) has come between us; after intimacy had come between us. But he isn’t someone who has such thoughts. I think they don’t need it. I can say from my life it is body which is important for them. Not mind. They realize it very late that it is beautiful when mind comes in. I think so. They want to see us as a body and they want to use us. When it won’t [x] when he couldn’t he thought we have some problem.

Silence 4 seconds

R: Problem means?

2. Leena: See, even after many attempts I was not opening. That didn’t happen. I have a friend. I have taken her to hospital several times as I know my experience. See whatever it is we need our sex organs to be open. But I couldn’t. Because I was not in that mood. I hadn’t reached such mood. On the contrary I was at the top octave of fear. I tried to tell myself. This is my husband. This is not someone else. I am with him. But it turned out to be not helpful. We won’t get into that mood. I didn’t come. Tried several times. Had no sleep. Tried several times in the night. And finally he tried to talk. But by that time I was scared. I was dead scared. Then stopped having accomplished nothing. Think we slept in exhaustion. Now I talk about these things. Now we really talk. Then I couldn’t. Even when he started talking I used to say ‘stop’. Because I was scared. This is something that shouldn’t be spoken. But he helped me at this point. He told me that this is not something
that shouldn’t be spoken. This is not something that shouldn’t be done. This is human. He told that.

Silence 4 seconds

R: He told that on First Night?

3. Leena: No. He said nothing of this sort on First Night. When I said no, he said yes. He wanted it. He too was nervous. He wanted it. He was taking it as a night given to us. He was trying to make me believe that. But I couldn’t. I think it was a failure because of my fault. I was not ready mentally. I think, if he had started talking to me before this, if there was love between us, I could have[x] But there was nothing. Entered the room suddenly. A lodge room. Someone pushed a woman into a lodge room. I still can’t accept it. I tell him now; all my respect for you vanishes when I remember that night. If there had been a bit of patience[x] But a man cannot do that. When they get a woman’s body near [x] a body upon which they have right[x] they won’t be patient and wait. It was almost a half rape. It was that.

Silence 6 seconds

R: Half rape?[pause 2 seconds] I mean what do you mean by half rape? That’s a very powerful expression.

4. Leena: Yes. That’s a powerful expression. It was that. The only difference is that there was no crying. See, somebody tries to say no. But no one listens. Somebody pushes away the hand. No. Tries to block. But can’t. That is it.

R: But why half?
5. Leena: May be because its my husband. Isn’t it? Yes it is. Is it? Don’t know. [laughing] I said it without knowing. Rape is not just someone pushing you to the ground and doing it. Any touch that happens without our consent is rape. I tried my best to block. I said no. Even after my repeated attempts to block and “no” if somebody tries to touch me what is it? I told him later. I felt that way. I don’t blame him. He is innocent. That he is. I think he was curious. He wanted to see ‘what is a woman’. I think, on this issue men are so meek.

a) Listening for plots

Her story unfolds as a story of violation. Her futile exercise in talking to herself to relax is heard by me as an act of total helplessness: “I was telling myself: This is my husband. This is not someone else. I am with him. But it turned to be not helpful.” The metaphor of lodge evokes the image of an unfamiliar place in my mind and as a place that usually appears in press reports for sex trafficking and police raids; lodge also evokes the sense of a place where something shady goes on. I felt she dismantled the respectability that the nuptial chamber enjoys in a culture through this expression. Her story has a distinct understanding in her own voice. She expresses that in many ways throughout the narration. Towards the end of the interview she says:

“I haven’t grown up in a culture which gives me voice. I understand my position in this house. I kept silent in many instances where I really felt what was going on was not right. It’s wrong. All the silence a woman needs[x] Getting silenced[x] Giving into silence on occasions that demand silence. That is the situation. When you know all this is right [she meant wrong but said right] you have to be silent. I am going through such a situation. Now when I use my Facebook he would say “Don’t play with it. Use it with caution”. He
doesn’t like it. I know he doesn’t want to accept that side of me. He is actually scared of me. My voice[x]. But family goes forward in our attempts to find pleasure beyond these points.”(Italics shows English in the original)

This understanding of voice and silence she carries within herself and her attempts to find pleasure ‘beyond these points’ of voice and silence informs my listening to her interview²⁰.

b) I – poem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I poem from para 1</th>
<th>I poem from para 2</th>
<th>I poem from para 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I told him no no no no</td>
<td>I was not opening.</td>
<td>I said no,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt sad.</td>
<td>I have a friend.</td>
<td>I couldn’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt rage</td>
<td>I know my experience.</td>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt</td>
<td>But I can’t.</td>
<td>I was not ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have</td>
<td>I am not.</td>
<td>I think,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t know</td>
<td>I haven’t</td>
<td>I could have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shouldn’t expect</td>
<td>I was on the top octave of fear.</td>
<td>I still can’t accept it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²⁰ While writing this chapter I came to notice that her Facebook account has been deleted. I have sent her a text message over phone out of curiosity asking what happened to her Facebook account and the message remains unanswered till date.
But I expected. I have tried to tell I tell him now,
I had a wish. I am with him. I remember that night
I think I didn’t come.
I can say I was scared.
I think so. I was dead scared.
Now I talk
Then I can’t.
I would say ‘stop’.
I was scared.

Leena: Leena: That night I told him no no no no several times. But he didn’t listen to me. I felt sad. Really sad. I felt rage towards this guy. That was the moment when I thought whether I had married a guy who doesn’t understand me? Because till that moment there was the hope that he will understand me. I didn’t know much about him and so I shouldn’t expect much. That was it[x] On that night[x]. But I expected. Because one enters life with a concept of First Night. I had a wish. No. It should be after it (ithu) has come between us; after intimacy had come between us. But he isn’t someone who has such thoughts. I think they don’t need it. I can say from my life it is body which is important for them. Not mind. They realize it very late that it is beautiful when
mind comes in. I think so. They want to see us as a body and they want to use us. When it won’t
[x] when he couldn’t he thought we have some problem.

Silence 4 seconds

R: Problem means?

a) Leena: See, even after many attempts I was not opening. That didn’t happen. I have a
friend. I have taken her to hospital several times as I know my experience. See whatever
it is we need our sex organs to be open. But I couldn’t. Because I was not in that mood. I
hadn’t reached such mood. On the contrary I was at the top octave of fear. I tried to tell
myself. This is my husband. This is not someone else. I am with him. But it turned out to
be not helpful. We won’t get into that mood. I didn’t come. Tried several times. Had no
sleep. Tried several times in the night. And finally he tried to talk. But by that time I was
scared. I was dead scared. Then stopped having accomplished nothing. Think we slept in
exhaustion. Now I talk about these things. Now we really talk. Then I couldn’t. Even
when he started talking I used to say ‘stop’. Because I was scared. This is something that
shouldn’t be spoken. But he helped me at this point. He told me that this is not something
that shouldn’t be spoken. This is not something that shouldn’t be done. This is human. He
told that.

Silence 4 seconds

R: He told that on First Night?

b) Leena: No. He said nothing of this sort on First Night. When I said no, he said yes. He
wanted it. He too was nervous. He wanted it. He was taking it as a night given to us. He
was trying to make me believe that. But I couldn’t. I think it was a failure because of my
fault. I was not ready mentally. I think, if he had started talking to me before this, if there was love between us, I could have [x] But there was nothing. Entered the room suddenly. A lodge room. Someone pushed a woman into a lodge room. I still can’t accept it. I tell him now; all my respect for you vanishes when I remember that night. If there had been a bit of patience [x] But a man cannot do that. When they get a woman’s body near [x] a body upon which they have right [x] they won’t be patient and wait. It was almost a half rape. It was that.

Silence 6 seconds

R: Half rape? [pause 2 seconds] I mean what do you mean by half rape? That’s a very powerful expression.

c) Leena: Yes. That’s a powerful expression. It was that. The only difference is that there was no crying. See, somebody tries to say no. But no one listens. Somebody pushes away the hand. No. Tries to block. But can’t. That is it.

R: But why half?

d) Leena: May be because it’s my husband. Isn’t it? Yes it is. Is it? Don’t know. [laughing] I said it without knowing. Rape is not just someone pushing you to the ground and doing it. Any touch that happens without our consent is rape. I tried my best to block. I said no. Even after my repeated attempts to block and “no” if somebody tries to touch me what is it? I told him later. I felt that way. I don’t blame him. He is innocent. That he is. I think he was curious. He wanted to see ‘what is a woman’. I think, on this issue men are so meek.

e) There is a loud and clear “no” in Leena’s story. I have colour coded it in pink. She has her voice. But her feeling of silence comes from the experience of ‘not being heard’.
1) “That night I told him no no no no several times.

2) I had a wish. No.

3) See, somebody tries to say no. But no one listens. Somebody pushes away the hand. No. Tries to block. But can’t. That is it.

4) I tried my best to block. I said no.”

There is a voice which observes the whole act as if dissociated from the one who experiences the night. And this dissociation happens when she reaches the ‘high octaves of fear’ and it is a temporary state and is not helpful to address the crisis. It is colour coded in blue.

1) “I at the top octave of fear. I tried to tell myself. This is my husband. This is not someone else. I am with him. But it turned out to be not helpful.”

2) “But there was nothing. Suddenly entered the room. A lodge room. Someone pushed a woman into a lodge room. I still can’t accept it.”

And I could discern another voice from the “I-poem”. It flows through the three poems made from three paragraphs. It combines the first line of the first poem, third line of the second poem and last line of the last poem.

I told him no no no no

I know my experience

I remember that night

This is the voice which knows what is going to happen and tries to resist it and comes out with the knowledge of what happened and keeps that knowledge within her. It is this
knowledge which makes her extend a helping hand to her friend who goes through a similar experience. Does this show a web of shared experience emerging through narrativizing - where one cannot define where one’s body ends and another body starts. The then voice and now voice is there as in the case of Bindhu’s story and goes hand-in-hand with the don’t talk voice and I am saying voices respectively.

3. Vasudha’s Story

Vasudha is a 59-year-old retired Malayalam professor who agreed to talk to me upon my request. I had met her at a poetry event in Kochi in 2001, while I was in college. I lost contact with her in the following years and we met again in 2012 through Facebook. In our chats on Facebook she appeared to me as someone with very fine taste in literature and an ear for the poetic. Our ‘First Night talk’ lasted for three and a half hours and she made nuanced observations and gave meticulous descriptions all through the interview. For instance while describing the experience of undressing she paused to think of what is shyness. And she made an observation, “I think shyness comes from the knowledge that somebody is watching you. You know, we are watching somebody watching us. It is this knowledge of watching which makes us shy”. She referred to many literary figures and genres and to particular literary texts in her storytelling. One major figure who appeared thrice in her interview is Kamala Das aka Madhavikkutty. She referred to Kamala Das when we were at around forty minutes into our conversation:
“Have you read Kamala Das’s First Night experience? She was married off for failing in the 9th standard. It was a punishment from her father. That too to an old guy. An old guy married little Kamala. The bitterness of that experience is there in her writing. There were wounds and the women in the family applied medicines and consoled her. I remember reading some such stuff. It is there in Sulochana’s book ‘My elder sister Kamala’. But you know, Sulochana won’t say this. Sulochana adheres to the Nalappat family’s tradition. She is not outspoken as Kamala. But it is there. Marriage as punishment. And Kamala’s hostility towards her father till his death. But Sulochana won’t have written it. But I have read it. Read it somewhere. The sentence goes like this. There were wounds at secret places[x] wounds at secret places[x] I saw mother applying medicines and consoling her. But you know Sulochana is younger to Kamala. I don’t think Nalapat family will allow such a scene to be witnessed by a younger sister. Lemme check the book. I am not sure.”

Again the reference to Kamala’s First Night comes in at around one hour fifty minutes into the interview.

“Madhavikkutty says this. In My Story. Husband used me. She wrote. Forcefully. He kept me in the room (Enne murikkullil sookshichu). Look, such meaningful words. That is Madhavikkutty’s language. She is her language. She says this while saying she was not allowed to go and watch Kathakali. There was Kathakali in the house as part of the wedding. Somebody asked whether she was coming. I don’t know which guy asked such a wicked question on her First Night? It is her First Night. And the question is whether she is coming to watch Kathakali. May be that’s why she used the expression he kept me in the room. It was against her wish.”

She referred to the poem Mrigashishkan (The animal instructor) by Vijayalakshmi while describing her First Night which likens/compares the condition of woman to that of a
circus animal. The man appears as the instructor in the circus tent. She also used the metaphor of cow and calf from *Krishnagatha* while describing the maternal feelings she has developed for her husband off late in the conjugal relationship. I will reproduce an excerpt from the interview where she narrates the most unpleasant and the most pleasant moments from her First Night memory. She moves sequentially from “worst” to the pleasant and she names them so.

“I had told you about the attack [she is referring to his first attempt to embrace her] It was not a big attack. [laughter] However[x] But in between the attack I don’t remember how I was undressed. Whether I was sitting or I was lying. I don’t remember at all. I haven’t felt anything. Because what comes next is the moment of fear. But after that he asked me to get the milk which was on the table. He said, “We didn’t drink milk. Get the milk” This is one moment where I feel really sad. I asked, “May I wear the sari?” Without wearing sari[x] Walking nude in front of a man. That is one of the greatest insult I felt. But he said please please if you love me do this for me. He wanted to see me for real. It was unlike watching me sitting in front of him. Even now when I think about it, it was not a pleasant experience. We enjoy shyness. Even when we say “ayyo I am shy” we enjoy shyness if we are sure that the other person is enjoying our body. But this walk[x] I can’t say I enjoyed. I didn’t like. But did. I did. Because that is how he blackmail me. Since he said do if you love me, I did. There was no light in the bedroom. He needs light even now. He won’t get up if the fan goes off. But he will if the light goes off. His cousins’ mother remarked the next day, “Ayye you guys slept with the lights on? Very bad. Disgusting.” I told, “He says he is scared. He can’t sleep.” If these people get something they will make a story out of it. That night since there was no light in the bedroom he switched on the bathroom light and kept the bathroom open. Not a romantic lighting at all. The worst moment in the night was that. But the most pleasant moment is [x]I told you earlier [x] When I said its painful for me he said then leave it. He showed kindness (*karuna*) towards me. So when I said “ayyo it’s painful”
he said. O.k Then leave it. If I try again you will feel aversion towards sex” he said this exact word. Aversion. But the message I got was he is very kind.

a) Listening for plot:

Her story came to me as a multilayered story which cannot be reduced to a single plot. However she emerges in the story as someone who was able to negotiate her space. She presents the moment where she was ‘being heard’ as the most pleasant moment in the night. Her insights on the relationship are commendable. What followed the excerpt quoted above was a definition of love which works for her in their relationship. “My idea of love is me doing something that will make him happy. His idea of love is again me doing something that will make him happy [laughter]. You get the difference. That difference is always there.” But her account clearly says even her idea of love is him doing (and here doing is ‘not doing’) something that will make her happy. Whenever she tried to produce the sacrificing wife’s voice, another voice emerged disrupting this sacrificial voice. What made her narrative different was the insight that sometime she has to produce the sacrificial wife’s tone, if she doesn’t really want to sacrifice what is at stake.

I poem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I had told you</th>
<th>I am shy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t remember</td>
<td>I can’t say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was undressed</td>
<td>I have enjoyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was sitting</td>
<td>I didn’t like</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>I was lying</td>
<td>I did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I haven’t felt</td>
<td>I did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am really sad</td>
<td>I told</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I asked</td>
<td>I told</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May I ?</td>
<td>I said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt insult</td>
<td>I said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think</td>
<td>I got a message</td>
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</table>

b) Listening for Contrapuntal Voices

Like the other two stories this is a story where the woman’s voice was heard. And it is this moment she presents as the most pleasant moment in the night. She qualifies it, “I got a message” suggesting the experience of listening to the other person’s voice. And the moment where her voice was not heard is reconstructed as the worst moment of the night. She presents it as an insulting experience and not the kind of ‘shyness’ which according to her women enjoy in erotic plays. She acknowledges the gaze and her willingness (not just her, she uses “we” implicating all women in the scene) to be in the objectifying gaze of the man. “I can’t say I enjoyed” presents two voices and the relationship between the
two. It reveals the cultural compulsion to enjoy the coercive gaze and her resistance with a negation.

4.2. Listening to the Polyphony and Timbre

A cursory glance through the Open Codes will reveal how multilayered the stories of First Night are. They are not just multilayered, they are polyphonic too. This is one problem the inquiry faced while attempting an analysis: the presence of codes on which I could ‘glance at’ and the multitude of voices that haunted me. Transcription helps to ‘see’ the material, but the chances are high that transcription might leave out the polyphonic voices. There are many voices that reverberate deep inside the listener.\(^{21}\) An analysis sensitive to the timbre of the voices could bring in new ‘insights’ to the material. Timbre is defined as one of the nine aspects of sound. This one is the less technical aspect among the nine aspects such as pitch or loudness. It is generally termed as ‘sound colour’ confounding the senses invoked and refers to the indispensable quality of a sound that gives it the character or the “unique quality that sets it apart from all other sounds” (Mott, 2014, p. 56). Timbre helps us to distinguish whether the sound comes from a Piano or a violin when all other aspects such as pitch, loudness and frequency are the same. I think it is possible or necessary to extend Listening Guide Method to listen to the timbre of the...

\(^{21}\) I am aware of the methodological and conceptual pitfall the expression ‘deep inside’ is capable of producing. It brings back the topological imagination the thesis was trying to displace. But I have decided to keep it as it is as this is what I felt as a researcher when I emerged out of the listening of the interviews for the first time, haunted by these voices and petrified by these voices. Also, in the original formulation by Gilligan “voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel connecting inner and outer worlds” (Gilligan, 1993, p. xvi). It is not easy for an inquiry to do away with the conception of interiority if it is employing the Listening Guide Method. I would like to acknowledge the tensions inherent in these conceptualizations while trying to think through the questions of intimate.
voices to tap their full potential as “ports of entry to human psyche”. The present analysis tries to combine the Axial Codes generated with the Grounded Theory Method with the timbre of the voices generated while listening.

I. Affect

The narratives present a multitude of emotions: fear, anxiety, excitement, anticipation etc. Fear is one of the major tones that leave behind its mark once you listen to the stories and to the voices. This rendition of fear has many sub-tones such as pain, anxiety, trauma, and the ultimate among them is the attempts to escape the nuptial chamber and the First Night either physically or psychologically through dissociation (as I have suggested in the listening of Leena). How does one analyse the recurring reference to a fear, that also a crippling or numbing fear? What are they actually afraid of when they say: “I am scared” or “I was on the high octave of fear” or “what comes next is the moment of fear”. This leaves the inquiry with three options:

1. The first and the obvious way is to treat the fear as real and stemming from the potential sexual encounter that looms large over the couple once they enter the nuptial chamber.

2. The fear could also be treated as a careful re-deployment of the trope of the virginal by the virgin herself where generally in the culture, virgins are represented as timid and shy and totally uninitiated sexually.

3. Third: The fear is real, but what they are afraid of is not the other person in the room, but their own desire.
Each reading opens up a window and closes off another. The first reading brings back the question of transparent self / transparent experience. To translate the question to this context: Is the person actually scared when he or she says “I was scared”? Should the inquiry take that speech at its face value? If she was not scared, what was she actually feeling and why did she say she was scared? Here the second reading could give a clue as to why she was saying she was scared repeatedly – Perhaps she was re-enacting the dominant and culturally validated role of the virgin bride – timid, shy and totally uninitiated sexually. Given the precarious positioning of the bride in the nuptial chamber it is possible that she was left with no other option than to ‘perform’ as virgin and to anticipate the act that will make and unmake her simultaneously. While thinking about the precariousness, I wish to draw attention to the corporeality of the exchange – in an unfamiliar place, in an unfamiliar house, in an unfamiliar room and with a stranger. It is a closure worked out simultaneously on the space and the subjectivity. The ‘woman’ in the nuptial chamber is left with no other subject position than that of the virgin bride. Whether she is actually a virgin or not is the concern here. That would be a question that reproduces the Patriarchal surveillance on the woman’s body. But the question here is how this moment makes a woman virgin so that it could tap her sexual and reproductive labour for the creation of a masculine order.

This leads to another question, whether the inquiry will overlook the voice of the women who entrusted it with their stories, in its attempt to deal with the transparent self question. This discussion will make an attempt to re-visit this voice towards the end.
Or it could be the third possibility that they were indeed afraid but what they were afraid of was not the unfamiliarity of the place, or the person, but the unfamiliarity of their own desire.

The sub-tones and the timbre of the voice that expresses fear help in listening to the ‘fear voice’ in a better way. It is an ill-defined fear. In some accounts the physical pain gains prominence and in some other accounts it is psychological trauma. And what is the nature of the pain? Below is an account of pain given by a participant:

   We don’t know. It is an unknown pain. We haven’t experienced that pain yet. These are the most sensitive areas of your body. So if there’s pain that’s some pain which we don’t know yet. How can I imagine it? I don’t care breaking my legs or hands. I am someone who has burnt my black moles all by myself. These things I can manage with my willpower. I have no prior knowledge of how it is. What it is. So I was curious. So what if it is unbearable? One of my friends in Bangalore told me, “gal if you get scared once, you will remain scared forever. Whenever you try, it will be painful for you. If you can withstand that pain once, the rest of the days will be o.k.” So I thought one day I will go through the pain and will live peacefully the rest of the days. (Appendix 1, Open Code, no. 7, Divya)

What kind of a pain is it? Is it physical pain? Why does she refer to this pain as unbearable when she has not experienced it? If she knows this pain is unbearable why did she say in the beginning, ‘we don’t know’? It may be essential to explore the other codes also to understand the nature and structure of the fear expressed. With this intention, I leave this discussion on fear and shall return to the discussion towards the end.
II. Negotiation

What I have tentatively labelled as negotiation in the Axial Coding, signals towards the question of relationality. The Open Coding gives three major nodes of negotiation – He wanted to see; He wanted to do; Talk to me\(^2\) (Appendix 1, Code, no. 4; Code, no. 6). The negotiation between the bride and groom on the wedding night reveals that an archaic battle is played out between them, and between ‘being seen’ and ‘being heard’. I would like to draw attention to not the objectifying male gaze but to the fundamental difference in the senses employed in understanding and negotiating through First Night. What does this empirical difference signify? I do not wish to endorse or valorize this moment of difference. Rather the discussion moves to the next Axial Code, ‘Consent’ in an attempt to understand this difference.

III. Consent

This is the third Axial Code I have used to suggest a situation in the First Night narrative which is reconstructed by the women as an experience of ‘being heard’. The Open Codes that accompanied this code were: He heard my No. He waited till I was ready (Appendix 1: Code, no. 5). I use consent to suggest that moment where the guy had not initiated the sexual activity, had decided not to proceed to penetrative sex or had decided to initiate a conversation between them. In most of the accounts these moments are reconstructed as instances of waiting where the guy waits to obtain her consent.

\(^2\)In the narrative reconstructions it is more “you could have talked to me” or “you could have listened to me” than a straight “talk to me” which my coding has forced on another speech. “You could have talked to me” is more suggestive where it gesture towards the (im)possibility of a dialogue.
I began the chapter on the *Tali* rite by mentioning the discomfort I felt while reading the case of the death of the girl Phulomonee on her wedding night and the testimony given by her mother Radhamony at the colonial court where she said, “I saw my daughter lying on the cot weltered in blood.”²⁴ I was confused over what else I could do other than to politically condemn the situation. The archive and the analysis of psychologising discourses framed ‘consent’ as a question related to modernity – related to personhood and rights. But here I would like to ask whether they are only the speech of the psychologized subject or do they express a fundamental human need? This leaves the thesis with the deployment of two contradictory frameworks to address the question of consent: The first approach considers consent as a modern question and the second approach considers it as a fundamental human need. However I believe it also makes the process rich by adding another layer – a layer of (hermeneutic) suspicion at its own neat, logical models. Even more important, it helps me to engage with the voice of the women rather than dismissing them to serve the purpose of my pre-conceived framework which renders rhetoric of consent as the “effect” of psychologising discourse.

The thesis has tried to document the psychological advice on popular media on First Night which urges the couple to talk to each other on that night. Here, in these narrative reconstructions of the experience of First Night, the women make repeated assertions on the necessity for talk/conversation – the need to talk and the need to be heard. How does one engage with this perceived need for talk? Do they suggest the same kind of talk? Is there another voice distinct from the one produced by the psychologized regime? One

²⁴See the discussion on Phulomony Case in “Rhetoric against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child Wife” (Sarkar2003, p.226-227).
possible way of looking at the psychologization is that the psychologized regime represents talk as a better tool for conquering and thus forecloses the possibility of the emergence of the ‘Scene of Two’. However these women suggest the possibility of another scene, where talk is presented as something that goes precisely against the conquering impulse. This takes the discussion to the next Axial Code - violation.

IV. Violation

Since this endeavour is primarily concerned with voice, it will be useful to listen to how voice manifests (or covers up) the experience of violation. In the end, the narratives distil down to two possibilities: The situation where the woman feels her voice was being heard and the situation where she feels her voice was not being heard. I attribute violation in those situations where the voice of the woman was not heard and attribute non-violation in situations where the woman said she had the feeling that her voice was heard. Parallel to this, there is a loss and recovery of voice happening within the woman. When the man listens to her, she is able to retain her voice and when he does not listen to her, it leads to the loss of her voice. Do these narratives present language as a precondition to inaugurate the Scene of two where one could experientially differentiate the touch that leads to violation and a non-violating touch?25

The Axial Codes, negotiation, consent and violation together suggests a speaking subject who expresses the need to be heard. But what is she saying? Listening to the timbre of her voice reveals it to be pleading. Though the culture presents First Night as a pinnacle

25 One striking example that came up in one of the narratives was the distinction made by the participant between the touch by a stranger in a crowded bus and the touch by the lover in the bedroom.
of romantic intimacy none of the narrative reconstructions presented the event as being so. At least in the three listening produced in the chapter we could hear women pleading to the men anticipating violation of a sexual kind. Though they present themselves in the narrative as subjects who are able to carve out a space for themselves later in the relation – perhaps after 1001 nights – First Night leaves with them no option than to plead. In these pleading, women emphatically foreground the power differential embedded in the heterosexual scene. This power differential is perhaps the most obvious and thus the most taken for granted element that constitutes the heterosexual exchange.

I would like to argue that the idea of consent which is employed to address this power differential reproduces precisely this power differential. By presenting woman as the consent giving subject and at the same time reserving the right ‘to act or not to act’ with the man, consent invisibilizes the power differential in the heterosexual situation. Consent brings back the active-male passive-female binary through the backdoor – a binary which goes back till Aristotle. The question, ‘consent for what’ brings the conventional notion that man is the active partner who penetrates and the woman is the body to be penetrated upon. This discussion hints towards the limitation of consent in understanding the experience of women as capable of differentiating their experience as violating and non-violating. If it is not consent what else is left with to understand the experience of women or the voice of the woman that says, “I am scared,” or “Talk to me,” or “Don’t do it”. What is the relation instituted here between the man and the woman? Or is it a relation at all?
The narratives and the analysis the chapter has attempted helps to see First Night as the difficult domain of the two or the domain of the difficult two. When First Night is presented as a beautiful moment of relation in the given culture, all the narrative reconstructions of First Night generated as part of this research project present the night as a potential site of violation. These narratives work like a counter narrative to the dominant cultural narratives which imagine easy relationality. The narratives reveal the threshold status of First Night as a moment that carries with it the promise of relation and the possibility of beheading. First Night narratives hints at the possibility that there is beheading in the relation. The relation is instituted through the beheading of the other. First Night which shows the celebrated moment of heterosexuality, actually suggests the “hom(m)osexual” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 171) order where sameness prevails. The stories and voices of women give a difficult picture of relationality in the given culture. It shows the chances of a murder that cannot be prevented by invoking the legal apparatus. Rather it shows that the legal apparatus with its notion of consent cannot prevent murder, it grants the murder. The next section tries to engage with a contingent detail of the storytelling to understand what emerges when the notion of consent is displaced from the explanatory grid.

5. First Night, Taboo and Virginity

I think one of the contingent detail, that lurks beneath the Open Code of “escape stories” or generally “First Night stories” provides a clue to this relation (Appendix 1, Code, no. 3). The first thing one would notice is that these are really not stories. These are casual or fleeting references to First Nights of other people. They do not occupy a central space in
the narrative reconstructions. They are only tangentially referred to in the narratives –
sometimes in the beginning, sometimes in the middle and sometimes it comes out of
nowhere. What do these stories tell us? – the grotesque stories where men appear as
animals or the escape stories where women make attempts to escape from the nuptial
chamber. My interest is not really in the transgression of the bride. I am not trying to
valorize the resisting subject image. But these stories throw a different light on the First
Night stories circulating in the culture. Do we tell stories to which we want to listen to?
What do these small one-sentence stories which inhabit a tiny space in the narratives or
placed at the appendix of the main text actually tell us? Why do almost every narrative
reconstruction, every story circulating among the peer group, in the school, in the
neighbourhood, feel the urge to incorporate another First Night story in to its narrative
structure? While engaging with the escape stories my attempt is to ask: Do these stories

26 To commit the crime again let me recount the first ‘First Night story’ I heard. I do not know how this
memory informs the analysis. It was a grotesque story and one involving an attempt to escape. The bride in
the story is my friend’s maternal aunt. Both of us were young - third or fourth standard students – at the
time of the incident. My friend used to call her Chittamma which could be translated as “little mom”. We
were neighbours. Both her house and her natal family where her aunt resided were adjacent to my house. I
vaguely remember the wedding. After the wedding, the bride is supposed to come back to her house for a
formal visit on the fourth day. But my friend’s aunt came back on the second day. Actually the groom’s
family brought her back to her house and I still remember the white Ambassador car in which they all
came. I do not remember much about what happened that day but I vaguely remember listening to my mom
narrating the story to my grandmother, later on in the day. The story goes like this: when my friend’s aunt
entered the bedroom on First Night the guy tried to attack her with a big knife in his hand. He shouted, “I
will kill you tonight”. My friend’s aunt was shocked and scared, and in an attempt to save her life she
literally ran out of the room and spent the whole night in the in-laws room. The next morning she insisted
on going back to her house and they took her back to her house. I remember my mom recounting that the
groom was mentally ill and was taking medication. He got scared when he saw the bride alone in the
bedroom. The groom’s family had concealed this crucial information about his mental illness from the
bride’s family. So they have received no sympathy in any of the narratives. This incident has been re-
carry a secret with them – a knowing that do not render it intelligible to knowledge? Do these stories carry the knowledge of beheading and a particular relation to that knowledge? Is there knowledge and disavowal of knowledge in these stories? Or in other words, if there is beheading, how the woman know that there is beheading and more importantly how does the woman relate to this knowledge that there is the possibility of beheading in First Night.

Combining ‘escape stories’ with “I know - I don’t know” switching reveals the knowledge –non-knowledge positions on which the narration is predicated upon. She knows, but she is not aware that she has the knowledge. She is caught between knowing and not knowing to know or in other words knowing and not knowing she knows. How else will we understand a story that never fails to remember the escape stories from nuptial chamber and that leaves the memory there, without leaving any trace after invoking it? My attempt is to ask whether this suggest the dissociative processes at work. It is useful to ask what is the cultural economy of this narrativizing? When the culture makes First Night a beautiful space-time, these narratives creates a counter culture of grotesque out of beautiful. I would like to consider this as the ‘I know’ moment which emerges in the narratives. But the narratives cannot stay with this knowledge and in the next moment moves to the ‘I don’t know’. Yet the narratives carry the traces of this process in its accounts of a crippling fear or in detailed accounts of an “unknown pain”.

narrativized countless times in our house and among my friends that it has become a story with which we all live. In some of the versions she hides under the cot, in some others she is attacked by him after being partially undressed, so that she could not attempt an immediate escape. But in all the stories in the end she manages to find sanctuary in the in-laws room.
We have discussed three possible readings of fear in the previous section which ended with the reading that the fear expressed by the women show fear of desire. This is a predictable psychoanalytic reading which almost always introduces desire to explain fear or vice versa. My discomfort with this reading is that it leaves out the embodied voice of the woman who repeatedly says “I am scared”. But the attention to the knowledge games helps to think about an alternative reading of the fear. A re-visit to the pain narrative reproduced in the previous section gives this curious expression “unknown pain”. This expression carries both knowledge and the relationship with the knowledge. How does she know it is pain if the experience is completely unknown to her? Why is she preoccupied with pain when the culture tells her it is the moment of pleasure and ecstasy? This shows she knows. But “unknown” comes in here as a relationship to the knowledge that there is pain. I think ‘unknown pain’ is one of the most cryptic ways of saying, “I (don’t) know it is pain”. The “I know–I don’t know” switching is so common in all the narratives that there was a point in the project where I thought First Night narratives are all about providing an informal pedagogy or to rope in cognitive psychology terms – a heuristic device or schema. It was the process of multiple listening and coding that has made me realize that the question is about knowledge, but this question is not placed at the domain of cognitive psychology (alone). Cognitive psychology by definition of the

27 Why I am calling it a predictable reading is because desire and fear are always deployed together in psychoanalytic readings though it is not very clear what constitutes the complementarities between the two. One reason could be the Freudian pre-occupation with castration anxiety and the analytic weight it enjoys in his schemes making it the interpretative master key. The site of eros is by definition a site of erotic danger for Freud; but the danger is for the man. The woman’s utterance, “I am scared,” will generate sophisticated readings by a trained analyst but in the end it will distil down to castration anxiety which actually displaces the embodied voice of the woman with the man’s abstract and theoretical fear.
discipline might leave out the affect and would concentrate solely on the knowledge question. My attempt here is to address the fear that fuels the act of narration making these women find their lineage in Scheherazade. And this unearthed lineage makes me contend that the fear might not be stemming from desire. Rather it could be emerging from the knowledge that it might not be her desire – it might not be her jouissance. My contention is that these narrativizations provides a glimpse of the process through which the woman come to occupy the subject position of virgin in patriarchy where there is a ‘don’t’ between the woman and her experience, between her body and her language, between her experience and her knowledge of the experience. This could be a corporeal knowledge – a knowledge carried with the body, that constitutes the feminine (of the) body. It would be by instituting a taboo at the heart of this knowledge that patriarchy produces and maintains the virgin. The taboo that constitutes virginity is the taboo that comes between the ‘I’ and ‘know’. Thus the virgin becomes the innocent and the ‘not knowing’.

This reading helps us ask the question: Could we listen to these stories as offering clues to a dissociative process at work? Could we consider knowledge and disavowal of knowledge as a fundamental process through which the sexuated subject inhabits the world? The early attempts in this direction were done by Freud himself. Gilligan observes that

It was the separation of women from their own stories that initially caught Breuer and Freud’s (1895) eye. “Her love had already been separated from her knowledge,” Freud wrote of the woman he called Fräulein Elisabeth von R (p. 157). By connecting women with their knowledge, Freud became a virtual Eve, or, more
accurately, the serpent in the garden. He was breaking a cultural taboo, undoing a process of initiation by forging a method of inquiry that placed him in direct opposition to the fundamental rule of patriarchy: the claim on the part of fathers to authority (Gilligan, 2010, p. 318).

It would be interesting to look at how Freud’s attempt to understand virginity is caught between these two impulses – ‘knowing and not knowing to know’. In his essay “Taboo of Virginity” Freud’s attempt was to understand and explain virginity and it is a comparatively less discussed piece of Freud (Freud, 1918). It appears after Totem and Taboo and is part of the series Contributions to the Psychology of Love (Freud, 1912). “Taboo of Virginity” is clearly influenced by the Totem and Taboo framework and treats virginity as a social taboo. A reading sensitive to the details of the text is required to show how Freud is caught between knowing and not–knowing in the text.

Freud, who reads through the social anthropologists descriptions of “primitive” initiation rituals and virginal defloration, observes pain and records it so, “In the first place we think of the pain which defloration causes a virgin, and we are perhaps even inclined to consider this factor as decisive and to give up the search for any others” (1918, p. 4).

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28 Serge Andre (1997) presents one of the recent re-reading of the “Taboo of Virginity” in his article “New Reflections on the Taboo of Virginity”. The attempt of the paper is to re-read taboo of virginity in the light of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Andre begins by saying that this is a piece by Freud “which is seldom commented upon” (Andre, p. 2) and positions the piece for the contemporary reader as “at once obsolete and extremely topical” (ibid, p. 3). While I find the article really illuminating, I felt the questions with which I approach taboo of virginity are slightly different and is informed by the narrative of the women.

29 What is attempted here is a cursory reading. A detailed reading can be attempted elsewhere. I have used this internet source to read taboo of virginity http://www.slideshare.net/341987/the-taboo-of-virginity and the page numbers used are from this link.
Interestingly in the next sentence he brushes away pain with narcissistic injury, “But we cannot well ascribe such importance to this pain; we must rather substitute for it the narcissistic injury which proceeds from the destruction of an organ and which is even represented in a rationalized form in the knowledge that loss of virginity brings a diminution of sexual value” (ibid, p. 4) (Emphasis mine). The man who discovered substitution as a defence mechanism here literally substitutes narcissistic injury for pain. In the next page he observes difference, sexual difference and records it as follows: “[W]oman is different from man, forever incomprehensible and mysterious, strange and therefore apparently hostile (ibid, p. 5). Serge Andre considers this articulation of sexual difference to be closer to Lacanian articulation of ‘radical alterity’ (Andre, 1997). But my interest is in showing how he moves to “Narcissism of minor difference” (Emphasis mine) in the subsequent paragraph and refuses to see the difference he himself has seen in the previous paragraph. And then with certainty he moves to “castration complex” (ibid, p. 5) and rest of the discussion is interestingly on female frigidity suggesting the working of dissociation was powerful in the text and in Freud’s thinking. He starts with the description of the “social taboo” and slowly moves into a domain of “psychic danger” and his favourite psychic danger – castration anxiety – hijacks the explanation. The first paragraph of the piece shows awareness of the social processes that makes virginity when he presents virginity as “the essence of monogamy” and connects virginity with sexual value. But while progressing with the question he loses sight of these social processes and takes the taboo as granted, and a reading which had the ability to produce an analysis of Patriarchy becomes a patriarchal text.
There is a need to re-read “Taboo of virginity” to understand the constitution of Patriarchy than to understand what virginity is. Re-reading Freud’s “Taboo of Virginity” will show how an inquiry that begins with the accounts of pain in virginal defloration ends up with castration anxiety and penis envy. This text actually carries the knowledge of beheading, but in its “knowingness” it abandons the question and becomes a text of castration anxiety. It is close to unravelling the dissociative knowledge, but later moves onto the unconscious. I think a close reading of “Taboo of virginity” could show how his attention to the taboo – the don’t that comes between ‘I’ and ‘know’ – slowly disappears and he takes the taboo that constitutes virginity for granted in his attempt to explain the working of the unconscious. This probably has something to do with the general movement many feminist scholars have observed in Freud where the early Freud listens to the woman and later Freud tells the woman what she is (Moi, 2001). Early Freud considers women as his teachers and the later Freud is the privileged knower where he becomes the ‘Grand Inquisitor’ who embodies the father’s authority (Gilligan, 2010).

Parallel to this movement there is another movement in Freud which is from dissociative knowledge to unconscious. And Gilligan observes, “With the shift in emphasis from dissociated knowledge to the unconscious, a cure through love became wedded to miracle, mystery, and authority” (Gilligan, 2010, p. 311). What is the nature of this dissociated knowledge? Is it a knowledge pushed to the registers of “unofficial memory and contraband history” by the “categories of dominance” as suggested by Nandy? Is this the Derridian secret that constitutes the First Night narrative? An always already encrypted discourse where the ‘escape stories’ always escape the stories; as something which the women themselves consider as not so important; stories that could only appear
tangentially or cannot be assigned centrality. All the references to these stories must be casual - must not be causal. Does that go well with Freud’s own discovery that the hysteric woman is keeping the knowledge not only from the analyst but was also keeping the knowledge from herself? If dissociation involves a splitting of consciousness through which we can come not to know what we know, I think the stories of these women gives a glimpse of this dissociation at work. I think this could also explain why there is “unexamined heterocentricity” even at the heart of feminist theory.

**Conclusion**

This chapter made an attempt to listen to the embodied voices of women and in that, took a narrative turn informed by psychoanalysis. Narrative generation and narrative analysis are treated as two separate phases here. Narrative generation is informed by psychoanalytic techniques such as active reconstruction and free association; the former suggests that the past is not just found but created, while the latter suggests that the associative logic reveals the dissociative process at work. In order to combine these two insights, narrative generation followed unstructured interviews which help to not interfere with the associative logic at work. Narrative analysis combined grounded analysis and Listening Guide Method. These two methods together helped the thesis to listen to the timbre of women’s embodied voices.

Listening to the voices added a layer of hermeneutic suspicion to the idea of consent the thesis has employed in previous chapters and also shows why the feminist project of producing a “radical geography of love” (Gilligan, 2002, p.22) cannot be replaced with the legal discourse around consent. Discussions in Chapter 3 presented consent as a
modern deployment which works with ideas of personhood and rights. The psychologization discourse documented in Chapter 4 presented consent as a *techne* of conquer that could be elicited through the language of love and intimacy. Listening to the embodied voices of women, on the other hand, helps the thesis ask whether consent expresses a basic human need to be heard. This chapter also opens up the possibility that suspending ‘castration anxiety’ from the explanatory grid might helps listen to the embodied voice of the women.