Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the complex field of heterosexuality after the question of the 'sex worker' and the 'queer subject' have problematized the field. It studies both discourse and experience of a celebrated moment of heterosexuality in the given culture, namely wedding night (adya rathri in Keralam) and employs the concept of exchange to understand this moment as constitutive of the making of the institution of heterosexuality. Problematizing dichotomous thinking - thinking marked by the either/or of pleasure/violence - which haunts such an inquiry, this thesis focuses on the domain of intimate; where intimate is imagined as a contradiction-ridden force field between public and private and social and psychic. The thesis engages with the discursive production of the wedding night and juxtaposes it with the lived and memoralized aspects of the same to capture the promise of relationality or “the fantasy of harmony” in the discursive register and the lack of it in the narratives. This telling difference in the two registers - discursive and experiential - leads the thesis to rethink, on the one hand, the emergent 'erotic economy' in Kerala modernity and the (im)possible nature of (hetero)sexual exchange on the other.