CHAPTER 3

Picture used as ‘Illustration’

Picture turned to establish a definitive relation with ‘literary works’, appearing as an ‘illustration’ of fiction published in periodicals in early 1930s especially in *Mathrubhumi weekly*. Uses of pictures were getting confined to some exclusively individuating terms. It is a practice of spacing an exclusively prepared picture in relation to the published body of fiction. A drawing or painting given by the artist becomes an ‘Illustration’ not in the form as it was given by the artist. A drawing, painting or photograph turned to be a ‘literature-oriented illustration’ when it was used for publication in a periodical along with a concurrent fictional piece. Literature in the periodical, when exposed to an association to picture, also did not get published as it was given by the writer.

Picture in ‘the visual form’ and the literary text ‘in the verbal form’ have throughout this practice been regarded as mutually explicating the creative / communicative content. ‘Illustration’ was possible only by a demand for specialized ‘visualization’ that can be given to literature / verbal text unlike in the case of an advertisement picture or photo feature where generally an unauthorized editorial textualisation functioned as verbal explication. A picture drawn ‘from imagination’ being distinct from diagrams vignettes or photos simultaneously gets established in humor drawings by the end of 1930s. Unlike the case of a vignette or diagram of facts, picture from imagination as such is not stocked or repeated.
Immediately as he gets the literary piece in hand, the ‘artist’ has to draw or paint its ‘illustration’. Picture is generally signed by an artist. Pictures when used as ‘Illustrations’, presented an ambiguous dimension of ‘imaginative feeling’ designed onto the fiction taken for publication. This interface of literature and picture was virtually working out a new ‘genre’ with various levels of privileges since early 1930s. Earliest illustration in *Mathrubhumi weekly* (November 1933) is a picture went with a story by P.G.Ramayyar. It is not clear who has done this ‘illustration’. There is a similarity in the ‘pictorial’ approach with an artist called S.S.Krishnan who had provided cover paintings for Mathrubhumi occasionally during this time. Those were compositions of human figures and a portion of a tile thatched house set in a pastoral landscape. The excerpt from story reiterates the particular context portrayed and makes it specific. Those were ‘finished’ ink works in a sort of ‘academic’ or ‘art school’ fashion. There was no attempt in caricaturing. Figures were treated with attention. The topographical details were taken care of and some basic perspective tricks are tried on. The female faces mostly resembled the baby faces in the matchbox covers. M.Bhaskaran occasionally ‘illustrated’ for stories in late 1930s. (App.a.25)

On his return after studies in Madras School of Art, Mathrubhumi Weekly appointed M.V.Devan as their staff artist in an editorial assistant’s grade in 1952 on a monthly salary of Rs.140. Picture turns more contextual by a specialized resourcefulness envisaged and worked out in different means by M.Bhaskaran and M.V.Devan in *Mathrubhumi weekly* in their own personalized methods of drawing. Like the photo-features, there is a sub-titling that goes with the picture in 1940s and
1950s. But the sub-title here is not in any way an abrupt editorial selection, but a strip of the dialogue taken from the story as a definitive reference point. This dramatically captured and reiterated the visual in an arbitrary fictional moment that is out there to be read and experienced.

3.1 Arbitrary Bodies, Full Page ‘Life-Studies’, And Imagining ‘Impossible’:

M.V.Devan

‘Artistic’ is to be understood as the special new manner in which visuals started appearing in periodicals. Meticulous sketches with particular mannerisms of lines were provided by M.V.Devan. He belongs to the post-independent generation of people from Keralam to take institutionalized academic art education in Madras School of Art. Drawings provided by M.V.Devan as ‘illustration’ marked a pronounced shift into an apparently self-willed and specialized treatment of visuals from side of an artist, an emergence of ‘arts’-in-print’ instead of ‘designs’ or ‘collaborative compositions’ with editor’s ideas that M.Bhaskaran used to give. In the early years of independence Mathrubhumi began to strongly determine an ambitious space of representing contemporary Malayalam literature. It formed a ‘serious’ politically surged and culturally ambitious class of readers for the day’s novels and short stories. They wanted to distinguish themselves from simply commercial and overtly sentimental interests. As an artist trained in modern methods of art, conscious of the issues haunted by ‘Modern European art’ and ‘Indian tradition’ in Madras based Modern artists like K.C.S.Panikkar, D.P.Roy Chaudhury etc and ‘thinker circles’ led by M.Govindan who was also based at Madras, M.V.Devan also belonged to a circle of ‘intellectuals’ who represented ‘mainstream’ interests. The underlying complexities of M.V.Devan, as an artist making pictures
for print will be best explained by his own pictorial materials. (Fig. 3.2, Fig. 3.3, Fig.3.4)

Devan provided brush drawings, charcoal sketches and later some pen sketches for various writers. Famous short stories, novels and novelettes were ‘illustrated’. People of different castes of the society, their struggles hopes and emotional traumas were explored by many writers of the time. Writers like Vaikkam Muhammad Basheer, Uroob, M.T.Vasudevan Nair, Kovilan, Karoor, KesavaDev and Thakazhi ShivashankaraPillai placed people of common place clearly and realistically in their social contexts. For some of them it was an explicitly ‘progressive’ and political act while some others approached the ‘commonplace’ with more of an implicit taste for the ‘human content’. Basheer’s stories and Devan’s illustrations are still remembered in their togetherness by many people of earlier generation. Examples are Basheer’s ‘Anavariyum Ponkurishum’ and ‘Sthalathe Pradhana Divyan’. Those illustrations involved small sketches of small figures with no confinement of lay-out box spaces different from that habituated by photographic illusionist sense. There is an immanent dwarfishness occasionally brought in effect by Devan in human figuration. However, this dynamism of commonplace was apparently shared by the illustrations done by M.V.Devan but the significance of those sketches does not fully lie in the fictional world ‘already created’ by the authors. It is important here to think of what really actualized such a figuration. Literature gave some clues to physiognomy. Pictures in small scale were not new. ‘Sanjayan’ had projected humor with drawings small scale. But Devan’s illustration for ‘sthalathe Pradhana Divyan’ or Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum’ did not necessarily project humor. He must have had familiarized himself with pictorial idioms of distorted human figuration that pervaded a modernist sense of formal dislocation. Mainstream
‘modern art’ idioms got a visibility in Malayalam periodicals through pedagogical featuring of photographs of ‘modern art’ by mid 1950s in *Mathrubhumi* and *Malayala Manorama* and later in ‘*Kalakaumudi*’ weekly by the end of 1970s. Devan also could not have fully adapted those formal modern art idioms he was apparently exposed to, because they were not capable of ‘clearly and graphically depicting the human content’ that was unknowingly, though not paradigmatically, regarded as the aim of ‘illustration’. The sustained demand for ‘the graphic’ presentation formed in a journalistic functioning could not be evaded by an artist even when he operated within the so called ‘imaginative’ and ‘original’ literary context or fold of ‘modern art’. So the dwarfishness of these characters in ‘*sthalathe Pradhana Divyan*’ and ‘*Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum*’ is neither a code of modernist distortion of forms nor a vivid description of the incidents and actions in the novel so as to evolve with the literary piece from one issue to the other with a creation of popular curiosity or sentimentality regarding the fictional eventuality.

Devan functioned within the graphic potential of the pictorial language that has already created a taste for symbolic allegorical languages through various journalistic categories of periodical publishing. There is an abridged and quick dealing with human body that speaks through swelling of flesh, horripilating hair, elongated moustaches, half sprouted and dotted beards, criss crossed dhotis, bulging eyes etc. they were representing the pick pocketer, or one who has stolen the golden cross or such ‘characters’ in the story. But more than that they presented a corporeal sensory presence conveyed through the particular artistic devise of the ‘illustrator’. In ‘*Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum*’, the hatchings done by black brush drawings went as ‘illustration’. These drawings in effect suggested his ‘artistic’ interest in light and shade and composition sketches. Still, they had a compressed suggestive feel of
simply scratching the human content. In the so called high art practice of the time in Madras the dwarfing distortions were primarily intended to have a decorative prettiness and finesse that never directly addressed specific human conditions. But in Devan’s ‘illustrations’ it becomes a language with clearly recognizable inputs from literary texts to refer to a specific kind of people and their sentimental contexts. The caricature ribbon constituted of the faces of the characters in the fairly long story “sthalatha Pradhana Divyan’ which got serialized in two issues, actually was the efficient signifier of the role that these ‘illustrations’ had to play, the popular engagement where ‘face of common man’ was slowly getting accomplishment. Graphically abbreviated bodies and faces containing the codes of ‘artistic’ treatment started defining the scope of the ‘illustrations’ from then onwards. These ‘sketches’ were regarded as an accompaniment of literary text and hence did not bring the ‘illustrator’ to any particular privileged status at that point of time.

These drawings of M.V.Devan, like any ‘illustration’ for that matter, were in general crippled with limited space and scope available for performing the ‘artistic’ interests. Illustrator’s sketches have to work out in haste in each periodicity. The dexterity of naturalism was not within the scope of this haste. Except for M.V.Devan’s artistic pedigree, these ‘illustrations’ do not seem to have been taken seriously by mainstream art world. Their efforts to project a corporeal graphic grasp of human figure also were not understood in terms of an artist’s graphic language. These apparently ‘careless’ scratches of figures did not demonstrate enough ‘skill’ to be regarded important by the readers who are habituated into to the RaviVarma-like figures, Calendars, photographs, photo features, art school variety of figure drawing that trained people with European masters that demonstrated efforts to make artistic illusions of graceful life and reality.
3.2 ‘In tune with breath’

In a personal interview this researcher had with Devan, he said that the brush dipped in the ink from Chinese made ‘ink sticks’ available at that time helped him to bring forth more of a ‘the three dimensional effect’ than the use of pen filled with drawing ink. Brush always moved in tune with the breath, he claimed. A physical intensity of the experience of drawing is conveyed through this comment. Bringing three dimensional effect on to the two dimensional surface was almost naturally deemed ‘artistic’. Moving the brush ‘by breath’ rather than a consciously devised practical pictorial strategy is also regarded very spontaneous and hence ‘artistic’.

The activity of ‘illustrator’ remained within manifold eventualities. He painted breathtakingly on sketches in each periodicity. He provided directions for page setting, marking the spacing of the picture. Still there are chances to find unexpected marks of nails that fixed the copper or tin plate on wood. The block making process is crucial in achieving the effect sketched by the ‘illustrator’. Minimum demands of refinement in the sketch assured maximum result.

It is important to note that Devan demonstrated an interest in taking full page space and making full figure sketches, while working out of the confines of literary text. Interestingly, he had made cover drawings for ‘Jayakeralam swathanthrya dina patippu’ in 1947. (Fig.3.5) It was a full figure done in black charcoal with clear light and shade. The solid body of a ‘common man’ is portrayed as having broken the enslaving chains. A full page picture given inside also shows a poor ‘common man image’ that stifles a plump man wearing coat suit and hat while this ‘incident’ happens in the backdrop of
a female form as a statue with fairly lit mast and flagstaff. The allegorical representation of freedom makes use of full page of the periodical. This is as sentimental and allegorical as M.Bhaskaran’s sketches. In *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Devan provided absolutely patriotic and hopeful poster depictions too. A playful child gracefully carrying huge national flag allegorically portrayed the identity of a free country in its hopeful childhood. (App.b.19)

In ‘illustration’ M.V. Devan showed some viable attempts at exploring fairly high scale expectations about art. But the casual nature and apparent effortlessness displayed no pictorial quality other than scribbling the corporeality of human figures graspable as ‘characters’ available from the literary text. (App.a.1, App.a.2, App.a.3 & App.a.4)

He had tried to make a lineage of significant drawing traditions of Europe in an article that starts like this:

‘We are not so attentive to this field. We do not take it seriously even though it came in the purview of our glances and struck us for a while. I am talking about the pictures on the walls of the youth hostels and bathrooms. Unattended by any, not being admired by any, these scribbles sink in times as self expressions of a group of anonymous people. It is doubtful if those who make these pictures themselves take it seriously. But there is a history for these pictures. Most of the pictures in their family are world famous as vindications of human dignity. Good drawings are old as human race since the cave man’s efforts.’

The article makes a rough historical review of great drawings by masters of European art. The weekly also gives a photo feature of their drawings. That feature is titled as ‘life that sprung from drawings’. This is an interesting article that vindicates that
‘illustrator’ noticed the ‘not so great’ but ‘not so unimportant’ status of his act that gets soon submerged in time. But attempts are duly done to derive linguistic logic from great master’s history. Still the thoughts on an art practice could not be phrased in practical thoughts of its functional realities and social communication. Inconsistent efforts through articles or features like this in periodicals started to accumulate ideas of genealogy and philosophy. But they could not help much to define the act of ‘illustrators’ either.

3.3 **Effortless sketchiness and modern values of ‘art’**

In the act of drawing and painting, effortlessness will be demonstrated in various modes. When an artist does not keep any pre-determined model and tries to work out something ‘spontaneous’, or when he does the act out of sheer habit or when he just grafts a content that doesn’t demand its visual effect or when he engages with something ‘less demanding,’ effortlessness will come into operation. M.V. Devan’s sketches more or less projected such sphere of his practice as artist. No pre-determined models. Swiftness is demanded by each periodicity to get ready with work, though not necessarily spontaneity. Sketching has to be a habit so that it works out within a deadline. Unlike in a canvas painting, the figural content in a sketch could exist even without much of amassed visual effects. Often sketchbooks are regarded ‘less demanding’ and more expressive resources of an artist for his ‘major’ works. Men who work on canvases that are fixed on easel and holding a palette working on a demanding representation of some ‘original’ aesthetic illusion was regarded as operating in a ‘high’ order. The sketches done fast or less thoughtful and more casual manner are regarded incomplete and often privately kept rough resource of training.
‘Artist’ is virtually supposed to be none other than a person who gratifies his ‘thirst for beauty’ by exhibiting his works in an art gallery of urban centers as this is the time of migration of Malayali artists like Parice Viswanathan, Akkittam Narayanan and many others to Europe, especially to Paris and establishing identity as a successful artist. M.V.Devan was also haunted by this vision of ‘artist’ as somebody in search of a ‘harmony that can be best explained in geometric forms’. The artistic problem faced by an artist is regarding a ‘formal order’. On the two dimensional space of a canvas in front of him should be dexterously made rich by squares, rectangles, triangles, circles or other geometrical forms. That is the merit he yearns. But it is said that ‘to enter into this essential cord of ‘formal order’, a viewer outside this realm would find difficulties. It is difficult to enter into this almost impossible rhythmic harmony of forms. There is an easy method for this. Through the representational and simulative forms of those familiar objects with volumetric existence enter into this realm.

As an ‘illustrator’ M.V.Devan could not present the codes of these ‘almost impossible artistic’ paradigm in the journalistic order of communication in periodicals. He was in effect presenting the ‘not so valuable’ effortless sketchiness in a public space which otherwise would have been simply understood as ‘an artist’s sketchbook’ if at all presented in ‘public’. By way of ‘illustration’, he was silently presenting those ‘lesser’ regarded ‘not fully developed’ ‘simply experimental’ experiences of ‘graphic observation’ and vigorous communication as part of a routinised artistic training in his life of an artist.

3.4 Photos as ‘illustrations’

As discussed in chapter 2, Malayala Manorama weekly in 1930s anticipated a new interest in photo journalism. This evolved into tapping the sentimental potential
of photos by placing it with fiction by mid 1950s. Interestingly the photos are not selections from a general collection as in the case of photo-features. When presented as ‘illustrations’ they were specially performed and snapped for each literary context by same ‘actors’ through out the issues of serialized single but long story. By the end of the serialization, in the last issue, actors performed and the photographer who captured the ‘session’ were acknowledged. (Fig. 3. 6) In such cases too the convention of sub-titling is not left out. It is important that these ‘special photo sessions’ or ‘illustrations’ involved some important aspects of reader involvement. Photographs were more action-oriented evoking the reader’s curiosity on the course of the story. Unlike the general photographic conventions in features, these photos eliminated the back ground details. They rather projected the sentimental ambiguities through filmic composing of faces and figures from various photogenic angles. (App.c.9). But photo as illustration was also not allowed to carry any ambiguity and hence the convention of reiterating with corresponding texts / excerpts from novel. The illustrator who did drawings as illustrations in Manorama in 1950s was P.K.Rajan. He mainly worked for short stories. Photographic illustration was a convention only for ‘long and serializing stories’. Fiction of all sorts was regarded as demonstrative of incidents and emotions. In the sense of ‘demonstration’ the fiction itself was referred as ‘chitreekaranam’ (meaning illustration). A long serialized story called ‘Nyayavidhi’ published with P.K.Rajan’s sketch. (App.a.5). Sketch was not much different from the photographic compositions except in that often it lacked the transparency that photos could give. The first piece of the above novel started with a woman washing out door in a river. The extra projection given to her chest makes the figure a disproportionate attempt. The title of this piece of the serialized is ‘A new beauty’. Even when photos ‘illustrated’ the literary piece, there will be a ‘title
picturing’ done by P.K.Rajan that generally repeated throughout so as to characterize the particular story. It wrote the title of the story and decorated its vicinity with romantic images of nature, silhouetted moon, profiled female face etc.

Giving photographs as ‘illustration’ was mainly a practice in Manorama. But by the end of 1960s, Manorama depends more on ‘photographic’ sentimentality and transparency that could be demonstrated by painted works or drawings. Particular kind of ink wash paintings gives titillating details of human body for romance fictions.(App.a.6) These ‘Illustrators’ though sometimes signed in a legible manner, they did not share the ‘cultural pedigree’ of those worked for Mathrubhumi weekly, Kalakaumudi or some special issues of Malayala Nadu that besides their casual sketches, assigned ‘illustrations’ to those with some amount of artist status, through1960s and 1970s. Even within these weeklies, there was a complex fabric of acclaim and acknowledgement that variously privileged each ‘illustrator’ from others as will be discussed in chapter-4.

An interest in women with uncovered breast is taking shape through color cover pictures and ‘illustrated’ drawings of Devan. M.Govindan’s poem ‘Prolitarian Devathakal’ was a work that assumed a critical tone. Devan displays a group of women with breasts exposed. In the next page of the weekly a tribal group of women ‘naturally’ exposing chests is shown in a photo feature. (Mathrubhumi Weekly, 17 August 1952.)

Devan also used to give sketches describing festivals like Onam, Vishu etc. for the features that claimed to display the ‘uncontaminated and never-artificial grace of pastoral life’. Exposed female chest becomes a pictorial subject accommodated with a voyeuristic vanity through out these sketches. The female figures supposedly from ‘lower orders of social importance’ like tribal or lower caste women, got displayed for
the sheer pleasure of looking but presented also to inform the readers on the social customs of ‘other cultures’. In ‘artistic’ sketches female forms with exposed breasts is simply a device of presenting innocent and cute beauty worthy of ‘simply seeing’. Among the very rare responses to ‘illustrator’s sketches, there is an interesting letter to the editor that notices that ‘in Mr.Devan’s drawings men are always portrayed as disfigured and women as graceful beauties’\textsuperscript{4}. Gendered devices of beautiful order adapts the female, pastoral, lower caste, labor class and child hood physiognomies into its fold so as to present as ‘contents worthy of seeing’. A cover photograph showing people at work is given a title as ‘the graces that toil’\textsuperscript{5} While photos worked out graces on toiling bodies, ‘illustrated drawings’ worked out ‘imperfect bodies’ by scratchy lines shades and expressive charcoal strokes establishing a language of graceful grandeur for human figure.

3.5 Namboodiri and A.S (1960s): The Time for ‘Special Effects’

Entry of Namboodiri and A.Shivaraman (popularly known and signed on the pictures as A.S) into Mathrubhumi in 1961, triggered a new academic rigor in this practice. The ‘academic’ effort can be found in their sketches in the way some new ‘artistic’ qualities of visuals were admitted and reciprocated by the periodicals. It is reflected in the generous space and importance admitted for ‘illustration’ in periodicals by this time. This is also visible in terms of a new assertiveness gained by their sketches. Formal education in art schools in the academic stream must have given them a new value of selective assertiveness and treatment of individualism that was tentatively surfacing in M.V.Devan’s sketches. This helped them to apparently transcend the photographic / the commercial elements that simply made visuals ‘common place’ than in any manner ‘distinctive’ or ‘individual’.
Focus derived on the graphic corporeality of human figures in M.V.Devan sketches were taken up by both A.S and Namboodiri. Casual and arbitrary nature of those sketches was abandoned for a more assuredly presented ‘visual’ spacing in the periodical. ‘Illustration’ becomes a space to exhibit the composed sequences of figural presence and gesticulation in the sketches of Namboodiri. (Fig. 3.7, Fig.3.8)

An emotional pathology of human existence was conveyed by general artistic codes of chiaroscuro into fragmented figurations in the drawings of A.S. (Fig.3.9 & Fig.3.10) Sometimes the interest in the figure is shown more to show the ‘best action’, ‘best mood’ or ‘setting’ and even the ‘best demonstration of jerry borders of skirt or sari’ and best available perspective of physiognomy of the ‘character’ whether it be man or woman. Just as one observes in the popular media’s tendency towards the pictorial, main purpose of the poses as grunting sociopaths, prissy middle class couples or brain dead walking cloth-hangers stumble their way through the plots whose main purpose is to get ‘the special effects’ aligned with the best artistic (camera) angle, and to propel their bodies into or out of a succession of expensive explosion, exotic location or extravagant frocks. This poses the question of what actually was an ‘illustrator’ doing with the literary text. What he was supposed to do with the literary text was only hinged at a textual realm. ‘Illustration’ developed as a practice not in terms of any visible cultural paradigm. Like the other devices of photo features, news features, cartoons or cover photos forming a popular ‘culture of taste’, it was part of an unproblematic and routinised order of journalistic act. It was indirectly guidelined by other general discursive essays and dialogues in the cultural ambience to which ‘the reading class’, especially ‘those with culturally ambitious interests’ would have easily exposed to. This study further goes into the problematic
aspects within this creation of cultural taste that systematically subordinates the visual language to ‘literary’ meanings.

3.6 Not a Simple Co-Existence

There is an unspecified and habitually observed protocol for ‘illustrations’ based on its existential order in periodicals. Illustration as devised in periodicals in its literary fold, is an activity of producing special visuals ‘suitable’ to the fiction within a stipulated time limit. And that is possible only when the piece of fiction goes through the hands of a person specialized in the task of drawing or painting with some amount of guaranteed ‘productivity’ to entrust this task by the editor’s desks. Literary text is supposedly originating in a writer’s creative brooding. Once it is selected for publication by the editor desk, it is passed on to the act of visualizing. It is not simply ‘two creative languages’ called ‘literature’ and ‘art’ originating in same or similar situations that can ideally operate harmoniously. It is the issue of newly fashioning some institutional behaviors for two cultural disciplines called ‘literature’ and ‘art’ in a periodical, where in effect, literature ‘assimilates’ the picture into its institutional fold and the picture ‘adapts’ itself to the demands of literature, printing and verbal textualisations regularly done on its idiom. This very fact rejects the simplistic understanding that ‘illustration’ is a co-existence of the ‘literary’ / ‘verbal’ and the ‘pictorial’ / ‘the visual’ mediums of creative expression. It is an issue of assimilations and adaptations that are not directly put forward but silently acknowledged. A literary piece not ‘illustrated’ evoked curiosity in the writer regarding the order of editorial treatment. Getting their poems and stories ‘well-illustrated’ was silently regarded a privilege by many writers. M.V.Devan in a personal talk told that poet G.Shankara
Kurup enquired why his poem was not given with illustrations. These are but unacknowledged remarks. No writer engaged himself in a reaction to the ‘illustrations’ he got. ‘Illustration’, being a service sector act, was regarded as an editorial task of page decoration that need not be discussed in terms of critical response. The responses of readers and writers veered between a submerged feeling of privilege and a naturalized habituation of an employment.

Often ‘illustration’ is understood as an aesthetic issue of ‘spacing blankness to be suitably filled’ by the visual and an act of saving from the boredom of reader’s eyes. “Illustration’ in periodicals more significantly establishes the media relation of space-time factor than the illustrations for books. It has two aspects. One is, when serializing a novel, its continuity has to be fragmented. The closing of one piece is focused in the space and time that arouses reader’s curiosity into the next piece in the next issue. Often the important instances and events will hang out in mind. Those instances when picturised along with the verbalizations, the curiosity regarding the eventualiy increases. Secondly, the lay-out of printed sentences when continuously proceeds without any blank space that will give a feeling of boredom to the eyes. To relax the eyes from this, the space in the margins and the in between areas of paragraphs and moreover, designing some blank space within the format of printed area and fill the gap with a suitable picture.”

This observation by Vijaya Kumar Menon very clearly represents the generally conveyed idea that ‘illustration’ entertains the readers eye as an ‘accompanying’ element. The reading community was also by and large guided through this editorial order of designing that involved a pervading exercise of power like selecting, excluding, spacing, cutting, aligning, pasting and then assigning all kinds of visual-verbal materials in a limited display space.
3.7 Spacing ‘The Verbal’ and ‘The Visual’

The ‘visual material’ emerged as ‘illustration’ is to be identified in this chapter as a complex plain for mutually overlapping interests in aesthetic, literary, pictorial, sentimental emotional and commercial activities ensuring a profound contingency to all outcomes. Taken as a practice, ‘illustration’ will basically be a cultural field of ‘the pictorial’ where all these aspects habitually contested. Some scripts of polarized concepts generally oscillated between the notions of ‘Fine Art’ and ‘popular applied Art’ operating at various levels of social acclaim, approaches and considerations. As discussed in chapter -2, an amorphous fictional dimension was generally designed on to the pictures during this period. By 1930s, popular periodical categories of communication designed in periodicals started to provide a sort of distinctive space for aesthetic discourses of ‘philosophical ideas’ on art, genealogies of artists, art movements, techniques of art, general debates on inter-relationships of art and literature, general significance of art and life (often synonymously posited as literary practice), or art and politics. Importance was also given for ‘culturally and aesthetically conscious’ reader’s responses on literature. This new space for aesthetic discourses tried to imagine a ‘natural and simple coexistence of visual and verbal expressions. ‘Illustrations’ indirectly operated in this space underpinning these discourses. These discourses exerted circumscribing influences in the way ‘illustrations’ were understood as sufficiently harmonious with literature. This made it too nebulous and silent practice to recognize often contradictory layers of artistic / original and popular / common place assumptions on ‘illustrations’.
3.8 A prescription of ‘figurative language’ – Kesari and ideas of ‘New world order’

By the time a tasteful group of people from the reading class emerged here with their own ambitions to grasp the ultimate constituents of art, defining ‘art’ by its underlying philosophical truth was more than a century old concern of German and French analytic philosophers. Very illusively posited question was “What is Art”.

Taking cues from available philosophical literature and romantic English poets, in mid 1930s, there was developing a selective taste defined for the contesting ideology of visual-verbal interface within the emerging sphere of philosophical speculations that are often phrased as ‘function or role of Art’. Comprehension of ‘what is art’ was supposed to be a valuable concern in itself. Many essayists contributed to periodicals introducing modern speculative theories of art quoting Burk or Burgson or Shiller who were much regarded as authoritative. Art was imagined there as an ecstatic knowledge or revelation of ultimate truths inaccessible to ordinary cognitive activities

The idea of an aesthetic definitiveness to visualization dissipated through the newly emerged culturally ambitious reading class in Malayalam interested in a sacred modern space of aesthetics.

Visual interface with literature as a general idea, not as a contemporaneous practice, started to be taken as a particular aesthetic area of enquiry though as a subtopic of major philosophical awareness of art. Kesari. A. Balakrishna Pillai is one of the predecessors in this track presenting the concept of a ‘historically relative and universally modern’ for the first time in Art and literature, citing comparative cross references from European modernist masters, Indian poetics and Chinese traditional aesthetic thoughts. He identified the limitations of tradition-bound insanely and idealistic ‘Indian Fine-Art’ that make artistically oriented geniuses unable to become
active agents in the formation of a ‘new world’. He envisaged that the entry of materialist ‘socialists with scientific vision’ would make a ‘progressive change’ in the economic and political scenario of India. If art wants any sustainable power over people, the methods of art need to be reformed in lieu of the time. Kesari perceived a necessity to encounter the contemporary social problems and produce artistic solutions. He also imagines an art movement that is similar to Italian futurists in their anarchy. It is interesting to note the eclectic modality that he prescribes for this imagined art movement. He wants artists to adopt oil medium like Ravi Varma. Discard Ravi Varma’s classicism. Avoid the ‘romantic post-impressionism’ as he calls it, of Bangal modernists. But work in the model of European impressionist masters like Pissaro or Renoir. The multi armed modeling of ‘the divine’ in Indian Classicism is prescribed to be replaced by a Greek classical mode that makes Gods in infallible human proportions.

Kesari could not have spoken to a visible set of artists in ‘Navalokam’ that got published in 1935. After Ravi Varma, a practicing artist figure doesn’t emerge from this region. What existed was a scattered class of people (portraitists, drawing masters, printers etc.) trained in regional varieties of academic fine art or occupational skills. One can only see that the legend of Ravi Varma was so effective that a social role of ‘artist’ could at least be so imagined. The complex state of confusion is clearly observable in the prescription of an abrupt combination of pictorial sensibilities borrowed from European contexts that Kesari envisages for artists here. It must have also underlined the inefficiency of ‘the pictorial’ as a cultural activity to meet ‘progressive’ political demands of the time. Interestingly Kesari’s prescription simultaneously favors two sensibilities. From among the European art languages, the inevitably naturalistic Impressionist painting and the Classicist mode of human
proportions are positively approached by him. The materialist socialists are also favored for political changes in society. Futurism is thought to be adopted as a revolutionary strategy not as a stylistic and aesthetic derivation.

Certain partiality for a ‘figurative’ language in art with some logical exaggerations to form a ‘brave new artistic world’ was the basis of Kesari’s universalizing aesthetic ideas. Kesari did not probe much into an exclusively ontological brooding over on ‘the artistic’ as such. But the writings of Kesari must have inserted an immanent urgency for an authoritative discourse of ‘aesthetics’ through a systematic sacralization of the field of artistic engagement so as to legitimate the demands of some inevitable ‘figural’ tendencies of ‘Art’.

The ‘modern’ tendencies were experienced at varying degrees by many art school trained people by 1940s. In the context of periodicals an ‘artistic’ attitude was already pertinent through the ‘picturesque’ drawings of Bhaskaran appearing as illustrations for fiction or as cover picture of the ‘illustrated weekly’ (Mathrubhumi). New genres like portraits and landscapes were tried out by artists to create vignettes, title forms or independent pictures. This glaring multiplicity of a picture’s utility and purpose in the print media and its extensive access to a broad public domain as contrary to both the traditional feudal contexts and the rarified professional contexts of the modern times, must have inserted a new need for a ‘deeper’ ontological brooding over pictures or ‘Art’ in general. The public domain created by the periodicals was also by then very ripe for a philosophical or speculative engagement on pictures not simply as emblems, vignettes, photos, cartoons or even some simple graphic facts but also a more sacredly or transcendentally or emotionally discernable presence of pictures as ‘Art’. The fictionalized sub-titles for photos and drawings given presumably from the editor’s desks is a clear reflection of a need felt so
immanent for describing ‘Art’, ‘beauty’ or sometimes illuminating the ‘inherent principle sublimated in the object represented’ in the picture, be it photo or sketch.

3.9 **The invisible wings of imagination:**

M.P. Paul’s *Saundarya nireekshanam* (1947) tried to vaguely demonstrate the ‘subjective’ and ‘modernist’ interpretation of art and addressed the issue of the connection between the ‘beauty of nature’ and the ‘beauty of Art’, the interface of the art of picture and the art of poetry, the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’. Picture of a river became a sublime object of ‘beauty’ just as the ‘real vision’ of the river. But the themes and meanings of modernity and its nexus with ‘fine art’ visual idioms as developed in European poetry and art could only be literally simplified and adapted to the use of Malayalam intelligentsia that was developing in the specifically colonial conditions here.

Text-image interface was imagined as a mutually abstracting terrain. According to the aesthetic habits as proposed by the speculative theories of art the picture evinces ‘beauty’ as much as a poem does and both demand the ‘wings of imagination’ from the viewer. The ‘sublime poetry’ and ‘beautiful imagination’ is a poetic content that is not to be envisaged as identifiable on the material surface but as something that leaves the image unfinished or incomplete. Likewise the word-picture is also about a picture just evidenced, rather invisible yet imaginable. Visual is conceived as that which is not directly perceivable but that which leaves the poetic word unfinished. In poetry and fiction, rhetorical search was for the imagery that abstracts invisible images while in pictures/ sculptures the search was for poetic imagination that is abstracted. According to major traditional / Classical concepts, the visual abstracted a textual meaning while the verbal in turn abstracted a visual meaning. There is a dominant habit in the history of ‘creative expression’ and
communication, ‘the verbal’ and ‘the visual’ operate in an alienated space wherein one is imagined to complete or be complemented by ‘the other’

3.10 Possibilities of ‘the poetic’ and ‘the pictorial’

According to the sort of concepts derived in ‘Saundarya nireekshanam’, those things generally impossible for Poetry (in the form of words and meanings) can be actualized by the art of painting (that is in the form of colour and line) and vice versa. M.P.Paul must have convinced a reader in search of the authoritarian knowledge of ‘what is art’ at that point of time. He argued that poem is locked in some specific language. It makes sense only to that linguistic community. The language of the artist is easily identifiable by anybody having eyes. But artist has the limitation of time. In painting, only one ‘time’ is expressed as frozen. Poet has no restrictions of time. Artist has to choose one particular ‘moment’ from a story or the creative / literary content. M.P.Paul also describes where poetry fails. The special area of poetic reference is the dynamic facts always in the flux of time. It is not that it is impossible for poetry to depict the space-bound conditions. But when poetry starts doing so, that is actually competing with pictorial art. Then in this competition, poetry is normally failing. This point is substantiated with a reference to the word-picture of Vasavadatta in the poem of Vallathol. In the delineation of the first appearance of Vasavadatta, poet challenges an artist in evincing the exact figural details of the heroine. Here it is the poet not the artist who is easy to fail. It is not the fault of a poet. But the frozenness of the poetic subject is the culprit. If an artist who has gained mastery of his art as much as Asan in his chosen field of poetry, he would have emerged more successful in portraying that heroine. Hearing vasavadatta’s poetic delineation if somebody says that it is ‘so picturesque’ it is not a complement to the poet but it reveals that the poet has just invaded into the sphere of an artist. But for
artists it is not a defect to accept ideas from poems. ‘Saundaryanireekshanam’ defines the sphere of poetry as dynamic incidents and evolution of happenings while that of picture is a space-bound frozen ness. The content of the artist need not be new, but it is technical skill that is expected of him. It is a demerit to the poet to accept content from a painting while the newness of content can act as an obstacle in the artist’s path.

This is actually the historical point in which an infiltration of academic ‘fine art’ ideally negates the whole sphere of various primitive, tribal, bazaar and popular art traditions of India operating at various levels of westernized and ‘orientalizing’ knowledge. Interestingly M.P.Paul suggests that we can imagine through a poetic vision the ten headed Ravana or devas with thousand eyes. But in a painting when these characters are formed the experience is not ‘poetic’. Bizarre imaging is not favored for the ‘pictorial’ in this line just as an illusionist / naturalist ‘academic’ artist would have his tastes defined. There are clearly distinguished realms of ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ for painting and poetry as exemplified in this path-breaking earliest philosophical effort on aesthetic experience in Malayalam.

For M.P.Paul, Homer ideally speaks about a shield, not the shield proper, but the shield in the making. The metaphor of a flowing river is brought in as representing the ‘poetic craft’ whereas a stand-still lake is imagined as representing the terrain of ‘artististic craft’. The ‘visual’ and ‘verbal’ get clearly defined as separate spheres of ideal existence, one active like a flowing river and the other passive like a standstill lake. This ideally polarized existence of the ‘verbal’ and the ‘visual’ is itself referred as ‘harmony’ later in the succeeding modernist terms.
3.11 Photos, poems and thoughts of a rhetorical garden of flowers and ‘sceneries’:

‘Beauty’ becomes a ‘divine’ and ‘aesthetic’ idea in Malayalam poetry in 1930s. Imagining the world as a garden of good (when one lives for ‘others’) and evil (when one lives for oneself) paths, poet P.Kunjiraman Nair exhorted the readers to ‘walk around’, ‘see’ and return from this garden of life without plucking a single flower. One can do plantations in this ‘royal garden’ but the flowers are not for decorating ‘oneself’. Flowers are imagined for the divine ritual renditions of ‘sight’ on ‘beauty’. The imaginative reader can only add beauty to the garden of pure and ethical tastes.

The act of seeing is imagined in the poetic philosophy as a ‘disinterested glance’. Object for this ‘seeing’ is said to be ‘flowers in garden’. The metaphoric taste for ‘flowers’ is also translated into journalistic terms as can be seen in a photograph that sub-titles as ‘decorated floral scene – an attractive vision of communal solidarity’. This goes with a poem by Changampuzha. Photograph shows children making floral patterns with flowers (App.a.7). A curious visual taste for the pastoral serenity is also getting defined in poems. Lalithambika Antharjanam in a poem urged the ‘poetic’ readers to ‘look at the inherently peaceful and sleeping beauty of the village as against the full-lit city that restlessly search for silly pleasures’. The comfortable placing of a poetic ‘viewer self’ within the inner recesses of a serene landscape that can be viewed as contained within the hills in the vanishing point. This is a ‘picturesque’ taste for the exotic pleasures of the locale taking shape in poems of this period. Interestingly, the pastoral potential for an artist is supposed to be so enchanting and untapped that he is welcomed in some poems of the time.
Malayala Manorama published photographs in different angles of ‘the beautiful hall’ and buildings of the ‘Art gallery’ in Thiruvananthapuram. An idea of ‘sahrudayatvam’ (reading with an empathetic heart, an exoticised poetic self, placed vis-à-vis ‘nature’) is getting discussed as a sort of reading that transgresses the demands of ‘reason’. The muse of ‘art’ is addressed in some poems as a woman who shines carrying an attractive ideal as capable of reflecting the heavenly happiness of the world.

In the journalistic sphere of periodicals, one finds visual and its verbal meanings getting explicated by various means. If poem as a revered literary activity explains its envisaged subject positions and ‘reader-imaginations’ through the words of the poem itself or through the reflective writings of the poet, these very ideas mostly put in metaphoric terms are also rephrased in other categories like photo featuring. Sharing these metaphors in literary conceptions, photos were explained to their ‘imagined-viewer’ through the sub-titles while taking it explicitly further into much political terms. In such functioning of visual texts and verbal texts, there is no separate existence regarded for the materiality of an object and its meaning. Visual – verbal compatibility is not yet recognized as a practicing issue. It is rather ‘an attractive idea of beauty and art’.

3.12 The emotive ‘body’ / ‘figure’

Art was supposed to emanate from the emotional tenderness of a culturally resourceful mind. The artist (in a general sense of the term applicable to artist, writer and poet together) who is melted by such emotiveness is supposed to invigorate him. He imparts that vigor of his inner feeling into the humankind. One who is in such state of mind may not at first recognize the ‘form’ it takes. His duty is to construct a ‘body’ to impart his emotional tenderness with the help of the cultural resources he
has been trained with 14. This ‘form’ interfaced with the idea of ‘body’ was supposed to actualize for ‘other’s senses’, something that is being marked in the inner sensorium of the artist and remaining inaccessible for others. Artist is supposed to make a bodily / figural congruence with his inner sense that is basically inaccessible to others 15

‘The congruent body’ is expressed by way of colours and words. It is the outer contour of the artistic ‘form’ that can be created by words and colours. Merits and demerits of this expression will affect the ‘comprehensive harmony’ of vision. If the artist is fully successful in this harmony by way of each organic element of the ‘figure’ in his inner mind, he will be correct in the outer world of expression too. Visual was increasingly imagined to operate as a reference from ‘reality’ sublimating the inherently transcendental / ‘fictional / aesthetic inner ideal’. It had to differentiate itself as ‘profound’ concerns from the ‘trivial’ and overtly exposed structures of interdependent communication patterns of the commercial, illustrative or demonstrative utility of pictures.

In this fold, a drawing published along with a literary work was primarily imagined as a support system for the ‘beauty’ of the word / idea / content that conveyed a figural idea 16. Understanding a picture as an artistic imitation of nature / ‘reality’ was often adapted into some ‘figural concerns’ 17. Duty of art was regarded as pointing the locus for the human (body) liberating it from the sustaining environments 18

3.13 Images as ‘essential stimulus’:

An understanding of the relation between ‘art’ and ‘literature’ proposed the emotive form of art as based on images that instills embarrassment. Embarrassment
demands ‘stimuli’. In literature, the lively figure of a character functions as stimulus. The artistically originated emotions are always sublimated and purified feelings quite different from and higher than the ordinary experiences of life. Changampuzha imagined poetry as a dancing lover. Art is referred as distinguished spiritual phenomena. Features of artistic expression are regarded as ‘knowledge of object world’, ‘perception and feeling’, and ‘emotiveness’. Imagination is understood as operating in literature as writer’s skill in characterization (where vivid pictorial description of figural form of the character was supposed to be an effective quality), plot and imaging that sublimates contradictory experiences of life.

3.14 Inputs from ‘Realist Literature’

In 1940s a glaringly ‘realist’ attitude with a ‘progressive’ and directly ‘political’ interventions from the part of writers occurs. In the meetings of Samastha Kerala Sahitya Parishad, Takazhi Shivashankara Pillai traced a new identity of the new ‘progressive writer’ who dreams of a new world with a scientific vision. The imagined new world of scientific vision is said to be a broad plan for human progress. The ‘young (progressive) writer’ is said to have the strength to face ‘realities’ of life that involves both ‘beauty’ and ‘ugliness’. He is invested with a free and scientific reason, healthy imagination and never satiating efforts. He questions many things that were regarded unquestionable. He will take out many stinking realities from the dark terrains of life. May be these ideas did not directly affect the use of pictures in periodicals because these were discussed circulated and taken up for discourses by basically ‘literary’ people. The envisaged young writer takes up the tragic, dirty and dark realities of life to portray. He observes life with a reason. His object of search is ‘human being’. He illustrates life based on its physical realities providing a new knowledge on the realities of life enlightening our desire for truth.
3.15 ‘Figuring the fiction’ – an available converging point for ‘art’ in ‘illustration’

One of the earliest published books on art in Malayalam envisaging as ‘a book depicting all kinds of painting techniques with a historical background’, was ‘ChitrakalaVeekshanam’ written and published by S.L.Larrius. He tries to discuss the ontological premises of art. Art is said to be an illustration of an (object’s) form / figure that is illuminated with the suggestive potentials of embellishments inherently present in objects. This is distinguished from ‘copying’ the figure from nature. Photography is dismissed as ‘un artistic’ because it is just an ‘exact copy’. A ‘structured form’ erupted from an emotional terrain of an artist is supposed as ‘artistic form’. This inevitably had to present something different from the photographic, the illustrated genres of ‘scenery’ or ‘life models’. It was expected to yield ‘beauty’ and ‘pleasure’ irrespective of historic time and space. These discursive attempts on ‘art’ and ‘aesthetic ideas’ had some shared assumptions regarding ‘art’ even when there is an apparent contestation on the terms of ‘what for art is’. Contentions that prioritized ‘art for art sake’ (regarded conventional, ‘apolitical’ and traditional) and those prioritized ‘art for life sake’ (regarded ‘progressive’ and ‘political’) determined the arguing axis of these discussions.

There is a general agreement shared by all forms of art like fiction, poetry, painting, sculpture, music and dance in the same measure. All art forms thought to evince ‘pleasure’ of a high order. Literature and ‘art’ of painting drawing etc operate through inner emotional content of the artist represented by way of figure / body / image. So there is a common ground in which ‘pictorial’ can characterize an ‘artistic’ method in a body / figure.
These assumptions could not have been a direct source of reference for ‘illustrators’. These discussions did not at all identify and ideate the activity of ‘illustrators’ like M.V.Devan, A.S, or Namboodiri as operating in the actual field of their imagination of ‘the artistic’. The derivative status and mediated space of ‘illustrations’ must have made ‘illustrators’ also think of this activity as a ‘job of applied art’ in a publishing house than an art practice. But the way in which a ‘figurative’ order of artistic taste came to be known as ‘illustration’ tangentially validated the definitive ideas of the distinct premises of verbal and visual practices based on their stipulated limitations and possibilities. All ideations were based on a general ‘sense of art’ and not on any specific ‘artistic’ practice other than literature.

3.16 Literally posited figures:

‘Imagining’, was grasped as the very idea of ‘Art’. ‘Illustrator’s imagining was very much ‘literal’ rather than a presentation of a personal ‘inner sensorium’ of the ‘artist’. In 1961, M.V.Devan sketched a dragon in the waves in the sea. It was an illustration for Vailoppilly’s poem ‘Manjakkadalindu’ that was a dialogue with the ‘yellow sea’ that represented the Chinese spying interests on India. The evil intentions of the ‘enemy’ were addressed as ‘dragon in the yellow sea’ in the poem and hence the picture. (Fig. 3.11, Fig.3.12) Later in 1963 November 17 issue, there is a story by Mali, titled as ‘Cheenavayali.’ That is also a fictive dialogue with the enemy imagined in the form of a dragon. A.S did drawing for it. It was a more perfected graphic presentation of dragon. When two similar imaginations were faced by two illustrators, pictures envisaged similar imagery, the difference being in a growing interest towards pictorial perfection and projection of form. Figure of a woman is roughly treated with black ink leaving high lights specified through contours so as to project her physical presence.(Fig.3.13) The story starts with the sentence ‘since she
is dark skinned, her first love afire was a failure…’ story is ‘Kamabhranthu’ (‘the lust’) of Madhavikkutty. Interest in ‘figure’ was dominated by an interest in propelling suitable emotional ambience, often dark and dense tone in which stark white space casually suggested the significant portions of face or hands. But the treatment suggests a peculiar attention from the ‘illustrator’ that subtly suggests the volumetric presence of figure in some cases as projecting a specific emotional tone. These treatments were tentatively tried out by M.V.Devan in 1961 before he left Mathrubhumi.(App.a.8). He had also given a charcoal drawing of a profile of a woman’s face with a tear drop slightly suggested and portrayed as holding a boy who blankly looks up was given for M.T.Vasudevan Nair’s story ‘Oppol’. The scratchy suggestion of design on the woman’s blouse was interesting at that time. A shift from earlier arbitrariness into minutely furnished details is pertinent in these sketches. The hairy chests and dotted jaws characterize some figures done by Namboodiri. He took a dexterous interest in depicting the big hairdos of stout ladies wearing lot of bangles and chains in Thakazhi Shivashankara Pillai’s serializing novel ‘Enippadikal’. Namboodiri does not merge figures into a messy background to bring in an expressive artistic gesture. A clear mix of graphic detailing of figures and sentimental compositions made possible from the story characterized Namboodiri’s interest as ‘illustrator’. He showed an interest in jerry borders of saris, designs of jewels, or on the pillow covers, designed gates of houses or decorated wooden mast of a cot. (App.a. 9 & 10)

Namboodiri used a different mode of sketching in dwarfish scale for the story ‘Mangara’ that had many satirical dimensions by O.V.Vijayan. Here also the sketch in the beginning itself will punctuate the reading of the first sentence of the story. Three owl-like birds are getting down from the train and walking towards. (App.a.11). The
dwarfish figures can be identified as persons belonging to different religious beliefs in the story. These are not scratches but simply some closed forms. Similar graphically put forward figures with an interesting caricature format goes with ‘Poymukhangal’ short story by Punathil Kunjabdulla. (App.a.12) All these ‘illustrations’ interposed literally with the first sentence of the story inspiring the readers to understand that ‘illustrator’ summons the reader to the act of reading literary work.

‘Figures’ and ‘images’ were increasingly getting more privileged importance right into the wave of ‘modernism’ in literature opening a different sensibility that apparently contested with the direct ‘imaging’ and ‘reflective detailing’ of the imaginative process. Interestingly ‘illustrators’ in 1970s were only further maturing their skills of clearly drafting and perfecting the activity of ‘figuring’ the fiction. Pictures continued to be understood as ‘artistic’ carriers of the ‘inner ideas’ in the corresponding literature.

3.17 Illustrator And ‘Modernism’ (1968) Khasakkinte Ithihasam

Here is an attempt to ‘read’ the ‘illustrations’ done by A.S.Nair for the novel ‘Khasakkinte Ithihasangal’ published in 1968. (Fig.3.14) This novel is generally regarded as one of the first novels in Malayalam to present a ‘modernist’ content and craft. Modern art is understood as attempting to avoid the language of ‘realism’ that overtly portrayed the ‘literal’ content. An imaginative modern artist was supposed to speak through (primary) colours. A.S as an illustrator still looked for a figural possibility opened by characters in the novel as placed fragmented groups of lines and contrasts of light and shade that could evoke a visual response in an emotionally charged plain. All the characters are descriptively illustrated. The scanty bearded and long haired Naisamali, women in Khasakh with thick lips and flat nose, Appukkili who is neither child nor elderly and so constitute the twenty eight pieces of this novel.
Those were not familiar depiction of human body for those readers who were accustomed to calendars, RaviVarma, closed and translucent academic drawing genres, advertisement narratives, photographs etc. A strange exotic ambience is created in a literally Goguinesque impressiveness of composition. (App.a.13)

But the novel fills each situation and each word with an alienating primitiveness that estranges the ordinary physical existence of words and the objects they refer to. Distinct combinations of words related to certain emotiveness. Those reader’s visions trying to enter into these estranging emotions evicted through words, will be distracted by ‘pictorialism’ that only grafts that which is familiar and ordinary. A particular art must have been demanded by this visionary imagination that it makes all ‘ordinary situations’ and bodies sublimate into abstract symbolic communication.

‘Illustration’ for ‘Khasakh’ is not symbolic and abstract though many literary critical readings of the novel went in that direction. Those sketches did not lose the graphic detailing of figures. It did not indulge in the harmonious rhythm of musical imaginations that was outside the graphic artist’s scope unless and until he devised allegories to meet that demand to some extent. A.S. did not think in sublimated metaphors that estranged ‘the real’ aspects of the ‘figures’ / characters in the novel in any way. Characters are placed in their normal human gestures fashioned in the fragmented dark forms characterizing the artist through out for eight years of ‘illustrating’ job in the periodical.

It is logical to think why AS was not working in a ‘masterly’ mould like that of ‘words and symbols’ of K.C.S.Panikker, he could have perhaps drafted objects in estranging visual terms. He was trained in art under the influence of K.C.S.Panikkar in Madras. some important ideas regarding the searches of a modern artist lies within the works of Panikker. His ‘words and symbols’ could lead clear and graphic ideas of
objects like flowers, crows, rivers, fish, dog and even the language scripts into a mysterious terrain where these objects are not ‘readable’ and ‘comprehensible’. As an ‘illustrator’ he did not work out a ‘pseudo-linguistic signification’ to contain the modern sensibility for mysteriously sublimating metaphoric vision of the time.

A.S. was an ‘illustrator’. So as understood as an unwritten inhibition that regarded an illustrator’s task as to make things or ideas clear. ‘Illustrator’ can not revel in the ‘incomprehensible’ even if it is virtually explicating the un-readability of literature.

General discourses of ‘art’ spread in Malayalam, though most of it transcribed the European speculative philosophies, did not speak specific guidelines for ‘illustration’ as a practice. In Europe ‘illustration’ was traditionally regarded as a specialized pictorial act. In 20th century, Modern artists also functioned as ‘illustrators’. Modernity had clear perspectives on the qualities of the most suitable ‘illustration’ for a literary piece, of the sort of dependencies it should establish with literature and regarding the ways in which ‘illustrator’ has to create an independent niche for himself.

Great ‘illustrations’ were supposed to make a harmonious relation between the literary piece and the art work goes with it as ‘illustration’. When writer and artist unites, artist becomes writer himself. Then on the unity of the writer’s and artist’s interests, there forms a harmony25. This as a rule shared the concepts of the relation of verbal and visual popularized here through a discursive field in periodicals. By the end of 1990s when independent collection of essays on each of the three ‘major illustrators’ got published, writers and tasteful people who had associated with them
through out the way and contributed essays to these books, lavishly encapsulated their long hushed assumptions and ideas regarding this practice.

“Each ‘illustration’ is a unique interpretation and re-creation of an artist in his own terms. Writer has no role in it. If M.V.Devan, Namboodiri and A.S drew the character Devi of ‘Pandavapuram’ all three will be doubtlessly three different works. Beyond the original skills and the artistic resources he attained, artist should imbibe a literary work in all its specialities and he should be able to communicate with all its crafted sense of beauty effectively. It is not an easy task. This evolves into a meaningful creative solidarity by all means.” novelist Sethu wrote. Those attempts spoke about the ‘meaningful collaboration’ that these ‘illustrators’ have extended towards the writers. They virtually projected the concepts of emotive and ‘characteristic’ figure / body /image as an essentially ‘artistic’ premise that evinced artistic pleasure of identification. So illustrator reads the search for a character’s / writer’s self and the possible ‘mind-grafted’ images in the multitudes of readers, trying to ‘sublimate’ it in the ‘illustration’ of the novel. The amorphously put idea of ‘visual harmony’ is explained as an enormously idealist endeavor that an ‘illustrator’ was supposed to take up.

‘Illustration’ could not ideally and practically join with any sensibility that tried to make his act ‘rare’ or incomprehensible or inconceivable. It evolved through the folds of magazine production with maximum communicability and certain refinement that is made possible by the stipulated time limit of the editorial desk. ‘Illustrator’ had through out paid attention to the ‘corporeality’ of those characters that are often left without descriptions or beyond the purview of the writer. Their physiognomy reflecting even the common sense relation of it to their caste identity and the gestures and presence of their bodies are treated well by the ‘illustrator’. A
sort of anthropographic interest is visible in ‘illustrators’ in the way they try to present human bodies across geographical and cultural regions especially when they get stories translated from other languages. It may sometimes be left as disappointing for a reader who is grasping the ‘modern’ literary sensibility of the time that ‘illustration’ simply operates as a documentary of the metaphysical or anthropographic types devised by the writer to actually establish his mysterious existential pangs and crisis.

3.18 Ideal of ‘beauty’ and ‘pleasure’ - modernity

Through out the ‘modernist’ 60s and 70s, many ideas on art and its aesthetic aims find space in assorted writings in special issues of periodicals. Necessity of pictures to demonstrate the content in a book is re-confirmed but always judged against an autonomous ideal of ‘beauty’ and ‘cultivated taste’. Interestingly ‘Anveshanam’, a magazine started publishing in 1966 by Madras Literary Cooperative society did not give ‘illustrations’ with the fiction they published. But the magazine was very well noted for its cover pictures that presented paintings, woodcuts and linocuts provided by many young generation ‘modern artists’. They were practicing solely in their own terms as ‘artists’ at Madras, a major south Indian center of art. They were also those artists who migrated to Europe in search of art but tried to have a sustainable bond with Keralam especially through the ‘intelligentia’ operated here through periodicals and books. V.Viswanathan, Akkitham Narayanan, R.B.Bhaskaran and Dattan Punaloor were among the contributors of these cover works. The absence of illustrations in Anveshanam while other magazines that are regarded as cultural fountain heads in Malayalam were sustaining the practice in more elaborate terms seems significant. It represents the deflection of taste in modern art world that wanted to judge pictures in an autonomous realm.
It is assumed in some articles on art published in some of the elite periodical space that a picture giving ‘form’/ ‘shape’ to the subject is used in order to display and concretize the idea of the subject. But an encompassing aesthetic sense of a culturally cultivated mind was ideally supposed to demand colorfulness, balance, rhythm and form, but ‘figure’. Picture is then demanded to deal with formal contents that ideally construed figural concerns. The picture of a familiar object or scene, picture that exemplifies a famous story, or picture of one’s own child, or any such subject matter with which one establishes a recognizable relation, is supposed to constitute simply a peculiar liking for the picture. E.M.J.Venniyoor wrote clearly that only those pictures created independently by an artist aiming at stirring ‘the beautiful’ would come under the status of ‘art’. Just like a portrait painting is difficult to be regarded as ‘art’ because it simply portrays, those pictures which simply demonstrate the content are not regarded ‘art’ because it does not have a ‘free existence’. ‘Art’ at this stage was envisaged as demanding a specialized training and awareness from the reader. E.M.J.Venniyur clearly writes: “some like the story of Mallan Pillai killed by an elephant than the ‘sacrifice of Sita’. Some might love a poster of a cine actress than a painting portraying Damayanti with the swan. Reason for this difference in taste is the cultural background and level of cultural refinement of the viewer.”

‘Art’ is supposed to provide ‘pleasure’ but there is a demand for training on the part of the viewer / reader to imbibe this ‘pleasure’. It is not ‘simple liking’ that is demanded by a ‘modern art’. The concern for ‘beauty’ supposed to have evinced from ‘truth’ when magazines were inviting pictures of famous scenic spots, portraits of famous men and the entertaining pictures that described political conditions in 1930s. This taste shifts considerably by the end of 1960s into an
‘aesthetic higher taste’ that demanded picture for needs other than depicting, portraying messaging and describing things or ideas.

3.19 Rhetoric of Art News Reports

A space for ‘Art’ as a separate selective value system began to be a regular feature in periodicals in 1960s. ‘Reproductions of highly placed Art works’ have been published in order to justify ‘the artistic value’ of the weekly. K.P.Padmanabhan Thampy, an occasional contributor of ideas on art to such weeklies, used to introduce a series of selected artists practicing then across the country like Asit Kumar Halder, N.S.Bendre, Sudhir Ratan Kashgil, Chaman Lal, Lalith Mohan Sen etc in Mathrubhumi weekly in 1950s. (Fig.3.16). Most of those artists were praised for the noble and ostentatious manner in which they depicted the common man’s life and its spectacles. They were also appreciated for the recognition gained from European art circles and the preoccupation they have of traditional Indian ness in the themes they paint. In mid 1960s, it is very well acknowledged that Annual or special issues of Malayala Manorama weekly presented ‘selections from the collection of art critic K.P.Padmanabhan Thampy’. (App.c.6). K.T.Ramavarma wrote a series of articles introducing European Modern art movements to the Malayali readers. He encapsulated Modern masters with catching captions for example, ‘artist of a lively present’ and ‘only a pair of eyes’ to describe impressionist master Manet or ‘a world made of points’ to refer to pointalist masters. ‘Anweshanam’ magazine reviewed and presented many Madras based artists in a floury language that was supposed to suit to represent artistic ideas of the time. Akkittam Narayanan referred to a painting by C.N.Karunakaran as ‘bursting tranquility’. M.V.Devan addressed the Madras state exhibition of art held that year as ‘sweet and pleasant introversion.’
Artists titled their paintings also in such vivacious language like ‘Message of Green’, ‘Beautiful horizon’ etc. The cover paintings of ‘Anweshanam’ also were titled as ‘pratibha’ ‘srushty’ ‘destiny’ ‘sympathy’ etc. Paintings were referred as ‘interpretations of dreamy memories’. Cover painting of August issue of 1971 gave a painting by P.N.Menon.(App.b.15). This gave a description in verse inside. It rhetorically said that a beautiful picture is offered. The picture is said stringing ‘art’ and ‘poetry’ together. The picture sketched a woman in sienna and ochre with highlights of white. The modernist interest in evolving half clarified cribbing forms out of a muddle of lines and colours is pretty visible in this painting. The convoluted form in the dark background showed an intimidating and frightening gaze.

An ‘anonymous female reader’ from Thiruvananthapuram wrote to ‘Anweshanam’ that did not ‘illustrate’ literary texts: “this is a suggestion. It is about pictures, not about cover paintings. It is seen that some lines are excerpted from the articles and given along with those articles published in ‘Anweshanam’. This is fine. But pages are wasted by this task. It is my complaint. Let us forget the issue of waste of page, sometimes when read the pages of ‘Anweshanam’ we feel like ‘not searching’ anything at all. There is only an overall turbulence. To prepare fiction and poem for publication, this is not a good method. Since everything is ‘modern’ we shall think that these excerpted words stand instead of pictures. But isn’t it proper to give pictures? It seems pictures will legitimize their presence in two-fold manner. Firstly it doesn’t become a waste of space. Another advantage is that of a visual shock”.

Information on ‘art’ is also accommodated in late 1970s (Kalakaumudi created an almost pedagogic space through such featuring) the ‘photo features’ of periodicals often presenting European impressionists, nude studies of photographers and
modernist sculptors. *Kalakaumudi* presented paintings by Velasquez along with elaborate fictional texts (Fig.3.17). The featuring note for this picture says, “It is not simply the beautiful facial features and elaborate breasts and the lustrous nobility that is immortalizing picture of this peasant lady. The details of the figure suggests the tranquil and beautiful domestic life of this lady through the rhythmic movements of painter’s brush.”

These information capsules (sometimes they were centre spreads) subtly accommodated the narrative preoccupations over human figures of any sort. The history of European naturalism that based on ‘essential copy’ and a progressive technical development to achieve the copy was understood in an intimately fictitious manner through this journalistic mediation. The figural concerns are taken out of vivid fold of pictorial detailing and rather placed in a more ideated realm of suggestive meanings where often rhythmic movements of the painter’s brush is given a charismatic importance. This is a consolidation of symbolic meanings on figural tastes that were only tentatively surfacing in 1950s. These are mostly unacknowledged information passed on to the reader but the journalistic tone of such presentations unquestionably accommodated the fictional indulgences that can be demonstrated on the photographs of great paintings.

### 3.20 Artists, Designs and ‘Modern Art’

In 1960s and 1970s Malayalam periodicals carried a sense of ‘Contemporary Art’ with inputs from South Indian Art scene based at Madras and a sense of ‘Modern Art’ through the inputs from Paris based Malayali artists, available photographs of Great artists and fashion photographers of Europe and regular reviews and news reports of artist’s camps and exhibitions being held across the state as an emerging space of art
as an actual practice here. Art events like exhibitions and camps held locally were reported often by Kaumudi News Bureau. (Fig. 3.18). Migration of artist in search of ‘Art’ is an inevitable part of the craving for recognition from metropolitan centers outside tradition and outside the locale. Though on one hand it represented the veering frictions of the literary locale and visual modern, it also tried some easy enroots into compromises through the journalistic communicative potential of periodicals. The cover picture of Kalakaumudi (1976) was a collage by Paris viswanathan. The issue contained an article by Viswanathan introducing the ‘modern art’ of collage and a cover picture demonstrating it. (App.b.16)

‘Fine arts’ has throughout been experienced in the context of Kerala as a dis-oriented outsider practice of individualism and struggle to attain legitimation. It was adapted first as a hybridizing mechanism of east and west and then as a noble and emotive presentation of the pastoral truth of Indian life, and then as a modern expression of aesthetic pleasure while the struggle to assimilate European naturalism by various means is pertinent throughout. But none of these modes seem to have settled the issue of ‘Art’ here. It also makes regional ‘artistic’ subjectivities like that of an ‘illustrator’ far more complex. ‘Illustrations’ specifically figured the human body for fiction since mid 1950s. There occurred inevitable adaptations and transcriptions of ‘modern art’ (as learnt from the urban centers outside this locale as in the case of South Indian Art based in Madras) into locally developed operational folds so that it gains an apparently comfortable ‘orientation’ as an ‘insider’ activity. AS sustained the typical Madras school orientation of human figure on expressive eyes and distorting proportions. This established human figure as a motif of feelings and lovely expressions. Namboodiri had displayed an iconic quality of human body that can carry and sustain social identity markers of caste and physiognomy in the
common sense about a lowest common denominator of bodily meanings. This seems
to have made the Madras trained ‘illustrator’- trios adaptable to the ‘insider interests’
of literature journalism and the popular politics of ‘common man’ here.

There was an inevitable breach with tradition in the attempts to grasp the
practice of art throughout 20th century. RaviVarma, the only instance of ‘enterprising
and ambitious professional’ of art in Keralam hesitated to bear upon his work much
that was characteristically rooted in his tradition of painting. Moreover, a tradition
sustained by a process of historical continuity and organic evolution defining its
distinctive identity was non-existent in the case of visual arts of Keralam. Many
attempts to trace a genealogy of ‘Art’ were worked out as paraphrases of European
books on ‘history of art’ and transcriptions of orientalist scholarship on Indian art.
‘Art’ as established by art schools and academies in colonial cities was an altogether
‘modern’ category for the time as elsewhere in India. Then emergence of ‘the artistic’
among a cross section of periodical readers is mediated by the way ‘pictures’ and
‘ideas on art’ appeared in periodicals.

3.21 What is educated as ‘Art’: Art schools

What was taught as ‘art’ within the art school was of course in tandem with
what was already much in the air and well accepted through the work of Ravi Varma.
In fact the history of ‘contemporary art they lived by’ was centered around the person
of Ravi Varma and his individual achievement, which was gaining ground as a
movement through his numerous imitators disciples and worshippers from literary
community mainly drawn from the upper strata of the society who could afford to
take private apprenticeships under some of Ravi Vama’s kinsmen. This was another
systematic filtering process that sustained the local legends of ‘the artistic’ mostly tied to the life of Ravi Varma and aristocratic contexts.

‘Art’ evolved as a concept and practice here through a series of systematic marginalization at various levels of this society. Institutional Art education, domestic market for portraits, landscapes and the popular pantheon for middle class ‘pooja rooms’ and journalistic categories of periodical press, all formed distinct but interrelated functional spaces for ‘art’. Each of these mutually inclusive spaces carried with them an ‘air of art’ that potentially popularized them.

Modernity as such in some discourses is regarded as a process of educating higher values for civilized life and in colonial exhortations it was regarded as ‘diffusion of useful knowledge’. ‘Art’ as a concept was a sort of ‘education’ of useful (in the sense of pleasure and cultural heights it is thought to provide) knowledge. This invariably leads to the assumption that what is newly ‘educated as art’ played a more defining role in contextualizing ‘Fine Art’ of Keralam than ‘what is practiced’ by traditional or modern groups of anonymous or acknowledged people. ‘What is newly educated as art’ was not simply a ‘dis-oriented outsider practice of individualism’ of ‘Modern Art’ but it worked here through an institutionally imparted art education. ‘Artistic’ has partly evolved through this system.

R.Nandakumar has thrown some light on the history of art schools in Keralam, an area yet to be researched in depth. A school of industrial arts was established around 1862 at Trivandrum. The British envisaged the promotion of Indian Crafts. The students sought training in painting at this school were largely from artisan castes with hereditary skills and modest professional interests and ambitions. The British were generous towards the traditional craft for its exotic charm and exportability. The Industrial schools of art (established at Madras, Culcutta and later in Bombay) across
the urban centers of the country offered training to promote the production of these craft objects. School of art in Trivandrum was one of its kind. It was with a view to cultivate the art of carving in which the Travancore workmen had already attained great eminence. Various World Fairs and exhibitions held at Europe found huge demand for the ivory carvings of Travancore. This school did all the carving work in ivory and wood in the presents sent for the acceptance of Her Majesty the Queen Empress on the occasion of Her Majesty’s Jubilee. As part of the reorganization of the school in 1888-89, thirty apprentices were admitted to be trained in the school and they were carefully selected from among those possessed of some education and taste for the arts. They were taught freehand drawing, model drawing, practical geometry, modeling, designing and were in addition set to practice the several branches of industry carried on in the institution. A drawing class had also been arranged to be opened for outside people. These admissions were ideally open to the sons of artisans engaged in the industry to which they are apprenticed. In reorganization in 1895-96, courses of instruction in painting were introduced for the first time. A number of Technical Schools were started later in Kollam, Alappuzha, Nagarcoil etc. wherein the students had to pass the Madras Technical Examinations for admission.

This institutional fold of art schools involved a channelization of a continuous tradition called ‘craft’ into the trans-national trade fairs of the time and it can be more or less seen as a ‘culture trafficking’. The trade Fairs were large exhibitions of industrial life and its ‘objects of discreet charm’ aimed for consumption of ‘culture objects’ against cash. The question of ‘Art’ and related individual ‘extra-social’ space occurred there as one among the categories of science, industry and art, as ‘great principle of the division of labor, which may be called the moving power of
civilization, was supposed to have extended to all these branches’. ‘Fine art’ was filtered into the ‘industrial art’ curriculum.

Those came out of these art schools must have faced a hopeless situation while the old craft tradition was deeply marginalized as ‘functional and decorative arts’ and did not get any independent domestic or international market support except for their occasional entry into the pavilions of trade fairs on the mercy of colonial officials. Moreover, a distinction of ‘art’ and ‘craft’ was already pertinent in their curriculum as mentioned above.

There is an observation by R. Nandakumar that in the particular conditions of Kerala, where the traditional schools of painting like that of miniaturists or patuas or other regional styles found elsewhere were non-existent, the introduction of western academic realism did not create any conflict of values or of artistic concepts. However, these ‘art school trained’ people could not make it in to a career and professional identity of an artist and could not identify with the image and social role of an artist as legitimized by the institutional frameworks of ‘Fine Art’ elsewhere in the country. This makes issues more complex. There were various kinds of artisan communities in Kerala working on wood carving. There was a regional tradition of mural painting that evolved in to a specific mode of representing divine iconography. Many pupils were drawn into the art schools from the very much existent artisan communities who must have faced the ‘re-organizations’ of the art school curriculum (added with ‘fine art’ of painting and drawing with nature study, still life study and life study) with a certain alienation. The introduction of ‘Art’ into the art school curriculum must have produced its share of friction that eventually marginalized the less privileged sections of the society further away from the very realm of ‘Art’. The emergence of highly adaptable literate fold of media has done its share to level the
differences and dilute frictions of artistic pedigree on a surface level. What was gathered from institutional art practices could be amended contested and made redundant by the activated romances of sentimental bodies by ‘illustrators’

3.22 Activated Romance of ‘Emotional Figures’ (1970s)

Bruce Burgett argues that a focus on sentiment raises questions central to any republic and democratic political culture by exploring the boundaries that divide private from public life, civil from state authority. Sentimentalism located readers bodies as both pre-political sources of personal authenticity and as public sites of political contestation. Body served two contradictory functions within sentimentalism, it provided a surface upon which sensations were expressed for a public that could imagine itself as respecting the autonomy of everybody and it provided a literary site for the management of those sensations through collective and potentially heteronomous means34.

Irrespective of the literary devises whether ‘modernist’ ‘realist’ or ‘progressive’, there is a consistent concern from the part of the ‘illustrators’ for distinguishing the ‘emotional content’ from within the ‘figural forms’ as supposed to demonstrate the gestures and actions in the narrative. In 1972, when Matampu Kunjukuttan wrote a novel called ‘Bhrusht’, it was in many ways a fictionalization of an actual historical incident as its nucleus, smarthavicharam, the expulsion of women who were judged as immoral and unchaste in a dramatic trial of men. The images of men wearing sacred thread and a towel around their waist, their angst ridden faces, their discussions with inmediacy, those men carrying the traditional lamps, those
entrapped in great fear and so on and so forth. (Fig.3.19). In the twenty-fifth chapter of the serialization, there is a sketch of a young girl with breast uncovered, the accused woman. She stands as a ‘figural code’ for the accused. She stands dramatically down into the page as a ‘figural pillar’ in the two small columns of literary text. Above her head, suggested is the cribbing, goggling secretive discussion of the sacred thread wearers. The romance of the story is enhanced by this figural code of an accused female, subjected to patriarchal decisions. Though characterised in the limited visibility provided by reformatory plays emerged from Namboodiri caste in 1920s, a ghosha-clad woman carrying a palm leaf umbrella was a peripheral visibility (while women from other matrilineal communities wearing traditional ‘mulakkacha’ are available in plenty in Ravi Varmaic generic works here) though she belonged to a dominant social framework by her caste identity. In 1972, when in a wider cultural space of periodicals the group of ghosha clad women appears as ‘illustration’, it entertained the modern reader-eye in search of obscured pleasures of sight. A.S. uses the typically Madras school patterned eyes for female figures. Here it is not part of any decorative or distortive presence. It is a patterned code of child-like innocence. The romance of the scene is further enhanced by graphically describing the lustful eyes (coded in a frightening gaze) and dotted jaw of the man and the slightly raised shoulder, bear breasts and aimless glances of ‘innocent eye’ of the accused woman. In the entire extent of Malayalam literature the hegemonic volcanos, their eruptions and the ‘heart rending’ consequences of it form a large part of cultural and political signification for ‘the progressive’ movements. In that sense, Namboodiri legends of reformatory stories did not exhaust. Lalithanbi Antharjanam’s novel ‘Agnisakshi’ published in 1976. The weight of ‘the past’ and its sentimental possibilities were grasped by A.S in the same fashion of juxtaposing male
goggle and female innocence. Novelist Padmarajan’s ‘Peruvazhiyambalam’ also got imposing dynamic and lively spectacle of human physiognomy of dark and lesser order in A.S’s black brush drawings. **(Fig.4.5)**

In *Kalakaumudi*, a magazine started with some mainstream cultural contentions, literary pieces were mainly illustrated by K.MadhavanNair. He demonstrated multiple skills of design, using single colour tones, muddling lines into forms, and portraying the sentimental in female figures when posed in association with male figures in a filmic fashion. **(Fig.3.20)**. He rarely attempted to display emotional turbulence through clearly defined independent figural forms treated with hatching pen or wash strokes as we see in A.S.(App. a15, App.a.16 & App.a.17)

Meanwhile Namboodiri started working in *Kalakaumudi* in 1980. He was aggressively devising methods to project so-called ‘characters’ of writers in *Kalakaumudi* in early 1980s. He used the technique of dramatically foregrounding figures in respect to some cues in the background establishing some emotional ambiguities usually communicating a ‘narrative mood’ in filmic compositions. Meanwhile, many film news reports could convey ideas ‘like that is shown in the picture’. The ‘illustrated’ figures and their compositions in the axis of a fictional narrative of artistic origin in the picture rather told a story. ‘Illustration’ placed itself on the axis of text. Picture defined ‘interpretation’ of the literary piece through an immediately recognizable image. In a news photograph of filmic context, the reader could voyeuristically take entour into the body of an actor / character where the designs styles and borders of their dress or contours of their body became very ‘interesting’. But photograph could not make intonations of varied importance and accentuations selected spaces of the body so as to communicate pathos titillations or
amusement on the situation. ‘Illustrator’s sketches could accumulate details on
selected parts of the figure while sustaining the idea of the whole.

3.23 ‘Accumulated detail supposed to tell a story’:

Study of individuals from physiognomic perception has a tradition right back
into the late eighteenth century debates in Europe. Physiognomy was defined as the
mode of distinguishing a person’s character by her or his outward appearance. It
stressed the surface qualities of the body and sought to make statements about what
was “deep” and stable by the discovery of patterns and variations in what could be
discerned by the eye of a skilled observer.

Pictures illustrating story appealed to some specific kind of ‘physiognomic
interest’ to its ‘readers’ who could fix an eye on the character of that physique.
Images in film-news photos, and line drawings used as ‘illustrations’ when posed
themselves in a realist compositional mode, encouraged the understanding of the
picture as an extension of life filled with characters (grafted on people, film stars,
fictional characters available from literature) who have histories and futures. The
particulars of the depicted situation were mainly read through physiognomy, close-up
faces, details / attributes of personal idiosyncracies and a narrative backdrop of some
sort. The source of this narrative backdrop can be an actual literary text with or without an excerpt published.

When C.N.Karunakaran illustrated in ‘Kalakaumudi’, there is a conscious
attempt to request attention to a fused scheme of decorativeness and caricature. It
must have got considered as very much ‘artistic’ by way of its achieved
embellishment’. Like Madhavamenon, the academic background of applied art must
have given C.N.Karunakaran, a thorough graphic base that is less veering towards
‘three dimensional’ skill. ‘Illustrations’ done by all these illustrators, carried strong bearing on filmic composition. (App.a.18). They often swerved towards three dimensional space. But they were simply going around the solid base of that supposedly unmediated and rarified illusionist space. In this circumscribing act, the graphic artists accumulated figural details that would please the reader. In effect they provided figures in composition that ‘spoke’ a story through accumulated details of gestures and postures.

All these initiated a model of reading a situation through accumulated figural detail. Aesthetic expectation from an artist in the age of modern subjects through out idealist romantic and realist phases had been to actualize and make available for the eyes to recognize this ‘accumulated detail that told a story’.

Literature should typically be an open ended puzzle of creative expression in ‘modernist’ thought because it presents the writer’s inner philosophical vision of the world that is not even completely graspable to himself. It shifted its focus from the anecdotal to the abstractly emotional. This shift was accepted by Namboodiri and A.S in basically two ways. One was in terms of pictorial composition and the other in terms of re-producing sentimental sights that are already codified in the journalistic featuring of situational narratives. They captured ‘emotions’ through an artistically assumed difference in the common place text of pictorial presentation in photos and photogenic sketches that paid attention to ‘beautiful faces’ and ‘body shapes’. Emotions deriving from a narrative picture could be made possible by ‘situational compositions’ where one figure with a significant gesture is composed vis-à-vis the other while that too is gesticulating. Emotions deriving from a narrative picture could be made possible by situatuinoal compositions where one figure with a significant gesture is composed vi-a vis the other while that too is gesticulating
emotions derived from wordlessly intuited beauty were conveyed through singled out full figure female form that already has attained the capital of evocativeness.

‘Emotions’ had to be extended to sentimental and shocking visions so that the readers could sense the enjoyable forbidden spaces inhabited by the writer. Madhavan Nair gave some filmic ‘action sketches’. In Kalakaumudi, Namboodiri performed such sketches in a subdued manner projecting single figure with some perspectival distortions placed in the suitable background of crowd or scenic details as simply suggested. (Fig. 3.21). ‘Illustration’ punctuated the titillating arenas of human (particularly man-woman) relationships but variously presented as ‘pictorial issues’ too. Madhavan Nair and C.N.Karunakaran adapted figures and sentiments to the basic issue of ‘design’. Namboodiri and AS did not tight-fit their figural concerns into ‘pictorial page design’ but tried to fluidly encroach in significant scale both into the figural proportions of their subject and the printed columns of the text. (Fig 3.22 & Fig.3.23). Illustration claimed its space in 1980s through Namboodiri’s works in Kalakaumudi weekly and ‘Katha’ monthly and AS in Mathrubhumi. AS provided panoramic scenes of villages with trees having huge sturdy trunks and branches that do not limit it into a finished picture but opens itself to create a space of the ‘visual’ within an aesthetically treated realm of serialized publication of literary text.

Painting and drawing pictures tried to digest ‘the modern’ in terms of sublimating the figural concerns into images of exultation and tranquility while it purposefully conveyed an ‘incomprehensibility’ and mystery through the muddle of figures. ‘Illustration’ also tried to test the viability of the muddling figure composition that conveyed not much in any ‘graspable proportion’ for the readers who habitually
looked for ‘situations that told a story’. (App. a. 19 & App.a.20). Those attempts were relatively less in number.

3.24 Titillating physiognomic particulars of the body:

In late 1970s and 1980s there is an almost settled graphic concern for perfect lines and perfect figuration that suggestively ‘contained’ emotions within some solidly featured conventions projected and repeated. Eyes, hairdos, drooping shoulders, noble fingers gesticulating some casual dialogues, exposed navel, partly or fully exposed breasts generally posited for a sucking child or for a male embrace, exaggerated huge buttocks, or panning visions designed upward on the figure so that the pleated frocks and long cassocks will converge in curiously small heads. (fig.3.24)

Such figural codes enviasaged a viewer with voyeuristic interests. Namboodiri makes literal display of voyeuristic eye in some situations. It is signaled in the spacing of the figures if not fully actualized through the sketchiness. The un-drawn face of a much drawn female figure was pretty graspable for the viewers who are simultaneously provided with expert cover photos showing women with subtle exposition of sexuality (App..b17). Pedagogic photo features that consistently instilled (modern) artistic value into nude photography in Europe (App.c.10) and advertisement lay outs that used the cut out projection of the ‘figural’ or ‘facial’ objects in the circuit of narratives on physical health centered on female body. (App.d.10). The focus on parts the body got conveyed by various means. ‘Illustration’ converged its visualizing attitudes into this circuit, though normatively, it has trough out been regarded in terms of demonstration, interpretation or decoration for literary texts.
Though the expertise in sketching, caricaturing, hatching and shading was giving ‘illustrations’ a distinctive space, these ‘artistic’ interests had to take inputs from the ordinary ‘behavioural particulars’ of human figures, representational schemes in other popular mediums of communication like film and advertisements so as to fashion its concerns. Fiction generated ‘characters’. ‘Characters’ often legitimized the drawings of human figure with the literary text. ‘Illustration’ that avoided human figure is rare. It had to share the sentiments of a regional culture and its reading / viewing habits so that traditional performance art forms and plump female figures were constantly quoted in ‘illustration’ whenever ‘illustrator’ got a chance to ‘read such a situation’ from literary text. There is a variety of middle aged ladies and their stout physiognomic presence (mostly in an amusing fashion exaggerating buttocks and breasts while head is considerably small in comparison) provided by Namboodiri for many stories in mid 1980s. Popular schemes of representation operated within the ‘illustrated images’ created and reproduced in the ‘public domain’ and its ‘literate-media sensibility’. But ‘illustrators’ or editors do not seem to be comfortable to admit their act as an ‘impure mixture’ at any cost. Especially those who specifically worked within the paradigm of ‘art’, like M.V.Devan, A.S, and Namboodiri had always veered their sense of form between ‘the artistic’ and ‘the popular’. Those worked for magazines with lesser ‘visual’ / ‘culture’ design ambitions did not have this issue. So they still work within the expectations of supposedly ‘romance reading public’. Painting cute faces, transparent blouses, fleshy bodies, and violent actions of police or rowdies put them neatly within the acts of ‘pulp’ and ‘soft-porn’ expressions. An ‘aesthetic’ or ‘individual’ dealing with a figure in terms of a ‘demanding fiction’ within a mediated space, time and technique is not an issue for a mere ‘painting act’ to cater to ‘pure romance readers’.
Alluring status of ‘artist’ and the gratifications of acknowledgements as an ‘artist’ is a temptation only for the ‘aestheticised’ act of ‘illustration’ for a ‘tasteful’ reading. This temptation is also created and sustained by the media-use habits of projecting selective importance on particular ‘illustrators’, conveying codes of artistic distinctions through the allotment of space and celebrating the very act of drawing as a ‘public sacred act’.

Next chapter discusses these mediatic patterns of canonizing the communicative potentials of this practice.

In late 1980s there emerges a newly consolidated ‘aesthetic’ field for ‘Illustration’ that signified this as a pure act of an ‘artistic being’. A.S passed away in 1987. ‘Yayati’ gained him a lot of attention as an artist. Mathrubhumi gave a painted sketch of A.S as its cover picture in July 17-24 issue of 1988. N.V.Krishna Warrier wrote a special article on not simply A.S.Nair, the ‘chief artist’ in the publishing company, but the aspects of the very practice of ‘illustration’ he was undertaking for almost two decades by then. “The pictures in periodicals and books (‘illustrations’) are regarded more or less as ‘commercial art’.

But it need not always be so. It can be pure art too. This fact is instilled into us by mainly three artists, M.V.Devan, Namboodiri and A.S.Nair. Most of their art works as ‘illustration’ appeared in Mathrubhumi weekly. Devan’s pictures excelled in the simplicity and ‘realism’ of lines. Imaginative quality and assertiveness of lines were the qualities of Namboodiri. All these qualities are there together in A.S. It is a vindication to the quality of their pictures that all these pictures were noticed as much as or even more than the literary texts that they accompanied. These three artists are also a proof for the quality of Madras art school where they studied under the tutelage of K.C.S.Panikkar.” The editorial also acknowledges the skill demonstrated by A.S on
designing typography and artistic cartoons like ‘akavum puravum’. (Fig.5.4). It is observed during this time that ‘many art scholars would not have much of a positive opinion on this ‘illustrator’ but moderate art lovers were very much attracted by his pictures and he is now immortalized in their hearts. In that sense he popularized art’.  


The life and works of these three ‘illustrators’ weaved a new understanding on this practice that had remained curiously silent for six decades. In spite of a new generation of artists working in culturally mainstream periodicals in 1990s, ‘illustration’ as a practice is still understood in terms of ‘Devan-namboodiri-AS’ trios. There is a consolidated media-interest in individual ‘illustrators’ demonstrated in such efforts that tried to somehow place an importance for these selected trios who had been there with the periodical publishing of literary texts for over four decades. This did not fetch an equal importance for the practice of ‘illustration’ in literary history. In the field of contemporary Art also, an ‘illustrator’ who operated in a regional media industry never occurred as an ‘artist’ worth considering at all.
3.25 The ‘popular’ resolutions of ‘the artistic’:

Analytical writings on Art and Literature, though such instances are very rare, kept reservations on ‘Illustrators’. In an article on Namboodiri, Sanal V wrote that in spite of taking up the task of consistently making ‘pictures’ for literary texts, Namboodiri gained no comfortably secured place in the serious history writings either of art or literature. Drawing ‘good looking pictures’ to hang on the verbal world of ideas will never fetch the status of ‘artist’ to anybody in history of art. Still it is true that Namboodiri got the most important chair of Kerala Lalitha Kala Academi though many of the discursive issues of Modern Art of the time have not bothered Namboodiri or any ‘illustrator’ for that matter. Then what mattered for them is an important question.

The problematic of their status as ‘illustrator’ is addressed and settled in a mediatic manner by AS and more successfully by Namboodiri. The ‘theoretical concerns of art’ in the ‘illustrator’s mind got expression through journalistic interviews. Throughout on availing such chances Namboodiri neither projected any ‘avant-garde’ concept of art, nor conformed to traditional aesthetic principles of art or even RaviVarmaic modernity. He did not evade his status quo as an ‘artist’ either. He was instead bothered by the demand for ‘imaginative’ drawing that economically ‘suggested’ (human) forms. He is also bothered by the need for a distinctive signature of his original artistic style. In interviews he is said to have wanted to get rid of the ‘influence’ of K.C.S.Panikkar, the master of his generation in Madras School. This is an equidistant positioning away from ‘Art’ in the sense of ‘illusionistic naturalism’ and ‘Applied Art’ in the sense of ‘art’ used in commercial purposes. His models are not ‘real life people’ though the presence of a ‘live model’ is much felt in RaviVarma. The visual details of scooter or a feast in the banyan leaf or the textural
details of the fabric have been avoided by Namboodiri not simply as part of a puzzle or an artistic suggestion. He went in a direction distinct from the picturesque. It is also because such details are out of the technical scope of a drawing. As Sanil observes, he is not interested in ‘incidents’ or ‘facts’ but searched for a ‘cartoon-design moment from literary text’. It is away from both picturesque word pictures available in literary descriptions of characters in stories or novels and ‘naturalistic illusionism’ that primarily gives visual details and authentic status of art.

Illustrator functioned in a graphic sense that had to devise and deal with clichés and stereotypes. It also had to function as a canon or cliché and not original in practice. Nobody seriously into Art discourse liked to talk about cliché. If to talk, document or celebrate, it should be in terms of a canonical importance of the practice that bestowed the personal and original qualities on the artist status of the ‘illustrator’ that in effect bestowed personal and original qualities on the popular clichéd act of the illustrator.

Next chapter examines ‘illustration’ as a text of the popular field of ‘mediatic codes’.

Notes:

1. Earlier than this, an essay on the concept of Lord Srikrishna is illustrated with a picture of the Lord, in a calendar format. It is not clear who provided this picture. _Deepam Illustrated weekly_, 1930.

4. Kelu, a reader writes letter to the editor. Mathrubhumi Illustrated weekly, 4 September 1952
7. Christopher Pinney, ‘Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India’ Oxford, 2004. P.8 Pinney argues for ‘a visual culture’ in the twentieth century public sphere. This ‘visual culture’ he argues, is not identified not as a mirror of conclusions established elsewhere but an experimental zone in which new identities and possibilities were forged. Also it is argued that this was not an ordered laboratory with a single script, but divergent political, religious and commercial interests ensuring profound contingency to all outcomes’.
8. Jean-Marie Schaeffer, ‘Art of the Modern Age- philosophy of art from Kant to Heidegger’ Princeton University Press, 2000. p.6. Critically characterizing European traditions of ‘speculative thought’ says that in all its forms and formulations, from the most profound to the most trivial, it implies a sacrilization of art, which is contrasted, as an ontological mode of knowledge, to other human activities, which are seen as alienated deficient or inauthentic.
10. Namboodiri vindicates that in 1940s, for most people, Art meant RaviVarma. For him it was not so. But could not say it aloud. The first deviance from Ravi Varma he has regards for was K.C.S.Panikkar. Namboodiri is said to have tried to come out of the presence of a ‘live model’ in his human figures. (Rekhakal) p-52
16. S.Guptan Nair’s article ‘vakkinte bhangikku varayude thangu’ appeared in Mathrubhumi Weekly may 26-june 1 2002. Though written recently, this article
represents the ideational premise formed for visuals in colonial modern times to which S.Guptan Nair formed himself as a critic and professor of literature.

17. ibid, S.Guptan nair remembers the account as described by the elder son of great poet Kumaranasan, Mr. Sudhakaran regarding the sketch done by a drawing master named Kunjushankaran for the publication of Asan’s poetry called ‘chintavishtayaya sita’. The account goes like this: ‘The banks of river ‘Thamasa’. Sita sits under a tree. Half closed eyes. On the beautiful face there is a shade of melancholy. The silver moonlight. At a distance the hermit valmiki’s hut. A deer. A young hermit. My father (Kumaran asan)looked at the picture for a long time. Then asked if there is any change necessary in the picture. There were two golden bangles on the hands of sita. Father (Asan, the poet) suggested if it is changed into a flower or a creeper. Next Sunday, the artist came and met the poet. Father (poet) sent me too to assist him to find a suitable flower or creeper in the wild bush nearby. After some search, kunjushankaran sir found a wild jasmine having two flowers. Sir plucked that out and placed it on the hands of Sita in the picture and found it suitable. Then taking brush and colours he made changes in the picture. My mother (Asan’s wife) later framed the picture.’


Writers are deemed successful in their skill on emotive evoking when they depict characters depicted ‘pictorially detailed. The distinction of literary language from the dry statements of facts is recognized as the fictional quality gained through pictorial depictions. Likewise, an artistic possibility is also supposed to be operating in a figural level even when he portrays ‘concepts’. ‘A turbulent wind’ is a formless figureless concept. If an artist portrays it by way of the agitatedly shaking trees and plants and the disorderly dress and long hair of a woman walking through a lane while she is also portrayed as struggling to keep her dress and hair unto herself, the strength and turbulence of the wind will be effectively available for artistic response of the viewer.”

20. Ibid, p-30. “Beauty of women shines over the ordinarily conveyed idea of the bodily fetures. Likewise a harmonious artistic beauty is always projected over the fragments of bodily features in a form of a figure portrayed”.

21. an abridged version of Thakazhi’s speech was printed titled as ‘kalayum vairoopyavum’ in Mathrubhumi weekly, 1943 May 16.

27. Take an instance of a literary piece being read by a reader, an editor and an ‘illustrator’. The word-pictures given by the writer would create three visuals in these three people. For the reader or the editor this mind grafted image need not be demonstrated. But for an illustrator, it is not so. If encountered with the sentence in literary piece ‘Raman Nair, so stingy doing not even a small help to others’ the ‘illustrator’ has to give a figure to this Raman Nair as in any minimum means related to the mind grafted images of thousands of readers. There are stingy people with beautiful figure of superstars in films. But it wont go with the image in the mind of readers or even the editor. Then that picture will not live out of that editor desk. Here it becomes mandatory for the artist to ‘caricature’ the character most suiting to the most possible mind grafted image in the mind of the people. Bringing ‘proportional variants’, exaggerations, distortions into lines, if an ‘illustrator’ has to illustrate the character, a cartoonist has to live within him.” Venu, in an article ‘A.Snte akavum, A.Snte puravum’, Ibid. p-115
29. Ibid,
32. Anweshanam, vol.3, no.5, June 1968
36. news report, ‘AS-oru anusmaranam’ ‘Kesari’ daily 10 July 1988. this report said that illustrations he did for ‘Agnisakshi’ (lalithambika antharjanam) Pavathan (sikrishna
alanahalli) and Yayati (V.S.Khandekar) gave him a permanent space in the minds of readers and art lovers in Malayalam. Those pictures he did for Yayati, combining Indian sculptural art and puranic imagination, gained him a national fame.

Fig. 3.1

'Illustration' story 'Antharjanathinte Kruthaknjatha', P.G. Ramayyar,
*Mathrubhumi Illustrated Weekly*, 13 November 1933
Fig. 3.4
Drawing M.V. Devan, short story, "Kudayanelloorile Oru Stree"
T. Padmanabhan, Mathrubhumi Illustrated Weekly, 4 January 1953.
Fig. 3.5
Cover picture M.V. Devan, 'Jayakeralam Swathantrya Dina Patippu' 1947
Fig.3.6
Concluding issue of novelette 'Kalyanaveedu' Kuryan Plamparamban in Malayala Manorama Weekly, 1967
Fig. 3.7
Fig. 3.8
Fig. 3.9
Fig. 3.10
Illustration A.S, story "Udhyanathinte Aruviyil" J.K.V,
Mathrubhumi Weekly, 18 August 1968

Fig. 3.13

Fig. 3.14
Fig.3.15
Cover 'Anweshanam' magazine, May 1966.
Fig 3.16
Fig 3.19
Illustration AS, novel "Bhrusht", Matampu Kunjukuttan.
Matrubhumi Weekly, 22 September 1972
Fig. 3.20
Fig. 3.21
Illustration Namboodiri, story "Abuvum Atbhuthalokavum"
Punathil Kunjabdulla, 'Katha' magazine, April 1984
Fig 3.22
Illustration Namboodiri, novel "Parinamam" M.P.Narayana Pillai,
Kalakaumudi Weekly, 3 August 1986
Fig.3.23 Illustration Namboodiri, novel "Gandhakam" MohanaChandran, *Kalakaumudi Weekly*, 13 November 1983
Fig.3.24
Fig 3.25
Illustration Namboodiri, presenting man sitting (on absent chair) in the left hand side page while woman half naked is posited in the right hand side page, Kalakaumudi Weekly, 1986
Fig.3.26
Illustration Namboodiri, story "Manassonnumariyunnilla" U.K.Kumaran, 'Katha' monthly, 20 February 1977
Fig.3.27
Illustration AS, novel 'Yayathi' V.S. Khandekar,
Mathrubhumi Weekly 16 June 1978