Chapter 5

‘Cultural acts’ and new media practices

This chapter intends to pin down the capital of ‘artistic’ and ‘cultural’ tastes that are symbolically accumulated over the years in illustrations that are currently used as stereotypes of cultural acts. ‘In mass picture production in India for the last 120 years, we encounter images produced within and mediated by ‘anaestheticising discourses’ and those produced within and mediated by sensory practices as Pinney observes in Photos of Gods. Aesthetic discourse is still inappropriately brought to bear upon popular representative practices surrounding them with reified discourses.’

5.1 Namboodiri’s ‘ways out’ of the canon and pleasures of the media

A center-spread column known as ‘nazhikakkallukal’ (milestones) which used to appear in Mathrubhumi weekly (January 21-27, 1996) thus presented a full page photograph of Namboodiri:

“Gaining the recognition of many readers, through thousands of illustrations, artist Namboodiri stands in the front row of line drawing illustrators of India. Though he has chosen a realistic figurative style he leaves lines unfinished, without much attempts to finish the figure. This is the ability an artist gains through his observation insight and training. These lines which can even be called magical catch hold of the reader. And here the dignity of drawing is elevated. We praise these lines as fine art form. This makes artist Namboodiri a veteran in this field.”

The column is usually intended to celebrate important personalities from cultural fields. (Fig.5.1)
A press report published in Kalakaumudi weekly on the public release function of the metal engravings of ‘Namboodiri drawings’ sponsored by the Arts and Craft development Corporation of Keralam said: “In Namboodiris figures God is not hiding but he is awakened. When Namboodiri moves his figures, God recognizes that it is possible to sing with lines. So he sings with Namboodiri.”(App.c.22)

Ultimate possibility of any art in order to be placed in the privileged space is to imagine it as a collector’s item. The ‘collector’ that a noted writer can imagine for an art object of his place is the ‘tourist’ and the ‘item’ was as poet O.N.V.Kurup identifies, the ‘Namboodiri drawing of kathakali’ or ‘theyyakkolam’. The investing of divinity onto the individual is the most popular and easy method of creating a rarefied space for any practice to make it a ‘cultural’ act.

There are readers of Malayalam periodicals who easily identify a ‘Namboodiri sketch’ as a tasteful creative visual as he has created a style of sketching that signifies his own artistic self. However, there are no considerable critical work gone into the meaning and efficacy of this signification. Rather what goes into the making of his ‘artistic self’ is the occasional interviews in which he gets a chance to speak about his ‘creative concerns’. As part of a usual journalistic review/report of the ‘event’, Namboodiri gets this chance mostly after an exhibition of his independent group of metal relief works or after a public demonstration of his skill to draw into the rhythm of Kathakali music.

The ways of assimilating and constructing the popular art into a privileged fold of a cultural elitism by way of praising it as ‘a fine art form’ and demonstrating the hallucinated subject positions are variously reflected in the journalistic spaces of periodicals and newspapers. Here suddenly the readers find a category called ‘line drawing illustrators in India’ (‘Nahhikakkallukal’, Mathrubhumi). It evades the fact
that Namboodiri operated in very much a localized activity – creating an aestheticised popular space through line drawings - that illustrators in other regional languages have not attempted as their only aesthetic medium. ‘Illustration’ as a ‘visual extension of the literary essence’ as developed in Kerala has never been a pan-Indian practice across all other regional cultures. The penetration of literate behavior across regional Indian cultures is still to be academically examined in terms of a comparative social history. But it can be well noted that there is no homogenous popular practice of ‘literature-oriented illustration’ across regional cultures as can be recognized here. Then the ‘Indian Line Drawing illustrator’ is a historically unexamined category and a never experienced pan Indian sensibility. The practice of ‘illustration’ could get discussed in thoroughly aesthetic modern and mainstream terms when it came to think about Namboodiri as illustrator in 1990s. The mediatic functional reality of this practice is totally neglected in order to project the legitimate issues of artistic traditions, modern cultural climate and personal style of the artist.

M.G.S.Narayanan writes on Namboodiri that his works in weeklies have all contributed great deal towards a receptive climate of art appreciation in Kerala. ‘The old tradition of mural painting had disappeared or de-generated and a rather muddled modernist school had come to dominate the art scene. In such an environment Namboodiri developed his own personal style of line drawing that stood far apart from the mural art of medieval Kerala, drawing inspiration from Kerala’s renaissance culture in which the classical style was re-awakened by the challenge of the modern age\(^2\). (M.G.S.Narayanan: 2004) The ‘unfinished ness’ of the figure is read as an artistic gesture portraying the ‘insight and training’ of the illustrator. The unfinished and distorted treatment is also generally identified as a ‘modernist’ gesture through South Indian semi figurative abstractions. The illustrator’s influences are identified
in the colourful theatrical performance of the celebrations of worldly passions of love and hatred in Kathakali, idealization of feminine form in Pallava-Chola art in the impressive sculptures and woodwork in the temples. Namboodiri is said to have breathed the clean air of his native Ponnani culture savouring the works of Malayalam literary masters.

‘A veteran’ is thus created. For his practice that actually remained in the regional folds of recognition a privileged national identity is gradually created. There is a ‘pleasure’ in this act of making an ‘artist veteran’ who has all throughout been a fellow traveler of venerable public domain of literary men’s solidarity. It can give a transgressive feeling for a literate media reader on his limitations in accessing ‘Art’ of the ‘contemporary’ practice in galleries. It is visible in the kind of language used in news reports and interviews. ‘Mazhayum veyilum pachayum pole namboodiri’(Malayalam weekly, 2002). ‘Namboodiriyude sangeetham’ (Kalakaumudi weekly issue 1089), ‘Yaniyude sangeethavum namboodiriyude chitrangalum’ (kalakaumudi issue 1089), ‘Kathakaliyude porul thedi’ (kalakaumudi issue 1083), ‘Kathakaliveshathile Namboodirichitta’(Malayalam weekly, 2001), ‘Thalam thalirkkunna Rekhakal’ (Deshabhimani weekend issue, 2001), ‘Varakal kondu Mohippikkunna Namboodiri’ (Malayalam weekly: 2001), ‘Charittrakaranaya chitrakaran’ (Bhashaposhini:2004), ‘Kazhchayude nivedyam’ (Malayalam, 2001), ‘Varakalude Marukaa’ (Bhashaposhini: 1996). (App.c.22, App.c. 23 & App.c.24)

Namboodiri’s autobiographical narrations published in Bhashaposhini monthly magazine and one can see the same amount of gratification in Namboodiri to remember the old days of his making when he was an ‘illustrator’ / an employee of a publishing house and not very much a part of any legitimately independent creative act. (App.a. 31). Though ‘literature’ is not his medium, he writes / narrates ‘facts as
they are’ in his ‘autobiography of an artist’. In autobiographical accounts he writes about the old ‘verandah’ in Calicut where writers, poets and film directors reached on holidays. It was not a silly rejoicing of some people but an expressive space of literary men with serious agenda of sharing. Effortless beauty, humor, contemporariness and a talent to conceive original ideas are all said to be inherent in that generation.

5.2 Writers as if losing their self to the illustrator:

Writer V.K.N wrote in the forward to his novel ‘Adhikaram’ (1991) that this book is a footnote to the pictures of vasudevan Namboodiri, the ‘Parama Siva’ of the art of drawing” V.K.N has occasionally expressed as if he were a sort of submissive writer that almost loses himself in devotion before the ‘illustrator’. Such a pleasure in the fictional loss of power or gain or ‘never fully conveyable devotional vigor’ is demonstrated by many writers. “I was so exalted before the metal relief works of Namboodiri as if I were bathing in the grand luminance of thousands of Sun around me.. About the ‘illustrator’s association with literary masters vivid accounts are available today. “There was an organic process by which the artist who spent many hours in the company of authors, developed a sixth sense to track their heartbeats. He (Namboodiri) was perfectly at home with their characters and episodes”. Noted historian M G S Narayanan writes about his access to a magic circle of writers, particularly younger ones and editor especially N V Krishna Warrior, who is referred as truly renaissance figure as editor of Mathrubhumi and as contributed significantly to the cultural awakening of Kerala. He writes about the amazing rapport that artist Namboodiri had with them. “That special quality helped him express their ideas with
at most lucidity through his illustrations and drawings. One could watch him listening to their endless gossip with wide open eyes and a disarming smile. His mature drawings and illustrations not only brought out the best in their writing, but also claimed attention in their own right as independent creations of art with their simple yet powerful lines”

This study tried to read how ‘the powerful lines’ further worked to organize gazes onto the objectified females, privacies of men and women and an all physiognomic detailing. It excluded the flexibility of graphic idiom in conveying a range of feelings objects and texts around. Namboodiri canonised line through physiognomies and accommodated only the detailing potential of graphic idiom not its flexibility in creating inter-referential texts that would have made ‘illustration’ a language rather than a habit in which ‘illustrator’ has to mimic himself.

5.3 Namboodiri mimicking himself but being read as ‘making history’

A relief galaxy of so called ‘historical events’ was constituted by human figures in some series of copper plate relief works by Namboodiri in 2004. In the media reviews, copper plate relief work was received as a ‘wonder skill’ in itself but further legitimized by its traditional associations with the royal decree and generous old courtly writings on copper plates that passed on to people for centuries that now form the archaeological evidence and ‘history’ of this society. Historical importance of copper medium as a royal material is clearly recapitulated and celebrated in the media reviews. Two epic series on Ramayanam and Mahabharatham were done first. ‘Ithihasam’ is the title of another series that claimed to portray ‘independence struggles’ and ‘visuals of Kerala’. This is a renewed nostalgic interest in freedom struggle and ‘scenes of Kerala’ in an apparently independent art work in materials with some amount of legitimate associations. This very well establishes the way his
own ‘history’ can be mimicked by a popular illustrator in order to escape an increasingly indifferent viewership he seemed to get. What is all the more notable is that a considerable media support goes into the making of an ‘aesthetic reason’ in the artist’s own words by way of long interviews. In spite of producing ‘Illustrated’ human figures along with literary works week after week in pretty large number, it did not fetch the kind of media attention gained by such ‘independent’ projects of Namboodiri referred as ‘large scale’ and ‘exhibiting sort.’ The metal relief simply mimicked his own conventional interest for ‘total form’, and ‘taste for the figural typologies. The journalistic news interest in ‘historical’ and ‘traditional’ helped achieve an extra symbolic capital of artistic value when crafted in more ‘legitimised’ material than that is habitually possible in lesser valued illustrations.

The legitimacy bestowed upon him as a ‘historian’ in reviews written by established literary figures add to such artistic symbolic capital of ‘illustrator’. Poet K.G.Shankara Pillai wrote about the ‘artist historian’ in the pages next to an interview with Namboodiri. But what makes him a ‘historian’ is rather corrugated with a charismatic mix of rhetorical words, like ‘legend’ and ‘history’. An ‘uncommon creative breadth’ is said to be at his disposal rating it to the highest levels of acclaim in contemporary Indian visual art. However, the arbitrary nature of these historic topics is admitted but phrased as ‘much loved themes’ of the artist. The eclectic selection of historic archetypes like ‘parayi petta panthirukulam’ (folk), ramayanam (epic), freedom struggle (contemporary) and Kerala scenes (cultural ethnicity) is assessed as a way in which Namboodiri ‘connects the different historic philosophical poetic and political spaces to create ‘a new height and depth of vision and meaning over our highly verbose routines’. It is also projected as a force of liberation that does not limit itself to the cultural ethnicity of Kerala thereby understood as ‘Indian
Art. But K.G. Shankara Pillai’s article is further interesting in the way in which it elusively looks back at the earliest times of getting personally acquainted with Namboodiri illustrations in Mathrubhumi weekly of the 1960s. Specially evoked is the image of a woman sitting with plaited hair decorated by a single flower. Specially remembered is the ‘romantic or melancholic glance’.

There is a notable pure physical terms of celebrating the visual’s birth. Finger is always depicted magical about artist in many media writings on art. ‘New subjects of interest’ are said to have derived out of both old and new times along with the urbanization of the time through Namboodiri’s figures.

5.4 The ubiquitous lingering of ‘Illustration’ in 1990s

Namboodiri attempted appropriations or re-workings of the images of classical performances and sculptural forms through an obsessive filtering, repetition and juxtaposition of human gestures into them so that an ephemeral practice like ‘illustration’ can share the traditional grandeur. His preoccupation with Kathakali form and his adaptation of it into more flexible field of figural gestures is clear from mid 1960s though a profusion of contexts infiltered by Kathakali forms since 1980s. To a lesser extent, A.S also tried such appropriations. He assimilated the visual effect of the folk form of puppetry into a royal content in ‘illustrations’ for ‘Yayathi’. (1987) The characteristic figural presentation of traditional sculptures were tinged onto ‘Randamoozham’ sketches. Interestingly in the years followed, Mathrubhumi weekend issue published the screen play of popular tele-serial ‘Ramayanam’. (5.17) Photographs from the screen cast were published. The visions of war front with chariots, armours and characters adorned with jewels can be similarly seen in that. The physique of casting starts and their make-up revealed their gullible human reality and that is ‘attractive’
and acceptable reality for readers/viewers. In *Randamoozham* almost caricatured muzzles of bodies and iconic presentation forms caught in ‘deep thought’ poised the ‘sculpturesque’ and bedecked forms in human situations. (App.a.33, App.a.29, App.a.30) That was also ‘interesting’ for the readers/viewers. All these assimilations appropriations and adaptations display a persistent interest in ‘illustrator’ to transcend the limits of ‘the ubiquitous’ ordinariness of figuration and share the glory of the past. This was virtually a tactful circumscription of the narrative-oriented definitiveness inherent in the practice too. Artist gets himself shrouded in a nostalgic visual field of the grandiose. In so doing, the focus of the viewer could be deflected towards the illustrator’s artistic persona even when it existed primarily as a ‘derivative’ act of figuring the fiction.

In 1995 July issue of Kalakaumudi weekly there published a long poem ‘Malayalam’ by Sachidanandan. It is a heap of images all having evocative bearing to the local experiences of symbols, images and history. The poem generated ‘picture’ in each word of it. Namboodiri had to inevitably select the draftable ‘images’ within the space available for him. Placed in the beginning, in between the title and the first few lines of the poem is the image of an elderly man who sits on a traditional wooden board with palm leaves. This can be read as an image of ‘ezhuthachan’ the father figure of Malayalam language and literature. Unnayi warier is suggested through three ‘Kathakali’ images. Ancient poet Cherusseri is placed like a playful grandfather looking at lord Shree Krishna depicted in the form of a child. A casual sketch giving a ‘feel’ of Herman Gundert as would have been assimilated by readers by way of photographs, is also given. Then rest of the ‘illustrations’ are some indulgences on female forms that are by now unavoidable for the ‘illustrator’. Woman is depicted as playing veena, with traditional narrow sword getting ready for
fight, and like a mother feeding the child. All these female figures must have emerged out of the subtle poetic interpolation through the language and culture with an essentially ‘feminine’ content. The mother images, kathakali images and the ‘father figuring’ on culture are the most ‘easy access’ images in a patriarchal society that one can demonstrate to show a ‘cultural act’ (Fig.5.2). Poem is explicitly made into a ‘cultural act’ by this selection of illustratable instances of cultural stereotypes.

5.5 Omissions and inclusions

There are some significant omissions of the images of social struggles and alternative expressions of the downtrodden. Even history had reproduced them comfortably into ‘progressive cultural images’. Still, ‘Illustrator’ canonically selects ‘culturally prevalent’ images of feudal nostalgia. The image of ‘Kathakali’ now pervades over the program notices of local clubs, tourism promotion leaflets, and mega shows of ‘culture events’ that are always signifying the ‘great traditional’. Bands of women are used at both ends of a banner in any public demonstration of power, pomp and glory. All these are being lingered in the undercurrents of a public consciousness of culture that are ‘popularised’ by way of their very ubiquity. ‘Illustrator’ utilizes ‘common place’ quality of images that are selectively given importance and are reproduced through out the years to validate his popular act in a cultural field rather than assimilating what is poetic or ‘literary’ in the text taken for ‘illustration’.

The crisis in literary writing very significantly surface in 1990s is also referred by the poet. ‘The processions have dispersed deserting their light masts’, he writes. He also expresses his anxiety regarding the very language that waits like a termitary for the next generation. ‘Illustration’ effects itself within the general omniscience of
visual culture, characteristically ‘popular’ and ‘fetishistic’ in attitude, rather than its solidarity with the literary feeling.

5.6 Sketching the sacred performance

In the absence of consistent critical thought on art, uninformed by national and international art practices, though informative journalistic notes on art still pertains, this society could alternately celebrate an illustrator like ‘Namboodiri’ in terms of his ‘original Art works’. This is part of a consistent singling out of ‘illustrator’ in terms of the ‘artistic’ qualities. Interestingly it was possible only by plucking him out of his context as ‘illustrator’ and that is evidenced through the fact that he is praised later mostly for his fast sketches of ‘Kathakali’ accompanying a Kathakali music in the background staging the public functions. But this in turn helps associate in actuality the oft-repeated Kathakali sketches drawn by way of ‘illustration’, with revered traditions of performance and music in popular imagination signifying the illustrated image in turn as a ‘sacred performance’. ‘Plucking something out from its context’ irrespective of its compatability, sacralising it in relation either to something rare and great or in relation to something that is everpresent and easily accessible is a political devise establishing a powerful mediatic subjectivity. The magical skill of the ‘illustrator’ is performed out there and photographed and featured within, so that this supposedly ‘literature-oriented habit’ is now worthy to be sustained as a media habit.

5.7 Pleasures of transcending the figural tastes

Persistent struggle over possible meanings of ‘illustrated images’ is pertinent in the ‘tasteful circles of culture’ from the time there started attempts to write articles on ‘illustrators’ or produce features and interviews on them. They try to validate visual pleasures of ‘illustration’ and illustrator’s independent ‘art’ in terms of
‘national identity’, ‘historical importance’, ‘intellectual cohabitation with literary circles’ etc. Lines are said to be rhythmic musical desirous and suggestive of higher concerns. It is characteristically an ‘evasive pleasure’ of losing of the viewer’s self in admiration and enjoyment. This pleasure is produced with ‘energy and self-esteem’ and hence expressed in loud terms and exaggerations.

As discussed in chapter-3, ‘Illustration’ figured fiction. Human body had throughout been demonstrated with graphic details. In the periodicals envisaging culturally ambitious public domain, there is a mutual protection mechanism between the graphical body-centered sensibility of the ‘illustrator’ and the abstractly philosophical and literary sensibility of the ‘cultural circuits’. Nudity of ethnic tribes or creative photography could be made ‘agreeable’ by a textual description that ‘informs’ either ‘knowledge’ about them or ‘aesthetic quality’ of the spectacle. The cultural public domain tries to define the pictorial interests providing it with some intellectual distance ‘purifying’ the generally demeaning pleasures of simply seeing a sexualized body and responding to it in bodily terms.

5.8 Bodies culturally protected and unprotected

‘The body remains an area of experience that escapes and threatens ‘pure taste’, which can come about only through social training and discipline’. When writer V.K.N expressed his ‘interest’ in the beautifully illustrated woman in his story, he communicated a pornographic (meaning of the female body within the purview of male desire) and gendered interest in pictures that are very much in popular circulation. But this comment had to socialize in a cultural public domain as an innocent and amusing expression. In an interview Namboodiri was responding to the question whether he has felt any sexual feeling for his own creations, ‘a post-creative response’. Then he revealed the ‘naughty interest’ that the writer expressed in a
personal letter to him. He also expressed a sort of gratified wonder at the ‘unexpected responses’ his drawing evoked. The interviewer concludes that the ‘Namboodiri laughter’ that followed this conversation was echoing the whole ‘pleasures and pathos of a human condition’. The bestowing of great creative stimulus, on the artistic activity on bodies, an orgasmic pleasure tightly gendered, has always seemed to purify the ‘bodily’ interests and evocations in art. It is a struggle to control the meaning of bodies or preserve it within the purview of ‘the cultured’ acts. In the general featuring, photographic images, except when it is not purposed as ‘artistic’, often succumb to scandalizing rather than purification. Images of women being laid by men on top of them could be a scandal but the pleasure of watching men and women in their privacies when given by ‘illustrator’, they catered to the acceptably ‘naughty’ and ‘amusing’ responses of a culturally enhanced viewing. A Lambada tribal woman when exposed herself so as to be a model for ‘fine art’ it was titled as ‘a presence enlivening the canvas’. When a lady is reportedly ex-posed herself for Mayfare magazine, she was referred as a woman who fetched bad name for her country. Many weeklies whether culturally ambitious or not, referred itself like Keralashabdam’ as ‘an independent political weekly’ used to publish scandalizing stories on women. Nude photographs of women were published with the question mark of ‘pornography’ scripted on to the female figure’s face suggesting subtly that pornographic taste is inherent on the body – hence not on the journalistic act of reproducing them - when there is no ‘cultural’ text to save it. The sculpture ‘Yakshi’ by Kanayi Kunjiraman was celebrated as a master piece of sculptural art that achieved great aesthetic beauty ‘beeping within the figure’. It was also reported as provocative for the ‘ordinary eve-teaser’s eyes in that they tend to pass nasty comments on the
‘married couple’ who come to watch it and enjoy it in the Malampuzha park (App.c.25 & App.c.26)

As John Fiske observed, the evasive element of pleasures often center on the body. The body has a core of nature to it. The struggle to control its meanings has high stakes of ‘loss of self’ in a jouissance, the bliss, ecstasy, orgasm or pleasure of the body that occurs at the moment of breakdown of ‘culture’ into ‘nature’. The loss of self is a pleasure of escape from the self / social control. ‘Illustrators’ who were supposedly carrying ‘the artistic’ codes had to necessarily lose themselves to the pleasure in the loss of self so that they can escape from stooping into the unprotected realms of the body they have so graphically and naturally encountered. But ‘Illustration’ right from the beginning demonstrated a skill in graphic detailing that functioned clearly on objective reality of world around. But a metaphorical idea seemed inevitable for the newly formed subjectivity of ‘a very much entertained reader’. Significantly an allegorical female body of the goddess of knowledge or ‘pranava’ as Sanjayan described, was placed at the centre in his magazine’s cover picture that drafted a particular position of a writer / reader subject ‘above of the ordinary’. ‘An emotionally charged heart’ of poets and readers in 1940s was said to be moved by the blissful ‘vision’ of nature. Artists supposed themselves to illusively create that ‘blissful nature’. M. Bhaskaran’s sketches captured cute ducks and pretty women in Ravi Varmaic poses but different in its newly demonstrated graphic detailing that illusive quality of paint and colour would not give.

Instead of illusive visuals, the ‘illustrator’ had to ‘clarify’. This act immediately robbed him off the attire of the ‘artistic’. The abbreviated human bodies with their curled or straight hair, contours, jewelry and jerry borders and prints on the dress provided the reader with a close graphic eye. ‘Illustrator’ often felt sorry for
such indulgences but he pleaded excuses as Namboodiri did in an interview, in terms of his ultimate need to make a ‘page decoration’. In literature one can obscure an idea by writing and overwriting on it. But one can not obscure an object by drawing it. One has to draw from within this limitation, Namboodiri explained. Clarifying was supposed to be a ‘limit to creativity’ while obscuring was supposed to be a valuable creative act in ‘modernist’ context. So ‘illustrators’ who portrayed ‘characters’ in terms of figural exaggerations, perspective tricks or light and shade systematically provided typography of human figuration that could suggest an obscured ‘other’ realm of the ‘aesthetic’ often protected by culture.

5.9 Devalued clarity and higher acts of obscuring

Illustrator’s graphic dexterity could have simultaneously been a pleasure of evading the aesthetic dominance of ‘pure and obscuring tastes’ of writers artists and thinkers, the civilized, literary and political people. But it is difficult to identify such a counter-aesthetic pleasure that Devan, Namboodiri or A.S could have consciously derived out of their activity of sketching and drawing even in the early years of this practice. Ideally that could have made ‘illustrator’ a radically transgressing subject who is frank about the functional reality of his act. It did not happen. Immediate presence of the literary text has throughout been regarded as a difficult and mysterious fold for the ‘illustrator’ that is out there to be escaped or transcended. The moment they started ‘illustrating the literary text’ they were brought in to the high texts of transcendence. Escape from textually / socially produced meaning to enjoy a jouissance was a sort of challenge that ‘illustrators’ also seemed to have taken up though that did not necessarily save them from the textuality of social meanings in which they operated. Aesthetically oriented reading community also looked for ‘artistic style’. Art education also expected ‘originality’ from an ‘artist’. Both A.S
and Namboodiri worked towards an ‘individual’ and ‘original’ demonstration of their skill in figuration. Writers discussed their political significance and the social changes that can be brought into force by their focus on the ‘ordinary’ and ‘common man’ contexts of life. The ‘illustrator’ trios in the three decades of 1940s 50s and 60s also dealt with sharply sketched, scratched and shaded figures of the ‘common man’ and his / her traumas and pathos were conveyed through gazes, glances, fleshy shapes, hairdos, wrinkles, folds in the dress, gestures of fingers and even finger nails that were thoroughly captured. But the details like this were necessary pleasures of decoration for the reader’s eyes. This did not fetch any ‘political’ status to their illustrators. They worked out the negotiable devises of the ‘aesthetic’ that can be grafted out of their artistically demeaning graphic fold. Not many of those who learnt art outside Kerala wanted to enter into the field of ‘illustration’ that was regarded only as a ‘job’ and an accompaniment to literature. ‘Illustration’ has not been an ambitious space an artist could look up to at any point. Only an act of transcendence was supposed to work out in this ordinariness and devalued impurity of taste so as to gain the right as an ‘artist’ to control the meanings of ‘culture’ and the relationship between the body and culture.

Modernists among writers tried to overcome any debased graphic mould of words where meanings are generally simplistically inscribed onto them. Words covered themselves in philosophical mysteries and endeavored grand escapes to ‘other worlds’. ‘Illustrator’ also had to transcend because he also is functioning within the politics of obscuring figures. K.C.S Panikker, an important modernist of the contemporary art of that time obscured the language scripts and simplified the object world into a nebulous presence. The available parallel of artistic modernity as could be imagined was centered around symbolic meanings of colours and geometric
forms. ‘Illustrator’ could not use colour schemes to convey his modernity. The major obstacle must have been technical incompetence of printing facilities that could not afford ‘illustrations’ to be satisfactorily colourful except as cover pictures. What remained was a compositional confusion that can be created through a mix of figures or suggesting a ‘feel’ of figures by simple lines. Both A.S and Namboodiri created it.

At the same time in weeklies like Janayugam, Malayalarajyam, and Malayala Manorama sketches continued with neither graphic nor abstract concerns. They were simply pictures of bodies with a sense of flesh given by moderate shading or washing tones. Most of these pictures were not acknowledged though they often took sufficient space from the periodical page. An effort to read them from their encrypting signatures might yield names like Mohan, R.K.Nair, Sajeev (Kumkumam) Dinakar, Viji (Kerala shabdam) Sabu (Kumkumam and Malayala Nadu). There was a pervasive similarity in the scheme of figuration shared by all these ‘illustrators’ including A.S and Namboodiri. They all generally activated male and female figures in their sentimental privacies or a single figure in some gestural form or glances on the periodical page. (App.a.34, App.a.35, App.a.36 & App.a.37) Except in some rare contexts, A.S and Namboodiri also generally worked in the similar figural vein. But there were also clear distinctions in the way A.S. and Namboodiri tried to transcend the graphic limits of language.

There is a systematic simplification of lines assumed by Namboodiri so that he could come to terms with the ideology of obscuring acts of literary and journalistic ‘culture’ to an extent. A curious state of ‘suggestiveness’ is achieved by Namboodiri as he proceeded as ‘illustrator’ in Mathrubhumi weekly. It still suggested only some preconceived idea of figure that is virtually not mysterious or narrative. But the figure gives a gratification of involving the reader in a pictorial puzzle. It is an easily
closed and simple puzzle. It invokes the reader to read a face, a breast, a nipple, a scooter or a finger or a waistline all generally falls within the habitual ‘total form’ the ‘illustrator’ himself keep on reproducing. But there is a show of playful ‘escapes’ that makes the ‘illustration’ all the more interesting for eyes that generally love to engage on body. A ‘form’ is by and large suggested so as to escape the ‘commonplace’ details of it. A quality of illusion is even bestowed upon the very act of drawing in terms of some simple logic as Namboodiri arrived at a later stage so that he articulates the wonder in his skill thus to an interviewer. “….the thing called drawing is completely a product of imagination. In reality it is non-existent. Line is not existing in nature. Only colour is in the nature. There is also a conceivable idea of relative distance between objects. We need to suggest lines. Drawing is a very creative act. With one or two lines, mass and space distinguish each other. There comes not simply a figure but emotions and many other things.10”

This attempt to sum up all that is ‘creative’ ‘artistic’ and ‘aesthetic’ in the act of drawing itself was a legitimation Namboodiri tried to project in his own individual level. This prompted many ‘readers’ to believe that there is something inherently ‘artistic and illustrative’ in the task of line drawing. ‘Illustration’ is often synonymously understood as ‘line-drawings’.

The new media space provided by ‘India Today’ and later ‘Madhyamam weekly’ offered an altogether new world of colour scapes and imageries in ‘illustration’ even liberating it considerably out of the dominant literary fold. They demonstrated the possibility of independently painted or drafted visuals that can be more flexibly placed in the locus of the journalistic textual sphere. This had created a strong destabilizing effect on Namboodiri’s efforts to place a charismatic importance
on the act of line-drawing within which he could comfortably repeat stereotypes of figures.

A.S. at any stage of his tenure as ‘illustrator’ does not seem to have come to such comfortable terms with the obscuring politics of modern art. In Mathrubhumi weekly of 29, April 1979, he wrote a small essay (‘Pavam Chitrakala’) on ‘the pathetic state to which art has doomed’ in the modern juncture. He openly wrote that artists are confused as to what else other than a picture, to be comprehended by the viewer when he looks at a picture. He projected the conviction that a society and culture can not be solely protected, grown and nourished by singing songs, performing dance forms, carving sculpture or writing poetry. A.S wrote that artistic creations are also not consumer goods sent to a market to cater to the tastes of those who find gratifications out of it.

A.S demonstrated a taste for the ‘pathetic’ ‘gloomy’ and even ‘ugly’ state of human affairs. He conveyed it through human figures enmeshed in expressively hatching sketches. Importance is given to emotions that can be conveyed through light and shade, a convention used in ‘artistic photography’ of the time or the tone of ‘artistic filming’ of the time. A progressive shedding of lines towards cleanliness and refinement of taste in order to suggest ‘form’ is not a concern in A.S. (Fig. 5.3). He too obscured figures into the mesh of lines wherein projected eyes that presented sublimating gazes of characters or the blank spaces unhampered by the mesh of strokes hinted at flesh of the body. A.S did not evolve an indulging eye on figure though he did not break into any mould other than sentimental figuring and sublimating glances of characters. He never escaped the panoramic view of pastoral nature. The abstract transcendental terrains in painting practices of the time abbreviated this detail into symbolic communication. A.S. operated very much
within the devalued graphic detailing, even pocket cartoons (Fig.5.4) but also devised some higher acts of ‘obscuring’ by bringing in some references to tradition (as in Yayathi) or placing almost obscured figures using aggressive shading. (Fig.3.27) He catered to a kind of readership that involved in pleasures of recognizing their ‘alternate self’ that supposedly resisted the refined glossy aspects of a petty ordinary life. This also fetched for him ‘endearing eyes’ (not necessarily ‘desiring’) of writers/readers though they revealed it later.

Another article by A.S lamented on the waning traditional roots of art in Kerala\(^\text{11}\). Many art critical writings tried to argue for essential Indianness and concerns of indigenous as against synthesizing ‘western elements’ in contemporary art. In that vein, A.S identified the reasons for impotent state of art and culture in its dependence upon western dominance. Though as a subsumed undercurrent to this lament, the codes of art that ruled him as an artist were visible.

‘Those drops of honey drained out of the inner spiritual world of an object of everyday experience will infatuate human mind. ‘Form’ and ‘colour’ are the externally available means for expressing it. Also one needs the power to liberate from everything and establish a new identity for oneself.”\(^\text{12}\) The spirit and warmth of traditional forms created by K.C.S.Panikkar is admitted as spreading the light on a new aesthetic enquiry on tradition that scrawled into our consciousness.

A.S doesn’t speak of his own function as an ‘illustrator’. But the pleasure of ‘getting infatuated’ by strong and mysterious inner world of everyday objects is suggested. The context of literary texts must have been taken up as a facility that makes everyday experiences available imaginatively for the artist. There is no trace of ‘illustration’ as understood as distinct in any form from ‘the artistic’. The demand for graphic detailing was inherent in the activity of ‘figuring the characters’. It was
supposed to be the ordinary experiences that can be creatively transgressed by means of artistic codes. The reader / writer was happy to recognize that the blissful truth ‘within’ the lines kicks away any accuracy of detail operating on the surface level.

Namboodiri achieved the ‘artistic’ codes through a systematic evasion of details by eliminating the lines that are unnecessary in conveying the ‘form’. A.S. often wrapped up the ordinariness pertinent in human face and body using thick black shades and messy assertive lines. When he struck a refined balance as colour defining form in a silhouette rendering in ‘Yayathi’ it was more appreciated as mature stage of his style in journalistic reports. ‘Illustrators’ employed a range of skills like sketching, shading, figuring, portraying, caricaturing and composing of objects. These devices were thoroughly codified as of ‘artistic’ transcendence.

Those who did not show such an extra task of ‘eliminating’ or ‘refining’ or suggesting a concern for ‘form’ by any such means, they were not understood as sufficiently ‘artistic’ so as to deserve legitimate recognition from the ‘culturally preserved’ public domain. Some ‘illustrators’ did not get into this cultural field because they simply gave garishly colored pictures or ink-painted works presenting the detailing of tears, teeth, and transparently seen undergarments and photogenically lit plaited hair and softened flesh of characters in the stories in weeklies with lesser cultural protection. The task they did was pretty similar. But they provided a direct possibility for a simpler romance viewing that did not hush up the graphic detailing of pictures. The pleasure of peeping into the forbidden areas or losing oneself into the simple details of common place presence of body was not covered in any blissfully ‘aesthetic sense for form’ in ‘illustration’ for romance fiction.
5.10 ‘Romance viewing’ and ‘aesthetic viewing’

Pleasure provided by ‘culturally unmediated’ romance viewing shared a sense of evasion of social control on the sensuous experiences. It is not looking for practicing an agreeably ‘artistic’ act of getting infatuated and enlightened by an ‘aesthetic form’. In that sense, the romance viewers maintained a more direct access into human body. That is different from the culturally disciplined viewing that could not ever agree on the graphic corporeality they were actually addressing. ‘Romance viewing’ and ‘aesthetic viewing’ agree on one fact that both encounter bodily pleasures for evasive purposes. ‘Romance viewing’ evades social control bestowed upon by ‘culture’ while the ‘aesthetic viewing’ evades the very corporeality of visual communication. But this distinction and categorization of ‘illustration’ assumed here according to the evasive and productive pleasures identified as inherent in them as popular practice, is only an analytical strategy. The work of popular pleasure takes two main forms: evasion (or offensiveness) and productivity. Its resistances are practiced differently in each form. Popular pleasure exists only in its practices, contexts and moments of production and thus much of it escapes the sort of structuring that generalization and theory call for. While evasion and production may be two of the main elements in popular pleasure, they are never all of it, because much that is unique to the person and the moment is beyond description and analysis as Fiske observes. This research came across some graffiti on the print of an Austrian renaissance painting of Venus displayed with a textual note that these paintings project sexual emotions. Anonymous reader added pubic hair and nipple on the nude that are unclear in reproduction. It is to be assumed that the meaning of ‘illustrated
images’ will be most authentically scratched on the pages like this or deeply sunk in the intimate personal interests in sensual / sexual gratifications.

5.11 The loss of ‘artistic charisma’ and the visual designs of 1990s

It is also to be noted that since late 80s, with the death of A.S and entry of some younger generation illustrators like J.R.Prasad, Madanan and Pradeepkumar, (in Mathrubhumi) Chandrashekharan (known as ‘chanz’, Deshabhimani weekly) , Shereef (mostly in Madhyamam) O.Sundar, James and Bhaskaran (Bhashaposhini) and a profusion of younger generation ‘practicing artists’ occasionally providing ‘illustrations’ in various magazines at present create a much fluid situation. While ‘Namboodiri’ is assimilated almost aggressively into media habits of ‘culturally enhanced’ order, no other significant modes of assimilation are visible in the case of any other ‘illustrator’. Some of them operate as ‘staff artists’ but gain no textualized help of devising cultural literary or aesthetic attraction to their individual stylistic variety as Namboodiri enjoys. (Fig.5.12 & Fig.5.13) ‘Illustration’ has today grown into a larger question of ‘visual design practice’ demanding the essential interests in pagination in each weekly than any illustrator’s particular skill or signature.

Nineties showed two remarkably opposing tendencies. If Namboodiri was celebrated with an evasive politics of the ‘plaisir’- that involves recognition confirmation and negotiation of social identity - the younger generation students and practitioners of art who graft clearer, more graphical marks of ‘visual engagement’, are categorically sidelined in this mediatic rejoicing. In fact the very canon of ‘illustration’ doesn’t get celebrated or understood for its functional potentials.

The bestowal of ‘artistic’ capital operates on individual terms on each ‘illustrator’ so that the whole terrain of media-involvement can remain hidden and they can strategically make use of ‘the artistic’.
Today ‘illustrators’ are so desperately scattered and they are not operating in any coherent professional identity. They are often selected at random by the editorial desks for ‘illustrating’. ‘Illustration’ does not intend on literary text alone. Visual is used extensively as part of a pervading media interest than a selective literary interest. Anybody who can make pictures or even make designs can be brought in as ‘illustrator’. Photos treated in digital softwares can suffice as catchy illustrations are done in digital medium today for political reports articles and general features too. ‘Illustrators’ of ‘India Today’ like Ninan, Ravishankar or Jayantho do not seem to be carrying the element of the ‘artistic’ but they present something simply ‘visual’ and graphical for communicating the idea. (Fig. 5.5) For those richly ‘illustrated’ literary special supplements, a random selection of ‘practicing artists’ not necessarily from Keralam but mostly within the south Indian art premises, are brought in by ‘India Today. (Fig.5.6)

There is a particular sphere of ‘the artistic’ sustaining here as usual. What is yet dominant in this general sphere of the ‘artistic’ created by ‘illustration’ in 1990s is a certain sense of media presence rather than establishing a harmonious solidarity with the literary world. For example, K.M.Madhusudanan’s etching was published as a beginning page of the section of ‘drama’ in the annual issue of 1994-95, India Today. The etching’s details and the software used on it later to prepare it for publishing were visibly written on to the picture. (Fig.5.6) This particular treatment of the visual professionally displaying its technical feature is a frank inclusion of the reality of a picture as a technical act and not simply a generator of ‘cultural meanings’. ‘Madhyamam weekly’ showed an almost consistent interest in young artists like K.Sherif, Bhagyanathan, and Sunil Ashokapuram. (Fig. 5.8) But these ‘new generation illustrators’ as can be called now, operate in a nowhere world of
‘culture’ because they generally lack that solid ‘literary’, ‘cultural’, ‘popular’ and ‘political’ textual sphere in the public domain to support them today.

This does not suggest that patterns of reading and assigning literatured meanings on to pictures have come to a drastic stop. Patterns of canonical viewer ship exist strongly. But there is surfacing a criticality, introspection and comparison within the canon itself though not in the external dominant discourses. An occasional response that a younger illustrator Shereef got from a reader Suresh Mampalli, Kavilumpara during the days of his ‘illustrating’ the novel ‘Kalapangalkku oru Gruhapatam’ in Madhyamam, says: “Shereef draws goats, hens, fish, date palms…all these never disgust us with uncontrollable repetitions. It is in this point that Shereef encounters Namboodiri…he is destabilizing the traditional patterns of ‘illustrations’. He can save ‘illustration’ from the boredom created by Madanan and Namboodiri who can never be different from their own models with a single scratch of line.13”

This reader also has recognized a legitimizing convention of tying ‘illustration’ to superior other practices of the aesthetic order. He tries to tie Shereef with the historical art movements like Fauvism and the anti-western attempts that he traces from K.C.S.Panikkar.

New sense of visualization demonstrated by magazines negates any possibility of an artist getting celebrated for his / her exclusive terms of ‘illustrations’ except for his attachment with tradition and his sufficient reproducibility in the genre as such. So there is a conscious effort to trace the tradition of line drawings from cave art or Ajantha paintings. Stereotypes of sexualising pleasures are celebrated as studies of female forms.

Powerful interpolation of the ‘artistic’ still continues in ‘illustration’. Bhagyanathan, Sunil Ashokapuram, Prabhakaran or any contemporary practitioner of
art when takes part in this genre of ‘illustration’, they carry codes of wholesome art practice with it as it was the case with the illustrator trios. It displays as a cross section of ‘contemporary art’ practice as if brought into the periodical. Most notable fact is that these younger illustrators do not generally stick to voyeuristic ordering of the eye in terms of any ‘aesthetic’ principle. They also use graphical scratches, graffiti schemes and a sort of abruptness that are difficult to accommodate in their supposedly ‘much demanding painterly interests’ for galleries today. So the codes of ‘the artistic’ continue operating in its effortless arbitrary graphic scheme almost as it was in 1950s when the illustrator trios started their careers. Difference lies in the fact that this gradual retrieval of the graphic attitude is not totally ‘literatured’ today.

It rather operates in a more liberal visual realm of media practices.

Neither the ubiquitous generality of photographs nor the ‘artistic’ codes of an individual illustrator depend upon definite textualities created by any particular ‘aesthetic’ attitude or literary text today in order to be displayed as ‘illustration’. More than discursive ‘aesthetic’ thoughts or literary concepts, visible media involvements and digitized facilities of pagination, determine ‘illustrations’ today. Except for sustenance of the fetishistic importance given to Namboodiri’s ways out of the canon still reproducing the canonical, it is a less individuated practice at present.

An illustrator can more flexibly bring in visual possibilities (not simply confined to figural, metaphoric, voyeuristic and literary) when he recognizes his act as a mediatic one that is not determined by ‘taste’ but by popular pleasures that exists only in its shared practices, contexts and moments of production. The scale and space available for an ‘illustrator’ in the periodical is not ‘aesthetically’ judged as delimiting though it can be ‘delimiting’ by way of sheer technical terms depending upon the context. Limit is actually not simply in terms of physical space of the
periodical page but capturing the ‘fictional real’ into the realm of the optical or more
‘graphic real’ itself. Some efforts are surfacing to encounter this very limit itself as
in some cover pictures Shereef has done for ‘Madhyamam’ weekly.

5.12 Tangible intimacy, intangible gravity, forbidden levity

Figural tastes for graphic expressions of ‘illustrations’ worked as a blanket for
submerged popular pleasures of readers who believe engaging themselves ‘in a
magical world’ where fact and fiction are not different from each other. They thought
‘line drawing’ is an actualization of ‘a moment in life’. An anthology of studies on
life and works of Artist Namboodiri described ‘illustration’ as ‘erasing the imagined
difference between reality and dream to form a magical world’. 14 ‘Illustrated
images’ generally attained an illusive quality that lingered in the locus of intimacy,
gravity and levity all at once’.

‘Let them be tumultuous, galloping or nourishing, these drawings (of
A.S) are tangible to anyone anywhere. But there is also an intangible gravity
in them….. Only four or five of drawings for my stories….That’s what I got as
extended from A.S towards me. But I have secretly loved those women who
were invigorated into life by him, bathed in dim-lit tones. I am someone who
caressed the little Madhavi who walked around in ribbon and frock in
‘Balyakalasmaranakal’ 15.

Those sketches for ‘Balyakalasmaranakal’ were thoroughly graphic pictures
using a slanting nib. They did not project flesh. They were too small even to describe
‘character-istics’ of the figure. Still the reader got a ‘feeling’ of actual character ‘so
alive’ to evoke affection and attachment.
The ‘reader’ rejoiced in hushed intimacies for ‘characters’. The reader is subject to ecstatic immersion of the self in the ‘beautiful’ or even near shameful (still assertive-in terms of creativity) indulgences in forbidden pleasures. His /her identity as a ‘viewer’ is supposed to be hushed at heart where fact and fiction dissolved into a sensory experience of admiration. This dissolution of distinctions between reality and fantasy is already evident in the kind of public domain created by periodicals from the early times where reader / viewer was habituated to involve as if in a virtual public domain of texts that spoke in simplest common denominator, showed the most explicit details and provided a special vantage point from above the ‘ordinary’ (chapter-1).

An absolute prominence is seen to have got bestowed upon ‘lines’ whenever attempted to celebrate ‘illustration’. Namboodiri reiterated it in interviews. But nowhere it is recognized as a language of graphic communication with its own potentials. Rather attempts are made to establish the essentially ‘magical’ / ‘rhythmic’ quality of ‘lines’. This is a politics of obscuring reality so as to achieve ‘cultural’ meanings of higher order that right from the beginning created a fetishistic importance on literacy, reading and the ‘cultural pedigree’ it provided. It is simultaneously empowering and discriminating, both transgressing and delimiting. Some readers / artists could claim new identities. Some readers / artists are obscured in a mechanism of selective tradition.

For almost half a century ‘literature-oriented illustration’ was a practice in the margins, not developing into any kind of serious discourse in the minds of people who just remained passive readers. Those private moments of jouissance in reading were envisaged as passing spectacles of innocence and confusion that ultimately thought needless to document in social memory. In that sense, working as an ‘illustrator’ did
not give a total creative gratification to M.V. Devan, A.S, Namboodiri, Rajan, sabu, chanz or anybody who did ‘illustration’. Whatever is done, it is regarded as a natural derivative or accompaniment of literary reading. When this practice started gaining attention so that it was regarded as worth speaking about, a whole lot of ‘illustrators’ were avoided because they did not do enough ‘magic’ to eliminate the distinction between ‘reality and ‘dream’. Even A.S and Namboodiri when occasionally got acknowledged since mid 1970s, it was in terms of their collaboration with masterpieces in literature. When talking about M.V. Devan in 2002, some writers love to remember that his sketches for Basheer’s novels had attracted the reading experience of that time and also love to praise him for his ‘adaptability’ 16. Like in the case of ‘Randamoozham’ or ‘Yayathi’ only when literary text was deemed great in itself, the compatibility of ‘illustrator’ was visibly checked. The iconic presence of female figures with half revealed breasts caught in their privacies was enjoyed through out. When ‘illustrator’ inserted the ordinary human figure into a surface level feel of traditional format, it was in effect a purposeful attempt to transgress the limits of the ‘ordinary’ or common place or ‘ephemeral’ in this practice. In a discriminating fold of the public domain, when a group of illustrators could not devise a technique to transgress the ‘limit’ of a media practice by openly exploring the graphic fold of the print medium, Namboodiri and A.S to some extent could forge an identity of ‘artist’ for themselves.

5.13 The literate media space of art: partial assimilations of ‘the artistic’

. To look at the ‘other’ was always an admirable curio spectacle for the kind of reading class emerged here. Celebrating magical qualities naturally had to do some patchworks with the higher outsider realms on the crippled functional realities of ‘art practice’ in this region. The objects of this ‘magic’ were texts derived from outside
higher spheres of Art and experience. The fashioning of periodicals and their communication patterns in Malayalam had strong bearings on British magazines like ‘Punch’ ‘Saturday Evening Post’ and the National periodicals in English like ‘Illustrated weekly of India’. Even genres like humor drawing, caricature and cartoon were derived as a ‘modern’ ‘outsider’ sensibility.

The sentimental new middle class and its domestic settings for stories, photos and ‘illustrations’ shared an ambience of the ‘other’ industrialized modern world around. The sketches arbitrated by M.V.Devan or A.S or Namboodiri in 1950s and 1960s were not necessarily looked at as ‘alien acts’ though they experimented on the limits of ‘artistic’ deformities possible in this genre. The kind of modern art education they gained from Madras school of art lingered in them as something that validated their artistic merit though they could not completely import them as such into this ‘media practice’. A partial assimilation of the ‘artistic’ from outside of this region and from an apparently ‘Modern Indian’ art field was also sustained by constant art news reports by Kaumudi news bureau, by the reports of National artist’s camps in Mathrubhumi and Malayala Manorama or by the selections from experts collections like K.P.Padmanabhan Thampy for special issues. ‘Paris kathukal’ from Paris Viswanathan showed the sustainable bonds with ‘an idea of Modern European art world’, Magazines like Anweshanam and Sameeksha occasionally presented ‘articles’, ‘some photographs’ and ‘some cover paintings’ of the contemporary (South) Indian Art world. Such assorted representative patches of ‘higher’ and ‘more legitimate domains of art’ that lies outside of this region seemed to satiate the quest for the ‘higher artistic’ tastes among the reading class here. They had more ‘insider’ adaptations of ‘the artistic’ though ‘not so modern’ and ‘still very figurative’ in 1970s provided by the ‘illustrators’ here. They could increasingly admire an ‘illustrated
image’ like an almost alternate act of ‘Art’ by mid 1970s when A.S. and Namboodiri worked with artistic codes of hatching, shading, foreshortening, panning into close-ups and profiles of faces, caricaturing etc. that could easily get recognized as sentimental, humorous and emotional narratives in literature. It was not received as acts of drawing and sketching as such, but as extremely personal act of magic so that they could evade any question of reality regarding the techniques of both drawing and printing the image. This was also forging a new class of ‘literary readers’ who are also ‘art lovers’ concerned with the meaning and experience evicted out of the picture.

This research tried to characterize the textual spheres that generally gave such ‘illusive’ meanings to pictures so that both the real and the imaginary worlds merged into one when picture is used as ‘illustration’. More importantly, the ‘illusive’ meanings disoriented not simply readers but also pictures out of their reality. ‘Illusiveness’ was created and habituated as communication categories by all kind of textualisations possible within the media. So ‘Illustrated images’ also had to operate as a ‘habit’ rather than a ‘language’. The struggle for dissolving this ‘illusiveness’ remains the possibility of any creative act possible within a media practice. It is possible through a rigorous use of the graphic corporeal potentials of images.

5.14 Graphic possibilities for ‘visual acts’ in a media activity:

Unlike the relatively self determining world of ‘Art’, a journalistic act of any sort will put huge hurdles before somebody who wants to ‘construct images in severance from social body’ so as to assume a measure of instrumental efficacy. But a media space also gives scope for a ‘designer-illustrator’ to strategically manipulate

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media’s own savagery on visual communication. Unlike the anthropologists who worked on the ‘character of movement’ in tribal societies, the contexts of modern societies in which these ‘physiognomic illustrators’ operated poses more complex issues. There is an impending shift from the description of the ‘character of movement of bodies’ to an inscription of the body’s communicative potential today.

Some of the younger generation ‘illustrators’ have paid attention to the range of critical possibilities in graphic presentation of ‘surface details and ideas’ whenever they get a chance to ‘illustrate’. Minimising the voyeuristic possibilities of human figures that simply reproduces gendered codes of sexual gratification and focusing on the unobscured physicality of a range of objects around they try to rephrase the visual realm canceling its ‘illusions’. Tom J Vattakkuzhy used to explore the graphic possibilities extensively even when he produced human figures as ‘illustrations.’(Fig.5.9) The charismatic importance Namboodiri brought into the infallible lines that were believed to economically contain the ‘mass’ in an automatically suggested ‘space’, is constantly undermined by the number of ‘fallen lines’ of Tom. His lines that are visibly ‘cut’ (a graphic code of something that is ‘wrong’) in the course of its making while the fallen lines simultaneously exist with one or two uncut (the ‘right’) line. This virtually makes the art of drawing an open sketch book of an artist where he freely records both right and wrong. This is a moderate claim from an ‘illustrator’ who functions within the constraints of time and space.

Bhaskaran’s ‘Keralam Rekhakal’ continues today in ‘Bhashaposhini’. (Fig.5.11). As against the subliminal subtexts and titles that accompany photographs and sketches in photo features, Bhaskaran gives documentary evidences corresponding to each biographical details sketched directly from life of ‘common
man / woman / place / monument’ across his entouring through the locale called Keralam. This dexterous documentation is not an idea of ‘cultural narratives’ at all. This is graphic presentation of the details of persons, places and monuments. The artist also notes the time and place in which the sketching was executed. He collects objects as references to the events in their life. He refers both formal and informal resources of history. It is a critical mechanism resisting the fictitiously fabricated evidences that is often provided by periodical journalism. There are occasional attempts from writers to closely encounter the problematic interfaces of ‘the graphic’ and ‘the literary’ languages in the act of graffiti that is not normally assimilated into dominant realms of ‘culture’. Ravi’s graphic novel called ‘Uparishad’ is an attempt towards such a realm where dilemma between the ‘graphic’ and the ‘verbal’ is directly brought to focus. (Fig.5.10) writer both scripts and scribbles. Visuals constitute a ‘graphic novel’ that designs conclusive poetic narratives in each piece of the novel.

These instances show that ‘illustrated texts’ that were earlier strongly determined by the single field of literary text that assumed for itself a dominant share of originality and significant cultural meaning is now dispersed into a sentient journalistic environment of interpolations. This has created a space for making only moderate ‘artistic gratifications’ but more flexible in terms of exploring the adaptability inherent in graphic expressions to create meanings through scratches scribbles and graffiti. It easily accommodates off-the-beat subaltern experiences. In such a mould, the communication categories like photo featuring, graphic narratives, caricatures and illustrations are getting redrafted in new forms in more ‘medium-conscious eyes’ of editors.
Notes

4. K.G.Shankara Pillai, ‘Charitrakaranaya Chitrakaran’, Bhashaposhini, April, 2004
5. Ibid
6. John Fiske, Understanding popular culture, 1989, p-52
7. Interview with Namboodiri conducted by Thaha Madayi, Bhashaposhini, December, 1996.
10. Ibid.,
12. Ibid.,
13. Madhyamam weekly 8 March 2002
Fig. 5.1
Center spread column on Namboodiri, *Mathrubhumi weekly*, 21-27 January, 1996
Fig. 5.2
Fig. 5.3
Fig. 5.5
Illustration, Jayantho, *India Today* weekly, April 1996
Fig. 5.6
Illustration Babu Xavier, play 'Gandhi' sachidanandan,
India Today annual issue, 1994-95.
Fig 5.7
Etching K.M.Madhusudanan, annual issue, *India Today* annual issue 1994-95
Fig. 5.8
Fig. 5.9
Fig. 5.10

Graphic novel Uparishad, Ravi, Madhyamam weekly, 2005
Fig. 5.12
Fig.5.13
Illustration J R Prasad, novel 'Jeevithathinte Pustakam' K.P.Ramanunni,
Mathrubhumi Weekly, 17 September 2006
Fig.5.14 Illustration AS, novel "Tyagiya Drohi"
Kesavadev, Mathrubumi Weekene edition, 15 Sunday 1963

Fig.5.15 Illustration Balakrishnan, novel "Athmavinu shariyennu thonnuma Karyangal"
C.V.Balakrishnan, & Illustration Sunil Asokapuram, story "Nashtapattika"
Fig 5.16 Screenplay "Mahabharatham" telecast in Dooradarshan each week got published in Mathrubhumi Daily's weekend edition in 1988.

Fig 5.17 Illustration unsigned, story "Ramachavishari" Moovattupuzha Ramachandran, Express thrissur weekend edition 13 January 1989.