INTRODUCTION

‘Illustration’: A Print-media Practice

Probing into the drawings, paintings, photographs and graphic works printed in Malayalam periodicals as ‘illustrations’ for literary texts, this thesis examines the practice of ‘Literature-oriented illustration’ in 20th century Malayalam periodicals as a particular media practice that constituted a ‘literate-media space’ for art.

Illustration is generally understood as a picture or diagram with clarity and embellishment. Traditionally an act of illustration is supposed to make an idea or text distinguished, clear to the mind, explain and adorn by the use of pictures as Chambers twentieth century dictionary cites (W&R Chambers, 1950). Act of illustration has always carried with it an air of nobility in the traditional contexts of manuscript and book illumination. This thesis deals with the 20th century contexts of illustrated images published within the periodical contemporariness of serialized novels, novelettes, poems and short stories in Malayalam periodicals. Hereafter these groups of pictures are denoted as ‘literature-oriented illustrations’ or simply ‘illustrations’ in this work.

Though they are generally supposed to illuminate and graphically demonstrate the creative essence or meaning of the fiction by way of an artist’s vision that definitively presents itself as an immediate mediatory text of the literary work in front of a ‘reading community’ that is supposed to imaginatively read it, this is more of a world of ephemeral materials constituting popular cultural consumption rather than the sacred preservable world of traditional and rarified texts.
Field of investigation:

‘Illustration’ is a complex instance of an alternate realm of art that operated in a literate-media sensibility of the public domain inculcated by periodical publishing industry in Malayalam. Many periodicals in 20th century giving some amount of importance to pictorial designs and illustrative communication constitute the field of this study. A detailed list of periodicals used as references used for this work is given in the bibliography. This study proposes that ‘illustrations’, the drawings sketches and photographs that are particularly given with literary texts, share linguistic grounds with general world of ‘print-pictures’ in periodicals so that ‘illustration’ creates meanings within the textualising processes of general periodical communication categories in a cultural economy. So ‘illustrations’ are examined here as identifiable pictorial materials within the textuality of ‘text-image concurrences’ like photo features, cover pictures with notes given inside, news features with pictures and diagrams. These journalistic categories established very influential typologies of imaginative, literal and cultural concerns for human figures, fictitious realities and private pleasures. ‘Illustrators’ forged an identity in this textual field. ‘The original commodity in the cultural economy is a text, a discursive structure of potential meanings and pleasures that constitutes a major resource of popular culture’.

Representative examples of various journalistic categories of essays, articles, news features, investigative reports, fiction, pictures, articles for entertainment, photographs and commercial advertisements are taken for analysis as constituting the pervasiveness of a public domain where connection between individual and society (also connection between ‘picture’ and its ‘meaning’) is textual. Public, variously understood as ‘readers’ / ‘viewers’ is created and established with their meaning in
the rhetorical textual sphere of periodical. ‘Literature-oriented illustration’ is identified as the material evidence of this metaphoric ‘public domain’ that created a pervasive and contesting plane of assorted visual attitudes in a ‘literate-media’ sensibility.

Method of investigation:

This thesis reads ‘illustration’ as a textualised site of reading / looking in a public domain that activates codes of ‘the artistic’ and ‘the popular’ pleasures to constitute and maintain a dominant order of the literary engagement. This is done by examining ‘illustration’ in terms of its functional reality as a print-media practice mediated by interlocking set of histories and discourses involving multiple relations and dependencies across a range of social fields and practices.

Here it is assumed that the immediate literary content is not the one and only determining factor for illustrator’s attempts though ‘illustration’ is normatively understood as a practice of illustrating or accompanying or adorning literary texts in periodicals. This study is different from the approach to visuals as ‘objects’ that need to be explained as aesthetic acts directed at and organized simply around individual objects, artists and their definite visible contexts. This study does not read literary meanings from ‘illustrations’ as if they are independent creative endeavors containing allusions inherently confined to the corresponding literary text. This study in turn, problematises this dominant mode of reading, the ‘mediatic act’ that establishes an ideology of aesthetic sublimation and gives specific cultural meanings only to maintain the status- quo of literary acts and verbal communication in a literate-media culture.
‘Illustration’ as graphic design of messages:

The pictorial materials taken for this study are also not treated as direct reflections of ideologies operated outside of it even when texts of various sorts were always visibly next to them. Here is an effort to examine ‘illustration’ in its own terms as a ‘media design’ practice. This research accepts that ‘illustration’ is inevitably a printed picture. Print picture operates in an orbit of graphic consciousness. Graphic pictures generally explicate things to its maximum level so that it leaves little to uncertain imagination.

‘In terms of information theory a perception is the reduction of uncertainty about what things and events that confront us are’. Print-pictures, let them be drawings, paintings or photographs, they are often subjected to extra clarification and textualisation by way of verbal texts in journalistic communication. They repeat similar models in composition, physiognomy providing extra information. But a message is redundant if it contains more information than needed. In graphic communication, redundancy is but useful. Major purpose of redundancy is to save, by increased predictability, reader’s time and difficulty in understanding what they read. All these media designs going to be discussed here are not necessarily ‘illustration’, strictly in the sense used here but it is an illustrative attitude that does not leave a picture alone in its own terms but textualises it to create and control specific meanings.

Features of graphic communication:

‘Illustration’ presupposes a communicating system that believes to ‘say in pictures what is said in words or could chart what is said in the text’. It is not an explanation or clarification of the literary text. There is a different order of
‘highlighting’ made possible through pictures in message-oriented graphic communication. ‘Printed messages are usually intended to be comprehended not simply recognized’. Pictures can be quickly recognized. But they are supposed as seldom delivering a message by being alone. So picture in a graphic communication is normally held in association with textual briefings, captions and sub-titles. It operates with a range of potential communicative modes.

If not for clarification, picture in communication is regarded as important aid in highlighting the ‘defining features’ of the cognitive world and that may be even substituted for words when emotional appeals to the reader are involved. The emotional responses are often supposed as able to save themselves from the cold logic of words as Turnbull notes. This work traces the making of an emotional order of poetically charged hearts that reveled in the pictorial and scenic spectacles of women children and nature. This study also traces instances of interchangeable typologies of graphic images in periodical magazines. The sort of figuration used in a photograph could be used as a cover photo giving a sentimental title, or it can be a featured spectacle evoking curiosity or a news feature making conventional and predictable communication, the framing or movement of which has nothing to do with any narrative but it keeps the story going like telling the reader where to look next. A compositional model for an ‘illustration’ of a piece of fiction too can punctuate the flow of the story at ‘here’ and ‘then’. Sort of sketches used in illustrating a story can also be used as a sketch for advertisement of a product that demanded a situational narrative emotionally captivating. Sort of poetic interest in landscape could be made into a sketch or a photo describing the poetic beauty of nature depicted, or it can accurately show a news event too. All throughout, pictures are best used to captivate
the attention of the viewer to the emotional, dramatic, curious and fictional aspects of communication.

As Malcolm Bernard rightly puts it, there can be no piece of graphic design that is simply decorative or only informative. These are only two among the many functions of it like persuasion, metalinguistic, entertaining, phatic functions as well. ‘Illustration’ is basically a metalinguistic act that comments on, explains, clarifies and qualifies another order of communication. As a quotation mark indicates about something that it is a concept that needs to be handled with care or it is singled out for some sort of special attention, ‘illustration’ came to signify the importance of the literary text.

**Literary works and ‘Illustrations’: Canonical texts of creative acts**

It is to be noted that particular concurrence of literary text and drawing for it as evolved in Keralam, is one among the communicative variants of the editorial designing of imaginative texts of art in a space away from the main urban streams of Indian art.

It makes ‘illustration’ different from other instances of textualisations because literary texts and their ‘illustrations’ together have attained a canonical status of ‘creative acts’ as distinct from mere commercial, journalistic and hence popular acts. Assorted political thought processes on progressive social changes through art, aesthetic attitudes, cultural tastes, social ambitions for fine-artistic refinement and aesthetic experience have participated significantly, though indirectly, in the practice of ‘illustration’. This study identifies both the codes of artistic qualities and popular sentimentalism. The former is assumed through aesthetic discourses and the later is assumed by way of its functional realities as a graphic communication. The ‘above-
popular’ and ‘almost-artistic’ importance gained by this practice within the Malayali literary community is problematised in this research. More than any independently evolved operational fold of art, general assumptions on the ‘artistic act’ activated and legitimated all that is popular, sentimental, graphical, corporeal and rhetorical in ‘illustration’. This will be clear from the illustrator’s consistent interest in physiognomic and graphic explication of characters from fiction rather than the craft of any other visual order deemed ‘illusive’ in art gallery mainstream practices, the abstract or geometrical, for example.

**Illustrator: A juggler of ‘the creative’ and ‘the ordinary’**

Identifying creativity in terms of an autonomous value, presupposes an individual artistic status for any object. But a picture published in a periodical is not a coherent and independent entity of either editorial or individual specialization but a sensibility of mass engagements operating in a network of mediations. It is an evolving distinctive taste for pictorial, imaginative and artistic qualities that introduced and sustained pictures as ‘literature-oriented illustrations’. This study assumes that an illustrator is a juggler of cultural tastes. The aim of a graphic designer is to communicate a message to his audience successfully through organization of words and images. Paul Rand defined the designer as being ‘like a juggler, demonstrating his skills by manipulating various ingredients in a given space’.

Being regulated by print media’s functional realities, ‘Illustrator’ of literary texts owes allegiance to graphic designing. Even when the ‘illustrator’ was supposed to work out hidden meanings or auratic literariness to transcend figural communication in the literary text, he had to take recourse in ‘figuring the fiction’. ‘Illustrators’ were at their best when demonstrated their skills by manipulating
various popular, sentimental, physiognomic ingredients. So attention is paid to all sorts of text-visual concurrences irrespective of their ‘literature-oriented ness’ to probe into these distinctive taste for figurative and artistic presentations.

‘Illustrations’ operated very much at the level of an extra-real, physical responses that visuals are particularly capable of evoking. The explicit graphic fold of pictorial interests was used as effective means of journalistic endeavors in periodicals right from the early decades of 20th century. It did not give room for illusive attitudes. Rather there is no distinction between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ in a textual field of the public. Everything seemed quite real. Pictures too worked in a dexterously realistic detailing. This realist fold in 1940s and 1950s associated itself with those literary texts that displayed some sort of graphic quality.

Interestingly this was the period that fetched a canonical status to the convention of illustrating fiction. ‘Illustrations’ did not bring necessarily literary codes in to the periodical page as mediatic cultural tastes would like us to believe. They did not simply demonstrate each literary character identifiable uniquely with the concurrent literary text. ‘Illustration’ could ‘literally’ activate various graphic codes of the ever meaningful public domain like photogenic, gendered, private, desirous, humorous, filmic, beautiful, sculpturesque, artistic, voyeururistic and modern frameworks. ‘Illustrations’ depended on literary imagination as much as the literary text operated in the general textual sphere of cultural tastes.

Frameworks of media use habits

‘Graphic communication is a process of conveying message by means of visual images which are usually on a flat surface’7. ‘Illustrators’ assumed explorations of
space through shading, ink washing, foreshortening and such techniques deemed as artistic. They worked as if they were making three dimensional effect only to polish their graphic corporeal interest in sentimental human figuration.

The graphic corporeal interest emerged clearly in 1950s in ‘illustration’ had to obscure its own flexibility in order to contain the metaphysical literary quotient in the modernist times. But 'Illustrators' rather worked towards the pleasures of the eye exploring the suggestive voyeuristic possibility of imagery in 1970s. It could contain both emotiveness and invigoration of characters in the literary text. This inevitably had to reproduce human figurations often in a redundant fashion but increasing thereby the linguistic potentials of it, as a pictorial medium of communication. So this research also observes that ‘illustration’ is very powerful as a medium. The graphic codes that in the early stage only abbreviated the characters, were later grafted into more sexualized and pornographic codes that could function in an elite ‘high culture’ sphere.

Like art and literature, and unlike the general print pictures with which it shares textual meanings, ‘illustration’ is unified as a practice around the notion of pleasure. The production of pleasures and desires, and the creation of new knowledge, and subjects as producers of meaning can be intimately bound up with functioning of power. Power is often regulatory and productive. Though tied with the literary text, ‘Illustration’ functioned basically as a visual practice addressing the sense of sight. But it is not simply an abstract realm of ‘visual imagination’ or ‘visual sense’ that is often ascribed to writers and artists. They are part of a strong taste for the scenic visuals, worthy to be seen, already created in the periodical space through various image-text combinations. The domain of ‘high art’ and speculations on philosophical importance of art had throughout tried to construe the allegiances of
This print media visual practice. This thesis identifies such texts of the ‘aesthetic’ and ‘artistic’ ideas in order to explain the way a whole range of ‘cultural’ meanings were ideologically created, sustained and reproduced without checking its functional efficacy as a mass sensibility. The ideological cultural domain functioned strongly by way of journalistic categories that placed a charismatic importance on this practice since late 1980s while sustaining an order of distinction that should be read out from the selective projections and omissions. This study also examines these ideological frameworks in media-use habits.

**Tensions between popular and artistic judgments of taste**

‘Illustrated images’ basically functioned as a selective tradition of fictionalizing visuals that supposedly added the creative significance of literature. It also operated within the field of popularized ideas on art by way of the same periodical space. On one hand, being a mediated activity, it could not neatly fall under the premises of aesthetic creativity but only within the parameters of ‘culture industry’. For example, an article titled as ‘Chitravum Chithreekaranavum’, appeared in ‘Jayakeralam’ Annual issue, 1989. It was supposedly written by R.Nandakumar under the pen name ‘Sharafath Hussain’.

It was the first ever critical response towards the practice of ‘original illustrations’ of illustrator Vasudevan Namboodiri, popularly known as ‘Namboodiri’, who was by then almost neatly placed ‘artist-figure’ within the media premises. Some ‘Original Namboodiri drawings’, but the sort used for ‘illustrations’, got extensively exhibited in the art galleries at various centers of the state in 1985, according to this article. The writer of the article was questioning the basis of giving an ‘original’ status to the piece of an illustration when plucked out of its mediatory literary contexts in
periodicals. The distinction conferred on the ‘print picture’ as reproductions of the more valued ‘original’ is supposed in this article to have caused by a lack of ‘visual literacy’ in this part of the country.

The value of the ‘original’ and the self sufficient existence that is inferred from the ‘illustration’ transcending the functional limitations of it is weighed in this article as ‘a legitimating act of culture industry’ that sustains this practice here. From an essentially ‘modernist’ stand point it was a rejection and denouncement of this practice from the legitimate higher sphere of ‘Art’ checking Namboodiri ‘the illustrator’ as against Namboodiri ‘the artist’ and ‘sculptor’.

On the other hand, the importance and sacralization attached to the activity of ‘illustrating’ literature within the periodical practices was much pertinent in the design, lay-out and manners of acknowledging ‘illustrators’ with the artist-status in media spaces. Interestingly, R.Nandakumar, at an earlier point written about the need to recognize Namboodiri for his ‘pure and noble models’ of representational figurative drawing functioning at that time unnoticed within the trivialities and ‘artificial demands’ for pictures of people resembling faces of film stars in the popular field as periodicals. This article was named ‘Namboodiriyude Rekhachitrangal’, ‘Amarsham’ magazine in May 1974. This can not be seen as a personal contradiction of the author. More importantly, this is a remarkable example of the ambivalent treatments this practice received as had established by a modernist parameter for the ‘aesthetics’ of creative engagement that reveled only in the distinguishable, pure, autonomous and unmediated acts.

Visible textualisations of the practice by common journalistic parameters reflected in letters to the editor, interviews with the illustrator, photographing the illustrator along with the novelist captured in their friendly interactions etc.
‘Illustrators’ who contributed for culturally elite magazines that established their status by way of representing intellectually more ambitious writers in their body, got clear acknowledgement as ‘illustrator’ or ‘artist’ in the magazine’s front page where editorial details were given. But periodicals that generally demonstrated lesser interest in text-visual interface and represented novelists with moderate creative ambitions often did not particularly acknowledge the person who provided sketches for novels. It can not be said that all such magazines were either ‘careless’ or ‘careful’ for visualisation in the same manner through out. Consciousness regarding the cultural capital of a picture when used as ‘illustration’ is not reflected in a homogenous scale or manner in all periodicals. Habits of reading and levels of cultural ambitions in the very act of publishing played an important role in determining the level of importance ascribed to this practice.

Such contradictory social uses and variants in approaches make ‘reading the illustrated Images’ a problematic issue. Peppy journalistic reviews in 1990s treated some selected illustrated Images and ‘illustrators’ as aesthetic objects. They reinforced an uncritical popular concept that ‘illustrator’ is as sufficiently artistic like any art gallery practitioner whose aesthetic genealogy can be traced back into ‘line drawing art of the cave man’. Apart from the journalistic instances of occasional references, an instance of academic thesis writing posited itself as dealing with the role of ‘line drawing art’ in the reading of literature in Malayalam. This was the first entry of ‘illustrations’ into the realm of academic discipline. But it was also a reproduction of fine arts paradigm that does not take the status of ‘illustration’ for analysis in terms of its functional reality as a print-media category of communication but discusses them within a presupposed regime of ‘literatured’ existence.
This research holds as its methodological premise that in a popular mediated practice and its pervasiveness, no single object is overtly ‘significant’ or ‘original’. Even when they appear to be so, as happened in the case of ‘illustrations’ of ‘artist Namboodiri’ or A.Shivaraman known as ‘A.S’ or when an engendering of ideas of the ‘original’ happens through assorted journalistic categories, like in the art news reports, boxes of information on ‘Art’, they signify mediatic texts of ‘reading illustration’.

This thesis is an alternate way of ‘reading the illustrated images’ from the perspective of media studies. There is no claim in this study of producing a comprehensive and exhaustive documentation of ‘illustrations’ because this is an attempt to analyze the very political potential of the pervasiveness of print-pictures and the sheer impossibility to grasp ‘deep’, ‘mysterious’ or ‘original’ from an ephemeral media practice. The periodicals ideally include newspapers. ‘Illustrations’ in the weekend issues of newspapers are observable as extensions of the magazine practice but in a further fragmented realm that does not act very much as a practice of any considerable coherence like ‘illustrations’ a magazine.

Unlike the ‘illustrator-trios’ of the modernist decades, the new generation ‘illustrators’ do not accumulate textually available cultural capital by their association with writers or literary texts. The status of ‘illustration’ as a media practice rather than an alternate art practice is glaringly observable today. It confirms that what was dominantly understood as ‘art’ throughout in this cultural locale is in effect a fragmented mediatic codification of the artistic ‘other’ that is often presented as originated in metropolitan urban centers.
Chapterisation:

Chapter 1 examines the formative characteristics of a ‘public domain of readers / onlookers, a unified sensory field of verbose spirit and graphic perception, in which periodicals assumed commodity status and political power. An exploration of the relationship between audience and communication will reveal how ‘belief’ is established thorough ‘design functions’.

The evolving taste for pictorial communication in Malayalam periodicals is traced in chapter-2. Convention of humor drawing that envisaged itself in between art and politics is studied. The text of ‘an emotionally charged heart’ projected as poetic and artistic attitude towards the scenic visuals is recognized from the poems and reflective writing of poets, writers and essayists.

The discursive field of aesthetic ideas of art and corresponding concepts of ‘progressive literature’ formed in 1940s is studied in chapter-3 so that the ideational and graphical flux that made ‘illustrations’ a particularly artistic use of pictures will be easy to identify. The veering between ‘art’ as emotive figuration of characters as demanded by periodicals and ‘Art’ as simplified symbolic communication of mysterious feelings as demanded by contemporary (mainstream) art of the time is traced within the works of M.Bhaskaran and M.V.Devan in 1950s and A.Sivaraman known as ‘AS’ and Vasudevan Namboodiri as they proceed as ‘illustrators’ in 1960s in Mathrubhumi Weekly.

Chapter-4 addresses the pertinent issue of sub-ordinate order of existence in which ‘illustrations’ are created and maintained. Discriminating habits of periodicals virtually determined the status of ‘illustrated images’. Further attempted in this chapter is an analysis of the codes of the ‘popular’ taste displayed by ‘illustrators’ of
all orders, irrespective of whether they are acknowledged or unacknowledged, celebrated or ignored.

Chapter-5 pins down the capital of ‘artistic’ and ‘cultural’ tastes that are symbolically accumulated over the years in this practice. It examines the shifting function of ‘illustration’ as stereotypes of cultural acts and as the subject of pagination that sustains a delirium of ‘contemporary art’ in which a number of younger generation artists take part virtually away from the ‘mainstream’ of gallery practice. There is a certain dis-orientation of literature as the major contender of cultural taste determining ‘illustration’ in 1990s on to the present decade. This has reduced the cultural capital and canonical status that got invested in ‘illustration’ today.

The images discussed are given at the end of each chapter. It difficult to overcome the temptation to present innumerable ‘illustrations’ that substantiates my points more or less effectively than what is given. This enormity of desperate materials itself showed that this research is not dealing with a coherently paradigmatic site of art. Transience, duplicity and redundancy of these materials do not constitute an aim or ideology of existence but simply operate in the creation and exchange of meanings. Arguing on the basis of graphic moulds of communication, this study does not intend to theorise on the correspondences of illustration with the content of literary texts but scrutinizes the powerful rhetorical messages getting circulated in a ‘literate-consciousness’ that creates and sustains dominance of literariness of meaning.

Notes:
3. Ibid., p.22

4. Ibid., p.33


7. Ibid., p.1
