CHAPTER-1

Metaphors and Figures of Epochal Transition (1900-1940)

The pictures-in-print produced as knowledge or information to be sold to unspecified buyers, at the market place, against cash was one of the earliest communication models to attain the status of commodity. The buyers were anonymous. They were common individuals. Literacy was instrumental in the functioning of this commoditized knowledge. Communication of this knowledge is characterized by technological reproducibility. Back in history, the agents active in the exchange of communication-commodity were always operating at a political level whether it is woodblock prints of the first millennium China or Gutenberg’s inventions that supposedly had radical modernizing effect through rise of literate societies in Europe and later North America. As Marshal McLuhan pointed in ‘Gutenberg Galaxy’, print as an immediate technological extension of the human person, gave its first age an unprecedented access of power and vehemence. Visually print is very much more ‘high definition’ than print\(^1\). Getting endorsed to capitalism, application of the status and power of ‘commodity’ to communication industries is also observed as hastening the consolidation of vernaculars, the rise of nationalism, revolution and new outbreaks of savagery in 20\(^{th}\) century. This endorsement basically involved a unified sensory field of graphic perception in which periodicals attained commodity status and political power. This is also an abridged field of public affairs, newsy events, commercial interests and a place of pleasurable displays of human bodies words and actions. Pictures in this field are objective traces of socio-semiotic struggles (conflict), allegiances (consensus) and ideologies (sense-making practices) right across the spectrum from large scale public politics to intimate
personal culture. ‘The material reality of pictures allows for the recovery and critical interrogation of discursive politics in an ‘empirical’ form; pictures are neither scientific data nor historical documents but they are literally forensic evidence’ of a public domain and its media use habits. This chapter tries to grasp the basic textualising features of this sensory field so as to understand the relations established by periodicals and their readers that create and sustain typologies of graphic communication in this cultural and linguistic community called Keralam in the early decades of twentieth century.

Pictures in a periodical engaged as clues for a consolidated practice of looking / reading that could also get looked at or textualised so as to attain a status of a cultural act. Journalistic exhortations that titled the pictures or framed the news, generally conveyed an immanent possibility of the reader / viewer to see himself / herself, familiar spectacles or information as getting demonstrated, illustrated, graphically detailed and actualized into a public textual field. This can be done as ‘a reader’ (who participate in the political domain even as a savior of the publication’s valuable cultural cause by buying and reading) or as ‘an ideologue’ (contributor of ideas, sceneries and essays) or as a dramatic onlooker (one who is conscious enough to see, grasp and acquire political potentials) who virtually participate in this domain by the very act of looking / reading. The periodical itself becomes a site for circulating both public domain and ideas on the public domain through the sensory involvement of seeing looking and reading.

1.1 The Verbose Spirit: Formation of Thinking / reading / seeing subject

The transition of unlettered society into literate ones in vernacular and colonial Indian cultures in mid-nineteenth century operated within complex socio-political
situations in which an increasing profusion of mechanically reproduced images, photos, engravings illustrated journals and calendars can be observed. Robin Jeffrey discusses the ‘light and dark’ sides of the radical changes that print brought into histories across the world. Positive reading of this transition has always regarded literacy and reading as liberating slaves, turning subjects into citizens and further creating the conditions possible for a democracy. Literacy and the consumption of print are also often taken as the key indicators of ‘quality of life’ in a society. But there is also a persistent equation between technological progress and cultural decline. So equally dominant contradictory feeling perceivable is that technology and assorted civilizing habits (‘parishkaram’ as referred in many articles appeared in early periodicals in Malayalam) shattered tradition and its auratic practices but empowered a society in its reformatory efforts.

In Kerala, regarded as ‘India’s most print familiar region’, there is a strong pitch for making a public domain filled with newspapers, periodicals and illustrated magazines in which a peculiar significance was attained by visuals. What is potently perceivable in this region is a predominant surge for ‘literacy’ and new verbal skills in English, Sanskrit and Malayalam that characterized itself through a media-sensibility that reveled in some amount of technological prowess that could be achieved. Together with this, a graphic sense of sight operated in various self-textualising methods of the weeklies. At a stage of attaining some degree of technological prowess by mid 20th century, publishing press celebratively photo-featured the printing tools and machines. (App.b.1) or they devised graphical formats to depict the importance of paper, book and the act of reading all in a rhetorical format of light depicted by the rays of the Sun (Fig.1.1). The periodical itself became a carrier of the idea of a periodical, depicting the distribution and consumption of it among the
potentially ‘liberated reading subjects’ like women and children (App.e.1&2). It devised punch lines, metaphors, diagrams, figures, ideas, articles and discussions to identify and characterize it’s own existence as a cultural or popular organ of a valuable taste.

Christopher Pinney in his efforts to write history as in part determined by ‘struggles occurring at the level of visual’ observes that nineteenth century India was increasingly pervaded by images, hand-made and mass-produced, local and exotic, religious and commercial⁵. Also he projects a finding that some wealthy Hindu homes (in the vicinity of Madras) had an extraordinary mixture of image styles and media to be found. ‘A glass painting, the gorgeous and grotesque native productions that could have been bought from any fairly large bazaar, an occasional print, perhaps a cutting from some English illustrated paper though appear very much out of keeping with surroundings, glaring labels from Manchester cotton goods that one sometimes seen adorning the walls or doors or shutters’. Pinney further observes that the manufacturers of cotton piece goods branded their products with pictorial trademarks, mostly images of gods and goddesses, because foreign entrepreneurs had recognized this ‘suitability’. It is difficult to identify any such atmosphere of ‘suitability’ for various sorts of visuals and a taste for assorted images even in ‘Hindu homes’ of this part of the country, where Raja Ravi Varma emerged from among not so visual but dominantly verbal cultures of royal kovilakams. The royal and feudal households had cameras. They learnt English and had access to illustrated English journals by the end of 19th century. But it is also legendary information by now that even Ravi Varma struggled hard to have access to prints of European masters in oil painting. Large scale ‘Fine Art’ exhibitions and commercial centers of printing presses emerged at much far off places from this region. Even Ravi Varma chose to start his
Litho Press only in a far off place like Gurgaon in Bombay that was later shifted to Lonavala. Buzzing commercial/bazaar centers of picture prints were also rare except for some oleo graphic printers in the neighboring Tamilnadu. Calendars found a large market in this part of the country too. But if ‘calendar art’ is identified as part of a ‘national modernity’, periodical graphics that predominantly demonstrated reality and figured fiction in Malayalam can be identified as the most important aspect of a ‘regional modernity’ in Keralam that has a specific historical flux of its own.

This researcher could not trace such a verbose artistic surge of this measure through ‘illustration’ of literary texts in any other regional cultures except in Bengal. Even in Bengal, ‘illustration’ could well be part of a media practice rather than an assumed artistic text because they did not face a significant rupture in mainstream art practice in its own terms. Culcutta emerged as a buzzing art center for 20th century with locally developed dynamic folds of ‘folk’ and ‘bazaar’ art. Tagore’s Shantiniketan emerged as an important academic centre of national importance. Keralam lacked such locally developed operational folds of art from tradition. This thesis investigates the verbose folds of art developed through periodicals as an alternate sphere of art for very localized cultural gratifications of Malayali society.

Technology was a double edged catalyst in this process. It created a venue for the anxieties of competence. It also energized the public domain with new contentions in education, ‘modern’ lifestyles, reading habits and progressive discussions wherein technology of mass reproduction was treated as a tool. Often challenges of technology must have been imagined to be overlooked for higher political causes of revamping the traditional linguistic skills in terms of simpler needs of basic communication. An editorial article in Bhashaposhini in 1072 Vrishchikam, observed that there was a clear trace of events that a common Malayalam prosody
was gradually developing that mutually erased and more or less spilled over the
convention. It was difficult to call it as predominantly Sanskrit, or predominantly
Anglicised in nature. Most of the scholars who were able to exhibit linguistic
capabilities were still ‘putting their humble asophateda’ in the ‘giant ocean of
Sanskrit’⁶ and they had not yet started loving prose as an expressive form though they
had recognized the prevalence of English and hence tried to make some sort of
prosaic sentences in Malayalam. Pointing out a lack of native interest in
transforming the technology of printing into a tool for a new world order, a new
linguistic and cultural community was impatiently evolving, a turning point in which
‘Bhashaposhini’ among many other periodicals envisaged such a social role, for
themselves as pioneers and gradually saviors of Malayalam language. It is observed
that mostly those who lacked in Sanskrit proficiency, started newspapers and
periodical journals at many locations and tried to gain coinage to a new form of prose
to contain ‘modern’ life and its spectacles⁷. O.Chandumenon started using an
unconventional prose. His novel ‘Indulekha’ put forward space for new contentions in
education and lifestyle. ‘Bhashaposhini’ dealt with the importance of devising a
native pedagogical system and also spoke about the historic establishment and role of
a separate department for Malayalam book publication by the Thiruvithamkur
government in evolving the new linguistic form of prose in the model of translations
of English books that became prevalent in the completely verse oriented native style.
But those books were also much loaded with Sanskrit usages that demanded
specialized scholars.

This interest in nurturing a language accessible to people of all creeds
including sections like peasants, children, women and skilled artisans was understood
as a means to agglomerate power of access that naturally believed to solve the
problems of commercial viability faced by magazines. Starting a newspaper or periodical was regarded as getting a stage to ‘speak and participate in public’ which turned out to be a mark of political power. Speaking in public was a worthy matter that supposedly deserved eyes and ears. (Fig.1.2).

Print at the early stages released great social energy in this region. Ideas of social-reformatory consciousness of renaissance also went into this spirit for the verbose that could function in the context of increasing importance to modernization, public instruction and elementary education that help updating to the times. An almost charismatic importance is inculcated by the periodicals on the habit of reading. Ideas and related perceptual practices assorted in the periodicals on a ‘thinking subject’ were taken as a marker of personal and civic significance. The period under consideration here (1900-1940) is a political surge towards an elite status for print in the sense that those entrepreneurs who recognized the importance of speaking in ‘loud rhetoric’ and ‘pictorial trademarks’ for an imagined reading class were virtually people from privileged classes trying to establish a privileged act that is reading. They were talking about the individuated refinement of modern habits of reading writing and envisaging cultural tastes. They were the ideologues who portrayed discursive and pictorial models of civilized life, scientific reason, civic identity, modern life style, patriotic spirit, sustainable values of tradition and domestic roles for ‘civilized subject’ expressing a strong political purposive ness throughout.

Periodicals were not simply envisaged as editor’s activity but most of them requested articles, pictures and ideas from the readers. We find a good number of people contributed to magazines along with their educational title like B.A, B.L etc demonstrating the cultural pedigree both as a valuable ‘reader’ and ‘writer’. In 1913, a magazine in the name of British Queen, ‘Maryrani’ edited by K.Joseph Mappila, says
that circulation of periodicals has increased progressively from earlier days, than almost thirty years before, when magazines published and sent to people free of cost pathetically came back to their editors. By 1915, it is observed in Maryrani that people are seen to send money in advance and get the magazines and newspapers sent to them. Interestingly, this magazine published from Kochi, placed their significance on the historical and traditional antiquity of the place of its publication with an old Vishnu temple, two Suriyani churches and the royal family that has established friendly relations with the British Empire. Religious places got an added cultural significance in the context of the ‘modern’ and this idea was imparted when many periodicals demonstrated a photographable and ‘picturesque’ interest in the temples and churches.

Modernization in the lifestyle of people is predicted as proportionate to the ‘success’ of the magazine. One can read this stage as presenting a ‘journalistic will to culture’ in a public space that is spiritedly envisaged as nourishable space. Even disputable elements were very well accommodated within the imagined homogeneity of ‘reading looking and thinking subjects’. As a rare and elite medium, periodicals in the early decades of 20th century envisaged on themselves a social role as having a striking potency to literally change lives and mould new sorts of social relations.

Drawings and photographs of picturesque spots of modern cultural significance carried the feeling of ‘capturing’ both the tool and skill of the ‘modern life’. While functionally shatters ‘tradition’ in a European context of rarified practices, print media was understood as an essential empowering agent here, the lack of which was thought not to sufficiently socialize and modernize the community. There goes an excerpt from Swami Vivekananda as he spoke about his experience of coming across a picture of some ships being caught in a Cyclone in South Sea Islands,
in Illustrated London News. ‘…all of them were wrecked except one English vessel, which weathered the storm. The picture showed the men who were going to be drowned, standing on the decks and cheering the people who were sailing through the storm. Be brave and generous like that. The watchword of all well being, of all moral good, is not I, but thou. Who cares wheather there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is a soul or not? Here is the wold, and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt. Forget yourselves; this is the first lesson to be learnt, whether you are a theist or an atheist, whether you are an agnostic or a vedantist, a Christian or a Mohammedan.”.

Such articulations acquired the languages of ‘epochal’ changes into a trans-sectarian cultural assertiveness that crudely accommodated technology of print and print-pictures into the status of index and metaphor of a brave generous and participatory will to culture. In the page opposite to this, there is a photograph of Sree Narayana Guru as sitting on a chair in an interior space with tables fixed with mirrors. It is also acknowledged as ‘photo by the Malabar Photo Works, Cannanore’. Down to it is written that Brahmasree Narayana Guru swamikal passes fifty nine years of age. On top of the photo it is written that God and Guru are not distinct for a ‘thoughtful mind’. It is already observed that print capitalism and the new genres of communication, graphic visuals/images being part of it, constructed public spaces and arenas of consciousness that are intimately linked to ‘thoughtful mind’ and saviors of society and culture.(App.c.2).

1.2. From ‘Dark’ to ‘Light’ – Between ‘the East’ and ‘the West’

Faculty of sight can be understood as an integral component of reading and speaking in public as started by periodicals. The emerging new public domain was often graphically presented in both verbal and visual terms as a journey of
enlightening from dark uncivilized days to the light of civilized knowledge and empowerment wherein images of rising sun, stars, angels, women, open book, landscapes and flowers were used as metaphors. Cover visuals and names of some earliest periodicals suggested a rhetorical importance of immanent cultural declaration communication and exchange\textsuperscript{12}. For example, one can take the cover of \textit{Navayugam}.

(Fig1.3) The meeting point of ‘East’ and ‘West’ is represented by two women. The sari-clad woman adorned by flowers in her hair is greeting the woman clad in Roman antique attire with armatures and majestically holding a spike in her hand. Their cordial exchange of handshakes is covered by the ‘table of contents’ in the magazine designed as a strip of paper that flanks – all this happening with a backdrop of sun rising far away from among the hill valleys. 19\textsuperscript{th} century Victorian context was similarly characterised by an anguished and highly contentious debate on the desirability of developing a society with widespread access to print, and hence to news, information and other forms of potential social knowledge. These debates were encapsulated in a series of phrases - ‘Useful Information’ ‘The Diffusion of Knowledge’, ‘The March of Intellect’ ‘The taxes on Knowledge’ and ‘The Radical Press’. The politics of literacy and related new methods of knowledge diffusion involved various overlapping layers of social change and people’s empowerment. Communications or print culture revolution basically entailed the shift from script to print, ‘from image culture’ to ‘word culture,’\textsuperscript{13} hence the emerging graphic sense was highly literal and metaphoric. Printing served to expand data pools far beyond all previous limits and to carry the new idea of an open-ended investigatory process pressing against ever-advancing frontiers.

Interestingly, by the end of 19\textsuperscript{th} century an ethical-cultural curiosity into the condition of women was very often posed in terms of a comparison between ‘women
of the east’ and ‘western women’. Women figured prominently in debates centering upon the constitution of the modern domestic domain while by late 19th century, the trichotomous ideational division between the State, the Civil Society and the Family had already become familiar within the public sphere. The picture mentioned above spoke in terms of a ‘femininity’ that holds the banner of new cultural contents at a meeting point of the ‘east’ and the ‘west’. This meeting point of two ‘femininities’ cordially converges and also conceitfully covers the essential differences and challenges faced by the emerging modern educated intellectuals in the colonial condition that provoked them into a self evaluation of their own domesticity.

In 1930, Deepam Illustrated journal devised a repeated design graphically depicting rising rays of sun, lotuses and plants, a lady reading on the left hand side while right hand side shows a gentleman reading. (App.b.2)

Another magazine Jayarashmi gave graphic representation of the Sun and the two flanking coconut trees as its title vignette (App.b.3). Cover picture of Arunodayam showed the rising sun. (App.b.4). A magazine called Jnanaprabha (light of Knowledge) put the devanagari script for ‘Om’ within a halo of light rays depicted with black lines and above this icon is written ‘Brahmavidapnothi Param’, that means, to attain the Knowledge of ‘Brahma’. Atmaposhini (means, that nourishes the self), a magazine edited by Vallathol Narayana Menon who emerged as a great poet of modern Malayalam literature, showed two cherubs flanking in the top portion of the content page.

The metaphors of sunrise, trumpet, opened book, goddess (of knowledge) and imaginative allegorical meeting point of cultures with representative differences seem to suggest an epochal change in the very function and operation of knowledge diffusion in loud terms of the verbal and the graphic.
1.3. The ‘Writer’, the ‘Reader’ and Rhetorical Image of ‘The Individual’

In this changing mode of diffusion of knowledge, a strong notion of individual is demonstrated both visually and verbally. Literacy, the knowledge of reading and writing was supposed to give birth to new category - ‘individual’ as ‘a writer’ and as ‘a reader’ both with an enlightening vision of the world wherein social changes and related public sphere of dialogues constituted subjects for this individual’s ‘enlightened glance’.

There is a particular cover picture that used to repeat in many issues of a periodical called Sanjayan in 1936 (Fig 4 & Fig 5). In the first issue of this magazine, the editor M.R.Nair himself signed as P.Sanjayan. After some issues, this picture was reformulated in a new fashion by M.Bhaskaran and it was repeated for the rest of the issues of the magazine that lasted only for four years.

It is the graphical representation of the face of a young man overlooking from behind the hills and his glance goes through the valley downwards. The face is placed in between the two hill-tops like the sun rising from behind. One hand holds inkbottle. The other hand holds a writing feather and the two hands are placed on the hill curves. A spark of light is tracing and showing everything in the valley downwards. The path of light is graphically represented as if in a science textbook. Goddess of knowledge Saraswati and some angels and the damaged village bridge and the placards presenting political and social demands of the village - the newly emerged public domain wherein people, largely addressed either as an anonymous category or as identifiable by their caste, were expected to participate with ideas, visions and gestures of ethical uprising against injustice - are seen in the drawing.

Literacy, a sort of command over words and ideas as metaphorically represented by the ink bottle and the feather, seemed to show somebody as enabled to be individually gaining a bird’s eye view to the vantage points of social uses and
expressions of knowledge. Paradoxically the very system of individual command over reading and writing in one’s own enlightened convenience, places him in a position that alienates from that society. Here the glance is of a ‘dis-interested’ subject who is a charged participant in the whole drama but equally distanced from his subject of interest. This eventually gained the added meanings of privacy, leisure and entertainment. The path of knowledge graphically constituted a separate potential entity that can both socialize and un-socialize the ‘writer’/ ‘reader’ by individualizing his faculty of reading. This is a newly gained distinguished vision of the educated individual who rises much above the ordinary life and its problems. He, the archetypal ‘enlightened intellectual’ has, as the picture shows, one head and two hands to look, think and laugh. This image has no body but in that place there is a collage of opinions and ideals. Blessed by goddess saraswathi, a woman shown with body clad in modern attire of sari, it suggests a dialectical presence of traditional, gendered and religious sanction transcribed into the notion of a nation / locale and the ‘enlightened individual’. The thinking individuals of merit had to refashion the philosophical issues of religion, imagination, reading habits, choices and the pertinent issue of God and life at large in a dialogic and individuated mode of depth. An engendering of the ideals of sufficiently distanced individualistic vantage points envisaged here is to be particularly taken note of. With his head to think and hand to actualize his thoughts, a vision from above the social realities is a powerful position for the modern educated male ‘reader’, ‘writer’ or ‘entrepreneur’. Woman is an allegory or symbolic figure of knowledge- a goddess represented by a body clad in ‘modern’ attire. J. Devika speaks about the late 19th century phenomenon of emerging English-educated class of people beginning to review the existing social order, ideas and institutions in sharply critical terms. Though this reading public
gives enough scope to stress the increasing circulation of newspapers and magazines in Malayalam, such reevaluation took place also in hitherto lesser noticed spaces like ‘reading clubs’ and ‘debating societies’ as well. They were mostly groups of modern-educated men gathering to discuss topics of general interest. Vidyavilasini sabha and Bhashaposhini sabha are some among them. ‘Chalai reading club’ and ‘Puthan chandha reading association’ are mentioned as felicitating V.Nagam Aiyya on his appointment as officiating Diwan of Travancore. C.V.Raman Pillai’s lampoons (Prahasanamala) on the everyday life of the modern educated class of early 20th century Thiruvananthapuram, were also said to have staged by the National Club and by the students of the Maharajah’s college Thiruvananthapuram.

A newly formed class of educated intelligentsia and entrepreneurial publishing class craved to imagine such operational premise for themselves as reflected through the Sanjayan cover picture. In this fold, the public made of individuals expressing their opinions using tulika (pen) and loudspeaker could envisage the periodical as an extension of this ‘public domain’ where an individual tries to grasp himself as a spirited ‘writer’, ‘reader’ and a gleeful ‘spectator’. (Fig. 1.2) In this premises, woman as depicted in the cover picture of Sanjayan, is a sexual category posed as an object of new knowledge. The reader, as a curious onlooker is placed in exalted and distant vantage points but he emerges with a mischievous smile reveling in the eventful life downwards and he is gleeful in his vision at large. The ‘reader’ of this cover picture must have looked at his own metaphorically placed image.

Though it contained new visual and verbal symbols of both tradition and modern, it also broke the individual out of the traditional group while providing a model of how to add massive agglomeration of power from individual to individual,
as a reader, writer, and participator in the ‘public space’, being conscious of newly emerged civic subjectivity. Pro-activeness to colonial models is to be noted. Sanjayan cover picture is very much fashioned in the model of popular British satirical magazine *Punch*. But it does not devalue it in any way as it was an effective prop of ‘modern selfhood’ for a reader in Malayalam. Even technology was a lesser wonder or preoccupation for him than arguing a ‘modern selfhood’ in the colonial context. Transition from hierarchical and traditional systems that largely imposed and sustained non-literate conditions to the literate, modern, enlarged and enlightened conditions was not a process of directly acquiring and practicing the new technology, new language and new lifestyle. Print cultures in colonial India encountered with modernity and its enlightenment accessories like literacy and technology using some textualising devises, shaping through them often contradictory values of cultured life.

1.4. A New ‘Journalistic Will’ to People – Identifying the ‘Reading Class’

Editorial attempts to probe into the reader’s choices and mindscapes influenced them with a pedagogically defined value system for a sort of ‘culture politics’. In the early decades of 20th century most of the periodicals loudly expressed their aims of the publication of the periodical while they used all editorial pressures to involve the readers in this activity as they were virtually imagined within the very same periodical pages. The publishers also expressed their anxiety in the ‘life span’ or ‘future’ of the periodical while informing readers regarding the financial crisis faced by them.

*Deepam Illustrated weekly* had conducted competitions to fill up the blanks using matching writer’s name. Pictorial clues were given. It was known as ‘chitramatsaram’ – ‘competition of pictures’. (Fig. 6) Rs.100 was declared as the prize money. *Deepam* also informed its readers that in the next special issue for Christmas,
there will be many colour reproductions of pictures and biography of O.Chandumenon. Rarely an editor devised means of creative and open-ended participation from the readers as Sanjayan did in 1939 to reach out to them. There was an interesting invitation to readers to participate in a competition of providing interpretations for the cover visual discussed above. As the cover-picture interpretation competition is over, Sanjayan declares another competition for the readers. It is to put in writing in the order of preference, the best five contents in a periodical. Poetry, pictures, investigative news reports, book reviews etc are referred as the existing examples of choices. And in determining the winner, Sanjayan, the editor does not take any responsibility. The sent list of contents will be matched with another list that is said to have made according to the opinion of majority of the readers. The most suiting list from the competition section will be given a ‘salva’. There are no clear guidelines of readable or worthy of seeing contents that could be suggested by this editor. But there is an assumption regarding a possible check list that is ideally made according to the opinion of ‘majority of the readers’. This ideal ‘list of majority opinion’ is not but declared in public. However, it is easily derived that an ideal opinion list of ‘majority of the readers’ was abstractly imagined by all editorial subjectivities in the popular press. ‘Competitions’ that demanded reader’s participation invariably pinned down the editor’s curiosity and search for forming a reader-oriented editorial subjectivity.

If the editorial exhortations inviting the anonymous readers to participate in picture interpretations is an intellectual or ideational one, some periodicals had already consciously devised commercial interactions in terms of a more specific cultural contentions with ‘the Keralite public’. Bhashaposhini, a monthly magazine established by the ‘Bhashaposhini sabha’ was a debate circle too. It declared its
virtuous intentions in the editorial of the first issue in 1896 that there should be a
general homogeneity for the language through the wide publication of ‘useful books’
and it also exhorts the enterprising ‘Keralite public’ who have the will to work for this
cause that for those who help in these ventures, a fee is offered in return to their
spending of time. It can be that the monthly will pay for the contributors in a
better way or it can be that all the contributors and the readers, by that very act of
buying reading and thinking, participate in a valuable cultural cause. It is also
offered that those things practiced in the case of English newspapers will also be
practiced here. What ‘those things’ practiced by English newspapers is ambiguously
put forward. The economic relations inherent in the cultural intentions are often
diligently and intimately pointed so as to suppress any further specific enquiries as to
who these rhetorical saviors called ‘general public’ are.

The will to reach out to many in a language, style and terms comprehensible
to multitudes had been projected as the cardinal factor and that the commercial
motives had been the fall-out effects displayed in disguises of a dialogic verbosity.
Sanjayan takes the help of a drawing done by M.Bhaskaran to communicate the idea
that one copy of Sanjayan is seen by a minimum of ten people as shown in the picture
as gathered in a library while a man walks out impatiently from the crowd only to buy
a copy for himself. Same picture is also proposed as containing the reason why
Sanjayan’s advertisement tariff is apparently higher. (Fig.7). Interestingly, the readers
are pictured at the modern public domain called ‘vayanashala’ or reading room, a
public place for reading and discussing news. As E.V.Ramakrishnan observes in
Aksharavum Adhunikathayum, the participation in a reading room will pluck one from
the personal sphere of reading to the political realm of ‘culture’ and access to
knowledge.
A bi-monthly called ‘Vinodamalika’ in 1902 used to declare in their front cover itself that this magazine gives remuneration to published articles at the rate of one rupee. This magazine envisaged a readership encompassing various classes of readers identifiable by their profession, gender and their level of literacy that is often synonymously put as ‘knowledge’. (App.b.5). The supposed readers are put up as ‘karyasthanmar’ (those who looked after the properties of upper caste landlords, mostly they were synonymous to the caste of ‘Nairs’), ‘udyogasthanmar’ (government servants), ‘swasthanmar’ (difficult to identify this class - must be the salaried class who later lead a ‘retired life’), ‘panditanmar’ (scholars), ‘pamaranmar’ (those with no special knowledge), ‘especially for women’ (the categories for them are specified beneath as ‘vaidyam’ (health and medicine), ‘vinodam’ (entertainment) and ‘neerampokku’ (comedy). It is to be noted that traditional caste-based dutiful labor does not figure in as an important basis of classification of this reading public. But this classification also does not include or mention ‘thozhilalikal’ (the ‘working class’) as a separate class of readers at this stage. A visibility of ‘working class’ though not very much as a ‘readership’ is emerging at a later point for 1950s in a more visible and textualised frameworks of progressive theatre, photography, commercial advertisements and ‘illustrations’. The social class of the reading public was supposedly determined by the level of literacy not so much by the involvement in productive labor. The category of ‘pamaranmar’ (those with no special knowledge) must have indicated in the early commercialization of knowledge, a lesser status but that could be offered as raised to a higher level by being a ‘reader’ of the magazine. For the periodical entrepreneurs, ‘knowledge’ (‘lokavyulpathy’) basically meant to have accumulated out of a literate media activity of reading. The ‘knowing of reading and to some extent writing’ was regarded as knowledge capable of yielding
money. A class of ‘readers’ who transcended traditional caste and labor system were formed and they all irrespective of their social status could be identified on the basis of their ability to read and write. This ‘ability to read and write’ was determined both by the traditional restrictions of caste based social immobility and by modernist / reformatory fervor for education for all and the newfound social status ladder attained by salaried government servants. This is a change-over in values from traditional skills and physical labor to a modern system of intellectual knowledge, dealing with ideas, words and visuals. This was giving rise to a new social class called ‘readers’. To take an example, an advertisement of Saraswativilasam Book Depot, Trichur that used to appear in *Mathrubhumi Illustrated weekly* of early 1930s, gives a list of all categories of knowledge ready for reading: Puranas, Vedanta, Bhaktimargam, Dharmashasthas, Literature, Grammar, Dictionary, prose story, poetic story, novel, drama, medicine, astrology, history, morality, biography, and industry. The ‘reverse print’ gave a visual quality to letters. The Black square box in which matter was written functioned as a visual. Matter is written in white letters. Just above it, A.R.P. Press, Kunnamkulam has given an advertisement turned information titled as ‘right to self rule’. It informed that A.R.P. Press has published a Malayalam translation of great speeches by Lokamanya Balagangadhara Thilakan in Ahmed Nagar, the famous speeches that are to be read and learnt by anyone who is a ‘patriot’. There gets defined that a patriot is normatively a ‘literate individual’ and a ‘reader’. The early commercialization of knowledge further over-layered this class by a sort of ‘will to political conscience’ as a basic patriotic and civic duty of each ‘individual’.

Filtering a feeling for political freedom demanded at this stage the ideological and cultural functioning of an idea of ‘homogenous nation’. This was possible only through literacy and people’s increased command over ideas. Demand for
homogeneity itself had to undergo a leveling process—leveling of differences to form an anonymous human group identifiable in terms of a nation / state through an epochal spirit of progressive change. But the emerging cultural space of periodicals shows that this was not without friction. Identifying ‘homogeneity, literacy and anonymity’ as the key traits of this ‘species of patriotism’ that becomes pervasive and dominant under certain social conditions, one can see that the ‘arts in print’ as emerged in colonial history of India’s nation building, constitute a knowledge disjointed between political rationality and its impasse, between shreds and patches of cultural signification and the certainties of the nationalist pedagogy, between the event of the everyday and the advent of the epochal, between the technological modernity and ideational traditionalism forming irregularly transcribed discourses through language, visuals and ideas. Keralam also experienced a strong surge for specific selfhood defined by ‘political consciousnesses’ evolved in the politics of ‘literacy’ that consistently shaped this region’s cultural attitude through the century. If this was the historical moment of enquiry in Europe into ‘Art objects in the world of mechanical reproduction’, in India it was the ‘making of a new Indian art’ in the context of colonial modernism. The idea of critical philosophy of ‘art’ in the world of ‘mechanical reproduction’ as Walter Benjamin formulated in ‘Illuminations’ in 1936, would be a glaring anomaly in this culture since the subject of this criticism, ‘Art’ as an aesthetic establishment of urbanized and industrialized society, was just in the making of its own shreds and patches in this regional system.

1.5 Irregular Transcriptions Filtering ‘The Picturesque’

Technology of print exerted irregular temporal and political impact in histories of cultures across the world. Five centuries long tradition in Europe takes a popular root in India only within the past century and a half and in Kerala within an even
lesser period\textsuperscript{20}. It is in the early decades of 20\textsuperscript{th} century that a book and periodical culture takes full fledged shape in Kerala. India’s encounter with the west and the will of the Christian missionaries from the west were undoubtedly the earliest factors behind the introduction of printing in India from the middle of 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Development of Indian book/periodical publishing was rather an ‘adapted response’ that activated the local cultural ambitions upon colonial models in early 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Earliest colonizing models displayed an anthropological interest in the ‘natives’. Their documentary surge was significant in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century British taste for the ‘pictorial’ and ‘picturesque’. It is the 18\textsuperscript{th} century that introduces European, predominantly British, painting into India, one important aspect of which is the technique and form of oil and easel painting\textsuperscript{21}. Not only painting and ‘fine art’, litho-printing was also brought in. The colonial printing presses in Culcutta produced catalogues of colored etchings descriptive of the manners, customs, character, dress and religious ceremonies of the ‘Hindoos’ in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century India\textsuperscript{22}. By Ravi Varma’s time in mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century oil painting, mostly in the way of portraits but also landscapes and genre pictures were a common feature of colonial culture\textsuperscript{23}. Apart from the British, the Indian elite too started to collect these pictures by this time. These were indiscriminate collections, including commissioned portraits, copies of masterpieces as well as contemporary work from various sources.

A ‘curio-interest’ in exotic human figure type and nature is established in colonial prints and in commission works of colonial officers. Malayalam periodicals that started gaining confidence in their own significance for the public that was envisaged through much verbose rhetoric in the early two decades, also displayed this sort of curio-interest in a range of subjects both British / modern / foreign and Indian / local / traditional subjects. But this display of ‘picturesque’ visuals strikes quite
different codes from the early colour plates on ‘Hindoo’ people’s customs. Pictorial features were displayed from a vantage point of access over perceivable truth of life through the considerably modern function of periodical journalism that could be self reflexively used for political reasons. This vantage point of ‘the pictorial’ is provided by entrepreneurial periodical journalism as grown here negotiated power through cultural mechanisms operated as the forums of debates and discussions on a much broader range of disciplines. The pedagogic, fictionalized and journalistic text with photograph of both foreign and Indian subjects alike was illuminating a reality through new homogenizing instruments of public sphere, entertainment and modernization evolved here with sufficient historic logic of actualizing the truth around. Interest in ‘Big Ben’, the famous London clock tower or ‘literary men in Kerala’ or ‘a woman in the process of making coir’ or ‘a boat man in his boat’ (App.c.3 & App.c.4) are all part of an interest in the ‘modern spectacle’. It also entails a ‘viewer subject’ that finds a sea shore, peanut seller, women working in small scale industries or a newly built bridge dam or church as visuals to be endorsed with ‘document-able’ meanings and worthy of being self- reflectively looked at from a distance. Mathrubhumi weekly in 1940s published pastoral sketches by M.Bhaskaran, photographs and other pictures of general curiosity, pastoral landscapes and people. Magazines also often declared to receive with courtesy photos that illustrate life in Kerala and beautiful landscapes of Kerala. (Fig.8) ‘Arunodayam’ magazine in the June issue, 1927 declared that portraits of great men who exemplify arts of Kerala, pictures of places of importance and the entertaining pictures that demonstrate political situations today would be specially adorning this magazine. A children’s magazine called ‘Balamithram’ in 1952 published cover pictures that made typical varieties of primitive and nomadic races. These ‘photo features’, illustrations
and caricatures were categorically understood as exotic expressions of reality, beauty and entertainment provided by the sites of informative journalism. They also characterized the new middleclass subjectivities of ‘reader’, ‘writer’, ‘thinker’ and ‘viewer’ fashioned in a colonizing model of mutually reflective but distanced ‘subject’ and ‘object’ positions. It positioned this society as an object of its own technological rhetoric of ‘picturesque scenes’.

An ‘age of mechanical reproduction’ seems to have entered into this society in a top down fashion that was only starting to grapple with the issue of truthful reproduction of its own image but thoroughly ingrained in verbal sub-textualisations. A documentary interest in customs, manners, character, fashion and religious ceremonies through which the new representational mode made itself visible here, was not an inherent logic or outcome of political or aesthetic interest of this society but that of the colonizer. It was a historical contingency in colonial India and it had to face the technique and content of both mechanical reproduction and ‘illusionist naturalism’ of European tradition all at once. Not simply a different model of knowledge diffusion or an imitation of reality, linear perspective and its actualizing potential was also the central totem in the repertoire of colonial signification and as Christopher Pinney rightly puts it, Ravi Varma emerged into this conflicting histories and aspirations as a highly charged trope.24 ‘The split identity of Ravi Varma as the father of modernism in Indian Art, as many official versions put it, and the legendary perpetuator of the devalued ‘mass artifact’ truly represents the amount of irregularities left both by this individual artist and by the historical moment in which he could operate as an artist.

Technology, especially litho and half tone printing of pictures was adapted to the newly imagined perceptual possibilities but with a lot of limitations. Most of the
vignettes and photo reproductions were of very low quality but it must have been made activity concomitant with a higher rhetoric of arts because the subject matter was always women, nature, landscapes and puranic stories fashioned in an ‘artistic’ and almost Ravi Varma-like theatricity. (Fig.9) These Ravivarma-like paintings published, taken here for instance in a periodical context of Deepam Illustrated Magazine were not often signed. But there is an occasional instance of an artist called J.K.V signing on a painting that is different from the compositional theatricity of Ravivarma. It is a close look at child Shakuntala lying among the bushes while hermit Kanwa is shown excited and looking onto her. The perspective spacing is not taken care of but the sentiment of looking at a child and the sage caught in an ordinary situation is seen to have given more attention though this is a sensibility that abandons the classicist gravity of RaviVarma’s subject matters. (App.b.6) The images available as allegorical cover pictures, cartoons, the stock motifs etc constituted a highly charged entrepreneurial / editorial scenario that designed, devised and charged visuals with more ideas and sentimental meanings than any independent interest of ‘the artistic’, ‘aesthetic illusion’ or ‘fine art’ could have equipped to do. They were simultaneously imagined as ‘lovely’ ‘beautiful’ objects that deserved to be charged with aesthetic emotions by the coexisting verse or literary text of some sort with sensibilities shifting from ‘classical’ to ‘romantic’.

1.6. The Readers who benefit – A feeling for Informed Community

Diffusion of useful knowledge was well articulated in the over all content and sustenance of early periodicals. There were presupposed notion of uses, benefits and people’s requirements in the floating of each periodical. A community of people / readers is envisaged as readers who benefit and who require civilizing knowledge. All that was traditionally known, including the very language dialects became a lesser
knowledge and all that is new, English, modern, upper caste and Brahmanic became ‘higher knowledge’ - the only capable identifiers that make one’s existence on earth ‘appreciable’ ‘civilized’ and ‘modern’.

An ‘informed’ trade or business was proved to be modern and providing this homogenous platform for the benefit of the community. Informed community-feeling also proved to give a coherent identity for the newly forming individuated nexus of the private and the public. For example Mitavadi, a periodical of the ‘Thiyya’ community extensively showed photographs of the community temples across the region (App.b.7), and the photograph of girls - women being the site for many social reformatory efforts in other communities also - of the community and those who encouraged them to perform drama to raise fund for French war.

Periodical press, emergent new instrument of knowledge, clearly represented a radical shift in value system. Communal existence in a modern world is preconditioned by the formation of literate societies because it involves at a primary level the individual’s skills of reading and writing on one’s own and then recognizing one’s civic importance in terms of one’s community. Reading and writing skills provided the homogenous public platform to virtually project one’s traditional community identity. Photographs authoritatively worked as record and information of facts of the community.

However, most of the periodicals and magazines in early 19th century were published for the interest of community, mainly the business needs and cultural needs integrated to it. It is a fact that periodicals could not survive without the political and financial support of the rulers. That is the obvious reason for most of the earliest periodicals to carry laudatory notes by colonial governor general or the Feudal royalties. Interestingly, all the ‘mangalashamsakal’ - the verses of benevolent wishes - from
authority carried a sacred aura\textsuperscript{25}. The decorative designs on the periodical name, monograms, trademarks, the first alphabet and the titles of essays all suggested this sacredness through the new richness and ‘grandeur of viewing’ to the ‘activity of reading’. A monogram or cipher is intended for ornament. For the purpose of commerce it is important that the device should be distinct and easily read. For private use however, the device is to enrich a piece of jewellery, binding of a book, a piece of furniture or part of decoration of a home. In the first place it should be a design satisfying to the eye. The conceit was clear, legible and comprehensible for the reader having the habit of reading periodicals. So the matter published in the periodical or the periodical itself was not basically regarded as a commercial endeavor. The cordial and benevolent tone of the editorials projecting a political contingency did not read much like a commercial endeavor. The periodical rather separately contained advertisements and pictures of objects available in the market in plain figures while the signals of external / official/ political power of the periodical space is conveyed through perfectly decorated graphic designs of knowledge. In other words, the periodical press established a particular social relation between the individual’s private life of traditional dependence on sacred rituals and his public life in a domain that projected a need for ritually re-habituating the more powerful, more useful and more delightful knowledge.

Ways of thinking about this relation can be further grouped around three central issues: everyday cultural reproduction of political eventualities, the ‘true’ incidents (simulated through features of news and photo on eventful world around), cultural knowledge of ‘creative imagination’ (through fictions and arts being served in the form of pictures and texts contributed by ‘more imaginative’ from among the readers). Writers and authors of literature are regarded as those arising out of the
society with responsibility and power to change it progressively. Commercialization of knowledge was well pervaded by the spirit for the ‘useful’ (as provided by the advertisement visuals and narratives). These commercial and cultural discourses were not exclusive or distinct categories but they overlapped curiously with exhortations of health, hygiene, modernized lifestyles, patriotic feelings and awareness of the world and the gendered domestic roles of an individual.

1.7 ‘Everyday World’ of Importance

‘Everyday world’ becomes a newly established sensibility in periodical culture. What form we take as modern subjects, about how to understand the relation between the everyday world and the public space, about moral and social value, about privacy and power of disposal over our lives, about ‘who we are’ – many of these questions are taken up in periodical categories of knowledge in relation to ‘progress, modernity, reformation, nationalism and culture consciousness’. These contents mainly dealt with everyday use and importance of periodicals themselves because they provided the reader with the political decisions of the leaders and dignitaries that directly affect them. They also provided imaginative and entertaining fictions that supposedly gave ‘value’ and ‘taste’ to their life. It notices things of public interest for instance, the ‘important treaty between East India Company and the King of Burma’. Appointments and transfers, arrival of ships on the harbor, market rates of various items and advertisements of public interest were some of the regular features.

Till the vernacular cultures internalized periodical as a profitable or useful cultural and economic exchange by mid 20th century, we have to face them as crucial instruments of truth, solidarity, and tongue (organ) of ethics. It was a cultural subjectivity that practically operated as communal and regional (caste, class and
intellectual/ cultural taste determined various ‘communities’ of periodical readers) while ideally proposed as national.

1.8 Modernising Habits of Everyday

Reading the periodical was understood as thoroughly modern activity because it operated as a reference for both practical and ideal subject positions in the modern world. Interestingly, the symbols of this change are traced in the everyday activities and behavior of people captured in the periodicals through articles (even when they criticized ‘parishkaram’) photo features and indirectly through commercial narratives that made use of a graphic clarity of print-pictures. Going to bars, night clubs and other entertainment centers, increased interest in sexual pleasure (put forward in prudently metaphorical language even in advertisements), physical beauty, hygiene etc. are identified as the symbols of modernity that are well placed against morality and religious life.

Reading and weighing what is read in an analytical manner was of course one among the symbols of modernity. Pictures and diagrams of ‘reading writing and speaking in public’ were understood as simultaneously true and metaphorical. Picture of a reading room graphically presented the new materials entering into the life of a ‘modern subject’. Analytical reasoning and critical appreciation of the contents that are being read and pointed at the modern pleasures of weighing measuring or judging hence a ‘weighing balance’ is depicted on the ‘reader’s desk’. The editorial right to criticize the foibles of the society was conceived as also an ‘aesthetic act’ as natural as a plant that produces roses but also have its thorns as in the title picture in the editor’s pages in Sanjayan.

Category of individual pleasure entered in the periodical space by 1930s as it reflected in the very name of some magazines that aimed at entertainment’
‘anandam’, ‘vinodam’ etc) or the light pleasure of reading. Anandadeepika (a magazine of 1930s) means the ‘lamp of pleasure’. Culture was increasingly identified in terms of everyday life and management of body and house even when that contested with the traditional habits. ‘Modernisation’ is regarded as a new found religion. A competing plane of wishful claims on health is developing that distinguishes those who are not modernized in their habits but regarded healthy and distinct from those who are modernized and contaminated by modern habits. For example, the new found interest among Nairs in taking morning tea and coffee is regarded as an ill-effect of modern habits. An anonymous article (‘parishkarathinte pokku’) that claims to have ‘depended on an English article’ in ‘Anandadeepika’ - April, 1939 - prescribes the traditional food called ‘kanji’ for health.

1.9 Gendered Designs, Disguises and Disputes of Reading and Looking

All renaissance thoughts on culturally enhancing the female life involved education health and family as major contenders of change. The uses of literacy and education of the female were constantly thought in direct proportion to the progressive changes in the social institutions of domesticity like marriage, health, child rearing etc though not very much in the institutions of public administration or other male-dominated areas. Any subjectivity outside the agencies of domesticity was rarely envisaged for women even in women’s magazines. Even when periodicals envisaged ‘free, selfless, and respectable’ vocations for women in ‘public’, interestingly it fell in the category of service sector and directly related to hygiene. During the Second World War, Mathrubhumi Illustrated Weekly published narratives of public interest through drawings showing two nurses. One is looking through the thermometer and the other putting the thermometer in the mouth of a male patient. ‘Nurses’ are slender female figure ready to take care of ‘others’ (here a male
patient). Absolute impossibility/ absence of a picture in which a male nurse taking care of a female patient makes this picture the accurate one. The periodical space is used in the service of government decision to ‘attract’ women for recruitment as nurses in the contingency created by the war times. ‘Picture and the text’ are used for the purpose of ‘attracting attention’ into a ‘progressive’ public domain in which women are invited to take part in selfless and respectable activity.

Education was generally thought as a facilitator for ‘useful knowledge’. But the ‘uses’ were variously defined for men and women in many essays written with a new found ‘prosaic’ air in many periodicals. Learning music or crafts like embroidery can be considered ‘useful’ for women but more substantially ‘useful’ knowledge were defined in terms of strict domesticity. Most of these essays, like any other topic of modern life, were either anonymous or obscurely authored efforts. This authorship is effectively obscured even when the name is given with titles of educational pedigree, in the sense that the authors did not take consistent interest or demonstrate specialized scholarship on the subject but displayed a scatter of feelings and casual musings that could not be contested easily and hence taken as people’s views in a common sense.

Interestingly Sanjayan, was a pungent but visibly gendered observer of the changing demands on and visibility of the female world. Taking the most reactionary stances in a progressive fashion, Sanjayan and Viswaroopam openly represented the contradictions inherent in the emerging ‘thinking subject’ that looks, reads, revels and talks. In the 1937 October 4 issue of Sanjayan, ‘one man’ writes a satirical piece titled ‘just two words to men’. There is an often obscured and restless mockery reflected in the ‘reader writer and spectator’ subject towards progressive changes in women’s lives even when it was discussed in terms of social reformation. The increasing visibility of women in advertisements is acknowledged by the obscured
authorship of ‘one man’ only to criticize its logic in a sarcastic manner against women. This is a mock memorandum. Part of Sanjayan’s gendered positions, but more importantly, it was a pointer to the commercially determined pictorial fund that is scattering female images in a lion’s share of unrealistic contexts of commercial manipulation. This article functions as a potential pinning down of cultural and political efforts, which are otherwise fashioned as progressive, into the lesser realm of the ‘commercial’. It is also pertinent to see the ‘gendered viewer subject’ who identifies and responds to ‘a naughty glance’ ‘deer-eyes lying down closed in sleep’ and red lipped women declaring the quality of famous cigars in the advertisement.

1.10 Assertion and Defense of ‘Modern Selfhood’

Discussion of tradition also put forward as the ‘other’ side of modernity. But the observable fact is that there was an ambivalence felt in each and every approach, both verbal and visual, to both these categories. Tradition is looked upon as a proud referent of identity in the past while simultaneously associated with the imagery of passive landscapes, distinctive customs lost in the past in the ‘onslaught of modernisation’. Sight of passive landscapes operated as a new artistic taste for the pastoral and rustic. Customs and rituals were not simply hung over modern life but also could be identified in photographs in news magazines. An attitude of both assertive celebration (of an essential immortal cultural ingredient) and nostalgia (anxious recovering from the past) characterizes the idea of ‘tradition’ in periodical journalism. Similarly an attitude of both reverence for ‘modernism’ as fast active and smart catalyst of social change (as reflected in the reports news and photo features from the west) and of contempt for an urban agent of dominance that evacuates the pristine villages and country sides of their ‘innocence’ and proud heritage. So in late 19th and early 20th century cultural assertions operated simultaneously with
political assertion but in characteristically opposite directions. While major political movements took up political freedom for India as challenging contention against the British, there emerged a parallel cultural contention that adapted and fashioned it’s selfhood in terms of the ‘modern’ (synonymously ‘English’) changes in lifestyle that was diffusing among a ‘reading class’ through the new entrepreneurial will in the potential periodical spaces of the ‘everyday’.

A magazine called Merirani (edited by K.K.Joseph Mappila and published from Star of Cochin press) names itself after the British Queen who is said to be ‘ruling the Indian empire with compassion and wisdom’. The first issue of Merirani gives an impressive description of the British empire that rates it on top of all empires in the history of the world in the security it gives to it’s subjects, satisfaction, urbanity, equality, social justice and safety.

The conflict of values and cultural counter posture – as of Indian periodical press- when faced with alien cultural domination and inputs was oscillating between self-pity and self-defensiveness. But the periodical press and the media culture involved various formations of assertive subject positions within the predominant instruments of self-pity. Emergent periodical press entrepreneurs internalized this predicament pressed on by the time. High grade illustrated monthly Pall Mall Gazette editor W.T.Stead wrote paying tribute to Ramanand Chatterji, the editor of ‘modern review’, “He (seeks) through the medium of the press, to rouse India to a sense of its fallen condition and inspire the natives of the land to help themselves”29. The inherent issue in modernity at this stage was a new definition and value system for ‘what knowledge is’ and what one ‘ought to know’. ‘Visual images of landscapes or the clock tower of Paris and the new cathedral being built in Thrissur were only comprehensible, of interest and of value to a certain public, a literate audience so
positioned as to be able to relate to both sides of the urban/rural equation. The printed landscape had little new to say to the peasants whose labour was drawn, painted or photographed. Writing on town planning and formation of urban spaces was irrelevant to the problems and self definitions of the unemployed, or the feudal landed gentry. But the charismatic importance to education and literacy bound all these sections of the society into a sort of eclectic public domain of which periodicals best represented. Periodical domain made active constructive sense to a range of urban social groups who were also addressed by new housing, shops, schools, bridges, festivals through an access to new illustrated journalism and cheaper books and literature. This network of cultural objects and meanings constituted a set of ideal subject positions which stood in relation to a wider mesh of already present values and beliefs that worked actively to exclude or marginalize others. The combination of values, health, morality, leisure, progress and civilization did not emanate from the pre-existing class formations. Rather, at this historical conjuncture, they became redefined and reorganized as central to the cultural life and identity of the ‘literate media-consciousness’ of the middleclass. This class habitually internalized the values of individualism and pleasures of reading and looking\textsuperscript{30}. It was an adaptation of a spirit of public in which private could be negotiated.

1.11 Reading / Looking in a Rhetorical Space

As suggested in the beginning of this chapter, the public domain created within and outside the periodical in early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Kerala produced a unified sensory field of perceptions in which metaphors of sight and vision operated inevitably together to actualize modern life in a dramatic spot light on the activity of reading. ‘The reader’ is inevitably a viewer too. Reading also meant viewing. There is a rhetoric of perception among intelligencia - those in the higher pedestal of this
reading class, like writers, thinkers, artists, politicians, professors, publishers etc - so as to feel oneself responsible for one’s individual vision on the social contexts. But once coming outside the rhetoric of sight, one can see that periodical is but not an individual’s sole premise. It is a public domain that is systematically and attractively individuated.

Periodicals had to patch the irregularities posed by tradition, modernity, technology, commerce, newly opened sensory domains etc. They did this by directly ‘staging’ these conditions through their journalistic categories of information. Formation of intellectuals in this society through rhetoric of ‘vision’ must have created ‘go-between thinkers’ to do such patch-works. To radically transform ‘knowledge diffusion’ techniques from social memory and restrictive access, into a more graphic, self-contained and individuated privacy, pleasure and will power of large number of people, this society had to foreground the necessary conditions of social change. So intellectuals or rather ‘go-between thinkers’ tried to encounter the disparities of the time. By the end of 1930s we find an emerging space of literary and artistic thoughts as initiated by Kesari A.Balakrishna Pillai. As M.N.Vijayan writes he envisaged himself as an ‘individual force’, a ‘go-between thinker’ who brings in the radical changes that have already surfaced as a new ‘modern’ world (‘navalokam’, 1937) of Asian cultures into the local cultural folds of Kerala. They presented themselves richly visualized and propped, the dramatic theatricality of this ‘picturesque staging’ through print-pictures will be elaborately discussed in chapter-2. Periodical was ultimately a theatre stage exhibiting words (ideas) and pictures (visions) that contained within itself the contradictions of trying to self-reflexively gratify individual pleasures of perception in a public domain. Editors of periodicals, like that of news papers, or ‘mouth-piece’ of public domain, grafted their tongue and
sight with the ‘reader’ or ‘viewer’ through an imaginative participatory politics
conducting competitions, displaying privacies, intimate tones in speaking to the
readers etc.

Periodicals operated in a textualised public- the anonymous and illusive realm
of the audience, the reader / viewer. As a result, in this ‘literate-media sensibility’
pictures-in-print were perennially textualised through features and subtitles. Verbal
texts were always immediately graphically demonstrated and clarified. Next chapter
probes into this textual field of ‘the graphic’ so as to characterize various reading
subjectivities that must have emanated from this field and determined the way an
‘artistic’ subjectivity was to develop in its fold by way of specific cultural practice
called ‘illustration’.

Notes:
   p.138

2. John Hartely, *The politics of Pictures: the creation of the public in the age of popular media*,


4. Ibid., p-2


6. while translating the content of the article in *Bhashaposhini*, it was interesting to literally
   translate a Malayalam proverb.

7. C.Madhavan Pillai, ‘Thiruvithamkoorile varthamana pathrangal’, *Bhashaposhini*, 1072
   Vrischikam. P-57
8. Punnasserri Neelakanta Sharma, Mangalodayam, book-1, issue-5, 1909. This essayist writes critically about the attempts of ‘Mangalodayam’ magazine to innovate Sanskrit. It is argued that Namboodiri society’s taboo on speaking English is foolish in the age of modern education. ‘Knowledge of the world’ being a byproduct of both the internal psychology and external ways of a visible world, was regarded a challenge in itself. The sectarian and conservative interests to innovate traditional linguistic skills in Sanskrit were contested for ‘keeping abreast of times’ in the same magazine spaces.


10. In 1890, Kandathil Varghese Mappila declared to give a section in ‘Malayala Manorama’ for verses, problem verses etc as available from those who love to use their imaginative power for the development of Malayalam language. And about this great event, Iravanad K.C.Narayanan Nambiar wrote, ‘as Manorama created a space for eligible verse writers in Malayalam, many people, poets or ‘not poets’, entered into the scene. It evolved into a cacophonous scene of verse recital. It also involved writing letters among them, making warlike situations among each other so that people wondered at this eventuality without any reason. Meanwhile, some ladies also intervened with enough masculine spirit suitable to verse writing and it could be doubted that this is a first incident in the war of verses. Beyond all limits of caste or creed, nimbi, namboori, thambi, thamban, potti, pothuval, unni, unnichiri, mappila, shasthri, menon, menokki, thamban, ayyar, akkithiri, varyaru, moossathu, nair, kuruppu, nambiar, namboodirippadu etc. together staged this ‘koodiyattam’ and this caused an unseen and undreamt of liveliness.’ – From an article titled ‘Adyakala Vrithanthapatrikakal’ written by Chambadan Vijayan in Malayala Manorama weekly, January 25, 1969.

11. ‘Mithavadi’ magazine, Issue 9, book 3, 1915. This magazine used to give exhortations by epoch-making personalities in their front page in a decorated box space.

12. The spirit is pertinent in the names of early magazines carried an air of ‘new consciousness’ expressed through the images and ideas of rising star, reservoir, social and individual ethics, reason, knowledge and female forms and names (as representative of knowledge) etc. Here are names of some periodicals chosen at random from among a big list that carried such an air and meaning. Satyanadakahalam (trumpet of truth), Jnananikshepam (reservoir of Knowledge), Navayugam (New Age), keralatharaka (star of Kerala), Vivekodayam (emergence of wisdom), Dharmayukthipракashini (expressing morals and reason), Jayarashmi (Rays of success)


15. Mathrubhumi Illustrated weekly had started a curious interactive session in the issues of November 1933 that proposed ‘Five Questions’ to the ‘thinkers of Kerala’ for their response. The questions were 1. What is the most important incident in your life and why? 2. Which is the book that has attracted your mind and imagination at the highest level? 3. Which are the four lines from the verse or prose that you feel hearty and valuable? 4. Will there be an end to the contradiction between religion and science? 5. Can you define ‘God’ in three lines? Then these questions were declared as being sent to forty-seven enlisted people of merit. And it was told to the readers that they were going to get ‘the fruits of the experiences of great men and their deep thoughts’. So they should never miss a chance to buy those succeeding issues of the weekly. It was also said that it was interesting to compare the great men’s opinions with the opinions of each one of the readers who could also write down answers and keep for themselves for such a comparison.


18. Translations in brackets are this researcher’s additions. The commonly accepted sense these words conveyed is assumed here. The proper sense of these categories was not specified in the text.


26. A representative example from the available huge proportions on this topic is quoted as follows: “Everybody agrees to the point that ‘physical health’ is the most important factor in human life. That ‘physical health’ depends on how women who are mothers to children preserve and look after both their bodies. So women need knowledge of the mechanisms of body parts and their workings. If they have such a working knowledge of the body, how many maladies can be curbed out in the very beginning, how many deaths can be avoided….the domestic management can be the basic activity that inevitably needs female education. If books dealing with domestic management are written by any great men and if they are taught at schools or informed parents familiarize them with it, the domestic affairs can be managed by women without the help of men and this will enable men to avoid unnecessary expenses and to involve themselves in higher and worthy causes spending more time.” (‘stree vidyabhyasam’, article by S.Subrahmaniayyar B.A, Bhashaposhini 1896 Dhanu)

27. Most of the articles with anonymous authorships in Sanjayan were seemingly written by the editor Mr.M.R.Nair himself in guise of ‘bhashabhimani,’ ‘sahityadasan’ etc.

28. It goes like this: “those downtrodden masses of men who are always subjugated by painters and poets have started facing yet another injustice that is shown to them by advertising tycoons. Anywhere and everywhere you find advertisements, in books, periodicals when you handle with it in any manner! All are with pictures; three fourth of them are of women! No complaint to see a woman flying down with medicine for purifying uterus… Apologies are granted for her if appears with ‘keshasamlongini’ (medicine for long hair growth) throwing a naughty glance at me… But why is it always fair toothed ladies smiling and smiling for tooth powder? Men have no tooth? The powder won’t whiten them? Why always those deer-eyes lying down closed in sleep to show that great sleep attained by taking a cup of ‘horlicks mix’
after the dinner? Sleeplessness affects only ladies? Men don’t need good sleep? …. What do you think of those red lipped women declaring the quality of famous ‘pocketknife mark’ cigars? Even in America, regarding smoking, men outsmart women. What an injustice is this? All men, we need to organize ourselves against this domination. We need equal representation with women in advertisement pictures. Inquiltab Zindabad!

29. Partha Mittar *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922* Cambridge University Press, 1994 pp. 120-121

30. In the article ‘visual representation and cultural politics’, *The BLOCK reader in visual culture*, Routledge, 1996 pp. 229-232. Nicholas Green and Frank Mort discuss varied forms of journalistic writings of early 19th century, dealing with Paris that give two interdependent images of the city, ‘old’ and ‘modern’, frequently harnessing together in an unstable alliance, although they were associated with different geographical areas and radically different social groups. “The result was that Paris represented in one and the same breath, vital social activity and ill-health, dynamism and artificiality, modernity and immorality. These contradictory definitions were most explicit when the city was juxtaposed with an oppositional elsewhere: with the French provinces, with a vanished historical past, a potentially different political future or with the certainties of nature. The naturalness of nature as signified by the burgeoning variety of landscape imagery available in the period, referenced as against the city, a stable continuity between the past and present, a natural and organic order of things, freshness and naivety and health both physical and moral. These representations of nature, visual and verbal, were not autonomous but were actively bound up with the debates around Paris, they were given meanings in and through that debate. These meanings predominated in the whole spectrum of visual images of nature from the 1820s onwards, as well as in pictorial writing on the French provinces in poetic texts and tourist guides. Daumier explored the contradiction of landscape as an urban phenomenon in his caricatures on the bourgeoisie in the countryside from the 1840s; they were shot through with meanings to be consumed by an urban audience. A decade later the same attitudes to landscape permiated the planning of the new parks of Paris, which were laid out or transformed by Haussmann’s team, with serpentine paths and successive pictorial vistas, with ‘natural’ events constructed out of artificial rock.”

Fig. 1.1
Cover of 'Keralam', 1105 Medam (1930)
Fig.1.2
Cover photograph *Mathrubhumi Illustrated Weekly*, 13 February 1949
Fig. 1.3
Cover picture, ‘Navayugam’, 1097 Thulam (1922)
Fig.1.4
Cover picture of 'Sanjayan' signed by M.R.Nair, June 1936
Fig. 1.5
Cover picture of 'Sanjayan' signed by M. Bhaskaran,
December, 1937
Fig. 1.6
Page about a 'picture competition' in 'Deepam' Illustrated Journal,
1105 Dhanu (1930) 77
Fig. 1.6a
Page giving 'picture competition' details in 'Deepam' Illustrated Journal, 1105 Dhanu (1930)
Fig. 1.7.
Advertisement narratives, sketch M. Bhaskaran, recurring in many issues of 'Sanjayan' in 1937.
Fig. 1.8
Cover picture M. Bhaskaran, *Mathrubhumi Illustrated weekly*, 1942
Fig. 1.9
Cover of Deepam Illustrated Journal, Vol. 1: No. 1, Chingam 1105 (1930)