Moinkutty Vaidyar:
A Continuity of Counter Aesthetics and a Link between Literary Landscapes

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This paper examines Moinkutty Vaidyar's aesthetics in two realms, the Kerala literary landscape and the Mappila literary landscape. Through a close examination of the characteristic features of his writing, this paper identifies Vaidyar as a crucial but rather unrecognised link between the early triumvirate and modern triumvirate in literary Kerala. At the same time, it also reads Vaidyar as an integral node in the continuum of the Mappila counter aesthetics spreading across four centuries.

A close reading of Vaidyar's life and poetry would help one trace the pointers of dissent in him. This helps one argue that Vaidyar is a poet of counter aesthetics, and explore the inherent counter currents in Vaidyar's poetic constructions, whether anti-orthodox or anti-colonial. These can be traced in almost all of his poems, which also mark the continuum of 'counter aesthetics' for which Arabimalayalam literature is celebrated. The significance of Vaidyar's linguistic and literary revolution is to be assessed in the context of literary history in Arabimalayalam as well as Malayalam.

I.1 Vaidyar in Kerala Literary Landscape

Against the backdrop of Kerala's literary history, Malayalam literary critic C. P. Sreedharan argues that romanticism in literary Kerala begins with Vaidyar (in Ahmed 17). Challenging the common belief that the modern literary movement in Kerala began with Kumaran Asan, Ulloor S Parameshwara Iyer, and Vallathol Narayana Menon, Sreedharan goes on to argue that Moinkutty Vaidyar was the harbinger of literary renaissance in Kerala (17). He further points out that it was Vaidyar's works which acted as the voice of the oppressed against the feudal and colonial rulers in the second half of the 19th century, and that Vaidyar was the major poet in his time whose works were influenced by the anti-colonial movements before him and inspired the anti-colonial movements after him (Sreedharan 17).

A very brief but most significant insight into the history of Kerala's literary landscape, Sreedharan's argument needs to be developed and validated.

Though the fact that the modern triumvirate in Malayalam literature comes after Vaidyar in chronology would stand in defence of Sreedharan's argument, to validate his point further one needs to look at two factors: first, the recognition in the literary history of Kerala for the contemporaries of Vaidyar and the lacuna of appreciation for Vaidyar in the same context, and secondly, the characteristic features in Vaidyar's writing which can be viewed as the beginning of literary modernism in Kerala. If Vaidyar is the harbinger of literary modernism in Kerala he must be viewed as the crucial link between the early and modern triumvirates in its literary landscape. This demands a thorough understanding of Vaidyar's position in Kerala's literary history.

I.1.a Vaidyar' Contemporaries in Malayalam: A Synchronic Reading

Historicising Moinkutty Vaidyar in Kerala's literary context necessitates an understanding of Vaidyar's contemporaries in Malayalam literature. Basheer has sought to answer the question 'where does the poetry of Moinkutty Vaidyar stand in Kerala's literature?' through an exploration of Malayalam literary history ("Moinkutty Vaidyar in Literary History" 153).

When Vaidyar began his writing, there were poets based in Kodungallur kovilakam just 125 kilometres away from Kondotty who spearheaded the Venmani movement in Malayalam poetry (Basheer, "Moinkutty Vaidyar in Literary History" 157). Kodungallur today belongs to Thrissur district in the state of Kerala. The map shows Kondotty (A) and Kodungallur (B). Also refer to the maps of Malappuram and Thrissur districts and state of Kerala in the appendix 1, 2, 3, and 4.



The major poets in Venmani movement who are contemporary to Moinkutty Vaidyar (1848-1893) include Venmani Achan Namboothiri (1817-1891), Naduvath Achan Namboothiri (1841-1913), Venmani Mahan Namboothiri (1844-1893), Kundoor Narayana Menon (1851-1910), Kathullil Achyutha Menon (1851-1910), Oravankara Neelakandan Namboothiri (1857-1917), Poonthottath Mahan Namboothiri (1857-1946), Kodungallur Kochunni Thamburan (1858-1926), Kodungallur Kunhikkuttan Thamburan (1865-1913), Pettarazhiyam Ramanelayath (1867-1935), Sheevolli Narayanan Namboothiri (1869-1906), Oduvil Kunhikrishna Menon (1870-1916), Naduvath Mahan Namboothiri (1878-1944), and Chathukkutty Mannadiyar (1857-1905). Venmani poets developed the poetic spring in Malayalam that evolved from manipravalam. Their writings include aksharashlokam, dhruthakavanam, samasyapooranam, koottukavitha, padhyakkathezhuth, puranic poems, etc. The *Pooraprabandham* and *Pushpamala* (1885) of Venmani Mahan Namboothiri, and *Nallabhasha* (1890) of Kunhikkutan Thamburan are the major poetic contributions of Kodungallur poets. Kunhikkuttan Namboothiri's translation of *Mahabharata* is another major contribution (Basheer, "Moinkutty Vaidyar in Literary History" 157).

At the same time in southern Kerala, Malayalam poetry developed through the writings of Keralavarma (1843-1914) and A. R. Rajaraja Varma (1863-1918). One may also notice that the modern triumvirate of Malayalam literature Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer (1877-1949) and Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958) belong to a period following Vaidyar in Kerala's literary history. One can argue that Vaidyar's poetic spring pre-dated the much celebrated works of the modern triumvirate in Kerala's literary landscape.

While both the southern Kerala poets and Kodungallur poets, and their contemporaries like Kesari Vengayil Kunhiraman Nair (1860-1914), Moorkkothu Kumaran (1874-1914), and Malabar Sukumaran (1876-1956) were well known across Kerala, Moinkutty Vaidyar was in the shadows of history and was denied his deserved acclamation (Basheer, "Moinkutty Vaidyar in Literary History" 159). The linguistic barriers of Arabimalayalam script beyond the boundaries of Mappila community could be the reason for this neglect.

Though the historical reasons under feudal and British rulers may defend Mappilas' self-exclusion from the mainstream, it resulted in the denial of the deserved attention for their greatest creative genius. But the alternative literary mission in Arabimalayalam ensured

Vaidyar's popularity among the Mappila community without fail. There was no significant endeavour by literary historians of Kerala, either, to understand in detail the diversity and contribution of Mappila literature in general and Moinkutty Vaidyar in particular. It should also be noted that until Mappila scholars started a deliberate attempt to explore and document Mappila creativity, the earliest instance of which can be seen in the 1978 book *Mahathaya Mappila Sahitya Parambaryam* (*The Great Mappila Literary Heritage*) by C. N. Ahmed Moulavi and K. K. Muhammed Abdul Kareem, the most reliable records of Mappila scholarship was by the British officials. One example would demonstrate the general view of Kerala literary historians on Mappila literature. In his *A Short History of Malayalam Literature*, a revised fifth edition of which came out in 1998, Ayyappa Panikkar mentions Mappila literature soon after his description of Venmani poets of the 19th century.

> Perhaps this is the place where mention could be made of what has come to be called Mappilappāttukal. These songs are chiefly the works of poets from the Mappila (Muslim) community and are written mostly in Arabi-Malayalam, a mixture of Arabic and Malayalam. They have a strong local flavour and belong to the general category of folk poetry. Some are anonymous and are popular in the region, although now they are read and enjoyed all over Kerala. There are public recitals of these poems, which are often related to specific social functions and rituals like Oppana. Among the greatest poets of this sub-genre are Moyinkutty Vaidyar and Pulikkottil Hyder. There are love lyrics as well as narratives (like, *Kappappāttu*, which has a symbolic mystical dimension). (A. Panikkar 51)

This shows Ayyappa Panikkar's half-baked understanding of Mappila literature. It is surprising to see that even when there are materials available in Malayalam by Mappila scholars and in English by British officials like F. Fawcett and Miller, however problematic they are, on Mappila literature by the end of 20th century, the historians have simply neglected them and have continued to refer to Mappila literature as a bunch of folk songs. "The vitality of the folk tradition in historical times is demonstrated by the Mappilappāttukal (Moplah songs) which have not only enriched the metrical resources of the language but put special emphasis on vira and sringara (the heroic and the erotic). The Arabi-Malayalam language used in these Moplah songs establishes the quaint beauty of their melodies" (A. Panikkar 19). This continued branding of Mappila society as a folk and Mappila literature as

a set of folk songs helps literary historians and scholars in escaping serious intellectual engagement on the inherent diversity, literary culture, and the abundance of creativity that Mappila literature has put forth. The practice of appreciating Mappila creativity by just reading or listening to some songs for pleasure, without giving the deserved attention to Mappila literature or recognising the unique significance it has in the literary world in general and Kerala in particular, has done much harm to this literary field. The patronising attitude embedded in such practices has to be challenged and rethought so as to reclaim and recognise the Mappilas' significant contribution to the literature of Kerala.

I.1.b Vaidyar as a Link between the Triumvirates: A Diachronic Reading

The two major epochs in the evolution of Malayalam literature in general and Malayalam poetry in particular are the works of the triumvirates—the early triumvirate including Cherusseri Namboothiri (c.1375-1475), Thunchathu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan (c. 1495-1575), and Kunchan Nambiar (1705-1770), and the modern triumvirate, N. Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer (1877-1949), and Vallathol Nerayana Menon (1878-1958). Understanding Moinkutty Vaidyar's (1848-1893) poetry closely would help us to posit him as the link between early and modern triumvirates. The short introduction to Vaidyar's works in the biography above and the detailed analysis of Vaidyar's creativity below should be taken as references for this attempt to explore Vaidyar's status as a link between the triumvirates.

The major characteristic of the early triumvirate was that they developed their poetic crafts in the backdrop of the pāttu tradition. Pāttu as a seminal tool helps us to establish Vaidyar's link with the early triumvirate since Vaidyar has remained a paradigm for the glorification of pāttu as he composed the best of sung texts in Mappila literature with a variety of themes. Tracing the literary history of Kerala, we find a celebration of the Pāttu School in Cherusseri, the first of early triumvirate. "Bhakti, vatsalyam, karuna, [and] sringara are the dominant moods in Cherusseri's poetry (A. Panikkar 30). "Ezhuthachan is the greatest spokesman of the Bhakti movement in Malayalam but he is more than a writer of devotional hymns" (31-32). Kunchan Nambiar is significant for his mood of protest, social criticism, and his "admixture of colloquial and dialectical forms" (44). Vaidyar is a symbol of creative dissent and his language merges terms from many linguistic traditions with the colloquial Mappila idiom. In Vaidyar's creative world, bhakti acts as a synthesising tool with the religious tradition in his attempt to secularise Mappila literature. His expansion of Mappila

horizon is not a negation of the tradition but an assimilation of it with the modern. The ability to synthesise and assimilate tradition and modernity shows Vaidyar's dynamic approach to the pāttu school and bhakti tradition. He is an extension of the early triumvirate stretching towards the modern.

The modern triumvirate in literary Kerala established their literary renaissance by exploring the marginalised seminal voices, finding a new idiom which is modern and politically vibrant, and attempting to uplift the marginal. Their works carry a strong nationalistic fervour contributing to the changing need of the time when the anti-colonial movement was on a high plane. There is a radical change in the concept of womanhood (the protagonist as woman) in all three in the modern triumvirate. With his revolutionary idiom, revision of language, empowerment of women, secular thoughts, and critical insights Vaidyar becomes a perfect precursor to the moderns.

The following analysis of Vaidyar's creativity will help one validate C. P. Sreedharan's argument that Vaidyar is the first modernist in literary Kerala. It will also direct one to realise that Vaidyar is the first romanticist and first female emancipator in modern Kerala literature. This argument should lead one to revisit the established history of literary Kerala, whereby Moinkutty Vaidyar's contribution as a crucial link between two eras of triumvirates is recognised and appreciated.

I.2 Vaidyar in Mappila Literary Landscape

Within the Mappila literary context, Vaidyar created a phenomenon of his own, to be conquered or mastered by no one else. This study concentrates on three sites of Vaidyar's counter aesthetics in the Mappila landscape; the site of language and literature, the site of religion and society, and the site of politics. The quest for freedom and the spirit of dissent are the inherent threads running across all his writings, be it from/on colonial rule, social apathy, or the orthodox constraints over an egalitarian society which Islam envisaged. Across the three sites of intervention one could witness Vaidyar quarrelling with the established patterns and existing systems. He changed the Mappila language and literature, he aimed to reform the Mappila society, and he openly resisted the politics of oppression. Vaidyar in his poetry embodies the rebel visionary spirit of Mappila community yearning for social revolution.

In Kerala's literary landscape, Mappila literature witnessed a parallel evolution in Arabic and Arabimalayalam along with Malayalam literature. The first available work in Arabimalayalam, *Muhiyidheen Māla*[1] by Quadi Muhammad, dates back to 1607. The well developed linguistic structure of *Muhiyidheen Māla* compels one to assume that the linguistic tradition of Arabimalayalam had its origin centuries before the construction of this poem since the evolution of Mappila society stems from 7th century CE onwards, and there might have been literary works before *Muhiyidheen Māla* which were lost or undocumented (Hameed 04). *Muhiyidheen Māla* uses a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam with the presence of Arabic, and this linguistic form is written in the unmodified original form of Arabimalayalam script. This continued to be the case with a developing interest towards Arabic terms in the works which followed *Muhiyidheen Māla* in mālappāttu tradition. But in Vaidyar, this mere blend of Arabic and Malayalam with Tamil terms gave way to a more complex linguistic formation including terms from Malayalam, Arabic, Sanskrit, Tamil, Kannada, and Persian (Basheer, "Moinkutty Vaidyar in Literary History" 155). The introduction of Persian must have been the reason for the modification of Arabimalayalam script with the help of the Persian alphabet for the sounds which do not feature in Arabic phonology.

One argument that has been made out of this complexification of Arabimalayalam in Vaidyar's works is that it marks a break with the simplicity of Arabimalayalam works in poetry and prose which has been a paradigm for alternative literary mission for the Mappilas (Rahman, "*Muhiyidheen Māla*: Oru Prathibhodha Kavyam" 36). Understanding the linguistic evolution of Arabimalayalam will help one recognise the significance of Vaidyar as a master craftsman of language, and as a major node in the creative continuum of the alternative literary mission strengthening the linguistic form. In *Muhiyidheen Māla* the language evolved from old Tamil (chenthamizh) into Malayalam and merges with Arabic making it a parallel to the manipravalam blend, as the Mālākāran says "like a string of pearls and rubies together" referring to the blending of Malayalam and Arabic.

The language of *Muhiyidheen Māla* draws more from and leans towards the ordinary language experience of the people of Malabar. In that, the language seems more simplistic. It should also be noted that none has qualified Quadi Muhammad as a scholar of languages beyond his expertise in Arabic and day-to-day experience of Malayalam. But Vaidyar was a

[1] The praising of the Sufi Saint Muhiyidheen Abdul Khader Jilani of Bagdad.

polyglot. Vaidyar's exemplification of multi-linguistic talent in his works needs to be understood in this context as a strengthening of the alternative literary mission in Arabimalayalam. Here, Vaidyar linguistically dissents with the orthodox establishment which banned the study of any language and script other than Arabic and Arabimalayalam. When the learning of Sanskrit and Malayalam was considered a taboo among the Mappilas, Vaidyar merged into the Arabimalayalam script, languages such as Arabic, Malayalam, Tamil, Urdu/Persian, and Sanskrit. The following instances for Sanskrit and Arabic would demonstrate this.

jagaḍara khannānām purā bījam
janiranyatharānām srishtīnām

janakagrasthanuranthiya ḍuthā
praḍamathi savicha
jaguna namaskara thassiya vedā

agrirshabhanām masguhathēna
sthithim yugmasthanushchāriyathathrē

ahisushirē dhrithikutaraswapāḍā
irvaḍa janakkrim
aravisunapranamya mahamēḍā

(*Malappuram Padappāttu*, Ishal 02, Lines 01-10)

ahadathile alifalif lām akamiyam
alifakshraporul bismillāh

arimakkale kuthubanuḍinam Qur'ānil
alakuttalakuri bismillāh

bahar aqur'anil porul muluḍ adakine
barishkkadal paḍi bismillāh

baḍar appada kodu kavinuvalvaḍin muḍal
baribeth abthaḍī bismillāh

(*Gasvathu Badrul Kubra*, Ishal 01, Lines 01-08)

sharthippadi tammil paranjurach
shoukhakkadal random pathapathach

surjāl mukham mothimanath pāram
sūkshithirupērum pirinthanēram

(*Badarul Muneer Husnul Jamal*, Ishal 10, Lines 13-16)

His use of these languages is also significant as these languages are not used in their 'original purity' but with a merged sense of Mappilathva coming through the local Mappila dialect. Vaidyar's is necessarily a Mappila language formed from his localisation of language into Mappila everyday experience in tune, music, metaphor, imagery, and his inherent leaning towards Arabisation of Sanskrit and Malayalamisation of Arabic. This to-and-fro move is an exceptional characteristic that one can observe in Vaidyar's linguistic construction of Arabimalayalam, making it a space for improving the alternative literary mission, and also a site to resist the dominant auras of both Arabic and Sanskrit leading towards what Bevinje calls 'sarvabhasha Saraswati' concept (Bevinje, "The Language of Moinkutty Vaidyar" 121).

At a time when Mappila poetry was deeply influenced by and indulged in Islamic philosophy and spirituality and other religious themes like saint worship, Vaidyar created an epistemological break in Mappila literature by versifying on love and war. His realisation that life is a combination of love, courtship, cheating, revenge, hope, desire, disillusionment, union and separation, success and defeat, pain and pleasure finds representation in his poetry. "Even before his writing of *Badarul Muneer Husnul Jamal*, Vaidyar's letter songs and love poems earned him the scorn from religious scholars and contemporary poets, and affection and popularity among the common people" (Kutty 18). But the significant fact which makes him a continuation of the earlier trend is that he incorporates bhakti into his works instead of negating it. Vaidyar's attempt is to be seen as reforming Mappila language, literature, and their social view. The abundance of his subjects, from children's literature to biography of the Prophet, made the Mappila writers realise the potential of Mappila literature to break the religious bonds of the earlier philosophical and Sufi poems and move towards more general themes incorporating almost all aspects of social life, and hence becoming a secular literature. This secularising attempt in the history of Mappila literature starts with Vaidyar. The dynamics of Vaidyar's aesthetics and the vastness of his literary horizons have been exemplified in Vaidyar's biography through a short description of his 14 works compiled in the two volumes released by the Vaidyar Memorial of Kerala government in 2005.

Soon after *Badarul Muneer Husnul Jamal,* Vaidyar is seen moving onto religious themes once he comes back to Kondotty from his banishment. The post-*Badarul Muneer Husnul Jamal* Vaidyar is an active narrator of Islamic history through his poems. But the choices which Vaidyar makes are significant, for, he does not follow the stream of religious themes that existed before him, the mālappāttu, kissappāttu, and viruthangal. Instead, Vaidyar chose to glorify the battles fought by the Muslims influenced by the Arabitamil padaippāttu (battle songs), and biography of the Prophet. It is important to note that even in *Kilathimāla*, Vaidyar's only poem in mālappāttu genre and one among the pre-*Badarul Muneer Husnul Jamal* works, the focus is not on the saint-like figures as in other mālappāttus, but on the glorification of martyrdom. While mālappāttu and kissappāttu choose to find spiritual asylum from the clutches of social reality in Islamic history and saint-worship, viruthangal has sought to philosophise the religion to release the Mappila psyche from the chaos brought by the oppressive socio-political systems. But padappāttu ventures to politicise the religion, and the romances, a thematic deviation of the kissappāttu, works to aestheticise the religious life. Vaidyar is to be seen in this context of literary evolution in Arabimalayalam, a context of politicisation and aestheticisation of Mappila life. Hence Vaidyar's move towards religious history should be seen as a strategy adopted by him to establish his presence approved by the authorities and use tools of authoritarian histories to challenge the norms and taboos and to put forth his dissent. Through his fictionalisation of the religious history Vaidyar communicates his voice and campaign against the oppressive forces within and outside the Mappila community. Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" speaks about using capitalist tools to fight against capitalism. Vaidyar's poetics can be seen fulfilling a similar purpose as Benjamin pointed out. Vaidyar's religious history does a double function. Apparently he is representing the battles in the pan-Islamic and regional history, exploring the ways in which minorities won the battles against the majorities with the force of their faith and not with weapons. In this he seems to be aestheticising politics. But Vaidyar's politicisation of aesthetics is revealed when one reads him closely. At the first level of signification he is inspiring the Mappila society to fight against the aggression of the oppressive forces of colonialism and feudalism by showcasing the heroic and adventurous moves of minority faith against majority force. In the second order of signification, Vaidyar presents points of dissent against the praxis and principles of religious orthodoxy through significant representations of certain characters. While the first level of signification apparently makes Vaidyar an anti-colonial campaigner, the second order of signification makes him a social reformer and an anti-orthodox dissenter.

One of the major social reformatory functions which Vaidyar's works attempt is to rethink the status and position of the women in Mappila society. Vaidyar's works are informed by a strong sense of voicing woman or the active female subject, be it his heroine Husnul Jamal or other female characters across his works. The female for Vaidyar is not a passive tool for joy or an object of oppression and negation, nor is it a saint-like or divine image. Though one may notice the naked portrayal of feminine beauty in Vaidyar and an active onlooker's view of the objectified beauty in his description of Ganeemath in *Salāseel Padappāttu*, one can also witness that such a portrayal is transformed into an embodiment of resistance as Vaidyar's poetry progresses from *Salāseel Padappāttu* to *Badarul Muneer Husnul Jamal.* Vaidyar activates the subject within this beautiful image and presents her as the agent of action, harbinger of change, and life force of human cycle. Then the embellished feminine beauty in Vaidyar should be viewed as a result of his deliberate attempt to break away from the conventional notion of female representation in Mappila consciousness and literary practices. Basheer Chungathara opines that the most powerful female characters during his contemporary times appeared in Vaidyar's works. Though many of Vaidyar's perspectives can be viewed as conventional from the yardsticks of today's social views, in the case of female empowerment Vaidyar is much progressive beyond the social views of many present day Muslim scholars (Chungathara 121).

Balakrishnan Vallikkunnu feels that the undercurrents of female representation in Mappila literature should be understood in the context of placing the Islamic culture in the indigenous traditions of Kerala and the possible alterations which might have occurred in the evolution of a social consciousness in such an Islamic community in the indigenous tradition ("Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 81-82). He classifies Vaidyar's female characters into two groups. "The first group of characters is drawn from the Islamic narratives like Ummu Ayman, and Hind bint Utbah in *Uhd Padappāttu*. The second group belongs to the Islamised stories like Ganeemath in *Salāseel Padappāttu*, Husnul Jamal in *Badarul Muneer Husnul Jamal,* and Saleekhath in *Saleekhath Padappāttu*" (Vallikkunnu, "Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 84). He opines that the female characters drawn from Islamic history have a fixed narrative frame and because of this predetermined characteristic they will not help the poet's horizon of female representation to widen (84-85). Hence he turns towards the characters in Islamised stories to look for Vaidyar's empowering of female characters and concludes that the strength and voice that characters in Vaidyar's Islamic tales show is an extension of the inspiration Vaidyar acquired from his female characters in Islamised stories (85-91). The camel owner's

wife and the slave girl in the *Story of Camel and Deer*, the old woman in *Kilathimāla* etc, as Vallikkunnu's observes, are not developed into living agents of action though they are silent witness to the course of action in the narrative. These female characters are used by the poet to fulfil the job of glorifying other characters.

But what Vallikkunnu misses to note is the possible comparison and contrast of Vaidyar's female characters in Islamic tales with the female characters in other Islamic narratives in the Mappila literature such as the mālappāttu tradition. To value the distinctiveness of Vaidyar and his break with the conventional notions and the tradition he is writing from, one has to see that it is with Vaidyar that Mappila literature began to represent female as a living subject having an active agency. Vaidyar's female representation is a complete deviation from the saint-like portrayal of Sufi women in the mālappāttus, the holy mothers of believers in historical narratives, and the plight of the female in Mappila society of the time. But it is also important for us to analyse the major female characters to understand the depth of Vaidyar's empowerment of womanhood.

Vallikkunnu observes that though Ganeemath is the first fully portrayed female character in Vaidyar she is not given a space to voice and a site to act. Ganeemath is the daughter of King Mahathwees in *Salāseel Padappāttu*. She is portrayed as an embodiment of feminine beauty through which Vaidyar breaks the taboo for representing female beauty in Islamic narratives. But since it does not show allegiance to the Islamic vision of female portrayal (which is to be hidden from the alien eyes), Vallikkunnu views it as an influence of two traditions: One, the jahiliya poetic representation of feminine beauty which was put into oblivion by Islam. Second, the patriarchal notion of feudal Kerala that female is an object of pleasure which found its expression in the manipravalam poetry of the decadence period in Kerala (Vallikkunnu, "Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 85-86). In such a context there is no space for exploring the voice and agency of the female as an active subject (86).

Husnul Jamal, like Ganeemath, is an embodiment of Vaidyar's representation of beautiful female. But unlike Ganeemath, Husnul Jamal is an active agent of action, a self-conscious subject, one who takes the frame story into an adventure by her decision to elope with Badarul Muneer. The portrayal of feminine beauty in Husnul Jamal by Vaidyar might be a result of such a demand from the narrative. Since a tale of love, it necessitates the romance between lovers and a portrayal of beauty is often taken to be the building block of a context for romance. The embodiment of Husnul Jamal as the 'most elegant beauty among humans

and Jinns' is also required to attract other men and jinns towards her to give an adventurous twist to the tale which takes the plot ahead. But, as Vallikkunnu notes, Husnul Jamal is not an imaginative representation of an obedient woman, nor is one who comforts in conventions. Her pride as a princess, the care and affection of her parents, the comfortable protection of her palace, the lower social status of her beloved, and even the probability of a disastrous consequence do not prevent her in her pursuit of love and elopement with Badarul Muneer. Having her own perception of good and evil, she embodies both sweetness and boldness of love. She does not hesitate to fight and defeat those who make advances to her, and when it seems wise she does not deny her intellect, the use of diplomacy. She is also shown as the weeping woman with the pain of separation from her beloved. Through Husnul Jamal's adventure of love Vaidyar shows that women can be equal to men not only in courage and determination but also in martial power and physical strength (Vallikkunnu, "Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 87). Here the poet boldly challenges the retrograde tendencies not only of his time but the times to come (88).

In *Saleekhath Padappāttu* Vaidyar's vision of female emancipation progresses through the development of the female into a more focussed portrayal of the fighting woman. Here Vaidyar's female is not one who resists temptations and cheating to defend her love and chastity, but a more developed female subject who fights for what she thinks just. She rules the land, leads the army, and conquers other lands. She is not hesitant to accept anything that is just and truthful, but she is not a fool to accept anything at first sight. She needs to be convinced of the truth from her own experience. She is a learned intellectual, trained and able martial, eloquent in rhetoric and ideas, elegant diplomat, strategic commander, and a tactful leader. The female in *Saleekhath Padappāttu* is not one who follows or yearns to be led by the male, but one who leads the male. Queen Saleekhath is the most powerful embodiment of Vaidyar's female empowerment. Ishal 9 of *Saleekhath Padappāttu* gives a brief introduction of Queen Saleekhath's childhood and ascendancy into throne.

> Her tidings are long to stretch,
> in greatness, grew the girl to fetch
> the knowledge of things in martial touch.
>
> Spread her fame for valour and wisdom.
> Shrivel the kings and their kingdoms;
> hearing her name their hearts turn fearful.

When her father did demise,
bravely the land did she raise.
Indescribable are her forts and fests.

To discuss the fare of fight,
ministers four fairly might.
Gentle Khaboos soft-spoken, first

then Rabeeà, and Khaises triad,
powerful still is Sakasi tetrad
stand still on her worthy command.

(*Saleekhath Padappāttu*, Ishal 09: Lines 01-15)

When the Prophet sends her letters to embrace Islam, Queen Saleekhath respects the news of the arrival of the last Messenger of God, but dares to challenge the Prophet and His army to prove His authenticity. Since she believed in the arrival of the last Messenger she does not hesitate to accept Islam, but the very fact that she is not ready to embrace it without being convinced of the Prophet's authenticity displays her intellectual calibre and leadership quality. Vaidyar does not attempt to portray the physical beauty of Saleekhath; instead he focuses on what Saleekhath does as an individual, as a self-conscious agent of action. When she realises that the Muslim army's resistance and aggression is strong though it is too small in numbers against her big army, Saleekhath herself decides to come to the battlefront to lead her men. When she hears the strength of Muslim commanders from her defeated soldiers, she tells them that 'braves are like that'. When she meets the Prophet, she retorts to His demand to believe him and lone God, saying though she knows that God is one and the last messenger is to come, she would not believe until she is convinced of the truth about the Prophet.

In the battlefront, Saleekhath fights fiercely against the commanders of Muslim army and Vaidyar focuses on her tactics as a warrior. At one point Saleekhath is caught by Hazrath Ali, Amrubnu Muad, and Abdul Kareem, but she escapes tactfully from their hold. With her elegance in the battlefield she strikes awe in the Muslim soldiers. But as she has not faced any enemy as determinate as that of Muslims before, it gives her point of contemplation. The adventure of Muslims brings her to a realisation of their divine inspiration. Saleekhath's intellect soon recognises the divine Messenger and embraces Islam.

Vallikkunnu views that the lack of beautification of Saleekhath's femininity in the poem is because of Vaidyar's gradual progress from Ganeemath to Husnul Jamal to Saleekhath and the fact that Saleekhath's portrayal is more focussed on her subjective agency than her objective appearance, which denies such a beautification (Vallikkunnu, "Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 90). One can also witness this transition in Vaidyar's portrayal of the female and the progression of his empowerment of women, from the titles of three poems which feature Ganeemath, Husnul Jamal, and Saleekhath. *Salāseel Padappāttu* is titled after the hero King Salāseel. *Badarul Muneer Husnul Jamal* shows an equal importance attributed to both protagonists. But *Saleekhath Padappāttu* is titled after Queen Saleekhath. It is also important to note that Vaidyar does not title any of his other poems after a protagonist's name including the Prophet's biography which he titled as *Hijra*.

If one thinks that Vaidyar looked for female characters only in the palaces, one ought to explore more facets of Vaidyar's female characterisation. To carry the most vital information of Abusufyan's return from Shām in *Gasvathu Badrul Kubra* Vaidyar introduces two women indulging in an argument over a debt. The Prophet's spies overhear their conversation and understand that the Meccan caravan led by Abusufyan is returning after successful trade in Shām and is expected to reach Badr the following day. Vaidyar attributes a whole ishal to mention this intervention of two women. Such vital information could have been delivered to the Prophet even by the angel Jibreel. But the introduction of women as vital informers who chance to lead to the Battle of Badr is purposeful to show the significance of women's presence in historic moments which changed the way of the world. Another significant female presence in Badr is Athikha, the Prophet's aunty in Makah, who had a dream predicting the impending disaster for Qureish leaders even before Abusufyan's envoy reaches Makah. Vaidyar describes this incident in ishal 13 of *Gasvathu Badrul Kubra*. These portrayals are to be seen as purposeful intervention by Vaidyar into the narratives of Islamic history from within the Mappila society.

In *Uhd Padappāttu* Vaidyar presents female warriors among the Muslim army including the Prophet's daughter Fatima, aunt Safiya Beevi, Jameela Beevi, Nusaiba Beevi, Hind binth Asasath, Hind binth Qusaima (not Hind bint Utbah), etc. This is again an important representation in a context when Mappila religious authority did not approve the appearance of females in the public. We would see how progressive Vaidyar was when we recognise such negation of female presence in the public still continues among the Mappila orthodoxy. Vaidyar describes the heroic fight displayed by Nusaiba Beevi in the battle of

Uhd in ishals 74, 75, and 76 of *Uhd Padappāttu*. In ishal 77 Vaidyar quotes the Prophet saying that "He did not see Nusaiba Beevi not as fighting on His four sides on the day of Uhd and that He did not turn anywhere without watching Nusaiba Beevi stand in fight with infidels. She got twelve wounds on her body by arrows and swords" (*Uhd Padappāttu*, Ishal 77: Lines 01-08).

In *Hijra*, his biography of the Prophet Vaidyar presents three powerful female characters: Khadeeja Beevi, Sumayyath, and Fatima bint Quttāb. After the first revelation the Prophet runs towards his wife Khadeeja in bafflement. It is Khadeeja who takes him to a scholar of scriptures and confirm the arrival of Jibreel (*Hijra*, Ishal 10: Lines 11-24). "Vaidyar presents Khadeeja as a courageous and self-confident woman who consoles and imparts courage and determination to the Prophet" (Chungathara 151). Vaidyar's presentation of the death of Sumayyath in *Hijra* is thought provoking. Though Vaidyar does not specifically mention it as the first martyrdom in Islam, the first sacrifice that evolves in Vaidyar's Islamic narratives is that of Sumayyath, who was killed by Abujahal (151). Vaidyar presents Sumayyath as a powerful woman who was ready to die for her religious views and faith (151). Fatima, sister of the second Islamic Caliph Umar bin Quttāb, is presented as a gateway of Umar into the Islamic faith. Vaidyar validates that it was Fatima's recitation of Qur'an verses and her determination to face any consequences for accepting the Prophet which gave a point of contemplation for Umar (151). Umar was one of the most powerful warriors among the Qureish and a close associate of Qureish leaders Abujahal and Abusufyan, and after embracing Islam he stood in the forefront of all battles which Islam fought in its early years starting from the battle of Badr. While Muslims remember Fatima bint Quttāb as one among the holy mothers of believers, Vaidyar's attempt is to be seen as establishing her as the most significant character in the glorious story of the second Caliph of the Islamic empire, and thereby a powerful woman in Islamic history.

Vallikkunnu's exploration of Vaidyar's female characterisation in Islamic narratives does not identify any of these characters. He takes only two instances, Ummu Ayman and Hind bint Utbah in *Uhd Padappāttu* ("Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 91). After the second attack of Qureish army some of the Muslim soldiers flee from Uhd and reach Madina. Ummu Ayman faces them with anger and throws sand on their face. She blames them for retreating before the battle gets over and asks for their weapons to be given to her (*Uhd Padappāttu*, Ishal 78: Lines 13-24). Vallikkunnu compares Ummu Ayman's courage and dignity with that of Unniyarcha in *Puthooram Pāttu* ("Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 92).

When he portrays Hind bint Utbah, the wife of Abusufyan who led the battle of Uhd against Muslims, Vaidyar's perspectives and approaches towards womanhood undergoes a complete transformation, and presents the realisation of an inherent potential of the feminine self to burst out in revenge. "The determination to avenge her father's death in Badr makes the beautiful Hind bint Utbah odious" (Vallikkunnu, "Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 92). In *Uhd Padappāttu* ishal 7 lines 27-30 we see Hind bint Utbah taking a vow to chew the liver of Hazrath Hamza who killed her father in the battle of Badr. In ishal 97 we are shown that when Vahshi kills Hamza and cuts open his body Hind bint Utbah takes out Hamza's liver to fulfil her vow. She also cuts Hamza's ears, nose, and sexual organs, and garlands herself with them. Though Hind bint Utbah is a historical character Vaidyar's portrayal of her is a depiction of the furious reaction of a pained heart, a daughter's determination to avenge her father's death. This shows the gradual transition of Vaidyar's female representation from one phase to another. "The femininity which we see when we reach Husnul Jamal from Ganeemath displays a creative resistance and audacity. The natural growth of resisting femininity is the fighting femininity. Here the female self is bold enough for resistance, fight, and invasion. We see such a female when we reach from Husnul Jamal to Saleekhath and Ummu Ayman. When femininity is drawn towards the other end of pain and patience, it transforms into a severe outburst. When we reach Hind bint Utbah, we see the portrayal of femininity which, when moves beyond the limits of patience, becomes a personification of cruelty" (Vallikkunnu, "Sthree Shāktheekaranam" 95-96). This shows the gradual empowering of Vaidyar's counter currents against the system which always attempted to view the female either as preserved sainthood to be worshipped or as a disastrous object to be controlled. "While the orthodox religious authorities keep on bringing novel explanations in the name of Islam to keep women veiled out of the public, they are silent about the presence of women like Nusaiba Beevi in the battles led by the Prophet" (Chungathara, *Ishal* 150). Chungathara opnies that "Vaidyar's poems, which establish the significant contribution of women from the beginning of Islam's growth, are to be used as powerful tools by feminist movements" (*Ishal* 150).

Another facet of Vaidyar's counter aesthetics is his characterisation of anti-Islamic figures, which took Mappila literature away from saint worship to secular thinking. In the common perception of Mappila society the anti-Islamic leaders who fought against Islam in its early years are conceived as arrogant, uncivilised ruffians even though a similar past of those who embraced Islam is forgotten or not discussed. In his padappāttu based on Islamic

history, *Gasvathu Badarul Kubra* and *Uhd Padappāttu* though Vaidyar follows the established notion of Islam's enemy force as cursed infidels, he makes a difference by focussing more on the enemy side in good light.

An attempt is made here to explore the representation of Amr ibnu Hisham (Abujahal as he is popularly known), the leader of Qureish army in the battle of Badr. Though Vaidyar calls Abujahal as 'the cursed father of ignorance' and the most arrogant creature, he does not degrade the 'human' in Abujahal. *Gasvathu Badarul Kubra* represents Abujahal as a determined warrior, an astute leader, a devoted believer in his traditions, and a charismatic commander of his clan. In ishal 18 lines 33-48 of *Gasvathu Badarul Kubra* Abujahal says: "Abusufyan informs that Muhammad is going to capture all the wealth of Makah. As we have received this sad news one who has life should think it is better to die with the gold. It is the wealth to feed our parents, women, and children. Losing it is disgrace, shame, and dishonour for us. Why should we live with such a disgrace? Oh people, we are not going to get anything from our wealth." This rhetoric was enough to inspire the Qureish leaders to prepare to wage battle on Muslims.

In ishal 20 lines 19-28 Vaidyar cites an anecdote to describe the strength of Abujahal. "Once, Abujahal had an argument with many brave hearts. They decided to examine their physical strength through wrestling. Abujahal stood in the middle of camel leather. Many braves pulled the leather from four sides. Though the leather was completely torn except the part under his feet, no one could move Abujahal's foot." Such a strong martial is the Abujahal in Vaidyar's *Gasvathu Badarul Kubra*. Ishal 21 describes the preparation of Abujahal to leave for the battle. The proud and elegant image of Abujahal is given more focus to explore his inner thoughts. Here Vaidyar shows that for Abujahal the battle is not a mere attempt to save their wealth. Instead it is an endeavour to prove the right from the wrong. It was not a means to save his wealth but a means to save his faith and his traditions.

In lines 21-33 of the ishal 21 we see Abujahal praying at the Ka'ba and in lines 34-35 we hear Vaidyar ironically pointing out that this prayer was truly answered by God.

> Oh Lord, this house,
> you own. The two, true and false,
> separate between them and make clear
> today. From two of us near

to the battlefront, one holds right.
And you know them aright.
They be made safe and separate.
Oh Lord, of the two faiths,

grace one and sustain in heights.
Expander, answer, delay no more
for the prayer. Oh Just, clear
the veil, and help it prevail

(*Gasvathu Badarul Kubra*, Ishal 21: Lines 21-33)

When the news of Abusufyan's safe arrival in Makah with the caravan is brought, and Abusufyan's suggestion to the leaders to return without moving ahead to fight is informed, Abujahal retorts to the emissary. He swears by God and Ka'ba that he will not return to Makah without killing Ahmed and His men. He tells the emissary that he is not afraid like Abusufyan. Abujahal then convinces his men the need to move to Badr and defeat the Muslim army for if the Muslim force is not torn now they would bring more threats for Qureish in the future. Since Badr was a strategic trade route of Arabs, Vaidyar's focus on Abujahal's rationalisation for clearing any threat on Badr shows the Qureish leader's intellect and determination, which is different from the common perspective of 'the cursed father of ignorance'. Apart from this "in the case of battle, Abujahal's aim was not the mere protection of the caravan. It was significant for him to prove whose side was right and who was wrong. That was the essence of his prayer. Hence, Abujahal could not put off the battle just because the caravan safely reached Makah" (Chungathara 65). When the Prophet's kinsman Juhaim who was among the Qureish force had a dream predicting the death of Abujahal the people raised their brow. Abujahal retorted to Juhaim and said:

If the dream comes true,
shouldn't I have such dream?

Of tribal elegance, intellect, and
kingly nature, I embody them all, soldiers.

Juhaim's words are false
like the false dream of Athikha.

Of liars, Juhaim is smaller,
and Muhammad is bigger.

(*Gasvathu Badarul Kubra*, Ishal 24: Lines 39-46)

Vaidyar uses the Prophet's own words to focus on the courage and strength of Qureish leaders who have come to Badr. When inquiring about the Qureish army from the two arrested slaves the Prophet asks "who are the intrepid stalwarts among the braves who have come from Makah?" (Ishal 32: Lines 01-03). Vaidyar repeats Abujahal's prayer in ishal 79 in the battle field. In ishal 85, while describing the fall of Abujahal Vaidyar focuses on his grief of dying without fighting with a brave. Abujahal wanted to die by fighting with brave warriors and he feels that he has been fallen to peasants who do not have any martial elegance. In ishal 86 Abujahal, having fallen, tells Ibnu Mas'ood: "You should report my words to the graced Muhammad. He, Vahab's grandson, is my everlasting enemy. I am the most valorous. Do not miss to tell him this. Now, here, take my sword and cut my head" (Lines 01-10).

What is important in such a portrayal of Abujahal is that Vaidyar opens up critical reading of the historical narratives of the battle of Badr. Noting Abujahal's prayer in Vaidyar's *Gasvathu Badarul Kubra* Chungathara observes that "Vaidyar invites the readers' attention towards the psychological conditions of the man Abujahal" (64). And this inclusion of prayer by Vaidyar reminds us to recognise Abujahal as a warrior who was prepared to fight till death for a system of belief he thought right (Chungathara 65). What we get from Vaidyar's portrayal of Abujahal is that he perceives Abujahal not as a mere enemy of Islam. Instead, though he is a terrible enemy of Islam, Abujahal is viewed as a real warrior who is ready to sacrifice himself to defend his faith, a quality popularly attributed in Islamic narratives to the Muslim warriors of Badr. Such critical insights into the counter Islamic characters in Islamic narratives make Vaidyar's counter aesthetics anti-orthodox though the work as whole appeals to the religious orthodoxy for the aestheticisation of the most significant event in Islamic history. Had Muslims lost the battle of Badr, Islam would have buried itself in that valley. But, as it is evidenced from Vaidyar's narrative, had not Abujahal been there the Battle of Badr would have been a mere fantasy.

The anti-colonial attitude and combats of Mappila Muslims are well known. Since literature reflects society Mappila literature mirrored the anti-colonial attitude of the society inspiring the Mappila outbreaks and getting inspired by such struggles. After the 1792 defeat

of Tipu Sultan in the Third Anglo-Mysore War, Malabar became a territory of British India and until 1947 the British administered Malabar. So, understanding Vaidyar's anti-colonial attitude would lead us to his responses to the dominant social behaviour of the Mappila community which was struggling under the feudal and colonial rule during his time. Though Vaidyar does not directly write anything against British in any of his works, the representations of heroism by the Muslim warriors in his padappāttu is enough to inspire the community to fight against oppression. T. Ubaid puts that "it will not be superfluous to say that Vaidyar's 'vira rasa' helped in reclaiming the social and religious dignity which was drowsed under the intoxication and oppression of foreign domination" (31). Karassery points out that it was the attempt of those who escaped from Makah to capture wealth most of which belonged to them that led to the battle of Badr. He views that "the battle of Badr is the revenge of the expatriated" ("Badar Padappāttinte Prasakthi" 67). Karassery goes on to say that *Gasvathu Badarul Kubra* "significantly influenced Malabar history" (73). It facilitated the Mappila's sense of freedom. *Gasvathu Badarul Kubra* as a legend of a minority believers' victory against aggression and oppression upholds the necessity of jihad to protect faith and self-dignity. This must have inspired the Mappila mind (Karassery, "Badar Padappāttinte Prasakthi" 73). Though Vaidyar's padappāttu deals with Islamic history it can be viewed as a reflection of his response towards socio-political conditions of his time.

Vaidyar's representation of the brutal social reality under feudal system in Malabar is seen in *Malappuram Padappāttu* in which he describes the powers the landlord Paranambi bestowed on his tax collector. Here Vaidyar places historical context of Malabar as the subject of his poetic campaigning against the oppressive forces to make clear his intention to inspire the Mappila society against feudal and British rulers. While Chungathara discredits Vaidyar for not developing *Malappuram Padappāttu* into a discourse on communal harmony Basheer deliberates to say that *Malappuram Padappāttu* is to be viewed as an embodiment of communal harmony and not as a representation of communal riots or social hierarchy (Chungathara 115; Basheer, "Moinkutty Vaidyrarude Krithikalile Saamoohya Veekshanam" 196). But the fact that Vaidyar, a poet of highest sense of freedom and social dignity, is writing *Malappuram Padappāttu* (1883) at a time when the Mappila society is battling both against the feudal landlords and the British state makes such arguments invalid. Vaidyar's prima facie aim can be viewed as a campaign against oppressive rulers, be it landlords or the British, and inspire the society to fight for their birth right.

Vaidyar is successful in achieving what he had aimed in his work from "the discovery of the copies of *Malappuram Padappāttu* from dead bodies of the martyrs of Malabar rebellion of 1921" (Chungathara 115). Such an argument is strengthened when we know that the British banned the pādipparayal programmes of *Malappuram Padappāttu* since pādipparayal was the major source of inspiration for Mappila warriors (Chungathara 115; Karassery, "Swathanthrayathinte Pāttukāran" 79). K. N. Panikkar observes that literature was the greatest source of inspiration for the Mappila rebels (K. N. Panikkar 90-91). Hence, one may conclude that Vaidyar enlightened the Mappila society against the feudal and colonial oppression through the battle poems based on Islamic and regional histories. Even years after Vaidyar's demise his works were used for the anti-colonial campaigning in Malabar.

This multifaceted exploration of his works shows that Moinkutty Vaidyar's aesthetics is necessarily the aesthetics of counter currents. In that it makes certain epistemological breaks in the historic evolution of Mappila literature and at the same time establishes Vaidyar as a significant node in the continuum of alternative literary mission and resistance against oppression which are the inherent threads of Mappila literature across centuries. Vaidyar moves away from the thematic and generic frames of earlier Mappila works, and turns towards more general and secular literary themes. This helped the later writers to explore newer horizons as subjects for literary creativity which was extended to writing poems on ploughing and hunting. But Vaidyar also sustained the idea of resistance and quest for freedom as a continuum of the pāttu tradition and the bhakti context which developed them. Thank you.

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