

Skin Cultures: Reconfigurations of the Body through Narratives

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COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Elwin Susan John, hereby testify that the work embodied in this thesis entitled **“Skin Cultures: Reconfigurations of the Body through Narratives”**, carried out under the supervision of Prof. M.T. Ansari, is the result of bona fide research during the full period directed under the Ph.D. ordinances of University of Hyderabad.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis has been earlier submitted for the award of a research degree or diploma at any other university. This work is free from plagiarism and the certificate for the same is attached. I agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodganga/Inflibnet.

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This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Parts of this thesis have been:

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Introduction

A Study of Body and Skin in Humanities

Rex¹ who was unveiled in 2013², the world's first most complete bionic man is proud to possess the artificial replications of two thirds of the human body organs. Rex has a heart, lungs, retinal implants, cochlear implants, pancreas, kidney, a functional circulatory system, mostly around 60 to 70 percent of the human body. Rex may have heralded the dawn of the age of bionic man and he is a glimmer of hope to the future of science that promises artificial extensions to thousands of amputees and transplant recipients around the globe. However, the concept behind the creation of Rex has been portrayed in literature and cinema years back as in *AI*, *The Island*, *The Matrix*, *I, Robot*, *Almost Human*, *Doctor Who*, Isaac Asimov series etc. The human body is a curious entity and the narratives of this body open up incredible possibilities of research. There is a new wave in researches by which, subjects and concerns that do not have a direct connection with the body also ultimately become research investigations with body as the focal point. Thus, we have ongoing researches on beauty, punishment, language, race, post colonialism etc in relation with the category of the 'body'. This tendency could probably be the result of advances in medical technology and interdisciplinary approaches appropriated by humanities and social

¹ I have used *MLA handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Seventh Edition for all citation purposes.

² All translations and emphases, unless otherwise mentioned, are mine.

sciences. In other words, the body is no more a concern of the medical discipline alone, but a serious subject of study across various disciplines.

Bryan S. Turner comments, “the body is a central feature of contemporary politics because its ambiguities, vulnerability and plasticity have been amplified by new genetic technologies” (223) which shows how “the human body has been a potent and persistent metaphor for social and political relations throughout human history” (223). Politics, cultural practices, beliefs and even personal inclinations are problematized and exhibited through the body. This tendency is what Turner calls, the ‘somatic society’; a society redefined in terms of its responses and variations to the *soma*. Any society is inextricably connected with the human conditions and concerns. So, to study the functions and activities of a society from the standpoint of the human body will be highly perceptive. The term ‘somatic’ is used in the context of the concerns that are related to the body and excludes the mind factor. Hence, the psychological parameter is beyond the scope of this project.

Susan Sontag in her book *Illness as a Metaphor* suggests that the healthiest way to approach illness is to avoid considering it as a metaphor. She says,

My point is that illness is not a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness and the healthiest way of being ill is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking (Sontag 3).

From a cultural point of view, the current thesis supports Sontag’s proposition as this study clarifies the ubiquitous nature of illnesses and how they are inextricably linked

to cultural variations. Sontag may have proposed the above statement in the context of defining the purest form of being ill. This would be detached from all meanings in which the illness experience is situated in. Although, the implication is not that illnesses are devoid of metaphors. Human beings tend to define their identities through life experiences and these experiences reassert itself as metaphors. This study proposes that the body and its illnesses are a reflection of its spatial and cultural locations. Hence, illnesses exude spatial and cultural metaphors. By quoting Sontag:

Master illnesses like TB and cancer are more specifically polemical. They are used to propose new, critical standards of individual health, and to express a sense of dissatisfaction with society as such. Unlike the Elizabethan metaphors- which complain of some general aberration or public calamity that is, in consequence, dislocating to individuals- the modern metaphors suggest a profound disequilibrium between individual and society, with society conceived as the individual's adversary. Disease metaphors are used to judge society not as out of balance but as repressive (72-73).

The health and well-being standards of individuals are constantly scrutinized by society. Governmental measures keep its citizens on toes by transferring the healthcare responsibility to its citizens. Without any doubt, the new standards of being ill and healthy are vested in commercial interests. The MNC culture and the politics of pharmaceutical companies create more 'patients' today. Even a pregnant woman is referred to as a 'patient' in a hospital. The normal fasting blood sugar which used to be 160 mg/dL was later reduced to 120 mg/dL and now made 80

mg/dL³ by corporate chains. This eventually converts millions of ‘health conscious’ individuals diabetic in a single go. This works on the discourse of self-reflexivity. That is, healthcare is extended as the individual’s responsibility making them undergo regular check up and start medication immediately once the ‘standard’ levels are crossed. Or, even the myth which is believed to be true that the cures and vaccines for most of the contemporary mortal diseases are after all being hoarded for a bigger market. The TNT network’s TV series *The Last Ship* presents this theme in the backdrop of a global pandemic. All these examples will raise the question if the advancement of science is pro-life or pro-gain. Or, if it is the commercial interests that determine the extent to which an individual is sick. To answer these concerns in this thesis, I study the metaphors of the body when it is associated with an illness. In this study, I adhere to the suggestion that diseases are metaphorical; both culturally and spatially.

When healthcare becomes an individual’s responsibility, it is also one’s prerogative whether to choose or opt out of such an entrusted responsibility. One can stand out from being frighteningly health conscious, just like how Thomas Szasz criticised psychiatry as a specialty without a medical cause: “these things called mental

³ There are international guidelines specifying the standard measure for each disease. So it’s a different decisive unit for diabetes, different for hypertension and so on. Guidelines for each measure are decided by experts based on data from large studies, which gets revised every few years. For diabetes, one of the most accepted ones is the WHO criteria. The measures mentioned here are taken from the WHO web page.

illnesses are not diseases at all but part of the vicissitudes of life”(5). In other words, he suggested that we are all ill in varying degrees and hence the scientific validity and effectiveness of the discipline was arguable. In a famous lecture by Szasz, he proposed that the psychiatric term ‘depression’ is a synonym to an ‘unhappy human being’. Or, what such terms do is nothing but turn a ‘person’ with problems into a ‘patient’ with a sickness. Hence, he reasserts that this discipline is focussed on a lost cause and as documented, in the 1960s with increasing number of psychiatrists in the US, five new mental illnesses were discovered every year. Interestingly, at present, rejecting the legitimacy of any mental illness is considered as an act of inhumanity.

Bryan S. Turner coined the term ‘somatic society’ to understand modernity too. According to Turner, modernity constitutes a society in which its moral and political problems are expressed through the medium of body. Now when the ‘somatic society’ is in question, the discussion will inevitably bring in the geographical location of the human body in question. This project will explore the human body in the Indian context with a focus on literature in Kerala⁴. An experience of illness that may be reduced to statistical data is given a somatic turn in this study. As seen through the earlier examples, illnesses are complicated by science, technology and MNC culture. The manner in which western modernity has seemingly complicated

⁴ Malayalam literature has produced significant socially conscious novels with the human body as the focal point. In M. T. Vasudevan Nair’s *Asuravithu*, the epidemic of cholera plays an important role whereas the exploration of life through the narrative of cancer becomes a favourite theme in Chandramati’s *Thirayilakkam*, N. N. Kakkad’s *Saphalamee Yatra* and Punnathil’s *Smaraka Shilakal*.

our health concerns can be directed along a new trajectory with this new perception about the body. In this thesis, I propose that it is extremely significant to acknowledge the presence of metaphors in the general character of any illness. As, various sociological, cultural and philosophical conditions participate in the formation of the identity of an illness, it is essential to study them. Thus, there could be a more human understanding of the problem and eventually a humane solution to it. The critical inquiry in this study is limited to the somatic (of the body) side of diseases and does not extend to the psychosomatic (of the body and mind).

By further narrowing down my research, I focus on a single component of the human body: the diseased skin⁵ of the human body as represented through narratives. I study how the narratives of the skin reconfigure the meanings associated with the body in order to encompass the intersections of health, self and identity. This is done by analyzing the spatial and cultural metaphors that I have sieved out of the select narratives for this study. This project aims at the skin-centered discourses of the body that occupy a central position in Kerala. Ambitiously, my research, also tries to reflect

⁵ Diseased skin could be understood in multiple ways. Skin is the surface on which the effects of various diseases can appear. Skin is the medium that can be marked as a point of entry for pathogens. Venereal diseases affect the body and its effects are generally found on the surface of the body/skin. C. Radhakrishnan's novel "*Pullippulikalam Vellinakshathrangalum*" explores this. The character Andrew Beckett, immortalized by Tom Hanks in Jonathan Demme's movie *Philadelphia* has Kaposi's sarcoma (a skin lesion which is an AIDS defining condition). The cultural study of venereal diseases like AIDS and its historical association with homosexuality is a research area within itself, making it beyond the scope of this present project.

on the centrality of the discourse of skin in contemporary India although, it is a seemingly impossible target considering the inherent multiplicities within the idea of 'India'. The following sections of this chapter will systematically elaborate the rationale of my study of skin cultures.

The Human Body as a Research Canvass in Humanities: Historical Fragments

The significance of the human body in disciplines across borders is very obvious. However, what is left unnoticed is to what extent this 'significant' positioning of the body has affected our ways of thinking and acting. Has it been always to take care of the body in terms of preventing diseases and ensuring good health? Or has it moved on to protecting certain specific bodies? And in this particular scenario, what are the different kinds of bodies that are left out without representation and inclusion? This project tries to consider some of these bodies that exist without representation and the ones that are misrepresented.

History tells us that, Body Culture Studies is a focussed field of study which critically enquired the participation of the human body and the various bodily practices within the larger context of culture and society. This branch of study which began among the historians and the sociologists developed into a specialized form of enquiry called as Sports Studies during the 1980s. Later on, it included the analysis of dance, dramatics, aerobics, gymnastics and other movement cultures which further transgressed to include the study of diverse cultures of festivals, of gender and sexual cultures, of fashion etc.

Bernadette Wegenstein sums up in her book, *Getting Under the Skin*,

The usefulness of the body to critical analysis lies in the fact that we both are and have bodies. The body is a material organism, but also a metaphor; it is the trunk apart from head and limbs, but also the person as in ‘anybody’ and ‘somebody’. The body is at once the most solid, the most elusive, illusory, concrete, metaphorical, ever present and ever distant thing a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity (Wegenstein 2).

Such endless possibilities of the body have been the reason for anxiety and delight among thinkers and practitioners around the world. What Barbara Maria Stafford coined as ‘body criticism’ will help us understand the contemporary concept of the body. This is because what the body has become today and how we might be utilizing the possibilities of the body in future has a long history of its own. And without understanding this history of body criticism it will be meaningless to analyze the contemporary status of the body in this study. Stafford’s work is primarily focused on Enlightenment Art and Medicine and how this historical period dealt with the inside of the body. She centers on the visualization element of the body and as she puts it, her work is directed on “key pictorial strategies for externalizing the internal” (Stafford 45).

There should not be any doubt over the fact that the way we perceived the body has changed over the years. The redefinition of the body has been fostered by a crucial turn in the way we have understood the body: the body as a single unified wholesome

experience to the body-in-pieces perception. Historians are of the opinion that modernity has caused this body-in-pieces verbiage. The debate between body-in-pieces and unified body has only resulted in a reawakening of body discourses and a reconfiguration of the body in popular imagination. One can suggest that psychoanalysis, cognitive sciences, digital technology, economics etc. have contributed to the recreation of the human body.

Modernity has altered our understanding of what constitutes being healthy and unhealthy. Harry Lesser notes that midwifery was a craft different from medical profession and today it is part of medicine with advanced medical techniques which has made childbirth easier. Similarly, infertility is a disease today because science and medicine can ‘cure’ it. Another noticeable disease is aging. Earlier, weakening of muscles and bones were considered as inevitable components in the process of aging. But today with medicine, we try to postpone this disease and we try to retain vigour as long as possible. In short, the possibilities of the body are explored and the resulting concerns, in Wegenstein’s words are “related to the nature of personhood, identity and individualism” (4). The debates within this discourse of body and the ensuing questions on identity formation are studied in this project.

The discourses around the body are extensively explored by philosophers both the living and the dead. Of the many key ideas propounded by the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, ‘body without organs/BWO’ is a determining factor to our present day understanding of the body in philosophy and psychoanalysis. This concept suggests that ‘body without organs’ is an attempt of the self to attain a pure

and unblemished subjectivity. They also refer to it as a practice of resistance in order to liberate the self from imposed thoughts and constructs. Thereby, the body can travel across 'boundaries' without being under the vigilante operations of the society. My study of individual identities through the select narratives on skin proves that these individual bodies constantly displayed a struggle to get out of that state of impurity and attain freedom from all restraints. Their paths were different but ultimately all of them wanted a BWO status. In the select texts, there is a leper's body that crossed boundaries through death, smallpox affected bodies which defined a community's identity, burn victim's bodies which traversed the limits set by society and so forth.

Of the many other thinkers, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's *Corpus* problematizes the body and the soul in contemporary times. He regards writing about the body and the body itself writing as markers of modernity. He suggests that "the body's on edge, at an extreme limit: it comes toward us from the greatest distance; the horizon is the body's multitude, approaching" (Nancy 9). The panorama of possibilities offered by the body is reasserted within this statement. This project is an attempt to unveil the inapproachability of the body and to bring it closer from that extreme limit. Skin is used as a medium to do so in this project because skin is an interface between the self and the world. Skin brings the self to the world and vice versa. Skin lets the world see us. Skin makes us visible. All the narratives studied in this project (narratives on leprosy, smallpox, leucoderma, wart and burn victims) integrate the utility of the epidermis.

The skin envelopes the individual in a labyrinth and it is a labyrinth from which one cannot escape from. At the same time, it offers enough space to the individual to invent, reinvent and destroy their individual selves. The French philosopher Georges Bataille suggested that literature is not innocent in his work *Literature and Evil* and he compared literature with evil. According to Bataille, for a complete communication between the reader and author, which is actually the essence of a creative process, the author must possess a certain level of morality. This morality can be acquired only when the author comprehends all the levels of Evil. In short, Evil transforms into what completes a creative process. In his case studies of Emily Bronte, Charles Baudelaire, Franz Kafka, William Blake, Marcel Proust, Michelet, and Genet, Bataille details how these authors symbolically die and resurrect in distinct ways. When these writers are connected with the “deep recesses of the human soul to produce their works” (Lewis “George Bataille”), readers are also motivated to look inside themselves. It is an interesting observation and in my study, I have observed that literature can bring out the best and the worst in individuals. The literature utilized in this study recreates individuals and individual histories where everything has skin as the common bearing. The identities that are produced through the literary texts chosen for this study offer an alternative agency for identity formation.

As sampled above, the extent of Body Criticism is very broad and it is impossible to document all existing theories on the body. Hence, only certain fragments of the popular theories are discussed and summarized in the second chapter of this thesis.

The perspectives on the body from humanities and social sciences are voiced in popular journals like *Body and Society*, *Body Image*, *Literature and Medicine*, *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, etc. Henceforth, by coalescing thoughts from multiple disciplines, Body Culture Studies has entered the folds of Comparative Literature too. This project intends to bring a systematic approach to body studies in India.

Various dictionaries define the word ‘culture’ as a collective manifestation of ideas, customs, social behaviour and other human intellectual achievements of a particular group of people at a particular point of time in history. Scholars of culture have discussed the production and consumption of culture over the years. Raymond Williams calls the word ‘culture’ as one of the most complicated words in English language because of its intricate historical development. The crucial distinction which he draws on the term ‘culture’ in cultural studies and cultural anthropology is significant here: “It is especially interesting that in archaeology and in cultural anthropology the reference to culture or a culture is primarily to material production, while in history and cultural studies the reference is primarily to signifying or symbolic systems” (Williams 91). In this study, culture is understood as a symbolic system engaged in the production of meanings through its engagement with metaphors. Stuart Hall’s circuit of culture presents the understanding of the term ‘culture’ through ‘shared meanings’. This study is on the cultural understanding of the human body through the medium of skin.

The human body has undergone various cultural transformations and revivals, as a result of which, the multiple capabilities of the body are channelized by the various

faculties of the society. The most obvious reconfiguration of the body is seen through its association with medicine. The medicalized body is the most highly visible and mostly experimented form of the body. As Arthur Frank puts it rightly, “our capacity to experience the body directly, or theorize it indirectly is inextricably medicalized” (136). The body in medicine or the medicalized body can be classified in a number of ways owing to its capacity in becoming a site for observation and treatment. The medicalized body alone can have different forms like healthy body, diseased body, disabled body, dead body, surgical body, patient’s body, cosmetic body, deformed body, burnt body etc. These classifications define the body in certain ways. The experience of different kinds of diseases attributes different identities to the individual. The experience of an individual with an STD in a society and what his/her body will go through is different from what an individual with malaria will face. Thus the illness experience furnishes the body with new meanings. A medical condition will get a new identity with its cultural bearings.

ShivVishwanathan’s keynote address⁶ at a National Seminar on “The Enigma of Health, Maladies and the Politics of Healing” criticized the overspecialization component of modern healthcare profession. He suggested that there is a connectedness with all aspects of health and thus it is incomplete to see it in isolation.

⁶ Shiv Vishvanathan delivered this key note address at the National Seminar on “The Enigma of Health, Maladies and the Politics of Healing” conducted by Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences at IIT, Gandhinagar on 25th March 2011.

Nevertheless, for my research, I am only concentrating on the cultural study of the skin to formulate thoughts on the self and identity.

Susan Sontag regards illness and health as two kingdoms of the self in her book, *Illness as a Metaphor*:

Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place (3).

Through her claims of a dual citizenship, she points out the creation and association of one's identity with an illness. One's existence with regard to each of these citizenships will also determine one's identity. Although eventually all that matters is how effectively we make use of these citizenships. In contemporary times, illness and disease are used as imagery for several things including unwarranted assumptions like of social taboos.

Siddhartha Mukherjee's *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer* narrates a different tale altogether. He talks about how cancer has enveloped human civilization over the years. If the citizenship analogy is applied to this biography of cancer one can say that individuals lose their citizenship rights when they respond and relapse to the cancer drugs. They become 'nowhere' individuals as they do not belong to any categories. He recollects in his book, "it was the most sublime moment

of my clinical life to have watched that voyage in reverse, to encounter men and women *returning* from that strange country, to see them so very close, clambering back” (Mukherjee 400). Narratives on cancer which is an extremely resourceful area within cultural studies goes beyond the scope of this project but the ‘nowhere-ness’ and citizenship rights in relation to disease and identity find a place in this research. The narratives on leprosy which are studied in this project elucidate how this whole discourse worked on an element of segregation and how a leper became a nowhere citizen.

The emergence of body as a topic of research in humanities and social sciences is also because of its efficiency to become a site for discipline and resistance. We find strict discipline being imposed on bodies as in a military camp or even a protest marked in the form of a hunger strike. In both these cases, the body goes through a harsh regimented experience. To observe regimented body through the lens of regimented institutions like a military camp or a prison is also another trajectory to study the reconfiguration of the body.

In order to show the expanse of this study, it is also significant to note that the human body has obtained a central position in religion and religious studies. It has ranged over ritual cleanliness, gender-biased ritual purity, sinless body, pilgrim body etc. Apart from these concerns that are common to most religions, every religion has its own specific practices and beliefs that are related to the body. The Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) prohibit women from taking part in its cultic activities because they are regarded as ritually unclean. Hinduism emphasizes greatly

on ritual cleanliness and the purification acts become extremely elaborate when it comes to significant festivals and other occasions like the funeral rites, anniversary of the dead etc.

The body is commodified through institutionalized religion. Religion is the centre stone in a country like India where there is a multiplicity of religions and religious institutions are everywhere becoming a part and parcel of public lives. Religion acts as a binder between the individual and the society although it is parachuting issues of intolerance in contemporary India. In economic terms, India attracts a large number of pilgrims to its various destinations. Medical tourism is one among the various tourism packages offered by the Government of India. Along with the travels for physical health, India has tourists splurging in for spiritual well-being as well. There are people who travel to these places every year and to them it means more than just touring around.

Having mentioned the medical body, regimental body and the body in religion, I turn to the study of the body in India. Apart from medical sciences, the research explorations of the body in Indian academia are scattered. India does not have a single established centre or department for the cultural and literary study of bodies except for the singled-out projects that are undertaken in the various disciplines within Humanities and Social Sciences. This lacuna of researches in India is where a researcher like me finds a space to explain the logical basis of my study on skin cultures in Comparative Literature.

Most of the contemporary Indian observations of the body are from a postcolonial perspective⁷. Moreover, I do not think that it is easy for Indian writers to surpass western philosophy of the body and skin as our understanding, manifestation and thinking of the body is deeply oriented and influenced by the western notions⁸ on the same. In Malayalam literature, medical reading of literature was recommended by V. Rajakrishnan, K.P. Appan, B. Iqbal, Punnathil Kunjabdulla etc. K.P. Appan's *Rogavum Sahitya Bhavanayum* and B. Iqbal's *Alice-inte Adbuda Rogam* are utilized in this study.

Apart from the postcolonial theories, various post structural theories have also placed the body in a crucial flux. By this, the body is to be considered as a cultural construct and not merely as a natural entity. Thereby, everything that emerges from and

⁷ Within contemporary scholarship in India, the study of the body in Humanities and Social Sciences are situated within the context of skin colour. Both the European readings like the ones by Sara Mills, Isabella Fane, Eliza Fay etc or the native studies like the ones by Meenakshi Mukherjee, Gauri Vishwanathan etc have the undertones of skin colour, when they contextualize the colonial othering. This, I find is quite a reductionist approach in understanding the trope of body.

⁸ T. V. Madhu's study of the body reiterates Michel Foucault as he proposes that the basis of modern medicine is dead bodies. The surgical incision and opening up of dead bodies explain the mysteries of the human body. He calls a stethoscope as the symbolic representation of the ways of modern medicine and the doctor's approach towards an ailment. When a checkup room (hospital) disrobes an individual from all social and cultural associations, the diseased body comes under the doctor's observation with the touch of a stethoscope and the disease communicates through that touch. Abey Koshy talks about 'absolute health'. Departing from the idea of taking care of the body to stay healthy, he proposes that happiness is the root and basis of staying healthy.

through the body will be a scrutinized dissemination of the power relations of any particular culture in question. As Kaustav Chakraborty's *De-stereotyping Indian Body and Desire* suggests, "the bodies of a certain culture are the 'embodiment' of the ideas of those who hold power in that culture. The corporality of the body, in this sense, is a cultural site in which the subtle political ideologies are deftly imposed, and accordingly the 'correct'/'sanctioned' desire is expected to germinate" (Chakraborty ix). The identities that are studied in my project are evidently not the mainstream bodies or entities and thus it questions the existing power structures and subverts the power hierarchies that exist in the Indian public domain. The discourse of desire suggested by Chakraborty becomes crucial in this study as it projects the culture of sentiments and emotions associated with the body. This component of the culture of sentiments is taken up in this study for identification with the self.

The Current Skin Project

This study will fall under the larger framework of Medical Humanities which is defined as a "term that broadly includes an interdisciplinary field of humanities (literature, philosophy, ethics, history and religion), social science (anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, sociology), and the arts (literature, theatre, film, and visual arts) and their application to medical education and practice" ("LitMed"). A study on the reconfigurations of the body within this framework will create new models of the body as this study will be cross pollinating thoughts and ideas from an array of disciplines. Medical Humanities might be easily mistaken for the sub disciplines like Medical Sociology (US) or Sociology of Health and Illness (Britain

and Australia). Medical Humanities, due to its literature component, is extremely keen about the lived experiences of an illness, the way people think and feel about it, how it affects the society, how individuals and society relate to illness and body, values, knowledge and responsibilities. It enables an act of enquiry and considers an attempt of reflection of the lived experience.

The University College of Medical Sciences (UCMS), Delhi, was the first in the country to introduce Medical Humanities into its curriculum in 2009. Dr. Navjeevan Singh of UCMS observes that transplanting other's ideas of medical humanities into the Indian cultural context may appear to be the easy way out but what is required is a humanities programme for medical students derived from our own cultural context. By keeping this in mind, this project will try to anthologize narratives of the body written within the Indian context to the extent where language does not take me any forward.

This thesis is divided into four chapters along with an Introduction and Conclusion. To study the reconfigurations of the human body in this project, my primary texts are narrations of the Indian experiences that were written during the 20th and 21st centuries. Narratives in which skin is a common factor are utilized in this project to propose the various identities that emerge through the medium of skin. This includes narratives on diseases like leucoderma, smallpox and leprosy, skin conditions like warts and experiences of the skin in acid and fire attacks. The fictional representations of these cases might provide an exaggerated image of the actual incident but the fact that these incidents actually happened cannot be ignored.

Although the medical education constituent is not a part of my project I utilize medical history and philosophical understanding of medical culture in my study. In order to substantiate this, I refer to the archival data⁹ on the epidemic of smallpox and leprosy in Kerala which I have compiled for the purpose of this research.

In the first chapter titled, “Journeying through the Skin: Skin as a Subject and Object of Popular Imagination”, I examine the ways in which the skin becomes a powerful medium for medicalization, commodification, demystification and governance of the body. I trace the oft quoted cultural issues related to the skin like race/class, beautiful/ugly, obese/anorexic etc. In this chapter I also incorporate the existing social and cultural practices that are benefitted by skin manipulations like (ab)uses of animal skin, various ancient and current cultural practices that disfigure or mutilate the body (piercings, tattoos and other body art) etc. Various agencies manipulate the space offered by skin through the discourses of gender, fashion, health etc. The evolving notions on hygiene, dirt, germ etc are compiled in this chapter. A close analysis of ad campaigns of personal hygiene products that are popular in the Indian markets is done in this chapter in order to validate the arguments. In short, this chapter shows the range and significance of my research questions.

In the second chapter titled, “Getting under the Skin: Various Frameworks to the Study of Skin Cultures”, I present and elaborate my research questions in order to set the pace for the coming chapters. Apart from the existing theoretical discourses on the

⁹ I have gathered archival materials from the Kerala State Archives situated at Nalanda, Thiruvananthapuram.

skin, in this chapter I collate my contribution to Body Criticism. I argue that the body has attained the role of a medium as a result of modernity. It has moved out of its status as a unified whole to a fragmented entity and at present it occupies the role of a medium for identity formation. So is the case with skin also. Before the development of dermatology, skin was seen as a protective covering for the mysterious ‘body’ inside. It was only much later in the nineteenth century that dermatology was established as an academic discipline. Hence, skin has also moved out of its mould as a mere covering of the body to what it has become today; an entity with its own identity. The representation of the ‘body without the skin’ was an educational tool to unveil the hidden innards of the body, while, at present, the representation of the body has reversed into ‘skin without the body’. This understanding of the skin allows medical and cultural scrutiny of the largest and most visible organ of the body.

Skin is a powerful instrument and it is utilized in multifarious ways giving us diverse directions for interpretations. Skin is an ever-engaging space. What happens on the skin is visible and thus a place for an event of existence. This chapter offers an elaboration of how the rhetoric of the skin becomes an aesthetic tool for the reconfiguration of health and identity. This chapter will also elaborate the theoretical frameworks within which this project can be situated.

In the third chapter titled, “Scars, Spots and Speckles: ‘Marks’ as an Alternative Imaginary of Identity Formation”, I analyse narratives on smallpox, leucoderma and wart in order to propose how the marks left by these diseases can generate an alternative imaginary for one’s identity formation. The fictional representations of

these diseases are studied in conjunction with the archival data so as to understand the State's perspectives on such diseased bodies. The marks on the skin and its effect on one's identity are studied in terms of the identity of the disease, diseased individual and the affected community.

O V Vijayan's cryptic short story "The Wart" is a political allegory. Written during India's emergency period, the 'wart' in the short story can be read as a metaphor for power. We find how the growth and development of the wart and the marks it leaves on the body can be aligned with India's malicious power struggle during the emergency period. A minor nick on the protagonist's face which reveals the presence of the wart on his face turns out to be a tale which is filled with a lot of anxiety and lust for power. Thereafter we see the wart establishing its presence and identity on the man's face by isolating and imprisoning the man from his society. It goes on to exploit the man's identity by making him commit atrocities to his own body. The wart literally transforms the man and it reaches the pinnacle of exercising power and authority over the man. At this point of time the man thinks that the wart is one with him, and it has an existence only in physical attachment with his face. It is disproved when the wart eventually abandons the man and becomes an elephant while the man is turned into an invisible worm. The identity transformations of the bodies in the short story also denote the power struggles in a society. Vijayan demonstrates how the surface of the body screams out the identity of a disease. In this short story, the identity of the disease works in multiple levels: identity of the wart, identity of the carrier (man) and identity of the modified bodies (elephant and the worm).

Through Sudha Murty's novella *Mahashweta*, I introduce the possibility of an alternative imaginary for identity formation with the diseased self as a focal point. Leucoderma affected protagonist of the novella represents Indian superstitions in the midst of India's confusing modernity. I have borrowed Claudia Benthien's framework on skin and the self to grapple with the identity of the diseased in *Mahashweta*. The protagonist explains the existence of her 'self' within the skin and without the skin. Through *Mahashweta*, I go on to narrate the identity of the self which is constantly transgressing, making it the new elastic self. The transgressing self is indeed a product of modernity enabling it to accommodate hybridity, fluidity and transformation.

With Kakkanadan's novel *Vasoori*, I illustrate how the marks on the skin can determine the identity of a community. Smallpox also called as the 'speckled monster' leaves four different kinds of marks on the skin which defines a community's identity. The marks left by the disease denote marks of struggle and suffering, marks of survival, marks of precaution and marks of deceit and control. I have argued that the last two marks have strong undercurrents of colonialism. This proposition has been validated by the natives' experiences under the colonial rulers which are documented in the archival materials¹⁰ I had collected for this study.

¹⁰ The archival materials collected and analyzed in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis were letters in the form of manuscripts and typescripts. These were taken from the directories of healthcare department, public works department, forest department and construction department at the Kerala State Archives inventory.

In the fourth chapter titled, “Mutilated Skins and Distorted Identities: On the Emergence of ‘Disability’ from Skin”, I study narratives on leprosy and burn cases. The question of identity is extended to the proposition that in these cases, disability emerges through skin resulting in disabled bodies. I argue that disability is driven by both social and biological dimensions as a result of which these disabled bodies are side-lined to the margins of a society. I suggest that the select narratives on leprosy perform an excavation of existing metaphors of liminality only to find that disabled bodies exist in the interstices of these existing images itself. By analysing Kamala Markandaya’s novel *The Nowhere Man*, Thoppil Bhasi’s play *Aswamedam* and S K Pottekat’s short story “*Asramathinte Neduveerppukal*”, I propose that the metaphor of migrants, metaphor of vagrants, metaphor of de-sexed category and metaphor of incurables recreate an order for disabled bodies in popular imagination.

While tracing the history of leprosy in India, I found that the attempts at the eradication of leprosy worked on the principle of segregation and not on the careful scrutiny of the medical aspects of the disease. On a different vein of thought, the colonial manifesto performed well with its focused approach on education, religion and land in India. By combining both these thoughts, I suggest that the adoption of isolation and segregation to eradicate leprosy was closely connected to the setting up of leprosy asylums in designated lands which was far away from human settlements. The European fear of getting contracted with leprosy (physical degradation) and the Indian fear of the caste system (physical and moral degradation) facilitated the need to segregate leprosy infected patients and isolate them in faraway lands. The letters

which were collected from the Kerala State Archives during the course of this research reflect the counter currents prominent during the nineteenth century with regard to the setting up of leprosy asylums.

In this chapter, I also study how disability generates a culture of emotions. I propose the argument that the emergence of disability due to burn injuries (fire and acid attacks/accidents) generates new forms of sense experiences. Malayattoor Ramakrishnan's novel, *Yakshi* is closely read for its examination of burn injuries through the protagonist Srinivasan. We are constantly engaged in a search to find an appropriate language to express our culture, history and memory. Consequently, we generate emotions that are layered with meanings. Shame, fear, love, laughter, anxiety etc form a unique culture of emotions that narrate cultural experiences objectively. In this study, I propose that the disability emerging through the medium of skin can give rise to a culture of distress and a culture of disgust. Hence, the way in which such bodies associate their relationship with the world is also reconfigured in essence. This is where cultures of distress and disgust give voice to the new environments of experience.

And in the Conclusion titled, "The Future of Dermatological Explorations", I summarize this research by tying the loose ends and by suggesting the various possibilities to pursue this research further. The research options entail the expanse of the discourse of skin which is yet to be explored in detail with Humanities and Social Sciences.

The ‘Telling’ and ‘Writing’ of Stories on the Skin

The term ‘body’ includes pointers like culture, colour, power etc. It is a buzzword in contemporary academic writing that incorporates techniques of production, consumption, marketing, commodification etc and debates on gender, empire, fashion, sports, health, medicine, hygiene, eroticism etc. Consequently, as Erin O. Connor suggests, “the body emerges as a dramatic theoretical character capable of striking any number of poignant attitudes: there are, to name a very few, the body in pain, unstable bodies, bodies under siege, virtual bodies, recovering bodies, extraordinary bodies, and bodies that matter” (Connor “Epitaph for the Body Politic”). All these may come under what is called as body criticism. The discussions on the body also extend to postcolonial theory, race theory, gender theory, performance theory, queer theory and cyber theory. The body has an overwhelming presence in all the discourses of a society and more interestingly they are all researched upon too.

When the ‘body’ gets attached with new meanings, the idea of human body is also reconfigured in essence. Body can be understood as a surface on which history’s and culture’s messages are inscribed. Probably, body is inherently meaningless and we usually ignore it simply as a part of ourselves. Indeed, it is a part of us, but the potential and importance of the body with regard to social identification cannot be side-lined. It is only when the body goes through certain experiences that it acquires meanings. Be it a cultural practice or an infliction of some kind of an emotion, the

body generates a new meaning to itself. Thereby, we will have a new association to be made with the body.

Thus, body is studied as a product of culture as it derives multiple meanings from various cultural practices. Scholars in social sciences and humanities study rituals, clothing, bodily decorations, cannibalism, sacrifices, medicine, martyrdom, religion, war etc to determine the limits and boundaries of the body. The potential of the body to become sites for pleasure, resistance, violence and power are dramatized in popular culture narratives. Literature of all times has represented these different attributes given to the body. Various theories on the body have come up with its growing significance in advertising and consumerism. Ethical questions regarding cloning, surgical stealing of body parts, patenting of one's own genetic material, abortion, physician assisted death/euthanasia etc are discussed in contemporary social theory. With the inception of postmodernism, the discussions about the body include trans-humanism, cyber bodies, cyberpunk etc. Every social, cultural and political activity leaves us with some kind of a body or the other. In short, the body is everywhere and its relevance keeps seeping into our lives with more vigour and force. Thus, this project will come under the cloud of Culture Studies.

Having presented some of the ongoing presence of the 'body' in Humanities and Social Sciences, I present the main focus of this current research: which is the visible 'skin' of the human body. The surface of the body is a space which is always seen and ignored except for matters of 'beauty' and 'purity' in the Indian context. The infantilization of individual identities to the colour of skin has received harsh

criticism in India. The Indian fixation with fair skin is rooted in its venomous caste system¹¹. As Vivek Dhareshwar observes caste is a quintessential component of the secular self's cultural narrative¹². The politics of fair skin is detailed in the first chapter of this thesis. The prospect of purity in relation to the skin can be traced back to the discourse of untouchability in the Indian context, which is again a by-product of the social stratification. A cultural understanding of untouchability is intrinsically related to the sense of touch and contact and hence, the skin. Without being in contact with something, we can't touch something. As Sundar Sarukkai observes in *The Cracked Mirror*:

Contact is one phenomenological experience of touch. We touch things when we are in contact with them. The moment of contact is also the act of erasing the distance between us and the object. Touch could be seen as something that erases the distance between the subject and the object (163).

But even during this act of touch, there exists a brief period of 'untouch' - "this ever-present intervening body constitutes an untouchable element in touch, a skin or

¹¹ Artist P. S Jaya conducted a social experiment in Kerala, where she painted herself in black paint for 100 days in order to create awareness about casteism. Her attempt to translate injustice into art and to draw attention to caste prejudices in society was done after the death of a Dalit Ph..D scholar, Rohith Vemula at University of Hyderabad.

¹² In the essay "Caste and Secular Self", Dhareshwar argues that the historiography of the Indian nation state and the biography of the secular self structures are deeply inter-connected. He analyses how the discourse of repression of caste occurs in relation to English language and class semiotics.

membrane that separates the skin from things but cannot be felt” (Sarukkai 163). In short, the idea of untouchability is always linked to the act of touch. After presenting the philosophy of touch, he interprets untouchability in the Indian cultural traditions. As skin can be associated with the idea of boundaries, the practice of untouchability is also to do with crossing boundaries. This suggestion is taken up for analysis in this thesis. With regard to caste system and untouchability in India, Sarukkai argues:

Since the notion of untouchability is an essential requirement of Brahminhood, the displacement of this characteristic to the untouchables illustrates not just the ‘outsourcing’ of untouchability but also a philosophical move of supplementation. It is through this process of supplementation that untouchability becomes a positive virtue for the Brahmins and a negative fact for the Dalits (158).

Thus, the purity of the body is directly connected to the purity of the individual. The skin that defines the individual which, when is impure and untouchable will make the individual also impure and untouchable¹³. This has to be seen as a phenomenon common to all the skin related conditions discussed in this thesis. This defining quality of the skin maps an individual’s identity in the Indian context. It gets highly problematic when skin alone is seated with so much power over an individual’s

¹³ K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu have compiled Dalit writings from Tamil Nadu and Kerala in their edited volume *No Alphabet in Sight*. Dalit writers of fiction have dealt with disfigurement of the body from a caste angle but not in relation to the diseased skin. A similar approach to body is done in Arjun Dangle’s edited collection of short stories, *Poisoned Bread*.

physical and moral identity- “the skin as a map of character and moral disposition illustrates how an untouchable’s skin embodies certain moral properties; once untouchability is inscribed on an individual, then the impossibility of crossing the wall of untouchability” (Sarukkai 170). He calls the sense of touch as a physical sense and identifies it as a moral sense also¹⁴. In other words, physical impurity gets translated as moral impurity. Accordingly,

The implication of this is that natural ‘dirt’ gets related to moral ‘dirt’. Or those who are morally ‘impure’ also embody this impurity in their natural body. Thus, in literary descriptions of the Candalas, they are described as ‘deformed, foul smelling and ugly’; these are characteristics that reflect and add to the notion of impurity associated with that community (Sarukkai 173).

Or, as Richard Burton illustrates the diversity of melancholy and its effects on the skin in his book *The Anatomy of Melancholy*,

If it be within the body, and not putrefied, it causeth black jaundice; if putrefied, a quartan ague; if it break out to the skin, leprosy; if to parts, several maladies, as scurvy, &c. If it troubles the mind; as it is diversely mixed, it produceth several kinds of madness and dotage: of which in their place (Burton 156).

¹⁴ Aditya Nigam’s article “Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique” offers an alternative Dalit critique of caste which is beyond untouchability and its related ritualistic practices. According to Nigam, the modern incarnations of casteism depends on the contemporary discourses of efficiency, merit and hygiene. In this context, questions of purity and pollution are also articulated with a modern outlook.

I employ the tradition of storytelling in this project to illustrate the role of skin. Our lives are essentially moulded through the stories we hear. Stories pass through our lives by teaching us good and bad, right and wrong, telling us who we are and where we belong. Stories create and complete us in that sense. Memories are stored in the form of a long narrative - an association of incidents, people, places, books, stories, media etc in our brain. The surface of the body also plays a significant role in storing some of these 'stories' of the past. Thus, our skin might take the role of story tellers and we might also become characters in someone else's stories. We listen to other's stories and we learn from it.

Siddhartha Mukherjee observes in his biography on cancer that all patients are storytellers. Their stories narrate agony, pain, suffering, moments of despair and resilience. "A patient, long before he becomes the subject of medical scrutiny, is, at first, simply a storyteller, a narrator of suffering-a traveller who has visited the kingdom of the ill. To relieve an illness, one must begin, then, by unburdening its story" (Mukherjee 46). Taking this analogy to the skin narratives, this thesis proposes that there is no other place other than skin where the patients' sufferings are converted into a visible story.

A cultural study of skin gained the attention of researchers in the 20th and 21st centuries. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey's edited collection, *Thinking Through the Skin* from 2001 compiled essays on a project of understanding the body as both the subject and object of thinking from a feminist perspective. The year 2004 produced

two crucial works on the cultural study of skin namely Steven Connor's *The Book of Skin* and Claudia Benthien's *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World*. These works have read the skin in multiple levels by taking examples from literature, medicine, paintings etc and both these works are thoroughly used in the course of my research. Michel Serres' *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* was published in 2008 which is a philosophical approach to the study of skin through the possibilities of the sensoria. The most recent 2015 edited collection *Probing the Skin: Cultural Representations of Our Contact Zone* by Caroline Rosenthal and Dirk Vanderbeke is a continuation of the projects initiated by Connor and Benthien. The essays in this collection deal with skin as a sensual organ, as a contact zone and as the visual marker of identity.

In my study, narratives portraying visible transformations on the surface of the body are selected. Skin is the canvass on which all inscriptions occur. Artists like Orlan use skin as a medium to express her art forms. She utilizes extreme body modification surgeries as an artistic procedure on her skin canvass. The traumatic pasts and the scars of a painful lived experience can be marked on the skin. Whichever theories we analyse, say race theory, postcolonial theory or gender theory, 'skin' becomes a very powerful tool. Skin can also be considered as a metaphor for the expression of certain experiences. Keeping this in mind, an attempt is made to develop a methodology that will consider the 'skin' as an aesthetic textual device and also as a surface for the expression of lived experiences. This project is also interested in the notions of the

body in relation to disease, dirt and disability, while studying the intersections of health and identity.

Skin is a space that allows experimentation (medical, scientific etc), commodification (fashion, clothing, and apparel industries), beautification (cosmetics) and also other specific political and religious uses. Jean-Luc Nancy observes that the body is not a “filled space” (15) by which he means that the body is an open space which allows filling up of its emptiness. Bodies allow existence of things in that sense:

Yet it is a skin, variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, exogastrulated, orificed, evasive, invaded, stretched, relaxed, excited, distressed, tied, untied. In these and thousands of other ways, the body makes room for existence ... the transcendental resides in an indefinite modification and spacious modulation of skin (Nancy 15).

As a result of each of these, various identities emerge. The emerging identities could be weak or strong and all of them may not be the same either. To follow Jean-Luc Nancy’s thoughts on the same, it would be valid to regard the body as neither the signified nor the signifier. The emerging identities may not directly correlate with the surface that initiated its emergence- which is the body. The body is “exposing/exposed: *ausgedehnt*, an extension of the breakthrough that existence is. An extension of the there, the site of a breakthrough through which *it can come in from the world*. A mobile extension, spacings, geological and cosmological displacements, drifts, sutures and fractures in archi-continents of sense, in

immemorial tectonic plates shifting under our feet, under our history. *The body is the architectonics of sense*” (Nancy 25).

As new identities emerge with regard to the discourse of health, people with disabilities and people with enhanced body conditions are two possibilities. My project is trying to show why such multiplicities should not be considered as a problem within itself. The physical bodies of individuals are different and so are the individual identities too. So, what we should aim for is a unity in the midst of such pluralities. People with differences and disabilities might be around us and a conscious effort must be taken to consider them as a part of the society and not as an outcast. The contemporary discussions and debates in the name of their empowerment can only rehabilitate the same issues in different forms. A bolder leap forward is required to abandon the idea of rehabilitation and to adopt co-existence.

Skin as mentioned earlier, is a platform on which the questions and at times even solutions with regard to staying healthy is precipitated. The emerging identities might be shocking and also pleasing to a keen consumer (reader). This study does not disapprove the role of science and technology in lengthening our lives or making it more comfortable, rather it respects the science around it. But this study cannot be categorized as medical history proper. It will be a part of McMedical history, meaning an offspring or a product of medical history. This is because only the cultural representations of certain biological conditions are studied in this project.

The current skin project presents the multifarious possibilities of the skin. Identity is a crucial category for analysis especially within our postmodern world where we experience and understand the 'selves' as fragmented and multi-dimensional. The skin which is a potential medium for identity formation is studied and analysed in the following chapters. In this project, I regard the markings on the body as a potential tangent for identity formation. The skin enables us to see the different meanings attached with these identities that are marked on the surface of the body. When skin is considered (as it has been since time immemorial) as an effective medium of communication, it also calls our attention to how this medium can be manipulated for further effective and sustainable uses. Some pointers to this query are investigated in my research especially within the Indian context.

Chapter One

Journeying Through the Skin: Skin as a Subject and Object of Popular

Imagination

Rahul Inamdar's mural installation, *Skin the label* at the Godrej India Culture¹⁵ Lab's special event, *Vikhroli Skin* begins with the following lines: "Skin / My sense / My defence / My shape / My colour / My label / Inevitable / Does the skin cover me? / Or does it hide me? / Close your eyes / Touch the wall / Where is it black? / Where is it white?" (Inamdar "Skin the Label"). These lines condense the timeworn discussions on gender, ethnicity, fashion, identity, medicine etc and thereby they stoutly echo the cultural scrutiny of the body's periphery- the skin. To expound the key idea in the above lines, the skin is a label that gives us information about the 'product'. The skin labels you. The skin is the biological bar code. It is visible and palpable unlike the inaccessible, sophisticated codes of our genomes. As Jean Luc Nancy calls the body as a place for an event of existence, I suggest that the skin appears to be a very powerful medium for medicalization, commodification, demystification and governance of the body. Through this chapter I try to trace the cultural genealogy (not

¹⁵ Based at Vikhroli, Mumbai, *The Godrej India Culture Lab* defines itself as "a fluid experimental space that cross-pollinates ideas and people to explore what it means to be modern and Indian" ("Godrej India"). The Lab organizes conferences, lectures and other events where quality conversations are facilitated and young talents are moulded. *Vikhroli Skin* was a one-day pop up event which was a conglomeration of art, music, food, fashion, technology, performances etc

medical history per se) of the skin by recording the existing trends and exposing novel perspectives on the language of the skin. One will find that skin is considered and utilized as a subject and object of popular imagination through the various cultural practices that are traced in this chapter.

Raymond Williams suggests that ‘culture’ is a complicated word in English language because of its intricate historical development both in linguistic terms (etymology) and also as a noun of process (a term for different practices in a society). The modern development and usage of this word is explained as “the idea of a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, applied and effectively transferred to the works and practices which represent and sustain it” (Williams 80). Thus the ‘skin cultures’ that emerge through my study is not the physical application of skin in dermatology (culturing of skin cells) to identify the identity of germs. Instead, skin cultures denote the various social, cultural, artistic and political manipulations, developments and representations that are associated with the dermis.

The etymology of the word ‘skin’ can be traced back to Old Norse word *skinn* which means animal hide or fur. From being the multi-layered covering of the body, the word ‘skin’ has plenty of references in English idioms. To mention a few- a banana skin, it’s no skin off my nose, run out of your skin, jump out of one’s skin, get under somebody’s skin, skin someone alive, etc. In other words, ‘skin’ has occupied an important position in English language over the years.

Skin and the Question of Ethnicity

Of late, one among the mostly discussed issues in literary circles is the question of ethnicity. The politics behind the colour of skin and the obsession with fair skin is displayed in various forms through literature and media. In the backdrop of post colonialism, in his book, *Black Skin White Masks* the Algerian-French philosopher and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon explains the inadequacy experienced by the Black people in the world of the Whites. Their traumatic survival modes force them to imitate and appropriate the ways of the colonizer. The already existing divisions among the colonized and the colonizer are intensified when the colonized split up among themselves and try to imitate the colonizer. In order to escape from the association of blackness with evil and sin, the Black subject tries to wear white masks like western education, mastery of English language etc. Fanon records this practice in his book as:

To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is. Rather more than a year ago in Lyon, I remember, in a lecture I had drawn a parallel between Negro and European poetry, and a French acquaintance told me enthusiastically, 'At bottom you are a white man'. The fact that I had been able to investigate so interesting a problem through the white man's language gave me honorary citizenship. Historically, it must be understood that the Negro wants to speak French because it is the key that can open doors which were still barred to him fifty years ago. In the Antilles Negro

who comes within this study we find a quest for subtleties, for refinements of language-so many further means of proving to himself that he has measured up to the culture (38-39).

Fanon's analysis and understanding of racism was subjected to his own educational background in psychoanalysis. He opined that racist culture can adversely harm the Black subject's consciousness as s(he) will be always subjected to the White norms impairing his or her psychological health. The Black subject alienates oneself from their own identity, body and culture. The colour of the skin becomes an obsession to the Black subject and they all want to be white. Adding onto this, is the dependency complex of the colonized and the authority complex of the colonizer as suggested by the French psychoanalyst, Maud Mannoni and quoted by Fanon in his book:

In other words, I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world, "that I am a brute beast, that my people and I are like a walking dung-heap that disgustingly fertilizes sweet sugar cane and silky cotton, that I have no use in the world". Then I will quite simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human. But, M. Mannoni will counter, you cannot do it, because in your depths there is a dependency complex. Not all peoples can be colonized; only those who experience this need for dependency. And, a little later: Wherever Europeans have founded colonies

of the type we are considering, it can safely be said that their coming was unconsciously expected-even desired- by the future subject people. Everywhere there existed legends foretelling the arrival of strangers from the sea, bearing wondrous gifts with them. It becomes obvious that the white man acts in obedience to an authority complex, a leadership complex, while the Malagasy obeys a dependency complex. Everyone is satisfied (98-99).

His lived experience as a black man-made Fanon think that what people see in him is the colour of his skin and not his education or achievements. "My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly" (Fanon 113). Closer to India, the Srilankan writer Ambalavaner Sivanandan gives more transparency to the British racism when he says, "a separate inequality: outside and inferior at the same time" (4). Fanon vehemently criticizes this attitude and asserts that the black subject is also a human being. Thus, the combined effort must not be to blindly follow the existing white norms or change the colour of the skin, but to think and choose.

The black man should no longer be confronted by the dilemma, turn *white or disappear*; but he should be able to take cognizance of a possibility of existence. In still other words, if, society makes difficulties for him because of his colour, if in his dreams I establish the expression of an unconscious desire to change colour, my objective will not be that of dissuading him from it by advising him to 'keep his place' on the contrary, my objective once his

motivations have been brought into consciousness, will be to put him in a position to *choose* action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of the conflict-that is, toward the social structures (Fanon 100).

Fanon takes this assertion one step further in his later book, *The Wretched of the Earth* where he proposes his desire for the emergence of a new world. A new world which is completely freed from the remains of the past and this is possible only through a complete revolution which he calls as 'absolute violence'. Decolonization by the nationalist bourgeois will only replace the European colonialism as their own petty interests and greed will find a place in the emerging state. They will continue to exploit the masses or the peasants (the poorest in the economic ladder) just like the Europeans have done. Here, Fanon calls for a violent uprising of the masses as violence is the only language the colonialist society will understand. Through this he hopes to see the inception of a new national culture, which is not an upgrade of the European norms or a return to the pre-colonial times, but a new altruistic culture in which the wretched of the earth ('lumpenproletariat' which was coined by Karl Marx and borrowed by Fanon) will be truly free.

A. Sivanandan follows Fanon in his responses on British racism and he addresses the issue of racisms- the racism meted out to asylum seekers and migrants, xeno-racism (preserving nativism and denigrating foreigners in the name of xenophobia, which is also racist in essence), racism aimed at Muslims on the basis of religion etc. Apart from this, he proposes that the new form of racism is poverty- another instrument of discrimination and tool of exploitation. This inequality needs to be tackled both in

cultural and economic terms as they complement each other. The changing nature of racism which he calls as poverty is a product of global capitalism. Here, even the whites are displaced and dispossessed not because of their skin colour but because of their economically impoverished standards.

The racist tradition of demonisation and exclusion has become a tool in the hands of the state to keep out the refugees and asylum seekers so displaced – even if they are white – on the grounds that they are scroungers and aliens come to prey on the wealth of the West and confound its national identities. The rhetoric of demonisation, in other words, is racist, but the politics of exclusion is economic. Demonisation is a prelude to exclusion, social and therefore economic exclusion, to creating a peripatetic underclass, international *Untermenschen* (Sivanandan 223).

Thus, in a way he justifies the political uprisings of young Asians in Britain against the racial and religious discrimination aimed at them. This concern I believe is in accord with Fanon's 'absolute violence'. He empathizes with them when he says there was nothing to unite the fragmented communities or to develop an alternative political force and thus "what were the youth to do but break out in violence, self-destructive, reactive violence, the violence of choicelessness, the violence of the violated?" (Sivanandan 227). He proposes that the fight against racism cannot be just about regaining a lost culture because culture is not a commodity that can be bought from markets. "The racism that needs to be contested is not personal prejudice (which has no authority behind it) but institutionalized racism, the racism woven, over

centuries of colonialism and slavery, into the structures of society and into the instruments and institutions of government, local and central” (Sivanandan 169).

Moving on to certain other thoughts on the question of ethnicity, the Ghana based thinker Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that it is impossible to understand the American social distinctions on the basis of race and it cannot act as a replacement for culture or identity. But the discussion on race inevitably draws culture and identity to the forefront. The process of cultural geneticism or the entry into a particular culture by virtue of their racial identity is blatantly rebuked by Appiah. He differentiates between racial identity and racial identification. While racial identity is a historical and social construct, racial identification in Appiah’s words is “the process through which an individual intentionally shapes her projects—including her plans for her own life and her conception of the good—by reference to available labels, available identities” (78). He points out this distinction with its own reservations. He is against the politics of racial identification as it can meddle with one’s personal freedom. It will direct individuals to choose as “there will be proper ways of being black and gay: there will be expectations to be met; demands will be made” (Appiah 99). Here, Appiah emphasises that one should avoid replacing one tyranny with another one. As a conclusion, he suggests that in order to construct a life with dignity one has to create “positive life scripts” (Appiah 98). And this is possible only if one is ready to surpass the existing racial identities. Thus, he encourages the readers to “live with fractured identities; engage in identity play; find solidarity, yes, but recognize contingency, and, above all, practice irony” (Appiah 104).

The Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* can be considered as a continuation of Frantz Fanon's earlier propositions. In this 1986 book he argues the importance to understand a national culture in the nation's own language as a language is not just a means of communication but also a carrier of culture. The inclusion of English language in Africa has erased pre-colonial memories and traditions, due to the lack of a common language to take it forward. In his opinion language and culture are intrinsically connected with each other and thus the loss of one will automatically result in the loss of the other too. "A specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history: written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries. Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other" (Thiong'o *Decolonising* 15).

Thiong'o's 1993 book, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* advocates thoughts on plurality that are similar to the ones proposed by K. Anthony Appiah which I have mentioned above. As evident through the title of this book, the main focus is the departure from a Eurocentric world view. But the concern was not replacing one centre with another one. He believed that the modern world is a product of both European imperialism and the resistance carried on by the colonies. So, he suggested the movement from its location in Europe to the pluralism of centres.

Taking this argument a little forward he actually proposes unity in plurality as he says,

Each department of literature while maintaining its identity in the language and country of its foundation should reflect other streams, using translations as legitimate texts of study. An English or French or Spanish or Swahili student should at the same time be exposed to all the streams of human imagination flowing from all the centres in the world while retaining his or her identity as a student of English, French, Spanish or Kiswahili literature. Only in this way can we build a proper foundation for a true commonwealth of cultures and literatures (Thiongo *Moving* 29).

This will ensure the possibility of a richer and more complex cultural tradition with multiple centres. He does not advocate individuals to give up their traditions or to lose focus on their pasts, but he suggests them to consider other perspectives to have richer cultures. He believes that such a struggle can free the world cultures from the constraints of gender, race, nationalism, class etc. He explains this as “knowing oneself and one's environment was the correct basis of absorbing the world; that there could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the centre. The relevant question was therefore one of how one centre related to other centres. A pluralism of cultures and literatures...” (Thiongo *Moving* 27).

From the traditions of Fanon's 'absolute violence', Sivanandan's 'racisms', Appiah's 'fractured identities' and Thiongo's 'plurality', the British professor and writer Paul Gilroy, leaps forward and introduces the concepts of 'conviviality' and 'planetaryity' in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia*. He attempts to breakdown the harshness associated with race with the term 'conviviality' which he explains as "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere" (Gilroy xv). But conviviality comes with a price of its own as it requires a certain distance from the term 'identity'. He presents an ideology here which describes that living with differences everyday can make race look insignificant and avoidable. In other words, he is suggesting a way that enables one "to live with alterity without becoming anxious, fearful or violent" (Gilroy xv). He challenges the world to conceive of a system where diversity and strangeness become the codes rather than homogeneity and familiarity. Although such a positive world is envisioned by the author he does not suggest how to achieve such a space not encumbered by race. His venture for our contemplation can be summed up as:

As the postcolonial and post-Cold War models of global authority takes shape and reconfigures relationships between the overdeveloped, the developed and the developmentally arrested worlds, it is important to ask what critical perspectives might nurture the ability and the desire to live with difference on an increasingly divided but also convergent planet? We need to know what sorts of insight and reflection might actually help increasingly differentiated societies

and anxious individuals to cope successfully with the challenges involved in dwelling comfortably in proximity to the unfamiliar without becoming fearful and hostile (Gilroy 3).

The ‘Poly-tricks’ of White Skin

The politics behind the colour of the skin also gets its articulation through the fairness-whiteness obsession which is rampant in contemporary society. Rhetoric of fairness and whiteness of the skin is also extended to the concept of beauty affecting the thought process of the general public. In the contemporary Indian scene, advertisements reach most number of people than any other marketing technique. Skin care is just one among the different categories of the extremely specialized Personal Hygiene segment of advertisements. While closely examining the advertisement literature of popular personal hygiene products we realize that what we always receive is a mediated perception of beauty. Apart from these advertisements, newspapers have published articles that say candidates with a fair skin tend to be more successful in interviews. Thus, in effect, fairness is associated with the notions of beauty, success and strength.

Such a prejudice or this constructed belief manifests our practices of hiring employees to choosing partners. Matrimonial ads never compromise on ‘fair skin’ as an essential characteristic of a girl or a boy. Amali Philips, in her article, “Gendering Colour: Identity, Femininity and Marriage in Kerala” records that the colour of the skin is a symbolic capital for marriage and dowry negotiations. Darker is the colour

of the woman's skin, more is the dowry to be paid. Fair skin continues to stand as a marker of femininity, marriage-ability, individual and collective identities. She evokes this thought in her article, "marriage makes a woman socially visible, but her social identity through marriage must be secured through her physical visibility (desirability) and material endowment in the form of dowry or inheritance. A woman's prospects in the marriage market are thus dependent on the extent to which she embodies the desired cultural qualities of ideal womanhood, in addition to her material worth and her individual achievements" (Philips 269).

In media also, we find more light skinned or fair skinned people than dark skinned people. Fair heroes and heroines being lashed by dark skinned villains is a regular frame in Indian cinema. Indian consumers are made to believe that fair skin is more desirable and black skin requires correction. The cosmetic industry magnifies this impression by assigning popular celebrities as the spokespersons for their products. From Hindustan Unilever's skin lightening cream, 'Fair and Lovely' that primarily targeted women, other companies have followed suit and now we have Emami's 'Fair and Handsome', Vaseline's face cream etc for men. A situation as uncomfortable as this in a country like India where majority of its people are dark skinned, it is surprising that very few campaigns have happened against this obsession. Nandita Das's 'Dark is Beautiful' is one such campaign that has drawn attention to the effects of racial prejudices. This campaign had filed a petition against Emami asking them to take down its advertisement that claimed fairness is the secret to success. Moreover, it

is motivating people to be comfortable in the ways they are, rather than running after some constructed and mediated notions of beauty.

In order to fight against the corporate advertising and multi billion worth industries, it is essential to understand ‘how’ and ‘what’ these advertisements profess certain notions. The rhetoric of personal healthcare advertisements indicates that good personal hygiene practices are essential to protect ourselves and others from getting sick. Certain kind of an individualized and customized agenda is put forth by bringing ‘personal’ or ‘you’ to the centre of these campaigns. It tries to advocate that good health of others is also in your hands. Thus, these ad campaigns try to make us more responsible and concerned about the welfare of a larger group of people. I believe that this strategy of personalization is effective in selling personal hygiene products.

The second part of the question which is, ‘what’ these advertisements profess is more of a word play to which consumers are lured into. With regard to skin care, ‘what’ sort of a skin is these products promising require some detailing here. Hindustan Unilever’s ‘Fair and Lovely’ promises “a radiant glowing fairness” or it is a new fairness system where “radiance is redefined”. L’Oréal’s ‘White Perfect’ ensures “90% effectiveness for a spotless smooth fair skin”. Garnier’s ‘Light Ultra’ attracts consumers to “fairness+dark spot reduction”. The inclusion of more varieties of these products like Nivea Extra Whitening Deodorant, Dove Whitening Deodorant and Clean and Dry Intimate Wash prove to be insidious. The Nivea ad lines, “Nivea Whitening Deodorant lightens your skin to reveal visibly fairer and smoother underarms. So, you have the confidence to be yourself” assures ‘confidence’. The

Indian preoccupation with whiteness took a preposterous turn with its latest entry- Clean and Dry Vaginal Whitening Cream giving “protection, fairness and freshness” below the waistline. Ayurveda principles are reinforced in Dabur’s promise of “a smooth, glowing skin” and Himalaya’s skin care products. This obsession with fair skin is connected to Indian caste system and worsened by the experiences of colonialism.

Thus, by analysing ‘how’ and ‘what’ these advertisements profess, we must be careful in our judgments on whether these modifications can in effect empower our selves. If these can shower its users with confidence, beauty, strength and success, then the next question is if empowerment comes by following the principles and characteristics of the ones who oppressed us for years, is it empowerment after all? Or, are we still colonized through indirect means? In the African context, Nana Adae-Amoakoh, a Ghanaian freelance writer suggests that skin whitening is a self-denying legacy of colonialism. She says, “the desire to alter one’s body image is nothing new, but to wilfully corrode the top layer of the epidermis requires a deeper distortion in one’s perception of beauty – it exemplifies an intrinsic belief that we are better only when we are similar to our white counterparts” (Amoakoh “Skin Whitening”).

Thus, I don’t think there will be any objections in calling ‘skin’ a commodity. Although not readily available like rice or peas, medical science has made it possible to culture and develop artificial skin. It is a boon to the furthering of cosmetic surgery departments as it can save a lot of accident victims. In the movie, *The Skin I live in*, the doctor is treated as god-like as he could create fire-resistant artificial skin. Apart

from the availability factor, skin is advertised and commodified like any other commodity in the market. Skin is displayed extravagantly in cinema and photography. Scantly dressed women who expose a lot of ‘skin’ have turned out to be an inevitable component in cinema. Directors and producers claim that it is for marketing purposes (commonly called as ‘eye candy’) as viewership increases with such sequences in cinema. What they forget is that such tendencies turn out to set wrong standards and pace up the moral degradation of a society.

Apart from this, cinema generally uses skin problems to portray evil. Characters with a rough, defective peel on their faces automatically suggests that they stand for negative roles. Whenever a character on screen comes out of a prison, it is almost inevitable that his/her make up should include a visible scar. In Indian cinema, while the handsome hero always maintains the perfect body size, the villainous character can make compromises to have a shabby and fearsome look. Even in Children’s movies like *The Lion King*, the merciless villain is named ‘Scar’, after the mark across his eye. Scars are also fashionable and attractive depending on whom it is for- the lightning bolt scar on Harry Potter’s forehead is far more innocent than the Joker’s scars in the Batman series. The scar on The Joker’s face in *The Dark Knight* is also suggestive of the Glasgow Smile¹⁶.

¹⁶ Glasgow Smile or Chelsea Grin is a scar in the shape of a smile. It is an ancient method of torture in which the wound is caused by making repeated cuts on the corners of the mouth, followed by beating or stabbing until the muscles on the face starts contracting.

Along with the depictions of visible disfigurements in cinema, the colour of the skin also requires attention here. David Batchelor observes in *Chromophobia*, “colour has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture. This prejudice manifests itself by either dismissing colour outright as ‘superficial’ or by denigrating it and (making it) out to be the property of some ‘foreign’ body – usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological” (22-23). In the world perfected by whiteness, Hollywood cinema has relocated its tropes to green colour which is the new proxy for black skin stereotypes as proposed by Brady Hammond in “Greenface: Exploring green skin in contemporary Hollywood cinema”. He closely examines the racial stereotypes in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and *Shrek*. He finds that the mobilization of negative stereotypes that are generally associated with black characters strongly align with the green skin in these movies. In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, there is an indication of a progressive interracial marriage between Grinch and Martha May which is interrupted with a fear of miscegenation. There is no evidence for physical contact between the two, they do not even kiss and in effect Grinch is desexualized and neutered in a way. In *Shrek*, there is a continued imbalance between green skin and white skin. Green skin is always associated with ugliness whereas white skin stands for beauty.

Photography and its contemporary techniques have played efficiently in demystifying the body and its mysteries. The human body has been opened up and framed from all possible angles. Apart from the medical experiments that have recorded and photographed the human body, in popular culture, Demi Moore has set a new wave in

nudity and photography. Her ‘More Demi Moore’ was a *Vanity Fair* cover in 1991 which was controversial as it was a nude photograph of a then seven months pregnant Demi. In 1992, Demi posed again for *Vanity Fair* which was called as ‘Demi’s Birthday Suit’ portraying a trompe-l’oeil¹⁷ body painting. Both these photographs were taken by the American portrait photographer Annie Leibovitz. Nudity in medicine and art are well received whereas its extensions into erotic depictions and pornography are understood as the abuse of the human body. Pornography is a billion-dollar empire and it is deeply rooted all around the world.

The discussions on women’s sexuality and other related issues created two sides during the Feminist Sex Wars that began in the 1970s. The Anti-Pornography Feminists, as the title suggests believed that the male sexual dominance was the root cause of women’s oppression and they condemned pornography, prostitution and other forms of male dominance. On the other end, the Sex-Positive Feminists or the Pro-Sex Feminists criticized the former for being a threat to free speech as they believed that women’s liberation must begin with sexual freedom.

Uses and Abuses of the Skin

The timeless uses and abuses of the skin are more than a handful. The skin is mainly known for its use as a covering that keeps the body inviolate. In Tom Tykwer’s movie *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, the body is manipulated in a very unique manner.

¹⁷ It is a technique used in painting to create an optic illusion as a result of which the depicted objects will appear to exist in three dimensions.

In this movie, the protagonist Jean-Baptiste Grenouille has superhuman olfactory powers. The movie tells us his quest for the perfect perfume formula during which he turns out to be a murderer too. After learning that the perfect perfume is the combination of thirteen individual scents, he embarks on a wild spree to preserve odours of human bodies. He targets beautiful young women to capture their smell and eventually kills them. At the end of the movie, although Grenouille has enough perfume to rule the world he realizes that it cannot allow him to love himself or be loved by others like a normal person.

The tanned and cured hide of animals used to manufacture leather has occupied a very important position in the history of mankind. While the most common leather is made from animals, the rarest is made from human skin. At present times, a book bound in human skin is an ingredient of horror fiction and supernatural films. In the seventeenth century, there existed a practice called anthropodermic bibliopegy which concentrated on the tanning of human skin and using it to bind books. *Hic Liber Waltonis Cute Compactus Est* is the name of a notorious highwayman James Allen's confessional autobiography bound in his own skin. This book is now at the Boston Athenæum, a cultural institution in America. When the nineteenth century body snatchers and murderers, William Burke and William Hare were convicted and hanged, Burke's skin was used to make the binding of a pocketbook and an elegant calling card case. Similarly, a French murderer, Antoine LeBlanc's skin was used to make wallets, purses, book jackets etc after he was hanged to death. Historical references are made about the Czech general Jan Zizka, whose dying wish was to

have his skin used to make drums so that he will continue to terrify their enemies even after his death.

From the Biblical 'Mark of Cain', marks on and marking the skin exhibited what needs to be emphasized and not to be missed by the observer. Marks on the skin brought past and the present together as in the case of a scar that might remind one of a past accident injury. Dr. Karev, one of the characters in ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* doesn't remove the bullet under his skin as it reminds him of the day of the shooting at the hospital. The marks on the skin which could include scars, wounds, moles, birthmarks etc thus narrate stories and communicate with us. A palmist 'reads' the lines on your palm and tells us what they see about our character and future. Similarly, reading moles and birthmarks is an ancient art of predicting future. Steven Connor suggests,

The mark in my skin is a destiny, a portent of what I may become, as in the explication of moles, or birthmarks, or chiromancy. Thus, what I will have become is that which I will always have been meant to have been. Marks in the body are foldings of time, bookmarks that look forward to the future that will loop back to them, the body made pluperfect (85).

The (ab)uses of the human skin for pleasure and recreational activities experiment with the limits of the body's endurance levels. The manipulation of one's appearances through cosmetic plastic surgeries has become a part of our modern-day identity. Cosmetic surgeries intervene on the notion that a new body is something that can be

bought and this new appearance of the body can change your life. The dreadful 'aging' can be kept at bay if you don't want it to be near you. At least externally, the marks of aging can be traced away from the surface of the body through cosmetic rejuvenation surgeries. Doctors tend to create a reality populated with bodies that require correction. But when a patient is forced into surgery due to familial and peer pressure, the end result can cause psychological issues as it questions one's very own identity and existence. As Virginia L Blum observes, "the 'you' who feels ugly is linked to the defective piece but is also imaginatively separable. Partly, this double effect of your body that is both 'you' and replaceable feels like a split right down the centre of your identity. I am my body and yet I own my body" (5). In spite of this, the existing aesthetics of beauty, the cultural fantasy about a 'beautiful' body and the circulating beauty solutions emphasize the inevitability of body modifications or as Blum calls it, the essentiality of 'physical malleability'.

Thus, we believe that body can be transformed in various ways- by adding make up, hair colour and also by surgeries. The body that can be transformed is at the other end of the surgical gaze. 'Gaze' gets a new meaning here. The culture of cosmetic surgeries gazes at both male and female bodies without gender disparities. The 'surgical gaze' that searches for correcting bodies is the new phase of the gazing trope. Blum notes, "more and more it seems that what was once the relationship between the male gaze and the female body/canvass is now experienced in the relationship between technology in general and any body at all" (34). The most interesting feature that adds on to this is that once a body is subjected to cosmetic

plastic surgery, there is a growing tendency among people to do the process again to either correct the defects of the first surgery or to make it even better. It is like there is an uncontrollable urge to intervene with our natural bodies and thus the hope that there is a doctor somewhere who can make things 'better' than normal. Moreover, this urge to change the body appearances could also be attributed to the notion that there isn't any objectively beautiful body.

An interesting example would be the French artist Orlan, who produces art with the procedures of plastic surgery and her own body as canvass. She questions the status of the body in a society with her radical body transformations. Orlan claims that narcissism is important and there is no stable all-time beauty. The question of ideal beauty has been changing from time to time and from place to place. In contemporary times, this change is faster, where our bodies and its extensions are digital. Blum emphasizes the profound cultural transformations of a 'beautiful' body and she is of the opinion that we are embracing cultures of post-narcissism at present.

The difference between our culture and traditional societies of the past is that their ideal images were longer lasting, giving the effect of a notion of beauty literally carved in stone. Increasingly subject to the vicissitudes of taste and fashion over the past few centuries, beauty is now as disposable and short lived as our electronic gadgetry, more impermanent than even the flesh it graces- an airbrushed smile in a woman's magazine, which soon becomes paper garbage; a glowing and toned thigh illuminated in amber brilliance on

the film screen, which briefly holds the most intangible projections of light (Blum 40).

Along these lines of the culture of cosmetic surgeries, we also tend to meet two different groups of people. As mentioned above, one group considers surgery as an extremely normal procedure and they are willing to undergo the process as many times as to become beautiful according to the changing notions of beauty. The other group is a bunch of surgery virgins and they consider surgery as an extreme solution. This division could also be based on what Blum calls as ‘body landscape’ which according to her definition is “the individual’s sense of where one’s body begins and ends, the hierarchy of the body parts, which parts one esteems or values or invests with more thought than others, the degree to which this body is perceived as transformable or having been transformed” (42). Some people may find it easier to live with an amputated leg than a mastectomy and vice versa. The former condition could be because those people may not value their social body as much as they care about their personal body (what they share with their partners and themselves). Clearly, there is a division between the public body and the private body and I owe this demarcation to the suggestions of body landscapes.

The zillion forms of bodily decorations which I call as ‘skin graffiti’ from here on is yet another (ab) use of the surface of the body. Skin graffiti includes practices like tattooing, piercing, scarification, body painting etc which when showcases creativity on one end also plays on the instability of the body’s border on the other end. Enid Schildkrout in his article “Inscribing the Body” mentions, “the body, as a canvass, is

not only the site where culture is inscribed but also a place where the individual is defined and inserted into the cultural landscape” (338). In other words, what your skin projects is an extension to what you stand for or your identity per se. the Korean art critic Chung-Hwan Kho opines that tattoos are deeply rooted in male culture and its legacy can be drawn back to patriarchy. Tattooing stands as a tool of self-expression and also as a mode for engraving cultural signs, individual and social desires of the time. Chung-Hwan displays an array of instances where tattoos symbolise certain cultural and social images:

A tattoo of the slogan “Just Do It” satirizes an overbearing military culture. A hidden tattoo in the shape of a heart carved on a lover’s private body part reflects a sexual fetish that considers the lover an object of one’s possession. A dragon-shaped tattoo that covers the whole body of a yakuza triggers a sense of danger and fear. ... Finally, tattoos, including stickers easily attached and detached from the body, have now become a distinct mode, transcending the boundary of taboos about the body and traversing the boundary of negative perception and social prejudice (Kho, “Fetish”).

There is an uncommon documentary in the Guinness Book of World Records on the body modification artist and cult figure, Steve Haworth. This documentary on his life called as *Flesh and Blood* claims that every artist requires a canvass to work on and for Haworth it is human flesh. He has popularized himself as an artist whose various techniques applied on the body has gone beyond full body tattooing and piercing. He calls his art as a surgical process with creations as elaborate as with 3D implants,

transdermals and electro cautery branding. It also involves implanting crosses, stars and other shapes of all sizes under the skin. People all around the world approach Steve for making radical changes to the shape of their head, arms and bodies. This is also unique that it allows the people to screw and unscrew the ornamental objects onto their bodies by themselves. This documentary also explores why people do this and is suggested that it is “for attention, sexual kicks, or even for the pain of the procedure itself” (“Flesh and Blood”). Clearly, I suggest that such decorations and ornamentations act as an extension of the body’s self.

An extraordinary utilization of the skin is the practices and representations associated with fetishism and sadomasochism. Its practitioners receive pleasure from either inflicting or receiving pain. The body’s capacity to withstand pain either by choice or lack of choice represents its ability to break through the sentiment of agony. The Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho puts this as: “... the world enjoys suffering and pain. There’s sadism in the way we look at these things and masochism in our conclusion that we don’t need to know all this in order to be happy, and yet we watch other people’s tragedies and sometimes suffer along with them” (179). To situate this sadistic insensitivity in the contemporary times, I draw the parallel of the Muzaffarnagar riot victims of 2013 who were left to shiver in the cold without help, when the chief minister of the state offered largesse to Bollywood and was a part of the party extravaganzas on one of the following nights. This contrasting situation in the state was welcomed with a lot of disdain. But as Coelho mentions it looks like the

world enjoys suffering and when some people tag along, others might die in the process.

The infliction of pain for the attainment of pleasure has many references in literature. Of late, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* mentions the ancient instruments of torture and how its followers are still using it to torture themselves, so as to preserve their brotherhood and relive the pain suffered by their ancestors: "pulling his shades, he stripped naked and knelt in the centre of his room. Looking down, he examined the spiked *cilice* belt clamped around his thigh. All true followers of The Way wore this device- a leather strap, studded with sharp metal barbs that cut into the flesh as a perpetual reminder of Christ's suffering. The pain caused by the device also helped counteract the desires of the flesh" (Brown 11). The Opus Dei¹⁸ community calls this 'corporal mortification'. The flesh as a space for inflicting pain/torture is stressed in the references above. Thus, it can be proposed that in these cases the body has traversed the boundaries of pain and has labelled itself as an enduring body. The tortures to which the body is subjected will help the body to fix its own levels of tolerance.

The history of our civilization has witnessed another scary (ab)use of the human body-cannibalism. Cannibalism is understood as a cultural practice. The Wari group of indigenous population in Western Brazil regards cannibalism as "the most

¹⁸ It is an organization under the Catholic Church which teaches that ordinary life and its circumstances are occasions for growing closer to God.

respectful way to treat a human body” (Conklin 76). They disposed of their dead bodies until the 1960s by consuming considerable amounts of the corpses’ body substances, which is technically called as mortuary cannibalism. Moreover, this cultural practice was regarded as a way to deal with the loss of their loved ones: “they tended to link cannibalism to a process of achieving emotional detachment from memories of the dead” (Conklin 76). Consuming human skin may sound slightly gory but it is part of our cultural history with representations in contemporary movies also. The 1973 Hollywood science fiction film *Soylent Green* narrates a futuristic world suffering from pollution, over population and depleted resources. Most of the population survives on a processed food product called as ‘Soylent green’ which is supposedly rich in high energy planktons. As expected, riots erupted when the Soylent green supplies exhausted and at the end of the ensuing fight it is revealed that Soylent green is made from people. Although it is the portrayal of a dystopian future, it makes us wonder what is in store for us.

Taboos, Curses and Praises: Skin in Religion and Folklore

Religion and folklore are two ancient systems that have managed to utilize the canvas of skin interchangeably for the representation of taboos, as an object for curses and a space for praises. In religious discourses, skin and body are particularly regarded as a sacred medium to worship its own respective gods. Although the ways of worshipping have drastic differences in different religions and its sub sects, the religious doctrines lay a very special emphasis on maintaining the purity of the body. Christianity represents body as imperfect, transient and impure and thus the emphasis

on the need to transcend these imperfections. A Muslim's elaborate preparations for prayer is to attain a pristine state, and in order to sustain that state one has to avoid contact with ritually unclean things such as blood, corporeal waste and other secretions. Hinduism emphasizes greatly on ritual cleanliness. The rules are generally stricter for those who preside over the temple worship sessions and they will be mostly Brahmins. For ritual purification, bathing especially in holy rivers like the Ganges is regarded as an auspicious affair. Thus, to desecrate this space (body) due to carnal or moral reasons is considered as a taboo.

Alongside the concern to protect and maintain the body in a pure state, many believe that physical pain is a pathway to attain a spiritual identity. As mentioned earlier, the infliction of pain is not confined to the sole purpose of attaining pleasure, but in religious discourses, it extends to a greater responsibility of pleasing the gods too. Without supporting self-infliction of pain as a means to achieve spiritual enlightenment, Kim Hewitt observes in her book, *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink*, the relationship between pain and spirituality. She mentions, "like intense pleasure, pain may result in a feeling of harmony between body, mind and spirit. Pain can prompt a loss of awareness of the self or ego, or in contradiction, acutely mark one's physical existence and result in awareness of one's precise place in the universe. Both processes may be analogous to a spiritual experience of union with the cosmos" (Hewitt 27-28). Throughout history we find various religious practices that induce physical discomfort and pain either on themselves or others for

varied reasons ranging from immediate answering of prayer requests to the attainment of a perfect 'after life'.

In the folk traditions like the Sun Dance of Native Americans, the dancers have to go through the ordeal of fasting, self-torture and ceremonial piercing of skin in order to receive a vision. The suspension rituals performed by the Mandan tribe known as Oh-Kee-Pa involves suspending a human body from hooks in their skin. The National Geographic has recorded a bunch of incredibly painful rites of initiation around the world- Bullet Ant Glove (practiced by Brazilian Satere-Mawe tribe where the participant has to endure the extremely painful stings of the bullet ant), Fulani Whip Match (the Fulani people in West Africa must endure tormenting whips from sharpened long sticks), Mentawai Teeth Chiseling (among the female Mentawaians in Sumatra, a crude blade is used to carve the corners of the teeth), Okipa Ceremony (Mandan tribe rituals that include torturous ordeals like slit opening the skin of chest and shoulders) etc, to name a few.

Apart from this, the religious customs of inflicting pain are also varied and plenty. *Thaipusam* is a Hindu festival celebrated mostly by the Tamil community in which the devotees shave their heads and take *kavadi* (burdens). The mortification of the flesh by piercing the skin with skewers is a common *kavadi* taken to please Lord Murugan. This is also similar to what is commonly called as *shoolam kuthal* where you pierce your cheeks and tongue with a *shoolam* (trident) which is also to please Lord Murugan. *Kuthu Ratheeb* is a ritual performed by a section of the Muslim population in Kerala. When a particular family wants the special intervention of this

group, say to be cured from a dreadful disease or to achieve certain special aspirations, this group of performers will be called and they will conduct this special ritual. In this ritual too, parts of the body are pierced with strong edged instruments. But the belief is that since the performers are blessed with a special permission from their God, the injuries can neither cause pain nor damage to the body. In the history of monotheistic religions, inflicting pain on the body manifests more in the form of self-sacrifice and self-torture.

Several cultures insisted on the need for ‘sacrificial bodies’ and they believe that sacrifice of the human body is the ultimate way to please their gods. The Bible records plenty of examples of the sacrifice of the human body. I mention two such references below:

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him therefor a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of (Genesis 22:1-2).

And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom: but they could not. Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And

there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land (2 Kings 3:27).

Shane Wilcox in his “The Sacrificial Body” suggests, “sacrifice is always a question of the flesh” (55). The ritualistic Aztec¹⁹ human sacrifice as quoted in this article is a little intimidating too. The victim’s body was distributed among the people and according to their complex social hierarchy they received certain quota of flesh of particular anatomical origins. The ritual cleanliness of the sacrificial body is also relevant here. The sacrificial body will be always purified and cleansed ritually. No matter whether it is human or animal, no custom will sacrifice a deformed or unhealthy body. Rather, the sacrifice made will be the best of what they have.

The human body which is praised and remembered for martyrdom can be regarded as an extended form of sacrifice. All the Semitic religions set aside an integral role to martyrdom in its narratives. A Muslim’s prayer includes what can be translated as “may Allah elect me to the ranks of the prophets and the *martyrs*, whom He will favour with rewards” (Odone, “The Power”). In Islam, martyrdom is believed to be a blessed, sacred sacrifice that can regenerate the moral life of individuals and the community. Nevertheless, the holy war or the jihad is misinterpreted in its religious context today, thereby making it more of a political concept. The Christian prototype

¹⁹ “... as they arrived in order, they were each taken by six sacrificers ... and were thrown on their back against the pointed stone, where the fifth minister threw the necklace around their throat, and the sovereign priest opened their chest with the knife, with a strange quickness, pulling out their heart with his hands and showing it, still steaming, to the sun, and offering it this heat and steam” (Wilcox 35)

of martyrs began with Jesus Christ who died for the sins of humankind. But the Bible teaches that anyone can have their sins forgiven and will be assured of Paradise by simply trusting that Jesus died for your sins on the cross. In other words, one need not be a martyr to have an assurance of paradise. The Crusades²⁰ that spanned over for almost two hundred years comes very close to the idea of jihad. In Judaism, the ultimate act of *Kiddush Hashem* which means sanctification of God's name is when a Jew is ready to sacrifice one's life rather than indulging in any of the cardinal sins. Interestingly, since the Reformation the concept of martyrdom started to fade away in Judaism and Christianity.

Apart from the objectification of skin and body as instruments for worship, spirituality, sacrifice and martyrdom in religious and folk traditions, the most cringing embodiment of the skin is the question of (un)wanted skin. The ancient Roman infibulation and its descending forms in various cultures around the world address cultural, religious and gender identities. Infibulation or the suturing of foreskin was practised among the youths to prevent masturbation and sexual intercourse. This in a modified form called as 'subincision' (ritual mutilation of the penis) became a male rite of passage among the Australian Mardudjara Aborigines. In contemporary times, circumcision or the surgical removal of foreskin is practiced widely by Muslims and Jews. The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) for non-medical reasons is

²⁰ Christianity sanctioned the military interventions in the wars that were fought between the Roman Catholic forces and Muslims to restore the Holy land. These wars, generally known as The Crusades were divided into nine crusades which occurred between 1095 and 1291.

outlawed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012 although its enforcement is very poorly undertaken.

Steven Connor proposes in his book *The Book of Skin* that tattoo is very close to taboo as the practice of tattooing or self-marking is a signifier of “innate degenerative tendency which was likely to appear under conditions of boredom and underemployment.” (84). The convict ships represented this statement as they produced a breed of body marking. Claudia Benthien observes in her seminal work *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and World*, that a skinless or an opened-up man denotes an image of liberation while a skinless woman is a taboo. And thus, in books, women are always portrayed with their skin. On a similar note, I propose that skin is very close to sin. Skin and sin do not probably reflect iconic references, but definitely indexical references. Sins of the flesh are condemned in all religions. It is mentioned in the book, *Re-forming the Body: Religion, Community and Modernity* that one’s eyes and ears are valued more in all religions as they offer unblemished access to the word of God. Whereas, touch and smell signifies the body’s sinfulness. The sense of touch is undeniably related to one’s skin. Today, a number of tattooing and piercing websites carry the words ‘sin’, ‘skin’, ‘flesh’ etc in their titles. ‘Sin the skin’ by tattooing or piercing is what they call for. Thus, the connection between sin, skin, tattoo and taboo are re-affirmed in new ways.

‘Sin the skin’ factor can be stretched further in the reciprocity of skin and curses. A number of tales from the past tells us that skin can be cursed or the effects of one’s evil deeds will be seen on one’s skin. Aging, the most agonizing ‘disease’ of our

times is evident through wrinkled skin. In the Stephen King novel *thinner*, the unjust judge is cursed and it causes scales to grow on his skin. In the Biblical story of Moses and his sister Miriam, God curses Miriam with a skin disease when she doubted Moses. In the traditional Zulu short story, “The Curse of the Chameleon”, the Creator cursed the snake and chameleon as the latter did not deliver a package of ‘new skins’ to humans and the former stole it from the latter. As a result, the chameleon still hides in the trees from its Creator while the snake sheds its old skin whenever it feels old. This process of shedding skin also hints the continuing mode of self-renewal or a glance of eternity. Thus, by way of letting go of the familiar and taking in the unknown is a representation of self-transformation. It is Sylvia Plath in her poem “Face Lift” who is credited for saying that skin does not have roots and thus it easily peels away like a paper. Although this claim is made about skin and roots by Plath, the Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami makes an interesting comparison between roots and skin diseases in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, “roots crawl through the forest floor like a virulent skin disease” (147).

Apart from the curses, taboos and praises of the skin in narratives, a recent study on religion and skin proposed a coinage, ‘devotional dermatoses’- the dermatological conditions that are associated with various religious practices like the allergies caused by the constant use of *bindis* and *kumkum*, prayer blisters caused by constant kneeling etc. Dermographia is a condition in which the skin is extremely sensitive such that even the slightest touch can result in itchy lines, reddening and even swelling. Nevertheless, medicine has penetrated the surface of the body and is trying to come

up with better solutions to the problems around. This is possible because of the polymorphous state of the skin. I believe that the skin is the most approachable, equally fragile and also a highly repelling space of the human body.

Skinning Cultures

The following is a poem called “Skinning” by Lorraine Gore and it is a great description to the very basic meaning of the verb ‘skinning’- to remove the outer covering/hide of a living being. “Hanging in the afternoon sun, / giving off that fresh-kill smell. / Crisp autumn air whips through / the pine trees. / Knife in hand, we start to / work. / Slick, quick sounds of / hide leaving muscle. / The grinding thrust of a / saw, gnawing, breaking / bone. / A tendon snaps. / Sharp slice of quartering. / The whole family comes / out to see that 10-point / buck. / A little family reunion” (Gore, “Skinning”).

Skinning a rabbit or a fish or any other animal for its meat is the general association with this word. As mentioned earlier, leather is an amazing invention with multifarious uses. The use of animal hide for manufacturing leather is largely dependent on the beef industry. Statistics show that sixty six percent of annual leather production is accounted to cowhide. Without proper waste disposal methods and improper treatment of animals in commercial farming this industry also accounts to be the most environmentally dangerous forms of agriculture. Tanning techniques release greenhouse gases to the atmosphere and also generate toxic wastes that contaminate water resources. Apart from cow, other animals like alligators, deers,

snakes, lizards, zebra, bison etc are hunted and killed to make exotic varieties of leather goods. The horrors of this commercial farming stretch to inhuman practices like un-anaesthetized castration, skinning while the animal is conscious, boiling alive, purposeful abortion to skin the unborn calves etc. Kangaroo skin was considered as a prime material for soccer shoes and in 2006 David Beckham who was a key promoter of Adidas goods, switched to a synthetic boot. The use of human skin in making leather has already been mentioned above.

The cruelty towards animals cannot be justified in any means as in the case of Angora Rabbit Fur Industry. This is a matter of concern for environmentalists and eco critics have taken up the subject to academic circles too. They are concerned about the future of this planet as poaching initiates the cultures of extinction. Ursula K Heise, Professor at the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability suggests that in art, cinema and literature, extinct or dying species are interpreted as symbols of a crisis in modernization, in which man as a biological species is trying to rethink itself. She understands environmentalism as a critique of modernity. In her essay “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Ecocriticism”, she expands the historicization of wilderness as follows:

It conceals the fact that the apparently transhistorical ideal of *wilderness* only acquired connotations of the sublime and sacred in the nineteenth century and that the cultural valuation of pristine and uninhabited areas led to the displacement of native inhabitants and in some cases to the creation of official parks. Far from being nature in its original state, such wildernesses were the

product of cultural processes. The wilderness concept makes it difficult for a political program to conceptualize desirable forms of human inhabitation, relying as it does on the categorical separation of human beings from nature (Heise 507).

With the realization that the skin is a strategic space for inflicting pain on the human body, various tortures carried on the skin have been a part of punishments for a very long time in our history. To name some of the methods of torture and execution from our past- flaying (removal of skin from the body), evisceration (removal of intestines and other vital organs through a small slit made across the abdominal area), parrilla (subjecting the victim to electric shock after strapping the individual to a metal frame), dismemberment (body parts being torn apart by horses) and many more as gruesome and awful as the ones mentioned here. The infliction of torture by stimulating the pain centres in the brain of a victim is a part of corporal punishment. Crucifixion is an ancient method of execution which was imposed on Jesus of Nazareth.

Michael Foucault in his seminal book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* examines how changing power relations and punishments were related to each other. Before the eighteenth century, punishments were a reason for public spectacle. The trial and execution methods I have mentioned above were directed at the victim's body in a ceremonious manner and in that situation, the audience was extremely important. During the eighteenth century, as Foucault sees it certain reforms occurred in the forms of punishments. As a result of this, a careful control of every aspect of

the victim's life came into existence. This disciplining was ensured through devices like timetables and military drills whereby the body's activities were controlled. The innovations within disciplinary actions introduced panopticism which ensured a permanent and continuous system of surveillance on the prisoners. Body eventually became an object on which punishments could be acted upon. Although the forms of punishments kept changing from time to time, (the body is regulated, supervised and controlled in modern culture rather than being tortured as in before eighteenth century), its manifestation as a space for punishment continues. According to Borge Bakken, "Foucault sees the development of discipline as a juxtaposition between the traditional spectacle of pain and power that physically mark the body, and a disciplinary regime based on hidden regulation and the 'marking' of the file emerging with the coming of the modern" (235).

Clothing or adornment is an interesting spectacle performed on the body. The clothes we wear make statements about our sexuality, social class and taste, or at times even our political standing. By tracing the cultural history of clothing, one can study how a fashion has come into vogue. Similarly, our skin also makes statements and I have traced its cultural history through this chapter. Skin is relevant in its ability to give its wearer not just an identity but also an entirety. Thus, by wearing the skin of someone more powerful than you, you tend to become the bearer of those super powers. This has been a tendency from the ancient Greek legends to the contemporary sci-fi movies and novels. Hercules is portrayed in paintings with the skin of the Nemean lion, Alexander the Great appeared in coins with a lion headdress, the Hindu God-

Lord Shiva is shown where he sits on or wears tiger skin and such examples are many. In the above examples, at least parts of their original identities are retained, as the new 'skin' is only used to accessorize themselves unlike the following examples where a completely new identity comes into existence by wearing a new skin.

Bruce Wayne with his suit and gadgets become Batman, Peter Parker with his new 'skin' becomes Spiderman, Tony Stark with his powered suit is Iron man and such superhero versions are endless. In this set of examples, the emerging super human identities rarely share common characteristics with their normal human counterparts. In the 2013 American Music Awards, the Hollywood artist Katy Perry took this conception of wearing a new skin one step further and she tried to wear a new culture like a fashion accessory. She tried to depict Japanese culture and presented herself on stage as a geisha. Journalist Tom Hawking commented that such an exhibit is problematic because "they do the same job of reducing a culture from a multifaceted entity with a rich history into a series of simplistic tropes from which you can pick and choose the same way you assemble an outfit: a Japanese-inspired kimono here, a henna tattoo there, a kabbalah wristband and yoga three times a week" (Hawking). Her stage performance was also criticized for overtly objectifying the bodies of coloured women.

The culture of skinning gets its voice not only from leather industries, food industries, fashion industries and penal systems, but also from medical cultures. With regard to surgeries, I remember reading that the first step to a cure starts with a cut. In the classical and medieval periods, skin was understood as a covering of the body and not

essentially a part of the body. It was more like an unrecognised veneer of the body. Skin made diseases visible but skin itself was left to be unseen and thus invisible. During Galen's period, when anatomy was gaining a steady significance, skin was not given that much of an attention although the anatomist had to breach its boundaries to get inside the body. The only concern was how well and smoothly it can be removed without impairing the nerves and blood vessels beneath it. Aristotle popularized that skin was a kind of excrescence. His explanation was that the skin is an after effect of the drying and hardening of flesh or it is that part of the bodily secretions that does not evaporate and thus remains on the surface of the body.

The ancient practice of embalming also thrust on the belief that skin is a covering that protects the inside of the body. Thus, as Steven Connor suggests, the integrity of the body is maintained by the skin. Through embalming, when the insides of the body are removed, it still remained as a function of the skin to continue preserving the body. The only difference being that after death, the skin has to preserve the integrity of the body's soul. Since the skin was endorsed with a heavy responsibility like this, the person who makes the first cut for the embalmer to do the rest of the work was looked down upon in that society because somebody who applied violence on their own tribe was considered as a fiend. As obvious from this practice, the skin was regarded only as a protective covering. This notion about the skin was carried forward for many years until the springing of the idea that skin can be regarded as a membrane.

This concept of the skin as a membrane was coupled with the focus on the cleanliness of the body as the central discourse in notions on disease and hygiene. Vigarello's

studies on Europe in the Middle Ages show that to be clean meant not to have dirt on the visible areas of the skin. In other words, cleanliness was only attributed to the external layer of the body. Thus, in order to strengthen the body, the pores on the surface of the body were closed by applying skin coatings and women wore tightly woven clothes to prevent the entry of bad air. By eighteenth century, this belief also changed. Bathing became popular and there was a keen interest in opening the pores which will free the skin by removing dirt and sweat from the body. This contradicted the earlier notion that the body is highly permeable and susceptible to disease attacks. As Deborah Lupton observes, “cleanliness changed from values of appearance to notions of health, vigour, strength, austerity and morality ... the use of powder, perfumes and scented oils was decried as frivolous and artificial ... Appearances were viewed as deceptive, for cleanliness and dirtiness were now invisible states, on the imperceptible microscopic level” (37). Thus, in this phase of the medical-cultural history of the skin, skin as a membrane was concerned with the elimination of waste.

In the more recent or the third phase of the history of skin, the notions of cleanliness have adapted to the changes in science and medicine. There is an obsession with cleanliness and it is reflected in the advertisements of vaccum cleaners, disinfectants and other house-hold cleaners. The cleanliness of the body and maintaining its vigour has attained whole new meanings with the revival of spa resorts and rejuvenation therapies. Consequently, the functions of the skin have multiplied. Through its associations as a covering and a membrane, the skin has become a space where multiple, interconnected incidents happen and its representations are inscribed. What

Michel Serres conceptualizes and is quoted in Steven Connor's *The Book of Skin* is an influential trajectory for my study- Serres calls it "a milieu: the skin becomes a place of minglings, a mingling of places" (26). Skin is extended as the milieu of all other senses or as Serres calls it skin is an 'entire environment'. It is the meeting place of the body and the world. The skin negotiates this meeting in the form of a boundary line. For the purpose of my study, I propose that the skin with its contemporary associations, mediates medicalization, commodification, demystification and governance of the body.

Chapter Two

Getting Under the Skin: Various Frameworks to the Study of Skin Cultures

If the cultural manifestations of the skin have been piquantly vibrant and elusive over the past many years, it has been so despite the strong examination of the skin under the microscopes of various academic disciplines. To invoke the critical consciousness about the skin in Humanities, skin scholars have placed and studied the skin within all the available theoretical frameworks. Such scholarship has confirmed that the ‘flesh’ is everywhere. The metaphors used in language, historical forms of punishments and adornments, visual enactments of skin as a powerful canvas (paintings and cinema), debates on race and gender, production of knowledge in medicine and the technological invasion illustrate the pervasiveness of the skin. This chapter recalls the prevailing theoretical judgments about the skin and outlines the theoretical schema for the following chapters of my study.

In this current project, skin cultures are studied by taking the substrates of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ from the fields of psychoanalysis, postcolonial thoughts and New Media speculations. As such, my analysis of disease narratives through the medium of skin employs the approaches from these schools of thought. The concepts of self and identity are undeniably related to the body. Utilizing four distinct frameworks, (Skin and Sensoria, Skin and Embodiment, Skin and Postcoloniality, and Skin in New Media Relations), this thesis tries to generate thoughts on self and identity in skin-centred disease narratives.

Sensoria and Experiences of the ‘Self’

The body speaks with the language of the senses and my study stretches to the fact that all the five senses merge on the skin in one way or the other. Philosopher Michel Serres claims that the skin is a milieu where multiple layers of meanings are spliced together. It is a place for the mingling of senses. According to him,

The soul has no fixed abode in the body, but rather comes into being in its very coming and going. The soul is above all on or in the skin, because the skin is where soul and world commingle. The skin is the mutable milieu of the changing, shimmering, fleeting soul, the blazing, striated, tinted, streaked, striped, many-coloured, mottled, cloudy, star studded, bedizened, variegated, torrential, swirling soul (Serres 4-5).

Serres might have taken this concept from the French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu who proposes the word ‘consensuality’ to mark a perception that all the senses meet in one place and all our senses can be situated somewhere on our skin. Thus, the discourse of skin which is conceptualized in this study will act as a response to the existing discussions about the language of senses (sensoria) and in effect, to the markers of self and identity.

The ‘self’ is projected with a prodigious presence in literary studies as it occupies a space everywhere and its appetite to control our identities is crucial to the present study. Conscious and unconscious selves are vexed pointers from psychology and we still struggle to define and categorize them. The self is thus discussed in religion,

philosophy, medicine, literature and other specific exchanges within various disciplines. The concept of the self opens up various forms of what is called as technologies of the self and body, as well as its corollaries: the practical use of the possibilities of the self and the body and its manifestations in culture and biology. Michel Foucault's lecture on technologies of the self-summarizes it as,

...technologies of the self ... permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault "Technologies").

He directs us to understand the body as a site for power transactions. For him, power relations and knowledge systems are always bound together. These power transactions determine our identity and existence in relation to other human subjects/bodies present within a larger group/community.

As this project understands, the 'self' and 'identity' are embodied. It is part of who we are and they are etched within us depending on the experiences through which the self has gone through. Maria Pini argues that, "the physical body has to be seen as the primary surface upon which our selves are constructed. This means thinking about our 'selves' as produced out of the many ways in which our bodies are classified, managed, disciplined and regulated by others and also by ourselves"(160). For example, if what is brought under the physician's observation is called as the medical

body, then we can also think about the multiple selves (diseased/ deformed/ disabled etc) that are inscribed on the medical body according to the various cultural and historical experiences of the body. Moreover, Foucault also reminds us about the power of naming and determining the mad/ deviant/ diseased/ sick/ criminal/ normal/ wanderer and so on.

Every technology demands appropriate machinery for its smooth functioning. The machinery put into use by the technologies of the self is undeniably the human body and its end products are the experiences that are either evident on the surface of the body or hidden in the inner recesses of the mind. When the body speaks in the language of the senses as mentioned earlier, I assert the fact that the skin is capable of enfolding all the sense organs making the vocabulary of the sensoria (the sensory system of the body) relevant to the present study.

The sensory history of our times reveals the wavering nature of the importance given to each of the five senses. At present, there are debates to privilege one sense over the other. Aristotle circulated a very bizarre belief about skin; that the skin cannot feel. It is suggested that this judgment of Aristotle is probably from the thinking that we feel because of being touched and this sensation comes from the flesh beneath the skin. The sense of touch was detached from the thin outer layer called as 'skin'. In other words, Aristotle regarded skin only as an outer covering. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the only noticeable responsibility of the skin was to act as a protective covering. Even medieval physicians articulated the same philosophy. They worked along a similar line of thinking that the human body was composed of a

bunch of individual 'nests' and each was separated by its own membrane or covering. Skin covers each of these nests or organs inside the body. Steven Connor explains this as:

The skin bounds the body, which is divided by the diaphragm between its upper, spiritual and intellectual organs (lungs and brain) and its lower nutritive and generative organs. Springing from the membrane, there are the linings of the lungs and the heart. The belly too, was thought of as enclosed in several layers of skin (18).

My study perceives that the skin is a felt space of mingling which can be experienced through the sensory system of the human body. Owing to the penetrability and permeability of the skin, human beings have the ability to experience various emotions like anger, happiness, loneliness, shock, trauma, fear, anxiety, shame etc and feelings like itch, scratch, tickle, pain etc. Emotions are understood as a mental and psychological concern whereas feelings are regarded more of a sensory experience. But for the expression of both emotions and feelings one requires the tactile dimension of the body. Connor states that the interaction between the world and its substances with all the senses through odours, vapours, sounds, light, temperature, vibrations and so on implies the ability of humans to perceive and determine by an exercise of the will.

i)Sense of Touch

The word ‘touch’ has two different etymological roots owing to its uses as a noun and as a verb. The verb ‘touch’ is derived from the Old French word ‘tochier’ which means to hit, knock or to bring into physical contact whereas the noun ‘touch’ can be traced back to the Old French word ‘toche’ which means a blow, attack or a test. This etymological backdrop of ‘touch’ displays the present-day utilities of the word. Thus, to denote both the inner feeling and physical act of contacting another person/thing we use the same word. The inner feelings as in being touched by a sad situation or touched by a wind or touched by a freezing moment and also the external physical act of touching are the semantic extensions of ‘touch’. The skin enables the sense of touch to be pronounced and expressed. ‘Skin’ is thus used as a verb (removal of outer layer) and as a noun (the outer layer/coating).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, religious sentiments prioritize the sense of sight and hearing more than the other senses as the latter category is associated with sinful conditions of the body. Whereas, it is believed that the sense of sight and hearing can ensure untarnished access to the word of God. What Michel Serres conceptualized as the senses merging on the skin is developed further in this project. The sense of touch cannot be withdrawn from its associations with the skin. The ability to touch oneself, to touch other bodies and to be touched are cutaneous sensations experienced because of the sense of touch. This tactile sensation is an essentially unique sense as it affects the whole body or in other words, it is felt by the entire body.

Skin is spread all around the body and thus the sense of touch can be felt by every single inch of the body's surface. This complexity of the sense of touch is narrated by the Flemish painter Frans Floris as a caption for one of his paintings on touch called as 'Tactus': "the sense of touch is spread out over the entire body, and therefore it is also its organ" (Benthien 188). Such an identification of any entity as the sense and the organ is unique and probably attributed only to the sense of touch.

Art history reveals the presence of the five senses as a theme of paintings since time immemorial. In fact, it appears like a favourite theme of artists all around the world. The allegory of the five senses has been a popular genre in paintings. There are multiple series on the five senses by artists like Frans Floris, Dutch painter Hendrick Goltzius, French artist Abraham Bosse, Spanish artist Jose de Ribera, Italian painter Pietro Paolini, Austrian Hans Makart etc to mention a few names. In most of these works there are two striking similarities despite the geographical variations. The tactile dimension of the senses is associated with sensual pleasure and thus announces a sense of the erotic. The many paintings and sculptures of various cultures are living witnesses to this association between the sense of touch and erotica. Secondly, the sense of touch is mostly depicted by a female model.

The Walters Art Museum is a digital labyrinth of artworks from around the world. In its *Seventeenth Century Art* collection, the Italian painter Pietro Paolini's 'Allegory of the Five Senses' occupies a special mention in this chapter. Although the painting looks like a dark corner of a seventeenth century inn, a closer look will reveal that all the five senses are depicted in this single painting. Each character in this piece can be

linked to each one of the senses: a woman playing the lute stands for sense of hearing, a lad smelling a fruit for the sense of smell, a man emptying a flask of wine for the sense of taste, sense of sight by a man holding a pair of spectacles and the sense of touch by a person who is fighting (Appendix I)²¹. When each of the four senses is presented with the intervention of an external object (lute/fruit/wine flask/spectacles), the sense of touch stands alone; all by itself. It is presented with a person who looks like fighting with someone else. Whatsoever, the external ‘object’ which is used to represent the sense of touch is another human being who can also touch others and be touched.

The popular depiction of the five senses was also surrounded by the repeated presence of animals in these works. Every animal had its own unique associations with the senses and the series consisted of such specific animals. In the traditional format, sense of sight had the eagle, hearing had the stag, smell had the dog, taste had the monkey and the sense of touch had a turtle or a bird or even a spider. In the German sculptor J. J. Kandler’s Meissen Porcelain statuettes series, the “Allegory of Touch” is depicted by a scantily clad nymph. In the statuette, there are two kids fighting playfully, a mongrel biting the nymph’s toes and another mutt being suckled by the nymph (Appendix II). Frans Floris’ work uses many animals as pointers for the sense of touch. There is a spider which is making its web and thus representing artisanal skills. Then there is bird which is biting the lady in the painting which will denote pain and there is a turtle which is always associated with sensual desire (Appendix III). Claudia Benthien’s interpretation of Floris is noteworthy:

²¹ The figures referred in the chapters are attached as appendices.

The figure's raised index finger performs the tactile sense's typical gesture of pointing and warning. The depiction of two boats, a sailboat close to horizon and a beached sloop in the right foreground, further points to the mediating function of the cutaneous senses, which possess the ability of actively spanning and abolishing distances. The net full of fish that is hanging out of the sloop corresponds to the spider's web: in both cases, the catcher perceives, through the indications of weight and movement (as qualities of touch), that something is in it. Moreover, weaving and fishing are both characterized as crafts (Benthien 188).

In Floris, the word *tactus* (sense of touch) is written just above the bird which is biting the lady in the painting and the lady looks at her hand with a pained expression. In Kandler too there is a mongrel which is biting the lady on her toes and she has a hurt face in the statuette. This is probably to highlight pain as a sensation on the skin which overshadows every other feeling of the body. The depiction of the sense of touch with punishment and surgery scenes also emphasize pain and thus "the multiplicity of feeling is reduced entirely to this one sensation" (Benthien 188). Sensations like pain, temperature and pleasure affect the body as a whole and it makes the body look like one large organ.

Hendrick Goltzius and Abraham Bosse's sense of touch are represented by a pair of lovers in provocative postures. This type casting of the sense of touch with bare or partially nude female figurines is a repeated story from history. Such a gendered and sensuous engraving also strengthens an Eve motif in these works. That the woman

seduces a man as it started from the Garden of Eden and the man always falls for it. Goltzius' painting on the sense of touch has a partially undressed woman sitting on the lap of a man in a seductive embrace where there is a turtle which is crawling into the lap of the woman. Bosse's *tactus* also presents something similar except for the presence of a chambermaid who is looking with a disapproving expression. Undoubtedly, such scenes mark the sense of touch with a sense of the erotic. This shows the distinctive similarities with regard to the representation of the sense of touch: that it is gendered in essence and also sensual.

Extending the sensuousness in art to the Indian context, we find that the paintings in temples are quite different from the present day moral standpoints of this country. In the post lapsarian scene, women are associated with evil and as a reason for the Fall. Whereas in Indian art women stood for prosperity, fertility and abundance. The murals and the sculptures at Ajanta caves are filled with the images of beautiful women, gods and copulating couples. They might raise our brows but it also emphasizes the true fact that our morality is very much time bound. According to William Dalrymple such an open embrace of sexuality in this ancient art can be regarded a route to the divine. This obsession with beauty shows that the sensuous and sacred are not opposed but rather spliced together. They are only vehicles of divinity. Thus, no wonder that even today the gods presented through visual media are superhumanly beautiful and handsome.

Apart from our abilities to touch others and to be touched by situations, the potential to touch one's own body is also crucial to our understanding of the sensation of touch.

We touch our own bodies in so many different ways- to scratch, to feel, to wash, to rub etc. We touch our bodies with the help of our hands and it shows the relationship between hands and skin. The mediation of hands in effect causes the sense of touch to be more visible. In other words, the sensation to touch or to be touched physically (and mentally at times) cannot be separated from the coefficient of hands. When we have a fever, we might touch our foreheads to check the temperature. When there is an itch on some part of the body, we might touch and see if there is a swelling or a bug bite. Such an own-body sensation can make us aware of our own body. The German philosopher, Hermann Schmitz who is called as the founder of New Phenomenology explains that touching one's own body marks a subject-object constellation. While touching one's own body, we tend to give the body a status of an object and that it is being explored by one's own hands. And in effect, the self attains some awareness of itself and its existence in the world.

Hands are thus intensely associated with the sense of touch. Hands are believed to be the possibility of the body. The body does what it does because of the hands. The hands are regarded as a unique faculty and not just as an organ by Michel Serres. Serres believes that the hands represent the body as a whole as it encourages the body's capacity to reach out beyond itself and also transform towards itself.

The classification of the cutaneous senses by thinkers like Johann Jakob Engel and Carl Gustav Carus exemplify the inevitable role of hands in the expression of the sense of touch. Engel classifies *tactus* as the "coarser 'feeling' and the finer manual 'touch'- that is skin and hand" (Benthien 200). In this classification, skin is the organ

for ‘feeling’ as it affects the entire body and it is different from the organ for ‘touch’ because the touch of the hand is an independent sense. In other words, hands are raised to become a sense organ in itself.

Along similar lines, Carus’ classification goes as ‘cutaneous sense as feeling’ and ‘cutaneous sense as touch’. His classification of the *tactus* is based on whether the perception of touch is active or passive. Claudia Benthien explains this as, “in Carus’ view, the former eventually develops at the highest level, and by means of the element of movement, into the sense of touch and as such it then brings to awareness not only the spatial-external world that comes into contact with it, but at the same time also the location of its own body” (200). These points out the presence of voluntary and involuntary sensations on the skin. Voluntary sensations are initiated by our hands mostly and the involuntary sensations are felt by the skin through other external interventions.

The ability of the skin to exhibit both these sensations also calls for the two-sidedness of the skin. For example, pain can be inflicted on the skin and the skin can inherently produce an itch on itself. The itch might be a reaction to a rash or it could be the body’s natural stimuli. In any case, the itch calls the attention of the sense of touch. Steven Connor comments that nothing calls for attention to the skin as the itch does because,

Itching and scratching involve a rising to the surface of ourselves, a centering of ourselves at our edges. Unlike pain, the intensity and tolerability of which are

dependent upon its closeness to the centres of consciousness- making a pain in the arse much more tolerable than a toothache or sinusitis- itch is always exquisitely proximal, always, veritably, upon us. Itchiness calls for attention to the skin, but is also concentrated in those parts where the body touches itself, between the toes and fingers and buttocks and in the armpits, as though to anticipate the corrective self-touching involved in scratching, as though a certain mimicry of the cure of itch were its cause (230).

Thus, we scratch an itch as we like. With the help of our hands this is possible and we can scratch the different parts of the body by our-selves efficiently. This consciousness of self-touching is not taught to us but it is part of our inherent selves. Itching and scratching are also considered as markers of diseases and this is because of our understanding of cleanliness and hygiene. According to Steven Connor, itching and masturbation share similar histories. This is because in his own words, both “makes us multiply and copulate with ourselves. In masturbation and scratching, one strives to become two, just as in sexual relations, two strains to become one. In masturbation and scratching, the hand, attending to the body, multiplies both itself and the body” (232). Consequently, it results in the creation of the skin, a multiplicity which is enabled by the hands.

As all practices and activities of human culture rejoices its own exceptions, so does the possibilities of the hands. Crucifixion is a heinous act which simply curtails one’s independent movement; let alone the ability to scratch one’s own toes. Crucifixion makes one immobile and one’s own body becomes inaccessible to oneself. The body

might be controlled by some random stranger. During crucifixion, the body and the skin undergo multiple tortures- piercing of hands and feet, beating, scourging etc. The excruciating pain and the inability to move or touch yourself by the hands will only add on to the suffering. Crucifixion thus exposes the skin to pain, torture, tolerance and inaccessibility to one's own self.

As seen through the various instances, the power and potential of the sense of touch is very significant. During the acts of touching others, being touched and self-touching, the body enables various transactions. Scratching involves the transaction of identities and passages of lives according to Connor. For example, some parasites rely on the itch to complete its life cycle-scratching the itch will let their eggs to come out from the epidermis through our fingernails. This in turn will help the eggs to find new hosts or get back inside the same host through the medium of hands.

So far, the emphasis of this chapter was on the tactile dimension of the sensoria and its involvement with the skin. The complexity of the sense of touch and the whims of this dimension also extend to the sense of sight. It looks like vision has a tactile dimension of its own and the faculty of hands has a role to play in the complete understanding of this sense. I take instances from art history again to read the tactile dimension of vision.

ii) Sense of Sight

During Renaissance, there existed a very strong debate and rivalry between the arts of painting and poetry. Although it started on the question of the hierarchical ranking of

arts, the steam soon spread along to other art forms also. Eventually it became a rivalry between sculpture and painting on the question of primacy. The five senses which was a favourite theme of painters and sculptors was brought into the middle of these discussions and thus the quarrel of arts became a quarrel of the senses too. Between the sense of touch and sense of sight, it was debated that the sense of touch had an upper hand. It was argued that the completion or the entirety of the sense of sight can be attained only with the sense of touch.

The painter Jose Ribera's (1591-1652) 'The Blind Sculptor' (Appendix IV) portrays an old man who is seemingly aged and blind caressing the head of a classical sculpture with his hands. This work, which is mostly painted in dark hues except for the sculpture denotes the world of a blind person. The blind person sees the world through the sense of touch. This painting was very often considered as the portrait of the Italian artist Giovanni Francesco Gonnelli who lost his sight and became famous as a blind sculptor. The Spanish art gallery *Museo Nacional del Prado* which holds this painting currently rejects this theory as Giovanni was not even thirty when this painting was made.

Similarly, the German art gallery *Hood Museum of Art* has a painting by Luca Giordano (1634-1705) called as 'Carneades with the Bust of Paniscus'- a representation of the philosopher Carneades who was blind but could identify the bust of young god Pan. The very same narrative mode is adopted by the Flemish painter Livio Mehus (1630- 1691) in his work 'The Blind Man of Gambassi'. This can be deduced as an accepted stylistic pattern for the representation of blindness on canvas.

The sense of touch mediates the allegory of sight in art thus confirming the proposition that the sense of vision does have a tactile dimension to it.

Apart from art history, the power of hands is linked to the sense of sight in popular myths. Steven Connor records some instances that mark this connection. It is believed that if a mouse or a cat leaps suddenly on a woman or some fruits fall on any part of her body, it could leave a mark on her skin and the print of the fallen object will remain on her body. This can be prevented only if she wipes that part of the body and puts her hand behind her back or in some remote part of her body when the said incident is happening. The printing on her body can be removed/cured with the special power of her 'hands'. Connor also narrates the story of a woman who was worried that her action of covering her face after seeing a wound on her husband's chest can result in a baby with marks of a bloodied face. In both these instances, the power of the hands for creation and decay is implied. Moreover, both these cases also connect the sense of seeing (falling objects/bloodied wound) to the unique ability of the hands.

So inversely, the sense of touch is supplemented by a visual dimension of the sensoria. The sense of sight which could either be your inner eye or your physical gaze determines what is to be touched and what is to be left out. It is the essence of what we see that builds our imagination. Seeing lets us understand things with more clarity. John Berger comments that it is seeing that establishes our presence in the world. Thus, all stories and beliefs which we construct will depend on the way we have seen things. It is also possible that what we have seen could transform over a

period of time. For example, until the discovery of gravity by Isaac Newton, falling apples meant nothing. But later on, the example of falling apples became a classic example in classes. It is also true that we see only those things we look at. Thus, the things we see could also be the things we touch. In other words, when we touch something we situate ourselves in relation to it. For Berger, the sense of touch is a limited form of the sense of sight.

It can be postulated that every object projects and owns a way of seeing. Photographs are representations of the various ways in which the photographer has seen the objects. A painter's observations are brushed on to a canvas. An architect's creative eye outlines the framework of a construction. Thus, each individual's perception matters and the ways in which we see things affect our appreciation of images. This proposition can be extended to the fact that what we have seen and experienced could reflect on the surface of the body also. In effect, we might judge/appreciate an individual by looking at their skin.

Michel Serres reminds us that,

what we reveal to others is a consequence of the erosion that others and things leave on our faces and skin, or from the shrinking of the harder skeleton, a worn-out frame on the edge of ruin. Whether we write, or are written on, our case is no different from the everyday concerns of geography. The constituent parts of flesh wear each other out: biography (275).

What is visible carries our visible identity. We walk with it and we live with it. Thus, the self cannot escape from the skin and so does the experiences that emerge from it. One's identity is not only the product of one's own activities but also a response to other's decisions and activities. The identity we project evolves into our biography.

The skin can be viewed as a screen on which our experiences and the emerging identities appear and disappear accordingly. The skin is a standard bearer and record of our living. The narratives of the self which covers questions of class, race, gender etc are imprinted on the skin. Skin is also a screen on which marks of diseases appear. Thus, recalling what Serres calls the skin- a milieu or a place of minglings, the skin enfolds everything about an individual. It engages in an epidermal communication with the self, world and the immediate surroundings. As Connor observes "the skin, normally as little apparent as the page upon which is displayed the words we read, is becoming visible on its own account" (9). It should also be noted that this epidermal communication differs from person to person. The signs for communication may include moles, birthmarks, scars, stretch marks, dimples, pimples, pores, freckles, marks, growths, colour changes etc. Michel Serres calls such unique life expressions on the skin as a constellation of signs. Steven Connor points out that the skin is an unlocalized organ of the human body. By way of quoting him,

The skin figures. It is what we see and know of others and ourselves. We show ourselves in and on our skins, and our skins figure out the things we are and mean: our health, youth, beauty, power, enjoyment, fear, fatigue, embarrassment or suffering. The skin is always written: it is legendary. More

than the means of what we happen voluntarily or involuntarily to disclose to sight, it has become the proof of our exposure to visibility itself (Connor 51).

Considering all this, skin can be regarded as a palimpsest. It is like an enfolding which is choked with meanings and symbols. Skin thus helps us to read an individual. In medicine, physicians read the signs of the body and diagnose the ailments. In literature, plenty of characters are immortalised by the specific featuring of their bodily characteristics. Paul Auster's Quinn notices a woman in one of his detective encounters,

Quinn turned his attention to the young woman on his right, to see if there was any reading material in that direction. Quinn guessed her age at around twenty. There were several pimples on her left cheek, obscured by a pinkish smear of pancake makeup and a wad of chewing gum was crackling in her mouth (Auster 85).

Emily Bronte's immortal Heathcliff is introduced in *Wuthering Heights* as,

A perfect misanthropist's heaven: and Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name. 'Mr. Heathcliff?' I said (Bronte 1).

The vivid and detailed descriptions by Charles Dickens are appreciated as his craftsmanship whereas the same details about his characters are criticized as a torturous ordeal for the readers too. The following is a paragraph from his *Hard Times*,

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellars in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders, - nay, his very neck cloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was, - all helped the emphasis (Dickens 1).

When the skin is understood as a palimpsest, the emerging meanings determine our identities just like the characters mentioned above. The history of the knowledge on skin markings is one among the many folded meanings on the skin. Didier Anzieu

calls such markings as an imaginary and actual ‘assault’ of the skin. Steven Connor classifies these markings as “tattooing, piercing, scarification, sun tanning, bondage fashions that appear to cut into or segment the skin, images of calcified, metallized or mineralised skin, along with the infliction of various kinds of disfiguring marks, actual and cosmetic” (50). Such markings improve the visibility of the skin whereby skin is “both made subject to the law and makes itself a law unto itself” (Connor 50). Through the markings on the skin, the skin becomes a subject in various discourses and also a subject within itself.

The imagery and language of the skin used in literature and other arts reveal details about individuals, cultures and societies. In other words, the skin is visible and no matter how we try to hide the skin, the skin does become visible in one way or the other. Consequently, the visually perceivable skin leaves clues about the otherwise hidden details. Skin is what makes us visible to others and ourselves in a physical and material world. One cannot live without their skin.

Roald Dahl’s short story “Skin” revisits this concept. In this story, the attempts to immortalise a tattooed skin eventually kills the person. In order to display and value the tattoo, it has to be removed from the living body because the tattoo lives beneath the epidermis and not on the surface. Thus, it is visible and invisible. But it is impossible to be separated from the living body and still hope that the body will ‘live’. Tattooing thus creates a fake surface. By means of injecting the ink beneath the epidermis, it creates another layer between the outer surface and the epidermis. Although the tattoo appears to be on top of the skin, it lies beneath in actuality.

Steven Connor draws a very interesting conceit-like parallel in his book on skin. He says that the irremovable tattoo is similar to the connection between injury and self-defence. Once the skin is marked it is difficult to regain the original lustre and the skin would not be able to recapture the earlier clarity.

Having said that it is impossible to live without a skin, it is important to notice the various forms of the skin's visibility and how they reconfigure the human body. A tanned skin is an appropriate example to explicate the reconfiguration of the body. Using Anzieu's terminology, the skin is 'assaulted' by means of sunbathing because prolonged exposure to the sun is harmful to the skin. At the same time, sunbathers fascinate this practice as they consider tan as a secondary protective layer which is formed on top of the skin. By tracing the etymology of the word 'tan' we derive its attachments to the leather industry where tanning means to convert hide into leather. 'Tan' thus meant to make something brown by exposing it to the sun.

Until the twentieth century, the association of tanning with human bodies was not an attractive solution for beauty. Shakespeare's sonnets regard tanning as the deprivation of freshness and beauty of youth. In Sonnet 115 he says,

But reckoning Time, whose million'd accidents
Creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of kings,
Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp'st intents,
Divert strong minds to the course of altering things (Shakespeare 121).

The speaker, who is fearful of the Time's tyranny, lists down the activities of time – vows between lovers are broken, change of kings might occur, dulling of human appetites and desires could affect general lives and even strong minds and powerful decisions could be altered due to the changing circumstances. Shakespeare's Sonnet 62 says,

But when my glass shows me myself indeed
 Beated and chopp'd with tanned antiquity,
 Mine own self-love quite contrary I read;
 Self so self-loving were iniquity (Shakespeare 68).

Here the speaker looks at the mirror for answers as it gives a more reliable and truthful knowledge about one's looks. He discovers that he has aged as his skin has stretched and wizened over the years similar to the ways in which hide would be stretched in a tannery to make leather. In both these extracts, tanning is not understood as a process of beautifying but as a sign of degradation. Although the contexts are different (earlier days tanning stood for deterioration and present days it stands for beautification), tanning is symbolic to reconstituted skin. It shows a change in colour and texture of the skin. In the words of Connor, tanned skin is "the sign of a secondary shield or integument formed in response to a traumatic assault upon the skin- and a reassertion of the skin's smooth, shining integrity" (64). The visibility of the skin is projected with multiple meanings through this example of sun tanning.

Marking on the skin denotes the passage of time. It could inform us the arrival of accident and contingency. It can record the events of the past. In penal branding, the

marks of punishments on the criminal's body were meant to last forever. Thus, when law ensured its power and presence through the body, it made skin as a medium and locale for the encounter. In effect, skin bears witness to the exercise of power and authority over the body. What Connor calls as 'primal marking' of the skin is the presence of marks to indicate the beginning and inauguration of a new order into a culture.

The introduction of rivalry and fratricide into the world with Cain's slaying of Abel is indicated by a mark on Cain. In popular culture, Harry Potter's lightning bolt scar on his forehead is the result of a killing curse which he survived because of his mother's counter sacrifice of herself. Lord Voldemort, the wizard who tried to kill him shared a link between both their minds through the scar and thus Harry was able to see Voldemort's thoughts at times. Marking thus shows the occupancy of a previously empty and immaculate space. The only way to remove a mark is to probably disfigure the disfiguring mark.

The manifestation of marks on the skin could thus mean the blame for guilt, time, history, death etc. For our most familiar example, skin displays the signs of our health and disease. As visible changes of venereal diseases appeared on the body, the desire for an immaculate skin was in demand. The connection between sex, disease and class in the eighteenth century directed to the thinking that the presence of marks and moles on the skin will signify "a lack of physical and psychological health as well as social status" (Kellet 14). Such a 'rotting bodyscape' was the product of the eighteenth-century aesthetics for immaculateness- smooth and white complexion,

dazzling lines in sculpture and architecture, the sheen in portraits etc. In many cultures, there is a popular belief that the mother's imagination can affect the developing child in her womb. The mother's skin will act as a blueprint for the child's skin. The impressions on the mother's skin will have its imprints on the child's skin too. Such impressions are called as 'psychic imprinting'. This feature of the mother's skin is striking:

The pregnant woman is important because she is herself regarded, not as a receptacle, but as an interface. She is an outside that contains another outside (the skin of the foetus) inside itself. Her skin is a meeting place for the different possibilities or natures of the skin; as point of contact or exposure; as medium of transmission or permeation (Connor 117).

There are stories about a child with an ape-like appearance because his mother played with an ape when she was pregnant. Then, about a child who had a scaly skin because the mother was terrified by a fish or a lobster. Similarly, moles are also believed to be imprints from the mother's experiences when she is pregnant. This suggests the permeability of the skin to another level altogether- from one body to another forming body. Although, maternal shock and upsetting situations might affect the baby that does not mean that the mother is a passive transmitter of shock and the child is a receptive surface. Moreover, the skin is self-forming and regenerating. It is always in the process of reinvigorating itself. Thus, the mother's skin is not a fearsome membrane that can affect the development of the child.

The emphasis on the forms of the visibility of the skin can be extended to the concept of gaze. The tourist' gaze might be a more common knowledge- a tourist gazing at a landscape, culture, delicacies, people etc. Gazing and the act of seeing can be distinguished as two different performances that seldom share similar characteristics. Nevertheless, neither of these actions might be innocent. Gazing stands as an activity that somehow attributes power to the viewer. "The concept of the gaze describes a form of power associated with the eye and with the sense of light ... The gaze probes and masters ... The gaze objectifies the body" (Cavallaro 115). The power of gaze is significant here as one gains pleasure from looking at something. We might gaze at something that cannot be owned by us, thus satisfying the self by just gazing at it. Gazing can be attributed to a vigilant observer who would look steadily and intently whereas; just seeing is done by a passive observer. The sense of sight can thus express itself as a gaze, mere seeing or even as a spectacle.

The visibility of the skin is re-emphasized in cosmetic and beautification procedures. As quoted in *The Book of Skin*, "the application of make-up makes the sensorium visible, highlighting the organs of sense and thus painting on to the skin the capacity to hear, see, taste and smell" (Connor 61). This proposition is made in the light of sadomasochist activities where the 'skin with a shine' is projected for value and commodification. By contradiction, art historian Heidi Heather Kellett is of the opinion that cosmetics work in contrast to anatomy as the handiwork of cosmetology veils the skin and hides the true surface of the skin. Anatomy peels away the skin and opens up the body for further exploration. They stand for demystifying the body.

Cosmetic procedures remove the natural skin and provide the body with a new skin. Artificial lightening powders are used to cover up pock marks and dark skin in real life and even in portraits. It shows that the visibility of the skin does matter and we really care about it because skin is what you first see in the other individual.

iii) Sense of Smell and Taste

The sense of smell and taste are intimately entwined with each other and they are known as the body's interpreters of the chemical world. This combination of the senses extends its interaction to our appreciation of food. Food odours and flavours are detected by these senses of the body. This close relationship within the sensoria is probably one of the reasons why Michel Serres combined the sense of smell and taste in his examination of the skin in *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. Both these senses chase memory and participate in the piecing together of the self.

In the following paragraphs, I propose that the procedures of cosmetology extend not only to the sense of sight (visibly looking good/appealing to the eyes) or enhancing the beauty of the skin but also to the senses of taste and smell. Cosmetology uses the metaphors and imagery from the family of olfactory and gustatory senses. Cosmetology is believed to give a new form and outlook to the individual. It creates a new life from the old decrepit body. Thus, the skin is nourished and refreshed and in effect the beauty of the individual is expected to be enhanced. Regeneration and revival of the skin will partake in making the whole body itself afresh.

The cosmetic industry lures its customers to various products by describing them as ‘creams’: creams that can heal, nourish and refresh your skin. There exists a close relationship between skin and milk. Milk exudes from the skin and it is believed that whatever passes through the skin will carry something of the skin with it. Milk and its derivatives such as butter (body butter/cocoa butter/shear butter) and cream (body creams) are thus used to advertise skin products. The new *Dove Body Wash* claims to nourish your skin better than a milk bath. Milk denotes the bounty of nature. Milk is entrusted with other roles too. In Hindu culture, the purifying functions of deities are done with ghee which is again a derivative of milk.

Cosmetology is just one among the many concerns that utilize the sense of smell and taste to re-nourish and give a new life to the skin. The loss of skin, formation of new skin and the attachment of new skin can be associated with a new life itself: snakes and lizards moult (peel away their own skin) as part of their life cycle, eggs hatch (cracks on the egg’s skin causes it to break open) for the new lives to come out. In both these cases, the outer skin opens up and gives room for a new life and body to emerge. The human body and skin are also given a new ‘life’ or a fresh glow by making use of the senses of taste and smell.

Uction is an antiquated practice of anointing someone with oil or ointment as part of a religious or cultural rite. Uction is unique for the fact that this does not involve cutting open or loss of skin; but it is the attachment of a new skin without losing anything. The oils used in unction will have a unique aroma of its own. Unlike flaying where an external agency makes a new skin, “unctuary actions involve the

palpation of the hand, and the use of some intermediary substance which imitates and merges with the skin, rather than a tool which works it ... Salves, oils, unctions, unguents, lotions, liniments, embrocations all involve not an arresting of the state of matter into a skin, but a harnessing of the power certain substances to change state” (Connor 179). In all religious rites, oiling and anointing is closely related to the evocation of a new life and fresh start.

Other than oils, fat and blood are also used to anoint the skin. This is a practice which is designed to transmit the strength and power of the slain victim. W. Robertson and J G Frazer’s accounts about the soldiers who oiled themselves with the blood of their victims and the tales in which African Arabs lubricated themselves with animal fat in order to take the power of their victims are recorded by Connor in his book. The practice of anointing and lubricating the skin with oil or any other liquids can be considered as a marker of identification. It identifies you with a separate clan and segregates you from different groups. Thus, it is a method to indicate authority and the exercise of power. Oil by being a carrier of specific characteristics can be even considered as ‘skin-like’; not only as the second skin but as a skin by itself. Oil possesses the unique property to spread evenly on various surfaces. This enables the oil to form a thin film-like layer on such surfaces.

Oil is versatile; like a skin, it can be turned. Though oil is applied to surfaces, its power derives from the suggestion of a welling-up of what is deep or submerged. So, sitting on the surface as a sheen-like second skin, oil also

provides a kind of hypodermis, a skin which comes from and sinks below the skin (Connor 187).

Moreover, only a small amount of oil is required to form a coating which Connor claims as the “possibility of replenishment through diminishment” (183). The fact that oil is water proof also enables it to be considered as a skin-like coating and a protective covering. Oil is deployed as a seal: sealing from the metaphors of evil. In the Christian tradition of baptism, the individual is immersed in water, anointed with the holy oil and signed with a cross on the forehead. It is a marker to cast away all evil and seal the body with the powers of holiness. The involvement of the sacred oil is a visible sign to emphasize the power of oil to act as a seal on the skin. *The Book of Skin* mentions a Catholic rite which involves the anointing of all the organs of the five senses (eyes, ears, mouth, nostrils and hands) which may have participated in committing sins. This again shows the participation of the sense of smell in renewing life.

The popular activity of painting faces during a match is an example of identification markers. As mentioned earlier, such markers can be utilized to indicate ownership and authority. The design and the colour of the paint used will denote your support for specific groups. This association of oils/paints/any other liquids with identity marks the quality of the skin to be a powerful agency for the expression of ownership and exercise of authority.

Skin, by virtue of its functions such as protecting, sealing, veiling and mediating can be thus called as a therapeutic organ of the human body. It also means that the skin itself needs to be protected. Recalling the vocabulary of cosmetology, creams and lotions are expected to renew and nourish the skin. Skin and milk complement each other. As a result, the skin is replenished. In contemporary times, oiling is a keyword used in the sectors of aromatherapy. This industry works on the principle that aroma and fragrances will have therapeutic properties and this may have resulted in an alternative treatment technique. This technique follows the application of what is popularly called as 'essential oils'. It is thus a duo operation of unction and aroma.

Aromas are obtained from the distilled essence of select plants. The co-operation of applying oil on the skin and the power of fragrances contribute to this treatment procedure. Then, one of the queries that can emerge from this duo activity is whether the qualities of smell alone can subside an irritation or not. Aromatherapy suggests that substances with distinctive smell could also have important biochemical contents and properties. It is this feature which is channelized in aromatherapy. For example, the resin which is exuded from the bark of pine trees hold strong anti-bacterial properties among other uses for the production of adhesives, varnishes and food glazing agents. Asthmatic sufferers are thus given bags of pine oil which can prevent the activities of the allergens to some extent.

Aromatherapy also has a subliminal side to it. As it works on the essence or the spirit of substances, the subliminal importance of the olfactory sense is brought to the limelight. Aromatherapy enthusiasts concur with the belief that essential oils which

preserve the odours of plants and flowers will also contain its life/energy/soul/spirit. During aromatherapy, the odour and life force is transferred into the new body. Thus, the emerging body will be a new body with a fresh skin. The psychical aspect of the senses of smell and taste can be connected with time. Unlike the senses of touch and sight, these senses can preserve memories and also reclaim lost time. The preserved memories can be awakened by these senses.

In the epic of Gilgamesh, there is an episode where the protagonist goes in search of immortality. This episode connects scent, time and skin. Gilgamesh is told about a special fragrant plant that grows in the bottom of the sea which can ensure immortality. He goes in search of it, gets it and on his way back he stops to take a bath in the waters. A passing snake smells the plant and steals it. Immediately, the snake sloughs its skin and becomes young again. Gilgamesh is heartbroken as he will never be able to lay his hands on the rejuvenating plant.

Utanapishtim spoke to Gilgamesh, saying:

“Gilgamesh,

you came here exhausted and worn out.

What can I

give you so you can return to your land?

I will disclose to you a thing that is

hidden, Gilgamesh,

I will tell you.

There is a plant ... like a boxthorn,

Whose thorns will prick your hand like a rose.

If your hands reach that plant you will become a young man again”

Hearing this, Gilgamesh ...

Attached heavy stones to his feet.

They dragged him down, to the Apsu they pulled him.

He took the plant, though it pricked his hand,

And cut the heavy stones from his feet,

Letting the waves throw him onto its shores.

Gilgamesh spoke to Urshanabi, the ferryman, saying:

“Urshanabi, this plant is a plant against decay

By which a man can attain his survival.

I will bring it to Uruk-Haven,

And have an old man eat the plant to test it.

The plant's name is ‘The Old Man Becomes a Young Man’

Then I will eat it and return to the condition of my youth”.

At twenty leagues they broke for some food,

At thirty leagues they stopped for the night.

Seeing a spring and how cool its waters were,

Gilgamesh went down and was bathing in the water.

A snake smelled the fragrance of the plant,

Silently came up and carried off the plant.

While going back it sloughed off its casing.

At that point Gilgamesh sat down, weeping,

His tears streaming over the side of his nose.

“Counsel me, O ferryman Urshanabi

For whom have my arms labored, Urshanabi

For whom has my heart’s blood roiled

I have not secured any good deed for myself,

But done a good deed for the ‘lion of the ground’ (Kovacs 50).

The sensory history reveals that the primacy given to the senses of smell and taste is a recent cultural turn. Our imagination of the powers of olfactory and gustatory senses is embedded within our cultural and decisive consciousness. Thus, there need not be any hesitation when the cultural waves tie these two senses together. The sense of smell and the sense of taste are both judgemental. They initiate differences as they support the implementation of discrimination. In other words, both these senses participate in segregation: good/bad, sweet/spicy, pungent/fragrant, ripe/putrid etc. These senses exert an involuntary control over us. This is because one can be indifferent to something seen or heard but never to a foul smell or a rough flavour. Thereby we will be forced to respond. These senses might make us more responsive than all the other senses. It makes us respond faster because there may not be a neutral smell or taste. It is said that a smell (either good or bad) that did not evoke a response may not have been smelled at all. As Steven Connor observes,

Smell acts as a gateway, or permeable membrane. When it says yes, the desired substance is approached and absorbed; when it says no, there is an immune

response of recoil and repulsion. The sense of smell is the strongest discriminator of self from non-self. This is perhaps because commonly a great deal is at stake in smelling or tasting; after all the decision whether or not to incorporate some foodstuff may be a matter of instant life and death (212).

The senses of smell and taste can act as a discriminatory screen and seal. The sense of smell can also act as a physical barrier. Foul smell prevents us from that object. Bees are attracted to pleasant smelling flowers from which they collect nectar and pollen. The foul smell of some flowers is the survival technique to protect itself from predators. The defence mechanism of mammals like skunk, pangolin and opossum is to produce/spray a foul and offensive odour from their bodies. Many animals mark their territorial limits by urinating- the odour of pee determines their boundaries and lines of control. It is said that although plague and cholera wiped away large communities in Europe, many local perfumers turned out to be immune to these diseases. Perfumes can also hide foul smell which is its attributed responsibility.

The durability of perfumes is most widely tested on the skin. The skin allows the aromatic substances to sink in and it also releases the aroma without retaining it inside. Perfume makers try various techniques to slow the release of the perfume. It is a known fact that oils can slow the release and thus oils are used as a fixative for perfumes. Thus, when we test the aroma of perfumes, we generally sample it on the wrist because it can be brought to the nose easily and since there is little fatty tissue on the wrists, the smell will be released faster. It can be thus concluded that the skin is the basis for aroma. The subtlety of aroma is approved by its application on the

skin. In other words, the visible form of fragrance (which is the sprayed vapours) is applied on the skin to release the aroma. Or as skin scholars agree, “the skin is at work in the contemporary idealization of aroma therefore not as a barrier between body and circumambient air, but as a dynamic space of mingling between them” (Connor 219). This is precisely the role of skin; to act as a space for the mingling of senses and in here for the actualization of the sense of smell in particular. The senses of smell and taste are discriminatory, barrier inducing and subtle.

iv) Sense of Hearing

The skin has its strong bearings with all the faculties of the sensoria: senses of sight, touch, smell and taste as discussed in the previous pages which leaves us with the sense of hearing. Then the question would be, can the skin hear? Studies conducted in 2009 report that human beings can hear through their skin also. The cells that are spread on the skin which are known as mechanoreceptors are similar to the receptors inside the ears also. This similarity between the receptors is tested and is put into use by science and technology. Scientists are trying to incorporate this technology in hearing aids for the better lifestyle options of deaf people.

The Emoti-Chair developed at the Ryerson University aims to treat the skin as a hearing membrane. Thereby people with hearing impairments can experience sounds in a novel way- a tactile music experience. By 2014, the technology to utilize the cutaneous senses more than the senses of sight and hearing has gained traction. Science journalist Sujata Gupta mentions the novelty in haptic technologies as:

Cell phones buzz. The handheld controller in Wii vibrates when a user knocks out his opponent in a mock boxing match. General Motors recently installed vibrators inside the seats of its luxury cars to alert drivers when somebody enters their blind spot or when they're drifting too far to one side. Researchers are looking at placing touch sensors along the body to improve bowing technique on the violin, facilitate rehabilitation after an injury or stroke, allow coaches to direct players on the field without yelling, and even help astronauts stay oriented in space (Gupta "Music for Skin").

In all these, the skin acts as an alert system. This discovery converts the whole body into one large organ for hearing. If paintings can appeal the sense of sight and music can appeal the sense of hearing, vibro-tactile sounds can appeal our skin also. This re-awakening of the tactile sense as a system for hearing marks a new epoch which is skin-centred with multiple possibilities of haptic technologies.

The sense of hearing is not limited to the traditional penta-logical correlation between the senses and the sense organs. As suggested above, ears are not the sole organs that can make hearing possible. After the discovery of skin as a fluid, hybrid and boundary-less space of the human body, technological dimensions have taken over the utilities of the skin. Since then, our understanding of the skin has transgressed its new meanings and functions. The hearing dimension of the skin collapses the earlier notion of the ears as the only organs of the human body for hearing. In the visible format, skin responds to a shudder and a shock in the form of goose bumps. We say something can give us the creeps and make our skin crawl. Wouldn't this be skin

hearing and responding? Following the skin scholars Michel Serres, Steven Connor and Claudia Benthien, skin is a space for multiple minglings where the sensoria participate immensely for the expression of the self.

Skin and Embodiment

Contemporary scholarship on body through the works of Jean Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben and others emphasizes the questions on ‘bios’ in critical theory. Michel Serres describes the materiality of the human condition. He reveals the sensoria as the primary mode through which experiences can be produced. The question of pain and the body is a highly discussed and studied area at present times. Thus, one can say that there may not be any elisions with regard to the presence of body in theory and practice. The concept and the material entity of ‘body’ have been controlling our thought processes in unimaginable ways. The outer surface of the body is a crucial element in understanding the role of sensoria and the experiences of the self. Inversely, the language of the senses is integral to our interpretation of the cultural manifestation of the skin. In this section of the chapter, I present another framework to contextualise our reading of the skin: a framework of embodiment. Drawing threads from psychoanalysis and philosophy, I argue that the surface of the body is not some fixed and unchangeable biological entity, but a dynamic prototype bound to hybridity, fluidity and transformation.

Philosophy teacher Ellie Epp’s forum on the philosophy of embodiment explores “the philosophic ideas behind the thesis that we are dynamic and emergent processes of

embodied interaction with the socio-physical environment. The embodied self is the whole human being, being neither a body with a mind or a mind in a body; the whole interactive, co-inherited self” (Epp “Embodiment Studies”). Here, embodiment is understood as the state and process of living in a physical body. This may have its expressions in various disciplines of philosophy, medicine, religion etc and the critiques on gender, health, race, class, experience etc. This theoretical framework moves away from the Cartesian dualism to a thinking where mind and matter are to be regarded as a single unified whole. In other words, neither mind nor body exist all by itself, but thrive through a complimenting relationship.

For clarity, in my project, the body embodies the skin through which our experiences are expressed and communicated. We are always in the process of forming as we constantly undergo interactions. We evolve through such exchanges. The biological envelope of the body permits the mingling of cultures and practices. Moreover, the entirety and totality of the physical body is achieved through the skin and vice versa. A body without skin is incomplete and scary to the eyes.

The emphasis on ‘skin and embodiment’ details the inscriptions of a lived experience. The transcriptions of one’s lived experiences in the form of markings and makeovers on the surface of the body redefine people’s identities and experiences of the world. The ways in which one may change their bodies can reshape their identities too. Such projects on the body through exercises, diets, drugs and surgeries reconstruct the body in multiple levels. Consequently, the way one may perceive their own bodies and the manner in which others may see their bodies will be drastically altered. As The Open

University course titled, “The body: A phenomenological psychological perspective” suggests,

Body projects can be seen as a way for individuals to express themselves, to feel good and to gain some control over their lives. For instance, people may focus on their bodies in a more sustained way when they suddenly become ill or infirm. Body projects can also be a way to challenge accepted societal ideas about what ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ bodies should look like. In this respect, individuals celebrate their difference and create alternative identities through a range of body modification activities such as tattooing, piercing and bodybuilding (“The Body”).

As the familiar scholarship by/on Michel Foucault mentions, the self and identity are embodied because power acts directly upon the bodies. Or reversely, power relations determine one’s self and identity in a large group of people or a society. The various experiences of the self, according to the historical and cultural locale of the self also contribute to the formation of an individual’s identity. Foucault’s lecture on technologies of the self asserts the ability of the self to transform and create new selves. Scholar Maria Pini calls this as a process of enselfment:

these technologies of the self, or what we might call ‘modes of enselfment’ (ways of becoming a self), include all the different ways in which we ‘work upon’ our bodies so as to become a self and achieve a sense of fulfilment. However, these technologies of the self are always related to our specific

historical and social location- and so too are the particular senses of ‘freedom’, pleasure and so forth we strive towards (Pini 164).

This ability of the self to rejuvenate is part of medical traditions and is thus helpful in healing. As Margaret Lock and Vinh-Kim Nguyen suggest in their book *An Anthropology of Biomedicine*, “even simple ‘self –less’ biomedical technologies inadvertently act as technologies of the self. Because they modify embodied experience and change the trajectory of an illness, biomedical technologies make an embodied self available as a substrate for action directed toward therapeutic goals” (Lock 284).

Michael Jackson’s experimentations on his own body have redesigned his identity in terms of race, age and sex. The body can be thus ‘used’ in various practices to express one’s identity and locate one’s aspirations and lifestyles. My thesis contests that if the body is a part of an identity project of this kind, the skin is the launching pad from which this identity project begins. The self and identity are always embodied. The physical body speaks for the individual. Self and identity are not to be mistaken as the inner essence of an individual. Instead, they are embodied concerns which are socially constructed. They are always in a state of evolving through the conditions in which the body goes through.

Skin scholar, Heidi Heather Kellet addresses this quality of body and skin by calling it as the morphological side of skin- the ability of the skin to change and to shift its

nature. As in Jackson's case, the skin alone can enable the transformation of one's identity in multiple levels. Skin is the visible biological calendar. For Connor skin is

... assailed by marks, the skin possesses the capacity to regenerate itself, to grow out of, as well as into disfigurement. The skin marks time partly by effacement: by the healing of lesions, and the reassertion of the surface against every assault. The skin's way of writing time is indeed to write it out. The skin is a soft clock, which we wind up whenever we mark it; for when we mark the skin, and await its healing, we can make time run backwards (90).

This means that the skin allows reversibility. We write on it with our own cultural experiences and involvements. We also try to erase the writings on our body. Through cosmetic procedures we smoothen the wrinkles and pock marks that time has left on our skin. The traces of the past are washed down to the drains. Through surgical procedures the fat deposits on your hips and thighs are removed. In doing all this, we are in fact trespassing on the skin's calendar and causing a threat to the skin's timeline. Connor informs us that by tampering with the skin we "attempt to mimic the skin's own powers over time. So, the skin *is* nothing but time, and yet, because the skin marks time, and can even reverse it, it can sometimes seem, like us, to be at odds with time, and therefore on our side against it" (90).

If the ability for transformation is one of the characteristic qualities of the skin that supports the embodiment argument, the paradoxical nature of the skin also needs to be discussed here. Tracing the history of skin, we find that in distinct time periods,

skin was regarded as a porous interface through which dirt and germs can get inside the body and make the body ill. Thus, the surface of the body was carefully protected in order to prevent this exchange whereas; later on, this tendency changed into an opening of the pores so that it will let a self-cleansing mechanism of the body to happen. More recently, bodies are more visible and not hidden acknowledging its permeability and porosity. This leads to the condition where skin can be regarded as a paradox. Skin is a strong boundary protecting the body and it also mediates the exchanges between the inside and outside.

People sun bathe to create a protective second skin. Sun tanning implies that in order to protect the shining interior, the body reconfigures and reconstitutes to create a protective outer covering. Body's integrity and sheen requires protection and tan produces a considerable change in the texture of the skin. In other words, with the exposure of the body and its surface to sun, the body expects to have a layer of protection. This calls for the paradoxical nature of skin as it can act as a screen from danger and also a filter for exchange. Steven Connor compares the sun block with the second skin of the condom. "The condom protects against the ecstatic passage of bodily fluids, maintaining manageable distinctions between the inside and outside. The phallic, invasive sun is made safe by establishing a quasi-epidermal block or filter against its penetrating rays" (Connor 67).

The experience of embodiment is marked by paradox and transformation in this study. Embodiment covers up the borders between skin and the body. As mentioned earlier, self and identity exist within the embodied experiences. The experience of

embodiment is achieved by not looking back at the identity of the body. In other words, one cannot separate skin and the body as they coexist for an embodied experience producing definitions of self and identity. Heidi's example of a wearable skin dress presents the possibility of looking back at an embodied experience. Here, the second skin stands for a temporary experience of embodiment. "The human skin as a fabric highlights our desire to shed our skins and take on a new identity" (Kellet 46).

The skin cannot be separated from the body for the sake of its existence and evolution. The materiality of human condition is re-affirmed by the presence of skin in all realms of our lives. As Connor observes,

the skin provides a good opportunity for enquiring into the material imagination because it is bilateral, both matter and image, stuff and sign ... However wrapped in thought, the skin is also the sensible form of our corporeal being. The skin, in all its many allotropes, seems to be the stuff, or the emblem of the stuff, of which we are composed, the model for many of the ways in which we meet with the material world, and shape it to our ends or to its: as clay, fabric, membrane, armour, powder, breath, light (Connor 41).

As observed earlier, the flesh is everywhere. We cannot live without touching our skin. When we talk, when we walk and when we think, we touch the skin in one way or the other. It emphasises the material condition of our own existence. The skin gives fullness to the physical body. The conceptualization of skin within the thread of

embodiment narrates the presence of skin in our personal space and also in the larger context of consumer culture.

Skin and the Post Colonial Condition

Skin vividly embodies all pretences of postcoloniality. Skin is the platform which projects the colour hegemony over the other, which is a chief condition in post colonial studies. Although the colour of skin is seemingly superficial, the discussions that have emerged from the colour of skin have been ruling our minds till date in different ways at different places and time. The binary of light and dark has controlled our interpretations about the world. In more contemporary terms, this distinction is proposed in terms of white and black. Skin and colour are in certain ways considered as the same in history which has initiated the theories on race based on the colour of skin. Skin is thus a creator of discriminations. It discriminates communities and even individuals within the communities. This study also concentrates on the colour prejudices and the ensuing discriminations and hindrances within society.

A society that rivals on the basis of white and black is a trademark of our times. Consequently, a mixture of black and white invites impeccable intolerance. A mixed skin colour will be the one that stands between races and is eyed with indifference. Historically, the skin colours are associated with certain intriguing meanings. In most of the cultures, black colour is associated with evil and thus frowned upon. In *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World*, Claudia Benthien opines the meanings related to white and black colours. Benthien writes;

As in printing technology or in painting, the white skin is understood as a kind of colour-neutral canvass or blank sheet, a *tabula rasa* and the dark skin as its coloured or written-on counterpoint. Coloured as opposed to light skin is thus interpreted as a marked epidermis, it becomes a skin that departs from the neutral norm (148)

Benthien's remarks very evidently address our culture's indifference towards black colour. In racial language, white skin colour stands for some sort of a pure and basic complexion whereas black skin colour becomes 'coloured'. It means that the black skin is already tarnished and it has lost its lustre while white skin is unblemished. This reduces various ethnic communities to the colour of their skin. The colour also moves from being a feature of the object to the name of the object itself as in the case of gold, black etc. David Batchelor reiterates Benthien's association with black and white skin colour. In his words, "colour represents the deceitful, superficial allure of sensuality and is therefore infantile, exotic and feminine. Where whiteness means clarity of thought and purpose, colour signifies demonic perversion and delusion. In the West, colour has been systematically marginalised, reviled, diminished and degraded" (qtd. in Connor 149). In this proposition also, the black skin colour imparts uncomfortable impressions.

The skin wraps individuals like clothing which means that the ethnic identity is a worn identity. The anatomical depictions of the sixteenth century reveal "the extent to which the skin was understood as a kind of enveloping leather or textile tent in which the true essence was concealed" (Benthien 64). In the post colonial condition, this

skin colour became a visual category of otherness. From the point of view of the colonies, white was the 'other' whereas the imperial powers plotted against the colonial other. As Fanon's *Black Skin and White Masks* proposes, the white man presented himself as an object to be feared and desired. The black man in effect tried to be more like the desirable white man/master by wearing a white mask. What emerges through the black man was a mirror image of the white man. As mentioned in the previous chapter, skin whitening is a self denying legacy of colonialism.

Probably due to the biases on fair skin, dark skinned people are also attracted to lighter skin tones. In *Passage to India* we have an Indian being prosecuted for sexually assaulting a white woman. This is probably 'colonial racism'; that even a dark-skinned person prefers to have a fair skinned partner. Indian matrimonial ads always seek light skinned girls and boys when they claim themselves to be the neutral 'wheatish' complexion. This has sparked the emergence of a bleaching and whitening mania in India. Alongside, the skin whitening industry in India is slowly killing the consumers with its toxic and carcinogenic products. It is a rather depressing factor that although the colonial rulers have left this country, their skin-deep legacy is still deeply rooted in this soil.

The 'bleaching syndrome' can be traced back to the folk preparations of African Americans to make their skin lighter. The cosmetic procedures in Ancient Rome were very keen about skin care. In their culture, white skin was the marker of beauty and class status. Only the elite class could afford a milk bath. Nevertheless, ancient Indians had a preference for dark skin. Taking the cases of mythical Krishna whose

name literally means ‘the dark one’ and the beautiful Draupadi in Mahabharata who is described as being very dark, scholar Sanjeev Sanyal quotes Marco Polo’s observations in India: “For I assure you that the darkest man is here the most highly esteemed and considered better than others who are not so dark. Let me add that in very truth these people portray and depict their gods and their idols black and their devils white as snow” (Sanyal 13). In spite of references like that, the caste system in India has always complicated the question of skin colour which was further worsened by colonialism.

Somewhere in the course of the colonial interventions these preferences switched and it is evident that the ancient Indian aesthetic was very different from how we understand it today. Venetian Ceruse was in great demand as a skin whitener and its lead pigment proved to be harmful. Repeated use of this chemical caused lead poisoning and a notable user of this whitener was Elizabeth I of England. Sun bathing is the most recent poison where people risk skin cancer. Tooth whitening was also in demand in ancient Egypt and Rome where they used urine, pumice stone mixed with wine vinegar, acids etc for sparkling teeth. By contrast, for commodities like cars, mobile phones, tablets etc, consumers prefer to buy black colour. Therefore, black colour becomes an available option mostly for the high-end models.

Ronald E. Hall observes that an assimilation of white skin among African Americans is prevalent as their own skin colour is a barrier for full acceptance in society. The dominant group generally becomes a point of assimilation and here it is the white skin. “Because light skin is the ideal point of reference for attractiveness, dark skin is

necessarily ugly and threatening. It is easily utilized in the subjective assessment of guilt. This has resulted in the exploitation and vilification of African American males everywhere” (Hall 103). He extends this point of reference specifically to the Indian context as, “by marrying a light-skinned bride, a dark-skinned male can erase the stigma of his skin through off-spring and increase his status in Indian society” (Hall 105). In India, the idea of beauty itself is fairness. The yearning for fairness as promoted through cosmetic industry, matrimonial advertisements, lifestyle magazines etc are the visible testimony to the Indian obsession with fairness.

In the post colonial situation, skin abides to assimilation and also launches discrimination. In both these tendencies, the ‘self’ of individuals is remodelled. As seen in the earlier section, skin embodies the self and identity. The skin is thus linked to self and identity in undeniable ways. This can be seen even in the literary representations prior to the post colonial accounts too. Literary works have called the flayed figure of the Greek figure Marsyas as nothing but a ‘raw wound’. A skinless body is thus treated as an equivalent to a wound. Apparently, Marsyas screamed when he was flayed by asking why he is being separated from ‘himself’. This shows the conjoined nature of the self with the skin since time immemorial. As Claudia Benthien suggests, “the act of flaying deprives the victims of their identity along with their lives, in extinguishing the skin, it obliterates the person” (72). An act of removing the skin thus dehumanizes the object in order to groom and equip it for a display.

As evident, the skin projects a strong current of discrimination, assimilation and the related production of knowledge. Be it race, social status, wealth, and even beauty, skin becomes a point of reference. Following the white skin obsession in the Indian context, we find that native Indians were not white skinned. But, over a long period of time and also owing to the Indian psyche's code of conduct- *Atithi Devo Bhavah* (the guest is god), the Indian soil has always welcomed foreigners to this land. In effect, we started assimilating and retaining foreign characteristics; white skin being one among the obsessions. Although, a very strong wave for fairness is on the move, there is also a powerful 'black is beautiful' campaign happening alongside. This has been the trajectory of skin colour in India- dark skin to white skin and now back to dark skin. What is waiting next in line is a very valid question especially with the improved technological support systems. George Bernard Shaw's oft quoted line, 'fashion is nothing but an induced epidemic' could shed some light to the future of skin whitening industry and the possibilities of skin itself. This is the next framework of reference in the current study.

Skin and New Media

The offerings of new media for the renewed possibilities of the skin are quite a spectacle which is not at all lacking in lustre and desire. It surprises and comforts us simultaneously. New media has already given us visual and haptic simulations (touch screen phones, tabs etc) while acoustic simulations (speech recognising softwares) are also on the verge of getting into common man's market. The goal of future is to merge all the sensory possibilities of the body into virtual reality with the help of data

suits as skin is being identified as an interface. The entire body is integrated as a part of the Internet through various ways. “The current trend toward the integration of the skin into the electronic network is conditioned by the unfreedom, involuntariness and eroticism of touch” (Benthien 222). The question of skin in new media is discussed through various buzzwords like cybersex, cyberspace, transplantation medicine, teletactility, cosmetic body, telepresence etc.

Intimacy attains new meanings in this era. In virtual reality, the traditional understanding of our experiences of intimacy through touch is reversed. The codes of closeness in terms of touch are now read as anonymity and physical distance. What was earlier regarded as distant is only a mouse click or a tactile swipe away from us. The telepresence of tactile sense is self explanatory. Also, what was believed to be intimate and close to us is distanced and presented in very abstract forms. The virtual world which is also a ‘reality’ in itself facilitates experiences in new forms.

Nevertheless, with full body suits, researchers are trying to accommodate the sense of touch also across distances. This way, communication across physical distances in the form of touch will also be possible in future. It is also the heralding of a fresh turn in the history of our sensory perceptions. Artists like Stelarc argue to integrate body into the cyberspace without the realm of biology. Cutaneous senses have become the referential point for this tele-existence of the body. In effect, the body itself turns into a self-referential object of communication as suggested by Claudia Benthien. It is no more the arm or leg which is enhanced by technology. Rather, the ‘skin’ which wears

our self and identity is transformed and reproduced in virtual reality. Steven Connor could not have said it better than as,

In the epoch of electronic media, the actual skin that bounds us within our individual selves is dissolved away and replaced by a polymorphous, infinitely mobile and extensible skin of secondary simulations and stimulations, which both makes us more versatile by enlarging our psychic surface area, exposing us to more and different kinds of experience and also numbs us, precisely because of the dazing overload of sensations which this synthetic pseudo-skin conducts (65).

Connor claims that skin has become a ‘transbodily hyperorgan’ with its present associations, functions and meanings. Digital technology has caused the actualization of a sensory linkage through the skin. The passage of information through skin is not confined to any of the senses by privileging any one of them. But, all the senses combine together on the platform provided by the skin. Steven Connor calls it as the “unified sensorium- the psyche as prosthetic” (67). The permeability, visibility and the vulnerability of skin permits such technological innovations through the skin.

Technology, in effect has produced hybrid identities. Ethical questions are raised here as in to what extend artificial intelligence can go. A robot which can feel is the ultimate goal of the scientists in the Hollywood production, *AI*. At the same time, scientists are dreadful about a future where supercomputers might take control of

human lives. Alex Proyas' *I, Robot* focuses on this idea where supercomputers are in charge and the world itself is an AI controlled society.

With technology, the idea of merging human cells with other organic cells for medical advancements alters our perspectives on humanness. The scientists at the Shanghai Second Medical University in 2003 successfully fused human cells with rabbit eggs. In 2004, researchers at the Mayo clinic in Minnesota created pigs with human blood flowing through their bodies. The Vacanti mouse has an extra ear that looks like human ear which was developed by seeding cow cartilage cells and they can be used as donor organs.

With combinations like this one should wonder at what point one can call the new form a human. Moreover, if such combinations are to be developed further, what new human combinations are to be produced and for what purpose? These genetic human modifications are to be considered as an attempt to create 'complete' human forms. But whether the new forms will be completely human in the traditional sense is doubtful. Can the pigs with human blood flowing through its body be human? Or can they be even called pigs? So, what exactly is the pig-ness of a pig? On a similar thread, eugenics also raises various ethical queries.

Scholars Patterson and Schroeder read skin and body within the paradigm of plasticity. Skin acts as a cover that can be modified like plastic over time. At present, skin is recreated on individuals to give them their desired appearances. Within consumer culture such an approach to skin takes us to what Patterson and Schroeder

suggest: “as a result of their commodification skins are ascribed exchange value, that is, they are seen to possess capital that may be subsequently converted to economic, cultural and social capital” (261). Cosmetic surgeries make sure that even when people die, their body will not decay as there is more of plastic than flesh on their bodies. Prosthetic bodies are on the cusp of disagreements between enhancing the quality of life and the question of dependency on technology.

As evident, along the cultural standpoints and events of our world’s history, the concept of skin has been completely revamped in its texture, function and morphology. As presented through the frameworks of sensoria, corporeality, post colonialism and new media, skin is evidently affected by various commingling. To make sense of the skin, its associations with self and identity are studied in this thesis. Generally, skin and self are coded throughout history in two ways. First, the skin as the other of self or in terms of the self’s existence within the skin. Here, the skin is treated as a covering which provides protection to the self thereby considering the skin as the other of self. It regards the self as something that resides inside the skin. In the second pattern, the skin itself is treated as the self. Here, skin stands for the whole human being to the extent of becoming a synecdoche. Skin is the felt boundary which is experienced through our sensory perceptions.

In both these cases, to split the self from the skin would mean to detach the identity of the individual. As Goethe points out, although skin and name are directly connected to a person’s identity, name is something external whereas skin is given at the time of

birth itself. He points out the significance of skin to an individual's identity. Through the next two chapters, I examine the various representations of skin related encounters (mostly disease narratives) and the identities that have emerged through such incidents. In the Indian context, a study of the self through this subjective dimension of skin is limited, despite the fact that skin colour has been taken up in multiple ways in this country. In other words, skin has been only studied within the discourses of beauty and untouchability in India. Hence, in this study, I endeavour to produce a comprehensive introduction to the discourses of self and identity through skin.

Chapter Three

Scars, Spots and Speckles: 'Marks' as an Alternative Imaginary of Identity

Formation

"Literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass" (Woolf 4)

Virginia Woolf's pivotal essay, "On Being Ill" argues that disease can and should be considered as a great theme in literature. She wonders why something as recurrent as illness "has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature" (Woolf 3-4), and she suggests that it can bring about a spiritual change in the individuals who experience the diseases. She explores a case of influenza to study how the experience of the disease had enabled the sick person to see the world differently. Written in 1926, the entire positioning of this argument that diseases have not received its deserving recognition in literature in spite of its recurrence and constant presence in life is not completely true especially after the Romantic and Victorian Ages in English Literature. Both these periods in the history of England are known for death and decay caused by diseases like tuberculosis, cholera etc and the resulting contribution to medical vocabulary like any other times.

Writers like John Keats, P. B. Shelley, Emily Bronte, Katherine Mansfield had suffered from tuberculosis and their writings reflected the body's experience of ailments that plagued their lives. It is well known that Keats' medical training has influenced his writing. Lord Byron tried to popularize consumption as the ailment of

the romantic period and he wished to die from the same disease. Some of these writers were advised to travel and isolate themselves from the daily routines as part of treatment. The European travel documents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries address this prescription of travel along with the larger project of colonialism. And more recently, Alan Bewells's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* uses disease and medical topography to further the discussions on colonialism. In this book, the diseases in the colonies are used as a category to understand the western biomedical identity.

In short, Virginia Woolf's proposition to take disease as a new theme in literature had nothing unfamiliar about it. Nevertheless, "On Being Ill" points out the fact that the 'body' was not taken as a serious concern for the study of literature till then. In that sense, this essay can be considered as a pivotal writing in the study of body as it anticipated our contemporary obsession with the 'body' and the need to study literature focusing on the experience of being a body and having a body. On the writings of her time period she says,

Literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear and save for one or two passions such as desire and greed is null, and negligible and non-existent. On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night the body intervenes, blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February (Woolf 4).

The forerunners of modernism in England saw the body from a new perspective. We find through their writings that there was a mad rush to search for ‘true’ selves in the midst of fragmentation, a condition that marked modernism- fragmented selves and identities. Body started occupying a centre stage and there was an evident shift in the nature of general sensibilities of the body. Performance based works of art experimented with naked and nude bodies. And in the aftermath of the World Wars, the Russian Revolution, the Great Depression, the Holocaust and the race for nuclear arms, the hidden possibilities of the body were further explored as the body proved to be a powerful space for experimentation. Frederick Turner observes that modernism is just like any other ideologies of the century which tried to cure the diseased bourgeoisie society. Here, society is regarded as a body that requires healing. But the confusion whether modernism was the cure or the disease itself continues to be debated.

The changing sensibilities in understanding and studying disease and diseased echoed in Malayalam literature too in what is recognized as the Romantic period in Malayalam literature. Obviously, the Romantic period in English and Malayalam literature did not happen simultaneously and hence this new theme in literature did not strike the shores of England and Kerala at the same time period. It was not too common but the sickness experienced by the body and the society in a larger sense did become subject matter and a concern for many writers in the Malayalam literary scene. A celebrated romantic poet from Kerala, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai suffered from Tuberculosis and his novel *Kalithozhi* has great many autobiographical

elements especially with regard to the condition of his disease. Two of the main characters in this novel, published in 1945 are TB patients. The manner in which this disease overpowers the body and eventually kills the body is carefully represented through his characters. The narrative sounds as if the disease is communicating to the diseased body the intense details of the state of the disease. Similarly, diseases like cancer, malaria, smallpox, cholera, AIDS, Parkinson's etc have found their way into the writings of authors like M. T. Vasudevan Nair, S. K. Pottekkad, Kakkanadan, N. S. Madhavan, Punnathil Kunjabdulla, M. Mukundan, N. N. Kakkad etc.

Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* is a semi-autobiographical novel about growing up with brittle bone condition. Portrayal of minor cases of a variety of ailments appears in the writings of Arundhati Roy, R. K. Narayan, Kiran Desai etc. There is an entire clan of doctor-writers writing about their experiences with patients, treatments, medicines and their own ailments. India has produced globally acclaimed doctor-writers like Abraham Verghese, Siddhartha Mukherjee, Anirban Bose, V. S. Ramachandran, Kavery Nambisan, Atul Gawande etc.

The Malayalam critic K. P. Appan thinks along the same lines of Susan Sontag and Virginia Woolf on their takes on the experiences of the diseased body. In his opinion, diseases cannot be explained, rather it has to be experienced. When diseases occupy the literary imagination, it is automatically critiqued outside the realm of medical sciences. "In other words, medical science diagnoses the writer's artistic calibre through such imaginative thinking about the body and diseases. Such a diagnosis in fact challenges all established doctrines of medicine and talks about the motivation

and spiritual vigour offered by a diseased state of the body” [Appan 67]²². He continues his critique and says that through the representation of such shocking experiences, the writer travels through the aesthetics of intense pain. And the fear of complete destruction due to the ailment creates an incomparable pleasure. The writer then sees the world through the disease and vice versa also. Then the art which such a writer produces will be the result of the writer’s selfishness. The ailment might be killing the body but s(he) fights and creates art. The irony is that the writer could succumb to the ailment as it is the creation of art that gets predominance there.

Thus, theme of diseases has been a part of the literary imagination in Indian Literature. In this chapter, I propose the argument that the visible and invisible scars left by various ailments on the surface of the body can be seen as an alternative imaginary of identity formations. These identity formations are overseen by power structures. I also suggest the role of the body in becoming a site of power exertion. As mentioned earlier, I am primarily looking at the socio-cultural identity of the disease and of the diseased and my arguments in this chapter are supported by thorough textual and historical analysis.

The short story “The Wart” by O. V. Vijayan is the tale of a protagonist with a wart on his lower lip. The ‘wart’ acts as a metaphor in the story; it stands for the ‘disease’ of a larger community. Here, disease refers to the shackles of power that exists in the Indian society. Sudha Murty’s novella *Mahashweta* tells the story of Anupama who suffers from leucoderma; a skin condition that occurs due to pigmentation deficiency

²² Square brackets are used in all the instances where the translations of the texts are done by me.

and causes white patches on the skin. The story explores the social stigma attached with this skin disease and it proposes that urban locations in India are more amiable to such diseased conditions. *Vasoori* written by the novelist G. V. Kakkanadan narrates the burden of pain and tolerance of a community inflicted by the smallpox epidemic. The marks represented in “The Wart”, *Mahashweta* and *Vasoori* proposes the formation of various identities. These narratives are thus used to elucidate an alternative imaginary in terms of the identity of the disease, the diseased and an imaginary community which are created on the shared knowledge and experience of these diseases.

Marks and Identity of the Disease: What the Skin Screams Out Loud?

The specific reactions and behaviour of the causative agent help medical practitioners to determine the identity of the disease. Dermatologists diagnose diseases based on the marks left on the surface of the skin. This act of diagnosing and identifying the causative agent, which is purely medical in essence, is not the focus point of this thesis. This project is an attempt to place the act of ‘identifying’ in the realm of ‘identity’ formation. Andrew Cunningham’s “Transforming Plague: The Laboratory and the Identity of Infectious Disease” argues how the coming of laboratories transformed the way we perceive infectious diseases. He takes the example of plague to point out the various conditions to be considered while an attempt is made to understand the identity of the disease. It is only rightful to think that the identity of a disease is subjective to the cultural changes it might encounter. The politics of disease and identity begins from where we situate the context of the disease in question. The

identity of a disease is bound by its spatial and temporal dimensions which are studied in detail in this thesis.

O. V. Vijayan's "The Wart"²³ is an intricately layered short story. Although the story can be read as a family drama of deceit, a spiritual encounter of a man and even as a love story, for the author this story belongs to his writings on allegories of power and "is concerned with power and terror, occasioned by India's brief experience of the Emergency" (Vijayan 457). It is a political satire wheeled on the growth and development of a wart on the lower lip of the unnamed protagonist. The wart matures and consumes the protagonist. Written originally in Malayalam as "*Arimpara*" during the Indian Emergency period, this literary piece used wart as a metaphor to question the people in power and their autocratic ways of governance. Although his love for the wart started with good intentions, as the story progresses we find that the wart starts to destroy the man. How power can exploit and make people blind are portrayed in this work along with Vijayan's own political standpoints. Bhavana Murali observes,

The Wart is a powerful tale about the corruption that power wreaks on an individual. It snares him with its lustful promises, isolates him from his spirit and human bonds, imprisons him in a web of deceit, and possesses him to commit atrocities against mankind. It then abandons him and leaves him in a

²³ This was originally written in Malayalam as "*Arimpara*" and Vijayan himself translated the short story as "The Wart" which was published by DC Books in 2000.

vulnerable state to face the consequences of his actions (Murali, “Bhavana Murali”).

A medical reading of “The Wart” finds that the life cycle of the wart portrayed in the short story is with the utmost precision. Diseases in general are transformative in nature. It is always in a state of becoming until and unless proper medicine is taken to curb its growth. Thus, the identity of a disease is also continuously evolving. In this story, one finds that the identity of the disease transgresses by acquiring meanings and associations as it matures. Interestingly, the author chooses the skin to represent this particular progress of the disease; the unnatural condition of the body in the form of a wart. A wart due to its existence on the surface of the body is visible and also tangible. When contemporary writings utilize diseases like AIDS and cancer for thematic and metaphorical references, Vijayan uses a wart to metaphorically portray an entire powerful political regime in India. This is probably why the protagonist alone remains unnamed in the story. A life cycle of the wart can be traced in conjunction with the destructive ways in which power works out in a society.

In a certain sense, this story begins at the end. The first-person narrative begins with a confession of realizing his ‘sin’ and the story unfolds as a process of unburdening of the narrator’s self. The wart transforms from being like a tiny seed to the size of a gooseberry, then to the size of a coconut and finally to become an elephant. The protagonist represents a generation that believes in the powers of tradition as he goes back to the “benediction of leaf and root” (Vijayan 461) and the “crypt-like chamber where much wisdom was stored inscribed on palm leaves” (Vijayan 461) for the

treatment of the wart on his face. He remembers his ancestors and their trust in Ayurvedic knowledge. Even when his son was down with a cold he insists on how a little soup with pepper can make him alright. Whereas, his wife Suma and the good doctor Aechchu Menon embrace modern medicine. It is interesting to find that the protagonist stays with his belief even at the cost of his own decay and almost death. The marks left by the wart expresses the identity of the disease through the following four ways.

i) Wart and its Identification.

The life cycle of the wart begins in the most mundane ways. Its presence was identified when his razor blade nicks the wart by chance. But he mistook it as a sign of luck when he thought that it excited Suma during their love making. Later on, we find that Suma loathed the wart: “I found Suma reluctant and her orgasm impersonal. She lay with her eyes closed and seemed far away” (Vijayan 461). He finds the wart attractive and was attracted towards it. He did not want to visit the doctor and get his attention drawn to the wart. Thus, it becomes obvious that he is reluctant to get it removed. So, he pampers it with the dense herbs, leaves and roots as guided by the principles laid down by sage Dhanvantari. Eventually we find the protagonist completely obsessed with the wart and moving on with “a new sense of foreboding” (Vijayan 464).

But soon, though I did not know it then, amidst these hills and sunsets I would be enslaved by fear and my sorrow imprisoned without communion. To you who watch the rise of the hill and sunsets, I say this: fear will return to hunt

again amid the trees of the hillside, which is why these brief moments of communing are precious (Vijayan 463).

My kinsmen here, he said bantering, believes in remedies of rain and dew (Vijayan 464).

Words rose within me only to ebb away; what could I say about the gentle realm of leaf and root, of the secret covenant between father and son who listen to the gongs of Shiva and watch the water-fowl streak through the dusking water? (Vijayan 464).

The political imagery in these lines indicates that the glowing snares of power have lured people for ages. It continues to do so as long as our determination to fight does not fail to do so. In the story, the protagonist is pleased with the existence of the wart. His growing attachment with the wart made him move away from his family and the world. He finds himself in a complicated and misunderstood situation. He was unable to express himself completely as his world was shrinking to himself and the wart. This can be regarded as the initial phase in the life cycle of the wart and its effect on the protagonist of the story.

ii) Wart and its Survival Mechanisms: Isolation and Imprisonment

Having established its presence and getting identified by the protagonist, the wart continues its journey into the second phase of its life. Just like how power can manipulate one's own decisions, the microbe acclimatizes itself to the host body. When it started to grow big at an alarming rate, the rate of pain also increased: "the

ducts of the wart had given way; there was the sense of an enormous slush, like the yellow ooze of riven rocks” (Vijayan 465). He becomes anxious and uses “the rarest of roots” (Vijayan 465) to prepare a medicine. From the size of a tiny seed it grows into the size of a gooseberry. Then the wart started to feed itself on the medical herbs and roots to gain the size of a lemon. It starts sucking in every medicament given to curb its growth. Power can entice one into its charm even when it is feeding on oneself. The wart utilized the protagonist’s preoccupation with it to isolate him from his family and world around. The wart became more visible and people started to move away from his presence. Its visibility also made him look ugly and disgusting.

Imperceptibly a change came over my relations with people. It was a curious idler first, a man I encountered in the village library, who stared hard at me; then another and another and another, until I found myself driven gently but relentlessly into a prison of their awareness of me (Vijayan 465).

By calling it a contagion, his wife prevented his son from going near him. Even Achechu Menon who continued to visit him stopped talking about the wart. Suma went near him one last time with some medicine and expressed her repugnance of being touched by him.

Apart from isolation, the wart used his obsession with it to imprison him. He was imprisoned in his own loneliness with the sole company of the wart. He moved his living to the attic in the house where he thought lived the spirits of his ancestors and distanced himself from humanity. What he calls as his excrescence takes away his

freedom and starts to control his life and movement. His helplessness made him pray to his forefathers which were answered in a great tide of sadness.

My fathers, I said, these riversides and mountain slopes had borne witness to your freedom, and yet what has befallen me, your son? You bequeathed to me the precious palm leaf with its arcana of healing, and yet why have these leaves and roots failed to prevail over this invading spore? (Vijayan 466).

The underestimated powers of the wart which was now as big as a tomato continued to take charge of his life.

iii) Wart and Exploitation of the Self

The next third phase showcases the wart in its pinnacle of power and penetration into the protagonist's life. He does not have any control over his decisions and in fact he was only the body with the wart's brain. He started committing atrocities to himself and also his loyal serfs. When his memories intensified his current state of abandonment he decided to excise the wart using his great uncle Koppunni's knife. Such a decision to self-harm was only a beginning to his many forms of insanity.

The wildness of the knife roused me, and I went to the shelf in the panelling and picked it up. I did not know what followed; perhaps the knife compelled me. The suicidal violence of my great uncle welled up within me along with the futile resistance of the pious, and in that great mingling I held the wart with my left hand and with the right drew the knife along its stem (Vijayan 467).

He realizes his alienation when his loyal serf Chaaththan and his relative Naani stopped bringing him food. His desperate need to be with humans and his laborious fight against the powers of the wart can be explained through the following conversation.

“Naani.”

“Yes, master?”

“Will you come?”

She did not reply.

“Naani.”

“Yes, master?”

“Naani”, I asked again, “Will you come to work?” Quietly she said, “I shall.” (Vijayan 470).

I have observed that once Naani is coerced to work for him, the wart exploits her sexually. The wart influenced the man to prey on her emotionally and seduce her to satisfy its vile need to feed. “I was crying. She pressed my face against her belly, and in my sorrow and dependence I began disrobing her. She pressed me harder against her body’s deep honey-hued translucence” (Vijayan 471). The rape, murder and the acts of necrophilia with the rotting corpse of Naani were involuntary actions by the protagonist to the wishes of the wart. Towards this phase of the life cycle, we find that the wart has started growing its own body organs. “Piercing through the pus and scab, an enormous phallus had come out of the wart. I fell away, but felt a miraculous

power pulling me up. It was the wart, drilling down beneath my scalp and holding me up in an unseen lasso” (Vijayan 472). Naani’s dead body has started rotting but “the wart mated with it again and again” (Vijayan 475).

Having accomplished such good control over the man’s body and mind, the wart demanded that henceforth it should be addressed as ‘brother’ by the protagonist. Brotherhood which is generally understood as a word of freedom to establish camaraderie among people is subverted here. In this short story, the wart says that by addressing it as ‘brother’, the man will only be expressing his knowledge of willing servitude. According to Bhavana Murali,

the salutation of brother is a veiled attack on the nature of political bodies/institutions that promote camaraderie among its cadres, to instil in them a sense of belonging and to unify them under the umbrella of an ideology and their love for freedom. Ironically this very fellowship is manipulated to suit the ambitions of those corrupted by power and their objectives become the antithesis of freedom (Murali, “Bhavana Murali”).

The wart in its spectral cackle of a woodpecker ordered him to gate their manor and also to lie down on Naani’s corpse for a funereal mating. It also reveals to the readers that the protagonist has lost his sense of personal freedom and he has transformed into a slave in the eyes of the wart.

iv) Wart and Eventual Abandonment

In the final phase of the wart's life cycle, roles are reversed. The man becomes the 'wart' on the enormous body of the wart. The wart consults the palm leaf manuscripts to disentangle itself from the man's body. We find that the protagonist has truly ceased to exist reemphasizing his unnamed existence in the story. The wart abandons the man. "*I began to dwindle, even as the wart grew by leaps and bounds; I became a mere appendage ... the medicaments had worked, and I had shrivelled and fallen off the wart's great body ... I had shrunk to the size of a worm*" (Vijayan 476). Although his size is reduced he is pleased that he got his freedom back. The wart emerges to become an elephant which was taken to the temple to become part of another new life cycle.

The wart transformed through these four phases and its identity also acquired meanings. We find that the identity of the contagion is carried on to the protagonist also. Or rather, in this case the protagonist gives up its identity for the existence of the microbe. His twin faced identity: the one with the wart and the other without the wart are established in the beginning of the story itself when he thinks that Suma made love to his other self; the one without the wart. But he rules it out as an "adulterous fantasy" (Vijayan 461). He reiterates throughout the story that the wart is part of him until the very end when the wart abandons him. He believes that the wart is his excrescence and that it could only exist as an attachment to his body. "Taking her to a tumultuous climax, I shared the experience with the wart. I had till then considered the wart an alien impurity, but from now on was to know I had fostered with the

nutrients of my body and the folly of my piety, was flesh of my flesh” (Vijayan 472). The independent existence and identity of the microbe is established only at the end of the story when it develops into a majestic elephant.

The sentence of the wart described in the short story informs its readers that the wart is brimming with life. A tiny mark on the skin acquaints us with so much information about the identity of the disease and its allegory. The wart was not a lifeless mark but a complete new organism with its own hands, eyes, mouth and phallus: “the red patch I had seen and which I had mistaken for inflammation and possible decay, now opened up into a mouth, vampire lips drooling spit and pus and the black dots into a pair of eyes, little eyes winking lewdly at me from the mirror” (Vijayan 473). The mobility of the wart when it was attached to the man was also real. He could feel the wart move, twitch and wriggle. The wart was also getting heavier everyday as it is said that he was lying crushed by the weight of his face.

The detailed description on the progress and development of the wart in the story is similar to the growth of an embryo in a woman’s womb. Initially, it is said that the wart grew large with a glistening scab around its stem. Later on, we find that it has grown and its hem of ooze has become wider. When it gets bigger, the wart was found to be “defiant and invincible, the size of a coconut, and around it like stalagmite or coral, glistened scab and fester” (Vijayan 467). After developing into a slab of meat it had grown its own organs and it hung like a sea turtle from his lower lip. Eventually, “the wart grew and in its growing, changed. Its black hide shone. It had legs, great flapping ears, a trunk and tusks. The wart had become an elephant”

(Vijayan 476). From the man, a new life emerged; he acts as a life giver and his face a womb. One could see the wart as having a life of its own or perhaps it could be the visible and tangible self of the alter ego of the man. In that case, it is a conflict for dominance between the self and the alter ego, a relationship that is both parasitic and symbiotic at the same time. The other within the visible (self and alter ego) expressing itself on the inescapable visible medium of the skin.

The sentience of the wart can be further explained through the splurge of various senses used in the short story. The wart always ‘touched’ the man as it was attached to his face. Every time he felt it, it had grown bigger than the last time. The dexterity of the body allows us to touch and scratch by ourselves. As introduced in the previous chapter, the unique faculty of our hands mediates this process. The only variation of touch that does not use hands is probably a kiss-touch with the mouth. Steven Connor calls kiss as a touch of greedy consumption. Hands can function as a paw and as a weapon. It can be re-modelled according to the way we want it to be. It is not a specialized faculty of the body which is designed to do only specific functions but it can do anything in general. And this makes it a unique faculty of the human body. Steven Connor stretches this idea and calls the hand as an alternative body, a second skin. Hence, the hands can be credited to own the potential to awaken the sense of touch and restore the contact with the ‘self’.

The strong stench of rot, mortuary odour of corpse and the scent of death did not prevent the wart from making the protagonist abuse Naani’s dead body. Instead the wart exercised its power of command over the man. It tasted the corpse like “the

monotonous slurping of treacle” (Vijayan 475) and “after one last union the wart had licked up the puddle with great gluttony” (Vijayan 476). The wart could speak and its voice is compared to the spectral cackle of a woodpecker. It could make the man do things for it by instilling fear. The manner in which the wart exercised power on the man is quite ingenious as it was not just about repressing his life’s order but it was about carefully fabricating and making him believe that the wart is not harmful yet attractive and hence powerful. The wart could listen to his thoughts, hear his mind and read his heart’s desires. The wart desecrated his prayers in foul abusive language. The wart’s constant observation and surveillance of the man’s life earned him more power to control him. In short, the identity of the wart can also be read as the identity of power in this story.

I have observed close similarities between “The Wart” and the 1989 British movie *How to Get Ahead in Advertising*. Its central character, Bagley, has a boil on his shoulder which develops into a head with the thoughts and decisions just opposite to the original head. In the movie and in the short story, we notice the transformative nature of the boil and the wart respectively. From its miniscule size, they both develop into large entities with position, power and authority. The acquired identities of the boil and the wart surpass the existence of the original central character in both the plots. Bagley gets back to his advertising profession with the boil head and becomes successful while his original head withers into a tiny boil on his shoulder. The wart transforms into an elephant which was taken to a temple where it was treated with the offerings of the temple: fruits, palm sugar, tender fronds of coconut

etc and on its back the idol of the temple's god was arrayed. Whereas the man who carried the wart till then was reduced to the size of a worm and was invisible. We find that the identity modifications that emerge from the marks on one's skin not only extend to the peculiarities of the contagion but also to the host body. The identities of the boil and the wart are re-interpreted with acquired characteristics whereas original Bagley and the wart's man cease to exist. The renewed identity of the disease is in effect voiced by the surface of the body.

White Patches on the Skin: Marks and Identity of the Diseased/ Deceased

Having discussed the question of marks and identity of a disease in "The Wart", this thesis continues to explore other dimensions of identity formation through the medium of skin. A framework of the experiences of the 'diseased' is used to propose an alternative imaginary of identity formation through Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta*²⁴. This novella deals with the ill effects of leucoderma. It narrates the almost predictable tale of a poor woman in India who was affected by this disease. Anupama is the epitome of beauty and versatility in music and theatre. Her beauty and talents catch the fancy of Anand, a renowned doctor who marries her at the beginning of the novella. When Anand is away in England for higher studies, Anupama contracts leucoderma and is shunned out of the house by her mother-in-law. After a long conflict with her own stepmother and society she starts a new life in Mumbai. The novella portrays the attitude of majority of Indians to this disease through the accurate portrayal of the ostracism and the stigma that Anupama experiences.

²⁴ This was written in English and published in 2005.

In medical discourse, the identity of the disease is automatically transferred to the healthy/living body of an individual and makes it a diseased body. The irony here is that only a healthy contagion can make the living body unhealthy. In ABC's TV series *Grey's Anatomy*, a doctor talks about a tumour that it is so perfect and well defined that it cannot be taken out: a perfect tumour in an imperfect body. The identity of the diseased body will be a product of the disease and the body will transform with the changes that happens to the disease. The body that survives the disease will then have a new story to tell as it keeps accommodating new associations within the body's narrative of existence.

An analysis of identity formation through the lenses of the diseased is significant here. The patient's conceptualization and understanding of the medical condition is appreciated by doctors. A research paper within this area argues that "patients are not mere observers of their body, for they are immersed in a re-assessment of values, relationships, priorities and perhaps even life-plans" (Kottow 1). This dimension of marks and identity of the diseased emphasize that the diseased are also amenable to cultural changes just like the identity of a disease.

Within medical sociology, two types of patient identities are mostly talked about: a public identity (this is based on one's relations and interactions with others) and a private identity (this is based on one's relations with the self). Extending on these categories, I propose that skin gives directions to the following different identities of the self:

i) The Self as the Skin (skin as synonymous to the self)

According to Claudia Benthien, the approach of considering skin as a synecdoche for a human being is most obvious in our idiomatic expressions. She suggests, “this approach takes language seriously as a historical medium for the production of conceptions of the self and treats it as a source that documents changing body images” (17). Benthien’s essay, “Skin in Language”, proves the importance given to the theme of skin in literature around the world. Metaphors where self is regarded as skin are in plenty in French and Italian literature. ‘Selling the skin’ and ‘selling one’s self’ are treated as the same and it shows that skin is considered as the most essential part of a person. Similarly, in the idioms ‘to save one’s skin’ and ‘to lose one’s skin’ skin is equated to life. Job, one of the characters in the Bible suffered from a terrible skin disease and he strongly believed that he will be cured by god. He affirms that his skin will be renewed and will become as smooth and fresh as that of a child’s. Here, his renewed new skin can be identified as his new life itself: a new life that comes in after all the suffering of a lifetime.

In Anupama’s story, ever since the white patches started becoming visible, the world could only see her as a ‘woman with white patches’ on her body. There is no more mentioning about her beauty, career or her talents. All focus is on the patches and her skin becomes what she is to the world. Her mother-in-law thinks she deceived Anand into marrying her for his money. The astrologer Narayana calls her a bad omen and that she cannot perform the ritualistic *puja*. Her father and step-mother thinks that her condition is a hindrance to getting suitable alliances for her step-sisters. Her friend’s

husband tries to molest her as he thinks due to her diseased state and lack of support systems she will succumb to his wishes. The white patches on her skin turned her into a helpless woman to the world which was her only ‘visible’ identity. There was no Anupama beyond those patches until she starts a renewed life in Mumbai.

The way public responded to her disease made her condition worse and she became despondent. Chris Gabbard’s course on ‘Enlightenment and Disability’ at University of Florida suggests three specific paradigms that are used to understand and represent disability in the western culture, namely: the ancient symbolic, the medical and the constructionist models. “In the first, disability serves as a sign of divine wonder or warning or as an indicator of an internal moral condition. In the second, it serves as a sign of scientific pathology. And in the third, it is viewed as a problem created by society” (Gabbard “From Wonder to Error”). With Anupama, all the three models are applied in the novella. Her white patches were considered as a curse of the gods. She was told that she suffered due to her *karma* because of something she has done in her previous life. Her affliction was considered as the result of someone’s curses. Adding on to this, her family and society made her condition look like something more dreadful than it is. Even when Dr. Rao tried to tell her that it is not a disease and only a defective pigmentation of the skin, her own wretchedness made her weaker.

This idea of ‘skin as self’ brings in the “desire of shielding this surface which identifies and reveals from the foreign gaze” (Benthien 98). Quoting The Bible again, ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit their eyes were opened and they became aware of their nudity. They clothed themselves with animal skins. In the

different versions of The Bible, coats of skin, garments of skin, animal skin, tunics of skin, leather clothes etc are used interchangeably. Here, a second skin is used to cover and shield the bare skin of Adam and Eve. The body's tendency to hide the bareness of the skin from all kinds of foreign gaze can be considered as the rise of the culture of shame. Ever since Anupama became aware of her condition, she hides her patches and wears her sari in such a way that all the patches remain concealed.

To a certain extent, Anupama also started seeing herself through the yardsticks used by the people around her. She saw herself as a woman with the white patches. Her confidence and life was draining out of her hands. She did not go for her best friend's wedding as she was scared that her condition might cast a shadow over the auspicious ceremony. Succumbing to peer pressure, she even followed through an advice to worship a village goddess with white flowers every morning for twenty-one days. In Anupama's case, an identity formed within the paradigm of self as skin proved to be harmful to her existence.

ii) The Self Within the Skin (skin hides the true self)

Since Aristotle till the beginning of nineteenth century skin was considered as an outer covering for the body whose role also extended to act as a membrane. The attempts of a Viennese military surgeon named Joseph Plenck, an Edinburgh physician named Robert Willan and his pupil Thomas Bateman produced what can be called as the first atlas of skin diseases. Although, the former two doctors died by the time it was published in 1817, their names are still remembered in the books on

cutaneous diseases. Thus, skin was given an individual status and existence only with the inception of dermatology as a separate discipline in medicine during the nineteenth century. In other words, it was believed that one's true self lies beneath the skin.

The metaphor of the self that hides under the skin has appeared throughout history in varying formats. In architectural theory, the walls of a building are called the 'architectural skin'. It is very often mentioned that the body of the building must be covered by a proper skin with layers of plastering. This particular convention in architecture has also changed over the ages; sometimes outer coating is removed exposing the inner smooth walls. Through changing technology, medicine exposes the skin below the clothes and architectural innovations remove all decorative facade to open up the building's frame. In her paper titled "The Metaphor of the Body as a House in 19th century English Novels", Ioana Boghian proposes that human bodies were conceived using architectural discourse in the nineteenth century English fiction and clothes were regarded as extensions or boundaries of the human body. If body is the house, then the sensory organs can be considered as the windows of the architectural structure.

The metaphor of body as a house can also be dated back to 54 AD-57 AD when the Second Epistle to the Corinthians is believed to have been written. The *Worldwide English Version* of The Bible goes as, "Our body is the house in which our spirit lives here on earth. When that house is destroyed, then God will give us another house. That house is not made by man's hand. But God made it. It will last forever in

heaven” (2 Corinthians 5:1). Plato also proposed similar ideas which said that the earthly house of the soul (that is the body) is just a temporary dwelling which is like a rest station before one enters the eternal and heavenly house. Thus, extending this architectural metaphor of body and building, the skin is the house of the body like the plastering that holds the entire structure of a building. The house metaphor of the body also initiates a spatial dimension to this comparison. As skin scholar Claudia Benthien suggests,

In the house metaphor, the body becomes a hollow, vessel-like space. This hollowed, empty form is conceivable only with reference to the tent-like, imaginary hide created by the skin. And the skin is not imagined as sack-like and soft but as static and solid, as though it was either impregnated and tanned or a self-contained balloon filled with air (26).

Skin was thus believed to give a shape to the body or as Steven Connor puts it, “skin gives us both the shape of the world and our shape in it” (36). Our identity is determined by the qualities of the skin. Anupama’s ‘public identity’ was mostly limited to a ‘skin identity’ at the beginning of the story. Very few people saw her true self that lies beneath her skin and the white patches. What can be called as Anupama’s private identity was the ‘other’ of her skin identity. She was a completely different person. She always waited for her husband to come back or at least reply to her letters. But that identity of Anupama was not known to the public as she was the woman who cheated the man she married for his money.

Through these two threads, namely: the self as the skin and the self within the skin, we find that the visible identity of Anupama was wavering. Her private identity was the opposite of her public identity. This argument is supported by the years of scholarship on the cultural history of skin. It is said that the letters written by Goethe proposes that an individual's process of growth and cleansing includes a certain shedding of the skin. The true self always lies hidden beneath the skin. As Benthien suggests, "there is no single skin that constitutes humanness, individuality and vitality; rather beneath the skin are ever-new layers to discover" (84).

iii) The New Elastic Self

This novella can be used to propose a third identity with the import of a newly acquired skin. With this new identity, unlike the frameworks of self as the skin and self within the skin, there are no strict boundaries as to whether one's self lies beneath or on the skin. Instead, the skin is in a constant mode of transgression. The skin and self are attached with qualities of stretching and resisting. The elasticity of the skin accommodates new meanings and it emerges with fresh identities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the surface of the body is not a fixed and unchangeable biological entity but a dynamic prototype bound to hybridity, fluidity and transformation. Thus, the skin modifies itself over time and we find that Anupama's skin has also acquired new meanings.

Anupama's new skin makes her a new human. She could be identified as a liberated independent woman. Her newly found confidence was a post-Mumbai transformation as she could establish her identity in the new city. The novel welcomes the idea that

cities are more inclusive in nature with regard to underprivileged categories of people. Also, urban locations make one stronger in life. Although Anupama worked with a diverse group of people, she was surprised and also satisfied that none of them ever talked about the patches on her skin or her past. Her financial independence helped her regain her lost confidence. She was cheerful, bold and was not bothered about the presence of those patches. She does not try to hide them anymore. She even donates blood to one of her friends who met with an accident. Later, when she gets the job position of a lecturer, she becomes self-assured of her future.

Her newly acquired boldness enabled her to talk with courage. She despised the idea of being introduced as 'aunt' to her best friend's baby boy. She hated such titles. When Dr. Satya thanks her for being like a sister, she retorts,

I have helped you the way any human being would help another; nothing more and nothing less. I don't like being caught in relationships of convenience. I don't want to be anyone's 'sister' or 'aunt'. When two men can be friends and two women can be friends, surely a man and a woman can also be just friends (Murty 114).

When her husband confesses and comes back to invite her back, she stands up for herself and makes her decision very clear to Dr. Anand. She lets him know that she is emotionally and economically independent then and she does not want to be just a beautiful object that someone can possess and flaunt. She rejects Dr. Vasant's proposal also as she does not want to be entangled in the complicated conflicts within

a family space. She decides to be friends with him and not complicate the relationship by getting married.

The predominantly post-colonial reservations for the white colour appear in the novella in multiple ways. The white patches on Anupama's fair skin were not welcomed by her family. They looked at the blemish on her skin with disgust and contempt. In Indian cultural practices, a black spot on white skin is appreciated as a way to ward off evil from the body whereas, a white spot on white skin is not tolerated as portrayed in *Mahashweta*. One is also reminded of Ishmael in *Moby Dick* who was disturbed by the whiteness of the whale and how he thinks white is associated with evil. When Anupama is asked to pray to the village goddess it was specifically mentioned that she should worship her with white flowers alone. Every kind of flower offered at a temple has a significance associated with its colour. White stands for purity, divinity, peace, innocence etc. Perhaps, they believed that the 'white' in the white flowers might be transferred to her body through divine intervention and take away the curse.

The marks on the skin mediated the identity formation of individuals in both the narratives discussed above. By keeping aside the medical history and cure of the diseases, I studied the cultural transitions in an individual's life when scars, spots or speckles acquired visible spaces on the body. In both the narratives, we find that the diseased individuals had come to terms with the disease. They fought rarely with the disease but they fought the stigma attached to the conditions of their sort. The cultures of stigma can be considered as the product of one's inability to face the

strange and the unknown. In effect, the self fears the strangeness and tries to stay away from its presence as what has happened in the case of the diseased individuals elaborated above. It is also seen that the identity of the disease and the diseased are formed by the trajectories drawn by the marks on the bodies. Such marks can also determine the identity of a community which is studied in detail next.

Identity of a Community: The Speckled Condition

While trying to make sense of this phenomenon of identity formation through the medium of skin, I have observed that the marks on the skin are also responsible for creating an imaginary identity of a new community. I use the qualifier ‘imaginary’ as it is a speculative community formation. The identity of the disease and the diseased transfer their characteristics for the creation of a potential community: a group that shares specific traits and also capable of affecting other groups and associations. In the previous sections of this chapter, I proposed a medical and a socio-cultural identity formation of the disease and the diseased. Foucault’s notion of governmentality is utilized in this section of the chapter to understand an imaginary community. The phenomenon of governing the body has been an effective medium of power exertion. Situating in this context, I attempt to do a historical analysis of smallpox with the help of archival materials so as to further my arguments on the native self and the foreign other.

The narratives related to smallpox that ravaged the Indian sub-continent till the latter half of the twentieth century provide enough information to legitimize the marks on

the surface of the body as a signifier of a community's identity. This thesis utilizes the narratives on smallpox that emerged when this epidemic infested the Indian state of Kerala during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Archival texts on smallpox emphasize the role of the colonial imperial project in creating socio-cultural systems of identification and identity formation. These texts narrate the stories of four different kinds of marks on the surface of the body. I propose that these marks on the skin can be projected as four expressions of a community's identity.

Smallpox is called as the 'speckled monster' which was made popular through Jennifer Lee Carrell's book *The Speckled Monster: A Historical Tale of Battling Smallpox*. Smallpox was one among the most readily visible and distinguishable diseases that have affected the Indian subcontinent. Speckles or marks on the skin along with blindness were the most common after effects of this disease. According to a reading, "the story of smallpox contains two figures who visibly exhibited the disease: the pustuled sufferer and the pitted survivor" (Reinarz 129). Smallpox is a viral disease with an incubation period of 12 to 14 days. Historians have traced the history of smallpox and have identified its presence in India from the seventh century. WHO's 1988 publication titled *Smallpox and Its Eradication* mentions that in the ancient Sanskrit writings it was considered as a common disease of those times. But it is still only speculated that the *masurika* mentioned in these writings stands for the contemporary understanding of smallpox. Early travel writers mention the presence of an epidemic that caused blisters on the skin resulting in eventual death of the victims.

i) Marks of Struggle and Suffering

Although references to smallpox are attributed to ancient Indian writings, due to the constantly changing nature of the viral strains a permanent cure for the disease was not mentioned or at least not so far identified in these writings. Smallpox is recorded as a seasonal disease with its intensity being the most severe during summer. The virus appeared to be more active in dry climate than in wet temperature. David Arnold in his essay “Smallpox and Colonial Medicine in Nineteenth Century India” cites the documentation done by R. Pringle on smallpox in India:

In the populous Doab tract of northern India as many as ninety five percent of the population may have been exposed to smallpox at some stage in their life. So prevalent was the disease that it has become quite a saying among the agricultural and even wealthier classes never to count children as permanent members of the family ... until they have been attacked with and recovered from smallpox (qtd. in Arnold 47).

Mortality rates on smallpox were not available till the beginning of the nineteenth century. David Arnold’s documentation suggests that from 1837 to 1869 around 21,000 deaths were recorded in Calcutta which was around 5 to 10% of all the deaths that occurred there. It was called as a fatal scourge that has dreaded Indians and Europeans at the same time.

With ripe, swollen and putrid pustules

The pox has melted into the village

Her dance of death shocked the people.

Taking away love and mercy from us

She alienated us from each other...

She stole knowledge and left us ignorant... [Kakkanadan 183]

Thus goes the epilogue of G. V. Kakkanadan's 1968 novel *Vasoori*²⁵. It narrates the intimate details of suffering by a group of people in a remote part of central Kerala. Along with the physical discomfort caused by the disease, ignorance and stigma make the diseased state even more miserable. The victims were weakened emotionally and socially as they were ostracized even from their own families and were left to die alone. The first character to have smallpox in the novel is Luko's wife. This unnamed character is given a separate room outside their house and Luko himself did not bother to check on her well-being. Husbands left their wives and parents left their children. Quarantining and alienating the patient became the norm of the dreaded times. We find the protagonist Krishnankutty wondering how one's mother can stop being his/her mother just because s/he is sick. He continues with sarcasm, "May be everyone is not the same. May be the thinking of people with wisdom and good manners is different from mine. For them when an illness strikes, it's the illness that is more important. I feel like laughing" [Kakkanadan 19]. Luko's son Pappachan was curious to know about the bubble-like blisters on his mother's face. But his mother's ill health never bothered him as he continued to learn new swear lines from the village toddy shop.

²⁵*Vasoori* was published in Malayalam and my translation of the text is incorporated in this thesis.

The author criticizes the pox marks on their living and dead bodies as a representation of the society's disease: a state of general degradation. They depict a diseased society which is in need of a cure. The fragility of human relationships and the superficiality of human lives are tethered to the speckles in this novel. The caricature of Rajan stands for the many fake faces we see around us, whereas the lead protagonist Krishnankutty is exaggerated for his goodness. Rajan pretends to be like a saint who hates loose morals in front of the general public while he visits the village prostitute in the middle of the night. Even Gopalakrishnan who is a respected retired teacher in the village recollects the number of women he has been with before and after his marriage. The characters who appear to be pristinely pure outside are inwardly embodiments of jealousy, lust and greed.

The novel touches the pseudo morality of a Kerala society in terms of religion and sexuality. Ever since the villagers came to know about the epidemic, they all wanted to enjoy and live their lives to the fullest. They shared a sudden urge and enthusiasm to explore the untraversed vicissitudes of their lives. They were all convinced that the disease will kill them. Mathai and Diwakar decided to treat themselves with alcohol and women. The sudden wave of fear made them forget human relationships as in the case of Ellikutty, Radha and Rukmini while desires of the flesh coveted their thoughts. The entire novel is filled with multiple episodes of random heterosexual affairs. The fear of death directed the villagers to fulfil their otherwise hidden passions.

The speckled monster has become a category of representation in popular culture to denote monstrosity and ugliness. It is evident from how this novel begins as the author details the surroundings with a description of darkness. He says that even the wind smells of darkness which is quite eerie to think about and all he could see was the leaves with sores on it. The author sets the tone for a chaotic culmination of the novel. Radha contemplates,

Even I could be infected with smallpox any moment. If it comes everything is over. I will die. If not death, I will lose a hand or a leg or ears and I will have to live like that. Even if all the body parts are intact, I will still have black spots all over the body. I will lose all my beauty. I am disgusted and scared when I meet smallpox survivors. I will also face similar experiences. People will try to move away from me [Kakkanadan 64].

The incidence of smallpox brought in a fear of death. We find the most unexpected friendships in the novel like the one between Krishnankutty and Radha. The shared experience of trauma brought them together. The novel narrates an extreme form of struggle and suffering through which very few people have survived. The scars on their bodies opened up a painful past and also exposed their true selves as presented in the novel.

ii) Marks of Survival

According to the WHO records, the earliest European documents on smallpox in India show that there was an outbreak in the year 1545 among children in the

Portuguese settlements at Goa. Most of the affected victims died during the outbreak and the lucky few survivors were scarred for life. Pockmarks were left on their skin reminding them of an (im)perfect past. The marks of survival can be explained as a successor of the marks of struggle and suffering. Their visible scars were trophies of their survival.

In Kerala, most number of smallpox deaths happened during 1950s and 1960s as per the number of the reported cases. Before the cure was invented, people found solace in smallpox deities around the world for a very long time. T'ou-Shen Niang-Niang was a goddess of smallpox in China, Tametomo in Japan, Sitala in India and worship of Sopona in Africa, to mention a few examples. People prayed to them for the cure of diseases especially from smallpox. There are several myths and stories around smallpox and the curse of gods. These gods are portrayed as the protector and destroyer at the same time like Shelley's 'west wind'. They can inflict one with the pox and also remove the disease which makes it necessary to please these gods all the time.

Although several other equivalent versions of Sitala were present in different parts of our country, the deity of Sitala seems like the one which is mostly studied and documented by anthropologists and historians around the world. In the Northern temples of India, she is represented as a calm goddess riding on an ass while carrying water, broom and a basket of grain. The grains symbolize the pox pustules and the broom signifies her power to sweep away the pox if she pleases to do so. Her name 'Sitala' meant the 'cool one' adding on to the burden of people to keep her 'cool' all

the time and not to be punished by her wrath. Thus, it is recorded that people who died of smallpox were not cremated “for the fear of scorching the goddess and further provoking her” (Arnold 48) even when it was the customary practice among many castes in India.

Luko in Kakkanadan’s *Vasoori* laments that he has not hurt anyone in his life and even then god has punished his family with the pox. Kakkanadan narrates the story of the powerful Mother Mary of Pareppally who has saved an entire market from smallpox in the past. Elikutty in the same novel is scared that god will punish her with the pox as she tried to seduce her son-in-law. In O. V. Vijayan’s *The Legends of Khasak*, there is a passive mentioning of Mariyamma as the goddess of smallpox who is worshipped by the Hindu lower castes with toddy in order to escape from her wrath and curse. In Kerala, the deity Vasoormala is attributed with the power of inflicting gods and people with smallpox. A popular goddess mentioned in the myths of Kerala Bhadrakali is often depicted with mild pockmarks on her face as she was cursed by Vasoormala.

Theyyam is a popular ritualistic performance in Kerala which is associated with this deity, Bhadrakali. It is portrayed as a performance by lower caste Hindus and the worship of gods of diseases is one among the many practices within the Theyyam cult. The invocation and dance are presented in front of the village shrine and in most cases Theyyam itself is considered as the divine presence. People pray to Theyyam as the artist metaphorically metamorphoses into the deity of the shrine during the performance. In the Malayalam movie *Kaliyattam* (an adaptation of Shakespeare’s

Othello), Othello is portrayed as a Theyyam artist who falls in love with the daughter of the village head. Othello is speckled with pockmarks all over his face, probably to denote him as a pox survivor adding on to the powers of a lower caste as the reincarnation of a god.

The marks of survival, thus, created a new identity and a new community. The attack of smallpox shook the existing community as it took lives from people without any biases of caste, creed or class. The survivors had marks on their skin which separated them from the un-infected. The identity of smallpox defines it as an epidemic, thus affecting communities together. “If it comes, it returns with many deaths in its hands” [Kakkanadan 28], Mathai reminds us in *Vasoori*. The survivors of the smallpox thus may not belong to the same community. As a result, the formation of a new community was also under threat. The new group could be brought together only on the basis of a fear of death. They might share a common fear of surviving a painful disease in the past. Thus, the idea of a new community fails, apart from the marks left by the epidemic.

iii) Marks of Precaution

The last known case of smallpox in India was on 17th May 1975. In the year 1798, Edward Jenner published his discovery of the smallpox vaccine. But it took another four years for the viable vaccine to reach India in 1802 with the keen efforts of the Swiss physician Jean de Carro. In the beginning, vaccination was limited to the European needs and it took many more years for it to become a popular practice

among the natives. The European fear of the colonial scourge prompted them to single out the Indians who worked closest to them and vaccinate them. Nevertheless, they later on realized the advantages of having a vaccinated native community around them. This marked the beginning of the imperial intervention into the native medical lives. Vaccination was a passage to introduce western medicine in India.

Vaccination was advocated as a precautionary measure among the natives by the colonizers and it can be thus called as 'marks from the west'. It had to overthrow the resistance from the native practice of inoculation and the native practitioners to establish staid roots in India. This resulted in a fight between the agencies of native marks and marks from the west. The native practice of inoculation was called as variolation where material from the pustules of smallpox patients were introduced into a healthy body. This practice was similar to the Turkish smallpox inoculation method popularized by the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in 1717.

Variolation was preferred over vaccination as the native practice had a very religious turn to it. The treatment started after invoking the gods which made the people trust this method. There were native variolation practitioners also called as tikadars or mark-makers who came from their own or nearby communities. Moreover, as Arnold mentions, "variolation was a form of medical treatment sought after and paid for by the people themselves: unlike vaccination, it was not dependent upon state patronage and intervention" (50). Thus, it was the people who took the effort to get inoculated rather than an imposed exercise by the state. As opposed to variolation, invaccination one is inoculated with cow pox virus. It caused discomfort in the minds of Hindus as

cow is venerated in this country. The idea of a male vaccinator touching a girl during revaccination was also not welcomed here. Thus, Indians viewed vaccination with scepticism and due to these reasons variolation became a strong rival to vaccination.

Vaccination claimed to involve fewer punctures on the body. As variolation procedure introduced material from smallpox virus into the body, it was argued that it can make one more susceptible to lethal forms of smallpox. Moreover, the body will act like a ticking bomb being the carrier of the virus. It was often called as a murderous trade. In effect, vaccination slowly coveted the minds of the natives and more native hands were raised for vaccination. K. S. Parthasarathy records in the *British Medical Journal* that Her Highness Rani Gouri Laxmi Bai, the then reigning Queen of the princely state of Travancore vaccinated herself first to set an example and reassure her subjects. Her efforts can be seen from the following note: “With a view to protect Her subjects from the outbreak of smallpox which was frequent in those days, Her Highness sanctioned the establishment of a Smallpox Vaccination Section in 988 (AD 1813)” (qtd. in Parthasarathy “Rani Gouri Laxmi”). In a letter written by General Cullen in 1844 to the Dewan of Travancore records the suggestions by Dr. Paterson, the Durbar Physician on the vaccination report.

To the Dewan of Travancore

... wide prevalence of smallpox ... not using the most valuable discovery ... immunity from the ravages of smallpox can only be attained by perseverance in a more general introduction of vaccination ... containment of other ordinary diseases ... success as vaccinators ... but be received as a boon by the population

... treatment of diseased to be printed in Tamil and Malayalam will be most useful and an additional ground for confidence in Dr. Paterson's professional skill of his zeal to promote the interests of His Highness' service.

Your Most Obedient Servant

Cullen

Resident

(Cullen, "Dr. Paterson's")

As evident from the letter given above, there was a strong promotion of vaccination among Indians. Despite stronger resistance from the natives, during 1865 and 1866, variolation was banned in Calcutta and its surrounding places. And in the Royal Proclamation of 1879 in Travancore, vaccination was made compulsory for all government servants, pupils in schools, *vakil*, persons seeking help from hospitals, inmates of jails and persons dependent on State charities.

The marks of precaution also extended to the questions regarding the setting up of smallpox hospitals and the disposal of the bodies of smallpox victims. While smallpox survivors were scarred for life, the dead bodies of smallpox victims were left unattended. The burial of pox victims was a matter of great debate and concern in India. As mentioned earlier, on one hand, cremation was not welcomed as it could displease their gods and could initiate further spreading of the epidemic. As a precaution, people neither allowed burial grounds near their locality nor did they want to burn the corpse as they dreaded the spread of the disease through air. On the other

hand, caste differences demanded that the dead bodies must get its own special funeral rites. The following letters exemplify the arguments related to the burial of smallpox dead bodies.

Parts of a letter dated 7th February 1912 by a surgeon Dr. Peter N. L. with regard to his inspection of the smallpox burial ground which was addressed to the Durbar Physician of erstwhile Travancore goes like this:

As regards the burial ground complained of, I agree that the bodies are being buried in a place where a brick factory has been established lately almost about 6 yards from the burial ground. Though the burial ground has been in existence for a long time and the brick factory is of recent growth, I recommend the burial ground be closed and the bodies be directed to be disposed of suitably covered and disinfected in the public burial or burning ground (Peter, "After Visiting").

A committee was formed to further analyse the problems related to burial grounds in Quilon and the notification published by the President of the committee on 11th December 1917 informed that the bodies of the persons dying from smallpox should be 'buried only' and that too at certain specific places. In the case of Brahmins, Thiruvallaram beach was the prescribed location. The case of the dead bodies belonging to other Hindu castes and other religions were not mentioned in the letters. The report continued that provisions were also arranged for the body to be carried to the burial ground between 10 p.m and 4a.m.

Simultaneously, a petition was submitted by a group of Brahmins on 24th December 1917 addressing their concern that the new rule (as per the notification published by

the Committee in December 1917) was in direct conflict with their religious rites and ceremonies. They wrote to amend the Rules so that it won't run counter to their religious sentiments. The petition goes as:

a) We find that the bodies of Brahmans who have died of smallpox have to be buried in the Thiruvallaram sea shore. This read with the subsequent lines lead one to suppose that cremation is prohibited, though it may be conveniently interpreted to mean burial or cremation. According to the custom of the caste, which meaning would have been naturally intended by the committee and hence, we pray that the rule be made clear by saying burial or burning according to the Acharas of the caste.

b) We find that those who follow the dead body of a Brahmana should bathe only in the sea adjoining Thiruvallaram and should not touch any public tanks or wells or canals. This rule is highly offensive to the religious observances of the Brahmana. Because from the moment of the death of a Brahmana to the Grihayagna on the 13th day after death, the whole period is one of a series of religious rites. For every Aparakarma pure water and not sea water is an absolute necessity. Sea water cannot ordinarily be touched by a Brahmana except on Parva days and in connection with the death of a Brahmana, his touching the sea for bathing and performance of the ceremony is an absolute prohibition. Ever since Quilon became inhabited by the Brahmanas, they used to cremate dead body on the Thiruvallaram beach and bathe in and use the water of the Thiruvallaram tank for all their religious rites on the spot. Hence, this rule

should be amended so as to be in conformity with the religious spirit of the Brahmanas as was hitherto in practice.

c) The time fixed for the removal of the corpses to the cremation ground is highly objectionable. The Rules fix the time between 10 pm and 4 am in the night. This rule runs quite against the religious practice of the Brahmanas. To a Brahmana even though death occurs during night, the body should be removed only after day break and should be cremated before sunset. Brahmanas who usually reside in groups in Agraharam, have a religious duty to observe in the matter of the removal of the corpse. Until the corpse is removed to the ... none of the inmates of any house forming the group shall prepare food, eat or drink or perform religious ceremonies or worship God. Even in the temples situated to the place of death, Poojas cannot be performed unless and until the corpse is removed. Hence this rule cuts the religious feelings of the Brahmanas to the quick and compels them to act against the Shastric injunctions. Secondly, even from the sanitary point of view, the dead body of the smallpox infected men should be removed from the house soon after the death.

We therefore earnestly pray that the above-mentioned portions of the Rules be amended at once by the Committee, in the light of the reasons set forth above, as not as to clash with the religious observances of the Brahmanas (Brahmins, "Petition by Brahmins").

In reply to this petition, a resolution was passed on 2nd January 1918 addressing the problems raised by the Brahmins. Dr. K. Raman Tampi was requested to prepare proper guidelines for cremation. His letter addressed to the President of the Town Improvement Committee, Quilon, allowed the 'cremation of bodies' of smallpox patients when it is unavoidable as in the case of Brahmins but with the following restrictions:

The bodies should be well covered with cloth wrung out of carbolic lotion (1 in 20). No part of the body should be left exposed. Plenty of dry fuel (*varali*) should be used for cremation. Crude sulphur may be used on the top of the fuel. Special arrangements should be made to see that no part of the body escapes burning. The cot and the mattress and the clothing used by the patient should be burnt. All those who have come in contact with the patient should be revaccinated within twenty four hours. Cremation ground should be so chosen as not to be in the vicinity of dwelling houses (Tampi, "Cremation of Dead Bodies").

This letter also informs us that vaccination was gaining momentum in the 1900s. The other problems mentioned in the petition were also dealt with amicable solutions through the resolution notified in January 1918. With the special permission of the President the time to remove the corpses was made flexible. With regard to bathing in the sea, the issue was resolved by providing them with a pot well near Thiruvallaram beach. The Government's notification which was published on 5th June 1936

conferring to the Indian Ports Act, XV of 1908 collaborate the strictness with which vaccination had to be observed in India.

Any person proposing to sail by a vessel, whether as a passenger or as a member of the crew, from any port in the Bombay Presidency subject to the said Act to any port outside India may, before sailing, be required by the Port Heath Officer to satisfy him that he has been vaccinated or re-vaccinated against smallpox not less than twelve days and not more than three years before the date of sailing or that he has scars proving a previous attack of smallpox (Sorley, "Letter from general Department").

A very similar rule was notified to passengers and crew members who were to come to India also. We find that in writing letters and also in taking vaccinations it was always a group of people doing it together. This projects the identity of a community in terms of their attitude towards the marks of precaution. There was a surprising reduction in the number of smallpox deaths during the post vaccination years and the mass vaccination campaign of NSEP (National Smallpox Eradication Programme) from 1962 to 1975 helped the nation to eradicate smallpox.

iv) Marks of Deceit and Control

The western marks of precaution intervened in the social lives of the natives. It questioned the Indian religious beliefs and gender reservations. The entry of state into the vaccination campaign and the government's efforts to convert variolators into vaccinators were resisted with further scepticism. This attempt of the government also

proved to be ineffectual as people did not pay for the vaccination which they did not want. People very genuinely wondered why the Europeans wanted to mark them and they were quite suspicious about the alien aspects regarding their medical intervention. It was difficult for the natives to believe that the colonial regime was purely humanitarian in its thoughts and that vaccination was a benevolent gift for their betterment.

Vaccination was said to be a deliberate attempt to violate caste and religion and so make converts to Christianity. Those marked by vaccination would later die in agony or be sacrificed to ensure the successful completion of a bridge or railway embankment. Vaccination was feared as the prelude to new taxation or forced labour. One of the commonest beliefs was that the British were searching for a child with white blood or milk in his veins: this would be the saviour (the Mahdi of the Muslims) who would drive out the foreigners unless first caught and destroyed (Arnold 56).

Hence, vaccination was received with a lot of disturbing criticism from the native end. The marks of the west were thus treated like the many other coercive tactics of the imperial power in India. Dominik Wujastyk's study of oriental medicine also states that vaccination had to face a lot of resistance of India especially the rumour that the state was trying to put a 'government mark' on the arms of the natives: "When older, the male children with this mark would be sent as coolies to other British colonies, or forcibly drafted into the army. Girls with the mark would be forced into harems. Another version of the rumour was that the mark was part of a

census of the people with a view to imposing a new tax” (Wujastyk 142). People went to the extent of washing away the vaccine with water or rubbing chalk on the arms in order to prevent the vesicles from rising on the skin. There were also families who hid their children from vaccinators against ‘marking’ their kids.

When we analyse deeper into the issue, we find that the measures of precaution extended to various forms of social control and deceit of individual bodies. As the natives dreaded, the European medical intervention was literally a mark of deceit and control. When the direct involvement and intervention into the native lives proved to be ineffectual, the European *modus operandi* adopted a project of nativizing the European ‘tablets’. This involved several measures to nativize the imperial agenda of building a strong hold in this foreign land. One of the most important strategies was to create more vaccinators among the natives. They tried to teach the existing *tikadars* the new method and tried to convert them into vaccinators. But it had its own disadvantages as “there were frequent reports of vaccinators submitting false returns, exaggerating the number of vaccinations actually performed, or being too illiterate to fill in the forms correctly” (Arnold 57).

Since caste and religion played their roles hand-in-hand in the Indian scene, this attempt to create more native vaccinators was to obtain a religious sanction too. The practice of vaccination was criticized overtly for its non-religious dimension. As vaccination did not include the invoking of gods like Sitala or any other dietary and ritualistic preparations, it was considered as an irreligious activity by the natives. But when the variolators turned vaccinators came into the picture here, they deliberately

“diluted the raw secularity of their work with a few Sitala prayers and rituals” (Arnold 56) and as they thought this could please more native minds. Such *tikadars* were also lured into becoming government vaccinators. Smallpox became rampant among the hill tribes and since vaccine was the only appropriate solution, two Pulayas were requested to be appointed as vaccinators in a letter written from the Huzur Cutcherry to the physician of His Highness Maharaja of Travancore and the Principal Medical Officer of Travancore in 1870. Thus although, low caste vaccinators received little public respect, they were the only ones to go to vaccinate the hill tribes.

Another popular strategy employed by the Europeans to get the appeal for vaccination in the native minds was to translate the medical procedures into the Indian native languages. The letter written by General Cullen in 1844, which has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, recalls the importance to print the treatment of the diseased in Tamil and Malayalam as it will be useful in regaining the confidence and preparedness of the natives. David Arnold mentions that the government had tried to persuade Brahmins to issue declarations that “there was nothing in the Hindu *sastras* or sacred texts that prohibited vaccination or made variolation a religious duty” (Arnold 58). An extension of this is probably the basis of Dominik Wujastyk’s noted work “A Pious Fraud: The Indian Claims for a Pre-Jennerian Smallpox Vaccination”. In this article, the author criticizes the Indian claims of possessing the technique of vaccination (injecting material from cow pox) prior to its official discovery by Edward Jenner in 1798 and he blatantly refutes this claim as a vested strategy to popularize and legitimize vaccination in India. With detailed references Wujastyk

claims that cow pox virus never existed naturally in India at least as earlier than 1798 so as to practice vaccination before Jenner's discovery. Thus, the so called vernacular vaccination tracts were only a ploy to promote vaccination.

The setting up of smallpox hospitals and the disposal of smallpox affected dead bodies were crucial concerns of those times with its own agendas of deceit and control. As discussed earlier, with regard to the burial of dead bodies, Brahmins were able to make their preferences. In the case of smallpox treatment, during the initial stages, the setting up of smallpox sheds near their own houses was purely to isolate the diseased so as to avoid further infection among the family members. This is evident through the fictional representations based on smallpox and such isolation sheds were based on one's fear of an unknown contagion and one's inability to contain the virus. Later on, separate smallpox sheds were attached to hospitals with the expectation that these patients will receive special care from doctors. Towards the end of nineteenth century, separate smallpox hospitals began to crop up. A letter dated 11th October 1896 addressed to the Durbar Physician informs the necessity to have these separate sheds.

I have the honour to bring to your notice that a special building attached to this dispensary for admitting cholera and smallpox cases is highly necessary. A few months ago, when there was an in-patient in the dispensary, a cholera case was admitted and the former also was after the admission of the cholera patient, attacked with cholera and both died within a short time. Besides three members in one family living next door to the dispensary caught the infection and

succumbed to the disease. On all sides and in close proximity of the dispensary is a Brahmins occupied neighbourhood who had been bitterly complaining of admitting infectious diseases in the dispensary. If a case of cholera or smallpox is brought to the dispensary I will be in such a position as I can neither admit nor refute admission. I am going to understand that cholera has broken out in Palghat and people of this country have dealings with those people there and so there is every likelihood of infection being brought here.

I therefore request you will be good enough to arrange to have a temporary contagious disease ward put up as early as possible somewhere remote from the populated part of the place ("Special Building").

This 1896 letter might have foreseen the need to have specialized treatments in India. Specialized hospitals with a view of uni-functionality emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century. For the treatment of smallpox, the Middlesex Hospital was opened in London in 1745. "The new uni-functional hospital comes to be organized only from the moment when hospitalization becomes the basis, and sometimes the condition for a more or less complex therapeutic approach" (Faubion 104). Coupled with a fear of the disease and also to treat the disease in appropriate ways, the Indian medical scene was also revamped with new smallpox treatment hospitals. This justifies the opening of specialized hospitals in India. Western medical mission deployed its strategies in the form of modern medicine. The King Institute of Preventive Medicine was opened on 11th March 1905 in the erstwhile Madras by

Lord Ampthill who was the then Governor of Madras. This institute was established with the aim of producing a constant supply of cow pox vaccine.

Once the idea of smallpox hospitals was established, what followed was a constant struggle as to where the hospital should be built. Nobody wanted the hospital or the burial ground in their neighbourhood and the privileged group of people was always successful in convincing the authorities to construct such spaces far away from their settlements. A great many letters written during the beginning of twentieth century requested the Dewan to shift the smallpox hospital to a less congested place and the reasons they produced for the move are noteworthy.

V. K. Govinda Paddar and Co. of Ashrama Tile Works, Quilon wrote to the Dewan in 1911 that the smallpox hospital was close to their tile factory and that the dead bodies from that hospital were buried in their neighbourhood. The workmen employed by them were afraid of working in a factory in the vicinity of a place where smallpox dead bodies were buried. Thus, they requested that the hospital be shifted to any unpopulated locality.

A group of people wrote a letter to the Dewan Peishkar in the month of October 1914 requesting to relocate the smallpox shed as it is presently in the close proximity to the District and Sessions court of Kottayam. Few lines of the letter are quoted below:

Even before the location of the District court in this quarter of the town, the tendency of the town was to develop in that direction as is evidenced by the large number of splendid residential quarters which have been constructed there

as well as by such public institutions as two Higher Grade Secondary Schools with boarding houses attached to them, several Elementary Schools, a European Hotel, several churches and chapels, the residence of the Roman Catholic Archbishop, an Orphanage & c.

Around the proposed site are the Archbishop's residence and the District Court with the civil jail attached to it. Besides the considerable number of civil debtors occupying the civil jail night and day, the district court every day draws a very large number of people including court officials, *vakils* and clients. After it was decided to locate the district court in its present site, the tendency to build *vakil's* quarters, shops and private residences in that quarter has become far more marked. In fact, this is the only direction where there is space for the town to grow.

The only way that there is for taking smallpox patients into the proposed shed and removing corpses to the burial ground is through the District court premises. For all these reasons, we respectfully submit that the location of a smallpox shed in the proposed site will be highly injurious not merely to the townsmen of Kottayam but will be a source of infection throughout the length and breadth of the taluks comprised within the jurisdiction of the district court ("Relocate smallpox shed").

In November 1914, the Vicar General and Administrator of the Catholic Diocese of Kottayam wrote a letter to the Dewan to revoke the plan to bring back the smallpox shed into the hospital premises.

Even those who are opposed to the new site would not for a moment support the idea of bringing the shed back to its old place. Around the new site there is not a single dwelling house of any importance within a furlong, the nearest building being District Court house which itself is about a furlong away ... Already there were a few cases of smallpox around the hospital before the removal of the shed, but no new attacks have been heard of since then. If however the shed be again brought to the old place, judging from the experience of the past, the usual contagion will soon spread itself in the town (Vicar, "Against the Proposal to Bring Back Smallpox Shed").

Similar letters were written in the following years also by residents and other concerned officials from different parts of Kerala requesting the Dewan not to bring back the smallpox shed to the existing hospital premises. One among the new sites for smallpox shed was suggested in a letter dated July 1919 written by the then Deputy Surgeon A. V. Jacob.

There is a small hill known as 'Nedumpala Koonoo', the top of which comprising about two acres of tolerably flat land, may in the absence of a better one be selected for the erection of the contagious disease shed. It is a private holding owned by one Vettathoo Mani, has no cultivation on it and is about a

mile away from the hospital by road. The neighbourhood is not at all congested though there are a few dwelling houses here and there at its feet. A cartable approach road about half a furlong long will have to be made for which also land will have to be assumed by government (Jacob, "Possible New Site").

A stark letter of opposition can be found in a letter dated November 1920 in which the poor class inhabitants of Kottayam taluk submitted a petition to the Dewan to disallow the recommendation made by the local municipal council for removing the smallpox shed from the hospital premises. When the smallpox shed was within the hospital premises, the patients were under the immediate supervision of the medical officer and this arrangement was beneficial to these poor class of people. When the smallpox shed was shifted to Vadavathur which is at a distance of about three miles from the hospital, it was these patients who had to suffer more without proper medical attention.

Owing to the distance of the locality from town the patients used to be kept for days together without proper attention and care in so far as the medical officer could not conveniently visit the shed as frequently as he is expected to do, or could the patients be supplied the necessary food or medicine in proper time ... At the instance of a few interested people the local municipal council has passed resolutions recommending the government to remove the shed to its quondam site at Vadavathur, a desolate locality far away from the town and that these resolutions were passed at the back of the poor class of inhabitants who form the majority of the population of the taluk.

That it is the poor classes that have to resort to the shed for treatment and therefore it is their convenience and welfare that should be given preferential consideration over the comparatively insignificant inconveniences of a few well to do people living within close proximity to the hospital (“Request to Bring Back Smallpox Shed”).

In the letters dated in 1921 and 1951 we find that the smallpox shed was brought back to the hospital premises. “I have the honor to inform government that the local medical officer has requested the council to construct an isolation shed in the hospital compound using the ground floor of an old and dilapidated shed situated in the hospital premises” (“Construction of Isolation Sheds”). The Euro-Indian battle against smallpox with the specialized modern medicine continued its ways into the natives’ lives.

A deeper look into the various techniques employed in the setting up of smallpox hospitals presents a vivid example of Foucault’s discourse on the exercise of power. In other words, the western medical intervention was just another strategy to mark their control over the Indian systems. With regard to the growth, development and eradication of smallpox in Kerala as detailed through the previous pages, we can trace a very systematic exercise of foreign power on the native lives. It started with the identification of the disease and the isolation of the diseased. After isolating them, special smallpox sheds and hospitals were opened to provide modern medicine and vaccination. Medicine was only a version of social control as Foucault has established: “priority areas of medicalization in the urban environment are isolated

and are destined to constitute so many points for the exercise and application of an intensified medical power” (Faubion 99).

With the Independence and the eradication of smallpox in 1975 we may have been relieved from the fear of this contagion and its definitive marks of deceit and control. But an article published in *The Hindu* in May 2014 recalls old wounds. 571 known samples of living smallpox virus are preserved by the Russian lab Vector and the Centre for Disease Control lab in Atlanta, USA. We are highly susceptible to a possible outbreak as we are no more immune to smallpox. Due to the divided opinions from the scientific community, these vials of live samples are not destroyed till date. Many have criticized smallpox of having the potential to be the most powerful biological weapon.

The Geneva Protocol of 1925 prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons but there could be other unknown sources of this potential virus as in: “the corpse of a person who died of smallpox and is buried in the Arctic or Siberian permafrost, or a virus vial unknowingly retained in some laboratory, or samples deliberately retained by some country out of a suspicion of the motives of the Russian and U.S. governments or out of intentions of bio-warfare” (Ramachandran, “A Virus Lives on”). Due to these reasons, some scientists are of the opinion that the live samples should not be destroyed. At the same time as our world is pacing up with echoes of another world war that can break out any time, advanced strategies of warfare will also be displayed by various countries. A germ warfare cannot be ruled out and

possibilities like the distribution of smallpox blankets (Siege of Fort Pitt in 1763) cannot be dismissed.

Through this chapter, I proposed that the visible and invisible scars on the surface of the body can define one's identity. The fictional representation of the wart, leucoderma and smallpox suggested an alternative imaginary of identity formation through the identity of the disease, diseased and of the community respectively. This indicates the formation of a socio-cultural identity based on the diseases under study. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Alan Bewell's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* proposes that the British understanding of their own biomedical identity was a response to their experiences of the colonial diseases. Their conception of a disease was based on the geographical location of the disease. Thus, the pathologies related to the colonies appeared in the narratives of that time period. This, in turn, became a medium to see them through biomedical lens and to make sense of the extent of their medical interventions in the colonies.

Similarly, it is also noteworthy that our medical identity is largely influenced by the European experiments and experiences in India. Thus, I suggest that the western conception of medicine has largely formulated the Indian biomedical identity. Their coercive strategies might have been the ruling factor, but their presence in the Indian history cannot be dismissed. Hence, the emerging identities in the Indian medical scene are also a response and result of the years of western medical interventions. When these interventions mingled with the Indian systems of knowledge, practices

and various existing medical agencies, what surfaced were identities that cannot be grouped into strict categories. 'Marks' on the skin is one among the many tangents that contribute to the multiple layers of identity formulations of an individual. As detailed in this chapter, the identity of the disease (contagion), identity of the diseased state and also the identity of a community during an epidemic become guiding tools that define the individual's identity and identities.

Chapter Four

Mutilated Skins and Distorted Identities: On the Emergence of ‘Disability’ from Skin

“The codes of discrimination and prejudice in India are unwritten and veil themselves in ambiguity. It is often difficult for the victims to establish their case as it unfolds- sometimes it doesn’t at all- in a complex and obscure manner” (Rashid)

Thus wrote the *The Hindu* journalist Omar Rashid in an article titled “Shutting Out the Other”. His observation has been made in the context of religious intolerance in India. Through this chapter, I make a similar proposition by taking the case of disability as a mode of discrimination and rejection in India. The discourse of disability is studied by analysing select narratives on disabilities that emerge from the skin. This chapter follows the same methodology utilized in the previous chapter, which is textual and historical analysis to do a socio-cultural reading of disability. This chapter goes on to address the question of changing notions of spatiality and temporality with regard to the institutions related to disability emerging from the skin.

Disability is one among the most obvious transformations of the body. Disability emerging from the skin can be understood as a discourse with many embedded meanings. Here, I study how the skin relates to disability. When skin becomes an agent for the emergence of disability of the body, the disability becomes openly visible and thus easily identifiable unlike impairments like deaf, dumb, blind etc. Mutilations on the skin can result in the physical dysfunction of body parts and

eventually it could give rise to disabled and distorted identities. In this sense, disability emerges from the skin. The two most obvious cases of such disabilities in India are leprosy and burn related disabilities. In this chapter, disability from the skin is studied by analysing select narratives on leprosy and burn cases in India. Leprosy and burn accidents are not only fatal but they can transform the body into what might be seen as repulsive and alienating by the normative society.

The case of disability came to limelight as a structured academic topic of discussion more recently with the establishment of Disability Studies in the 1990s. In this sense, disability can be considered as a recent entry into the terms narrating marginality like exiles, expatriates, deportee, outcasts, refugees, lepers, vagabonds, mutants, misfits, doppelgangers, transgressors etc. As advocated by medical and psycho-social experts, disability is a broad term which is used to indicate various absences of abilities like physical, fiscal, mental, legal, sensory, intellectual etc. For clarity, I use the category of ‘disability’ in this current study to address physical distortions. Furthermore, the discourse of disability is studied here by analysing the various identities that have emerged through the mutilations and aberrations on the skin. In the previous chapter, ‘marks’ on the surface of the body have been already established as an alternative imaginary for identity formation. Here, I study how skin becomes an agent in addressing the agency of disability. The connections between skin and disability are explored here to showcase how visible disability is embedded on the surface of the body.

The dimensions that define and categorize disability emerge from multiple disciplines like medicine, ethics, law, humanities, sports etc and thus the naming of this category is very often debated. During the nineteenth century, the term ‘handicap’ was replaced by ‘disabled’ as the former term was used in the context of unequal contestants in horse races then. Later on, the term ‘differently-abled’ has been used for political correctness but it fails to convey the idea of physical distortion as all human beings are different in their capabilities. Even the awareness of languages varies from person to person thus making a monolingual person differently-abled from a polyglot and vice versa. Moreover, this term is inclusive of the presence and absence of abilities. More recently, the term ‘physical minority’ has been used to identify disability. Hence, we find that the naming of this category is in a constant flux and in search for a term that better expresses inclusiveness and agency. The shifting terminology debate within Disability Studies is an indication of the attempts made to conceptualize the disabled body in positive terms.

Lennard J. Davis defines the disabled body as “live bodies that are deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken and diseased” (Davis 5). This particular definition of the disabled body becomes central to this current project. Within the discourse of disability, the category of disability is constantly scrutinized by the category of ‘normal’. The norms of being normal and disabled are in the same loop, with each one of them complementing and critiquing the other all the time. In other words, the existence of normal is legitimized by the presence of disabled. According to Davis, “the very concept of normalcy by which most people (by definition) shape their

existence is in fact tied inexorably to the concept of disability or rather the concept of disability is a function of a concept of normalcy. Normalcy and disability are part of the same system” (2). The politics of naming the disabled and the inscrutability of normalcy/disability stresses the fact that disability is in a fluidic state in multiple levels. This fluidity within the discourse is precisely where a researcher like me finds a place.

The question of othering establishes its presence in the most subtle ways through disabled bodies. Although the situation has changed over the years, disabled bodies are very often rejected or ignored from platforms offering education, marriage and employment. Mass media is also responsible for depicting disabled bodies as helpless bodies in need for charity and hence, the ruling narratives around this discourse continue to be stigma, social exclusion and rehabilitation. As Davis says, “lurking behind these images of transgression and deviance is a much more transgressive and deviant figure: the disabled body” (Davis 5) which calls our attention through the narratives of leprosy and burn cases in this study. The binaries of inside/outside, private/public, self /other, western/Indian etc find its places in this disability discourse.

By keeping these concerns in the backdrop, I use the term disability to represent a category which has both biological and social dimensions. From the many available suggestions of naming this category, I adopt disability to highlight the physical dysfunction of the body. Disability is often argued as a socially driven concept, although, the biological aspects of disability cannot be left unseen. Hence, in this

study, disability is understood as the functional consequence of impairment (biological dimension) and also as the norm that is used to define an ableist community (social dimension). In function, ableism is the discrimination and prejudice faced by disabled bodies when they are defined in conjunction with non-disabled bodies. The abilities of such bodies are determined and defined by their disabilities. The stereotypes that are circulated with such disabled bodies further reinforce society's discriminatory attitude towards them. I study the bodies affected by leprosy and burn accidents by fusing its biological and social aspects in India.

Leprosy Induced Disability: Identities on the 'Margin'

Leprosy is often identified as a disease of ancient folklore and as a scourge which is disfiguring and contagious. People tend to look at leprosy-affected individuals with a grim face and they are mostly avoided in the mainstream society. In spite of WHO's efforts to eradicate leprosy globally, it is still a challenging infection in India. Leprosy, also called as Hansen's disease, is a bacterial infection that can be cured. But the social stigma around this disease prevents people from self-reporting and also early treatment. The notion that individuals affected with leprosy are unclean disallows them to obtain jobs or find a means of livelihood. In short, they are pushed into the leper colonies where they are left to die even when they are cured: once a leper, always a leper. Anthropologist James Staples has studied the case of leprosy in South India and he remarks that leprosy is a disease that can never physically kill its victims but once it is left untreated it can produce distinctive deformities until it finally burns itself out. He finds that it "has played a unique role in creating a

category of the socially excluded that is distinct from other forms of untouchability in Indian society” (Staples 3). I present that the disability emerging from leprosy is socially and biologically distinct which in fact creates identities on the margins or as Staples calls them: a distinct category of socially excluded odd bodies.

In this thesis, I propose the argument that disability through skin becomes a category in itself, by virtue of how it is represented in literature. I suggest that the following metaphors are repeatedly found in the narratives on leprosy namely, metaphor of migrants, vagrants, incurables and de-sexed category which are studied in detail in this chapter. In effect, they emphasize the peripheral existence of the disabled bodies in question. These metaphors explain how leprosy has become an issue of concern in India and how it has aided the creation of identities on the margins. This proposition can be extended into suggesting that these metaphors legitimize their own marginal existence and identification. They explain the idea of ‘margin’ and ‘centre’ by using the existing marginal categories like exiles, expatriates, deportee, outcasts, refugees, vagabonds, mutants, misfits, doppelgangers, transgressors etc. When such categories are used to explain the case of disabled bodies, they will also be automatically grouped as another marginal category.

Leprosy as a disease is mentioned and recorded in texts ranging from religious mythologies, travelogues, diary entries, tourist pamphlets, logbooks, novels etc. Multiple histories of leprosy can be obtained depending on the texts we choose to study. A number of references can be made from The Bible. The Old Testament links the disease with ritual impurity as in Leviticus, where it distinguishes between the

body which is clean if the sore has turned white and the body which is unclean if the swelling turns out to be like leprosy. But in the New Testament, the disease acts as a condition to be cured by God. In Matthew, we find God performing miracles with the patient's body as he was cleansed and his leprosy was gone when Jesus touched him.

William Blake's painting titled "Satan Smiting Job with Sore Boils" (Appendix V) from 1826 which is now held at Britain's Tate Gallery is a powerful rendition of Job's sufferings. The arrows and sores are aimed at Job's senses as seen in the artwork. The theological message through this work highlights the propagandist nature of art. The NYU LitMed Database summarizes the painting as:

Dominating the image, a vengeful Satan with arms outstretched stands upon Job's prone body dispensing boils from a vial with his left hand while shooting arrows at him with his right. Job's head is thrown back and his hands are lifted off the ground in a sign of agony. His weeping wife kneels at his feet. The background is minimal yet dramatic with its dark swirling clouds, bright setting sun, and Satan's huge blood red wings (Blake, "Litmed").

In India, leprosy is more commonly known as *kustha roga*. It was considered as a horrendous skin condition. Documents locate that this disease was mentioned in classical ayurvedic texts with details on its varieties and causes. The Christian ritual impurity associated with leprosy had its parallel in the native knowledge in the form of *dosha* or *dosham*. On such similarities between native and missionary constructions of leprosy, Staples says, "for the missionaries, as for the medieval

European thinkers on whose ideas they drew, leprosy was a metaphor for the diseased soul. In Hindu legal and medical discourses on the other hand leprosy was seen as literally caused by bad action” (80). In Tamil Nadu, just like smallpox, leprosy was also regarded as a curse from the Gods. The local deity goddess Yellamma is attributed the power of leprosy curses.

The discourse of leprosy in India has been formulated by the agencies of missionary activities, indigenous know-how, colonialism, modern medicine and the governmental and non-governmental interventions. The knowledge produced through these interactions has constructed the contemporary understanding of leprosy. When the colonial interventions punctured the Indian society, missionary activities demonstrated how a leprous body was a metaphor for the contaminated soul with the aid of the Bible. Evangelical literature shows how leprosy was utilized for the benefit of the imperial rule. It was regarded as the worst kind of malady to have affected the body and also a fortunate opportunity in which salvation from God can be attained. In the leper asylums run by religious organizations, the identities and ideologies disseminated from the asylums tend to reflect the respective religious codes. This religious identity could be seen in the early Christian leper colonies in India.

Colonialism penetrated its roots in India through the triad of education, religion and land. Evangelism was used as a tool to spread religion and also teach the illiterate natives. Modern medicine is partly a by-product of this plan of educating the natives. It was also introduced because the tropical diseases had started to threaten the physical well-being of the foreigners in this land. The third leg of the triad namely the

land, was a crucial category of interest to the colonial power. Apart from the obvious trend of settling in a new geographical territory, lands were designated for specific purposes. This was aimed to enable the colonial task of segregation and the agenda of social control. This is explained in this chapter with the example of leprosy asylums in Kerala. The changing notion of spatiality and temporality with regard to leprosy asylums and similar spaces are analysed in the following pages.

Later on, once a definite cure for the disease was invented, the Indian government adopted the National Leprosy Control Plan (NLCP) in 1955 and was renamed as National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) in 1983. Apart from the governmental activities, many NGOs were also actively present on the scene. With the aim of removing the stigma attached to leprosy, they work on Community-based Leprosy Rehabilitation (CBR) and Reconstructive Surgery Centres. The CBR approach aims at the social inclusion of all kinds of disabled individuals. With the public health priorities shifting to AIDS and cancer, leprosy still remains as a disease to be eradicated in India. The records of NLEP indicate that new leprosy cases are increasing in this country.

The discourses around leprosy induced disability and the resulting disabled bodies can be thus drawn as a construction through the web of categories mentioned above. The positioning of these disabled bodies continues to be on the margins in spite of the efforts from various rehabilitation agencies. The previously mentioned recurrent metaphors on leprosy are studied in detail below to show how disabled bodies are treated in India.

i) Metaphor of Migrants

The marginal existence and problems faced by diasporic communities have been a topic of discussion for a long time without any viable solutions. Due to massive geographical displacement of large communities of people, stateless communities like that of the Rohingyas emerge in the world history. It may not be fruitful to compare the hapless situations of such heterogeneous diasporic communities, as the reasons of displacement, categories displaced and the levels of marginalization might vary. The added burden of racism sidelines Indian expatriates in Western countries. Among the many writers who have dealt with the Indian diaspora, the Indian novelist Kamala Markandaya's many novels probe the diasporic dilemmas. Through the story of an elderly Brahmin man Srinivas in her novel *The Nowhere Man*²⁶, she compares his immigrant condition with the diseased state of his own body. His own expatriate life in London and the progress of the problems associated with it are compared to the growth and decay of his leprosy-affected body. He has outlived his wife Vasantha and son Seshu while he is not close to his other son, Laxman, who is now a second-generation immigrant there. The novel presents the hardship and marginal existence of an expatriate while it simultaneously details the onset of leprosy sores on his skin which culminates in his death.

The migrant image of Srinivas is central to the plot while his leprosy induced disability lets him die without an acceptable identity. The novel can be read as a narrative on marginality as it is fused with the marginal existence of an expatriate and

²⁶ This novel was published in English in 1972.

also a man affected with leprosy. In other words, Srinivas is doubly marginalized. The representations of flesh and skin recur in the novel for multiple reasons as follows. Skin is represented as a surface for diseases:

Making provision for the many ills to which flesh is heir (Markandaya 1),

Dr. Radcliffe's treatment procedure:

It had made him wince and finger the blue tingling planes of his shaved jaw, though his hands did not tremble when he lanced a boil or dressed the weeping tissues of a burned child (Markandaya 11),

the aging body of Srinivas:

In terms of years, he realized his father was not old, middle aged of course, well into middle age with the parching and reducing that went with it, the shrivelled up skin, the pulpy flesh and pouch like a prune but then women could take anything, cripples, old men, the lot (Markandaya 68),

Abdul's comments on slavery:

But maybe you think my skin's so thick I never felt what they did to me (Markandaya 81),

Mrs. Pickering's take on the various races in the world:

It would be a dull world, she said quite straightly, her colourless eyes unwavering, very dull indeed if we all had pale skins and pale eyes (Markandaya 97)

and also to explain Srinivas' father, Narayan's thoughts during the colonial days:

What is happening to make us look like a copy of human beings? Like lepers, he said to himself, at the point where flesh becomes sludge and fled horrified from his own image to his wife, the sanctuary she offered, but gazing upon her pinched features saw that she too was haunted (Markandaya 134).

As quoted above, skin and flesh are recurring images in the novel that act as precursors to the upcoming leprosy affected days of Srinivas.

When the novel is read as a fiction on leprosy, it endorses the progress of the disease and disability through the descriptions of Srinivas' skin. The life of the migrant protagonist is made more troublesome after the death of his wife. We also see that the leprosy-sores made him ashamed of himself, "he hunched himself still lower in shame, staring at the shins which were level with his eyes and he saw rather thin and encased in thick stockings which were holed, the holes exposing small hideous protuberances of puckered flesh" (Markandaya 51-52). His lonely days were interrupted by Mrs. Pickering with whom he started sharing his house with. Mrs. Pickering is his only solace now when more troublesome days were in stock for him. He was ignored, ostracized, tortured and abused by some of his neighbours like the loutish young man Fred Fletcher and his friends because they believed that immigrants like him were draining away all the money from Britain. Thus, people like Fred will lose their jobs as they never worked hard like the immigrants. Fred and

his friends went to the extent of depositing filth on his doorstep in their attempts to deport people like him from their country.

There is nothing short of saying that the immigrant problems portrayed in the novel run parallel to the diseased state of his body. He is alienated in the same society when he believes that he is a London citizen by adoption. He thought he was a Londoner like his neighbours: "I am becoming more English than the English, he said, and felt almost as if he could enter their skins. Indeed, his whole awareness seemed to have grown, as if the finest cilia covered all surfaces of mind and skin, ready to pick up messages" (Markandaya 74). But the protagonist Srinivas continues to be an outsider and an intruder with the mark of the devil. The lesions continued to haunt him and they started to become painful too: "I don't think that, said Srinivas kneading his knuckles which were painful and juttred" (Markandaya 184). Later on, we find that the disease changed its colours quickly: "she saw that his knuckles were whitened and jutting, bulwarks of his will which she would not thwart" (Markandaya 251).

The human senses are the primary victims to an untreated case of leprosy. The senses disintegrate to culminate in the death of the patient. The ability of the skin to feel the sense of touch has been presented in an earlier chapter. Many cases have been reported where leprosy-affected individuals have lost their body parts as they cannot feel pain. Leprosy affects the patients' nerve tissues and with the resulting lack of voluntary and involuntary sensations the body will not respond to pain or even an itch. In turn, they become deformed individuals whose identities are decreased to the disabilities of their bodies. Srinivas also loses his sense of touch in the story:

Srinivas looked down again at his hands, the blotchy beginnings of disease; the penny sized areas of decreased feeling and felt unclean as if somehow they reflected the meannesses of the situation which possibly they did. Then he thrust them out of sight, his old cold hands deep into his pockets and went into the house and up the stairs (Markandaya 202).

The senses of smell and taste tried to salvage his last interpretations about the world as he was losing them also. He allowed the sense of smell to wash him over with all the flavours available around him. Thus, he was surprised by the contradictory olfactory senses: there were “extraordinarily tender, tinged with rosy delicate hues, redolent of roses, as if the watery walls to which his world had shrunk had developed subtle petalled linings” (Markandaya 233) and he also sensed “sharp like singed flesh or the cyanide odour of bitter almonds” (Markandaya 233). They revoked his memories while trying to piece together what was left of him. The disease had shrunk him to a speck, unwanted in the society.

The source of these flavours he could not define, having *temporarily lost the faculty*, or perhaps unable to believe the monstrous nature of the emanations that rasped against his membranes, though occasionally it did occur to him to consider if, indeed, it was intended for him to enter the reeking cubicles of self destruction (Markandaya 233).

He does not do much other than suffer silently especially when the news about his disease starts to spread in the neighbourhood like wild fire. There were noticeable

changes on his body which he tried to hide all the time. While going for a funeral he “drew gloves over his disfigured hands” (Markandaya 205). He even decides to end his life as the society was playing with his head when the disease played with his body: “it is time when one is made to feel unwanted and liable as a leper to be ostracised further perhaps beyond the limit one can reasonably expect of oneself” (Markandaya 209). When the fusion of individual and social consciousness aims at inducing hostility towards people like Srinivas, the end product can be nothing else but more categories on the fringes.

What granules then had gone into the shaping of his momentous resolution? Srinivas smiled, genuinely, faintly, once again, as he gave himself the answer. The colour of his skin which had begotten the dangling man and the configurations upon it which marked him out as diseased. These grains, so mighty, grew pathetic even as he named them (Markandaya 207).

The trauma linked with his expatriate experience was worsened because, his assimilation with the migrated land was least approved by the early settlers there. As the title of the novel suggests, he was a nowhere man with no place to go. The title of the novel might have been inspired by Beatles’ “Nowhere Man”: “He’s a real nowhere man / Sitting in his nowhere land / Making all his nowhere plans for nobody” (“The Nowhere Man”). London was not a home to Srinivas neither was India which he left years back: he was “a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city” (Markandaya 179). As described above Londoners were trying their best to get rid of migrants like Srinivas. He had to internalize the fact that there was nothing left for

him in India and that there was nothing he could do, if he went back. His expatriate woes can be explained with his thoughts itself as follows:

When however some of his energies did dribble back, he found he had no notion of where to go to in India or what to do when he got there since so much had been destroyed or given up self-respect, livelihood, family cohesions, during the struggle of independence. In the absence of these robust lifelines the decision to leave did not survive (Markandaya 48).

The post-colonial othering discourse is etched in the hearts of the Londoners as portrayed in the novel. The pronouns, 'them' and 'us' were used to describe each other. One of the kids even says that his father would kill him if he saw him with a black man, especially if he is a rich black man. This metaphor of migrant reinforces their sidelined position in society, which is extended to the category of leprosy affected individuals in this novel. In the case of Srinivas, he dies without the identity he tried to create for himself. He died as an expatriate who was affected with leprosy. It had shrunk him to an isolated category on the margins. He didn't fight to prove his individuality by staying distinct and unique. Rather, his entire life was all about finding what is common between him and the Londoners. In his philosophical thought, Alphonso Lingis points out the possibility of a community of those who have nothing in common through a book written under the same title. He envisions that such a community could transcend communities based on commonalities and define communities by its otherness.

ii) Metaphor of Vagrants

The metaphors that recur in the narratives on leprosy are generally through ‘liminal’ or borderline categories like the migrants and vagrants. They occupy the fringes of a society. A vagrant is defined as a wanderer like a nomad with no settled abode, income or job. Vasantha in *The Nowhere Man* declares that only if they buy a house in London can they claim some sort of stability there. She says, “I am tired ... tired of moving from pillar to post. As if we were gypsies. It is time we bought a house and settled down. There is no nomadic strain in us that force us to wander. Although it may well manifest in our children if we continue this vagabond existence” (Markandaya 19). Although she tries to claim her stable migrant identity, it foreshadows the possibility of a vagrant life too: vagrants who have to live by constantly shifting their locations and sustain themselves by begging on the streets. The metaphor of vagrants is yet another category repeatedly seen in real life and fictional narratives on leprosy.

Vagrancy is inevitably linked to the idea of a community. They move around and live together mostly in the same locality. In an institutionalized format, the idea of a community exists in the form of leper colonies to the leprosy affected vagrants. The earlier idea behind the setting up of leper colonies was to avoid leprosy affected individuals from interacting with the ‘normal’ people. I suggest that the leper colonies subvert the mainstream idea of discarding them as an expendable community as these leper colonies are a powerful strength within itself. They marry and create families

within their communities which is probably their only choice although laws and strict rules try to prevent this from happening.

Leprosy is associated with a culture of begging throughout history. And in the eyes of the government begging is associated with vagrancy. The Indian Lepers Act of 1898 contain a category called as 'pauper leper' who is defined as a leper,

a) who publicly solicits alms or exposes or exhibits any sores, wounds, bodily ailment or deformity with the object of exciting charity or of obtaining alms,

or

b) who is at large without any ostensible means of subsistence ("Proposes Legislation")

Thus, leprosy beggars belong to the outsider category of the state. Begging is an economic choice of leprosy affected individuals and it is an 'embodied practice' as suggested by James Staples. Begging constructs and defines a certain kind of identity. There used to be group-begging among leprosy-affected people but ever since they realized that solo begging can make more money they have dropped the practice of group begging. Also moving in groups had practical difficulties as the more severely injured could not move as fast as the less impaired ones.

Staples' encounter with the leper colonies in South India narrates an insider's perspective on leprosy. We find that along with the culture of begging rose the construction of marketable selves. Not everyone became eligible as beggars. Only the extremely diseased could function well in begging. Thus, they disguised themselves

as more deformed than they are in reality. People used to wrap clothes on their hands to ensure credibility to their inability to do any other work. Leprosy affected individuals firmly believed that the transformations and gruesomeness of the disease had to be physically inscribed on their bodies so that they will be categorized as the group that 'deserves' alms. As Staples understands it, "bodily techniques, the ways in which deformities were wilfully exposed to create a momentary moral relationship between the donor and the recipient also correlated directly with begging success" (181). Thus, their marketable selves were exhibited as wounded and disabled, which was drastically different from their non-begging selves. The case of begging among leprosy affected people presents the flexibility of bodily techniques.

The disabled body becomes the mode of communication in begging. Thus, the same disability that pushed them to the fringes of the society is used to claim their identity back. People could save money for their personal needs through begging. In this way, they were able to regain their lost statuses in their villages as they were poor and disabled earlier. Their testimonies based on money and status explains how they were stigmatized before. The State itself regards begging as a negative syndrome as it contradicts the state development model. The lifestyle which is associated with begging which is that of a vagrant remains socially unacceptable. As M. Chaudhary notes, "Begging was seen as a social problem to be tackled, a disturbance both to the local population and to India's image on the global stage, impacting negatively on international tourism" (qtd. in Staples 189). Begging is believed to immediately construct a "culture of poverty" (Staples 190) which will not look good on the global

front. Begging is adorned with a negative image which lacks dignity. Even when people could regain their statuses with the income attained through begging, they usually concealed the source of their income from the general public.

In Thoppil Basi's popular play *Aswamedam*²⁷, we find a character who escapes from the leprosy sanatorium telling the doctor that his disease will not go with the treatments at the hospital as he is suffering from the sins of his previous life and he will get his redemption only through begging. In this narrative, we find that he is trying to regain his lost identity through the act of begging. Or the act of begging is enabled with the power to ascribe one's lost identity back to one's own self.

As illustrated above, the metaphor of vagrants establishes the social identity of leprosy affected individuals. The practice of begging is probably one among the many lifestyle options of the vagrants which is adopted by leprosy patients. This social identity is interlocked with the possibilities of the body. They expose their deformities and even exaggerate their disabilities to qualify a begging self while they conceal their disease during other situations. In other words, their bodily experiences are manipulated and modelled according to situations. The definitions of begging reinforce the identity of its practitioners as the stakeholders of a negative moral category as seen through the metaphor of vagrants. Then it is precisely such rules of the society and interventions of the State that force such individuals to camouflage their identities.

²⁷ This is a play published in Malayalam in 1969.

iii) Metaphor of De-sexed Category

In order to further study the discourse of disability due to leprosy and how they are pushed to the margins, I use the metaphor of de-sexed category. Here ‘de-sexed’ is used in the sense of depriving somebody of sexual qualities as they are not physically appealing due to a diseased state. The proposition is that they can be regarded as a ‘category’ on the margins. Unlike sexual minorities, who define their selves by asserting their sexual and gender orientations, the identity of the de-sexed category is defined by society. Thus, in the case of sexual minorities, identification is done with a sense of pride and the difference is noted as something definitive of their identity. Whereas, for de-sexed category, their identity is imposed by the society and they lack agency.

Leprosy contaminates one’s identity and physical presence in a society. Those who are infected by this disease are not allowed to marry or mingle with others. They are ostracized and thus socially excluded from routine interactions and exchanges. The desires of the flesh are to be suppressed in such individuals as portrayed through the characters like Lokadasan, Bhargavan and many other unnamed players in S. K. Pottekat’s short story, “*Asramathinte Neduveerppukal*”²⁸.

²⁸ This is a short story written in Malayalam and published posthumously in a collection of his short stories in 2015. The translation of this short story as “The Sigh of the Ashram” and other quotations from this text are done by me.

This short story which is set in a leper colony narrates the trauma and psychological impacts of leprosy. Lokadasan who is also affected by leprosy acts as their guru. We find Hinduism and its practices acting as a comforting presence within the ashram compound: "Religion was a blessing to those beings. Although humanity rejected them, without dying, by occupying an intermediary presence and while wandering as human ghosts, the temptations offered by the prosperous promise of religion allowed them to have a new life" [Pottekat 103]. Religion was their only hope to ward off the desires of the flesh. Under the leadership of Lokadasan, special prayers and singing sessions were conducted to engage everyone at the ashram.

The role of religion is also evident from the title of this narrative as it is called as an ashram and not a leper colony. The initial description of this place makes it sound like a recreation space rather than a place where deformed leprosy affected people lived: "It was a beautiful mountain range. Here and there one could see really tall trees. The greenery and the thick foliage looked like a decorative piece on the hills. The trees drew pictures with its shadows and there were soft lawns along the sides. Within the premise of tranquility everything merged with each other" [Pottekat 99]. Prayers and Lokadasan's religious teachings gave them hope to live their lives.

The entry of the new doctor and his young beautiful daughter changed Lokadasan's life. His beliefs and philosophies were left on the bay when he fell in love with the doctor's daughter, Prasanna. His love was not reciprocated while he dreamt dreams about her and waited eagerly to at least touch her once. At one point of time, the protagonist recalls that the love of a leper will be ridiculed as they are considered as a

category even below animals. They are regarded as a de-sexed category with no sexual feelings. But the short story reveals that their hearts urge to be loved and that they earn to be touched by other human beings as they are never visited or even looked at by other people. At least, Lokadasan finds a way to touch and be touched by his heart's choice. He sets fire to the doctor's house when he is away and rushes to save his daughter from getting burnt alive. Being affected by leprosy, Lokadasan's senses were numb and he never felt the pain while running through the fire. Moreover, Prasanna was hugging him when he shouldered her out of the burning house.

He might be one among the few cases whose sexuality was expressed at the cost of his own death. Most people affected with leprosy face lives like the other characters in the short story; they just die with the disease and suppressed desires. One of Thoppil Basi's characters Sarojam says that she does not want to create another generation of lepers. She requests her doctor to give her a place in the leper colony. People like her live their lives by suppressing their feelings till they face their lonely death. The metaphor of de-sexed category signifies the many individuals like the ones in *Aswamedam* and "The Sigh of the Ashram" who are denied partners in life because of leprosy.

The references to 'death' in these narratives are in plenty. The thoughts of death are predominant in the minds of the leprosy patients, and hence, one finds a large presence of it in narratives about leprosy. Pottakat calls the ashram in his story as a graveyard full of life. Here also we find the sensoria taking its role. The sense of

smell experiences the smell of death in this short story as the stench of rotting flesh filled the air. “While their flesh was rotting and organs were disintegrating, all their aspirations in life were also collapsing” [Pottekat 103]. According to the author, the dull existing lives have become more monotonous and their sighs were stinking metaphorically. Pottekat calls the dead living beings at the ashram as “humanity’s leftovers” [101]. In the case of Lokadasan, his ultimate wish was gained through his own life’s sacrifice and thus, he was pleased with his death.

Sarojam, Lokadasan and Bhargavan’s identities were redrawn by the rules of the society. They were de-sexualized by the stigma discourse of leprosy. In the leper sanatoriums of the colonial Travancore, special effort was taken to prevent the mingling of male and female patients. Apart from having separate wards, the leper asylum at Oolampara was asked to construct higher walls that divided the wards. This also points out the medical uncertainty in diagnosis and treatment, and hence, the need for an isolating wall. In a letter written on 3rd October 1896, the Durbar Physician requests the Dewan of Travancore to find spatial solutions to the increasing number of leprosy cases of both genders as there was no more space to accommodate them at the Taikaud Hospital. The metaphor of de-sexed category highlights our sensibilities towards leprosy cases.

iv) Metaphor of Incurables

In the narratives on leprosy, one can see that the diseased were living the lives of migrants, vagrants, de-sexed category and incurables. These categories represent

images that were similar to the image of a leprosy affected disabled individual. Mrs. Radcliffe calls Srinivas “the disgusting old tramp” (Markandaya 258) and Dr Radcliffe recalls, “... this unusual patient of his, with his unusual lesions” (Markandaya 263). The metaphor of incurables is probably the most commonly circulated impression about leprosy. Ignorance makes people still think that leprosy is an incurable scourge and thus the narratives on leprosy contain the metaphor of incurables in different forms.

In the Indian context, the term ‘incurable’ with regard to leprosy can be accounted as a colonial contribution. In the early setting up of hospitals in Kerala, we find that the leprosy patients and incurables were admitted in the same compound. A letter dated 9th October 1896 written by the Durbar Physician to the Dewan of Travancore is phrased like this:

I think the plan of accommodating the incurables near the leper asylum a good one and little difficulty will be found. Land may be taken up to the north, if suitable and some buildings put up. These people could not be actually put up with the lepers, but next to the leper asylum will do very well. As to the ultimate disposition of the Tycaud hospital, government can decide but my opinion is that the site is unfit for a Maternity, a Surgical Hospital or a Vaccination Depot. (Durbar, “Accommodating Incurables”).

As the letter clarifies, the only group of patients that could be put together in the same compound were the incurables and leprosy patients. The role of caste among the

leprosy patients is also noticeable in the early letter correspondences in the erstwhile Travancore. The lower caste people were to be accommodated in special sheds. Caste was a more powerful 'disease' during those times. Leprosy was defined by a distinct form of untouchability. When the existing parameter of untouchability was caste hierarchy, leprosy-affected individuals became untouchable due to their physical deformity and mutilated skin. The following letters exemplify how deeply ingrained was the idea of caste and we find that it used to be more aggressive than the physical disease itself at times.

The Durbar Physician wrote to the Dewan of Travancore in 1890 that the lepers should be removed from the charity hospital. As it is situated in a very populous part of the town it could be turned into a Brahmin male ward. Another letter written by the Durbar Physician in 1891 suggests that it is not advisable to put sheds especially for the Pulayas in the locality as it would be displeasing the Brahmin quarters. Instead, Pulayas may be accommodated in the Pulaya sheds in the General hospital. The trauma faced by a Pulaya convict who was identified with leprosy was even worse. S/he was a social and medical outcast who had to deal with self stigmatization. S/he belonged to the lowest of all castes, a convict and affected with leprosy. The social and medical elements abandoned her/him without a place to accommodate her/him. The following letter was written to the Dewan from the Central Jail Office on 17th July 1894:

I have the honour to inform you that a Pulaya convict who appears to be afflicted with the worst form of leprosy was transferred to this from Quilon

jail. I have no accommodation for him in the leper ward here as it is occupied by *sudra* lepers who object to him on account of caste which is strictly observed in this jail. Besides a Mohamedan convict leper lately transferred to this jail from Alleppy threatens to murder the Pulaya leper if he should be placed in the same ward with him. I have every reason to fear his threat as he appears to be of unsound mind. I had the Pulaya leper placed last night in the ward occupied by Pulayar Christians and Mohamedans which occasioned a general complaint this morning by the whole block. Pending your orders I have placed the convict under reference in the infectious disease ward. I have not referred the matter to the Durbar Physician for advice (Iyer, "Pulaya Convict").

As evident from the letter mentioned above, a leprosy-affected Pulaya convict was triply disabled. S/he is disabled based on her/his caste, disease and crime. Pulaya convict is neither accepted by the *sudras*, who themselves is among the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy nor taken in by Pulaya Christians and Muslims because of their different belief systems. In the following September 1894, the Dewan declared that two wards be put up in the jail hospital premises exclusively for the Pulaya leper convicts.

Thus, we find that there is a very interesting transformation of places and creation of spaces with diseases like leprosy. During those times, the prevailing caste system controlled and determined social spaces which walled out untouchables and incurables. Lepers were pushed out to a space which is outside and far away from the

exclusive Brahmin neighbourhood. Leper colonies stood for the impure and blemished bodies as opposed to the ghettos for upper caste: “Bodies are turned into a cultural space and the Brahminical system could rule over, could write on, and could regulate this rule” (Guru 86). Places like leper houses, sheds and isolated wards create spaces to situate and define the disease and the diseased body. Moreover, diseases create places to accommodate the diseased bodies. With added parameters like caste, quarantine measures etc, diseases attach identities to places.

Apart from separate hospitals and sheds for patients, the structures of the hospital buildings were also of importance. The following letter written in 1894 requests special shed for two categories of native patients. It is interesting to read it in conjunction with another letter which details how the European ward should be built. In the letter to the Dewan, it was detailed that:

- a) Owing to the dismantling of the cholera shed in the compound there is no place to put bad skin cases and such sick as cannot be accommodated in the wards. Great inconvenience and danger to other patients result for want of a shed and I request you will be good enough to have one put up for this purpose.
- b) A small shed for Pulaya patients (“Request for Special Shed”).

The Chief Engineer wrote to the Dewan of Travancore about the European ward to be constructed at the General Hospital compound.

There are no windows in the ground floor main rooms. The two proposed doors in the length of the room should be windows to ensure some privacy, convenience and to economize space. The bathrooms should open directly into the main ward for a sick patient cannot in many instances expose himself by passing through the verandah. There is no provision for a staircase (“Chief Engineer on European Ward”).

These differences in the hospital structures also show the fear of Europeans about tropical diseases. It was suggested that a proper surrounding wall must be built around the leper asylum at Oolampara to complete its structure and identity: “a proper surrounding wall is absolutely necessary. This must be stone or laterite and at least seven feet high, possibly higher. The lepers now can leave the institution ... they frequently ... even get in ... and bring in opium and liquor. The dividing wall between the sexes to be similar to the surrounding walls” (Durbar, “Leper Asylum”). Both *Aswamedam* and “The Sighs of the Ashram” refer to a dark tall and thick wall that surrounded the compound.

The European fear of the colonies resulted in more rigid forms of social control which they exercised on the natives. Through both missionary activities and indigenous knowledge, leprosy and its associated disability was used to instil fear among people. People dreaded the scaly patches that appear on the leper’s skin and they shuddered at the probable deformities of their bodies. In a certain sense, both these categories exercised social control over the disabled body and also the idea of a disabled body. As mentioned earlier, the agencies of colonialism, modern medicine, governmental

and NGO activities further contributed to the historical construction and reconstruction of the discourse of leprosy. Marginalization of leprosy cases through all possible modes was the expected result of this social control of native lives. The marginal identity of the leprosy cases is evident from the mode of setting up of hospitals and its association with the caste system. As mentioned earlier, the sanctuary of outcasts (the four metaphors detailed above) that are displayed through the leprosy narratives re-emphasize the marginal existence and identity of leprosy affected individuals.

The Indian Leper's Act of 1898 was formulated much before the discovery of the drugs that can cure leprosy. But this current understanding of leprosy does not reflect in the Indian laws. By the Act of 1898 leprosy affected individuals cannot contest in elections, cannot obtain a driving license and cannot travel by train. By the Special Marriage Act of 1954, it is also a reason to file a petition for divorce. The Law Commission of India submitted their Report No.256 titled 'Leprosy Affected Persons and the Laws applicable to them' in April 2015. They have suggested the repeal and amendment of certain laws and, accordingly, the Law Commission's 'Eliminating Discrimination against Persons Affected by Leprosy' (EDPAL) bill, 2015 is currently taking its course to be passed by the Government.

The Commission's Report suggests measures against discrimination, right to employment, land ownership rights, educational and training opportunities, right to freedom of movement, social awareness, welfare measures, concessions during treatment etc. In the global scene, the word 'leper' was to be replaced by a more

humane and less degrading term according to the Leonard Wood Memorial Conference on Leprosy held in Manila in 1931. But it was only in the April 2015 Report, the Law Commission of India has recommended the removal of the official use of the word 'leper' as it initiates the segregation of people with leprosy. Interestingly, the Rehabilitation Council of India Act and the Persons with Disabilities Act include only individuals cured of leprosy. Thus, again leprosy affected individuals are discriminated within the mainstream society.

The discrimination and marginalization of leprosy affected individuals can be revoked only with the combined effort of a nation's people and its law-making bodies. The next immediate step is to find a cure for the stigma attached with leprosy. What Zachary Gussow and George S. Tracy propose as the attempts to de-stigmatize a society becomes relevant here. Their study subverts the popular stigma theories towards leprosy and suggests the possibilities in which leprosy affected individuals can establish an identity on par with the so-called 'normal' people. They argue that the stigmatized can create stigma theories and try to de-stigmatize themselves.

Surely there are other feasible modes of adaptation. One is the development of stigma theories by the stigmatized that is, ideologies to counter the ones that discredit them, theories that would explain or legitimize their social condition that would attempt to disavow their imputed inferiority and danger and expose the real and alleged fallacies involved in the dominant perspective (qtd. in Blaszcak 52).

The first step is to regard leprosy just like any other disease and not to consider it as an incurable malady. Thus, instead of constructing more rehabilitation centres and making provisions to isolate the diseased, the non-diseased have to find a place for the diseased in their minds. Not all leprosy patients believe that they have wronged. In fact, the patients themselves have deeply embedded notions of normative definitions of the disease which makes them internalize the stigma just like the so called normative category of the abled. Julie Blaszcak's study phrases these thoughts as follows:

Instead of focusing on how the stigmatized should adapt or hide, the focus is the faulty, greater society. The stigmatized are in effect saying, 'This is not *our* problem, this is *your* problem'. They believe that society has wrongly labelled them and they do not succumb to the common belief that they are somehow inferior (53).

This distinct category of socially excluded bodies need not be treated as an inferior category. They are just 'different' with a particular medical condition and nothing less from being 'normal'. Once the social misconceptions about the disease are corrected and the societal norms redefine leprosy as a curable disease, the patients with leprosy will be integrated and incorporated in the mainstream society without much deliberate mediations. Having presented the case of disability through leprosy, I move on to discuss disability through burn injuries in India.

A Dance with Acid and Fire: Burnt Identities and the Culture of Emotions

According to the statistical reports in India, another cause for disability of the body through the medium of skin is burn injuries. Of the many possible reasons for burn injuries like scalds, contact burns, fire, chemical, electrical, radiation and so on, acid and fire are the most common agents for burn injury and its subsequent disability in India. Skin is the first line of the body's defence which is broken and crossed over during fire and acid attacks. The marks left by these attacks scar its victims for life. Disability and disfiguration weakens their body and mind. Its consequent trauma, physical and psychological pain have been represented in popular culture. Both onlookers and victims experience the trauma associated with burn injuries in varying levels. In this chapter, I propose that identities that emerge through burn injuries can give rise to a culture of emotions.

Research dating back to many centuries has established the relationship between culture and emotions. Charles Darwin proposed the universality of six basic emotions namely happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise. It has to be taken into consideration that although these emotions appear to be universal, its evolution is undeniably culture bound. It is reported that adolescent and childhood trauma can negatively impact the emotional intelligence of children. Various incidents like diseases and natural disasters that could occur in various cultures determine the emotions that emerge because of them. Such emotions represent one's identities too. In the case of burn injuries, certain emotions emanate in the lives of the victims and the bystanders which eventually determine their identities too.

As I argued in Chapter- Three, the various marks on the skin can formulate an alternative imaginary for identity formation. The marks left by burn injuries are painful and attaches a disabled identity to its victims. Their identities also affect our culture of emotions as they modulate the victims' and our own psychological states of mind. Fire and acid can literally devour our identity as it penetrates through the powerful shield of the body which is the skin. In other words, burn injuries result in the essential loss of one's identity with effect to the loss of skin. Accidental and deliberate cases of burn injuries initiate a discourse of trauma and emotion which are studied in here. Such incidents are alarmingly high in our country and due to religious and cultural reasons many of those cases go unreported too.

In this country, honour killings have gone to the extent of burning people alive and threats come in the form of acid attacks. Although many support groups are in the forefront of rehabilitating the survivors, they all say that such a fate is worse than death. Acid can burn one's skin and even disintegrate the bones. They result in permanent blindness, disability and disfigurement. Maryrose Cuskelly vividly describes the burning of flesh in fire in her study as:

Those images provoke a visceral, stomach-churning response. The swelling, the sloughing of tissue, the charred skin, black and flaking, the intense redness, the distortion of limbs, the fluid gathering in blisters; it all screams pain (204).

Cuskelly's description acts as an overture to the study of the culture of emotions in this chapter. Of the many emotions that can play its roles, I discuss the culture of distress and the culture of disgust here. They cannot be compartmentalized as the experiences of the victims and that of the onlookers, as both these categories of people actively participate in the making of the discourse of distress and disgust.

i) Disability and the Culture of Distress

There may not be a better way to discuss the discourse of distress and disability that emerges from a burn injury, other than to examine its representation in Malayattoor Ramakrishnan's novel *Yakshi*²⁹. The word 'distress' means great pain, anxiety and sorrow or acute physical and mental suffering. The events in *Yakshi* emerge through the subjective perspective of its lead character Srinivasan. The distinctive loss of sensations and the disturbing distress experienced by Srinivasan due to a burn accident becomes the driving force of this novel. Srinivasan narrates his tale from a mental hospital which evidently unveils the mental state of the lead character.

When the protagonist narrates his tale to the readers, he is presented as a young handsome Chemistry professor who used to be a heart-throb of both students and colleagues until his face was charred during an experiment in his laboratory. He dated one of his students, Vijaya, who stopped seeing him after the accident. After the accident, he found himself moving away from people and vice versa. Hence, research

²⁹ This novel was published in Malayalam in 1967. All the translations from this novel included in this thesis are done by me.

related work became an obsession and in order to engage his free time, he started working on black magic in Kerala. Meanwhile, an extremely beautiful woman named Ragini was attracted to the “beauty of his heart” [Ramakrishnan 31]. Through his occasional meetings with Ragini, he claims to have gotten his ‘face’ back and, thus, he marries this ethereal beauty. When his research progressed, he got too involved in the texts and the readings on the supernatural. Thus, in spite of his scarred face, when Ragini showed interests towards him, he started to believe that Ragini was a *yakshi*³⁰. His own mind was wavering between the realms of the supernatural and the natural world around him. Thus, it was difficult for him to believe in the beautiful Ragini as a normal human being. As the story progresses the readers find that he murders Ragini. While committing the murder, he thought that he was only chopping down the *pala*³¹ tree which had become synonymous to Ragini in his head.

His inability to come to terms with his ‘new facelessness’ and the inner conflict it created are depicted in this novel. More than the world, it was he who could not accept his face. He says that after a couple of days people stopped staring at him as “with repeated sightings, people accept and tolerate even monstrosity” [Ramakrishnan 15]. All he could see in the mirror was an extremely ugly and disfigured face: “probably one can call it as the ghost of a face, a moving skull” [Ramakrishnan 6]. Although his doctor tried to console him with the oft-quoted lines like ‘beauty is only skin deep’, Srinivasan was indeed falling down into the dark

³⁰ In Malayalam folk stories and myths, *yakshi* is the female counterpart of a ghost.

³¹ It is a tree bearing white flowers and having mythological significance in *yakshi* stories.

recesses of utter distress. He was mentally, physically and emotionally disturbed. His intelligence became unfathomable to an average human brain. At some point of time in the storyline, we wonder whose story was actually true: Srinivasan's or Ragini's version? Or is Srinivasan walking on the thin edge between sanity and insanity? As the story unfolds through Srinivasan's narration, the seemingly coincidental ways in which they meet, gives us ample space to doubt Ragini's identity. Thus, did he actually kill his wife? Or was she a ghost and he saw her disappear into a wisp of smoke? Such questions will haunt the rational thinking of its readers.

The depiction of his burnt skin is central to the manner in which identity and skin are interwoven in this disability narrative. The skin is an accepted space that contains one's identity. His face used to be charming once when it had a proper skin covering. But after the accident his face was no more appealing. He lost his left eyebrow completely and one of his eyes was jutting out of his face. The first time one saw his face, one will shudder with fear. His face reminded him of a half-burnt candle with its wax melting on its sides. With this facelessness, Srinivasan believed that he lost his self and his identity too. His scarred flesh was no more able to hold and project his identity. This aspect of the skin distressed his already broken soul.

In the narrative, we find that till one point, he had control over his thoughts. He tried to negotiate his thoughts and imagination with the fact that he is a man of science and that he should not believe in the silly doubts of his mind. Nevertheless, the sudden death of his neighbour's dog Judy, after seeing Ragini made him re-evaluate her identity. The preposterous details about Ragini's past and his insufficient knowledge

about her were coupled with his muddled questions about the supernatural. In effect, Ragini was given the identity of a *yakshi* which has to be seen as a reflection of his mind losing control. It can be seen as a transitional phase in which the boundaries of his self were blurred and that thin line between sanity and insanity coalesced.

The intense sensations of sexual desire which he used to feel were nullified. He finds himself unable to fulfil his sexual dreams during the post-accident days. This gives him more reason to push himself into a permanent state of anxiety. His former girlfriend stopped talking to him. Vanaja, one of his students to whom he preached morality lessons, mocks at his misery. His colleagues find his new hobby (research in the supernatural) ridiculous. The pimp at the brothel finds his face disgusting and tells him that the girl will run away if she sees him. Above all, every time he tries to have sex with Ragini, he could never complete the act. The readers are given a hint that he might be impotent. This also addresses the question of why and how people with disabilities are tagged as sexually anomalous.

The discourse of sexuality in connection with the disability discourse is explored by Margrit Shildrick. According to her, “the sexual relation itself, and the operation of desire as that which extends beyond the self to the other, is always a locus of anxiety, a potential point of disturbance to the normativities of everyday life” (Shildrick 225). Srinivasan’s disability never prevented him from wanting sex. His sexual desires took him to a brothel and he was rejected there once because of his face. Later on, when he met with a prostitute he could not fulfill his intense erotic desires because he found himself incapable and he had to leave the room without saying a word. What

Shildrick proposed is applicable in the case of Srinivasan as the operation of desire becomes a locus of anxiety in multiple levels. His attempts of sexual relations were evidently disturbing: he might have been impotent from the beginning as the reader is not given any information of his past sexual encounters or it was his mental state that made him asexual for the time being. Either way, his routine life was affected and we, therefore, find that his emotions were transferred as dreams. He started seeing similar dreams repeatedly:

There was a white stairway that extended to the sky high above and on the steps there were young beautiful women welcoming him. They all extended their hands in the manner of trying to reach out to him. So he started hurrying up to the final step. There he saw the most beautiful woman lying on the softest bed he could ever think off. Since she was facing the other side he could not see her face but he sat down on the bed. Then somehow he lost his balance and he was falling down with his face on the beauty. Then she got up and extended her hands. He found that her face was extremely grief-stricken [Ramakrishnan 23].

The dream sounds exasperating, especially when he saw that the woman's face was sad. This might be because she saw his charred face only at the very end and the dream can be, thereafter, read as a projection of his own mental agony. He saw different versions of the same dream with Ragini as the beautiful woman on the bed. The popular assumption of people with disabilities as being asexual is reinforced with the experience of Srinivasan. He projects the anxiety of his self onto Ragini, perhaps

the reason why he killed her. The stairway dream was his unconscious self reinterpreting his sexually anomalous body.

Apart from the sexual emotions, we find that his hatred and distress were also transferred to the closest thing/person available to him: *pala* tree/Ragini. He believed that Ragini was too good to be true for a normal human being. He finds ill omens: that his neighbour's dog never came near Ragini and that the *pala* tree bloomed after many years and that his neighbour's baby had died in the womb. Although there can be other rational explanations to all his observations, Srinivasan believed that it was all done by the *yakshi*³², Ragini. His mind played more games with him and we find him eventually killing Ragini while he thinks that he was only chopping down the *pala* tree. It is probably a human technique of adaptation that we see through Srinivasan's act of transferring emotions to something or someone else. He was also thinking and trying to come to terms with the situations as we see through the narrative.

Through this disability narrative, I tried to present a case of distress which is one among the many emotions that might emerge through the cases of burnt identities.

³² The rhetoric of dreams, *yakshi* and ghosts in this novel could remind one of C. Ayyappan's short stories which narrate Dalit experiences using a spectral apparatus. Udaya Kumar's essay, "The Strange Homeliness of the Night: Spectral Speech and the Dalit Present in C. Ayyappan's Stories" studies the spectral vocabulary which is central to the Dalit narrators of Ayyappan's short stories. Udaya Kumar indicates that "this spectrality is the very condition of their voice and agentiveness" (178). Nevertheless, the author, narrator and the protagonist are not Dalit subjects in Malayattoor's *Yakshi*.

The culture of distress signals psychological instability as in the case of Srinivasan. It can also fabricate the identities of burn victims. Like Srinivasan, they tend to imitate the identity of someone else and also see others in a different light mostly due to their own emotional confusion. This distress can further blur the boundaries of what is 'normal' or 'real' and it also paves way to a culture of disgust which is addressed in detail below.

ii) Disability and the Culture of Disgust

Disability is admittedly not a quality which most people hope for in their lives. It is associated with several inconveniences and concerns that can affect the disabled person and others around. The culture of distress which was discussed above can be regarded mostly as the perspectives of the survivors. In this section, I try to elaborate the culture of disgust which is mostly about how the society perceives burn victims and survivors. As mentioned earlier, these cultural emotions cannot be pigeonholed as both the survivors and the society share these emotions in varying levels.

The word 'disgust' can be traced back to the Old French word *goust* which means 'taste'. In contemporary times, this word is used to denote something that can offend one's senses. The word 'disgust' can be then associated with what is not pleasing to one's eyes or nose or mouth; something that upsets one's sense of sight, sense of smell and sense of taste.

The concept of disgust is usually associated with dirt and unpleasant situations. A cultural study of dirt could probably trace its connections with the culture of disgust.

Due to medical reasons, dirt always confronts the question of diseases. Some argue that the concepts of dirt and disgust are cultural constructs because we tend to ‘develop’ taste through experience. As quoted by Valerie A Curtis,

Modern historians of science such as Barnes and Tones offer a ‘revisionist’ view which takes a relativistic approach to the social production of ideas. For example, Tones proposes that we should see ideas, such as the germ theory of disease, as not as having an ontological life of their own but as social constructions, embedded within local structures of meaning. For them, like Douglas, dirt is a cultural construction (660).

Curtis’ study suggests four patterns of disgust: a) disgust elicited by substances like sweat, vomit, excreta, sick people, corpses etc, b) disgust elicited by things contaminated by disgusting matter like toilet, stained sheets, fishmongers’ hands etc, c) disgust elicited by sensory cues like the damp, the stinky, the slimy etc and d) moral disgust which is the one reserved for politicians, injustice, prejudice, vulgarity and abuse of power. Her distinctions identify the various objects and events that can give rise to the emotion of disgust.

Some critics find the connection between dirt and disease to be purely biological in nature. Following the biological thread, it is argued that the culture of disgust is a mechanism within the adaptive language of animals and human beings. A mechanism in place to help us stay away from disease prone objects and events: “... at its core disgust is what humans call the urge to avoid disease-relevant stimuli ... Disgust is

thus the name we give to the motivation to behave hygienically” (Curtis 661). Thereby, the concept of hygiene is a by-product of this innate stimulus of living beings.

Although the culture of disgust is seen as a strategy to avoid dirt and disease, this discourse is also produced as a cultural response to several situations. Thus, the cultural associations with the emotion of disgust cannot be ruled out just as the biological ways of the body. With the biological and cultural bearings of the emotion of disgust in the backdrop, it is significant to notice what emerges when the culture of disgust encounters the discourse of disability in this current research. I present here how burn cases are more than the physical lack of flesh on the surface of the body.

Disability of the body through burn injuries induces a culture of disgust as people generally shudder and turn away when they see bare wounded flesh. As Malayattoor’s character Srinivasan recollects, “... it is all about the body. The body should have a skin. The skin should be white in colour. And the skin should be healthy and glowing” [31]. Thus, the lack of skin and other injuries on bare flesh could be disconcerting for some. Our society which is generally keen about looks sidelines such wounded selves.

Generally, a moment of curiosity or oddity is what makes people stare at objects and people. Staring in fact explores the possibilities of our eyes. As Rosemarie Garland Thomson phrases the act of staring,

Everybody stares. Staring is an ocular response to what we don't expect to see. Novelty arouses our eyes. More than just looking, staring is an urgent eye jerk of intense interest ... we stare when ordinary seeing fails, when we want to know more. So staring is an interrogative gesture that asks what's going on and demands the story. The eyes hang on; working to recognize what seems illegible, order what seems unruly, know what seems strange (3).

But people stare for a while and then they might look away when the particular sight no more captivates them. Due to a moment that reminds one of an undeniable reality like death or suffering "our eager stares often quickly shift to uncomfortable looking away" (Thomson 79). In what I am proposing as the culture of disgust, people stare at what they consider as monstrosity or a departure from the normal human form.

Thus, the culture of disgust presents the inevitable questions on normalcy and deviancy. Our understanding of normalcy excludes people with disabilities. The visible corporeal differences as in the case of burn injuries produce disgust and contempt towards such bodies. Several governmental and non-governmental activities give rehabilitation packages to burn survivors. But their lives can continue smoothly only if the society adapts to their presence and promotes co-existence. The *Stop Acid Attacks* campaign website claims that its work is supposed to act as a bridge between survivors and the society. This is because in most cases the survivors are treated as an outcast and they are blamed for their misfortune. The more we tend to be silent the faster we breed crimes unknowingly: "society prepares the crime and the criminal commits it" ("Stop Acid Attacks"). The violence caused by fire and acid cannot be

justified in any means. The disability that emerges through fire and acid attacks are mostly irreversible as they penetrate deep through the body's surface wrecking bones and organs.

The culture of disgust mostly carries cynical responses in terms of staring and questions on deviancy. On the contrary, Rosemarie Garland Thomson suggests that staring can be utilized to develop beneficial reactions too. This study promotes staring till it reaches the point of 'engagement' as suggested by Thomson: "staring begins as an impulse that curiosity can carry forward into engagement" (3). The victims of burn injuries become spectacles through many ways. But if the society just stares and do not involve in an engagement with the survivors these crimes will continue to happen. The act of staring has to reveal the unfamiliarity with what one sees and in this case why and how some faces are scarred. By quoting Thomson again, "this intense visual engagement creates a circuit of communication and meaning-making. Staring bespeaks involvement and being stared at demands a response" (3). The starees demand an answer from the starers as to what has happened to their bodies. The response has to be the society's prompt resistance against such gruesome crimes.

She quotes the example of the painter Doug Auld's portrait series titled as 'State of Grace' which presents the portraits of ten young people who were disabled by burn injuries. Although they are disfigured and deformed, "as portraits, the paintings announce that their subjects are worthy of public commemoration, important to look at, even beautiful" (Thomson 80). In this example, the 'object' welcomes to be stared at and it makes us wonder in bewilderment and definitely not in an objectionable

looking away mode. They make us participate in the survivors' experience not with repugnancy but with wonderment about their strength and courage to have survived such a dreaded fate.

Auld's portraits translate what we think of as disfigurement into pictures of 'beauty and courage'. They confront us with 'our fear and our repulsion of the unknown', converting it into appreciation for their subjects' 'unique disarming beauty' (Thomson 80).

A similar case study has been done by the German photographer Ann-Christine Woehrl, whose photo book *In/visible* compiles the photos of women survivors of acid and arson attacks in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Uganda. The visible-invisibility of these women is studied in this project. These women are scarred and disfigured which pushes them to the fringes of the society. They are treated as outcasts which makes them invisible within the society. But Woehrl captures the visible side of these women which is their heroic strength during their unimaginable suffering. She documents their daily lives, struggles and hopes about future. What is usually seen as a culture of disgust with regard to disability is subverted through these projects. Both Auld and Woehrl exhibits unusual subjects in their works: "these portraits invite us to draw close to their strangeness and see something of ourselves waiting there. They show what to many of us is the 'strangeness' of disability in the familiar frame of a portrait" (Thomson 82). This project can also be considered as an 'engagement' as suggested by Thomson.

There are cases where people set fire to themselves and commit suicide. Fire and acid attacks are generally aimed at women. Among the reported cases in India, most of the victims are generally women. Hatred and rejection of sexual advances become reasons for such attacks. The ensuing revenge and punishment for such rejection is targeted on the victim's body. In other words, in hate crimes the culture of disgust is used as weapon to exert social control. The assailants commit such crimes to prevent the free movement of their targets. They think that if the victims' bodies are purposely disabled and disfigured they will be ostracized in society. In such cases, they 'punish' their victims with disability.

The proposition of 'engagement' with the victims of burn injuries is one step closer to the process of disabling the category of disability. India's *Stop Acid Attacks* campaign created calendars which featured acid attack survivors as models. Seeping out through these images is a renewed definition of beauty itself. They also portray the dead ambitions of the survivors when they posed as a doctor, chef, photographer, fashion designer etc. The culture of disgust has to be subverted to create better tolerance and accommodation levels.

Through this chapter, I presented the emergence of disability through the skin which in effect partakes in the creation of disabled identities. Drawing from the narratives of an Indian context, I studied the disabled identities that have emerged through leprosy and burn cases. The leprosy narratives detailed the creation of identities on the

‘margins’: disabled identities who are generally pushed to the fringes of a society. The recurring metaphors that were isolated from the narratives on leprosy suggest how disabled bodies are segregated in the Indian context. The metaphors of migrants, vagrants, de-sexed category and incurables emphasize the absence of a space for leprosy victims. Based on the narratives on burn cases I have suggested that the emerging disability also formulate a culture of emotions. This study has discussed a culture of distress and a culture of disgust.

As seen through this study, skin is a phenomenal felt space which responds to the slightest of all stimuli. Burn accidents and attacks invariably alter the texture and capabilities of the skin. The smouldering skin and flesh can give rise to physically mutilated skins and psychologically distorted identities. The tendency to produce disabled bodies of marginal existence and a clash of emotions due to disability are both socially and biologically driven. The many metaphors discussed in association with the disability through leprosy prove that in spite of the many efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations and scientific medicine, the stigma attached with these disabled bodies is entrenched and pervasive in nature. Rehabilitation strategies have not yet fully achieved the goal of accommodating disabled bodies in society or detaching the stigma attached with this disease. If our society can generate a culture of compassion it can support such victims to resuscitate and thus hasten the social assimilation of such disabled bodies.

Conclusion

The Future of Dermatological Explorations

Moving away from the oft quoted understanding of the skin in our society, which is primarily ‘beauty’ oriented, my project attempted to study the need to consider skin as a crucial medium for observing identity in the making. I argued that the narratives produced during the 20th and 21st centuries in India have already hinted this proposition and through this project I have attempted to systematically compile the ways in which the skin can be regarded as a new medium for identity formation. Considering the expanse of this organ and its effects on the self, I argued that even the various marks on the surface of the body can effectively participate in the making of one’s identity. I have also proposed that such changes on the skin can pave way to the creation of disabled identities.

Skin is a very crucial organ of the body and its relational nature makes it increasingly important to understand the production of meanings through the skin. By tracing the historical contexts of the skin from a global perspective and then by placing the question of skin in an Indian context, this project has tried to reassess the ways in which the Indian public thinks. My project mirrors the social hierarchies and tensions that are prevalent in the social and cultural fabric of India.

In the Introduction, I have broached the relevance of this study and I have established the rationale of this project. The human body as a research canvass in Humanities is no more an alien idea and my project is situated within this context. Most recent

writings on the body by the Kerala literati were discussed to situate my thoughts on the body in the Kerala context. The focus of this project has been the skin in relation to disease narratives in the Indian context. In the section titled “The Current Skin Project” I have briefly summarized the prime themes presented in the four chapters of this project.

In Chapter-One, I have attempted to assemble the various historical and cultural manifestations of the skin. The most widely circulated thoughts on the skin were discussed in this chapter. The question of ethnicity was studied through the writings of Frantz Fanon, A. Sivanandan, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Paul Gilroy. Through the close reading of popular advertisements, I have tried to show the attempts to project fair skin as a synonym of beauty. In the section “Uses and Abuses of the Skin”, I have detailed the various cultural and historical utilization of the skin in terms of bodily decoration, cannibalism, fetishism, sadomasochism etc. Skin is a crucial marker in religion and folklore and this aspect is covered in the section titled, “Taboos, Curses and Praises: Skin in Religion and Folklore”. The section “Skinning Cultures” introduces the idea that skin is the body’s first covering/clothing.

In Chapter-Two, I have narrated the main theoretical frameworks within which this project is located. The theses propounded by the skin theorists Michel Serres, Claudia Benthien and Steven Connor were extended to analyse the role of sensoria in relation to the skin. The five senses of the body were used to study the experiences of the self and in effect to discuss the formation of identities. Similarly, this thesis has

considered the skin as an embodiment of the body. The biological envelope of the body allows various inscriptions to be recorded on its surface. In the section “Skin and the Postcolonial Condition”, I have elaborated yet another framework for this project which is the duality of the self and other. The question of whiteness vs blackness also finds a space within this framework. Through the section “Skin and New Media”, I have detailed the theoretical offerings on the skin when this discourse meets technological advancements.

In Chapter-Three, I have proposed that marks on the surface of the body can function as an alternative imaginary for identity formation. I have closely read O. V. Vijayan’s “The Wart”, Sudha Murty’s *Mahasweta* and G. V. Kakkanadan’s *Vasoori* to elucidate an alternative imaginary in terms of the identity of the disease, the diseased and an imaginary community respectively. The main proposition in this chapter is that marks on the skin signify an individual and collective identity, memory and suffering.

The identity of disease is analysed by a close reading of “The Wart” in terms of the physical identification of the war, its survival mechanism, its exploitation of the patient’s body and its eventual abandonment of the body. The trope of identity of the diseased is studied as an existence of the leucodermic self within the skin and the affected skin itself as the self. This trope also proposes a new elastic self: the skin which allows modification, hybridity and transformation. The third and last trope which is the identity of a community is also speculated in terms of the marks on the skin: as marks of struggle and suffering, as marks of survival, as marks of precaution and as marks of deceit and control.

In both Chapter Three and Four, my arguments are validated by the archival data collected during the course of this project especially with regard to the State's policies and stands on these identities.

In Chapter-Four, I have proposed that skin becomes an agent in addressing the discourse of disability through the narratives on leprosy and burn accidents. This chapter progresses on the belief that disability has both biological and social dimensions. With the help of Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*, Thoppil Bhasi's *Aswamedam* and S. K. Pottekat's "The Sighs of the Ashram" I have suggested that the mutilated skin in these leprosy cases gave way to the creation of disabled identities on the margins. I have problematized the marginal existence of disabled bodies in this chapter using the metaphors of migrants, vagrants, incurables and de-sexed category.

In this chapter, I have also reassessed the disabled bodies resulting from burn accidents. I have proposed that the identities that emerge through burn injuries can give rise to a culture of emotions, specifically a culture of distress and a culture of disgust in the Indian context.

Body Culture Studies may be called as one among the many waves that shake disciplines across academia. As long as the visible physical body finds a place in human life, I propose that the viability of the human body as a topic of research within Humanities and Social Sciences will not diminish in importance. My

specialized focus on the skin is only one among the many possible routes to untangle the roots of this discourse. The studies on the body have no limits as it finds a space in visual culture, folklore studies, religious studies, gender studies etc. In the following paragraphs, I suggest some possible research areas to extend the study of skin.

- Skin Studies within itself is a budding area of research in universities all over the world. Apart from the cultural study of skin diseases and conditions which I have attempted in this research, a study of sexuality and sensuality within the trope of skin is a possible way to further this project. The senses of taste and smell can be utilized to study these discourses of the skin. A study of the skin can also be approached from the perspectives of gender studies especially because of the desires to attain a clear and flawless sheen regardless of one's sexual identity. This can also be attached to the study of skin within beauty and cosmetology.
- In the Indian context, a study of skin and caste will be highly prospective. Caste will bring in the discourses of untouchability and the sense of touch. Although this concept has been broached in this study, a more nuanced study of caste and skin cultures in India is a possible area of research.
- The facade of skin and plastic within cosmetic surgeries and other beautification procedures is now a popular area of study within celebrity culture. More than raw flesh one might find plastic like components on

bodies as a result of cosmetic surgeries. This questions the basic formula of what makes one a human. Or where is the humanness of a human? This leads us to problematize and worry about the post-human today and tomorrow.

- The creation of cyborgs breaches the human and non-human divide. Thus, it essentially questions the humanness of humans and also cyborgs. Keeping this in mind, a study of the cyborg's skin can be attempted as we are already at the interface of technology and humanity. The sense of touch and other bodily sensations will attain a dubious status in this scenario.
- Skin can even be studied from an eco-critical perspective as there is a sharp similarity between the skin surface and earth surface. A study by Philip K. Wilson suggests that both these surfaces are subjected to erosion and decay and he calls it as a geo-historical study of human surface. Taking this cue, a geo-historical approach to human skin in the Indian context could be a valuable contribution to Indian literati. Considering the extent to which people suffer and are being exploited because of their skin differences, an eco-critical approach to the study of skin in India becomes very significant.

Ultimately, whether understood as a covering or a protective shield or a surface for inscription, the skin cannot be taken away while defining one's individual and

collective identity. The essence of one's self and of being human is given back to the dermis. This interface determines our appearance, reality and existence in this world.

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