



MAR THOMA COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, PERUMBAVOOR

Affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam & Re-Accredited with A+ grade by NAAC

The Department of English

in association with

**The College Development Council
Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam**

Mar Thoma Research Foundation and IQAC

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

TWO-DAY NATIONAL CONFERENCE



**AT THE FAULTLINES OF SURVIVAL:
READING VULNERABILITY AND PRECARITY
IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN NARRATIVES**

4-5 March 2025



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(A collaborative initiative under MoUs with Sanatana Dharma College, Alappuzha, Sree Sankara College, Kalady, MES College, Kunnukara, and Union Christian College, Aluva)

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Foreword

The Department of English is delighted to publish a Book of Abstracts containing synopses of the invited lectures and presentations for the Two-Day National Conference, “At the Faultlines of Survival: Reading Vulnerability and Precarity in Contemporary Indian Narratives”, conducted on 4 and 5 March 2025 in association with the College Development Council, Mahatma Gandhi University, Mar Thoma Research Foundation and IQAC. This is a collaborative initiative conducted under the Memoranda of Understanding signed by the College with Sanatana Dharma College, Alappuzha, Sree Sankara College, Kalady, MES College, Kunnukara, and Union Christian College, Aluva.

At a time of increased vulnerability at the collective and individual levels owing to multiple socio-political factors, a seminar on Vulnerability Studies seemed necessary in order to comprehend the field in all its diversity. The invited lectures, as well as the presentations, illuminated various aspects of vulnerability and precarity in the Indian context and laid the foundations for envisioning a uniquely Indian model of Vulnerability Studies. The abstracts stand testimony to the possibility of framing a theoretical framework focusing on the Indian experience of vulnerability and precarity.

The abstracts in the book engage with vulnerability in its manifold forms – social, political, cultural and environmental – with specific reference to Indian literary and cultural narratives. We hope that this venture would lead to the emergence of novel perspectives and methodologies in approaching the arena of Vulnerability Studies in India and the Global South as a whole.

The Editors

Message from the Principal

It gives me immense pleasure to write this message for the Book of Abstracts emerging from the Two-Day National Conference, “At the Faultlines of Survival: Reading Vulnerability and Precarity in Contemporary Indian Narratives”, conducted on 4 and 5 March 2025 by the Department of English in association with the College Development Council, Mahatma Gandhi University, Mar Thoma Research Foundation and IQAC. Aligned with the Mission and Vision of the College, the theme of the Conference encompasses a wide array of vulnerability narratives centered on gender, class, caste and the environment. The abstracts reveal the richness of the field and highlight the scope for further research in the area. I am sure that that this venture would contribute significantly to the field of Vulnerability Studies in India, setting the stage for larger discussions and interventions leading to societal transformation. I congratulate the Department of English on conducting the Conference and hope that the Book of Abstracts would serve as a pivotal point of reference for researchers and academicians engaged in the field of Vulnerability Studies.

Dr. Letha P. Cheriyan

Principal

About the College

Mar Thoma College for Women has, since its inception in 1982, been striving towards excellence in all spheres of higher education, catering to the educational requirements of women from various parts of the state. Affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, the College offers graduate and post-graduate courses in various disciplines. The dynamic academic ambience, along with state-of-the-art infrastructure, has fostered a culture of research, innovation and interdisciplinary learning in the institution. Accredited with A+ grade by NAAC and ranked 84th in the Kerala Institutional Ranking Framework (KIRF), the College continues to mould generations of women into progressive thinkers and leaders contributing to the society in multifarious ways.

The Department of English

Since its inception in 1999, the Department of English has been a beacon of excellence, shaping generations of students into articulate, creative, and highly competent professionals. Offering a BA English (Honours) programme with specialization in Cultural Studies, the department provides an intellectually stimulating environment that nurtures critical thinking and innovation. The Department boasts of various innovative practices that not only enrich the academic ambience, but also contribute to the society at large. Our best practices include the facilitation of student research through the Research Forum and fostering creativity among students and teachers through ART-TRY, an initiative promoting artistic endeavors within the Department. Our community-intervention services include the conduct of Communicative English classes for underprivileged children through AGAPPE, and editing and proofreading services for academia and industry alike through Incandescence Language Consultancy Services (ILCS). The Department also boasts of a Drama Club and a Centre for Gender Studies, apart from numerous other initiatives that spur the creativity and critical thinking skills of students, enabling them to flourish in diverse fields.

The Mar Thoma Research Foundation

The Mar Thoma Research Foundation serves as the apex body for promoting and advancing research at Mar Thoma College for Women, Perumbavoor. Committed to fostering a strong research culture, the Foundation emphasizes on critical thinking, innovative scholarship and societal intervention. Students and members of the faculty are encouraged to undertake research activities, contributing meaningfully to the academia and to the society at large. Serving as a platform for academic discussions and collaboration, the MTRF plays a pivotal role in shaping the research ecosystem of the institution, creating an ambience conducive to academic growth and research excellence.

“At the Faultlines of Survival: Reading Vulnerability and Precarity in Contemporary Indian Narratives”

Concept Note

Vulnerability and precarity as theoretical concepts have been at the centre of academic discourses in recent years, owing to their potential to engage with the lived reality of human and non-human subjects caught at the intersections of global power networks. At its core, vulnerability is a fundamental human condition “arising from our embodiment, which carries with it the ever-present possibility of harm, injury, or dependency” (Fineman) , while the related concept of precarity “designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death (Butler).

Precarity and related concerns regarding ‘livability’ shape vulnerability discourses, by engaging with the modes in which certain populations and/or entities are rendered vulnerable through the lack of recognition of their lives as ‘grievable’. Theorists such as Judith Butler, Martha Fineman, Bryan S. Turner, Isabel Lorey, and Chandra Talapade Mohanty, among others, have engaged with the intersection of vulnerability discourses with human rights, war, mobility, capitalism and gender rights. These concerns are of utmost relevance in the global context where entire populations are rendered precarious by legal, economic and political frameworks, as well as by the stark living conditions engendered by war, refugeeism, climate crisis, poverty and a range of other factors.

The two-day seminar, “At the Faultlines of Survival: Reading Vulnerability and Precarity in Contemporary Indian Narratives”, seeks to initiate a dialogue on vulnerability and precarity as portrayed in literary and cultural narratives from India, with special emphasis on regional discourses. The modes in which the mainstream and the state function to render individuals and groups susceptible to violence, and the strategies of resistance adopted by such subjects would be examined. The Conference also aims to locate an alternate model of vulnerability studies that is rooted in the Indian experience of vulnerability and precarity, shaped by factors such as caste, colonialism, religious dynamics, and labour precarity.

Programme Schedule

Day 1 (4 March 2025)

9.00 a.m. - 10.00 a.m.

Registration

10.00 a.m.- 10.30 a.m.

Inaugural Ceremony

Prayer

Welcome Address

Dr. Sangeetha Rachel Koruth
Head, Department of English

Presidential Address

Dr. Letha P. Cheriyan
Principal

Inaugural Address

Dr. Chinmay Murali, Assistant Professor (English)
S.D. College, Alappuzha

Felicitations

Dr. Vineedkumar K., IQAC Coordinator

Vote of Thanks

Dr. Minu Susan Koshy, Programme Coordinator

10.30 a.m.-11.45 a.m.

Plenary Lecture I

Chair: Dr. Sangeetha Rachel Koruth, Assistant Professor and Head, Dept. of English,
Mar Thoma College for Women, Perumbavoor

Lecture: “Visualizing Vulnerability: Women’s Infertility Memoirs and Graphic Medicine”

Dr. Chinmay Murali

Assistant Professor (English)

S.D.College

Alappuzha

11.45 a.m. - 12.00 p.m.

Tea Break

12.00 p.m.- 1.15 p.m.

Keynote Address

Chair: Ms. Roshin T. Roy, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Mar Thoma College for
Women, Perumbavoor

Lecture: “Singlehood in Contemporary Indian Films: Vulnerability or Resilience?”

Dr. Oindri Roy

Assistant Professor (English)

Aliah University, Kolkata

1.15 p.m.- 1.45 p.m.

Lunch Break

1.45 p.m. -3.00 p.m.

Plenary Lecture II

Chair: Ms. Preethi Sara Joseph, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Mar Thoma College for Women, Perumbavoor

Lecture: “Crafting the Witch: Witch(craft) Hunt Narratives and Vulnerabilities”

Mr. Alwin Alexander

Assistant Professor (English),

Union Christian College

Aluva

3.00 p.m. - 3.15 p.m.

Tea Break

3.15 p.m - 4.30 p.m.

Panel I

Panel I

Venue: P.G. Seminar Hall

Chair: Ms. Roshin T. Roy, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Mar Thoma College for Women, Perumbavoor

Presenters:

1. **Vinu Varghese Kurian (Assistant Professor, St. Stephen’s College, Pathanapuram):** Vulnerability and Precarious Memories: Reading *Kashmir Files* and *Andhar Badhirar Mookar*
2. **Sweta S. Kumar (Content Writer, Global Surf, Kochi):** Precarious Pasts: A Reading on Memory-Induced Vulnerability in Subhash Chandran’s *Samudrasila*
3. **Sneha Bhanu Menon (PG Student, St.Xavier’s College for Women, Aluva):** Delving into Engrossing Biopics: Justice Delayed and Denied for Savarkar and Sarbjit
4. **Anjana M Rajesh and Gouri Krishna V.A. (PG Student, St. Xavier’s College for Women, Aluva):** Manifestation of Collective Trauma in *Anandhabhadram* and *9*
5. **Aaysha Humayoon Kabeer (Research Scholar, Lovely Professional University)** Exile at Home: Embodied Vulnerability and the Cultural Trauma of Crisis
6. **Aswathy G Babu (Research Scholar, Mar Thoma College, Tiruvalla):**Materializing Vulnerability: Navigating the Trauma of Displacement and Social Invisibility of Indian Jews in *The Teak Almirah* by Jael Silliman

Day 2 (5 March 2025)

9.30 a.m.- 10.45 a.m. Plenary Lecture III

Chair: Ms. Chaithanya Elsa Achankunju, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Mar Thoma College for Women, Perumbavoor

Lecture: “Shared Vulnerability Beyond the Human: Introspecting Representations of 'Injurability' in Select Indian Narratives”

Dr. Rajeesh K.P.
Assistant Professor (English),
Sree Sankara College
Kalady

10.45 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. Tea Break

11.00 a.m. - 12.00 p.m. Panel II (Virtual Session)

Panel II (Online)

Venue: P.G. Seminar Hall

Chair: Dr. Rajeesh K.P., Assistant Professor (English), Sree Sankara College, Kalady

Presenters:

1. **Dr. Harleen Kaur (Assistant Professor, Multani Mal Modi College, Patiala, Punjab):** Gender, Violence, and Resistance in MC Jithin's *Sookshmadarshini*
2. **Dr. Debobani Biswas (Assistant Professor, The Neotia University, Kolkata):** Voices from the Margins: Gendered Vulnerability and Resistance in Dalit Women's Narratives
3. **Himadri Gogoi (Research Scholar, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya) and Dr. Gayatri Das (Assistant Professor, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya):** Birthing Inequality: Precarity and the Economics of Surrogacy in *A House for Happy Mothers*
4. **Dr. Alizehra Haider Raza (Assistant Professor, Parul University):** Precarious Lives, Powerful Rhymes: Poetry as an Act of Indigenous Resistance
5. **Insha Qayoom Shah (Independent Scholar) and Dr. Sheetal Lalotra (Guest Faculty, Punjab Engineering College, Chandigarh):** Life Amidst Conflict:

Analyzing Farah Bashir's *Rumours of Spring* through the Lens of Vulnerability Studies

6. **Nishtha Pandey (Independent Scholar):** Postcolonial Precarity and the Hungryalists

12.00 pm- 1.00 p.m.

Panel III

Panel III

Venue: P.G. Seminar Hall

Chair: Ms. Sreedevi N.S., Assistant Professor and Head (English), Sree Sankara College, Kalady

Presenters:

1. **Surya R (Research Scholar, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kollam):** Vulnerable Bodies Navigating Precarious Lives: A Study of Widowed Elderly Women Depicted in Select Films.
2. **Annet Anna Koshy (PG Student, Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta):** Lullabies of Oppression: Unveiling Gendered Vulnerabilities in Malayalam Lullabies
3. **Sahala Zanam (PG Student, St.Xavier's College, Aluva):** Emergence of 'New Powers': Reading Characters in South Indian Cinema
4. **Mathiusinliu Clare T Panmei and Kedinsi Nchang (MA Students, St. Xavier's College, Aluva):** Understanding Gender and Vulnerability in a Conflict: The Case of Manipur
5. **Aiswarya L R (Research Scholar, Mar Ivanios College , Thiruvananthapuram):** Gender Precarity and Vulnerability Amidst the Covid-19 Lockdown: A Critical Study on the Malayalam Movie *Wolf*
6. **Chaithanya Elsa Achankunju (Assistant Professor, Mar Thoma College for Women, Perumbavoor):** Politics of Governmentality and Power Amplifying Vulnerability in *The Plague Upon Us*

1.00 p.m. - 1.30 p.m.

Lunch Break

1.30 p.m. - 2.45 p.m.

Plenary Lecture IV

Chair: Dr. Minu Susan Koshy, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Mar Thoma College for Women, Perumbavoor

Lecture: "Resilient Voices: Disability, Vulnerability and Survival in Indian Narratives"

Ms. Haifa N.K.
Assistant Professor (English),
MES College
Kunnukara

2.45 p.m.- 3.00 p.m.

Tea Break

3.00 p.m. -4.00 p.m.

Panel IV

Panel IV

Venue: P.G. Seminar Hall

Chair: Ms. Abina Sulhath, Assistant Professor (English), MES College, Kunnukara

Presenters:

- 1. Vivek Madhu Kaippilly (Research Scholar, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam):**
The Everlasting Thirst for Humanity: Understanding the Different Degrees of Helplessness
- 2. Sandra Lis Sebastian (Research Scholar, Sacred Heart College, Thevara) and Dr. Rajesh M. (Assistant Professor, Sacred Heart College, Thevara):** The Waste of Humanity: Reading *Perariyathavar* through Human Rights and Vulnerability Studies
- 3. Neethu Varghese (Assistant Professor, BCM College, Kottayam):** Surviving Surveillance: Gender, Biopolitics and Illness Narratives
- 4. Aiswarya Ashok (PG Student, Kerala University) and Aswathi Santhosh(MA Student, Kerala University):** Precarious Labour and Social Injustice in "Bethimaran"
- 5. Diya Saji (PG Student, Sacred Heart College, Thevara) and Angel Raju (PG Student, Sacred Heart College, Thevara)** The Silent Scars: Unravelling the Endosulfan Tragedy Through the Lens of Environmental and Gender Vulnerability
- 6. Maria Sebastian (Research Scholar, CMS College, Kottayam)** Climate Change and Disillusionment: Analysing Vulnerability and Precarity of Women in Postcolonial India

4.00 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.

Valedictory Session

Prayer

Welcome Address

Dr. Sangeetha Rachel Koruth
Head, Department of English

Valedictory Address

Dr. Letha P. Cheriyan
Principal

Feedback

Certificate Distribution

Vote of Thanks

Dr. Minu Susan Koshy, Conference Coordinator

Abstracts

Keynote Lecture

Singlehood in Indian Films: Vulnerability or Resilience?

Dr.Oindri Roy

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Department of English

Aliah University

Kolkata

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The study approaches vulnerability and precarity, that have gained significant theoretical faculty, through the portrayal of singlehood in cinematic narratives from India. A language of vulnerability shall be interpreted in the characterization of the seemingly invisible singles in the traditional, marriage-oriented plots of films in India, especially Bollywood cinema. Moreover, singlehood has also acquired visibility, during the twin phenomena of globalization and digitalization which has led to remarkable transitions in the consumption practices of visual culture. This new-found visibility is owed not only to film-making in India but also to YouTube vlogs and reels along with online viewing of tele-series and soap-operas.

The research seeks to expose whether and in what ways the cultural patterns of visibility can dismantle existing forms of ‘singlisms’ or stereotypes about singlehood that become experiences of precarity for singles. Another pertinent question shall be whether the present cultural visibility of singlehood can be read solely as narratives of resilience without any ambiguity or slippages that may create potential risk factors. It shall also be possible to identify and comprehend factors like gender or sexuality, socio-economic status or ethnicity that can accentuate or extenuate these risk factors. This shall also entail questions about the ways in which state-apparatuses and other related mechanisms govern singlehood and its cinematic/visual representations , further inviting questions about vulnerability and resilience.

The scope of this study shall not only address the questions within the framework of Bella de Paulo’s ‘vulnerable singles’ and ‘resilient singles’ but also seek to understand whether, and in what manner Indian singlisms entail an expansion of the framework. This shall allow a few observations on how singles visualize themselves through the social media platforms, and to what extent this visuality is contextualized within the vulnerability-resilience narratives that emerge from contemporary Indian films.

Plenary Lecture I

Visualising Vulnerability: Women's Infertility Memoirs and Graphic Medicine

Dr. Chinmay Murali
Assistant Professor
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This lecture examines select infertility memoirs authored by women, both visual and verbal, through the lens of vulnerability and precarity. Primarily, the lecture situates the emerging discourse of graphic medicine within the larger framework of vulnerability studies by demonstrating the potential of this interdisciplinary field to visualize vulnerability in the context of women's infertility. Foregrounding the ways in which graphic medicine narratives visualize the physical, psychological, economic and social vulnerability experienced by childless women, the presentation underscores infertile women's vulnerable subjectivity. As such, an attempt is also made to explore how the visual-verbal grammar of comics enables female artists to approach their vulnerability in aesthetic terms. At another level, the lecture approaches vulnerability occasioned by infertility in the Indian context, close reading two infertility memoirs: Anita Jayadevan's *Malicious Medicine* (2009) and Rohini Rajagopal's *What is a Lemon Squeezer Doing in My Vagina* (2021).

Plenary Lecture II

Crafting the Witch: Witch(craft) Hunt Narratives and Vulnerabilities

Alwin Alexander
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Union Christian College
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Tens of thousands of people were tried and executed by ecclesiastical and secular courts in Europe between 1450 and 1750 for the crime of witchcraft. Most of them were women, labelled as witches. Such witch hunts still persist in many parts of the world, including India. And the most vulnerable subjects to be persecuted are still women. The underprivileged and subalterns too fall prey to this often socially sanctioned malfeasance. The attempt here is to understand the socio-political and religious vulnerabilities involved in such

witch hunts. Along with that, the precarity of the subjects concerned will be examined with reference to the codified patterns of witch recognition that are still extant. Narratives from history, contemporary society and fiction will be explored to illustrate the operative dimensions of witch recognition and witch hunts.

Plenary Lecture III

Shared Vulnerability Beyond the Human: Introspecting Representations of 'Injurability' in Select Indian Narratives

Dr. Rajeesh K.P.
Assistant Professor
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'Vulnerability' derives from the Latin word 'Vulnerare' which means 'to wound'. It refers to the fact that one is likely to be exposed to physical or psychological harm. Social Vulnerability is mainly discussed in the context of natural hazards with a stress on how a community can anticipate, shield, resist and recover from these tragedies. "Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on humane and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free enquiry through human capabilities" (Copson 6). Curiosity is an inherent feature of human civilization and it is this alacrity for truths with regard to the world in which they reside that adds meaning to their lives. The moment you raise the query 'What it means to be a human being?' you set the wheels of introspection rolling. This attempt on our part to understand the earth in which we live is crucial since we are the product of natural processes that informed our planet over a span of billions of years. "He is conscious of himself as an earth child" (Copson 10). In today's era of global inequality the question of 'vulnerability' attains a paramount significance." The human condition is one of vulnerability....to recognize fragility is to accept that we are vulnerable to circumstances.....Just as we have to acknowledge that terrible things can happen to us, so also we have to acknowledge that we could do terrible things" (Copson 15). This acknowledgement of tragedies paves the basis for compassion for others which also includes the non-human world. Here lies the importance of shared vulnerability whereby you establish connections with fellow human beings and also other elements within the environment like animals and plants. Literature and art play a dominant role in inculcating eco-consciousness within human beings and my lecture will

focus on select Indian narratives that serve the purpose of bringing issues of sustainability and eco-ethics to the forefront especially in the wake of the large-scale injuries inflicted upon the environment in our country that has resulted in pollution and other natural calamities in India.

Plenary Lecture IV

Resilient Voices: Disability, Vulnerability and Survival in Indian Narratives

Ms. Haifa N.K
Assistant Professor
Department of English
MES T.O Abdulla Memorial College
Kunnukara
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Vulnerability and disability are two distinct fields of study that deals with human condition and existence. In the rich tapestry of Indian storytelling, disability narratives have long been overshadowed by prevailing notions of vulnerability. Disability literature is a subgenre of literature that portrays the lives of disabled people, their experiences, trauma, and existence as well as their survival, with a deeper understanding of disability. A person with disability in India is defined as “someone with long term, physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment, which, in interaction with barriers, hinders their full and effective participation in a society equally with others” (Rights of person with disability).

The lecture titled “Resilient Voices: Disability, Vulnerability, and Survival in Indian Narratives”, explores how individuals with disabilities navigate systemic barriers, social exclusion, and personal struggles, transforming vulnerability into strength. It examines how contemporary narratives depict disabled people as agents of change. Through a critical analysis of literary works, personal narratives, films, contributes to the growing field of disability studies in India, highlighting the need for inclusive and accessible narratives that center the experiences of individuals with disabilities. The lecture aims to amplify the resilient voices of individuals with disabilities, promoting a more nuanced understanding of disability, vulnerability, and survival in Indian narratives. The role of resilience in literary narratives is highlighted, illuminating the modes in which disabled individuals claim their rights through activism, community support, and personal determination. The lecture aims to raise awareness about the need for societal change, robust legal frameworks, and a strong emphasis on ensuring dignity and opportunity for all.

Panel I

Vulnerability and Precarious Memories: Reading *Kashmir Files* and *Andhar Badhirar Mookar*

Vinu Varghese Kurian
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St. Stephen's College, Pathanapuram
Part-Time Research Scholar
Mar Thoma College Tiruvalla
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This paper explores the role of vulnerability and precarity in the manipulation of collective memory, analysing how historical narratives are reconstructed to serve ideological and political purposes. Through a comparative study of the film *The Kashmir Files* (2022) by Vivek Agnihotri and the novel *Andhar Badhirar Mookar* (2020) by T.D. Ramakrishnan, the research examines how selective memory-making amplifies experiences of violence and the denial of justice. By framing vulnerability as both a condition and a consequence of manipulated memory, the study investigates how historical omissions and distortions shape precarious subjectivities, influencing societal perceptions of victimhood and legitimacy.

Drawing from vulnerability studies and memory studies, this paper argues that the politicisation of memory not only reinforces existing power asymmetries but also produces new forms of precarity, where certain groups remain exposed to continued marginalization and historical erasure. It interrogates the intersection of memory, violence, and justice, questioning whether these narratives empower the vulnerable or perpetuate cycles of exclusion and retribution. Both *The Kashmir Files* and *Andhar Badhirar Mookar* engage with historical trauma, but their representational strategies diverge in ways that expose the ethical and political stakes of memory-making. By situating the select works within the broader discourse of precarity, the paper highlights the fragility of historical truth in contexts where memory is actively contested and weaponized.

Precarious Pasts: A Reading of Memory-Induced Vulnerability in Subhash Chandran's

Samudrasila

Sweta S. Kumar
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Global Surf
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The paper 'Precarious Pasts: A Reading of Memory-Induced Vulnerability in Subhash Chandran's *Samudrasila*' centres on the conceptualization of memory as more than just remembrance of past events. Subhash Chandran is a recognised contemporary Malayalam writer known for his popular novel *Samudrasila* (2019), a composition that blurs the differences between myth and reality, as well as dream and consciousness. Memory, as the plot shows, is moulded by society and culture, and not only by what one goes through. The theoretical framework of the paper incorporates Martha Fineman's concept of vulnerability. Fineman's work looks at the vulnerability of human life, suggesting that memory makes existing vulnerabilities worse or gives birth to new ones. The memories of past trauma, social injustice, and unsuccessful relationships have a significant impact on the present life of *Samudrasila*'s protagonist, Amba. Instead of just being quiet, her thoughts haunt her, affecting her actions, connections, and self-perception.

The study thoroughly analyses how memories of loss, desire, and regret create vulnerability, shaping Amba's personal and communal experiences. The constant recollection of memories, especially those related to her son's autism and past sufferings, points to the idea of cruel optimism as developed by Lauren Berlant. The attachment to these memories makes Amba yearn for a better past or a healthy son which adversely affects her will to deal with present reality. This cruel optimism rooted in the memories of the past creates a repetitive pattern of hope and disappointment, making Amba vulnerable.

Judith Butler's concept of precarity is very relevant in the novel as it addresses the uneven distribution of vulnerability across different socio-political contexts. Amba's identity as a woman and the mother of a specially-abled child heightens her vulnerability due to the social expectations and norms imposed upon her. Descriptive recollections of past injustice, losses, and societal pressures make her a precarious subject, pointing to how certain social labels engraved in the memory add to an individual's vulnerability. Subhash Chandran's

interconnected narratives of various women, including Amba, show that memory keeps precarity alive, ensnaring individuals in a loop of grief, uncertainty, and social marginalisation.

Additionally, the paper examines how memory actively functions as a form of vulnerability both in the individual and communal context, affecting generational narratives and collective identities. Blending stories from Indian epics like the Mahabharata with contemporary experiences, Samudrasila depicts the communal aspect of memory. The memory of these shared stories of grief and endurance contribute to the present state of communities. According to Dominick LaCapra, trauma and history passed down through generations greatly influence the modern experiences of vulnerability. Thus, 'Precarious Pasts: A Reading on Memory-Induced Vulnerability in Subhash Chandran's *Samudrasila*' explores in detail how precarious past events and present circumstances intersect to create vulnerability, and locate characters as precarious subjects caught in the dynamics of memory-induced trauma.

Delving into Biopics: Justice Delayed and Denied for Savarkar and Sarbjit

Ms. Sneha Bhanu Menon
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Today the world has been reduced to a generalised disciplinary society regulated by the biopower and biopolitics implemented by modern nation states to subjugate populations. Anatomo-politics, as imagined by Michel Foucault, is a form of biopower that further elevates the state's power to control and regulate the human body. This act of supervision functions through the manipulation of citizens. Judith Butler opines that vulnerability, though a human condition shared by everyone, is unequally distributed.

Veer Savarkar, born as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and acknowledged as the pioneer of the Indian independence struggle was victim to the biopolitical strategies exercised by the British government and was convicted for abetting revolutionary deeds, which included fighting against Partition and advocating Hindutva, in order to free his homeland from the clutches of the colonisers. Decades after his painstaking endurance of the atrocities that the infamous island prison had in store for him, his deeds were rendered vain as his countrymen continued to be falsely accused on the grounds of Partition. Like Savarkar, Sarbjit Singh

Attwal, an Indian man who was subjected to character defamation suffered in prison for years after being misunderstood to be a terrorist by the Pakistani judiciary, for the former accidentally trespassed the then provisional boundary separating India and Pakistan, subsequent to being intoxicated.

The legacy of Partition still remain clear in the Indian subcontinent, in its new political formations and the memories of divided families. This paper tries to inquire into how innocent lives were stripped of their fundamental rights and rendered vulnerable by the precarious configurations shaped by Partition and the subsequent communal riots, through a reading of *Sarbjit* (2019) by Omung Kumar and *Swatantrya Veer Savarakar* (2024) by Randeep Hooda.

Manifestation of Collective Trauma in *Anandhabhadram* And 9

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Trauma is an inevitable part of human existence. Present ever since the beginning of humanity, however unacknowledged that might be, the footprints of trauma could still be traced along the centuries and the collective diasporic experiences that present and past communities share. Belief in the supernatural, the magical and the cosmic has been a trait shared by human beings ever since prehistoric times. Excessive belief in these elements, and the effort that people tend to make in order to reach the ethereal and the supernatural, is a subject matter that deserves serious attention.

This paper explores how excessive belief in the sublime and the supernatural, could lead to trauma in individuals, and how this trauma affects those around them, leading to the transformation of individual trauma into collective trauma. Analysing this through the context of Indian films like Santhosh Shivan's *Anandhabhadram* (2005) and Jenuse Mohamed's 9 (2019), this paper tries examine how individual trauma manifests as collective trauma and how it affects the psyche of the people who are directly or indirectly in proximity to it. Analysing these films through the theoretical framework put forth by Jean-François Lyotard's

conceptualization of the sublime and trauma , Cathy Caruth’s theory of the unclaimed experience of trauma, and Jacques Lacan’s theories of the Mirror Stage and the Symbolic Order, this study attempts to analyse the modes in which trauma shapes these narratives. It also investigates the transformation of individual trauma into collective trauma through a reading of Digambaran, from *Anandhabhadram*(2005) and Albert, in Jenuse Mohamed’s 9(2019).

Exile at Home: Embodied Vulnerability and the Cultural Trauma of Crisis

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The paper argues that the experience of stigma and exclusion faced by internal migrants during the Covid-19 pandemic in India contributed to the construction/shaping of cultural trauma. Focusing on the disruption of lives in their usual place of residence, this article explores how the question of home and belonging, as well as their social identity, were re-negotiated in the event of the sudden imposition of the lockdown. Employing a contextual and textual analysis approach, the study investigates the precarious experiences of the urban migrant labourers in India in Puja Changoiwala’s *Homebound* (2021). Her portrayal of their experiences integrated in a matrix of fiction emerged from her sheer determination that it should be preserved in cultural memory, and to ensure that it is never allowed to “drown... into oblivion again” (1). She highlights the manner in which public health policies tend to forget the particular vulnerability of the underprivileged during a crisis, leading to their public perception as potential virus carriers and superspreaders and consequential violence against them. This results in the experience of the pandemic not only leading to the construction of cultural trauma unique to their community, but also a reiteration of the trauma of the routine. The novelist being an award-winning journalist by profession, articulates the story as the experience of the entire migrant community united by similar experiences during the lockdown.

Earlier studies on the novel have dealt with the social, political, and cultural concerns of home, identity, and belonging as well as the vulnerability of the migrant community in the wake of a pandemic. However, they failed to explore how these experiences could turn out to

be culturally traumatic for the community. This paper therefore seeks to address this research gap and attempts to understand how their experience of precarity led to intense cultural trauma. The migrant experience reiterates the concept of the cultural trauma of routine which states that an event of cultural trauma is not only constructed when a routine is disrupted, but that it can also take place “when regularly expected occurrences... occur and in fact get reaffirmed in a public or official manner... for certain subordinated groups and under certain circumstances...” (Onwuachi-Willig). This paper argues that the embodied vulnerability of domestic migrants during times of crisis—manifested through physical suffering, displacement, and systemic neglect—serves as a critical lens for understanding the construction of cultural trauma, revealing how the intersection of bodily experiences and societal structures perpetuates cycles of marginalization and collective memory in India. Further, public knowledge about the virus caused the migrants to be viewed as potential virus carriers whose movement on roads could turn out to be a super spreader event. Thus, mass media representation of their long journeys coupled with collective fear and panic proved to be antithetical to their reverse migration, and thus to their safety and existence. They were thus forced to navigate a terrain of uncertainty and precarity, leading to a renegotiation of their identity and sense of belonging.

**Materializing Vulnerability: Navigating the Trauma of Displacement and Social
Invisibility of Indian Jews in *The Teak Almirah* by Jael Silliman**

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In literature, theories of trauma and vulnerability are becoming more prevalent, particularly when discussing racial and ethnic minority groups. The displacement tales of migrant communities like Indian Jews serve as epitomes of the abstract and palpable politics of adaptation. Vulnerability within migrant experiences often refers to the heightened susceptibility of migrants to exploitation, abuse, and hardship due to factors like language barriers, lack of legal status, cultural alienation, and economic dependence. In the life of migrants, their cultural objects act as tangible reminders of their past and as tools for cultural expression in their host country. Objects play a critical role by helping them maintain a sense of identity, connection to their ethnicity, and adaptability to their new environment while

navigating the trauma and vulnerabilities of cultural assimilation. There exists a close reciprocity between memory, material culture and trauma, the understanding of which is crucial in accessing the vulnerability of the minority groups like Indian Jews. This paper purports to identify how the vulnerability of Indian Jews, particularly that of the Baghdadi Jews of Calcutta are manifested in their material culture or cultural objects by scrutinizing the variegated characters and their cultural artifacts in Jael Silliman's novel *The Teak Almirah* (2016). In the disputed and complicated context of contemporary Indian literature in English, Jael Silliman's novel enables a transnational and transcultural analysis of the socially complex Jewish communities of Calcutta. The novel explores the themes of cultural alienation, identity loss, and the struggles for belonging of the microscopic migrant Jewish communities of India in their host society by highlighting the complex social, psychological and moral dilemmas endured by them. This paper, by investigating the cultural objects used and preserved by the various Jewish characters in the novel, traces how the vulnerability of strangeness shifts to the vulnerability of adaptation and that of cultural assimilation. The paper emphasizes the precarity and social instability faced by the Baghdadi Jews of Calcutta and examines their vulnerability and the anguish of cultural displacement.

Panel II

Reading Gender, Violence, and Resistance in M.C. Jithin's *Sookshmarshini*

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The paper intends to comprehend vulnerability in the context of gender in the Malayalam film *Sookshmarshini* (2025) by M.C.Jithin, through a scrutiny of the role of gender in determining one's vulnerability to violence and its consequences. It will underscore the response of an orthodox Christian family to the possibility of a same-gender relationship within the heteronormative space of the intimate family, and situate homophobia as a cause of vulnerability in the contemporary social order. The film narrates the unsettling story of an otherwise quiet neighborhood when a new family arrives there. The well-connected women of

the area, owing to their inquisitiveness and suspicion, launch a fact-finding crusade. Gradually, a murder in the name of honor killing committed by unassuming characters comes to the surface.

The study will focus on the protagonist Priya as an agent of change, while appreciating her efforts in negating her own vulnerability through wit, grit, and a sharp instinct. She aptly impersonates the traits of a *sookshmadarshini* (microscope). It is interesting to observe how she utilizes her ‘nosiness’ in an ethical manner. The precarious character Diana will be examined for trusting her family in spite of knowing their true colors. The sense of entitlement, and the agency of punitive action vested in Manuel and other male members of the family will be discussed, along with the autonomy of characters in responding to violence and the spirit of resistance conspicuous in the character of Priya. This research will draw upon the theoretical framework of gender studies and vulnerability studies in order to understand gendered vulnerability as depicted in *Sookshmadarshini*.

Voices from the Margins: Gendered Vulnerability and Resistance in two Dalit Women’s Narratives

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Dalit women’s narratives occupy a critical space in Indian literature, focusing on the intersectionality of caste and gendered oppression. Unlike mainstream feminist discourse, where the concentration is on upper-caste experiences, Dalit women’s writings expose the compounded vulnerabilities they face in a caste-ridden society. This paper interrogates how Dalit women writers, articulate experiences of systemic discrimination, social exclusion, and resistance, through an analysis of Bama’s *Karukku* (2014) and Sujatha Gidla’s *Ants Among Elephants* (2017). By analysing these narratives, this study aims to highlight the ways in which Dalit women challenge the patriarchal and caste ridden structure of society through their storytelling.

Bama’s *Karukku*, an autobiographical narrative, documents her lived experiences as a Dalit Christian woman, confronting caste-based humiliation and patriarchal restrictions within religious and social institutions. Her writing resists hegemonic narratives by reclaiming agency through education and self-expression. Similarly, Sujatha Gidla’s *Ants Among Elephants* narrates her family’s struggles with caste oppression, emphasizing how Dalit women navigate social and economic precarity. Both texts

challenge the erasures of Dalit women's voices in mainstream feminist discourse and foreground their unique modes of resilience.

This paper argues that Dalit women's narratives redefine vulnerability not as passive victimhood but as a space for collective resistance. Unlike mainstream feminist views that focus only on gender oppression, these narratives show how caste, class, and gender are connected. Dalit women authors use oral stories, autobiographies, and testimonies to create counter-histories. These challenge the dominance of upper-caste groups. This study also looks at acts of resistance in their works. These include claiming dignity, building community support, and raising political awareness.

Through a close reading of *Karukku* and *Ants Among Elephants*, this paper examines how Dalit women articulate their lived realities, asserting their agency despite systemic marginalization. It also highlights the necessity of an intersectional feminist approach that acknowledges caste as a fundamental axis of oppression. Ultimately, this study underscores the power of Dalit women's narratives in reshaping literary and sociopolitical discourses, advocating for a more inclusive feminist praxis.

Birthing Inequality: Precarity and the Economics of Surrogacy in *A House for Happy*

Mothers

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In the neoliberal global economy, the female body has become an arena of investment, with Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) transforming surrogacy into a commercialised form of labour. In the years before India's official ban on commercial surrogacy, the country had emerged as a major hub for transnational commercial surrogacy, with economically disadvantaged women carrying children for affluent intended parents, often from the Global North. Surrogacy, framed as an opportunity for financial upliftment placed surrogate mothers in precarious conditions marked by informal contracts, medical risks, and a lack of legal protection. Surrogates, often from marginalised communities, navigated a system that commodified their reproductive labour while reinforcing traditional patriarchal constraints of propriety and honour.

This paper examines the intersection of precarity and reproductive labour through Amulya Malladi's *A House for Happy Mothers* (2016), a novel that critically examines the socio-

economic vulnerabilities of Indian surrogates and the global inequalities embedded in the fertility industry. The novel's depiction of surrogacy not only highlights the commodification of motherhood but also raises critical questions about agency, consent, and the structural inequalities that shape reproductive markets.

Precarious Lives, Powerful Rhymes: Reading Poetry as an Act of Indigenous Resistance in the Works of Jacinta Kerketta

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Jacinta Kerketta (1983), an Adivasi poet-journalist from Jharkhand, offers a powerful literary voice that articulates the vulnerability and precarity of India's indigenous communities. Her poetry is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of Adivasis, addressing themes of displacement, environmental destruction, caste-based violence, and state oppression. Kerketta's poetry emerges as both an act of resistance and a documentation of the sufferings of her people. Her collection *Angor, Land of The Roots* and *Ishwar Aur Bazar* provides a poignant critique of the exploitation of Adivasi communities, illustrating how precarity is not just an economic condition but a deeply entrenched socio-political reality.

This paper examines how Kerketta's poetry embodies the intersection of ecological and social precarity, depicting the forced evictions, land dispossession, and cultural erasure faced by indigenous people. Through a close reading of selected poems, the present study explores how she employs earthy metaphors, stark imagery, and indigenous oral traditions to highlight the fragility of Adivasi existence. Drawing from eco-criticism, postcolonial studies, and subaltern theory, this paper argues that Kerketta's work exposes vulnerability and reclaims indigenous agency through poetic resistance.

Furthermore, her poetry challenges dominant narratives that frame Adivasis as passive victims of modernity. Instead, her verses depict them as guardians of the land, holders of ancestral wisdom, and resilient communities fighting for survival. By analyzing her engagement with gendered precarity, forced migration, and environmental justice themes, the paper situates Kerketta within contemporary literary movements that foreground indigenous voices. In doing so, this study underscores the modes in which her poetry offers a counter-narrative to mainstream developmental discourse, and highlights the urgent need to recognize the precarious position of India's marginalized communities.

This paper argues that Jacinta Kerketta's poetry is a powerful critique of modern India's socio-political landscape, where the cost of development is often paid by the most vulnerable. Her work is not just poetry—it is a call for justice, resistance, and reimagining survival in an increasingly precarious world.

Life Amidst Conflict: Analysing Farah Bashir's *Rumours of Spring* through the Lens of Vulnerability Studies

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The paper examines Farah Bashir's memoir *Rumours of Spring* through the perspective of vulnerability studies. Published in 2021, the memoir is a gripping narrative of Farah's youth in tumultuous Kashmir during the 1990s. The book examines the effects of militarisation on the daily lives of Kashmiris, with emphasis on the experiences of women. Bashir's narrative illustrates the upheaval of a young girl's mundane existence, wherein basic activities such as studying, strolling to the bus stop, or even falling asleep are laden with tension and trepidation. The persistent violence and unpredictability deprive youngsters of their innocence, affecting their psychological and emotional growth.

The research scrutinizes how political vulnerability, stemming from conflict, can disturb the psyche of subjects, as exemplified by the terror induced in the characters in the novel, by seemingly insignificant incidents. The use of tear gas or the sound of a cicada becomes cause for intense fear and trauma for the subjects. Bashir's prose possesses considerable emotional depth, encouraging readers to empathise with the sufferings of those in conflict. She conveys her personal truth, the reality encountered by her family, where anything that is typically assumed is imbued with fear. Bashir conveys the collective memories of numerous Kashmiri youngsters raised under analogous situations through her evocative descriptions and personal recollections. The paper assesses the author's sincere depiction of injustice, characterised not by rage, but by a subdued recognition of the pervasive horror that distorts the boundary between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Postcolonial Precarity and The Hungryalists

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Avant-garde movements in Indian literature of the 20th century aimed at challenging existing conventions, which resulted in an increase in backlash from both the public and the critics, resulting in an abrupt end to these movements. They went through obscenity trials, changing the public perception of the movement and the poets itself, often also encountering pressure from the state. I propose situating my research on the Hungryalist Movement of the 1960s in India to illustrate the effects of postcolonial precarity and bodily vulnerability in performative poetry. Performative poetry across the world has had to face its own set of challenges, which is why this research will briefly discuss performance poets from the West to highlight the postcolonial precarity of the Hungryalist Movement.

The proposed research will shift the focus of existing scholarship on aesthetic transgression and sexual liberations, and look at the debate from the lens of precarity. The research aims to investigate the reason for the differing degrees of reception of obscenity through the poetry of the Hungryalists. The Hungryalist Movement in India was one of the many poetic movements in modernist literature. Its aims and vision were very much similar to its Western counterpart, the Beat Generation. However, the similarities between the two end here, as the Hungryalists went through trials and tribulations that led to the end of this short-lived movement. The research investigates the reasons for the decline of the Hungryalists in India, and the factors that led to their obscenity trial in 1964. The research aims to locate them as precarious postcolonial subjects. The Beats and the Hungryalists were both vulnerable due to the performative aspect of their poetry, but the end of the Hungry Generation due to the trial highlights the fact that postcolonial precarity plays a bigger role here. The paper attempts to engage with this hitherto neglected aspect of the movement, using Judith Butler's notion of enhanced precarity and bodily vulnerability as the major theoretical framework.

Panel III

Vulnerable Bodies Navigating Precarious Lives: Reading the Portrayal of Widowed

Elderly Women in Select Films

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Population aging is a booming phenomenon across the world. India is turning into an aging society at a rapid pace, and it has become necessary to cater to the needs of the elderly. Being a nation which upholds filial piety as a virtue, it is ironic that India witnesses the elderly being abandoned by their kin. Widowhood marks an epochal shift in a woman's life, calling for profound social adjustments. In the Indian scenario, the predicament of widows is extremely dire, as widows are looked down upon and treated as outcasts. This societal perception diminishes the status of widows, jeopardising their identity and agency. The social taboo associated with widowhood has been a pervasive paradigm ever since ancient times, adding to the perpetuation of discrimination and exploitation. The intersection of age with widowhood exacerbates their susceptibility, as elderly widowed women are deemed burdens by the mainstream social order and are often silenced by their own children. As such, they are more vulnerable to marginalization in both the micro and macro spheres of life. With their reduced status in the familial space, elderly widows are often subjected to abuse and neglect within the domestic. Stigma surrounding widowhood, coupled with the ageist outlook of the society, amplifies the atrocities elderly widows are forced to endure, making their life precarious and vulnerable.

The paper investigates the situation of elderly widows in the familial realm by employing Judith Butler's concept of vulnerability, precarity and resilience, and their intersection with the gerontological aspect of ageism. Butler conceptualizes vulnerability as both a universal human condition and an individual experience conditioned by social infrastructures. This theoretical notion applies to elderly widowed women, whose vulnerability is heightened by social structures, family dynamics, role transitions, affecting their resilience. The paper attempts to

scrutinize these aspects through an inquiry into the portrayal of elderly widows in the movies *Idam* (2019) by Jaya Jose Raj and *Appatha* (2023) by Priyadarshan.

Lullabies of Oppression: Unveiling Gendered Vulnerabilities in Malayalam Lullabies

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Vulnerability Studies is an interdisciplinary field, a key aspect of which is the concept of gendered vulnerability, which describes the particular ways in which social, political and economic factors intersect to make women and girls susceptible to various forms of exploitation, violence, and marginalisation. Patriarchal norms, power relations, and systemic injustices that sustain women's marginalisation and subordination influence gendered vulnerability.

The internalization of gendered norms is often achieved through the use of popular culture, in the form of films and songs. The paper attempts to unveil the complex and subtle ways in which patriarchal ideologies are perpetuated and internalised in Kerala through lullabies featured in Malayalam cinema from the 1960s to 1990s. Lullabies such as "Aadyathe Kanmani" from the movie *Bhagya Jaathakam* (1962) by P. Bhaskaran, and "Thamara Kannan Urangenam" (1993) from *Vaalsalyam* (1993) by Cochin Haneefa, which are seemingly harmless melodies, scaffold and reinforce societal norms that render women and girls vulnerable. The lyrics and melodies naturalise and normalise patriarchal values, making women's agency and autonomy limited. The study also reflects upon the modes in which the social order of Kerala utilizes lullabies to reinforce patriarchal values and expectations.

Emergence of ‘New powers’: Reading Characters in South Indian Cinema

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Power dynamics centred on various axes of identity play a significant role in shaping the way individuals and societies operate. The shared structure of power in society refers to the way power is distributed and exercised across various groups, institutions and individuals within a community or country. Political, economic, social, and legal power function in tandem to create ‘docile’ subjects of ‘use’ to the state. Louis Althusser asserts that Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) such as the police and the criminal justice system can enforce ‘obedience’ directly, often through the use of violence. Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), on the other hand, are institutions which generate ideologies which we as individuals (and groups) then internalize, and act in accordance with. These include schools, religion, the family, legal systems, arts and sports. Foucault’s concept of ‘biopower’ (or *biopouvoir* in French), refers to a technology of power for managing humans in large groups; the distinctive quality of this political technology is that it allows for the control of entire populations.

The operation of state apparatuses and the creation of docile subjects through biopower is evident in characters represented in cinema. South Indian films tell stories that are in tune with the culture, politics, social structure, and lifestyle of the people in the region. The paper aims to read the power dynamics depicted in select South Indian movies by engaging with select characters as agencies of power that disrupt and challenge existing systems, influencing the everyday life and survival of individuals, often creating a cycle of vulnerability over people. The paper, utilizing concepts such as biopower, ISA and RSA, explore how characters in movies such as *Lucifer* (2019) by Prithviraj Sukumaran, *Malik* (2021), by Mahesh Narayanan and *Sarkar* (2018) by A.R. Murugadoss, not only represent a break from traditional power dynamics but also get involved in the creation of new forms of control that echo larger societal conflicts.

Understanding Gender and Vulnerability in Conflict: The Case of Manipur

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Gender inequality affects men and women in varied ways. The negative impact of conflicts on gender relations and on women in particular is well documented. Women suffer disproportionately in situations of conflict. Rape and sexual violence often become instruments of war, designed to weaken families and break down the social fabric of communities and societies. Women are often perceived as embodiments of the prestige and honour of a community. Thus, sexual assaults and other acts of violence that target the modesty of women are perpetuated in a conflict, exacerbating their vulnerability. The conflict between the Meitei and the Kuki-Zo has been one of the most reported and discussed conflicts in India in recent times. Though it had been raging since May 2023, it became visible in mainstream discourse only after a video of two Kuki women being paraded naked became viral on 19 July 2023. It was reported that the incident took place on 4 May 2023. This led to another spate of violence targeted at the women of both the communities engaged in the conflict.

Brutal crimes against women have been reported during this period. The trauma has led to long-lasting psychological effects, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression, affecting their psycho-social functioning. The violence against women in this conflict took a unique turn, where even women directly or indirectly abetted these crimes. Such reports of abetment by women flattened the general perception about the women of Manipur, who were admired for protecting their honor with tenacity and courage in the past. Today, women in Manipur are extremely vulnerable subjects, marked by a loss of status, lack of recognition, and frequent humiliation, which result in psychological distress. The dimensions of violence against women perpetuated by the conflict in Manipur are analyzed using news reports, commentaries, articles, commission reports, and panel findings. The paper attempts to explore these sensitive issues and highlight the impact of the conflict on women in Manipur, rendered vulnerable by their socio-political realities.

Gender Precarity and Vulnerability during the Covid-19 Lockdown: A Critical Study of the Malayalam Movie *Wolf*

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The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the sudden implementation of the lockdown in India exacerbated prevailing social inequalities. The lockdown amplified the pre-existing gender inequalities and structural violence against women. Social isolation, confinement and loss of support increased the risk of precarity and violence, especially among women who were confined with abusers at home. According to Kasturirangan, Krishnan, and Riger (2004), violence against women is frequently made worse during emergencies, as evident during the pandemic. Although lockdown measures were necessary to contain the virus, they hindered women's ability to seek help. Women are frequently positioned within pandemic narratives as either sexualized bodies that offer hope, or as victims to be saved, which increases their precarity in times of crisis (Gledhill).

The paper explores the themes of precarity, vulnerability and toxic masculinity in the Malayalam lockdown movie *Wolf* (2021), which depicts the experience of three characters trapped in a house due to the lockdown. The discursive negotiation of gender precarity during the pandemic as represented in *Wolf* comes under scrutiny. It interrogates the representation of gender performativity and toxic masculinity in lockdown narratives and highlights the precariousness and vulnerability of an upper-middle class woman who is contained in her house with two men, estranged from support systems.

The paper further argues that the pre-existing gender precarity in the Indian society aggravates the vulnerability of women during the Covid-19 lockdown through violence, either in the form of physical or verbal abuse. It examines how the narrative displays the functioning of toxic masculinity and often advocates it by falling back on the old myth of protective manhood and feminine fragility. The representation of the female protagonist as a submissive damsel in distress in need of the help of a chivalrous man is questioned, and the reinforcement of existing societal gender norms and traditional binary stereotypes by pandemic narratives is problematized. The work draws from the theoretical framework of performativity and precarity as outlined by Judith Butler, as also central concepts from genre theory.

Politics of Governmentality and Power-Amplifying Vulnerability in *The Plague Upon Us*

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Vulnerability is smeared in the ‘realities’ of living beings. Despite the assurance of stability envisioned, human lives are marooned by precarity and vulnerability. Systems of society such as law, government and various power structures created to manage vulnerabilities can often be repressive, and can grow to create insecurities and dangers in the lives of its own otherwise benefactors. Judith Butler maintains that at certain times ‘state itself ... attains a certain ‘indefinite’ power to suspend and fabricate the law. This paper examines Shabir Ahmad Mir’s *The Plague Upon Us* (2020) that deals with the bloodshed in Kashmir and contextualizes this in the present times of wars, insurgencies, forceful deporting and dehumanization. The paper argues that violence and the grief it generates further escalate the scale of potential vulnerabilities, jeopardizing modes of survival. The paper establishes that the reckless and insensitive use of power displaces and unsettles the body and mind of individuals. It also states that the reciprocity between the state and its allied bodies subjected to its autonomy dismisses the human rights available to individuals through deterritorialization and the calling off of citizenship.

Panel IV

The Everlasting Thirst for Humanity: Understanding Varying Degrees of Helplessness in *Marubhoomikal Undaakunnath*

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Through a thorough analysis of different facets of human emotions, especially in their weakest stages, the novel *Marubhoomikal Undaakunnath* ('How the Deserts are Formed') by Anand, published in 1989, invites the reader to witness new depths of vulnerabilities, mainly through the lens of helplessness. By paper primarily attempts to reveal how the isolation of the desert personifies distance from hope and empathy. Furthermore, the essay argues that the haunting contextual imagery of the parched barren land situated in the physical world is a projection of many deserts that the characters carry within themselves. Each character in this novel is portrayed as an embodiment of many identities, rooted in the present, but paralleling personalities from historical times. The dry merciless wind that blows through the pages, subconsciously carries the reader to a disturbing dust bowl where hope attains the vitality of a summer rain. The never-ending stretch of desert that surrounds the many lives portrayed in this novel conveys the intensity of struggles for survival. The superstructure of the story narrates the cruelties, cold-heartedness, and selfishness of the state machinery on a group of prisoners who are recruited to undertake life-threatening construction work inside a historical fort on the edge of a desert in Rajasthan. The present disquisition intends to investigate the forces that desiccate the element of humanity from the social domain, slowly leading to the desertification of human minds. Attention will also be paid to the modes in which the state and its citizen-support systems remain inaccessible to the precarious sections of the society in the rural Indian scenario, where the loopholes of the Constitution and the lack of agency ensure prolonged episodes of exploitation, across generations.

The Waste of Humanity: Reading *Perariyathavar* through the Framework of Human Rights and Vulnerability Studies

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For human beings deeply ensnared in mazes of dependency shaped by social, political and economic conditions, autonomy becomes an illusion. Dictated by multifarious factors such as class, colour, caste, race, gender or geography, many overarching frameworks reinforce disparities and inequality. Vulnerability studies examines the induced fragility of subjects and the modes in which precarity and uncertainty are inflicted upon them.

Dr. Biju's Malayalam film *Perariyathavar* (2015), whose title means "the unknown" or "the unrecognised", attempts to bring an often-neglected and marginalised class to the limelight. Pushed under the sheath of invisibility, this shadowed class of garbage collectors lives on the fringes of society. They carry the weight of a society as they remove the filth which, if not for their labour, would accumulate and choke the beneficiaries of their service. They are the intentionally abandoned and forgotten subjects who are doomed to walk through the city as the ghosts of daylight.

Throwing light on the vulnerable and precarious livelihood of the urban poor, especially the sanitation workers in Kerala, this film offers a platform to critically examine the seminal concepts of vulnerability studies discussed by Judith Butler. Butler asserts that structural inequalities determine the degree to which individuals experience precarity. The film probes the nuances of the challenges faced by this invisible workforce. They are not just marching on an existential precarity, but rather surviving on the stench of decay exacerbated by casteism, class hierarchies and institutional neglect. The state policies and cultural norms weaken the social, economic and legal armoury before them.

The different dimensions of human vulnerability are evident in the depiction of the health hazards, job insecurity, low wages, social stigma, homelessness, displacement and the question of identity, in the movie. Their autonomous self is in check, as "a mode of

dispossession” (Butler). *Perariyathavar* exposes the violations of basic human rights including the right to equality, dignity, shelter and safety, and attempts to amplify the voices of labourers silenced by the mainstream. The film also juxtaposes human suffering with environmental degradation and portraying how vulnerable communities and ecological systems are exploited and discarded by the social order. Collective action and resistance become key to a reclamation of the identity of vulnerable subjects caught in the nexus of power structures.

Surviving Surveillance: Gender, Biopolitics and Illness Narratives

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Illness narratives serve as critical sites for examining gendered biopolitics, wherein the female body is simultaneously pathologized, disciplined, and reclaimed. This paper explores the intersection of gender, illness, and state-medical control through the memoirs of Anita Moorjani (*Dying to Be Me*, 2012), Lisa Ray (*Close to the Bone*, 2019), and Manisha Koirala (*Healed*, 2018). Drawing on Michel Foucault’s concept of biopower, the study interrogates how cancer memoirs expose the regulation of women’s bodies through medical surveillance, social stigma, and cultural expectations of resilience.

Moorjani’s account problematizes the Western biomedical paradigm, arguing that “our bodies are not separate from our thoughts and emotions” (Moorjani 2012). Ray’s memoir critiques the hypervisibility of illness, where a woman’s body is commodified in the media yet rendered invisible in conversations on suffering. Koirala’s narrative highlights the disciplining of the female body post-recovery, where survivorship is framed as an obligation rather than agency. These texts collectively challenge the medicalization of female suffering and propose alternative epistemologies of healing.

This paper argues that contemporary illness memoirs function as counter-discourses to patriarchal and biomedical hegemony, offering new ways to conceptualize bodily autonomy. By reclaiming their narratives, these women disrupt the biopolitical structures that govern illness, survival, and post-recovery identity. The study situates their works within the broader

discourse of feminist health humanities, illustrating how personal illness becomes a political act of resistance.

Precarious Labour and Social Injustice in *Bethimaran*

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Vulnerability is an ambiguous notion involving the power to wound and the capacity to be wounded. While vulnerability is an inherent state, precarity is relational and has to do with social, economic and cultural conditions. Precarity emerges because human beings are embedded in social relations and it presupposes that, being embedded in specific systems which are unequal and unjust at multiple levels, some sections of the population will become the precariat. Precariousness is, thus, often associated with workers, contractual job takers, students and migrant workers.

This paper analyses how *Bethimaran* (2022), an autobiographical novel by Sukumaran Chaligatha, portrays labour precarity in contemporary India. Labour precarity is a defining feature of contemporary capitalism marked by job insecurity, low wages, and the erosion of labour rights. Chaligatha highlights the incidents where people of the Ravula tribe are placed in a position of labour precarity. He provides a firsthand account of these realities, offering a literary perspective on economic struggles and social injustice. The precarity factor is perpetrated upon the people by exploiting their vulnerabilities. The unstable working conditions and constant transfers between temporary jobs with little financial security are challenges faced by the protagonist at an individual level, while the community undergoes exploitation due to the absence of workers' rights, which further leads to systemic oppression and marginalization. *Bethimaran* serves as a form of resistance literature which challenges the neoliberal policies that perpetuate precarity.

Chaligatha's autobiographical novel offers a poignant critique of labour precarity intersecting with the social marginalization of tribal communities and illustrating the lived experiences of precarious workers in contemporary India. By depicting employment characterized by insecurity and instability, where workers experience a lack of job security, limited benefits, unpredictable work hours, and often low wages, the novel exposes the structural inequalities embedded in the labour system. This study situates *Bethimaran* within the larger discourse of

labour precarity in literature, arguing that it serves as a powerful critique of India's changing regional labour landscape.

Silent Scars: Unravelling the Endosulfan Tragedy Through the Lens of Environmental and Gendered Vulnerability

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Enmakaje (2009) is a dystopian novel originally written in Malayalam by Ambikasutan Mangad, which sheds light on the environmental crisis resulting from the extensive use of the endosulfan pesticide in the village of *Enmakaje*. Set in the Kasaragod district of Kerala, the novel highlights the devastating consequences of over two decades of aerial spraying of endosulfan on cashew plantations. The toxic effects of the pesticide have led to widespread health problems, deformities, and death among thousands of people. This paper delves into the depiction of the socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities faced by the villagers, particularly the long-lasting impacts of this disaster, through the lenses of Judith Butler's notions on precarity and Ulrich Beck's concept of a "risk society" (43).

Butler's theory of precarity, which refers to how some lives are of more value politically and socially is evident in the novel's portrayal of how the villagers, already marginalized by their socio-economic status, become even more vulnerable due to their exposure to endosulfan. Ulrich Beck's concept of the 'risk society' depicts how modern industrial society creates inequality and rift which affect the economically backward groups. Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence, which refers to the gradual and invisible environmental destruction that occurs over time, forms another key framework for analysing the novel. The effects of endosulfan spraying were not immediate; they were manifested over years, causing harm to the population over time. This functions as an instance of slow violence where the damage is cumulative and often neglected by those in power, which is made worse by the isolated location of village. The paper also explores the gendered vulnerability experienced by women who are forced to deal with the harsh consequences of the endosulfan tragedy. The effect of such a tragedy is much harsher on women than it is on men which puts them in a

position of double vulnerability. Thus, *Enmakaje* illustrates how environmental crises makes worse existing social inequalities, rendering certain social groups extremely vulnerable.

Climate Change and Disillusionment: Analysing Vulnerability and Precarity of Women in Postcolonial India

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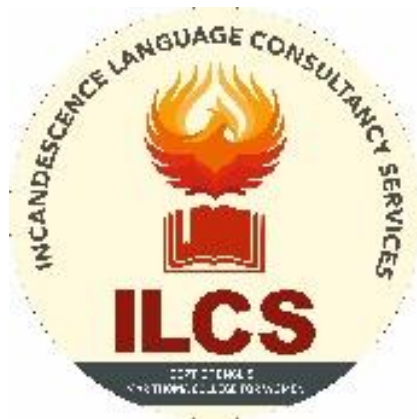
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Climate change is an issue of utmost urgency in the postcolonial context, with ‘developing’ countries being forced to bear the brunt of earlier bouts of environmental exploitation and destruction by colonial powers. In India, the financially and socially weaker sections are the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Amongst them, often women’s lives are more precarious owing to their subalternity. The fairy tale narratives of happily-ever-after falsely sold to women, falter under modern realities. By extension, women can no longer spoon-feed western ideals of progress-and-profit oriented environmental exploitation to their children in good faith. This paper analyzes the children’s book *When Fairyland Lost Its Magic*(2023), written by Bijal Vachharajani and illustrated by Rajiv Eipe, in order to examine popular reimagining of characters like Cinderella and Rapunzel in the Indian context, and examine the modes in which they illuminate the vulnerability and precarity of Indian women in relation to environmental change. Issues like environmental pollution and climate anxiety, water and food scarcity and resource allocation and migration will be analyzed. The paper argues that postcolonial disillusionment narratives that highlight the current vulnerability of Indian women in relation to environmental degradation will bear positive effects for future generations.

As We Conclude....

We hope you had an enlightening experience reading the Book of Abstracts, which purports to be a humble starting point for researchers engaged in the field of Vulnerability Studies in the Indian context. Being a relatively novel arena, the vast landscape of vulnerability narratives offers immense scope for further inquiry, which can, and must, result in societal intervention for the welfare of groups and subjects rendered precarious. As cosmopolitan citizens located at a crucial juncture in history marked by wars, refugee crisis, communal disharmony and violence in various forms, we must consider it our duty to pursue action-oriented research that would enable hitherto precarious sections of the social order to not only exist, but to thrive and flourish.

We sincerely hope our venture has been successful in initiating a dialogue on vulnerability and the related notion of precarity, fostering meaningful discussions and critical engagement.



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