

Translation and Embodiment of Gendered Spaces: Reading *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021)

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Abstract

This paper, titled 'Translation and Embodiment of Gendered Spaces: Reading The Great Indian Kitchen', investigates the translatability of gendered embodied spaces in Malayalam films in general, and in The Great Indian Kitchen (2021), in particular. Critical reading of the embodiment of gendered spaces, as represented in this film, results in a site where knowledge and pleasure, produced and defined by the dominant cinematic aesthetics, get subverted. The subversion offers a feminist critique of the representations of women and women's experiences produced by popular Malayalam cinema. This subversion is visible in Malayalam cinema, which has been attempting to revise these popular gendered representations since the 2010s (Pillai, 2013, p. 26). This paper argues that these attempts become a form of feminist translation. This paper further argues that such an informed reading would enable an uninitiated reader to reinterpret the experiences of women subjects and their interactions with normative discourse/s.

Keywords: Audiovisual Translation, Knowledge, Embodiment, Gender, Space, Malayalam Films.

Introduction

The film *The Great Indian Kitchen* (TGIK) received great acclaim for its critique of the normative notions of gender roles and performances. This audiovisual text revolves around the journey of a newlywed woman, taking place in a traditional Hindu Nair¹

¹ "Nair is a matrilineal community that constitute a large section of landed elite in Malabar" (G. 2002: 3-4). The matrilineal kinship and descent were ended in 1933

household. The film unravels her transformation, within the cinematic narrative, from an ostensibly liberated upbringing in her NRI parents' home to the boundaries of an orthodox married household. This study attempts to critically read how the embodiment of gendered spaces, as represented in the film, becomes a locus where the established aesthetics of popular Malayalam cinema are subverted by challenging the hitherto patterns of productions of knowledge and pleasure.

The paper looks at spaces as having both concrete and symbolic dimensions. *TGIK* depicts domestic and outer spaces to carve gendered meanings associated with them, of which the most important is the kitchen. The kitchen produces wide-ranging meanings as a space encompassing diverse involvements and interactions. Moreover, the kitchen has conventionally been regarded as a female-centric space where women's unconditional servitude and unpaid care work are demanded (Abarca, 2006, p. 19).

The film unravels how the wife's reactions, expressions, and interactions with other characters conflict with the expected display of normative discursive behaviours. This paper argues that *TGIK* offers a feminist critique of the dominant representations of femininity by critically reading how behaviours prescribed by normative patriarchal discourses are combated. The feminist discourse embodied in this audiovisual text allows a re-writing of the popular representations of women characters and their performances in Malayalam cinema. In doing so, this paper establishes that this text becomes a feminist translation. The study reads how power competes between patriarchal, normative discourse, and gender discourse in this audiovisual text, which is represented through embodied gendered spaces. This study argues that such power conflicts are negotiated by translation (Tymoczko, 1991, p. 285). The power conflicts in the AV text (*TGIK*) privilege female

by the Madras Marumakkathayam Act. This resulted in the "realignments of power along the lines of gender, generations, and changing access to property and authority..." (G. 1996: 283) The film subtly reveals its backdrop, particularly highlighting the North Malabar setting of the in-law's family, through the presence of 2019 Lok Sabha election posters, featuring candidates.

subjectivity, emphasising female agency and, thereby, bringing forth feminist translation (Godard, 2021, p. 2).

Space, Gender and Power: Contextualising Gendered and Embodied Spaces

Drawing from the Foucauldian perspective, John Allan points out that power can no longer be discussed as a centralised phenomenon but rather be understood and explored as divergent and operating through diverse geographies (2016, pp. 19-20).² According to Allan, specific spatial contexts manifested through everyday practices shape how power operates (*ibid.*). Feminist geographers have proposed a more nuanced notion of power manifestations in the diverse spaces occupied by different genders. They have been exploring how power works through these various sites, such as home, work, leisure, and so on, to highlight how gender identities and subjectivities are constructed. They argue that gender identities and experiences are shaped by the spatial contexts and power dynamics in which individuals navigate their lives. Since 'subjectivities are spatially embodied' (Rose, 1993, p. 546), pointing at how power operates through the production of space and how gendered identities are placed within these spatial configurations becomes a critical point to discuss at some length in this paper. Linda McDowell draws upon Butler's conceptualisation of gender as performative (2007, p. 23) to investigate how gender performances can be transgressive and specific to certain spatial contexts (*ibid.* p. 40). Further, Gregson and Rose also emphasise that not only the actors, but the sites are also 'performative of power relations' (2000, p. 441). McDowell says, "Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial — they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience" (2007, p. 4). Drawing the relationship of space and gender into the Indian, particularly in the South Indian context,

² The notion of power has conventionally been associated with dominance and control, which conjures up the ideas of hegemony and resistance. This perspective implies that power is exercised 'over' through a top-down dynamic.

Seemanthini Niranjana discusses how women have been muted in conventional anthropological discourse (2001, p. 22). The attempts to locate women's experiences, therefore, give way to the discussion on power and knowledge and the representation of identities (2001, pp. 22-26). Thus, the attempts of *TGIK* (2021) to explore the relationships between gender, space, and power open multiple possibilities for reading the power dynamics of gendered domestic spaces and their mutual shared margins with other spaces. Niranjana's notion about the household being the centre of women's lives (2001, p. 48) maps the locus of the film, *The Great Indian Kitchen*, as a household that demands its women to situate it at the centre of their lives.

Film Analysis: Representing Gendered Spaces and Embodied Spaces

The Kitchen as a Symbol of Gendered Roles: *TGIK* discusses how married life unfolds for a woman in a traditional arranged marriage, culminating in estrangement and divorce. As the film's title suggests, much screen space is devoted to the protagonist's life around the kitchen. The wife and all other women in the film, all unnamed, are engrossed in the kitchen, performing various tasks. The uprooting of the female protagonist from an apparently modernised family of an NRI parent to a traditional and conservative environment is indicated by the architecture of both houses. The kitchen, in the in-laws' house, is situated at a distance from other common areas of the house, thereby limiting the interaction of the women, who are preoccupied with cooking and related tasks, with male members of the house. The culinary preferences of the men, as detailed by the mother-in-law in the initial sequences and later by themselves, stop the kitchen from getting modernised. The father-in-law demands the rice to be cooked on the hearth, chutney be done in grinding stone, and his clothes be washed manually. The husband insists on having chapatis for dinner. The women perform even the simple acts of giving a toothbrush and placing the men's slippers beneath their feet. After serving the men, the women swiftly vacate the veranda and other open spaces, while

the men never enter the kitchen or the backyard, markedly differentiating and demarcating gendered spaces inside a household.

As the film progresses, the women are reduced to mere hands which tirelessly perform a multitude of chores. This relentless repetition is symbolised by their wedding rings and bangles. The initial scenes of delicious meals give way to leftovers scattered on the dining table, remnants of the men's meals.

Women, including girl children, are not permitted to dine with the men. Arjun Appadurai observes, "While the male children are encouraged to continue to demand deference in culinary etiquette, female children are increasingly socialised into the subordinate, service role that they must learn to occupy as future daughters-in-law" (1981, p. 6). When men enjoy meals lavishly, women do not even have clean and hygienic spaces to eat. Appadurai says, "Domestic food transactions express the superiority of men largely through their priority in being served food, the positions they physically occupy, and the disengagement from the cooking process" (ibid. p. 5). The wife is displeased for being compelled to eat amidst leftovers and waste; however, the mother-in-law seems habituated and unbothered about the dirt around. The displeasure and discontent solidify on the wife's face, and she is haunted by the murky smell of kitchen waste even during sexual intercourse.

As the mother-in-law leaves, carrying a mini kitchen in her luggage, the house becomes solely the wife's responsibility. The kitchen, where the woman is tied to almost entirely, becomes what Simon de Beauvoir calls a space of "immanence" (2012, p. 98). The domestic labour she is slammed into "locks her in repetition and immanence; day after day it repeats itself in identical form...It produces nothing new" (ibid. p. 98). The film shows the wife performing the same tasks, including cooking, cleaning, and engaging in sex, repeatedly for about forty minutes.³ Beauvoir refers to Bachelard to argue that the Sisyphean struggle of a housewife is

³ The wife toils relentlessly, cleaning the filth and dirt of the kitchen, wiping the dining table where men have spitted the chewed drumsticks and changing the wastewater leaking from the broken pipe and clogged sink. When the kitchen sink is clogged, her pleas for her husband's help falls on deaf ears.

the one against the unconquerable dirt (ibid. p. 537). She repeatedly requests him to bring a plumber; however, he does not find it urgent or even necessary. The rotten smell of the murky water follows her till night, even during sex, and she gets nauseous.

Beauvoir says, “washing, ironing, sweeping, routing out tufts of dust in the dark places behind the wardrobe, this is holding away death but also refusing life: for in one movement time is created and destroyed; the housewife only grasps the negative aspect of it” (ibid. p. 541). The decay of the rotting kitchen leftovers is repeatedly visualised in juxtaposition with the wife gradually losing her liveliness and love.

The Shared Space of Bedroom: Sex and Desire: The bedroom, the only space she shares with her husband, also offers no atmosphere for intimacy or connection. Conversations are absent, and the exchanges are one-sided, mostly with the husband exerting his conjugal authority over the wife. The shots of their sexual acts are taken in top-down mode, with the wife being laid down and not involved in the act of sex. She is incessantly distracted by the memory of the dirt she is dealing with. Her mentioning of the pain of penetrative sex, devoid of any foreplay, shocks the husband and is met with humiliation and disapproval. Holland et al. observe, “to reveal sexual knowledge and express sexual desires threatens a girl’s reputation” (1994, p.4). She struggles to find a language that allows her to speak about her sexual experience; as Holland et al. find, “the dominant culture has no acceptable language for discussing sex”. They say, “a modest feminine reputation requires a young woman to construct a disembodied sexuality. The woman becomes a passive body, rather than actively embodied” (ibid., p. 4).

Body as a Site: Menstruation and the Notion of Impurity: The only time the wife is disengaged from household and sexual labour is when she is menstruating. The concession is not out of consideration but due to the concept of impurity during the menstrual period. “During a woman’s menstrual period, she is totally isolated and is especially barred from any contact with the hearth” (Appadurai, 1981, p. 9). She is instructed not to cook or touch utensils and other accessories. Chitra Karunakaran Prasanna observes:

The practice of treating women as unclean during menstruation can be observed across India, where women face restrictions in mobility during menstruation not just in the domestic sphere (home and surroundings), but also in the public sphere (mainly in places of worship). In the private sphere of domestic life, the nature of restrictions includes denial of body contact within the house, denial of sexual intercourse, denial of entry to the kitchen or worship rooms in the house, segregation in terms of separate beds or rooms or even separate habitation where women have to stay away from the house etc.

(2006, p. 92)

The narrative takes a turn with the Sabarimala pilgrimage season starting, and the men of the house decide to observe the rituals. However, the wife, due to her upbringing in an NRI parents' household, is ignorant of the rituals and practices and ends up violating many of those to the displeasure of the men. Intensifying their discontent, she enters her menstrual period during the pilgrimage season. An aunt is urgently summoned to address the domestic and religious needs of the men during her menstrual period. This aunt embodies the traditional ideals of a woman in a patriarchal household, dressed in traditional Kerala attire and performing household chores as if they were acts of devotion. The wife is asked not to step out of the small and dark room where she is confined. She is barred from using any bedding or common vessels. The aunt clearly instructs her not to come out or see anyone. The wife is instructed to wash everything she has used during her menstrual period in flowing water to cleanse their impurity. Prasanna says: "Women also institutionalise these taboos, passing them on to successive generations through the process of socialisation. The violence is manifested in the silencing of a natural aspect of femininity by inculcating guilt and shame in women, which lasts for a lifetime" (ibid., p. 92). In an attempt to rescue her husband from a motorbike accident, the wife happens to touch him, which triggers his abusive response. However, he seeks ritualistic solutions to keep his asceticism intact. While men get opportunities to make religious amends, women are forced to abide by the rules and norms of yesteryears.

The bitterness within the family regarding the wife's disregard for customs and rituals intensifies as she shares a video advocating women's entry into the Sabarimala temple. This act enraged the religious group headed by her father-in-law. The wife refuses to delete the video, creating extreme dismay for the husband. In contrast to the silence and submissiveness she embodies throughout the film, the wife yells at the husband when he attempts to coerce her to delete the video. This silence, notes Kristine De Welde, drawing from Urban Walker, "was inextricably linked with traditional gender roles and adherence to cultural narratives of femininity..." (2003, p. 20). De Walde says, "The ability to summon their voices and yell deeply and assertively... been compromised by a doctrine of silence" (ibid., pp. 19-20). Regaining her voice enables the wife to see how generations of women have been exploited and denied their choices, dreams, and fundamental rights.

In the penultimate shot, we see the wife in close-up shots with determination to leave the in-laws' house. She has removed the nuptial thread. Enraged with being ordered to serve tea for the priests, she pours the wastewater from the leaked kitchen sink. When the husband and his father storm at her to beat her, she throws the murky water on their face. de Welde says, "self-defence as a system of techniques and as a way of life subverts dominant gender patterns through an internal critique of them" (ibid., p. 4). She walks out as the men stand in shock, and the priests continue their rituals. She passes those women who protest against the Supreme Court verdict, allowing young women's entry to the Sabarimala temple, symbolising that progress is achieved only by destroying the conventions.

In the epilogue, we see the woman achieving her dream of being a dancer with confidence by choreographing an intense theme of women's resistance, opposite to her husband, who now got his divorce and married again, following the same pattern.

Subversion of Societal Norms and Critique of Patriarchy:

The only character named in the film is Usha, the domestic help. Even when shown doing all the household chores like all other women in the film, Usha is the only one making an earning out of it. Thus, domestic labour for Usha is neither an emotional burden nor a

devotional activity, rather, it is like any other vocation. She tells the wife she does not follow the conventions of staying isolated during the menstrual period. Usha and her daughter are the only people who come closer to the wife in her isolation during menstruation. Usha's shots are taken in the opposite direction to other women when performing household tasks to emphasise the difference.

A Dalit woman, Usha is aware of the exploitations and discrimination society inflicts on them. She subtly critiques the practices, saying one has to be smart to survive. When she says she works even during her menstrual period since she has to afford her children's education, the wife exclaims that it is an extraordinary measure any woman could take in her life. Even while observing the rituals, Usha's daughter does not turn discriminatory or practice rituals that endorse untouchability and marginalisation. The kid meets the wife and even touches her, showing empathy and sensitivity.

Representation of Feminist Discourse as Translation

Reading as Feminist Translation: In the previous sections, we have discussed how spaces are understood as gendered embodiments and we have illustrated our point by showcasing examples from our audiovisual text. Moving on, to carry forward this idea, the study will argue how reading a text through a situated lens becomes a feminist translation itself. The study attempts to establish that reading, much like translation, is shaped by socio-cultural contexts. It has long been perceived that readers, like translators, are engaged in the reinterpretation of texts, navigating the intricacies of language and cultural context to construct meaning (Steiner, 1975; Tymoczko, 1999). This understanding further adds to Godard's view, where she theorises that translation is "re-writing in the feminine" (1989, p. 3) and that a feminist translator is "an active reader becoming a writer, a co-producer of meaning rather than a passive amanuensis" (ibid.).

While it is increasingly clear to note the connection between the reader and the meaning-making process, it is also emphatic to note at this point that critical attention has shifted from a mere "textual

reader to a contextually situated reader” (Littau, 2006, p. 122), courtesy, identity studies like postcolonial studies, ethnic and minority studies, women’s studies, queer studies, so on and so forth. This situated reader, then, focuses on ‘the differences of reading produced by women, gay or lesbian readers, or readers of ethnic minorities’ (Bennett, 1995, p. 4). Thus, an informed and situated reading of *TGIK* impels the reader to critically engage with the portrayals of the embodiment of gendered spaces, offering reinterpretations of the representations produced by the popular Malayalam cinema over decades. Such a reading opens possibilities to reinterpret traditional gender roles and patriarchal stereotypes and, therefore, offers an alternative and feminist translation of the text. Through its portrayal of a newlywed woman navigating the power dynamics of an orthodox and patriarchal family, as well as the burdens of household chores, the film ensures disruptions of normative gender roles and challenges patriarchal stereotypes. The contrasting representation of the wife, who loathes household chores, and the aunt, who considers it a devotional duty, offers reworked meanings and re-written depictions of women’s experiences. The wife’s resistance is recognised, whereas the aunt’s acceptance is critiqued within the cinematic narrative. This shift in the representational pattern invites viewers to derive feminist meanings through centralising and honouring the challenges posed to the patriarchal order.

This audiovisual text distances viewers/readers by disallowing them the possibility of any attachment to or involvement with the narrative through a repeated depiction of mundane household chores and dispassionate sexual intimacy. Judith Fetterly has pointed out how androcentric texts ‘co-opt’ the female reader to ‘identify against herself’ (1978, p. xii). The repetition and consequent displacement enabled by the film allow the readers to resist the androcentric representations they have been conditioned to accept. The process of ‘distantiation’ (Littau, 2006, p. 131) becomes the underpinning of resistance reading. The narrative urges the readers to actively resist the patriarchal codes perpetuated by dominant Malayalam cinema, by presenting contrasting representations of equal companionship in marriage, advocating for equal rights and independence through

subplots. Through a critical reading of the film, readers are encouraged to be ‘renegade readers’ (Boardman, 1994, p. 208) who read against patriarchal codes and stereotypes. Consequently, viewers/readers, through the act of ‘distantiation’ or ‘passionate detachment’ (Mulvey, 1987, p. 18), are alerted to the consciousness of a feminist reader. Through this process of ‘distantiation’ or ‘passionate detachment’, the film dismantles the working of the male gaze and necessitates the reader to foster a feminist consciousness.

Translation as Re-writing: The interface of Gender Studies and Translation Studies shows that translation is not only a means of communication but a powerful medium to subvert social and cultural practices as well. When normative discourses clash and give rise to new narratives, situated reading, encapsulated in feminist translation, emerges as an imperative act of rewriting these traditional normative positions. Alvarez and Vidal say that translation signifies an unstable power balance. They say “Translation is ... a complex process of re-writing that runs parallel both to the overall view of language and of the ‘Other’ people have throughout history; and to the influences and the balance of power...” (1996, p. 4). They further say, “Translation is an excellent vehicle for conveying the typically Foucauldian binary essence of the opposition power/knowledge: power is intimately related to knowledge, information, and especially to how that information is conveyed and the way of articulating a wide range of discursive elements...” (ibid., p. 6). As translation is now being recognised as a process of re-writing that foregrounds the questions of power and ideology, gender theories also intersect with translational operations. The film (*TGIK*) depicts patriarchal and feminist exchanges in juxtaposed sequences. The battling of these ideologies demands the viewer/reader to critically engage and develop a feminist consciousness to decipher the decision of the wife to break free from the institution of marriage. The representation of the activist who advocates for young women’s entry into the Sabarimala temple is narrated in alternative scenes with the confinement of the wife during menstruation. These sequences play a crucial role in understanding the gender politics of the text. The father-in-law holds a power position, not only within the family but also as the community head. The men of the said community

congregation attack the activist and threaten her to mute herself from advocating for women's rights. The wife, navigating through these tensions around her, claims her voice and resists the demands of the patriarchal institutions. Her resistance and reclaiming of voice give rise to feminist interpretations of the text.

Visibilising Women's Voices: The prime endeavour of gender discourses is to reclaim the language and disengage it from how patriarchy has constructed it. Feminist movements which gained momentum over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries appealed to view language as a sexed and emphasised that language plays a critical role in constructing gender and gendered roles. Thus, feminist discourse attempts to deconstruct the patriarchal language and strive to make women visible linguistically. In Louis von Flotow's perspective, the endeavours that deconstruct the "conventional and prescriptive patriarchal language in order for women's words to develop, find a space and to be heard" become feminist translation (Flotow as cited in Arrojo 1994, p. 10). We see how the experiences of the female lead character in navigating the conflicts become the central theme in *The Great Indian Kitchen*. Her growing discontent is represented through repeated representations of the mundane. The film juxtaposes the close-up shots of the women hurrying to finish the household chores, being reduced to mere hands, with the scenes of men at leisure shown in long shots. The film showcases how household and emotional labour have become entirely women's responsibility. The shot of the mother-in-law's packed luggage, which contains only food items and cookware, as she leaves abroad to attend to her daughter's pregnancy, summarises how the patriarchal family perceives women and their role.

The film focuses on how women experience their everyday lives and how the household responses and society, in general, impact their experiences and emotions. *TGIK* details the experiences of not only the wife but also the experiences of the domestic help, the women's rights activists, and the women relatives of the newlywed couple. It highlights women and men who respect the dignity of all identities when shown in contrast with the shots of men who disregard women's individuality.

Translation as a Tool to Subvert the Dominant Cinematic Language: The text revises the conventional cinematic language of Malayalam cinema in portraying the space occupied by the wife in the in-law's house. The women characters in Malayalam movies were shown with a shade of villainy for questioning the imposition of household labour entirely on them or for asserting their individual space and talking for their rights. *The Great Indian Kitchen* departs from that cinematic tradition by fixing the camera through a woman's perspective and her experiences. Her discontentment with the repudiation of her interests and negation of her needs is rendered in various ways—focusing on the nauseating expression on her face, how she holds the dirtied cook and dine wears with her fingertips, and the repulsion she feels while compelled to have sex—to give emphasis to the angle of vision. In setting this angle of vision, the film denies all possible scopophilic pleasures, even in the scenes of sexual acts. The gaze is set through the wife's character, whose repulsion, discontentment, and pain are detailed in being subjected to mechanical sex without acknowledging her desires. The female experience of how patriarchal hegemonic institutions treat them is given the centre stage in the cinema, which dismantles the conventional use of the prescriptive patriarchal language. It builds a space for women and women's experiences to be heard and visible.

Barbara Godard has emphasised that “feminist discourse is translation in two ways; a notation of gestural and other codes from what has been hitherto unheard of, a muted discourse, and as repetition and consequent displacement of the dominant discourse” (1989, p. 46). A woman who loathes domestic chores and aspires to become a dance teacher, and yet the narrative standing by her is a representation the popular Malayalam cinema has not been familiar with. Meena T. Pillai finds “Film after film in Malayalam has created the image of a woman who loves to cook and clean, wash and scrub, shine and polish for her man (*Melaeparambil Aanveedu*, *Valsalyam*, *Mayamayooram*, *Kumkumacheppu*, *Kudumbapuram*, *Thillakkam*, *Kuruppinte Kanakkupusthakam*, *Nayam Vyakthamakkuka*, *Rakkuyilin Ragasadassil*)” (2010, p. 19). The aunt's character, who prescribes to the wife how to follow the traditions and conventions, is the ideal representation of women the popular Malayalam cinema

has established. She further says, “The obvious enjoyment of these women in offering their servitude to men takes on a new signification and serves as a marker of the power of culture to impose its structures on the woman as representation. Thus, that it is nearly impossible for a woman to command power in the family hierarchy elsewhere is neatly established through the differential assignation of tasks according to gender” (ibid. p. 19). In *The Great Indian Kitchen*, we see women who do not enjoy, rather loathe, the monotony of household labour and grow discontented about the servitude they are compelled to perform.

Transformation as Translation: The film emphasises these emotions and gestures where the patriarchal prescriptions are disavowed. The wife finds joy in dancing and finding her career in it. Women who choose art as a profession, such as Vasundhara Devi in *Ente Sooryaputhrikku* (1991), Rajalakshmi in *Sarovaram* (1993), etc., are disallowed to have a dignified life and are pushed to anomalous deaths for making their choices. *TGIK* ensures the women who exercise their powers to pursue their choices find their path and independent existence, and that they win over patriarchal ordeals. Such women and their narratives are unheard in the popular narrative patterns of Malayalam cinema. In voicing the unheard and giving life to what has been muted so far, the film offers a feminist translation of cinematic representations of women and their experiences. Godard also notes that “feminist discourse presents transformation as performance as a model for translation” (2002, p.12). *TGIK* showcases how the wife’s representation evolves from a docile and submissive existence to a robust and assertive individual. From a passively listening, apologetic, and muted character, her performance grows, with realising how the institution takes her rights away and pushes her to mere slavery, to questioning the institutions themselves.

The Great Indian Kitchen offers a reworking of the meanings and codes presented through the masculine and patriarchal gazes over the decades. The text establishes the experiences of women and how they are treated in the gender hierarchy through the perspective of a woman by enabling her views to find visibility and voice to be heard. And, in doing so, the film becomes a feminist translation.

Conclusion

“It is only by learning to decode and deconstruct the cultural implications and meanings of messages that one can seek to destabilize the ideology of gender hierarchy so inscribed in their language”.

(Pillai, 2013, p. 22)

This paper has shown how the film *The Great Indian Kitchen* challenges the notions of impurity associated with women and menstruation, dismantles the convention that a “good and noble” woman cannot express her sexual desires and offers a central stage to represent the experiences, and expressions, emotions and gestures of women who combat the dominant social order where gender and caste hierarchies join their hands together. In doing so, the film enables women’s voices to find a prominent space in narrating their experiences. The dominant meanings associated with women and women's experiences are thereby reworked. The reading of the film text serves as a catalyst for challenging patriarchal constructs of femininity, shedding light on the transformation of traditionally submissive figures into empowered agents. Through its deliberate repetition of performances representing the structural violence inflicted by patriarchy and other dominant ideologies upon women and marginalised subjects, the film prompts readers to engage critically with reworked meanings, thereby elevating them to be feminist readers. These meanings, decoded and deconstructed, offer a feminist translation of the representation of gendered and embodied spaces by subverting the gender hierarchy and patriarchal prescriptive language established by popular Malayalam cinema over decades. As represented in the film, the representational conventions established by Malayalam cinema over decades are challenged as it encourages a Dalit woman character to inspire the upper caste female lead to be a fighter against systemic oppression. The character of the wife, the female lead, refuses to remain a victim of the patriarchal social order. She, scene by scene, gains her voice and assertiveness and, towards the climax, summons her powers to break free from the bondages the patriarchal marital institution has imposed on her. The film text offers a re-representation of the women characters and a reinterpretation of the meaning associated

with them and their roles by giving voice and agency to the women characters. In doing so, reading the embodiment of gendered spaces in *The Great Indian Kitchen* becomes a feminist translation in itself.

The study, in investigating the production of meaning and how gender plays a vital role in encoding and decoding, is a translational analysis that aims at exploring how feminist translation theories work on textual interpretation. Through the lens of feminist Translation Studies and concepts drawn from feminist reading theories, the study foregrounds the reworking of patriarchal codes and meanings within the film *The Great Indian Kitchen*. By focusing on the transformation of characters, rewriting gendered meanings and re-representing gendered and embodied spaces within the context of feminist discourse, the study situates itself as a Translation Studies exploration through uncovering how meanings are constructed, negotiated and transformed across discourses and ideologies.

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