

# Canons of desire sexual morality cultural studies essay

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



## Chapter 4

I came to know about these places when I was in college. I was not very sure as to what exactly happens in these places although everyone seemed to know of their existence. For us terms like flute and kuntan[1] were part of our daily vocabulary. But then I had my first sexual encounter . . . I then knew what happens there and the implications of those terms. Once you know that this exists and have experienced it then you see it everywhere or you will look for it wherever you go. The feeling of shame shudders through me sometimes. However since then I never missed an opportunity to come here although I know it is very risky. Vipin[2]- Interview[3]

## Introduction

The language of reformation has indeed governed the memory practices where the past often appears as a site never to be retrieved. One immediate outcome of this is that it turns the future into the teleology of progress. Within this frame the contemporary is deliberately kept separate from the past, held accountable for the future and is thus defined as the only site of the 'real'. Incorporating progress into a daily vocabulary has been part and parcel of the project of colonial modernity. This required intense campaigning that not only idealize progress but also construct a life-world of values and practices. In this chapter I attempt to pitch my arguments on a different level. While the mainframe of the thesis around sexual morality in the public sphere of Keralam is continued in this chapter I also make an attempt to explore how this regulate same sex intimacies and subjects who indulge in same sex practices at the most micro level. I borrow from Nancy

Fraser's observation that participation in the public sphere, which in the modern societies has been gathering the form of a theatre, "is enacted through the medium of talk" (Fraser 1990). The predominant language of sexual morality centered around reformation and progress, while on the one hand, continues to permeate the contemporary modern public sphere, on the other hand, has also has important manifestations at the level of daily language used by sexual subjects. The realm of values, closely associated with body and its representation, is consistently foregrounded in the public domain of Keralam in order to configure its specific regional existence and as a signifier of its regional modernity. This had lent itself to an expanded discourse of morality where the life-world practices are framed and shaped accordingly. The hegemony of this language of morality continues to persist even against the backdrop of globalization and the drastic changes it has been causing in the material realm of lives. I focus on the deployment of this language on a level that is different from the standard gay/lesbian activism or the transnational same sex subject. Using both critical ethnography and textual readings I make an attempt here to identify how the earlier anxieties concerning the local moral realm revisit the contemporary both in the form of writings produced in the public domain as well as in the daily vocabulary of same sex subjects. I have focused on clandestine same sex intimacies – practices and relations and the subjects who are involved in such practices; how they make a different use of the language of progressive sexual morality simultaneously deploying the politics of monogamy, heterosexuality and reproductive family in their day to day existence. I also attempt to initiate a discussion of how subversion could assume different forms by not

only destabilizing the standard moral norms but also by making non-heteronormative practices a familiar event of cultural existence. Using critical ethnography[4] of some of the major cruising sites in the region I focus on the middle ground between conformity and transgression trudged by these subjects to pursue their homoerotic desires. The constitution of these intermediate spaces is a symbolically rich field filled with metonyms of sexual acts and subjects outside the normative frame, acts of subversion, resistance and, at the same time, conformation to the dominant gender and moral beliefs. In this introduction I discuss the larger theoretical paradigms charting the general academic understanding of this area. In the next section I explore the use of social semiosis by individuals pursuing hidden same sex desires and examine the space of metonymy and metaphors surrounding these practices in Keralam. In the third section the politics of family and reproduction around the question of homosexuality is analysed in order to understand the larger cultural politics of modernity in Keralam. At this point I shall return to my original discussion concerning the deployment of the progressive politics of sexual morality in the public sphere of Keralam. The abstract continuities between the life-world of the clandestine, male same sex subjects and the sedimented notions of morality not only show the close link that exist between the public and the private but also tell us the subtleties involved in the constitution of their subjectivities. It is precisely through these subtleties that they escape the surveillance apparatus, thus turning their existence into a case of subversion, at the same time as reproducing the hegemonic ideas of heteronormativity. As Johnson stated, "subjectivities are produced, not given, and are therefore the objects of

inquiry, not the premises or starting points" (1986, 6). Nevertheless coming across the invisibility of these otherwise most visible subjects was the most dynamic moment that led me to engage with this whole research. I realized that their outward semblance is constructed upon the thin lines of distinction between 'normal' and 'deviant' identities. Their language was filled with tropes borrowed from the standard moral lexicon used in the public sphere. It was precisely this moment that induced me to work through the history of this vocabulary and to engage with this abstract entity called sexual morality that continues to sweep across the cultural spectrum of this region. My use of 'subjects' here includes the anonymous and invisible bodies who come under the recently invented epidemiological term MSM – Men who have Sex with Men – as part of medical efforts to curtail the spread of HIV/AIDS especially in Third World countries. Seabrook advocates, in Indian and other similar contexts, the use of MSM over other terms like gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer as these terms are inherently Western. For him "to impose such categories – except upon a small minority who have been much influenced by Western gay experiences – is to bring alien concepts to the people involved" and it would be "arrogant and disregarding for other cultures" (1999, v). Whereas concerns about reading 'Indian sexuality' or sexualities with the help of Western theories are not quite uncommon, to imagine its reverse would be equally problematic. That is, an Indian sexuality or an Indian sexual self that is quite distinct from its western counterparts. As John and Nair articulated, "the very conception of the other of the west as being something to which western concepts do not apply (or only as an act of violation from which one must be redeemed) is itself a western legacy"

(1998, 6). Hence attempts to understand subjectivities in the context of same sex desire have to be theorized amidst constructions of transnational homosexual subjects, such as gay and lesbian, informed by cultural differences. While the former results in the "flattening" of categories "erasing the differences and nuances among same-sex desiring peoples" in the non-West (Collins 2005, 182), the latter tends to "lead to dehistoricized and exoticized depictions of the non-Western other" (Hindley 2001, 117). Further, I situate same sex relations and practices amidst experiences that characterise an ambivalent (Chatterjee 1993) and "uneven modernity" (John and Nair 1998, 7). Using critical postcolonial historiography, I revisit the meanings of same sex desire and its practices as subversion in Keralam. I focus on male deviant subjects in the cruising spaces in Keralam. I argue that the construction of sexual subjectivity implicit in the metaphoric flute complicates our understanding of the differences between behaviour and subjectivity. The popular metonyms for homosexual subjects, the essential and pre conceived symbols of deviance and the inside/outside strategies deployed by these subjects are discussed in the paper against the context of the moral discourse. As Leeuwen has argued that the representation of and the knowledge that it draws upon about some aspect of reality stands within the pluralities of framework that a discourse provides for (2008, 3-8). The site of homosexuality and its representation in Keralam is filled by systems of knowledge that articulate itself consistently through newer technologies of gender. Despite the common parlance which connects flute – the passive male homosexual – with oral sex and a passive role in male to male intercourse, the chapter illustrates how the social stigma associated with

these subjects cut across the active and passive divide often attributed to non western locales. I identify men, commonly conceptualized as MSM, as subjects who skillfully contrive their own master plans to retain their dissidence from common gender beliefs. I discuss the local social regulatory modes in the form of a politics of reproduction and the strategies commonly deployed by these subjects to straddle the middle ground between spaces of subversion and heteronormative structures. Theories about the expansion of an "existing Western category" by focusing on "the rapid changes in the lifestyles and an identity politics" (Altman 1996: 8; see also Altman 2001 & 1999; Hall 1994) are usually contradicted with the "heterogeneous understandings" of homosexual persons that exist in non-Western societies (Jackson 1997: 55). In the context of the "modern gay" and the "traditional Kothey" models in Hyderabad in south India, Reddy argues that the post-Foucauldian distinctions between 19th century homosexual and 20th century gay, and between subjectivity and behaviour have tended "to elide the receptive/penetrative sexual distinction so common in parts of Latin America and Asia" (Reddy 2004: 48)[5]. Reddy stresses the "trans-local" nature of gay subjectivities that disproves "the universal gay identity . . . and an explicit non-universal, local particularity" (2004: 149). In her work on gay hosts in the tourist district of Mallate, Philippines, Collins argues that: "[T]ransnational analyses provide an alternative to globalization approaches; they shift the emphasis away from Western mobility and its consequences and consider sexualities as the product of a hybrid reworking of identities, languages, and desires (2005: 189). The dynamics of the interaction between the subject and local social regulatory apparatuses are

often ignored in the literature. The implicit subversive potential of certain practices is often replaced by the subjects' interaction with the transnational citizens – Western, or west oriented, gays and foreign tourists. Whereas the local is inherently located amidst transnational networks it is also a terrain constituted by different social, historical and political processes which merit analysis of its own. Major contemporary theorists refuse to conceptualise sexual relations in terms of regulatory practices (Glick 2000; Sawicki 1991) in order to stress the freedom of sexual expression (Echols 1992; Vance 1992; Rubin 1992). They argue that "to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate relations of domination", providing the logical framework to understand "destabilizing practices" (Butler 1990, 30-31). Nevertheless, I argue that an understanding of subversion should account for the local shades, the regulatory modes of which are further stabilized or destabilized as a result of these subversive practices apart from considerably influencing the nature of these subversive bodies and practices itself. It further throws light on the different modalities of power in a non-western cultural terrain rather than re-articulating repression from a different vantage point. Such circuits are still embedded in the postcoloniality of the region, the systems of knowledge and the moral technologies that consistently produce the 'normalizing effect' even against the backdrop of subversive practices. I maintain that unless present practices and perceptions are contextualised against this past its significance in constituting the contemporary cannot be fully captured. Such an analysis is also important to understand bodies and practices that subvert a predominantly unilateral gender order. Field documentation and interviews



with those who regularly visit the cruising spaces are the main tools of my analysis in this chapter. In all three districts my initial contact with them was established through outreach field workers in the local Non- Government Organisations (NGO) engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention activities. Although in a general rubric the subjects I am dealing with come under the category of MSM, I am not using the term in this paper as it brings them under a pre-fixed category and, above all, many of those who I met have never crossed their lines with any NGO mainly resulting from a deliberate attempt to keep their distance from such public activities. My personally belonging to this region was considerably useful, mainly in terms of sharing the same mother tongue, Malayalam, with these individuals. I have mainly followed the theoretical frame and practices associated with critical ethnography in order to establish a closer link with the world of clandestine same sex intimacies and practices in Keralam. Critical and reflexive ethnography engages with meanings, social practices and material relations at the same time as accounting for the researcher's positionality (Naples 2003; Madison 2005; Harvey 1990). Critical ethnography disrupts the tendency to objectify and silence, and allows the less visible subjects to become more apparent (Behar 1993). The considerable amount of time spent in cruising spaces in different parts of Keralam with subjects who visit these spaces has helped me to build confidence among them and has resulted in many informal but insightful conversations with them. I have also used participant/non participant methods to observe the field in order to fully understand the technologies of communication between these subjects and strategies that are deployed to escape the social and institutional surveillance methods. I carried out

unstructured, in-depth, formal and informal interviews during my fieldwork. Taped interviews were very rare since the presence of any device to record interviews were found to be discomforting on most occasions. On all occasions I remained open with my interviewees telling them about the purpose of my being there and the nature of my research. Basically the interview schedule was a flexible one and my questions were crafted on the basis of ongoing discussions. Mostly the questions were points of departure to initiate a discussion in order to allow the interviewees to fashion their themes of interest and to talk about what seemed to be relevant for them. The general framework for the themes discussed in the interviews consisted of 1) narratives of same sex experiences, 2) social hostility and acts of violence committed against transgressive desires and practices, 3) their reactions to the metaphors signifying their own body and desires inside and outside the spaces of transgression, 4) understandings of the emerging gay politics, 5) social control, 6) their being at their homes with their family, at their workplace etc., and 7) their modus operandi and relations within and outside the spaces of transgression.

### **Aberrant subjectivities: the Flute in local settings and cruising spaces**

" It is easy to identify them. They will always keep a distance from the crowd. Or they will often imagine the crowd as a wild animal that can turn violent at any moment. Inside their mind they always have to swing a whip for self protection. From their face they would appear as reclusive. But with full of love deep inside..."[6]I briefly introduce the social and spatial dynamics of the act of cruising[7]and the trope of flute in Keralam. Cruising takes place in

public areas within the crowds of the urban-semi urban locales where men with homosexual inclinations come in search of same sex partners. Such spaces are present amidst almost all urban centres in Keralam. These are not places secluded from public use or which lie beyond the reach of surveillance apparatuses. The spaces are crowded, with a specific meaning assigned according to the functions they perform during the busy hours. These could be market centres, bus stations, public parks, public toilets, town squares and maidans[8], areas adjacent to campuses of crowded religious structures like temples and churches and large scale parking places, staircases of large and crowded buildings and dark corners under bridges. The crowd provides ample room for the subject to remain unnoticed while seeking a suitable partner. The knowledge about the availability of such a space remains a secret with men who have initiated the use of it, although their existence, their 'anti-social' nature is no longer a secret. These places fall well within measures of social control and are located amidst notions that reiterate the sanctity of moral codes and the dangers of transgressions. Cruising spaces by their very nature defy spatial categorizations. It transforms the meaning of a public utility to serve one of the most private activities of human life. It converts a space into an intense one where "the excitement of breaking the law converges with a myriad of techniques of social control. . . . [A] leaky vulnerable place where exclusion of the unwanted voyeur, the violent gay basher, the security guard and the policemen is almost impossible" (Plummer 2002, 300; see also Woodhead 1995). In the case of Keralam where there are hardly any sex venues[9] new spaces have to be discovered, identified, explored, and sometimes,

generated from the already existing ones towards this purpose. This is especially the case with those entering into same sex relations and/or practices as it is not only not accepted but such practices are resisted, opposed vehemently and sometimes suppressed brutally[10]. Such men use the opportunity afforded by urban spaces to remain anonymous amidst an impersonal crowd. They have to spend a great amount of time loitering around these places in the evening hours looking for a partner or partners to have sex with. The number of single men in parks and city squares increases around sunset as married couples, families and young cross sex couples start leaving the place. Loitering is necessary and they have to take special care to look detached since that will help protect them against being noticed by policemen, security guards or other outsiders. By their very nature these spaces are used for cruising by people from various backgrounds cutting across class, and rural and urban differences. A wide range of men engage in such practices, including migrant labourers from neighbouring districts, people who work in local shops, in factories or in government offices away from the city/township areas, visitors passing by the city from other districts and locales farther from the urban centre and students from local colleges. During cruising the only difference that matters is one's sexual preference. Male homosexuals in Keralam are widely known under the derogative term flute. A flute has an inconspicuous existence both within and outside cruising spaces to the extent it refers to a male body who indulges in a particular sexual practice rather than to a specific individual. The word flute is both a metonym and a metaphor simultaneously. The association with a musical instrument of this name invokes the metonym of certain sexual practice.

Metaphorically this usage refer to abstract desires, pursuits for pleasure, or to deviance (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kovecses 2005). Flute signifies the passive male homosexual who indulges in oral sex. The figure of a flute is an abstract imaginary whose attributes are, nevertheless, coherent within a local cultural setting. These attributes are often performed by subjects at defined temporal and physical spaces to communicate their sexual orientation whenever a possible partner is within the vicinity. Outside this time and space and beyond such a communicative purpose these attributes enable the subject to transcend the scope and limits of being a flute precisely by abandoning them. The male homosexual subject has the option to stand outside the ambit of a sexual label and to pass in and out of the social corridors without inviting unnecessary hazards through the manipulation of such pre determined attributes. The epigraph of this section suggests markers associated with men whose ‘ masculinity’, sexual desires and practices are often cast under doubt – that make their identification ‘ easy’. Their physical presence, especially in places that are public, can invite hostile reactions from the homophobic surroundings. The circulation and apprehension of these markers – such as the feminine symbols in a male body and vice versa, certain sexual practices etc., – are commonly apprehended as signs of transgression. Such bodies remain outside the standard models of a virile heterosexual and reproductive, masculinity and a passive femininity. Sunil-InterviewReminiscences of previous confrontations, stories of invitations with and without success, descriptions of sexual acts and stories of violence, were part and parcel of our conversations. Sunil’s account highlights the manipulation of such nuanced differences that exist

between behaviour, action, identity and subjectivity. That there are different ways of expressing same sex desire and that such hidden expressions are acknowledged and responded to, itself challenges the dominant male scripts and makes gender non conformity a familiar event in daily social life. Same sex encounters in this respect cut beyond public sites used for cruising. Crowded public transportations, empty cinema halls when the shows are in progress, dark corners inside porn movie theatres, all are potential spaces to express and practice their same sex desires. Flute as a label imposed on the subject for the deviant sexual acts he indulges in could well be interpreted as symptomatic of a repressive regime. Nevertheless the subjects exercise agency and build relations, sometimes intimate relations, and find spaces to express their same sex desires. Fox (1995) illustrates a typology of bisexuality in which male individuals who take only the active role during sex with another male consider themselves heterosexuals. A flute is the counterpart of these active male bisexuals who assumes a passive role during sexual encounters. Such classifications, on the basis of roles assumed during sexual intercourse, are a well documented area in sexuality studies[11]. Taylor (1978) and Carrier (1995) show how effeminate men – "maricones" – who assume passive roles are heavily stigmatized in Mexican society whereas "mayates" (the active males) are a non-stigmatized identity. In the context of the Dominican Republic De Moya and Garcia (1996) identify a similar relationship between masculinity and bisexuality, where they conclude that bi-eroticism, bisexual behavior, and bisexuality seem to be associated with the social construction of masculinity and gender-role relationships among Dominican males (e. g. a man is a man

even if he has sex with another man as long as he is the one penetrating and not assuming the passive role). However the dynamics associated with these local cultural topographies are likely to be missed if one only takes the traditional gender-role based interpretations of sexual identities as the basis of one's analysis such as these authors do. If stigma is taken as a criterion to understand dichotomous distinctions between passive and active in male homosexual expressions in Western and non western locales, the context of Keralam provides a different experience. Whereas the common imagination of flute justifies the penetrative/receptive, active/passive dichotomies often attributed to same-sex erotic behaviour in these locales, the larger context complicates such a simplified understanding altogether. I come here to give [kodikkan], not to take [edukkan], or vice versa, is a common expression used to communicate their sexual preferences between two individuals having come across for the first time inside the cruising space. But outside these spaces both of them have to take precautions not to let others know of their activities. Aneesh, one of my interviewees, said that the only reason for his wife to divorce him was that he was found having sex with other males. They [wife's relatives] found me having sex with other males on two or three occasions and they told my wife although she never discussed with me about this. On the third occasion she left house and only after two or three weeks when I visited her at my in-law's house did she tell me what her problem was. I never knew that my wife had information about this as she never told me before she left. She was quite adamant about her decision although she never revealed the actual reason to my parents or other relatives. Aneesh-Interview

Such stories of divorce cases have a familiar ring in Keralam

without a distinction being made between passive and active men; identification with homosexual impulses is enough justification for divorce whether or not the subject husbands assume an active or passive role. Both the flute and his partner, usually called– kodukkunnayan (the giver) are stigmatized. This is not to argue against the familiar dichotomy of the giver and the receiver. But such dichotomies are not as simple as they are often imagined. They have different meanings within certain cultural contexts of modernity. Here, in Kerala, for instance, same sex desiring people are stigmatised despite the practice – passive or active – they often engage in. Flute is not a traditional category as the other ones are (such as the maricones and mayates mentioned above). The usage of flute representing homosexuals is absent from visual and print records, fiction and stories and when the term came into being is hard to say. The metaphor captures the main form in the local light talks of male gatherings of different age groups. The sissiest mannerisms of speech and other gestures of a flute are quite often emulated, mimicked and performed on each other in order to mock, a homophile in the locality whose sexual foibles are widely bruited with a voyeuristic flavour. The simplest understanding of a flute signifies the passive male homosexual who has indisposed himself from the modern gender order, its disciplined forms of life and the masculine and feminine etiquettes in order to support his ‘unnatural’ sexual desires. The flute is imaginable only through his affectations, wanderings and amorous gestures in public spaces to the pedestrians and the ‘abhorrent’ sexual practices he engages in. Unlike hijras, a traditional category of transgender/transsexual people in India, flute does not signify a way of life. Hijras, also known as



Aravanis in Tamil Nadu (Mahalingam 2003, 490) – a neighbouring state of Keralam in South India – have a significant presence in South India, especially in the metropolitan cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad besides Tamil Nadu. A traditional category of ‘hermaphrodites’ and found in most parts of India hijras are, nevertheless, almost completely absent in the public spaces in Keralam. Jereena- a Malayali hijra living in Bangalore who authored *Oru Malayali Hijrayude Atmakata* (Autobiography of a Malayali Hijra) stated during an interview published in the *Mathrubhumi* weekly that[T]he society of Keralam entails brutal treatment on those who do not conform to the gender expectations. . . . For one year after joining Hijras here in Bangalore I did not go to my native place in Keralam. I was so scared. . . . I can live in Keralam only as a man which I never can and whose feelings are still alien to me. So I prefer to live in Bangalore only. . . . [12]However later Jereena, whose real name is Suresh, also learned to go in and out of the local socialities in Kozhikkode, her home district in the northern part of Keralam. In a film directed by Prem Kalliath in 1990 we see how Jereena transforms herself to a pleasant-looking young man in jeans and with a stylish, long haircut, goes by train to her home in Keralam. He tells us that he comes home every three months. Home is a house he had built two years before, in which his sister resides with her two small children. He continued to maintain this practice of adopting and abandoning his hijra identity at Bangalore and Keralam respectively until his autobiography was published in the year 2005 and his photographs were released in the newspapers. Thus even hijras have to adopt the practice of going in and out of the normal sociality in Keralam. However as a sexual subject both hijra and flute show a different dynamics

in their construction. The cultural politics of gender and sexuality operate in significantly different ways in their cases. As opposed to the flute one important feature of hijras is their visibility in the social and cultural environment in the varied contexts within the subcontinent apart from the traditional and religious significance ascribed on them[13]. The counter stereotypic gender patterns of hijras are often openly celebrated as a mark of their identity. They not only bring transvestitism and gender non conformity before the naked eyes of the society but also make alternate sexual ways of being a part and parcel of everyday reality (Nanda 1990; Busby 2000). Flute, on the other hand, signify an abstract imagery of both a sexually deviant persona and an abhorrent sexual practice. As opposed to hijras flute has minimal visibilities and the very foundation of the cultural imagery is its hidden nature. Flute can violate the stereotypes of gender non conformity at any moment despite its ' normal' appearance in the immediate preceding moments. Besides, in the case of flute, it is associated more with performance and the display of signs at fixed temporal and spatial settings. As I mentioned earlier the figure of flute signifies the dynamics associated with the very process of metonymizing certain acts and practices, and subjects involved in it. Krippendorff (2006) maintains that metonyms provide the basis for a human-centred theory of signs. Thus " the part that is chosen to be a metonym of its whole is not arbitrary. Such a part must be in some sense outstanding, easily recognizable, and play a unique role in the whole" (2006: 43). Metonymy in general is considered as a process of association between signs in which a sign symbolically represents an object or a concept of which sign is a smaller part. Recognizing that signs can refer to objects or

concepts much greater than themselves can help us to understand that the meanings of signs can be complex and varied. In addition to the immediate meaning of an individual sign ("denotative") a sign may also bear a much wider range ("connotative") of associations (Gordon 2005). Metonyms of an object or a concept emerge from particular cultural dispositions and reflect the social and moral location of that particular object within the given social and cultural order. Flute literally means a musical instrument played by mouth. In Keralam the word flute carries a more familiar ring than its Malayalam equivalent Oodakkuzhal. Playing the instrument flute in Malayalam is 'flute vayikkal'. Vayikkal – literally meaning reading – is an act conducted through the mouth. Thus the sexual act that the male homosexual indulges in, oral sex/fellatio, is matched, with a lousier connotation, with the act of playing the instrument flute. Here the sexual act, the most abhorrent in the popular imagination of body and sex, becomes the main sign to mark the deviant persona. This sort of association blends the subject with the sexual act both becoming a synonym for each other. The term vayikkal has a special connotation in this context. As already mentioned, the trope flute doesn't have a familiar presence in visual or print media in Keralam yet it is widespread. Nevertheless wherever references are made, particularly in the visual media and mimicry and comedy shows, to the effeminate gestures of the male homosexual the term vayikkal is invoked to remind the spectator of the 'abominated' sexual practice. In fact expressions of physical desires – both homo and hetero – under, sometimes vulgar, terms by comedians are quite common in films, mimicry shows, dramas and other stage performances in Keralam. Although the term flute

does not figure in this genre of comedy, hints, sometimes including the sexually explicit term *vayikkal*, or actions of playing flute etc., are provided to remind the spectator of the actual figure referred to. Comedy in this respect reduces 'the homosexual' to sexual behaviours, acts and practices, denouncing and quarantining it substantially in the society. Nevertheless the metonymic space of flute and its representation in comedies opens the possibilities for a counter reading wherein such representations could be understood as an implicit interrogation of gender and its pervasive influence over social systems and individuals. The comedies allow the spectator to be familiar with behavioural patterns which deviate from the gendered associations of the performer. The mockeries, both during the local male banters and in the comic representations, articulate the breaking of links between the "biologically determined categories and socially constructed conceptions of sex" (Scott 2005: 74-75). However in Keralam, these comedies are merely passing gestures and, more importantly, statements of a deviant persona. In his study on homosexuality in modern Japan, McLelland (2000) concludes that its visibility in Japanese media such as comic books, women's magazines, TV dramas and talk-shows, movies and popular fiction has not created the space for individuals expressing lesbian or gay identities to come out in actual life. Such a reading, however, is again oriented towards imagining explicit identity categories as essentially subversive and tends to discount subterranean practices that exist regardless of available spaces. The social imaginative of a flute does not only make gender non conformity part and parcel of a local common sense but it also generates its own space by challenging the rigid regulatory settings. The figure of a flute cuts across

the parameters of male sexual subjectivity and signifies a deviant morphology incited by, and reproducing and popularizing in turn, notions of deviant sexual acts, gendered behaviour, and what is masculine and feminine. Halperin in his analysis of pre modern texts in ancient and medieval Greece identifies a deviant morphology in terms of anatomical descriptions of the male body that displays overt feminine characteristics and does not fit within the dominant versions of masculine behaviour (2002: 41-43). Deviant sexual acts can exist in society practiced by subjects who do not come within the purview of such deviant morphologies. The distinction that Halperin provides between deviant morphology and subjectivity is by exploring the difference between the narrativisation of experience and anatomy in a given context. Thus the seemingly masculine 'straight' male who indulges in homosexual behavior considerably disappointing his own wife signifies a deviant subjectivity whereas a kinaedo who displays in open 'the effeminate male' is a deviant morphology. Thus, according to Halperin, morphology and subjectivity are two different things (2002: 42). The site of flute combines morphological, and also physiognomic, characteristics to construct a deviant subjectivity. Such descriptions emerge from perceptions already available and popular knowledge invariably constructed out of essential understandings of the body and its desires and ethical and moral desirabilities of (gendered) personal demeanor. Flute, in other words, constitutes the imagined body where the stereotypical perceptions about (male) gender deviance in the society are celebrated. It represents the dynamics behind the transmission and circulation of such stereotypes without the help of sophisticated technological mediums. It functions as a

typical illustration of transgressive desires, the inept and feckless male persona unfit for leading a family life which runs counter to, and functions as the other of, the notions of the ideal masculine. The figure, symbolic and imaginary at the same time, is an un-systematic representation of the deviant subject unable to retain itself within the spatial and temporal order of the socio-cultural system. It brings together the possible negative elements in the male body and conceptions of the ideal masculine being contaminated by the former. As Edelman puts it in his account of narratives on male homosexuality in 19th century Europe " the presumptively heterosexual spectator's unobserved surveillance of a sexual encounter between men" could be one source for the production of such metaphors (1993: 167).

### **The politics of family, reproduction and progress**

The social imaginative of flute has also spatial connotations. The subject's expressions of same sex desire are largely invisible and not easily identifiable in the local surroundings. Inside the cruising spaces most visitors, if not all, who are searching for a partner from the same sex do not carry an explicit homosexual identity. It includes people who are married and with children, those who plan to marry; I found few men resisting marriage as an option in life. Regardless of their bisexual nature and, sometimes, a fixed ' non-deviant' identity – and this applies to most of them – they get in and out of their hetero and homo relationships and desires. This is more a strategy to avoid social surveillance mechanisms, than that it must be seen as making a choice between the two types of desires (or objects, in terms of gender) at

different points of time. The lives of these individuals revolve around strategies of camouflage, acts of conformity, the performance of and giving life to the deviant interior other at definite spaces and times. The inside/outside locations of the self reflect not only adherence to the social norms but also resistance against them. These shifting locations signify the "mechanisms of meaning production" and the "exterior or outside that defines the subject's own interior boundaries and corporeal surfaces" (Fuss 1991: 3). The inside/outside locations of these subjects refer to their lives in the familial and subversive spaces respectively. Outside the cruising spaces their daily lives involve negotiations of different kinds with their immediate environment. Most significantly these involve a reassuring of their heterosexual identity. Despite the pluralities in strategies deployed and negotiations engaged with, they reflect an enthusiastic dodging of any expressions of same sex desire. Thus the socially constructed stereotypes of same sex desire are also equally violated by subjects indulging in clandestine intimacies. These stereotypes are converted into a language of signs and body gestures to be deployed inside a safe place in order to communicate what desire motivates them. However outside the safeness of these spaces they wear a heterosexual identity. They strive to head a familial space which apparently is the most popular sign of 'manhood' in Kerala[14]. Being married and leading one's own family is a primary condition to remain unnoticed. On several occasions the respondents said that marriage provided them the veil behind which they could pursue their homoerotic inclinations[15]. This brings us back to the now familiar repercussions of closeted same sex desires. Nonetheless such an unmarked

and forgotten existence is the first step towards entering the corridors of ‘normalcy’ and to prove one’s worth in life. Sajju is aged 32, married and has a child. He works as a construction labourer for a daily wage of two hundred rupees. He is a regular visitor to the Thekkinkadu maidan, a famous cruising site in the middle of the city in Thrissur. Sajju- Interview Sajju still comes to this place, has partners or finds one from the crowd, and they leave searching for dark spaces within or outside the city. But, according to his own definition, he is no longer concerned about his desires. Ibid Most of those who visit cruising spaces belong to the lower and lower middle classes. With the emergence of modern technologies such as computers and internet, educated men belonging to the middle or upper classes can avoid the hassles involved in being physically present in a public space. Joseph is a medical representative working in Cochin. A constant presence in the cyber chatting spaces under a pseudonym he searches for partners mainly in these chat rooms and other virtual spaces. He calls himself a bisexual although he said that is just a secret and he can’t let his family, friends and colleagues know about this. I know I have to marry and in fact my marriage is fixed with a girl with whom I have been in love for the last three years. I can’t disclose ‘this’ to her either and as long as I am not indulging in sex with another woman I am faithful to her. Having sex with a man is not something she needs to be bothered about, although I know, I can’t reveal these things to her for that can harm our relation and I indeed love her very much. . . . [W]hen I have sex with another man that gives me the utmost pleasure. But pleasure is not life and there are other more serious considerations that we need to account for. Joseph- Interview If for Sajju homosexuality is the



hallmark of abnormality for Joseph it stands as a symbol of pleasure. Nevertheless both feel obliged by the dutiful aspects of heteronormative standards of the society. Sajju and Joseph are not exceptional in this regard. Throughout my interviews and conversations with subjects this oscillation between pleasure and duty, faith and deviance, normal and abnormal were quite apparent. This applied to men from all classes. Such a wavering between conflicting values is part of a common parlance whenever the topic is discussed. Shaji, a teacher in a local engineering college in Kozhikkode – a district in the northern part of Keralam, who is a frequent visitor of these spaces, puts it thus: Our society need to be developed a lot before it can accept homosexuality or bisexuality as just another choice that is open to anyone. In the West it is possible because they are fully developed and there is no need for them to bother about such issues. On the scale of progress they have reached the other end whereas we are not even half way through it. Shaji- Interview Thus for Shaji, sexual freedom and material progress are linked to each other in a close knit relationship. Apparently his statement was a justification for adopting a heterosexual identity outside the cruising space. The location of these subjectivities is embedded in a law- medicine- moral circuit that functions through the multiple paradigms of criminalizing and normalizing the deviant subjects. The melting pot of heterosexual morality connects these diverging links through ideas of sex and gender, family and marriage, normal and abnormal, pleasure and deviance, progress and moral decadence. The subject has to very often adopt the shield provided by the semiotics of the display of same sex and heterosex desire in order to shift between hetero and homo desires and practices. This also

helps in affirming a non ambiguous identity. Simulation of cross gender features becomes the mark and sign of a body with same sex desires. It displays the unique assembly of biologically driven desires and socially constructed norms of gender.

## **The contemporary textual space**

As we have already seen print has a privileged role in the cultural context of Keralam and in building the regional/ national space from the very beginning of its modern times. This is the very reason I chose to build this thesis on texts in print form more than anything else as they literally access every nook and corner of social existence and, most importantly, are simultaneously equally accessed by a huge section of population. Within the region itself this predominance of print is often discussed both as a matter of pride as high subscription to print media is also a mark of higher literacy rates and as a specific cultural disposition unique to Keralam while comparing with other Indian states. In an article on the history of development debates in Keralam the authors bring out this point thus: Does ‘ Keralam’ and the ‘ Malayali’ define themselves through printing blocks? . . . As the neighboring state which invokes the jealousy of Tamilians, as the model that can be emulated by Latin America, as CIA’s persistent nightmare do we weave ourselves again and again through print? In short are we a paper-country?(Sreekumar and Sanjeev 2003: 2). Print definitely is a site where the sphere of moral is prima facie addressed as the most significant element in constituting the progressive and nationalistic space of the region. This have produced and been reproducing the orientalist versions of sexual

discipline. At the centre of this discourse lie notions of monogamy and heteronormativity, progress and cultural decadence. Within this frame homosexuality is exoticised and is made a symbol of cultural degeneracy. While the contemporary is flooded with literature produced to address homosexuality as a central issue it is precisely the age old categories of heterosexual morality that regulate clandestine same sex subjectivities. The metonymy and the discourse of signs directly translate, deploy and manipulate, sometimes with subversive effect, the public and common understandings of sacred and profane. They attempt to subvert, and reproduce in the process, the system of binaries that sustains the discourse of progressive heterosexual morality. These binaries broadly include those that exist between masculine and feminine, normative and non normative, homo and hetero, normal and abnormal, and between civilized and degenerated. In this section I return to print in the current social settings to understand how the subjective notions, that we have already seen in the previous section of this chapter, of sexuality are those that have already become a central element of the regional moral discourse. There has been an unprecedented boom in the production of literature in the contemporary settings that directly addresses homosexuality as a central issue. As opposed to literature produced at the heights of the movement towards social realism in the mid 20th century onwards the new text is framed more in a political form than in cultural- fictional form. Thus while the political language of realism is continued in the current writings there is a radical change in terms of producing theoretically and politically informed commentaries to both oppose and sustain the colonially constructed regional moral sphere. This

has literally brought the older concerns of reform movement back to the centre of cultural contestations in the contemporary. The perennial concerns around reproductive, monogamous family and of ensuring sexual discipline on the part of the citizen subject revisit the site of homosexuality in the current context. In other words the configuration of region in the language of morality has confronted a crisis situation with the emergence of the gay/lesbian discourse. The transnational nature of this discourse and its influence on sexuality activism in Keralam have brought questions of degeneracy back to its cultural sites. Whereas depicting liberal sexuality in the language of decadence goes considerably uncontested in the current context the source of this new discourse, that is the west, becomes that hallmark of that degeneracy. Thus there are certain circularities involved in this space of argumentation, a point to which I shall return later in this section. The construction of a superficial layer of identity by the clandestine homosexual subject in the cruising spaces is rooted within popular perceptions concerning family and gender. It is precisely within the dynamics of the shifting morphologies and sexual identities of these subjects that gender stereotypes and questions of progressive morality are inserted. They establish a direct link with popular expressions concerning gender non conformity and non normative sex. In fact, in Keralam, it is not uncommon to find popular expressions relating homosexuality forthrightly with medical disorders, unnatural relations, and with questions of culture. In a book, claimed to be a pioneering attempt to investigate the rising trends of lesbian suicides in Keralam, the author has conducted interviews with people from different walks of life including local feminist leaders, writers, medical

practitioners and advocates (Sebastian 2004). The book was a collection of articles published by the same author in the year 1998 in a weekly newspaper called Sameeksha that was published and circulated in the central region of Keralam. There was a stark similarity in the interviewees' statements concerning homosexual. Most of them shared the view that homosexual desires and practices are unnatural, immoral and abnormal (Sebastian 2004, 28-37). A recurrent theme was the identification of local culture as distinct from Western culture where homosexual relations are possible because of that culture's degeneration. In one of the interviews a well known feminist activist Prof. Sarojini Devi remarked that the presence of homosexuality " in Western culture indicates the problem with those cultural milieus . . . which do not identify sex as divine as we do" (Sebastian 2004, 29-30). Here there is a reverse movement in terms of assigning west as the other of sexual disciplines and civilized modern sexuality that are often celebrated as characterizing the local moral sphere. Nevertheless such a characterization in itself is a construction in the past resulted from the regime of colonialism and reformation enterprises. Foregrounding sexuality through the binaries of divinity and deviance and in the language of cultural degeneracy was a product of the earlier colonial politics. This oriental knowledge is reassigned in the current context effectively reproducing in the process another major division that eventually work as the driving force in the global grids of sexuality – the division between the east and the west. Sebastian, the author of the book, foregrounds the different levels of experience associated with class, gender and urban/rural differences of homosexual subjects in Keralam. All the instances of lesbian suicide in

Keralam referred to in the book have taken place in the rural geographies of the region and in most of the cases the subjects were financially poor and without much education[16]. According to the author the reason suicides are rare among male homosexual subjects and lesbians living in urban places is because of the physical mobility allowed for the former and the availability of spaces to hide in the urban settings in the latter case (2004, 24-36). The question is not as much pertaining to similarities of experiences of these subjects cutting across class and gender differences. Rather it pertains to the contestation for spaces to pursue same sex practices and intimacies within the socio cultural realm; that such contestations have to address a wide range of issues that remain close to individuals' consciousness at the broader and micro levels. The statements of interviewees in Sebastian's book are embodiments of the discourse of cultural degeneracy and sexual discipline. Articulating same sex love and homoeroticism in the language of decadence, unnatural and abnormality draws considerably from previous accounts of progressive sexual morality. Drawing from the earlier accounts of representations and contestations around sexual morality and homoeroticism in the public sphere of Keralam narratives in the contemporary reconfigure homosexuality amidst concerns largely touching upon questions of cultural decadence and reformation. Raghunathan Nair whom we discussed in the previous chapter in the context of Basheer's novelette *Shabdangal* observes that Only the term unnatural can characterize homosexual practices and relations. If it was natural god would have created another male, instead of Eve, to resolve the Adam's solitude. . . Homosexual instinct could be innate or acquired. The one who has that innate instinct

always takes the initiative for same-sex intercourses. The one who is [thus] persuaded acquires that instinct for same sex love . . . But their desire will always be oriented towards the opposite sex. Nair 2003, 201. Nair, in his earlier account on Shabdangal specifically and Basheer's stories in general, observes that " Basheer's stories and fictions are filled with descriptions of desire that are disgusting . . . [H]owever, it is precisely the legacies of this abhorrent sexuality that many intelligent newcomers, in the field of Malayalam story writing, have adopted in their stories . . . including Madhavikkutty in her Chandanamarangal" (Raghunathan Nair quoted in Scharia 1990, 58). This line of argumentation revisits the contemporary terrains retrospectively by looking back upon representations produced in the past. The meta narrative of heteronormativity, under the wrap of which same sex practices were very often depicted in those fictions gets to be redeployed as a lucid ground to logically insert the 'unnatural' paradigm into the local frameworks. Raghunathan Nair regenerates the common derision in the past for fictions that centered on homosexuality as their theme by focusing on certain generalized points that they simultaneously evoked. That all these works, with the exception of Shabdangal, focused on women as their subjects whose sexual discontentments within a heteronormative frame were often projected upon as a major driving factor towards seeking intimacies in same sex relations. The association of homosexuality with sex/gender non-conformity is visible in the case of female homosexuality as well. Addressing similar questions an author writes that:[A] close observation of a lesbian team (couple) . . . will definitely tell you that one always assumes an active role and the other a passive role during sexual

intercourse. . . . "[T]he one who plays the dominant role, that is the one who is masculine than feminine, definitely has biological problems and is helpless by nature under whose constant pressure the other person agrees for a relationship. Once it starts then this other person will find no escape from it for the " man" in this lesbian relation will often threaten to commit suicide or may respond aggressively to any suggestion for separation. Kootummal. 2005, 58-60. The ' man' in question here carries that tag because s/he displays the masculine qualities of dominance and aggression and assumes an active role in a sexual relationship. The predominant feminine qualities of the woman in a homosexual relationship save her from being labeled as an ' actual homosexual' (Kootummal 2005, 63). The intrusion of femininity into a masculine body and vice versa is considered harmful in the view of this author who prefers to locate them in mutually exclusive realms. He argues that " the basic concerns of these movements (including lesbianism and rights for homosexuals) are . . . . pleasure and pleasure alone" (Kootummal 2005, 61). These unlimited material pleasures have been made possible by globalization, the author maintains. In its wake bodily pleasures and experiences are extolled (Kootummal 2005, 69). Beyond the diminishing social concerns around class, caste and differences between the rich and poor the author is more unsettled with the unlimited opportunities for sexual pleasure unleashed and envisaged by the discourses associated with globalization. In the context of his discussion on AIDS he states that " AIDS actually is a creation of unlimited sexual desire and lust. The only way to save oneself from it is to sustain a healthy sexual morality in his/her life. That is, monogamy which has evolved out of the history of sexual



transactions should be recognized as a social reality and as the only cultural and sexual backdrop for avoiding this disease" (Koottumal. 2005. 62-63). There is a shift in the signification of sexual desire in the current critiques from that of admitting it as coherent in the context of male-female relations only to the contexts of same sex love. However such a shift in assigning coherence is deployed to project same sex desire as a case of deviance. There is a definite circularity here in terms of the concerns invoked and how sexual morality is reframed against the emerging queer discourses and discourses of globalization. For instance progress and reformation revisit the contemporary as major concerns reproducing the colonial notions of sexual discipline and non normative sex as the essential framework within which only a discussion of homosexuality is possible. In a recently published edited volume, homosexuality and the emerging queer voices in Keralam are contextualised within an emerging liberal-global paradigm where the economic realm has gained full control over the social and the moral (KEN 2005). The volume opens with the translated version of a chapter about "healthy sexual morality" from Bertrand Russell's 1929 book "Marriage and Morals". The volume includes articles from such widely respected and well known (some of them feminist) intellectuals in Keralam as Sara Joseph, Ramanunni, and Dr. Pocker, apart from the main editor KEN himself. The book, as the editor claims in the introduction, is an attempt to problematize the influence of the market on sexual relations and sexuality (KEN 2005, 1-3). The world of pleasure in this edited volume is exclusively associated with the changing trends of the market within a neo liberal economy (2005, 9-10). Homosexuality is a phenomenon sprung from the material affluence that

privileges corporal desire over moral values. Alternative sexual desires are equated in the book to immoral trafficking, pederasty and molestation; all premised upon the endorsement of flesh and (animal) instincts over and upon the social obligations. The pursuits of sexual pleasure beyond the means already provided and accepted by society amounts to transgressing the conditional relation between freedom and progress at the cost of the welfare of the whole society (KEN 2005; 5-10). In yet another account Viju Nair, the author, displaces questions of reformation and pursuits of material pleasure with questions concerning the ethicality of accepting same sex practices. Borrowing from a range of theories including feminism, Marxism and questions about pre modern sexuality Viju, nevertheless, ends up questioning the freewheeling of desires in an age when "sexual discipline is most important" (Nair 2006, 126). According to him a system which refuses to admit individual tastes, desires and choices for sex should definitely be rejected as meaningless. But should politics of sex be confined to such individual imaginations of sex? In which case how would it deal with such obviously false sexual desires and acts (like pederasty, rape etc.)? (2006, 145). These texts are embedded in the global grids of body politics when sexual progress and economies of desire clearly violate the older schemas of heteronormativity. The present narratives are mainly intended to produce counter narratives to the transnational discourses of alternative sexuality. In the process the colonial/ orientalist schema of sexual restraints and its direct connection with cultural nationalism, regional identity and moral discipline is reproduced in the contemporary settings. According to this genre of literature[17] homosexuality brings to sight the freewheeling of sexual

desires, and the pursuits of unnatural intimacies, confining individual bodies to carnal pleasures. The authors' positions in these books are marked by a conflict constituted by a humanitarian consideration for the subjects they discuss, as well as an uneasiness in shifting away from the current moral conditions. These texts articulate a site replete with thick descriptions of body, sex, pleasure, natural and unnatural relations. Homosexuality occupies a pivotal place both as a presage of total erosion of the local value structures and as an instance of hedonism. Most importantly these texts, most of them produced in the 21st century and post 1990s' liberalization era, symbolize a sudden rupture from the tradition of social realism in Malayalam literature and a return to the 19th century reformers' dialectics. It is notable that there is a significant absence of materials produced in the form of fictions that deal with same sex desire in the society during the contemporary. The short story swavargam (same sex) by Dileep whom I quoted in the previous section was one among the rare exceptions. Sancharam, a short film directed by Ligy Pullappally and released in the year 2004, on the other hand dealt with an open lesbian theme that countered the progressive narratives in representations in Malayalam[18]. Sancharam which literally means journey was a film that attempted to foreground the political side of same sex intimacies and the violence unleashed upon it by the society. Openly affirming lesbian desire within the cinematic space of Malayalam films Sancharam however faced with huge opposition during its screening. Although the film was made in Malayalam it was not commercially released and thus was not available for public viewership inside Kerala. However the film was released and captured wide attention in the first world countries

including US, UK, France and Spain. Within India it was available for viewing only at the film festivals and the few public screenings conducted in the different parts, mainly metropolitan cities, of the country. As Ligy, the director of the film and a social worker and lawyer based in US, in an interview states that an occasion of public screening of the film in Keralam itself turned out to be a venue where " there was a lot of vocal opposition to the subject matter of the film. Not necessarily whether it was a good film or not but just heckling along the lines of " You're trying to turn our kids gay""[19]. But at that same screening there was actually a large number of the queer community who came. Although they were vocal . . . during the question and answer period after the film, the interesting thing is they came up to me in private to say they were members of the community and thanking me for making the film[20]. The film, which was apparently an emblem of the radical desire to openly challenge the moral discourse within the region, was widely euphemized as a product of economic materialism and the emerging global language of unfettered desire. The film was definitely restricted to foregrounding the significance of gay/ lesbian identity politics and did not in any way address the multiple ways in which politics of sexuality operated in the region. Even then the film that could have been an inaugural attempt to introduce and familiarize the language of body politics in the cinematic space of Malayalam film industry could not invoke much response due to the label of embodying ' transnational gay/lesbian desire' and ' sexual liberation' with which it was already received. Also there was not much response to the film on behalf of either the film critics or the local intelligentsia as it was not released in the theatres in Keralam. This had

aggravated the common perception that the film (or even such films) was merely an offshoot of metropolitan instincts which evidently lacked any sense of regional sentiments. Such a discourse effectively exoticizes not only efforts to break the silence and make visible unconventional sexual forms but also patterns of same sex desire and same sex subjects. The locally produced texts have been literally reproducing the progressive narratives of fear of cultural degeneracy in their opposition to the identity discourse and forms of alternative sexuality. What emerges out of these texts is not a common theme but a plurality of concerns that gives rise to questions related with the market and the economy versus the realm of moral values which are seen diametrically opposed to each other. These are not texts meant to reproduce the common social understandings of deviance. They are part of a wider debate among the local intellectuals on questions involving sex, body and the social, as well as the modern and post modern culture and economics. While their common grounds of departure is the local common sense and while they position the local within the global cultural and economic transactions these writings lay emphasis upon the cultural specificity of their local context. The body emerges as the prime locale for an immediate reflection of these anxieties. The structural associations of the body in the form of family and gender relations are perceived as symbols of the local values structures that contain its essence. As one of my respondents, Ajith in Thiruvananthapuram who works in a local automobile shop, said, that I have to confess that for me these things (marriage, masculine behaviour etc.,) are just superficial although this superficiality not only protects my whole life but it provides me with the necessary emotional

support. This (having sex with a male partner) gives me temporary pleasure although I can't help being allured towards it almost every day. I can't live with a man, I just want to have sex with one and that's it. Ajith- Interview

## Conclusion

The opposition to global forms of materiality has reintroduced in the current settings the colonial language of cultural degeneracy. The questions of desire, body and pleasure are accounted as inevitable forms of that materiality where resistance to the language of sexual liberation and identity politics assumes the form of protecting the local against the global.

Narratives of progress, reproduced in the contemporary under the belief that they provide better logical frameworks than those in the past, in effect have circumvented the language of realism and engage in redefining the region through the language of sexual morality. Attempts to counter the hegemony of this moral language have resulted in the production of representations and narratives using standard gay/lesbian vocabulary like in the case of the film Sancharam and/or restricting such movements to the sphere of law and NGO activism. While both these genre of texts raise their claims in the building of a progressive society they both equally leave behind the possibilities opened by social realism in the past to inaugurate a new language of subversion in the world of representations in Malayalam. This situation has led to the production of two predominant layers in the regional public sphere those are mutually opposing but simultaneously claiming for more progressive. However those who support alternative sexual forms still continue to be a minor section in the society. The homophobic narratives of

progress and cultural decadence have considerably succeeded in labelling those proponents as upper classist, metropolitan aliens. There is also a significant absence of any attempt to explore the heterogeneous sources in the society that reproduce notions of sexual morality as a standard apparatus to regulate subjectivities. While both these narratives mostly assume non-fictional forms narratives of same sex desire and/or alternative sexuality seldom finds any space in the popular media. Hence articles that support legislation of same sex relations, resist the hegemony of the discourse of morality, that contemplate on the rising incidents of lesbian suicides and so on often appear in intellectual elite magazines such as Mathrubhumi and Pacchakuthira. On the other hand narratives of morality appear in all possible forms of media besides its recurrence through the infinite sites of social interactions. It is precisely against this return of colonial categories to the contemporary realms of sexuality that the inside/outside paradigm and the life - world practices of the hidden same sex subject open the different possibilities of reading. One has to admit that the transit between the familial and subversive spaces is an arbitrary project of the subject with same sex desire, intended towards deceiving the moral eye. However in doing so he reproduces the same conditions that he violates so often. A major part of this emerges from the subject's understanding of himself constituted through a set of meanings concerning moral and amoral, gender and identity; this is compounded by ideas of deviance and a sense of alienation. The subject constantly negotiates the different configurations of these elements which he experiences as exterior to his existence. They articulate the political, economic, cultural, religious and scientific perceptions

that substantiate and regularize the moral, gender order in the society. The transgressive practices, embedded within the larger politics of modernity, challenge the dominant gender regime by synthesizing the abnormal with the normal in daily social life. According to Zarilli practices present an active and embodied doing and are. . . intersections where personal, social and cosmological experiences and realities are negotiated. To examine a practice is to examine these multiple sets of relationships and experiences . . .

Practices always exist within and simultaneously create histories. Likewise a practice is not a discourse, but implicit in any practice are one or more discourses and perhaps paradigms through which the experience of practice might be reflected upon and possibly explained (Zarilli 1998, 5-13). The textuality around deviant desires re-articulates the commonsense binary between tradition and modernity. The daily life experiences of the homosexual subject articulate the depth of this commonsense. Nevertheless the narrators in my research exercise their agency by simultaneously resisting the local hegemonies as well as transnational ideas, especially those of an emerging gay identity politics. The subjects' indispositions to admit same sex practices as part of their life should be seen as evolving from their subterranean life. Hiding this from social surveillance apparatuses should be seen as an agency rather than as an expression of "powerlessness" (Seabrook 1999, 126). The problematic and elusive location of these subjects within progressive discourses allows one to segregate their experiences and bodies from the local frameworks of self and subjectivity. Such frameworks are rooted within culturally idealized life trajectories, common perceptions of femininity and masculinity and the monogamous



heteronormative family, constantly feeding into the dominant versions of sexual morality. The flute and the anonymous male subject with same sex desire in cruising spaces in contemporary Keralam articulate a complex site loaded with meanings afforded by the meta-narratives of family, reproduction and progress as also with counter positionings of body and desire. They simultaneously enact and violate the predominant and preexisting social narratives about body and space. The acts of transgression afford symbolically decoding exercises mediated by the regulatory power of these discursive spaces. The male subject with same sex desires assembles in his body the predominant markers of gender, while simultaneously subverting their social and spatial boundaries. The performativity associated with flute is primarily linked to the simulation of feminine qualities. The constant shifting of the subject's body between subversive and normal spaces makes gender an imitating process – imitating the masculine, through duties and obligations, as well as the feminine, in its sexual passivity and forms of behaviour. Rather than cloning gender archetypes, such practices collapse the gender regimes, loosen their rigid boundaries and explore the possibilities of body and desire. Their location reflects the ambivalence of being in and out of the local regulatory apparatuses. By conforming to local gender norms and moral expectations such bodies and practices constitute at the same time a parallel and ulterior world of deviant sexualities that are embedded within the local trajectories of modernity.