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**Fluid Bodies, Fluid Ecologies: A Hydrofeminist Analysis of
Perumazhakalam and *Ullozhukku***

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Abstract: Hydrofeminism is a mode of Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology that understands our bodies as being fundamentally part of the natural world and not separate from or privileged to it. This concept was developed by the cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis in her book *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. It calls for humans to examine our relationship to oceans, watersheds, and other aquatic life forms from the perspectives of our own primarily watery bodies. It also connects our ecological, poetic, and political connections to other bodies of water. In films water or water bodies represent the fluidity of female self in different ways. It plays as a metaphor for emotions, boundaries, confinement and self. It might be in the form of rain, rivers, or sea. *Perumazhakalm* and *Ullozukku* are two films which explore themes of love, forgiveness, grief, and human resilience. The constant presence of rain in the films symbolizes the emotional turmoil faced by the four women characters, which plays a significant role in the movies. The presence of rain and river in the background metaphorically represent the tears of the major characters. These movies also tried to depict the tragic plights of women who are the victims of patriarchy in Indian families.

Keywords: *Bodies of Water, Rain, River, Women, Posthumanism, Phenomenology, Hydrofeminism, Malayalam Cinema*

Introduction

Phenomenology, as its name suggests, is concerned to describe basic human experience (and hence, a concern with phenomena, a word that is derived from the Greek for ‘appearance’). Phenomenology is a philosophy of experience. According to phenomenology the ultimate source of all meaning and value is the lived experience of human beings. All philosophical systems, scientific theories, or aesthetic judgments have the status of abstractions from the ebb and flow of the lived world. The chore of the philosopher, according to phenomenology, is to describe the structures of experience, in particular consciousness, the imagination, relations with other persons, and the situatedness of the human subject in society and history. Phenomenological theories of literature regard works of art as mediators between the consciousness of the author and the reader or as attempts to disclose aspects of the being of humans and their world. The modern founder of phenomenology is the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who sought to make philosophy a “vigorous science” by returning its attention “to the things themselves”.

As phenomenologists suggested everything on this earth is lived experience through water, space, air, wind, deserts, fire, heat etc. In phenomenology, the foundation of all meaning and value lies in human lived experience. Philosophical systems, scientific theories, and aesthetic judgments are viewed as abstractions derived from the dynamic reality of life. The philosopher's role, according to phenomenology, is to examine and describe the structures of experience, including consciousness, imagination, interpersonal relationships, and the human subject's place within society and history. Phenomenological approaches to literature see artistic works as bridges between the author's and reader's consciousness or as efforts to reveal fundamental aspects of human existence and the world they inhabit.

It calls for humans to examine our relationship to oceans, watersheds, and other aquatic life forms from the perspectives of our own primarily watery bodies. And also through our ecological, poetic, and political connections to other bodies of water. In films water or water bodies represent the fluidity of female self in different ways. It plays as a metaphor for emotions, boundaries, confinement and self. In every genre what we see is that the different emotions of women are symbolized through water bodies one of the best examples which show the interconnectedness of women and water are *Perumazhakalm* and *Ullozhukku*. Apart from men, bodies of women are inextricably connected to water as it gives vindication to their repressed feelings. *Perumazhakalm* and *Ullozukku* are two films which explores themes of love, forgiveness, grief, and human resilience. The constant presence of rain in the film symbolizes the emotional turmoil faced by the four women characters, which plays a significant role in the movie. Though patriarchy is governing in the movie, the two female protagonists

(Raziya and Ganga) together bring ultimate victory of love, compassion and patience. The other two characters Anju and Leelamma also depicts how misfortunes act as a villain and both women weep a lot. The presence of rain and river in the background metaphorically represent their tears. This movie also tries to depict the tragic plights of women who are the victims of patriarchy in Indian families.

Perumazhakalam: A Hydrofeministic Study

Perumazhakalam is 2004 movie directed by Kamal and written by T. A. Razak poignantly explores themes of love, forgiveness, grief, and human resilience. The movie depicts the lives of two women characters that are entirely different with regard to their religion, culture and tragedy. Throughout the film we can see the presence of rain which symbolizes the tragedy struck in their life. Even the title itself carries the presence of water in the drama. The story revolves around two female characters. Raziya, a Muslim woman from a remote village in Kerala, is struggling for the release of her husband, Akbar, who killed a Brahmin man in the Gulf from the police. He was imprisoned in the Gulf and the Gulf government decided to hang him as part of their law. The presence of rain has started when she discovered the truth behind her husband's life. If they want him alive, the government demanded the signature from the dead man's family. They should pardon Akbar otherwise he will be beheaded. Raziya disparately tries to see the dead man's family. When she heard about her husband's fate, the rain started to pour in the background. It actually shows her mind, which was really broken when she heard about her husband. Though she belongs to a patriarchal Muslim community, she decided to meet the dead man's family. Ganga is the wife of Raghu, who was killed by Akbar, belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family. We can see the two phases of Ganga. When her husband was alive she dressed up in an elegant way: Wearing beautiful sarees, putting sindhoor on forehead, using Jasmine flowers to adore her hair etc. But after the death her husband her life has completely changed. She was supposed to wear white saree, no makeup, even not to step out of her house. When Raziya went to meet Ganga, Ganga's in-laws didn't allow her. During all these actions, rain plays a crucial role. Until these women heard the catastrophe happened to their husbands, everything was normal. In the first part of the film there was no rain, when they heard the news regarding their husbands accident suddenly it starts raining. The rain was not a usual rain; it was a heavy down pour. That represents the heaviness in the hearts of these two women.

The title *Perumazhakalam* meaning "season of Heavy Rain", symbolizing overwhelming emotions and a shared sense of sorrow between the two women at the center of the story. Hydrofeminism frames water as a connective medium, dissolving boundaries between individuals. Here in this film, for Raziya only way to save her husband from death penalty is to obtain a letter from Ganga, that she pardons him. When Raziya knew about this, she decided to meet Ganga. Raziya

and her father travel to Palakkad to meet Ganga to plead for mercy and obtain the letter from her. We can see the heavy rain in the background. That shows the inner struggle through which these characters went through. Ganga's in-laws refused her to meet Ganga. By then we can see the transformation happened to the character Ganga. She became a widow, and controlled by her in-laws. When finally Ganga gave the letter for pardon she was ostracized from her community. She was thrown out of her house for helping the murderer of her husband. The two major characters were linked through their tears. Ganga, according to Hindu mythology, is a river which flows from the head of Paramashiva flowing through the earth and giving life for millions of living and non-living beings. Here in this movie Ganga was able to give life to Akbar and Raziya. So through water these two women who were being controlled by their religion and men, entered into another life of brotherhood and love. The rain in the movie reflects the emotional and moral dilemmas that bind the two protagonists despite their differences in religion and background. Through Hydrofeminist perspectives, their evolving relationship can be seen as fluid and transformative, much like water reshaping the surroundings. Their journey reflects the potential to move beyond rigid societal norms, bridging differences through mutual understanding. Another important aspect is water as a Medium and transformation. Rain appears in the moments of emotional catharsis in the film, signifying renewal and cleansing. Hydrofeminism views water as not only a physical but also an emotional and spiritual force. In the film, the appearance of rain underscores the healing process both women undergo as they navigate their shared grief and moral conflicts.

Ecofeminism is a concept from where Hydrofeminism emerged as a major stream. The rural setting of the film, where natural elements like rain play a central role in the character's lives, highlights the interdependence of humans and environment. One is being Kozhikode Kallayi, from where Raziya travels to Palakkad to rescue her husband from death. Ganga is from Palakkad Pattambi, that place is exclusively inhabited upper caste hind people. They were very orthodox, conservatives who follow a set of rules especially for widows. They tonsure the widows, they were not permitted step out of their house, and even they were not able to wear colorful dresses. A character called Patti(grandmother) is an example in this movie. She was tonsured and not having the normal life of a woman. She was not ready to take the shower. Here we can see how she detaches herself from the natural or outside world. Hydrofeminism ties these elements to the lived experiences of women, showing how cultural and environmental contexts shape their lives. For example, the rain becomes a metaphor for societal pressures and the weight of tradition, which both women confront.

There are different scenes involving water- be it be rain or rivers-creates moments for characters to reflect on their choices and emotions. Both these women were utterly broken they heard about their husband's fate. Their tears are symbolized through these water bodies just like post human

phenomenology, which stood for the lived experience of human being. Hydrofeminism emphasizes the porousness of bodies, suggesting that human emotions and experiences are as Fluid and interconnected as water itself. The movie portrays this fluidity in evolving bond between Ganga and Raziya as they navigate personal loss and societal expectations. Rain has become a major narrative device in the movie. The consistent appearance of rain mirrors the emotional intensity of the story, symbolizing grief, renewal, and the fluid connections between the characters. Through Ganga, Raziya and Akbar got united; they got a new life. But this act also has Ganga a new life out of her community. She broke the shell of patriarchy, came out of that made a life of her own. Both these characters' bond transcends religious and societal divides, reflecting water's ability to flow across boundaries, dissolving distinctions and fostering unity. As per the various religious faith, water has the power for cleansing and renewal. The key moments of decision-making and emotional breakthroughs often coincide with rain, emphasizing the transformative power of water in the characters' lives.

Ullozhukku: A Hydrofeministic Study

Ullozhukku is 2024 movie directed by Christo Tomy, is a Malayalam drama that delves into the intricate dynamics between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. The movie set against the backdrop of a Kerala village during monsoon season. The presence of rain and subsequent flood are a constant image in the movie. As the title suggests, *Ullozhukku*(under current), aptly reflects the subtle emotional tensions and societal underpinnings that drive the narrative. It also speaks about the unspoken tensions between the protagonists. The story revolves around Anju, played by the actor Parvathy Thiruvoth, enters into an arranged marriage with Rajeev. But she was already in relationship with another man. Rajeev was already contracted by cancer but Leelamma, his mother never disclose this truth with Anju and her family. But when Anju came to know about his health condition she resumed her affair with her former lover; she became pregnant through him. Despite an outwardly harmonious relationship between Anju and Leelamma, there exists an undercurrent of unease, exacerbated by social expectations and personal boundaries. On Rajeev's death bed Leelamma came to know about Anju's pregnancy, she persuades her stay with her. But Anju discloses the truth that the child is not Rajeev's. Then Leelamma reveals her story. When she was at young age her ambition was to become a doctor, but her parents forced her for marriage. And after the marriage her world was her husband, daughter and son. So she expects Anju to follow her footsteps.

In this movie, water acts as a carrier of memory and emotion. The title itself is representing the unspoken tension among the protagonists. Hydrofeminism views water as an emotional conduit-carrying past traumas, suppressed grief, and generational burdens. Here Leelamma for the past years suppressed her grief of being a typical mother, suddenly outburst in front of Anju. Through her

conversation with Anju, the viewer got the idea about her past life. In the film, the monsoon rains and the presence of water bodies reflect the hidden emotions that both women struggle to articulate. The rise up of water in the locality shows the growing tensions in the mind of Anju, as she is pregnant from another man. Next aspect of the movie is that the fluidity of grief and female relationships. Water, in a Hydrofeminist sense, is not bound by rigid structures; it flows, adapts, and reshapes landscape. Similarly, the relationship between Anju and Leelamma is fluid rather than fixed, shifting moments of conflicts, understanding, and eventual transformation. In the initial part of their relationship Anju was not able to understand Leelamma's feeling and vice versa. After death of Rajeev Anju was ready to leave lonely Leelamma but when both characters shared the inner turmoil in their minds they started caring each other. Through their understanding of each other, they involuntarily support the other one. Their shared grief over Rajeev's death does not take a linear path but evolves, much like water carving its way through terrain. The movie suggests that emotional healing is not immediate but is shaped by time and movement- paralleling the ceaseless ebb and flow of water.

Hydrofeminism critiques how patriarchal societies control both water and women's bodies, often treating them as resources to be damaged. In this movie both characters are subjected to societal expectations that dictate their roles as daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, restricting them from expressing their emotions without any hindrance. The frequent rain in the film sequences and damp settings reflect their internalized repression, illustrating how societal norms attempt to contain their emotions, much like dams restrict the natural flow of water. The same water acts as an agent of resistance and renewal in Hydrofeminism. It became a force that disrupts existing structures. It also suggests that just like the floodwater wash away entrenched barriers, both these women's eventual confrontation and catharsis are necessary to break free from societal constraints. Their reconciliation is closely connected to the release of a long-contained flood, symbolizing emotional liberation and the breaking of patriarchal bonds. Sometimes seasons also play a vital role in our life. Monsoon is symbolic of purification and transformation. The monsoon in Kerala is not just a backdrop but a central metaphor in the film. In Hydrofeminist thought, rain can symbolize both destruction and renewal; a cycle of life that allows for rebirth. The film's climax, set against the continuous downpour, signifies a moment of emotional breakthrough, where hidden truths surface and relationships are redefined. The season therefore, is not just a setting but an active participant in the narrative, much like how Hydrofeminism sees water as an agent of change.

In both these films we can see how water acts as a vehicle for rejuvenation and new life through their hardships. Raziya, Ganga, Anju and Leelamma went through patriarchal pressures which eventually led to their new phase of life. Raziya learned the lessons of forgiveness from Ganga and the latter learned how to stand on her own stand while being pressurized by the family. The tears of Raziya

led Ganga to think from former's perspectives, she lost her husband but she never let Raziya to become a widow like her. These two films as explained in the above paragraphs show cases the elements of Hydrofeminism in different ways. The fluidity in characters, constant presence of rain, flood etc. determines the actions of the movie. The characters in both these films get connected to each other and helped them to establish new perspectives in their life. As we know water has the power to shape and reshape our life, here rain reflects them inner psyche of the characters.

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