Mimicry as a Decolonial Praxis: Exploring Colonial Representations in *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi*

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Abstract

The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is characterized by complex interactions of power, spatial dynamics, and social structures. Literary narratives function as critical instruments for exposing the underlying discourses of colonialism that permeate everyday social exchanges. While some narratives tacitly acknowledge colonial hegemony, others strive to subvert it in pursuit of a postcolonial stance. However, Indian writers and critics have long neglected the imperative of decolonial readings in narratives addressing colonisation and westernisation themes. Yet, M. Mukundan's novel, *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi*, uniquely integrates colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial dimensions of social relations, fostering a nuanced understanding of contemporary social dynamics. This paper employs Homi K. Bhabha's concept of Mimicry to trace the discourses of colonial control within the narrative. Mukundan vividly portrays the colonisation of Mahe by the French alongside the local freedom struggle, facilitating an exploration of mimicry's multifaceted implications and its potential transcendence into mockery as a means to surpass subjugation. Furthermore, the paper underscores the inconsistencies inherent in postcolonial efforts to dismantle colonial boundaries even after their physical dissolution. Such postcolonial narrative analyses are relevant in navigating individual existence amidst the complexities of daily social relations in a neo-colonial milieu.

Keywords: colonialism, postcolonialism, decolonial, Mimicry, Homi K. Bhabha, Mahe, French administration, mockery

1. Introduction

The intricate interplay between power dynamics and the constructed perceptions of the 'Other' within political discourse has engendered a pervasive inclination towards positioning the subjects of former colonies as inherently inferior to their colonisers. This phenomenon has, perhaps inadvertently, fostered endeavours aimed at emulating colonial powers without complete assimilation. Homi Bhabha elucidates this phenomenon as mimicry, characterising it as a pursuit of an altered yet recognisable 'Other,' embodying a semblance of difference while remaining distinct. Within the postcolonial literary canon, the concept of mimicry has been extensively scrutinised for its potential as a tool of resistance. Figures such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, alongside other champions of freedom, exemplify how mimicry can be strategically deployed to appropriate, reinterpret, and challenge the dominant discourses propagated by colonial powers to benefit the colonised populace.

The ramifications of mimicry extend beyond the confines of postcolonial societal dynamics or narrative constructs. In an era marked by the resurgence of neocolonialist tendencies, a pressing imperative emerges to discern and cultivate decolonial attitudes within narrative frameworks and everyday practices that pervade societal norms(Persaud 2022). This necessitates critically examining narratives and quotidian routines, discerning elements of mimicry and exploring avenues for their subversion and transformation.

The twentieth century saw the loss of colonial control across the globe. It has not only changed the world's political geography but has also paved the way for a renewed perception of the world in a post-colonial set-up. Indian literature has extensively discussed the complicity of Orientalism as an imperial institution and a scholarly discourse across time with a naturalised justification of Western supremacy over the ‘Other’ or the colonised. This tendency resulted in the nuances of history being the product of the West’s action on others at the cost of the Other being displaced from the production of their history (Bhabha 1994). The postcolonial thoughts popularised by people like Edward Said and Homi K Bhabha unsettle this oriental thought by fracturing the convenient nomenclature of the Other as a passive entity.

The rejection and the overcoming of colonialisation were ideally supposed to create a decolonial scenario where the colonised created renewed ideological attachments and political affiliations that retained their innateness. However, the rejection of colonialism did not lead to a decolonial state but led to “alternate claims to political inclusion, social entitlements, and cultural respect, all aspirations thought to be achievable within, rather than beyond, the structures of empire” (Thomas & Thompson, 2014). This state of affairs is prevalent even today in earlier colonies. Postcolonialism as a holistic discourse is unfortunately restricted to post-colonialism. Edward Said, in his work *Culture and Imperialism*, notes that postcolonialism in literature has largely relegated itself to reassessing colonial writings to find the

voice of the colonised or to engage with post-colonial writings that largely deal with globalisation and neocolonialism (Said 1994). These sentiments are reflected in several narratives that emerged after independence where either the plot or its reading are restricted to a myopic view. The question of 'what after independence' is an inconvenient one as it pushes the successors of colonialism and the benefactors of the resultant replacements to look beyond political changes. A decolonial perspective becomes inevitable at this juncture. To engage with decolonial aspects of society and literature from previous colonies, it is important to collate the arguments put forth by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in "*Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature",* where he notes that decolonisation is not just a political and legislative phenomenon but also a linguistic, cultural and psychological phenomenon (Raghavan 2022). There needs to be an informed engagement that looks at literature from earlier colonies to clearly distinguish the postcolonial and decolonial attitudes that weave its narrative together. There are literatures, especially from the South, that engages with the decolonial notions of independence which were unfortunately drowned in the limited contours of postcolonial readings.

Published in 1974, *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi* is a notable work within Malayalam literature, authored by M. Mukundan and subsequently translated into English by Gita Krishnankutty. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of Mahe, called Mayyazhi, a region nestled within the contemporary confines of the Puducherry Union territory, embroiled in the struggle for independence from French colonial rule. While superficially portraying a romanticised portrayal of French rule, the narrative also unveils a contrasting narrative imbued with sentiments of disillusionment, betrayal, and indignation, particularly articulated through the disillusionment of the younger generation towards the French colonial legacy. Consequently, the novel intricately examines the nuanced subjectivities of its characters within the colonial discourse, illuminating their modes of resistance.

On the Banks of the Mayyazhi situates itself within the former French colony of Mahe/ Mayyazhi As with RK Narayan or Thomas Hardy, who wrote *Malgudy Days* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, novels based in and on specific locales, Mayyazhi is crucial in understanding Mukundan's fiction. The characters are moored in the history and politics of Mayyazhi, and the main protagonist of the novel is Dasan. Through Dasan, the past and present of Mayyazhi are unravelled, and the ambivalence of the people of Mayyazhi in challenging French colonial rule is evident (Vijay & Nair 2024). The author, being a resident of Mahe has personally experienced and taken part in the rampant metamorphosis that Mahe underwent during the time of its independence which adds to the authenticity of the creative representations in the novel.

M Mukundan makes use of the unique political atmosphere of this French colony to fuel the intricacies of his narrative as well as the depth of the characters.

Mahe, once a part of French India, is now a town in the Mahe district of the Union Territory of Puducherry. Located at the mouth of the Mahe River, it is entirely surrounded by the state of Kerala. The development of political awareness in the French Indian settlements was gradual. It was only in 1954, seven years after India's independence from British rule following a prolonged anti-colonial struggle, that Mahe was integrated into the Indian Union. Although the French withdrew from Mahe, the influence of colonial ideology and culture remained deeply ingrained, resulting in a weak process of intellectual and cultural decolonization despite the end of political domination. Mahe has shown resistance to decolonization, as its identity and culture have been closely intertwined with French rule. The two centuries of colonial governance are often regarded as fundamental to the personal, social, and cultural identity of the region's people. Today, approximately 9,950 French nationals reside in India, with the majority living in Pondicherry, Karaikal, and Mahe, where they communicate in a dialect commonly referred to as Indian French (Vijay & Nair 2023).

Mukundan's novel intricately delves into the complex dynamics characterising the relationship between the inhabitants of Mayyazhi and their colonial overlords, delineating these interactions through a diverse array of characters. The novel transcends the conventional boundaries of postcolonial discourse by adopting an extended decolonial perspective. In doing so, it supplements established historiographical narratives and endeavours to reimagine and amplify the voices of marginalised individuals whose perspectives have historically been marginalised or silenced (Forsdick 2018).

The paper contends that while ostensibly portraying French colonisation in Mahe as benevolent, the novel, in fact, endeavours to disrupt the normalisation of French hegemony and its attendant material dominance while concurrently envisioning a decolonial trajectory for Mahe that foregrounds the resurgence of indigenous cultural paradigms. Through the lens of decolonial mimicry articulated in the narrative, the paper seeks to interrogate the potentialities inherent in such a reclamation effort, aiming to elucidate the contemporary neocolonial undercurrents prevalent in the global milieu. By juxtaposing diverse responses to colonial encroachments and their legacies across pre- and post-independent communities, *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi* assumes a distinct postcolonial tenor (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 2000). These variegated experiences serve as a locus for critical inquiry into the ramifications of the colonizer-colonized dynamic, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of its implications within the narrative context.

According to Homi K Bhabha, colonial mimicry is the desire to curate the Other as a reformed yet recognisable subject (Bhabha 1984). Through appropriating the Other with a clear envisioning of power, mimicry seeks to build a generation of different and yet the same subjects. On the one hand, mimicry disrupts colonial authority, and on the other, it sustains it. It is important to look at how mimicry is used as a colonial tool to maintain power structures and how the same tool becomes a liberating entity for the nationalists. While mimicry successfully controls colonial subjects, the scope for the difference is an imminent threat to the colonial institutions of power since the partial recognition of the colonial object will disrupt the authorised versions of otherness (Bhabha 1984). This contrast is the central interest of the paper. The contrast that paves the way into the decoloniality inherent but inconspicuous in the novel is scrutinised to navigate through the interstitial spaces of benevolent colonialism and resistance.

The novel takes a decolonial shift with its rejection of the flag independence or political independence as a breaking point in their independence journey. The novel subtly explores the indigenous histories of the place, the characters and institutions and humanitarianism, thereby opening newer dynamics of decolonisation. The process inadvertently displaces the imperial narratives of race and gender through mimicry in itself. Through the character of Dasan, the novel and the author try to 'reverse, displace, and seize the apparatus of value-coding' in a systematic and subtle way (Spivak 1990).

1.1 Mimicry and the Growth of Colonialism in Mahe

The novel opens by establishing the nature of natives as passive receptors of colonial ideologies. Inadvertently, the author traces these mimickings as a vital reason for their cultural, political, and social subjugation under French rule for four centuries. The story explores the shared emotions and sentiments, demonstrating how characters like Kurumbi Amma, Kunjichiruntha, Unni Nair, Damu, and others not only respected the colonial rule but also felt a sense of belonging with the benevolent colonial authorities. The geographical factors influencing French colonialism in Mayyazhi reflect the reasons behind the idealized portrayal of French colonialism by the characters in the novel.

The character Kurumbi Amma was an eyewitness to every drama that unfolded in Mayyazhi. She lived her entire life in Mayyazhi under the rule of the French. For her, Leslie Sayiv was the ideal of a perfect man. She adores everything about the French administrator, who she considers an integral part of her life. At the novel's beginning, Kurumbi Amma welcomes Leslie Sayiv to her house to spend leisure time with him. They both share a pinch of snuff and talk about Mayyazhi's daily affairs. Every evening, Leslie Sayiv visited Kurumbi Amma's house, and they discussed all the matters in the town. Kurumbi Amma had a snuffbox made of ivory, which was almost always full. Leslie Sayiv, dressed in a coat and trousers, visited Kurumbi in his carriage and talked to her. Kurumbi Amma adored everyone who wore trousers and a coat. For her, that was the most fashionable way of life. She also adored the fair skin of the French rulers and compared that with the local people of Mayyazhi. She idealised the habits, manners, and even the dress of the French, which almost became an obsession for her.

Another character Damu Writer was also a paternal figure to the protagonist Dasan, who exemplifies the archetype of the compliant 'Other' who dutifully serves the colonial administration. Having attained a basic education up to the fifth standard, he assumes the role of a document writer for the French government. His characterisation bears a striking resemblance to Thomas Macaulay's depiction of the "class of interpreters," individuals ostensibly Indian in blood and appearance yet culturally aligned with their colonisers (Macaulay 1862). Throughout the narrative, Damu Writer exhibits a conspicuous absence of personal convictions, save for his unwavering allegiance to the French authorities.

Upon securing his position following his modest education, Damu Writer ensures that his son Dasan commemorates his first day of school by lighting candles outside the local church. Subtly, his gaze gravitates towards the Holy cross adorning their dwelling during moments of distress. Moreover, Damu Writer manifests a pervasive sense of inadequacy, frequently seeking validation from the French residents of the community. Notably, he visits Mr. Leslie's domicile to solicit blessings, a practice recurrently facilitated by Leslie's wife, Missy (Mukundan 2014). This recurrent hierarchical dynamic effectively bolsters the French colonial hegemony, perpetuating a system wherein the colonised are encouraged to emulate their colonisers without ever truly assimilating their power.

Through a mechanism of interpellation, the French administration cultivates a symbiotic relationship with the indigenous populace, one readily embraced by the latter. However, instances wherein Mr Leslie "offers" job opportunities to Damu, extend educational assistance to Dasan, or where Missy "blesses" the protagonist underscore a palpable sense of superiority, maintaining a status quo wherein the colonised are expected to adhere to colonial norms without usurping the dominant power structures. Consequently, a semblance of imitation is preserved, albeit at a safe distance from disrupting the prevailing power dynamics.

This narrative of mimicry and deference towards the oppressor is perpetuated through generations of unchallenged compliance and imitation. Kurumbi Amma, for instance, clings to her memories of Mr Leslie long after his demise, even as she nears the end of her life. Her elation at Mr. Leslie's union with Missy surpasses that of her own nuptials, a poignant manifestation of her reverence for the oppressor. Likewise, her bedtime narratives to Dasan invariably exalt the valour of French figures intertwined with local lore, thereby perpetuating a narrative that glorifies the colonial enterprise while subtly reinforcing its dominance.

1.2 Pervasive Benovelence and Cultural Assimilation: The Plight of the Colonial Subject

The assimilation of the new culture is the key factor that distinguishes French colonialism in Mahe from most of the other forms of colonialism that were hinged on violence and hierarchisation in another part of the country. The characters practically mimicked their colonial counterparts in an attempt to become them without realising that their positions will always be 'defered' relative to that of the coloniser. Kurumbi Amma wished for her grandson to be like the French, but she was disappointed when she saw Dasan dressed in a white *mundu* and short-sleeved shirt (Mukundan 2014). The superiority that the French and the French culture accrued from Mahe over the course of colonialism is apparent from the sensibilities of the coloniser. Explicating the cultural colonisation that Mahe underwent, these events also put across a unique case of benevolent colonialism where an ostensible sense of cultural assimilation was perpetrated by the French. The feigned assimilation along with a calibrated approach to hold on to colonial discourses led to the admiration and bequeathed superiority that spearheaded the colonial endeavours in Mahe. This syncretic approach inadvertently leads the natives to mimic and valorise the French.

In one of Kurumbi Amma's tales, she recounts the English incursion into French territory with pride, extolling the bravery of French men

and women who valiantly defended their freedom (Mukundan 2014). Yet, amidst her narrative, there lies a poignant irony: while she celebrates the valour of her French characters, she remains oblivious to the oppressive discourses permeating her own environment. This narrative paradox underscores the inhabitants' unwitting complicity in perpetuating colonial narratives, even as they empathetically embrace similar narratives from distant lands. Kurumbi Amma's deep-seated attachment to her French ideals epitomises this paradox. Her emotional investment in these narratives transcends mere admiration; rather, her sentiments serve as a mirrored reflection of those espoused by her French counterparts. In essence, her emotions cease to be distinctly her own but rather emerge as replicas of the sentiments harboured by the French, which she erroneously internalises as her own.

In this context, the narratives propagated by Kurumbi Amma assume a dual significance. On the one hand, they serve as conduits for fostering empathy towards the French colonisers among the native populace. On the other hand, they exemplify the insidious nature of colonial discourse, wherein narratives of valour and heroism are selectively appropriated and internalized by the colonised, thereby perpetuating a cycle of cultural subjugation and emulation.

> As the French were leaving, hundreds of natives gathered at the seashore to bid adieu. When the ship drifted away towards the horizon, many wept. That is something the French could be proud of, as no Indian ever shed a drop of tear for the British when they left. For most of us, the very word ‘colonialism’ is anathema, if not offending. But thanks to the presence of the French for over 200 years, today Mahe has a place of its own in the decolonised country. (Mukundan, Mahe: Un Pur Esprit).

A segment of the population, represented by people like Kurumbi Amma, saw their lives shattered when the French left Mayyazhi. Her life was intricately woven with the presence of Leslie Saheb and the white authorities who governed Mayyazhi. Having lived under the benevolent umbrella of French colonial rule, Kurumbi Amma perceived the French as protectors. The notion that these white individuals belonged to a distinct country was inconceivable for her. In their hearts, the French were not just rulers; they were seen as guardians who had elevated Mayyazhi to a state of past glory. The dream persisted that, one day, the French would return, restoring Mayyazhi to its former splendour. This was the reality of Mayyazhi, forgotten with time. Mukundan, through his novel, told Mayyazhi's untold story, unveiling a unique colonial experience often overlooked by traditional historical accounts. Characters like Kurumbi Amma lived through a distinctive period, supported by the locals. Even after the era had ended, a collective yearning persisted for the return of those colonial days. Many departed with the hopeful belief that someday, the lost glory of the land would be revived through the resurgence of colonial rule (Mukundan 2014). This narrative challenges conventional historical perspectives, shedding light on the personal lives and sentiments that shaped Mayyazhi's complex history.

The pervasive influence of four centuries of French administration within Mahe not only engenders a sense of subordination but also cultivates a fervent patriotism towards the French colonial regime among its inhabitants. This allegiance is palpable in the actions and attitudes of the characters depicted throughout the novel. Chief among them is Damu Writer, whose unwavering loyalty serves as a quintessential representation of this attribute. As the fervour of the freedom struggle against French rule escalates, Dasan, the emblematic figurehead of the resistance movement, finds himself incarcerated. In a poignant yet unexpected turn of events, during a clandestine visit to his family home upon learning of his sister's marriage, Dasan is betrayed to the authorities by none other than his own father, Damu Writer. This betrayal underscores the apex of the colonized's subordination and loyalty to the colonial administration, wherein even familial ties become secondary to the dictates of patriotism towards the colonizers.

The colonial narrative of innocence and benevolence pervades the opinions of staunch French supporters like Damu Writer and Kurumbi Amma, underscoring the extent to which colonial ideologies shape and dictate the perspectives of both the colonizers and the colonized alike. So, the novel portrays a stark depiction of the insidious nature of colonial hegemony, wherein the colonized not only internalize but actively propagate the narratives and ideologies of their oppressors. This p influence extends beyond political allegiance, permeating familial relationships and shaping the very fabric of social identity within the colonial milieu.

M Mukundan constantly uncovers how mimicry was an inherent part of the colonial discourse. The author’s strategisation of the narrative structure exemplifies this observation. He strategically begins the novel with a dream that Kurumbi Amma is having about Leslie Sayiv and how she wishes the same for her grandson. She makes sure that Dasan always lights the candle in front of the chapel. The author also ensures that the colonial subject’s tendency to mimic the coloniser is imbued in their language. He carefully packs this tendency within their conversations to convey how people like Kurumbi Amma and Damu admire and follow the ways of the coloniser. In fact, the author exposes mimicry as a tool for hegemony to strengthen the impact of it becoming a tool of resistance, which is discussed in the latter part of the essay. In colonial imagination, mimicry is the simple imitation of the coloniser by adopting their institutions, values, rituals and habits (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 2000). As long as this passive reproduction continues, the scope of resistance is minimal.

Within the tapestry of characters ensnared by the colonial discourse, Kanari emerges as a poignant exemplar of blind mimicry, devoid of any semblance of differentiation. A member of the solitary ensemble in Mayyazhi, his penchant for donning suits akin to the French garners the author's ridicule, likening him to a forlorn scarecrow amidst the village landscape (Mukundan 2014). Kanari's unwavering commitment to emulating colonial mannerisms, despite his impoverished circumstances, underscores the profound depth of colonial interpellation. Notably, his insistence on acquiring and flaunting a suit, despite his precarious financial standing, serves as a testament to the entrenched nature of colonial influence, both material and cultural.

The author, further delineates Kanari's identity as neither wholly white nor entirely French-Indian, accentuating the artifice of his mimicry. This mimicry, however, transcends mere sartorial emulation, permeating the very fabric of his cultural identity. Conversely, Kurumbi Amma, the matriarchal figure in Dasan's family, forms a warm camaraderie with Mr. Leslie, the French administrator. Her daily

rendezvous with him, sharing tobacco, is imbued with nostalgic fervour, romantically recollecting their erstwhile companionship. At the surface level, this may appear as a sentimentalization of a French man; however, Kurumbi Amma's attribution of her tobacco habit to Leslie underscores the depth of her unconscious mimicry, encapsulating not only him but the entire colonial discourse.

Indeed, Kurumbi Amma ardently champions the permanence of French rule in Mayyazhi, envisaging its departure as tantamount to the village's demise. Her fervent belief in the indispensability of colonial oversight encapsulates the extent to which mimicry operates within the colonial milieu. It takes subsequent generations to discern and exploit the inherent vulnerabilities embedded within colonial authority. Through Kurumbi Amma's characterization, mimicry serves as a subtle instrument of manipulation for the French administrators, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and ideological subjugation that spans across generations.

2. Mimicry and Mockery Against Colonialism

Dasan, son of Damu Writer, is an example of the ambivalence of mimicry becoming a form of resistance within the colonial discourse. He was educated in a French school, excelling in each class. Dasan was offered a government job or an option to study in France after his baccalaureate. However, his perception of his land and the future of his homeland was different from that of his parents and neighbours. He chose not to opt for any of these. After two days of his results, he confesses to his family that he will not work for the French government but will fight for freedom from the French (Mukundan 2014). Dasan epitomises the post-colonial citizen who mimicked and appropriated the colonial discourse to pave the way for a decolonial future. He occupies a third space, as put forth by Homi K Bhabha where there is a robust resistance against ground opposition which opens up a space for translation (Bhabha 1984).

The younger generation was deeply influenced by the coetaneous resistance against British colonialism, and they were acutely aware of the economic impact associated with colonization. Even though they were educated and employed within the French colonial administration, native intellectuals like Dasan and Sukumaran strategically used their knowledge and positions to resist colonization without becoming compradors. The constitution of a hybrid space, mimicry is processed as mockery in its negotiation. They believed that for the nation to prosper, it was essential for the colonizers to leave. They associated the poverty and poor economic conditions of the people of Mayyazhi with colonial rule. For them, the struggle for freedom was intrinsically linked to the need for improved prosperity, as they believed the socio-economic impact of colonization on Mayyazhi was something the colonial authorities never considered.

The anti-colonial movement brought tragedy to the family of native intellectuals, affecting both Dasan and Vassuty. Even when Dasan tried to make his father aware of the necessity for freedom and anti-colonial rule, it was beyond what Damu could understand. Dasan's parents were the simple reproduction of the interpellated cultural habits and values of the coloniser, while Dasan was the 'blurred copy' of the coloniser, who had broken himself away from colonial dominance.

Bhabha warns about the changing of mimicry into mockery, which will lead to double vision. This ambivalence will, in turn, disrupt the colonial authority. The beginning of this double vision can be seen in one of the statements made by Pappan, who is an active young man fighting against the French who clearly states his opinion on French rule and appropriates the underlying discourses. He says that his protest is against the French government and the way they treat the natives. However, he is sure that the inferences from French education will show him the light to strengthen his protest (Mukundan 2014). In this instance, the act of mimicking reveals its own limitation wherein it embodied the seeds of its destruction within itself. It becomes an instrument of semblance and menace at once. The hybridity that colonialism championed took a complete turn to reverse the effects of colonialist endeavours. The opposition to colonial authority is not automatic or spontaneous, but through the availing of mimicry as a tool to reshape itself to become a mockery of the colonial authority.

At this juncture, the novel extends beyond its apparent postcolonial models. The mimicking of the coloniser undergoes several changes and becomes an important subversive tool that facilitates the freedom struggle. Bhabha states, "It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilising mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come". The interstitial space between mimicry and mockery, he notes, only in partial proliferation. This is also true in Mahe's case.

When it comes to the language, French functioned as an official language alongside Malayalam. During the colonial period, the colonial administration established French schools to educate the local population in the language. Learning French was widely regarded as prestigious, as it provided access to employment opportunities within the colonial administration. Consequently, French became an integral part of everyday communication alongside Malayalam. This is reflected in the novel through the *École des Garçons*, where Dasan and Girija studied, and their interactions with Kunjanandhan Master, who was proficient in French. The school housed popular French literary works, and Dasan frequently read books such as Hugo's *Hernani* and Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* (Mukundan 2014). In Mahe, the cultural hegemony was reinforced through education and language, with the French authorities actively encouraging the use of French. Unlike some colonial powers that imposed their language as a means of dominance, the French adopted a different strategy. Rather than enforcing linguistic assimilation, they presented learning French as an opportunity, linking it to promising career prospects and scholarships within the colonial administration. This approach led to an increasing number of people embracing the language, fostering a sense of allure around it and admiration for colonial officials fluent in French. Educational initiatives thus became a subtle yet powerful tool of influence, intertwining language acquisition with economic advancement.

2.1 Embarking on a Novel Decolonial Praxis

The general tendency to explore the binaries in a postcolonial novel accrues the fallacy of self-limitation. It gets predicated along the Us

vs Other binary. Postcolonialism, as fashioned by Kanaran, Kunjananthan masters etc, was synonymous with post-colonialism. The names and nativity of the people in power changed without any changes in the system in itself. The author notes this fundamental lack of change amidst the perceived change of administration as a significant inconsistency in the postcolonial discourse. He, in a way, questions the freedom fight movement that took place in Mahe if it was only for a namesake change in the administration. Through the character of Dasan, the author highlights these inconsistencies, paving the way for a decolonial approach that should have governed Mahe's freedom struggle. The way Dasan imagined the future of Mahe garners a decolonial hue, while the reality of the liberation of Mahe was punctuated with the natives' love for the French people and their administration.

To embrace the decolonial matrix that novels like *On the Banks of The Mayyazhi* lays out, it is important to focus on the deep-rooted histories of marginalisation that are ingrained in the indigenous ways of living (Srinivas 2023). Mukundan notes that Damu's father used to earn a living by harvesting coconuts. The change of profession when it came to Damu was the colonial intervention that deprived him of their indigenous ways of living by infringing on their quotidian life. The life of Malayan Uthaman elucidates the interpellated marginalisation that the people of Mahe underwent. He despised his tradition of adorning the Thira headgear and became a mediator between the pupil and the god. Despite his poverty and the income he could have made out of this venture, he refused to take it up until he succumbed to the pressures of his father only to die out of lack of expertise and lackadaisical behaviour. Uthaman's refusal and disdain towards the innate ways of life mirror the archetype of the benevolent colonised. Mukundan, through such careful characterisation, accentuates the need to be aware of the colonial interventions to imagine a decolonial future.

One of the key elements that Mukundan explores in the novel is the careful uncoupling of the coloniser from the colonised through a re-imagination of the postcolonial future envisioned by the characters. Towards the end of the freedom struggle, nationalist leaders including Kanaran have a perception about Mahe as a new space where people have control over themselves. It is fundamentally marked by political and spatial autonomy. The vision is limited superficially restricting itself from exploring the epistemic undertones fundamental for a place that is soon going to be politically independent. The decolonial future that Dasan extolled was futuristic and complicated unlike the superficial change of administration that materialised following the departure of the French. The position of Dasan in the novel in fact ruptures the narrative to force the readers to think of the pre-histories, teleologies and a novel sense of independence that would have exalted Mahe to a decolonial status (Raghavan et.al. 2022).

Mukundan's carefully reimagined postcolonial future is rendered through Dasan. The transformation from the impressionable young boy that he was to the politically conscious man that he became is a typical postcolonial transformation that many novels of the same genre have represented. Beyond his active engagement in anti-colonial movements and becoming an agent of resistance, it is his conscious attempts to dismantle colonial epistemologies and reclaim indigenous worldviews that make him a patron of decoloniality. However, he cannot pursue it in the face of stronger neo-colonial endeavours that replace the colonial administrators. Dasan highlights the cross-cultural and inter-country transactions and translations of ideas and representation to emphasise the need for a decolonising journey in Mahe. The future imagined by Dasan becomes a far-fetched dream owing to the inconsistencies and misrepresentations that plague the post-colonial discourse. The protagonist and author moans the deference of the indispensable decolonial praxis that should have permeated the shores of Mahe following the departure of the French. The death of Dasan and the vision of the dragonflies of *Velliyankallu* symbolise this loss and the unwavering hope that persists to embark on a novel journey where the indigenous ways of life are restored.

3. Conclusion

The decolonial praxis inherent in the nuances of mimicry unhinges the novel 'On the Banks of the Mayyazhi' from the contours of a postcolonial categorisation. Amidst a generalised satisfaction that pervades the superficial understanding of independence and post-colonialism, M Mukundan pushes the readers to think further upon what constitutes autonomy, sovereignty and independence. While mimicry is a blind repetition for the supporters of the French, it was a mockery for the nationalists. The novel delves into the repercussions of blind mimicry within the nationalist movement, as exemplified by figures like Vasutty, Kanaran, and Kunjanandan Master. Their emulation of the Indian national movement inadvertently perpetuates a cycle of imitation, ultimately yielding an ambiguous sense of liberation. Despite the transition from French to indigenous administration, substantive changes remain elusive, with the replacement of the French administrator by an Indian freedom fighter symbolising a mere superficial alteration. The subsequent administrators regress to mimicking the broader trends of post-independence India, mirroring a cyclical return to the status quo.

For Dasan, the protagonist, this trajectory of mimicry exacts a heavy toll, culminating in profound personal loss, including the demise of his love, Chandri. Echoing her tragic fate, Dasan, too, succumbs to despair, choosing to end his life and metaphorically transcend into the realm of dragonflies. The postcolonial alternative that emerges in the aftermath of the arduous struggle for freedom is depicted as contingent upon individual perceptions. While some may perceive the existing system as a democratic epitome, embodying notions of individual and collective freedom, others may view it as a facade marred by incessant reliance on central governance and the imposition of the president's rule.

The novel concludes poignantly, encapsulating the cyclical nature of human existence and the perpetual quest for liberation. It underscores the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the postcolonial condition, wherein mimicry is both a tool of assimilation and resistance. The problematic implications of blindly mimicking nationalist ideologies remain pertinent, hinting at broader socio-political ramifications beyond the scope of the narrative. The novel presents a compelling exploration of the enduring legacy of colonialism and the nuanced dynamics and inconsistencies of postcolonial identity and liberation, to embark on a decolonial future.

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Ms. Anagha Sivasankaran and Mr. Sayant Vijay were responsible for all aspects of the study, including research design, literature review data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. They both collaborated closely in drafting and revising the manuscript. No special agreements regarding authorship were made, as both authors contributed equally to the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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