

# Unmuting Women's Bodies: A comparative study of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and Lalitambika Antharjanam's 'Revenge Goddess'

Sangeetha Puthiyedath

## Abstract

Women's writing challenge not only the patriarchal hegemony exerted over discourse but also received notions about the female. Masculine control over all forms of discourse has ensured the portrayal of women as duplicitous and untrustworthy. This is reinforced through myths, poetry, and even religious literature. When women started writing, she had to contend with societal customs that not only tried to mute her but also dictated what she could write about. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the author of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Lalitambika Antharjanam, the author of "Goddess of Revenge," are two path breaking authors who refused to abide by these rules. They boldly wrote about subjects like female desire and bodily and psychological issues like post-partum depression; subjects considered taboo and shameful. This paper is a comparative study of two women writers who dared to cross boundaries and spoke about women's bodies and women's desires, thereby opening up new frontiers. This paper argues that by claiming authorship to these topics, these writers were in effect, wresting the right to their bodies and the prerogative to speak about it.

**Key words:** *Taboo, female sexuality, unmuting, puerperal mania, post-partum depression.*

What connects Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the author of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and Lalitambika Antharjanam, the author of 'Goddess of Revenge,' is their willingness to venture into uncharted territories. Separated as they are, by geography and the times – Gilman lived in the latter half of the nineteenth century in the United States of America; Antharjanam lived in the early half of the twentieth century in India; – what brings them together is their courage in challenging received notions and breaking taboos regarding women. These writers had distinct histories. Gilman was a humanist, writer and editor, a successful speaker who relied on giving speeches as a source of income. She was fiercely independent, divorced her first husband, and was romantically involved with a woman before contracting a second marriage. In contrast,

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Antharjanam chose to remain within the conventional role accorded to her by society, while critiquing and challenging notions that enslaved women. Indeed, it is remarkable that the concerns that these diverse writers address overlap, underscoring the similarity of the female experience. This paper is an attempt to plot the struggle of two women writers who occupied widely different cultural milieux, who tried to unmute issues on women's bodies and women's sexual desire. It also attempts to uncover the techniques adopted by society to delegitimize female voices.

Female sexual desire is a contested space. Women are not supposed to have a desire, let alone express it. Patriarchal society has appropriated the right to speak about it and has robbed women of the voice to articulate it. In patriarchal discourse, a woman who has sexual desire is identified as a temptress. Juxtaposed against the angelic woman who nurtures, embodying motherhood, a temptress is designated as 'unnatural' and 'not normal.' The de-legitimation of women's sexuality is a process that is as old as the myths. Both Eastern and Western myths have women who transgress, display desire and unleash destruction upon herself and her tribe. The story of *Genesis* begins with Eve's transgression which echoes Pandora's fate in Greek Mythology. Women who disobey, cause suffering and pain to the entire community: it is a lesson that is reiterated through myths and religious texts. Women who dare to desire are portrayed as sirens, which lead men astray, and should be actively resisted. Looked from that vantage, the war in Ramayana was not because the Lankan king Ravana stole Sita but because Shurpanaka desired a man and dared to propose to him. The destruction of Lanka mimics the destruction of Troy. Both catastrophes were brought about by a woman who desired men.

Lalitambika Antharjanam through her short story 'Goddess of Revenge,' or '*Praticaradevatha*'<sup>1</sup> challenges the belief that well-born women do not have sexual desire. It is conceived as a story within a story, a *mise en abyme* wherein the narrator functions as a frame to highlight a story that interrogates received notions regarding the feminine. This allows the writer to circumvent taboos and break the conspiratorial silence that has been deployed by the society around the fate of Tatri, the protagonist. Tatri is a proto-feminist. She dimly perceives the injustice meted out to her by a repressive social order that insists on confining her physically, to the inner spaces of the house. The term used to refer to the women folk among the

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*Namboodiri* Brahmins of Kerala, *antharjanam*, (The prefix *anthar* means inner and *janam*, people) which they incorporate into their name, as a surname is indicative of their status. They are literally and figuratively locked up with invisible chains of custom in the interiors of the house. That Tatri's original sin, which leads to her ostracism, is of looking out of the window is symbolic. She has dared to open a window to the light of the outside world, thus symbolically challenging her confinement. The intensity of the backlash that this seemingly innocuous gesture provokes is partly due to society's recognition of the metaphorical import of this act. The opening of the window is not a simple physical act but an assertion of her subjectivity. Granting her the power over her subjectivity will necessarily involve acknowledging her identity as a person. Tatri's act of opening the window and allowing herself to be seen and admired is an affirmation of her sexual identity and her need to be desired. It is a direct challenge to tradition that seeks to alienate, appropriate and control women's sexual desire. In the hermetically sealed world that Tatri inhabits there is no place for women's sexuality. It exists merely in conjunction with male desire and exists only to satisfy his needs.

To appreciate the extent of the challenge, involved in the act of opening a window, it is necessary to understand the situation of *Namboodiri* women. Though belonging to the uppermost caste in the social hierarchy of pre-independent India, the *Namboodiri* women were subjected to severe oppression. Exacerbated by the societal rules that prohibited the younger *Namboodiri* sons from entering into wedlock with *Namboodiri* women, the women had no choice but to accept any offer of marriage that came their way. Nor did they have any say in the matter. The power to decide rested solely with men. She could end up marrying a man older than her father or might have to be content with being the third or fourth wife. The punishment for a transgressing *Namboodiri* woman was dreadful. If a woman broke caste rules, a court of elders will be summoned. The court would deliberate on her guilt and if found guilty, she will be thrown on the streets to starve and die. The situation of the *Namboodiri* women is shocking because Kerala is a land where a significant majority practise patriarchy and where women enjoy considerable rights over property and their sexuality.

By choosing to write the story of a woman who not only transgressed,

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but also ensured the excommunication of sixty-four men, Antharjanam was taking a huge risk. The closed *Namboodiri* society had received a body blow through Tatri's actions. The rigid rule bound community had closed ranks in its aftermath. Anyone who would dare to defend Tatri, or lend her a voice would be considered as a traitor, especially if the person happened to be from within the community. It is in this context that the true significance of Antharjanam's actions should be appreciated. However, pushing boundaries and challenging the status quo was not new to Antharjanam. In her own life, she had challenged strict purdah (*mudupadam*) by discarding her palm leaf umbrella and entering the public space that had been forbidden to *Namboodiri* women till then. She also authored a short play on the theme of widow remarriage<sup>2</sup> of a *Namboodiri* girl when the idea would have evoked horror and repulsion.

The act of Tatri opening a window should be viewed as a metaphorical act. Through this action she forces open her sealed interiority which precipitates a journey of self-discovery. Her exploration into her subjectivity exposes her to the multiple ways by which society exerts control over her as a woman. Her revenge was to actualize the role that her husband had envisaged for her to fulfil his sexual fantasies. By voluntarily embracing that role to its fullest, Tatri was reflecting the image society had imposed on her. Society had reduced her to a body and she reflected that image back to society – searing a woman-sized hole in its hypocritical fabric. Society's futile attempt to bury the cataclysmic act of revolt unleashed upon an ultraconservative section of the society by a lone woman had been successful in driving the narrative underground, but not in suppressing it. By recording it, Antharjanam boldly proclaims herself as a sister who partakes in the rebellion and asserts her right to be the voice of the silenced woman.

The voice of the protagonist in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is similarly stolen, and in the absence of a chronicler, she literally etches her story with her body on the walls of her physical and psychological prison. Both '*Praticaradevatha*' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper' are intimately linked in that they record a universal phenomenon – the suppression of the feminine voice and articulation of the female body. Although occupying a space that is culturally and geographically removed, the protagonist in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' shares a similar plight emphasising the underlying uniformity

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in the experience of women. The voice that narrates might belong to the protagonist, but her life is firmly controlled by her husband, who is presented more as an extension of society than as an individual.

The story is conceived as a series of journal entries that lays bare the psychological conflict that the author experiences. She resorts to writing her thoughts because she is constrained to do so. She cannot express her anguish because they are brushed aside as feminine exaggerations or hysteria. Instead, she is physically and metaphorically restricted to a 'nursery,' emphasizing her lack of personhood. The story imputes that she is a nonperson controlled by 'male' adults.<sup>3</sup> The nursery, with its barred windows and the bedstead, nailed to the floor is symbolic of the infantile space that she occupies in her husband's mind. The threat of being sent away if she doesn't behave hangs like a Damocles' sword above her head. Terrified of being designated as a 'nervous' patient and locked up in an asylum, she hides her psychological difficulties from her husband and his sister. Their lack of understanding of the nature of puerperal insanity or post-partum depression complicates the issue. Her husband, who is also a physician is firmly convinced that she can 'come out of it' if she wants to. As Showalter explains:

Victorian doctors believed that in most cases insanity was preventable if individuals were prepared to use their willpower to fight off mental disorder and to avoid excess. Mental health was to be achieved by a life of moderation and by the energetic exercise of the will. Being sane, wrote John Barlow in *Mans Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity*, depends on the individual himself.<sup>4</sup>

Doctors in America shared the view that human beings had the power to 'prevent' and 'control' insanity. They also concurred with the prevailing knowledge of the preponderance of insanity among women. Notions regarding the weakness of the female constitution were firmly entrenched in nineteenth-century consciousness. This conviction led society to forbid women from exerting herself physically and mentally. The hypocrisy involved in such notions can be easily exposed when one recognizes that these concerns did not extend to women who belonged to the lower classes or other races, who were engaged in strenuous physical activity, including working in farms, factories, and mines. Thus, the category 'women' was

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selectively applied and excluded most women.

The weakness of the constitution that society accorded to the female extended to her mental capacities as well. It was a commonly held notion that a woman's brain was significantly inferior to the masculine one and that she should be protected from mental exertions, including strenuous study.<sup>5</sup> Such beliefs also resulted in designating a whole series of ailments as female maladies which were then dismissed as imaginary. As Showalter observes, "the prevailing view among Victorian psychiatrists was that the statistics proved what they had suspected all along: that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control".<sup>6</sup> It helped in adding to misinformation that female-specific mental ailments were related to the uterus and the birthing process. In hindsight, one can see that the lack of female doctors, and caregivers<sup>7</sup> was a significant contributing factor.

Gilman's protagonist is a writer, who is forbidden to write by her husband. He argues that, his wife, who has recently given birth to their first child needs physical and mental rest. Reading as well as writing will cause unnecessary mental exertion and will hinder the healing process. The author knows that her imposed period of inactivity is more detrimental to her mental health than moderate activity. However, her suggestions are brushed aside without any consideration, by her husband. Like many female maladies including hysteria, her depression is perceived to be the result of her inability to control her excitement and imagination, and the cure that he prescribes is a 'rest cure'.<sup>8</sup>

Gilman's stated intention was to expose the pernicious effects of the 'rest cure' advocated by the famous Doctor, Silas Weir Mitchell. Gilman knew first-hand the effect of such a 'cure.' When Gilman suffered a bout of depression, Weir Mitchell had prescribed for her a complete break from all manner of mental stimulation and she was forbidden from reading, writing or painting. Having undergone it for three desperate months, Gilman recognized how close she had come to losing her sanity. Her fear for the mental wellbeing of fellow women and her desire to save them from total breakdown impelled her to create a character that would succumb to the pressure and lose her sanity. Insanity in women has a well-documented

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trajectory. Throughout history, doctors have insisted that women are more prone to mental imbalances.<sup>9</sup> How far this perception was determined by the prejudices harboured by a predominantly male body of doctors is any one's guess. But from the time records are available, the ratio of women patients in mental asylums have shown a sharp increase, compared to the number of male patients.

Madness in women was closely linked to her body and her sexuality. In the nineteenth century, any perceived sexual 'deviance' in women – masturbation, a robust sexual desire, or desire for other women, were considered as marks of insanity. Broadly categorised as 'moral insanity,' women who indulged in such acts or exhibited a propensity for such acts or desires could be institutionalized. Showalter explicates how the definition of moral insanity could be stretched to encompass 'almost any kind of behaviour regarded as abnormal or disruptive by community standards.' This would have allowed the society and its guardians a power to exert control over all forms of female sexuality.

'Moral insanity,' a concept introduced by James Cowles Prichard in 1835, held madness to be 'a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect, or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane illusion or hallucination.'<sup>10</sup>

Judged by male doctors against masculine conceptions of what constituted the feminine, many women were judged to be insane by the Victorian society. 31,822 out of 58,640 lunatics, who were institutionalised in Great Britain, were women. Showalter argues that the increasing number of mad people among females was in part driven by 'the idea by male doctors that the menstrual cycle in a woman's life made her the victim of madness. The beginning of the menstruation during puberty, pregnancy, lactation and menopause were considered to be triggers for madness.'<sup>11</sup>

Viewed from this vantage, both protagonists in these short stories are 'insane'. Tatri had dared to admit that she enjoys sex and was adept at pleasing men. Since her rebellion was sexual in nature, her name became synonymous with perversion, for well-born women like her was not supposed to have sexual desire. Her actions were deemed insane for they

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were born out of gross perversion. The normalisation of male desire and a concurrent demonization of female desire are in keeping with the patriarchal narrative around female sexuality. Female sexuality was deemed passive, her role that of a receiver rather than of an initiator or actor. By daring to interrogate the role accorded to her by society Tatri had mounted a challenge that shook the very foundation of patriarchal society. The only logical recourse was to quickly neutralize the threat and to shroud it in silence. Tatri could not chronicle her revolt and ‘[a]ll the documents relating to the trial have been destroyed by her husband’s family’<sup>12</sup> By breaking this silence and narrating the tale, Antharjanam is forcing society to introspect its attitude towards women, especially customs that legitimises her brutalization and exploitation. She is also asserting the right of women to experience sexual desire. Through this story Antharjanam is challenging the prevalent reading of her work by male “homoaesthetic circles from specifically universal gendered (Womanly) perspectives.”<sup>13</sup> As Devika pertinently observes in her excellent study of Malayalam women writers there is a marked tendency among those critics to “consecrated LalitambikaAntaijanam’s writings, [by] reading in them either the voice bewailing the ‘Tragedy of Woman’ in the traditional Malayaleebrahmin community, the voice of the ‘Motherly Muse’, or that of ‘Fundamental Human Values’.”<sup>14</sup> Devika objects to the reductionist reading that seeks to sanitize women’s writings by delineating them as “representatives of the universal feminine.”

[T]he recognition of Lalitambika and Madhavikutty as ‘geniuses’ by

dominant homoaesthetic circles in Malayalam involved a reading of their work that mostly emptied it of their lives and even their subjectivity, and saw them as representative of the universal feminine. This is despite the fact that all four major women authors in Malayalam ... wrote intensively, even obsessively, of and around their lives as women of their times and social positions in Malayalee society.<sup>15</sup>

This tendency to exert societal control over women’s writing and what women write is not restricted to Malayalee society alone. This tendency is evident in “The Yellow Wallpaper” as well. Gilman’s story is about a woman, a potential writer, who, unable to write, goes mad under the weight of her suppressed voice. She is prohibited from even reading books as



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reading and writing were believed to exacerbate her puerperal mania. Devoid of any distraction, prohibited from even the company of her baby, she starts obsessing about the room in which she is confined. She transposes her condition to an outside object and imagines that there is a woman trapped behind the vines and trellis pattern in the yellow wallpaper which covers the wall of her nursery/sickroom. That the imaginary woman and yellow wallpaper becomes an objective correlative is evident when she writes, '[a]t night in any kind of light, in twilight, candle light, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be'.<sup>16</sup>

The protagonist recognises that she needs stimulation and engagement. Instead, the forced inaction impinges on her and draws her into madness. The descent into madness develops as her preoccupation with the yellow wallpaper of her nursery/sickroom and ends with her total identification with the woman she sees trapped behind the bars of the wallpaper. The narrator records her thoughts clandestinely in a journal that she is forced to hide. The journal is a traumatizing account of her initial difficulty, exacerbated by societal notions and her spiralling mania that spins out of control. Initially, the narrator recognizes that the bars are closing in on her and actively resists it. However, she does not get any help from her husband or women in the family. This futile fight is evident in her record of the 'woman' trapped in the wall paper – a woman who 'is all the time trying to climb through,' trying to shake the bars of her prison. As the narrative progresses, the distinction between the woman in the wallpaper and the narrator appears to be erased: 'I've got out at last,' she writes triumphantly addressing her absent husband, 'in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!'

Barred by societal conventions and pseudo-scientific beliefs women were prohibited from being engaged in any 'meaningful work, hope, or companionship'. 'Almost every woman who lived during the 19th century was literally and figuratively imprisoned: literally in her father's or husband's house and figuratively in male texts and a male dominated society,' observes Showalter. Already suffering from a debilitating bout of post-partum depression, the condition of the narrator in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' is worsened by the attitude of the people around her. Her husband, a physician is convinced that she is not sick, 'that there is really

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nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency’. Her brother, who is also a physician, concurs and they both forbid her to write or to exert herself in any manner. This diagnosis is in keeping with the masculine propensity to bracket all female maladies as ‘imaginary’ and dismiss them as born out of ‘hysteria.’

Gilman’s bold uncovering of the horrors of post-partum depression was path breaking. It was so shocking that initially publishers refused to publish it and even when it appeared in print was deemed too disturbing to be read by women. This tendency to suppress the articulation of female problems, especially issues related to the female body and her sexual desire, is a universal phenomenon. Discourses about female sexual desire and female maladies written by women, that were in contradiction with received notions were marginalised and suppressed because they challenged beliefs of patriarchal society. The most commonplace device to control the female voice and her body was by designating her as ‘insane.’

Drawing attention to the proliferation of deranged female characters that haunt nineteenth-century women’s writing, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, argue that they symbolically represent the female author’s rage against the rigidities of patriarchal tradition. Elaborating this, Showalter observes:

The madwoman is the author’s double, the incarnation of her own anxiety and rage. It is through the violence of this double that ‘the female author enacts her own raging desires to escape male houses and male texts.’ Biographies and letters of gifted women who suffered mental breakdowns have suggested that madness is the price women artists have had to pay for the exercise of their creativity in a male-dominated culture.<sup>17</sup>

The impulse to stymie the creative impetus in women or to dismiss it or to belittle it appears to be a universal phenomenon. In the land where Antharjanam wrote, women’s writing was often dismissed as ‘*pennethuthu*.’<sup>18</sup> The term ‘*pennu*’ instead of the more respectful ‘*stree*’ is revelatory. It embodies the controlling gaze of a patriarchal society that insists on reducing women’s writing to the marginal. The fact that women writers embraced the degrading term and celebrated it by claiming it as their own does not mitigate the original crime. Antharjanam can be viewed

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as a pioneering voice who sought to fight to tell 'her' side of the story. She is the first female writer of repute who fought for space for a female perspective in the literary world dominated by male writers. The only other female writers who reached her stature in the canon of Malayalam literature are all poets. This allowed her to be free of the burden of the problematic category of women's writing or in this case 'pennezhuthu.'

Unconfined by so called 'feminist concerns' as well as the equivocal rubric of women's writing Antharjanam charted her territory. The difficulties she encountered and voiced reflect universal concerns raised by women writers. Talking about the challenges of balancing a life as a wife and a mother with that of a writer, she remarks:

How can there be no conflict between a literary life and family life?... [B]oth require complete involvement. A housewife has to look to the welfare of her husband, her children, and all the other members of the family circle. Besides, there is the kitchen, the cattle, and the servants – and isn't the physical and mental development of the children also totally her responsibility?... Creative writing too requires continuous reading, thinking, observation and training, concentration, time, leisure for examination and correction, and hermitlike meditateness. Just try and imagine how difficult it is for the wife of a farmer in Kerala to succeed as a writer – and that too one with a sense of responsibility.<sup>19</sup>

This dilemma is emphasized in the *Revenge Goddess*, as well. Antharjanam begins the story about the difficulty of stealing a few moments to write. She is tired and longs for sleep and rest, but is acutely aware that if she put the pen down, she would be able to pick it up only the next night, after all her family members are asleep: "I knew that if I threw down the pen and paper I had taken up to write my story, I would not be able to touch them again till this time tomorrow. And the same obstacles would present themselves tomorrow."<sup>20</sup> If Antharjanam finds it difficult to write due to paucity of time, Gilman's protagonist is explicitly forbidden to write: "I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal – having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition."<sup>21</sup> The struggle to find time and space to write has been repeatedly

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emphasized by a host of women writers including Virginia Wolf in her excellent work *A Room of One's Own*. The blatant opposition to women writing and the need to be covert about it forms an important subtext in "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Unlike Wolf, Antharjanam and Gilman are acutely aware of the difficulty in writing about women's issues and the backlash it might provoke.

Story writing is not a pleasant task. Especially for a woman like me, who nurtures her ideals on a sense of status and prestige, on an awareness of being nobly born. When fictional characters come to life and argue heatedly about contemporary issues, the author has to face opposition from many quarters.<sup>22</sup>

Antharjanam's fears are not unfounded. People, who acted in contravention to the beliefs and cannons of the *Namboodiris*, were subjected to a community trial called the *Smarthavicharan*. Based on the findings of the body, solely consisting of male elders of the community, a guilty person could be excommunicated and her family penalized with fines and in other ways. By choosing to break the silence surrounding the exploitation of women authorized by tradition and custom, Antharjanam was putting herself and her family at considerable risk. Yet, she boldly writes with empathy and compassion about an adulterous woman while simultaneously allowing the reader a glimpse into what she considers as her duty as a writer. Remarking about the choice of her literary subjects, she observes that the characters who jostled for her attention and her voice were 'Creatures tormented by pain. Those who had lost their voices, though their throbbing hearts thudded like thunderclouds, flashed like lightning.'<sup>23</sup> She wonders whether they were 'demanding to be transcribed?' and freely admits that she 'was afraid,' but was 'also inspired.'

In the story, "Goddess of Revenge," Antharjanam initiates a dialogue about the means of protests available for an oppressed woman. When Tatri claims that she had revolted as much for her fellow victims, the forsaken women in Namboodiri houses, 'Oh, my sister, what I did was as much for your sake as mine. For the sake of all Namboodiri women who endure agonies,' Antharjanam firmly contradicts her. She insists that 'the end cannot justify the means'. What Antharjanam is opposing is not Tatri's act

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as much as it's perceived impact on the fate of Namboodiri women. She reminds the reader that instead of liberating women it only served as an excuse to suppress them further. She interrogates Tatri as to why she chose to wreak vengeance rather than educate her sisters, 'Fired as you were with the intoxication of revenge, why did you not try to inspire all the other weak and slavish Namboodiri women? Why did you shoulder the burden of revenge all alone? In matters of this kind, Sister, individuals cannot triumph.'<sup>24</sup>

Antharjanam recognises that the situation in which women, especially Namboodiri women, were placed was unenviable and demanded immediate redress. However, she is also perceptive enough to realize that individual actions of protest are bound to fail as they might be read and interpreted in specific, narrow terms. What she advocates is educating the people concerned and that gives us an insight into how she envisages the role of a writer. In this, she is very close to Gilman's intention in writing 'The Yellow Wallpaper.' Both writers were willing to compromise their creativity for didactic purposes. Their focus was to expose the condition of women and break the silence imposed by society. These writers chose to ignore unwritten rules laid down by society about topics appropriate for women. They wrote about subjects considered taboo and dismissed as shameful. This paper analyses two trailblazers among female writers who challenged and breached boundaries. They spoke about women's bodies and women's desires. By claiming authorship to these topics, they were in effect, wresting the right to their bodies while legitimising their right to speak about it.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> The story *Praticaradevatha* also appears as "Revenge Herself" in *The Inner Courtyard: Stories by Indian Women*. Lakshmi Holmstrom. This version is translated by Vasanti Sankaranarayanan.

<sup>2</sup> Lalithambika Antharjanam, *Aathmakadhakoru Aamukham (A Preface to Autobiography)* (Kottayam: DC Books 2012), p 75. The play *Punarjanam* was performed under the title *Savithrikutti*. It revolved around the story of a very young girl who became a widow on the third day after her marriage but before it was consummated.

<sup>3</sup> Women like the sister-in-law Jane of the protagonist act as extensions of patriarchy and actively collude with men to restrict her. There is a stark

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absence of sisterhood and empathy between the women in the story.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Penguin, 1987), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> See Geena Rippon. *The Gendered Brain*. Penguin Publishers, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> During the nineteenth century a series of medical reforms were initiated in England which barred women from running mental asylums. Doctors like Bucknill and Conolly actively campaigned against the authority enjoyed by ‘matrons’ who were in charge of the women’s ward.

<sup>8</sup> The “rest cure” was popular during the time and was prescribed for many psychological problems including post-partum depression. Dr Silas Weir Mitchell is credited with pioneering this mode of treatment. The rest cure was used to treat patients who exhibited psychiatric disturbances, particularly neurasthenia and hysteria. The treatment consisted primarily in isolating the patient from her family and confining her to bed. The cure also involved a fat rich diet.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Victorian psychiatrists believed that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control. See Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p.56.

<sup>10</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Antharjanam, ‘*Praticaradevatha*,’ p. 490.

<sup>13</sup> J. Devika *Womanwriting = ManReading* (New Delhi: Penguin 2013), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Devika, *Womanwriting*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Devika, *Womanwriting*, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1952/1952-h/1952-h.htm> p.3. Accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> See Devika *Womanwriting*, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Antharjanam, ‘*Praticaradevatha*’, p. 489.

<sup>20</sup> Antharjanam, ‘*Praticaradevatha*’, p. 490.

<sup>21</sup> Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Antharjanam, ‘*Praticaradevatha*’, p. 491.

<sup>23</sup> Antharjanam, ‘*Praticaradevatha*’, p. 491.