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The Tyranny Within: Internalised Ableism and the Female Sleuth in Sreeparvathy's *Violet Pookkalude Maranam*

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Abstract

This article examines how disability and gender intersect in contemporary Malayalam crime fiction through Sreeparvathy's *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* (2021), which introduces Aleena Ben John, a wheelchair-using woman, as its central detective. The study situates Sreeparvathy's work within Kerala's evolving literary landscape, where disability has rarely occupied a central position in fiction and is often represented through metaphors of dependence, tragedy, or moral burden. Drawing on Fiona Kumari Campbell's theory of ableism and key insights from Feminist Disability Studies, the article analyses how Aleena's narrative oscillates between empowerment and internalised shame. While her role as a detective appears to challenge patriarchal and ableist frameworks, her self-perception and limited social agency reveal deep-seated cultural anxieties about the disabled female body. Through a close reading of the novel's narrative structure and psychological interiority, the article argues that *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* both expands and constrains the possibilities of representing disabled womanhood in Malayalam literature. By exploring disability not as metaphor but as lived experience, this study contributes to understanding how gendered embodiment and genre conventions shape the politics of visibility and agency in Kerala's popular fiction.

Keywords: Disability Studies; Gender; Ableism; Female Detective; Malayalam Crime Fiction.

INTRODUCTION

The representation of disability in popular culture significantly shapes social attitudes toward disabled individuals, often reinforcing stereotypes or, more recently, promoting inclusion. While most scholarship on disability representation focuses on Anglophone and Euro-American contexts, portrayals in Indian and regional literatures, particularly Malayalam, remain comparatively underexamined. Situating literary works from Kerala within their linguistic and cultural context highlights how regional storytelling traditions engage with popular genres such as crime fiction while negotiating local constructions of gender, the body, and normativity.

Media portrayals have historically oscillated between reductive extremes, depicting disabled people either as pitiable victims or as inspirational "superhumans." Although progress has been made in expanding these portrayals, misrepresentation remains pervasive. Ivan Gladkov identifies a gradual shift in television series such as *Speechless* (2016–19) and *Atypical* (2017–2021), which present disabled characters as complex and agentic rather than one-dimensional. Yet problematic tropes endure. Sean Arnold critiques the "overcoming adversity" narrative that frames disability as an obstacle to be conquered, while films such as *The Elephant Man* (1980) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1982) perpetuate the "helpless victim" stereotype. Similarly, Annie Segarra notes that *Me Before You* (2016) portrays disability as inherently tragic, and *The Ringer* (2005), despite casting disabled actors, relies on caricatured humour. Caroline Casey observes that although media representations of disability have increased in recent years, most roles continue to be played by non-disabled actors, reinforcing entrenched assumptions. Even with inclusivity initiatives such as *Vogue*'s "Reframing Fashion" issue and Apple's *The Greatest* campaign, systemic change remains elusive.

Crime fiction, as a genre deeply embedded in social norms and anxieties, has long negotiated the politics of ability. In the Victorian era, characters such as Jonathan Small in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890) were villainised, their impairments tied to moral corruption. Yet Sherlock Holmes's obsessive precision has been retrospectively read as an early

instance of neurodivergent brilliance. The Golden Age of crime fiction (1920s–30s) alternated between harmful and innovative portrayals: disabled figures were often deceptive or underestimated observers. Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) features Dr. Sheppard, whose apparent marginality conceals guilt. In post-war American noir, disability was treated ambivalently—figures such as Wilmer in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) are physically unimposing yet morally dubious. However, this period also introduced the "armchair detective," exemplified by Josephine Tey's Inspector Alan Grant in *The Daughter of Time* (1951), whose confinement heightens cognitive acuity.

Later decades witnessed more nuanced treatments influenced by the disability rights movement. Ellis Peters's *A Morbid Taste for Bones* (1977) presented Brother Cadfael as an ageing, contemplative detective, while Jeffery Deaver's *The Bone Collector* (1997) made Lincoln Rhyme, a quadriplegic forensic expert, an emblem of intellectual authority. As David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder argue, such figures challenge "narrative prosthesis"—the use of disability as a mere plot device.

The evolution of female detectives parallels feminist interventions in crime fiction. Early figures such as Mrs. Bucket in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53) or Mrs. Paschal in William Stephens Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864) balanced ingenuity with social constraint. By the early twentieth century, the "New Woman" detective emerged, epitomised by Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, who converted social marginality into epistemic strength. The late twentieth century brought explicitly feminist sleuths—Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone and Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski—who combined independence with social critique. More recent figures, such as Nikki Baker's Virginia Kelly (*In the Game*, 1991), engage intersectionally with race, gender, and sexuality.

Within this lineage, the disabled female detective occupies a crucial intersectional position, subverting both the genre's reliance on physical prowess and its conventional gendered hierarchies. Such characters literalise the "armchair detective" trope, transforming physical limitation into intellectual advantage. Examples include Anne Holt's Hanne Wilhelmsen, who becomes paraplegic; Brigitte Aubert's Elise Andrioli, a blind quadriplegic who solves crimes through listening; Brian Lutterman's paraplegic attorney Pen Wilkinson; and Barbara Nickless's Sydney Parnell, who contends with PTSD. These figures resist patriarchal and ableist assumptions, redefining cognition and agency.

Despite growing critical attention, scholarship on disability in crime fiction remains fragmented. Studies of neurodivergent detectives such as *Monk* (2002–09) are more common than analyses of physically disabled sleuths. Hafferty and Foster note that deaf detectives are often portrayed in isolation rather than within social networks. Susannah B. Mintz's *The Disabled Detective* (2019) offers a genealogy of such characters, while research across linguistic traditions reveals the diversity of narrative strategies used to reimagine disability within the genre. Yet disabled female detectives in Indian-language fiction remain critically neglected. This gap is particularly evident in Malayalam literature, where gender and disability rarely intersect in central roles.

Malayalam fiction, while long engaged with issues of caste, class, and gender, has historically marginalised disability. When present, impairment often functions symbolically—as punishment, redemption, or moral metaphor—rather than as lived experience. Works such as Vasanthi's *Innale* (2006) and N. P. Mohammed's *Daivathinte Kannu* (1990) use disability as temporary or allegorical devices. Canonical texts like M. T. Vasudevan Nair's *Iruttinte Athmavu* (1957), S. K. Pottekkatt's *Ottakam* (1978), and O. V. Vijayan's *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* (1969) similarly render disability as existential burden or philosophical metaphor. This reflects what Fiona Kumari Campbell identifies as the essence of ableism: the systemic construction of disability as negative, abnormal, and undesirable.

Female disability is especially erased in Malayalam literature. In Madhavikutty's *Nashtappetta Neelambari* (2009) and *Keeripolinja Chakalass*, the disabled female body becomes aestheticised or eroticised, while Ajay P. Mangattu's *Susannayude Grandhappura* (2019) references bodily difference without sustained engagement. Across these narratives, the female disabled subject remains voiceless, her desires and agency suppressed. It is within this literary context that Sreeparvathy's fiction emerges. An independent journalist and novelist, Sreeparvathy has authored works such as *Meenukal Chumbikumbol*, *Premashramam*, *Mystic Mountain*, *Poetry Killer*, *Lilly Bernard*, *Mathavi*, and *Violet Pookkalude Maranam*. Among these, *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* (2021) is notable for featuring Aleena Ben John, the first wheelchair-using female detective in Malayalam literature. Observing her neighbours' lives from her balcony, Aleena becomes involved in investigating a mysterious death—an inversion of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* that fuses psychological depth with suspense.

This study analyses how *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* represents disability through Aleena's character and explores whether her portrayal challenges or reinforces ableist and patriarchal ideologies. The central question asks: to what extent does the novel subvert traditional portrayals of disabled women, and how does Aleena's narration negotiate agency, shame, and internalised ableism? Drawing on Fiona Kumari

Campbell's theory of ableism and Feminist Disability Studies, the article argues that despite introducing a disabled female detective, the narrative ultimately reproduces deficit-based tropes. By situating this reading within the context of Malayalam literature and Kerala's socio-cultural imagination, the study underscores both the possibilities and the limitations of representing disability and gender within the conventions of regional crime fiction.

Theoretical Framework

This article analyses *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* through the combined frameworks of Feminist Disability Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with Fiona Kumari Campbell's theorisation of ableism serving as the primary conceptual lens. Campbell (2009) defines ableism as "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human" (p. 44). Through this perspective, the novel becomes a site for examining how narrative structures in Malayalam literature both reproduce and resist cultural assumptions about disability. Aleena Ben John, as a wheelchair-using female detective, inhabits a space where the conventions of the crime genre intersect with entrenched social expectations about ability, gender, and normative embodiment. This framework enables the analysis to trace how a regional narrative from Kerala interrogates the literary and cultural imaginaries that have historically rendered disabled women invisible or marginal within Malayalam fiction.

Feminist Disability Studies provides further insight into how disabled women are systematically excluded from dominant cultural scripts of agency, sexuality, and femininity. Campbell (2009) observes that "ableism functions to divide, classify and order human variation into a binary of normative and deviant, natural and unnatural, valuable and disposable" (p. 5). Aleena negotiates her position within this binary, continuously confronting social and internalised evaluations of her worth. Her sense of self is shaped both by the gaze of others and by the internalisation of ableist norms, revealing the complex intersections between disability and gender. By foregrounding these dynamics, the study examines how Malayalam literature represents disabled women, particularly in the traditionally male-dominated sphere of crime fiction, and whether such narratives can accommodate epistemic and investigative agency for disabled female characters.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) sharpens this investigation by highlighting the linguistic and narrative strategies through which disability and gender are articulated. Aleena's internal monologues, her spatial confinement within the "Seventh Villa," and her reliance on careful observation evoke Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) but are reframed through a disabled female consciousness rooted in Kerala's sociocultural milieu. Her attentiveness and interpretive insistence exemplify Campbell's (2009) notion of "disability imaginaries," which "open up possibilities for thinking, feeling and perceiving differently, unsettling dominant epistemologies that privilege ableist mobilities and temporalities" (p. 218). CDA helps reveal how these imaginaries are both enabled and constrained by narrative discourse—where Aleena's intelligence and insight are often undermined by recurring tropes of shame, infantilisation, and longing for able-bodied normalcy.

By integrating Feminist Disability Studies and CDA, this article offers a nuanced reading of *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* as a Malayalam text that negotiates between gendered and ableist norms within regional crime fiction. It investigates how the novel both challenges and reproduces Kerala's literary and cultural assumptions about disability, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the representation and restriction of disabled female subjectivities in contemporary Malayalam literature.

Internalised Ableism and Female Agency in *Violet Pookkalude Maranam*

This section examines how internalised ableism intersects with female agency in *Violet Pookkalude Maranam*, observing the ways in which Aleena negotiates self-perception, societal expectations, and the constraints imposed by her disability. The novel repeatedly reinscribes what Campbell (2009) identifies as internalised ableism, where disabled individuals "internalise … self-loathing which devalues disablement" (p. 21). Rather than portraying Aleena's disability as a source of epistemic authority, the narrative frequently reduces her to immaturity, irrationality, or self-effacement. As Campbell explains, "to emulate the norm, the disabled individual is required to embrace, indeed to assume, an 'identity' other than one's own" (p. 27). Aleena's characterisation reflects this compulsion: she is measured against able-bodied ideals of heroism and femininity, never allowed to fully inhabit a disabled identity that is complex or empowered.

The narrative's emphasis on her emotional vulnerability and infantilisation further illustrates Campbell's insight that "passing occurs when there is perceived danger in disclosure … a form of self-protection that nevertheless usually disables, and sometimes destroys, the self it means to safeguard" (Leary, 1985, p. 85, as cited in Campbell, 2009, p. 25). Aleena is written not as a detective whose disability opens new ways of knowing but as a woman whose impairment signifies lack. Her shame, yearning for normativity, and internalised sense of disposability reflect what Campbell (2009) calls "the tyranny within" (p. 16).

Sreeparvathy's introduction of a disabled female detective into Malayalam crime fiction constitutes a significant narrative innovation. Yet this gesture is constrained by cultural scripts of pity, tragedy, and inspiration, which ultimately reinforce rather than subvert ableist frameworks. The novel thus stages a tension between disruption and containment: while it gestures toward reimagining the detective figure, it reinscribes ideologies that restrict the possibilities of disability and female agency in contemporary Malayalam literature.

i) Self-Negation and Shame

The representation of Aleena Ben John in *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* is shaped most immediately by a discourse of self-negation and shame. Rather than offering a complex, empowered disabled subjectivity, the narrative foregrounds her sense of bodily inadequacy and emotional despair. Early in the novel, Aleena admits, "I still feel embarrassed when I think about my body" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 15). This statement, unchallenged by the text, normalises embarrassment as the natural condition of disabled embodiment. Campbell (2009) identifies this phenomenon as a defining feature of ableism, which "induces an internalisation or self-loathing which devalues disablement" (p. 21). In Aleena's case, her body is rendered as a source of shame, incapable of being imagined outside the cultural script of inadequacy.

This self-negation manifests not only as embarrassment but also as psychological avoidance. Aleena confesses, "It is always better to think about a murder than to think about the uncertain state of my own life, body, and mind" (p. 22). Here, fantasy functions as escape: crime and death become preferable subjects to her lived reality. Rather than affirming the possibilities of her embodied perspective, the novel scripts her as seeking distraction from it, reiterating the cultural stereotype that disabled lives are too tragic to endure. Campbell, citing Watt-Jones, notes that "shamefulness is magnified in culture where the rhetoric of being a survivor, a non-victim, is powerful and being a victim is to be 'passive or deficient'" (Watt-Jones, 1992, p. 594, as cited in Campbell, 2009, p. 25). Aleena embodies this paradox, where acknowledgement of vulnerability is equated with deficiency, and avoidance of self-reflection becomes her primary survival strategy.

The most devastating articulation of this internalised despair comes in her fatalistic reflection: "My life doesn't have any value. The rest of my life will be on this wheelchair, and maybe I will die sitting in this wheelchair itself" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 91). This moment reduces her existence to static confinement, foreclosing any possibility of a meaningful disabled life. Campbell (2009) underscores that "to emulate the norm, the disabled individual is required to embrace, indeed to assume, an 'identity' other than one's own" (p. 27). Aleena's inability to accept her present embodiment results in the erasure of her agency: the wheelchair is cast not as a tool of mobility but as the coffin in which she anticipates her death. Her narrative is organised around what Campbell (2009) terms "the tyranny within" (p. 16)—the disciplining of disabled people into despair through ableist cultural scripts.

The absence of counter-narratives exacerbates this framing. Aleena's shame is presented without resistance from either narrator or plot, leaving readers with a figure defined primarily by fatalism and self-loathing. As Campbell (2009) observes, "passing occurs when there is perceived danger in disclosure … a form of self-protection that nevertheless usually disables, and sometimes destroys, the self it means to safeguard" (Leary, 1985, p. 85, as cited in Campbell, 2009, p. 25). Aleena's continual deflection from her own body, whether through fantasies of crime or resignation to death, illustrates this destructive self-protection. Instead of imagining disability as a generative form of embodiment, the text collapses Aleena's identity into shame, reflecting a broader cultural discomfort with disabled female bodies.

ii) Desire for Normativity

Aleena's shame is compounded by a longing for normativity, a nostalgic desire to reclaim her pre-disabled life. The novel presents this desire not as a problem but as a sentimental anchor, thereby reinscribing ableist ideals. One striking example occurs when she reflects, "I embraced all the loves that returned to my life" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 103). At first glance, this appears to signal affirmation. Yet the "loves" in question are drawn from her able-bodied past, a life imagined as complete and desirable than her present. Campbell (2009) cautions that "to emulate the norm, the disabled individual is required to embrace, indeed to assume, an 'identity' other than one's own" (p. 27). Aleena's embrace is not of her current self but of a lost, idealised version, rendering her disabled embodiment unintelligible as a site of wholeness.

The depth of this longing is captured in her lament: "I was reduced to nothing more than a helpless girl who couldn't walk" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 170). The term "reduced" conveys the stripping away of all other aspects of her subjectivity—her intellect, emotional depth, and observational acuity—collapsing her into a single marker of lack. The infantilising phrase "helpless girl" compounds this erasure, suggesting that without mobility she cannot claim adulthood, autonomy, or dignity. As Campbell (2009) notes, ableism "induces an internalisation or self-loathing which devalues disablement" (p. 21). Aleena's self-description embodies this internalisation: she adopts the cultural script that defines her as less than fully human because she cannot walk.

The narrative again fails to challenge these constructions. Instead, it allows her internal monologues

to reinforce normativity as the only imaginable good. Campbell (2009) observes that "passing occurs when there is perceived danger in disclosure … a form of self-protection that nevertheless usually disables" (Leary, 1985, p. 85, as cited in Campbell, 2009, p. 25). Aleena's yearning for her past becomes a form of passing by imagination: she attempts to erase her present body by rehearsing a fantasy of restoration. Yet this yearning only deepens her alienation, positioning her present existence as diminished and sorrowful. By refusing to interrogate this longing, the novel reinforces the ideology that disability is a tragic deviation from the norm, foreclosing the possibility of a counter-narrative.

iii) Gendered Dimensions of Ableism

The intersection of gender and disability in *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* further compounds Aleena's erasure. Rather than presenting her womanhood as a site of resistance, the text diminishes it, portraying femininity as either absent or irrelevant once disability is introduced. Aleena reflects, "I don't often remember that I am a girl. Sometimes, the drops of blood that come to make my skirt red remind me, that's all" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 23). Here, gender identity is reduced to biology, dependent on menstruation rather than lived experience. This recalls Campbell's (2009) observation that in Western thought, women were historically cast as "intrinsically deficient, as mutations of males; profoundly disabled" (p. 133). Aleena's remark signals a double erasure: as a disabled woman, she is denied both femininity and subjectivity.

Her sexuality is likewise marked by evasion. She admits, "Although I can't really feel anything physically, it is a state of mind … A twenty-five-year-old girl has all the desires and thoughts. But I have to escape from the truth and reality" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 37). This articulation frames sexuality as something she disowns, acknowledging her desires only to suppress them. Campbell (2009) argues that ableist regimes have "produced a depth of disability negation that reaches into the caverns of collective subjectivity" (p. 166). Aleena's disavowal exemplifies this depth: her sexuality is imagined as impossible, existing only in theory, divorced from embodied possibility.

This disavowal extends to digital spaces. She reflects, "Maybe my profile picture is with me sitting in a wheelchair. And by seeing that, maybe they all felt that I may not be enough for their needs" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 79). Online rejection is not framed as prejudice but as confirmation of her inadequacy. Instead of critiquing these dynamics, the narrative presents them as inevitable, reinforcing what Campbell (2009) terms "the internalisation of disposability" (p. 17).

The mirror scene deepens this negation: "It will not be good if I stay longer staring in the mirror. I may get feelings. So, I went out of the washroom. My body and my desires are not important anymore. Those things will happen only by depending on someone else" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 101). The mirror, traditionally a site of feminine self-recognition, becomes a threat to be avoided. Her desires are dismissed as unimportant, contingent on another's permission, affirming cultural assumptions that disabled women cannot possess sexual autonomy. Campbell (2009) critiques this logic, wherein disabled subjects are reduced to pathological embodiments to be denied or silenced (p. 133).

Her sense of disposability is also gendered through familial responsibility: "I don't wish to be a burden on anyone" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 107). This echoes patriarchal ideals of female self-sacrifice, compounded by disability. Her academic accomplishments are rendered meaningless, while her brother's freedom is affirmed. This double bind—where women must efface themselves for others' comfort and disabled people must internalise their burden—marks Aleena's subjectivity as doubly erased.

iv) Spaces of Exclusion and Disappearance

Spatial exclusion in the novel operates as both literal and symbolic erasure. Aleena notes, "I cannot go down the steps to the ground floor … or go shopping" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 7). Ordinary activities of urban life become impossible, underscoring how the built environment naturalises absence for disabled people. Campbell (2009) explains that ableist cultures produce "architectures of exclusion" that render disabled subjects "out of place" (p. 164). Aleena's confinement to her home exemplifies this structural violence.

Her reliance on the view outside— "I might have gone depressed" without the sight of violet flowers (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 8)—illustrates how aesthetic consolation replaces participation in public life. The flowers are not symbols of empowerment but fragile coping mechanisms. This aligns with Campbell's (2009) claim that ableism engenders "a depth of disability negation that reaches into the caverns of collective subjectivity" (p. 166). Instead of confronting systemic inaccessibility, the text offers Aleena escapism.

Even her claims to independence collapse under architectural barriers. She asserts, "I have become self-sufficient in the last three years," but immediately qualifies: "However, if I have to go down the steps from this floor, I need someone else, or at least two people" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 17). Self-sufficiency becomes hollow when the simplest structures, like stairs, become insurmountable. Campbell (2009) notes that disabled lives are cast as "inconvenient" and "expendable" (p. 168), and Aleena's dependence is framed not as interdependence but as burden.

Her most explicit critique— "But it's not at all convenient for wheelchair users" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 106)—momentarily resists resignation. Yet the narrative does not expand this into systemic commentary, instead

retreating into silence. Campbell (2009) emphasises that internalised ableism leads disabled individuals to "accept their own disappearance from public life as natural" (p. 170). Aleena's resignation reflects precisely this acceptance, marking her exclusion as inevitable rather than contestable.

v) Aleena as Reluctant Detective

The culmination of these dynamics is the novel's portrayal of Aleena as a reluctant detective. Instead of empowering her as an intentional sleuth, the narrative frames her investigation as accidental, born of futility. She reflects, "Still, before I go, I feel I must do something—just to feel like I did something before leaving" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 108). Her motive is not justice or intellectual drive but distraction before death. Detection becomes an act of resignation, not empowerment.

Her recollection of the case's origins reinforces this: "I started investigating him … what can a person do who has been lying in bed in the most depressed state … until then?" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 11). Investigation is positioned as pastime for the bedridden, not pursuit of truth. Aleena's sleuthing emerges from confinement and despair, confirming Campbell's (2009) point that ableist discourse constructs disabled people "not as viable humans, but as failed, incomplete, or lesser versions of the normative self" (p. 5).

This framing recurs in her admission: "I don't have anything in front of me or behind me, that's why I am doing all these … you are not like that, ok?" (Sreeparvathy, 2021, p. 111). Her sleuthing is portrayed as filler activity, born of emptiness. Intellectual labour is stripped of intrinsic value, imagined only as by-product of isolation. Campbell (2009) reminds us that internalised ableism compels disabled subjects to "absorb and reproduce ableist norms" (p. 162). Aleena's investigation embodies this absorption: rather than resisting her marginalisation, it confirms it.

By contrast, Mintz (2019) argues in *The Disabled Detective* that disability can provide alternative epistemologies of detection, reshaping what counts as evidence and knowledge. Disabled sleuths, Mintz writes, "explode the boundaries upon which [detection] rests" by offering "different truths altogether" (p. 22). Detection can become "strikingly embodied, phenomenological, and partnered" when mobility is constrained (p. 100). Yet Aleena is denied such epistemic potential. Instead of dramatizing "cripistemologies"—knowledges arising from disabled embodiment (p. 167)—the novel casts her investigation as accident and pity.

Mintz (2019) also warns that disabled detective's risk being reduced to prosthetic tropes, where impairment becomes a quirk rather than a framework of meaning (p. 2). Aleena exemplifies this reduction. Her sleuthing is not rooted in embodied difference but in narrative despair—a tragic detour before death. Rather than a detective on her own terms, she becomes a figure whose agency is overshadowed by impairment.

As Campbell (2009) concludes, ableism "reduces disabled people to embodiments of suffering, tragedy, or inspiration" (p. 9). Aleena's trajectory exemplifies this reduction: she is a detective only in the shadow of her disability, never through the power of her intellect. What might have been a radical reimagining of crime fiction in Malayalam literature becomes instead an ambivalent and often regressive representation, one that reinscribes the very ideologies it might have unsettled.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Sreeparvathy's *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* (2021) demonstrates that the novel's attempt to introduce a wheelchair-using female detective, Aleena Ben John, marks a significant yet ambivalent moment in Malayalam literature. Using Fiona Kumari Campbell's (2009) theorisation of ableism and the framework of Feminist Disability Studies, this study finds that Aleena's portrayal reveals the complex entanglement of disability, gender, and genre within Malayalam crime fiction. The major findings indicate that while the novel symbolically expands the detective genre to include a disabled female protagonist, it simultaneously reinforces ableist and patriarchal ideologies that limit the potential of such representation.

First, the study reveals that *internalised ableism* governs Aleena's self-perception and narrative voice. As Campbell notes, ableism produces a "tyranny within" (p. 16), compelling disabled individuals to internalise self-loathing and devaluation. Aleena's reflections—her shame, embarrassment, and longing for normalcy—mirror this process. Second, the text demonstrates that *female agency* is systematically curtailed through infantilisation and emotional dependence. Rather than subverting gendered hierarchies, the novel constructs femininity as passive and contingent on able-bodied validation. Third, the *spatial dimension of exclusion* is central to the narrative: Aleena's confinement within the "Seventh Villa" exemplifies Campbell's (2009) "architectures of exclusion" (p. 164), wherein disabled bodies are rendered invisible within public and narrative spaces. Finally, the study identifies a *generic limitation*: Aleena's detective role is defined by resignation rather than empowerment, transforming detection into a coping mechanism rather than a mode of epistemic agency.

These findings establish that *Violet Pookkalude Maranam* both challenges and reproduces dominant cultural narratives of disability. While it expands the representational field of Malayalam crime fiction, it does so within the restrictive frameworks of pity, tragedy, and inspiration. The novel's potential to develop what Mintz (2019) calls "cripistemologies"—embodied ways of knowing—is curtailed by its own internalised ableism.

Thus, the text ultimately positions Aleena as a figure of despair rather than resistance, reflecting the persistent cultural unease with disabled female subjectivities in Kerala's literary imagination.

The scope of this study is limited to a single text-based analysis, focusing on linguistic, narrative, and ideological structures. This delimitation allows for close reading but restricts comparative breadth. Future research could extend this inquiry by examining other Malayalam narratives that feature disability or by exploring intersections of class, sexuality, and religion in the construction of disabled identities. Despite its limitations, this study highlights the urgent need for Malayalam literature to evolve toward inclusive and authentic representations that move beyond symbolic visibility, recognising disability as an integral dimension of human experience and female agency.

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