

Indugopan's Gendered Spaces: A geo-spatial reading of 'Twinkle Rosayum Panthrandu Kaamukanmaarum' and 'Pushpavalliyum Yakshivasanthayum'

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The spatial turn in Humanities foregrounded the importance of locales in fiction and the study of history and culture. Space was now seen as a plot element that played an important role in directing narratives and the arcs of characters in fiction. This paper attempts to critically locate and analyse geographical places in the work of G. R. Indugopan, an author in Malayalam. The short stories titled, 'Twinkle Rosayum Panthrandu Kaamukanmaarum' (ട്വിങ്കിൾ റോസയും പന്ത്രണ്ടു കാമുകന്മാരും) and 'Pushpavalliyum Yakshivasanthayum' (പുഷ്പവല്ലിയും യക്ഷിവസന്തയും) will be analysed as short stories that gives life to the immediate spatial environment and how it impacts the characters inhabiting them. This paper attempts to look at the relationship between[female] bodies and space and how its positioning creates a distinctive spatial practice by closely looking at the different geographies that the author attributes to the characters in the selected short stories. It also looks at how new discourses of power and resistance are created against attempted invasions of body and space.

Keywords: Space, Gender, Body, Resistance, Position

Introduction

The notion of space became crucial in literary criticism through a ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities. This was a radical move, going beyond universalizing narratives, that had discarded space as an empty container where people lived and stories happened. The ideas of space and spatial identities came into the foreground in the post-war years, along with the new geopolitical organizations and disruptions, resulting in “spatial and geographical vocabulary became common in the surveying of literary terrains and plotting narrative trajectories” (Brosseau, 2000, p. 12-14). Warf & Arias (2008) situate space in a marginalized status to that of time in the Nineteenth century. This was a linear conception of time that resulted in ideas of temporal stages of development, where the past was viewed as the progressive, inexorable ascent from savagery to civilization, simplicity to complexity, primitiveness to civilization, and darkness to light. The historicist way of thinking disregarded space, human consciousness, or the contingency of social life (p. 2). Passiveness was associated with space since the focus was always on what was happening, instead of looking at ‘where’ it was happening and the possible ways in which the place of occurrence could influence the turn of events. Space was seen as a cartesian absolute, in which the analysis was often focused on what is contained within, a label which was the result of a scientifically informed search for an understanding of space, whose outcome mandated space as a concept to be understood through a Euclidean-geometric view.

However, the poststructuralist methodologies changed this view of space from that of a background point of reference and tried to find ways in which humans and geography are interrelated. Cosgrove argues that the ‘[post structuralist] agnosticism about naturalistic and universal explanations about single voiced historical narratives and the recognition that position and context are implicated in all constructions of knowledge’ (qtd in Warf & Arias, 2008, p. 1). This decisive turn in humanities and social sciences was made possible with the arrival of Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre. Soja (2009)

says that this foundational moment which eventually became the Spatial Turn ‘was an assertion of the ontological parity of space and time, that each was formative of the other at a most basic existential level, with neither being intrinsically privileged’ (p. 18). Space was now seen as an entity that shaped ideologies and thought processes. This new attention to space resulted in interesting formulations such as Heterotopia¹ and the famous conceptual triad of understanding space by Lefebvre, through spatial practice, representations of space and representational space.

Before discussion on the stories it is imperative to look at how certain ‘public’ spaces around us are not necessarily free to access or the entry to them is ‘restricted’. Certain labels based on the purity of gender or class prevent the space from having free movement, making it into a site of control and hegemony. Soja (2009) calls this terms this behaviour as locational discrimination. This attitude is imposed on certain populations because of their geographical location, created by those who have lasting spatial structures of privilege and advantage. This exclusionary zoning can take forms like territorial apartheid, institutionalized residential segregation, colonial and/or military geographies of social control, and the creation of core-periphery structures of privilege (p. 3).

One can locate the tryst of space and gender in the famous essay of Virginia Woolf’s ‘A Room of One’s Own’. In the broader debate about women and fiction, Woolf (2014) establishes how having a place is empowering to a woman, who has been shunned from public and intellectual spaces because of the predominant thought that they were inferior in every aspect. Even in the private sphere, women were deemed inadequate for political and literary discussions, thereby limiting their space for any kind of creative output. Woolf believes that literary production is influenced by the space in which it is produced when she says that women in the Elizabethan age could not have done anything creative because “and to see that they could not do anything in their houses with their dark, cramped rooms, to realize that no woman could have written poetry then”(p. 49). This is an identity that extends over and is formed concerning the rural and urban landscapes respectively.

The relationship between people and place is not a niche tendency in Malayalam literature. Works like *Oru Theruvinte Kadha*, *Khasakinte Ithihasam* talk about different models of spatiality and how people understand and negotiate their roles and positions in relation to a space. The political and the active ‘Public Space’ in Kerala was controlled and limited by the whims of upper caste Hindus and it was not democratic and accessible until the caste-based reform movements and educational initiatives by the missionaries in the early twentieth century. Mahatma Ayyankali undertook the ‘villuvandi protest’ in 1893 through public roads which were closed to the depressed classes and it was a turning point in the accessibility of public space in Kerala. One of the other factors, along with these acts of political and caste defiance was that of education. Harikrishnan (2020) draws upon the work of Sanal Mohan in establishing Missionary Education as a liberating factor that broke the rules of mobility imposed by the traditional caste order in Kerala, allowing the slave castes to be assembled for a purpose other than their ancestral occupation.

Their assembling in slave schools, in contrast, was a direct resistance to caste oppression and control over their social spaces. It became spaces where women, men and children of the lower castes interacted and learnt new practices and habits (p. 85).

The scope of this paper is to understand how gendered spatialities that the protagonists construct in the selected short stories. G.R. Indugopan has written stories that deal with spatial practice on various locales, including the rural and urban settings. This paper attempts to critically locate and analyse geographical places in G R Indugopan’s short story collection titled, ‘Twinkle Rosayum Panthrandu Kaamukanmaarum’ (ട്വിങ്കിൾ റോസയും പന്ത്രണ്ടു കാമുകന്മാരും)² and ‘Pushpavalliyum Yakshivasanthayum’ (പുഷ്പവല്ലിയും യക്ഷിവസന്തയും). This paper also looks at the relationship between bodies and space and how the positioning of female bodies creates a distinctive spatial practice dialectics of power and resistance against attempted invasions of body and space. The aim of this paper is to examine the ways in which the author has created gendered spaces.

It will look at how female bodies exist and traverse their spaces and how these spaces acquire a colouring of their personalities. Their spaces of inhabitancy are given distinct auras like their human inhabitants by Indugopan. In the introduction to the short story collection, he mentions that he was inspired by an article about St. Sebastian island in the Ashtamudi Lake and the Chala market in Thiruvananthapuram. One should note the two starkly different settings that Indugopan has made here; one being a complete rural ‘isandscape’ and the second, being a bustling city market. The laid-back description of the island can be contrasted with a rushed tone and the sense of an urban uncanny when it comes to the Chala market. Feminine images of the Punyalan island exist as an aura that seems to be permeated from the protagonist Twinkle Rosa as akin to a symbiotic relationship. In contrast, the market is described by Indugopan as composed of infinite forking paths and maze-like pathways that can disorient anyone who attempts to find its corners, just like the antagonist in the second short story, Pushpavalliyum Yakshivasanthayum. A gendered space is closely related to the positioning and mode of activity the body engages in which gives it a distinct spatiality as opposed to routine and socially accepted behaviour (females in the context of this paper). Iris Marion Young (2005, pp. 40–43) categorizes three modalities of feminine existence in a space; the first one being how the feminine body appears to have an existential enclosure between her and the surrounding space whereby she is constricted in movement which is associated with timidity, immobility, and uncertainty. The second one is of a double spatiality, that is ‘here’ where one can exercise full body possibilities and the ‘yonder’ where there is restriction and someone other than the feminine moves through it. The final modality of feminine spatial existence is positioned by a system of coordinates that does not have its origin in a woman’s own intentional capacities. These challenges are overcome by the protagonists in distinct ways.

Twinkle Rosayum Panthrandu Kaamukanmaarum

‘Twinkle Rosayum Panthrandu Kaamukanmaarum’ is about a young woman who arrives in a place called Punyalan Island after getting married to a clam fisherman, Terry Peter. We are introduced to Twinkle through the eyes of Haron Thankachan, her college senior.

Indugopan straightway gives the impression that Twinkle is a dreamer, who gets starry-eyed thinking about the beauty of the Punyalan island. The seafood that Haron brings over and shares with Twinkle, is her first encounter with the island. This encounter is described by Indugopan through a simile based on the geography of the Punyalan island and almost as a premonition to her relationship with the landscape. He says that when Twinkle takes a bite of the delicious clam meat, “her eyes became wide as the backwaters during monsoon. Spice filled the land and she became more beautiful than ever before” ‘അവളുടെ കണ്ണുകൾ ഇടവപ്പാതിയിലെ കായൽപ്പോലെ വിശാലമായി. എരികൊണ്ട് കരകവിഞ്ഞു. ഇരട്ടി സുന്ദരിയായി. (my trans.; p. 19).

The first perception of the Punyalan island can be described in terms of what David Harvey calls the ‘perceptual space’. The sense experiences such as optical, tactual, acoustic and kinesthetic come together to create a spatial experience. This process implants a schema or an impression and may lead to its retention over time. The relationship between Twinkle and the Punyalan island transforms throughout the story, from a curious outsider to a long-lost inhabitant of the island. The spatial practice of Twinkle is closely linked to her sensory perception of the island. Simonsen says that as part of this ‘lived experience’, the body constitutes a practico-sensory realm in which the space is understood through smells, tastes, touch and hearing and as well as through sight. The spatial practice of Twinkle with the landscape transforms the island’s perception, enabled by the careful use of vocabulary by Indugopan. In terms of Lefebvre’s conceptual triad, we could see a trajectory in Twinkle’s engagement from a representational space to that of spatial practice. Lefebvre (1992) says that Representational space is based on the imaginary, and contains different codes of meaning. These are spaces where philosophers and artists use imagination to change and appropriate a particular space and overlay a physical space (p. 39). Punyalan Island attains the compositions of magical realism and wonder in her imagination and continues to exist as representational. From hearing the description of the island from Haron to being an inhabitant, we can witness a spiritual tone in Twinkle’s imaginations and conversations;

however, this is not a particular god or religion, but a devotion that sees the island as a living entity, similar to the notion of *genius loci*.

Twinkle identifies the island as her partner or rather, lover, “In reality, I’m marrying the island right?” സത്യത്തി ഞാനാ ദ്വീപിനെ അല്ലെ കെട്ടുമെ? (my trans.; p. 24). The place acquires the role of a subjective entity, acting as an extended self of Twinkle. The place becomes a complete ‘event’. Schulz says that “A place is, therefore, a qualitative total phenomenon, which we can’t reduce it to any of its properties, such as spatial relationships without losing its concrete nature out of sight” (p. 8). Phenomenology with space provides a subjective experience of a space, giving credibility to the observer’s experience rather than positioning him as an object in a multitude of spaces. A phenomenological spatial practice creates a self in relation to that space when Indugopan says,

“She was confused as to whether it was her desire that made the sky orange. It was something that she never had seen before; something she could not visualize even from Haron’s words” ‘അവൾ കണ്ടതാണോ അവളുടെ ഉള്ളിലെ ആഗ്രഹത്തിന് നിറം വന്ന്, ആകാശം നിറയെ നിറഞ്ഞതാണോയെന്നു അറിയില്ല. അവൾ ഇത് വരെ കണ്ടിട്ടില്ലാത്ത, ഹാരോയുടെ വാക്കുകളിൽ നിന്ന് അനുഭവിച്ചതിലും എത്രയോ ആനന്ദകരമായ അനുഭവം.’ (my trans.; p. 30)

The male characters, Haron and Terry Peter are unable to see Punyalan island through the perspective of Twinkle, since they only see the geography in terms of a source of livelihood. The spatial practice of Twinkle is not, however, occupation-based and Indugopan does not provide any detail on what she does to bring money to her household. Another character, Christina also engages in this spatial practice, by being in sync with the landscape and is also not economic in nature. This is also the case with the self-proclaimed ‘lovers’ of Twinkle, Deep Anurag and his companions seek to refashion the island through a tourist gaze. This intention to see a space divorced from its natural aura can be defined in Lefebvre’s terms, as a conceived space, seen by those belonging to geometrically plan and define spaces without life. These spaces are tied to the relations of production and

to the ‘order’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to ‘frontal’ relations. Deep Anurag wants to injure Twinkle, effectively distorting her appearance by marking the number ‘13’, which parallels his ambition of building a resort on the Punyalan island.

The positioning of bodies within a particular geography gives us an insight into the power ascribed to them. Indugopan does an explicit phrasing and uses the invasion of Deep Anurag and his companions on the island as an allegorical spatial invasion of the female body. For Anurag, the island is a representation of space, that offers itself to be conquered, just like everything in his life. The invasion of the landscape runs parallel to the crisis situation of the female body; with Twinkle being the core of a new kind of spatial practice of Punyalan Island. The feminine aura is the prize for Deep Anurag, who is the self-proclaimed harbinger of ‘development’. This ‘orientation in space is made possible by regarding the body as a centre; in this way space becomes nuanced by differences between, for example, high and low, or left and right. Space is mapped with reference to directions that not only guide the traveller but are also symbolic and meaningful (Stewart, 1995, p. 612). It is also worth noting that the boat aggressively reaches the island, even when there is an absence of a boat jetty. The dwarf, second to Anurag says, “But I will draw the number 13 on her face, the number of her lovers who landed on this island” ‘പക്ഷെ അവളുടെ മോന്തയിൽ 13 എന്ന് വരയ്ക്കും. അവളെ തേടി ഈ തുരുത്തിൽ കാലു കുത്തിയ കാമുകന്മാരുടെ നമ്പർ.’ (my trans.; 52). Power relates to identity validation, which happens when the character who was referred to as ‘dwarf’ by Deep Anurag, is addressed by Twinkle as ‘Suresh’, his name. When Suresh gets agency, overlooking his physical stature, he refuses to kill Twinkle and returns, foiling the plans of Deep Anurag.

Pushpavalliyum Yakshivasanthayum

The second short story that is placed into a spatial lens is ‘Pushpavalliyum Yakshivasanthayum’. We are told that there is a city-wide feud between these two women, but the reason isn’t disclosed by the author. There are two urban locales which have contrasting

spatial properties, one being the Karthyani Bar owned and administered by Pushpavalli directly and the other being the Chala market controlled by Yakshivasantha. While the bar itself is described as a welcoming recluse that leads drunkards into a debt trap, the market has a paradoxical feature of being open and closed, just like the rumoured presence/absence of Yakshivasantha who is hidden somewhere in its labyrinths. The plot is about how Prabhakaran, an ordinary man turned police informer takes up the job to meet Vasantha and end her feud with her nemesis Pushpavalli.

The story opens with the murder of a drunkard policeman named Surendhran, who owes a significant amount of money at Karthyani Bar. We get an impression of the bar and the owner through his thoughts before he is murdered by an unknown assailant. We understand that the bar masquerades itself as an open space, but the people who frequent the bars aren't free.

“There is a way through the back by which one can get into Karthyani bar, even at early hours of the day. The employees functions like an army, accompanies you to the treasury or office, when the salary comes, to get back the money that you owe at the bar. Doesn't it imply that she is a monster? She will ravage this country.” ‘വെളുപ്പിന് എത്ര നേരത്തെ ചെന്നാലും പിറകിലെ വഴിയിലൂടെ ബാറിൽ കേറാനുള്ള സംവിധാനമാണ് കാർത്യാനിബാറിനുള്ളത് ... കടം കൊടുത്തിട്ട് ശമ്പളമോ പെൻഷനോ കിട്ടുമ്പോൾ ട്രഷറിയിലോ ഓഫീസിലോ ഒപ്പം ചെന്ന് ആ മാസത്തെ കടം വാങ്ങിച്ചെടുക്കുന്ന ജോലിക്കാരുടെ പടയും ആ ബാറിലുണ്ട്. എന്നുവെച്ചാ ഒരു രാക്ഷസിയല്ലേ ആ ബാർ നടത്തുന്നത്. അവളീ രാജ്യം കുട്ടിച്ചോറാക്കും’. (my trans; p. 42)

Unlike the soft-spoken Twinkle in the first short story, Pushpavalli is in complete control of the many bars in the city and has reliable contacts in the Police department. This is evidenced by the conversation between the Sub Inspector, who is a daily tippler himself at the bars owned by Pushpavalli who even provides monetary support to the policeman. “She isn't just the provider of drinks, but life itself“

‘കള്ളുദാതാവ് മാത്രമല്ല, അന്നദാതാവ് കൂടിയാണ് പുഷ്പവല്ലി.’(p. 43)

Coming to the Chala market, the stronghold and the centre of operation of Yakshivasantha, it is described as akin to a fort; she has spies positioned everywhere. In the hopes of meeting Vasantha, Prabhakaran disguises himself as an apprentice carpenter gradually working up the pecking order. As opposed to the romantic language that Indugopan deploys while describing the Punyalan island, he uses a tone of fear and mystery to describe the maze-like structure of the market and how Vasantha controls it. Indugopan describes the Chala market vividly, about the existence of nooks and crannies where humans fear to tread.

“Just like man, there are places which are claimed and controlled by birds inside the market. Places that haven’t witnessed a human touch. Rats, Snakes, Mongoose ... You should keep in mind that this is a place that couldn’t be bought by offering more than a crore for a cent. She is hiding somewhere in this maze of a place. Vasantha. From land deals to assassinations, there is not a business that she doesn’t take up and that is her strength.” മനുഷ്യരെ പോലെ കിളികൾ ഓരോരോ പ്രാദേശങ്ങളായി കയ്യടക്കി വെച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന ഏറിയ വരെ ആ കമ്പോളത്തിനകത്തുണ്ട്. മനുഷ്യസ്പർശമേറ്റിട്ടു വർഷങ്ങളായ ഇടമുണ്ട്. എലികൾ, പാമ്പുകൾ, കീരുകൾ ... നഗരത്തിന്റെ ഏറ്റവും ജാനബാഹുല്യമുള്ള സെന്റിന് കോടികൾ പറഞ്ഞാലും കിട്ടാത്ത സ്ഥലത്താണ് ഇതെന്ന് ഓർക്കണം. ഇങ്ങനെയുള്ള ഭൂവിഭാഗത്തിനുള്ളിൽ എവിടെയോ അവൾ ഒളിച്ചിരിപ്പുണ്ട്. വസന്ത. മണ്ണു കച്ചവടം മുതൽ കൊലപാതകം വരെയുള്ള ഇടപാടിന്റെ ഇടനിലയാണ് അവളുടെ സാമ്പത്തിക സ്രോതസ്സ്. (my trans.; p. 62)

Later, we find that Prabhakaran’s cover is blown and he is taken to an ordinary woman whom the carpenter introduces as Vasantha. However, Prabhakaran realizes this as an attempt to divert his investigation. He gives up the investigation and arranges a meeting with Pushpavalli. We get a glimpse of who she is, as an antithetical force against Vasantha who does a lot of charity work compared to Pushpavalli. This conversation goes back and forth and the initial

impression we get is that Pushpavalli is indeed the victim. To our surprise, we find that there is no Yakshivasantha; rather she is a fictional character made up by Pushpavalli herself to exert control on the market without ever being there physically. Her elaborate narrative of the feud was created so that she could retain power and do charitable work, (getting rid of men who become burdensome to the family) without anyone else knowing it. Ambuchami goes on about the market:

“The buildings here, ranging from three days to three hundred years old. Fitting in like jigsaw puzzles. You would not believe it, but there is a wholesale of items ranging from a small pin to the spare parts of rockets. Most people are only familiar with the immediate surroundings of their shop. The rest? No clue about the ten-kilometer maze. No one dares to know what goes down in there. Not even god. You will sigh with exasperation.” ‘മുന്നൂറു കൊല്ലം മുതൽ മൂന്ന് ദിവസം പഴക്കമുള്ള കെട്ടിടങ്ങൾ അതിനകത്തുണ്ട്. നിരന്തരം കൂട്ടിച്ചേർക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. മൊട്ടു സൂചി മുതൽ റോക്കറ്റിനുള്ള സ്പെയർ പാർട്സിന്റെ വരെ മൊത്തക്കച്ചവടം അവിടെയുണ്ട്. അവരവരുടെ കടകളുടെ പരിസരം മാത്രമേ പലർക്കുമറിയൂ. ബാക്കിയോ? പത്തു കിലോമീറ്റർ ചുറ്റളവിൽ. അവിടെ ആ കമ്പോളത്തിൽ എന്തൊക്കെ നടക്കുന്നുവെന്ന് അറിയാൻ ദൈവംതമ്പുരാൻ പോലും മെനക്കെടാ റില്ല. തല ചുറ്റി പോകും.’ (my trans.; p. 62).

It is interesting to see how an urban space, creates closeness by being open. Here, the labyrinth created by the market is symbolic of Yakshivasantha as a scheming and clever woman. Schulz says that “the character of a man-made place is to a high extent determined by its degree of openness. The solidity or the transparency of the boundaries make the space appear isolated or as a part of more comprehensive totality”(p. 63). The in absentia spatial practice that Yakshivasantha engages in is in opposition to Lefebvre’s argument that ‘social spatial practice presupposes the use of body; the use of the hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work as of activity unrelated to work’(p. 40). These gestures of accepted codes exist in a unidimensional power hierarchy where Pushpavalli/

Yakshivasantha is the centre. Simonsen further elaborates that Lefebvre's sense consists of articulated movements mobilizing and activating the whole body whose accomplishment implies the existence of affiliations, of groups(p.6). Throughout the story, there is a departure from these codes as Indugopan chooses the ending, where Pushpavalli cocks a gun at Prabhakaran for finding out her secret.

Conclusion

When Twinkle becomes almost synonymous with the landscape, Pushpavalli holds power directly through the bars she owns and indirectly through an artificial persona that controls the market. The marketplace is not a site of power struggle; rather, it is made to believe so. No one attempts to challenge the authority. Prabhakaran, unlike Deep Anurag, invades the place, but her power and control aren't disturbed. Prabhakaran is an outsider, who conceives the market space as coherent and penetrable, something that can be decoded. The representational space is created by the everyday people who inhabit it. The character of Yakshivasantha was created to counteract the power wielded by Pushpavalli, who was not a city-bred woman and gradually worked her way up the ladder to own multiple businesses. She creates a metropolitan identity through her fictional alter ego. This impenetrable market becomes Vasantha's physiology which is unknown and shrouded effectively from everyone. The market becomes an example of a place constructed solely through power and prohibits [male] free access, unlike the Punyalan island. According to Grosz (1997), this physiology acquires metropolitan dimensions and moves away from what is real.

neither the body nor its environment can be assumed to form an organically unified ecosystem. The body and its environment, rather, produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, 'citified', urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body (p. 242).

While Pushpavalli is omnipresent in the Karthyani bar, her simultaneously ‘present and ‘absent’ body of Yakshivasantha becomes a metaphor for the Chala market, an urban spiral that exists yet is unknowable. The spatial practice that Pushpavalli/Yakshivasantha engages in is mainly against forms of male domination and power which Pushpavalli had suffered in her younger years. This is evident in the character sketches of different sections of society that Indugopan reveals to us; the Police force is merely a toy in the hands of Pushpavalli, the man who is seen to be aware of at least a fraction of the market’s untraversability, is Rajappan, the ordinary carpenter for whom Prabhakaran works for a while. The job is entrusted to Prabhakaran precisely because of this; his status as an ordinary man who does not represent any real threat to Pushpavalli/Yakshivasantha.

In both of these short stories, we can see how space creates a persona for each of the female protagonists. The two characters, Deep Anurag and Prabhakaran are the symbolic embodiments, the agents that seek to conceive space, to quantify, measure, conquer and understand. But the lived reality, or the representational space, does not go in their favour, resulting in their retreat. Interestingly, both these retreats are done without the use of force. Both these women who acquire the quality of geography they represent resist invasion and appropriation, where the masculine trump card of violence and force fails.

Endnotes:

1. Heterotopias are in Foucault’s formulation, are places that exist outside all places, but are geographically present in every society and acts in a contrast to that of a Utopia. He gives the examples of graveyards, prisons and asylums.
2. Due to the unavailability of an English translation, all titles in Malayalam have been translated by the author.

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