

**Shalu Lukose**

*EFL University*

*Hyderabad, India*

### **Keeping One's Own Pace; Otherness in the Crowd**

Crowds and the solitude of the individuals who are part of the crowd have been in the foreground and background of a lot of literary narratives especially those set in an urban context. They have been used to represent the fragmentation and otherness felt by the modern man. The madness of the crowds has also been the central theme of narratives featuring mob lynching and riots, discussing the power and mindlessness of the mob.

Pertinent observations about the volatile nature of crowds in the socio – political world have been made by critics such as Mary Esteve in *Aesthetics and politics crowd American literature* and Gustave Le Bon in *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Charles Baudelaire, unlike most of the approaches which consider the crowd as an oppressing and negative phenomenon, celebrates the masses in his poem “Crowds” where he depicts the crowd as a chance for the individual to be involved in their living world.

In this paper, I shall try to analyse the engagement of the individual in the crowd and with the crowd, through Anand's Malayalam novel 'Aalkkootam' (The Crowd), and other select narratives which engage with the concept of otherness and the theme of 'individual in a crowd'. 'Aalkkootam' features a group of individuals in a metropolitan city trying to "keep their own pace in the crowd". The narrativization of otherness and how the crowds are wielded as an instrument to signify otherness are topics of interest in this paper. The paper undertakes this critical reading by drawing on conceptual frameworks developed by major existential philosophers.

<sup>1</sup>The phrase is taken from Anand's 'Aalkkootam'.